

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the slide, framing the central text.

A Christian Perspective on Justice

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Justice in the Old Testament

Justice is relational - Relationship with God, one another, and Creation

- ▶ Justice is multi-faceted but can be thought of as fidelity to the demands of relationship.
 - ▶ This what God asks of you: To act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:6)
- ▶ Justice in the Old Testament is communal then, not individualistic - life means life with others.
 - ▶ Every Morning without fail, He brings justice to His people (Zephaniah 3:5)
- ▶ The three relationships are interdependent.

Justice in the Old Testament

Justice is relational - Relationship with God, one another, and Creation

- ▶ For Israel, the relationship with God is a holy Covenant which defines the demands of relationship
 - ▶ God heard their groaning and God remembered His Covenant (Exodus 2:24)
- ▶ The relationship with the “stranger” or “alien” features strongly in the Old Testament - the stranger enters into the web of relationships of a community without being in relationship to anyone in that community.
 - ▶ You shall not wrong the foreigner, neither shall you oppress him, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. You shall not take advantage of any widow or fatherless child. If you take advantage of them at all and they cry to me, I will surely hear their cry (Exodus 22:21-23)
- ▶ The just person is the one who properly responds to the demands of relationship.

Justice in the Old Testament

God's justice is a "Saving Justice", not a vengeful justice

- ▶ Yahweh sets out to save not to condemn.
 - ▶ Punishment is always oriented towards restoring the right relationship.
 - ▶ The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103)
- ▶ God's saving justice is exemplified in the delivery from Egypt in Exodus. As the Jews celebrate Passover and their delivery out of Egypt they are obliged to free the other in response.
- ▶ The Psalms are about all aspects of life including justice. Two themes are central to the psalms:
 - ▶ Yahweh is God, Creator and Saviour
 - ▶ Our reaction to Yahweh

Justice in the Old Testament

The Just Person “Fears the Lord”

- ▶ What is Fear of the Lord: Dread before power, reverence for God’s greatness, fear of offending our heavenly father? It is perhaps all these things together.
- ▶ CS Lewis wrote of fear of God, saying that it is being filled with awe and a feeling of shrinking before it.
- ▶ Abraham’s fear of God was mixed with his trust in the Lord.

The just person upholds peace:

- ▶ She cares for the weak and defends them.
- ▶ She maintains the community
 - ▶ Psalm 112: “Happy are those who fear the Lord, [...] and their righteousness endures forever. [...] They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor”
- ▶ To be just then is also to distribute the fruits of creation.
- ▶ The Just person protects the marginalized: those without the defence of kinship - the widows, orphans and foreigners. They are isolated because they lack relationships in the community. To use modern parlance, they have no *social capital*.
- ▶ This concept of the Just Person is rooted in the idea of God Himself as defender of the oppressed - the Just Person then copies God’s saving justice - in this way we live in His “image and likeness”.

Justice in the Old Testament

Justice includes Care for Creation

- ▶ There are three pillars to care for creation in the Old Testament.
- ▶ God is creator and owner of all.
- ▶ There is a special place for the human being in Creation.
 - ▶ The human person has a special relationship with the earth - God made Adam from the earth - Adam literally means “Of the earth”.
 - ▶ However, Adam was also made in the image and likeness of God - we are a copy of God as mentioned above, not physically, but in our ability to reason and be just.
- ▶ God gave responsibility for care of the earth to human beings.
 - ▶ “To till it and keep it” - here the word “to keep” is rich in meaning; it signifies to sustain and nurture, not merely to hold or exploit.
 - ▶ This responsibility to care for creation also comes with the duty to rest on the Sabbath. We humans rest on the seventh day and the land, the fields, must rest on the seventh year.

Justice in the Old Testament

The Prophets call for fidelity to God's Covenant

- ▶ Throughout the Old Testament the prophets call for the restoration of right relationship between God and Israel: fidelity to God and to the weak.
- ▶ The prophets confront Israel when the people forget the Covenant and harden their hearts to the poor and oppressed.

The Prophet Amos

- ▶ Amos lived approximately 900 years before Christ and is one of the earliest prophets of Israel.
- ▶ Israel was at the height of its power when Amos rebuked them for forgetting the Covenant.
- ▶ Amos attacked their wealth and luxury which came from exploitation, corruption and rent seeking - especially legal and financial corruption.
- ▶ Amos especially railed against taking ill-gotten goods into the Temple of the Lord: this hypocrisy is condemned.

