



# Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus



## CHARITY AND JUSTICE

There are a number of ways that we can walk in the footsteps of Jesus today. We can help in a soup kitchen, visit someone in prison, or help resettle a refugee family. We can contact legislators, work for peace, or support a local community organization that empowers low-income people to address issues that impact them. These examples illustrate two distinct yet complementary ways to put Catholic social teaching into practice: charity and justice. These two types of responses have been called the two "feet" of Christian service. We need both feet—charity and justice—to walk the walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Catholic social teaching calls us to both charity and justice. Charity meets the immediate needs of persons and families; but charity alone does not change social structures that attack human dignity, oppress people, and contribute to poverty. Pursuing social justice helps us change oppressive social structures; but we cannot ignore the urgent needs of persons while we work for social change.

Charity and justice are incomplete without each other; they are two sides of the same coin. Charity calls forth a generous response from individuals; justice requires concerted communal action to transform institutional policies, societal laws, or unjust social situations. With our emphasis on individualism, we Americans tend to emphasize charity over justice. The challenge for Catholics is to appreciate the demands of both charity and justice.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana-USCCB, 2000, 2nd ed.) reinforces the important distinction between charity and justice. "The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity" (no. 2446).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also speaks of both personal and social sin. The "sin of the world" can "also refer to the negative

influence exerted on people by communal situations and social structures that are the fruit of men's sins" (no. 408). "Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. 'Structures of sin' are the ... effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a 'social sin'" (no. 1869).

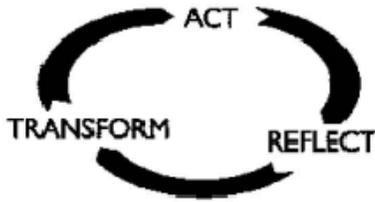
The reality of "social sin," which is imbedded in social structures, institutions, and laws, requires more of us than individual acts of charity; it requires works of justice. Abortion, racism, discrimination, sexism, genocide, ecological devastation, violence, pornography, and excessive economic inequality are all examples of social sin- structures of sin that also demand action for justice. The following chart compares and contrasts charity and justice.

<p><b>CHARITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on the needs of people</li> <li>Looks at individual situations</li> <li>Meets immediate needs</li> <li>Ameliorates symptoms of social problems</li> <li>Relies on the generosity of donors</li> </ul>
<p><b>JUSTICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on the rights of people</li> <li>Analyzes social situations and structures</li> <li>Works for long-term social change</li> <li>Addresses underlying social causes</li> <li>Relies on just laws and fair social structures</li> </ul>

**THE ART OF CATHOLIC SOCIALTEACHING**  
The "ART of Catholic Social Teaching" is a simple model originally developed by the Office of Justice and Peace of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, to help parish life integrate charity, Catholic social teaching, and justice. ART is an acronym that stands for Act, Reflect, and Transform. The goal of the ART process is to infuse the values and work of building God's Reign of justice and peace into our lives and world.



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Each of these elements will be explored as we move through the model.

## **Act**

The initial response of most people to issues of human concern is to act to meet the immediate need. For example, we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, resettle the refugee, protect the victims of domestic violence, and recycle paper: Through this action we come in contact with the issue. The issue takes on a face; it becomes more real to us. But this type of action alone also frustrates us. It does address the pain of people and the planet, but it does little to address its causes. People continue to come to us hungry, homeless, in flight from war and oppression, and battered. The environment continues to suffer.

## **Reflect**

The next step is to ask why. Why are people hungry, homeless, uprooted, battered, or discriminated against? Why is the environment damaged? Why are these issues concerns of faith? What does our faith have to say about these social issues and their causes? We begin to ask deeper questions: What factors contribute to this social problem? Who gains from the current situation? Who loses? Who has power? Who doesn't? Which beliefs and values support the status quo? And which challenge it? What does Scripture and Catholic social teaching have to say? The *reflect* phase of the ART process enables us to explore the underlying causes of poverty, violence, homelessness, racism, war, ecological devastation, and other issues. It also gives us the opportunity to *reflect* on the rich tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal teaching.

## **Transform**

The final step is to transform the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice. Social transformation is a different kind of action. Transformation gets at root causes; it does not stop at alleviating symptoms.

We can transform our communities and our world through changing social values, empowering low-income people, advocating for just public policies, buying or boycotting goods based on social values, adopting lifestyle changes, investing in socially responsible corporations, and so forth.

The *transform* phase of ART embodies the kind of action envisioned by the World Synod of Bishops in its 1971 document *Justice in the World*: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation" (in *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP [Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1982], 696).

The chart below summarizes the "ART of Catholic Social Teaching" model and the distinction between charity and justice. Reflection on Catholic social teaching and analysis of social issues provide the link between the acts of charity and works of justice.



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ACT IN CHARITY TO MEET IMMEDIATE AND URGENT NEEDS	REFLECT ON ROOT CAUSES AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING	TRANSFORM IN JUSTICE THE ROOT SOCIAL CAUSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act to alleviate the symptoms of social problems. Examples: Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, resettle the refugee, reach out to persons in crisis pregnancies, protect the victims of domestic violence, and recycle paper.</li> <li>• Come in contact with the issue; it takes on a face.</li> <li>• Perform the corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, visit the sick, and bury the dead (see Mt 25 and Tb 2).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Charity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on the needs of individuals, families, and creation</li> <li>• Looks at individual situations of need</li> <li>• Meets immediate and urgent needs</li> <li>• Addresses painful individual symptoms of social problems</li> <li>• Relies on the generosity of donors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask why? Why are people hungry, homeless, uprooted, in crisis, battered, or discriminated against?</li> <li>• Why is our ecosystem deteriorating?</li> <li>• Listen to those most directly affected—the poor and the marginalized.</li> <li>• Begin to ask deeper questions that challenge the status quo.</li> <li>• Explore the underlying causes of poverty, violence, homelessness, abortion, racism, ecological devastation, and other problems.</li> <li>• What do the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching have to say about these social issues and their causes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transform the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice.</li> <li>• To transform is to take a different kind of action.</li> <li>• Transformative action gets at the root causes; it does not stop at alleviating the symptoms.</li> <li>• Transform our communities and our world through working with empowered low-income people, advocating for just public policies, creating new social structures (for example, cooperatives and low-income housing), and consuming and investing in socially responsible ways.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Justice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on the rights of individuals, families, and creation</li> <li>• Analyzes social situations or social structures</li> <li>• Works for long-term social change</li> <li>• Addresses the underlying social causes of problems</li> <li>• Relies on just laws and fair social structures</li> </ul>