Justice in the Old Testament

The Prophet Isaiah

- ▶ Isaiah lived in the 8th century before Christ.
- ▶ To be Holy is to be imbued with a sense of justice and righteousness: to be Holy is to be like God, and God is just. Holiness and Justice then are rooted in one another.
- ▶ Isaiah's response to being called to holiness is to first look at his own sinful life.
 - ▶ This self-examination is a mark of humility.
 - ▶ God forgives the humble man, and having reconciled Isaiah to Himself, sends him out to convert the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, to restore right relationship.
- ▶ It is God's Holiness which makes injustice punishable - it is an affront to the God's Holiness.
 - ▶ God rejects Israel's prayers and fasting when they are offered in tandem with unjust living - in this scenario ritual without justice becomes a form of idolatry.
- ▶ Isaiah is disappointed with the political and religious leadership of his day and offers a vision of the Ideal King.
 - ▶ This Ideal King will be for the whole world, not only Israel: justice will be administered with integrity and worship will be done properly. For Isaiah, justice and worship are indivisible.

Justice in the Old Testament

The Prophet Jeremiah

- ▶ Jeremiah lived in the 7th century before Christ, and like his predecessors he attacked apostasy, mouth worship and injustice.
- ▶ Jeremiah called on us to deal with one another justly:
 - ▶ Do not oppress the foreigner; do not oppress the orphan or widow; do not shed innocent blood; follow no other gods.
- ▶ Jeremiah attacked the institutions - religious and political - in which people were placing their trust. This was idolatry and self-deception.
 - ▶ They were trusting human institutions rather than God, and relied on institutions rather than in living justly with proper interpersonal relations.
- ▶ Like Isaiah before him then, justice is the application and substance of faith.

Justice in the Old Testament

Covenant: “You will be my People and I will be your God”

- ▶ God dealt with people as a community not individualistically - justice has a communal corporate nature and the obligations that this entails.
- ▶ The logic of justice in the Hebrew understanding is that as God has dealt with us, so we must deal with one another.
- ▶ Covenantal justice recognises all people as equal.
- ▶ Covenantal justice is loving, and does not harden our hearts: ‘I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh’.

Justice in the New Testament

Jesus is the fulfilment of God's Saving Justice

- ▶ “God did not send His Son into to the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved though Him.” (John 3:17)
- ▶ The Kingdom of God is mentioned 90 times by Christ. The Jewish understanding of Kingdom is not simply a territory but a *process of ruling*: a Just Reign.
- ▶ Signs of the Kingdom include: healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and confronting the powers of evil. The Kingdom of God is made **present** by these actions; it is not only a future event.

Justice in the New Testament

The teachings of the Kingdom are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Magnificat

- ▶ The Beatitudes are a description of the ideal Christian. The people who try to live these beatitudes are the making Kingdom present: “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)
- ▶ In the Magnificat, the values of the world are challenged by the values of Christ.

The focus of the Kingdom is declared by Christ in the Synagogue in Nazareth

- ▶ “to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save His people.” (Luke 4:16-19)
- ▶ Jesus showed special concern for the social outcasts - those regarded as sinners and ostracized by the society. Jesus instead sees their dignity.
- ▶ Those who were captive, whatever the nature of their chains, are freed.

Justice in the New Testament

Jesus challenged the values of the world

- ▶ Christ criticized the ruling and religious establishment:
 - ▶ you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. (Luke 11:39)
- ▶ Jesus was critical of accumulation of excessive wealth.
- ▶ He emphasized the need to have the right perspective and criticized how we assess our priorities:
 - ▶ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:31)
- ▶ Jesus disregarded legalistic norms that obstruct human contact and argued that legal purity can never replace fundamental moral conduct:
 - ▶ The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)
- ▶ The description of the Last Judgment is the most striking example of God's Justice:
 - ▶ Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40)

Justice in the New Testament

Making the Kingdom present

- ▶ The attitude or spirit needed to bring about the kingdom of God is one of service and humility - the simplicity of little children.
- ▶ A primary concern of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles is that nobody is left without their basic needs. The community should share their resources to ensure that nobody is left in need.
- ▶ St James' Letter is very practical and he describes the just person as the person who puts faith into action, who does not merely speak justice, but acts justly.
- ▶ St Paul insists that Christ has freed us from the Law. He makes clear that we are all equal in Christ and the divisions and barriers that existed before are gone - justice is about living together in harmony and right relationship, rather than strictly observing the Law.

Justice in the New Testament

Orienting ourselves towards Justice

- ▶ St Paul talks about the emptying out - kenosis - by the Son of God when He became man. This kenosis is an act of radical solidarity with the poor, with us humans, God taking on the form of a human being even “unto death and death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:8)
- ▶ The key attitudes needed to live the beatitudes then are humility and service.
- ▶ We must orient ourselves to the vision of reality in the Bible. Jesus has commissioned us to carry on this vision and make the Kingdom present where we are - in our homes, community and places of work.

Care for Creation

The Old Testament: Three Principles of Care for Creation

- ▶ God is the **creator and owner** of the world in all its richness, diversity and order. He remains **active in sustaining** creation.
- ▶ The Old Testament recognises the **special place of the human being** in creation.
 - ▶ God created man from earth - in Hebrew “Adam” expresses **man’s organic relation to the earth**. Adam is also given a special dignity by being **made by God in His own image and likeness**: man is a facsimile of God - we are like God in that we are a person and we have intellect, free-will, and an eternal destiny.
- ▶ Human beings are **stewards of creation**.
 - ▶ The Lord entrusted responsibility for all of creation to us: **“to till it and keep it”** (Gen 2:15). The Hebrew word for “keep” means to nurture, sustain and care for creation, **not to exploit or dominate**. The prophet Ezekiel criticises the Hebrews when they cease to care and instead exploit:
 - ▶ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of the pasture with your feet? Is not it enough for you to drink the clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (Ezekiel 34:18)

Care for Creation

The New Testament: Creation is Reconciled to God

- ▶ Jesus is the fulfilment of God's plan for us and for creation.
- ▶ Jesus coming into the world is the definitive action by which God offers **salvation to all humanity and to the cosmos.**
- ▶ Through Christ, humanity and **creation are reconciled to God and destined to undergo a radical transformation and purification.** The Passion and Resurrection inaugurated a New World in which **new relations with God, with one another, and with creation are established:**
 - ▶ Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now (Romans 8: 22-23)
- ▶ In His life, Jesus made use of the elements of the natural world, especially in the **parables which represent nature as harmonious and in tune with the Will of God.**
- ▶ The New Testament concludes with a **vision of a new heaven and a new earth.**

Catholic Social Teaching

- ▶ Living justly means living faithfully to a **right relationship** with God, our fellow human beings and with creation itself.
- ▶ We are called to orient ourselves constantly to the vision we see in the Bible and **make the Kingdom of God present where we live and work.**
- ▶ According to *Gaudium et Spes*, the seminal document of the Second Vatican Council, the Church stands with every man and woman of every place and time, and makes the **teachings of the Bible present in this complex world of social relations.**
- ▶ The Church interprets our experience of the life by **reading the signs of the times in the light of faith** and provides direction and guidance in a world that is in constant change.
- ▶ Catholic Social Teaching then is about giving guidance at the crossroads where Christian life and conscience come into contact with the real world, and to inspire us to appropriately address the social issues of our time.

Catholic Social Teaching

A Broken World

- ▶ Right relationships which should exist are often absent: hunger, war and poverty cause hardship and suffering.
- ▶ Many people lack the basics we take for granted: food, water, shelter, and medicine.
- ▶ Inequality caused by greed, corruption, and exploitation, create poverty and damage the earth itself.

See, Judge, Act

- ▶ Six key guiding principles of Catholic social teaching help us **to see** the situation clearly, **to judge** the situation accurately, and **to act** in response. This enables us to rectify and to maintain the right relationships between God, one another and the earth.

Catholic Social Teaching

Human Dignity

- ▶ We are created in the image and likeness of God and each person has an inalienable dignity which is not lessened for any reason. This dignity makes us equal in rights. Our human dignity is the basis for all our rights, the first of which is the right to life.

The Common Good

- ▶ The sum total of social conditions which allow the people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. We are all called to develop our gifts to achieve our potential and have a right and duty to do so. The rights and duties of each group and individual must be in harmony with all others. All have a responsibility to promote the Common Good: we have no right to squander resources, and even rights to property are subordinate to the rights of all to subsistence. The Common Good expresses the unity of the entire human family.

Catholic Social Teaching

Participation

- ▶ People have the right and duty to participate in decisions that directly affect them and actively shape their own destiny. Participation in political and social life is a virtue and the requirement for the triumph of justice.

Solidarity

- ▶ Expresses the fundamental bond between all human beings and our interdependence. Solidarity is the “the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the Common Good... to the good of all and the human rights of all - because we are all really responsible for all”. The rich have responsibility for the poor and national and international structures must reflect this. The poor are not burdens, and the “strangers” who live among us are not alien; they are our brothers and sisters.

Catholic Social Teaching

Subsidiarity

- ▶ All power and decision-making in society should be at the most local level compatible with the common Good. This places responsibility as close as possible to the grass roots: interventions from above should only be to support in cases of need, and to coordinate with the rest of society to achieve the Common Good.

Care for Creation

- ▶ We are stewards of God's Creation and nature must not be reduced to an instrument for manipulation or exploitation. All of nature is interdependent and there is solidarity between all life. Care for Creation involves the integral development of the poorest parts of our world - the universal destination of goods - and the option for the poor means that solutions for environmental problems do not consign millions of people to endless poverty. There needs to be a change of attitude and lifestyle which must involve a spiritual response: our orientation towards Creation should be one of awe, respect and gratitude.

Catholic Social Teaching - The Founding Documents

The following fifteen documents provide the foundation for the social teaching of the Catholic Church. While Catholic teaching is rooted in Scripture, these fifteen documents work through the teaching of scripture and provide practical guidance for society. In the light of Christian faith, they reflect upon:

World peace; rights and responsibilities between individuals, groups and states; the global economic balance; freedom; social concerns and action; development and peace; urban poverty; condemnation of unfettered capitalism; combating injustice; advocating fair trade; the relationship between truth and charity; and concern for the earth.

- 1891 - Rerum Novarum - on workers' rights
- 1931 - Quadragesimo Anno - criticizes abuses of capitalism and communism
- 1961 - Mater et Magistra - on agriculture and aid to developing countries
- 1963 - Pacem in Terris - a plea for peace based on rights and duties

Catholic Social Teaching - The Founding Documents

- 1965 - *Gaudium et Spes* - on human dignity and the common good
- 1967 - *Populorum Progressio* - on structural poverty, aid, trade, and international justice
- 1971 - *Octogesima Adveniens* - on new injustices and a call to political action
- 1971 - *Justitia in Mundo* - on justice as a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel
- 1975 - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - on links between evangelisation and development
- 1981 - *Laborem Exercens* - on the rights of workers, especially women, and unions
- 1987 - *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* - on solidarity and the option for the poor
- 1991 - *Centesimus Annus* - on human dignity, human rights, justice and peace

Catholic Social Teaching - The Founding Documents

- 2009 - Caritas in Veritate - a comprehensive review of development, and reflection upon the recent economic crisis and business ethics
- 2013 - Evangelii Gaudium - on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world
- 2015 - Laudato Si' - an ecological critique of the current global political, social and economic and cultural model as it impacts our common home, the earth
- 2020 - Fratelli Tutti - on fraternity and social friendship

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004, systematically presents the foundations of Catholic Social Teaching as outlined in these documents, and it is a most useful guide.

What Does This Mean For Me: Living Justly

- ▶ We are all called to live in right relationship with our God, our neighbours and the environment
- ▶ Right relationship means giving to others what is owed to them - we must recognise and remember what we owe to those who cannot demand it.
- ▶ “Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his”, what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot “give” what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity [1], and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, “the minimum measure” of it [2], an integral part of the love “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us.”
- ▶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 6

Questions to consider about JPIC

- ▶ What is the relationship between Justice and Compassion?
- ▶ What is the relationship between Charity/alms-giving and Advocacy?
- ▶ What is the relationship between development work and Justice?
- ▶ What is the relationship between self-reliance and the Option for the Poor?
- ▶ How do orient myself *justly* in the web of social relations in which I live?

This presentation was drawn from the *Living Faith Means Living Justly* programme by Bishop Pádraig Harrington SMA and Mr Gerry Forde, SMA Justice Officer.

The Living Faith Means Living Justly programme includes a series of video presentation and PDF documents containing the relevant Scripture verses.

Visit www.sma.ie to access the *Living Faith Means Living Justly* programme.