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Work and Catholic Social Thought¹⁵⁹

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One Monday morning a few weeks ago I was passing through Merchants Arch on my way to a meeting. There was a woman lying on the cobblestones, apparently unconscious. She didn't look too good to me. I guessed she was in her mid-thirties. Was she ill or just "stoned"? What to do in such circumstances poses a real dilemma? If you were to stop for every person in similar circumstances that you would come across while walking across town then you would have a full-time job. But this woman looked ill all the same. I resolved my dilemma by asking the porter in the Central Bank to call an ambulance for her. When I made my return journey she was gone – hopefully to be checked out in St James's Hospital.

I am acutely conscious that a genuine Christian, following the example of the Good Samaritan, should have taken a more interventionist course.

But what should the Good Samaritan do if he travels the same route every day for several years and finds another victim of the muggers each week at the roadside? Treat each victim with the same kindness? Give up his acts of compassion on the grounds that his purse will not bear the demands? Or begin to ask what is wrong with this particular road or the society through which it passes?

Will he begin to suspect that the Innkeeper is in league with the muggers? By his rescue efforts is he creating a market for this type of crime?

¹⁵⁹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to a conference on the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* held at Croke Park, Dublin on March 2nd, 2006.

And why will the authorities not do something about this problem? Why will they not police the road? Perhaps they don't have the resources? Maybe public spending is being curtailed, because of overseas military commitments by the Roman army.

Perhaps the local business community are objecting to paying rates or corporate taxes. Maybe the Innkeeper is an influential member of the Local Chamber of Commerce.

Perhaps it is that the police trade union is in dispute about overtime and is working to rule?

Luke, Chapter 10 does not consider these angles so it is a good thing to have a Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church to interpret Gospel values in the context of the modern world.

Catholic Social Thought is rarely mentioned in Ireland today. It has been said of it that it is the Church's best kept secret.

One morning on BBC Radio 4 I heard the author, Paul Vallely, being interviewed about a book he had written entitled "The New Politics – Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty First Century". At the time Tony Blair was promoting the concept of "The Third Way". Vallely suggested that if Blair really wanted to find a third way he should talk to his wife. When asked to explain what he meant, Vallely pointed out that, as a Catholic, Cherie Blair would know about Catholic Social Teaching and its focus on 'The Common Good' as a *via media* between capital and labour which eschews Marxist/Leninist concepts of class war. As a matter of fact the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales arguably played some part in the election of the Labour Government in 1997, when they published a Pastoral entitled "The Common Good", which was widely interpreted as an attack on the Tories.

Mr Blair, alas, did not consult his wife and little is heard from him today about a Third Way. It has been said of him, and it seems to be true, that he is a man who holds opinions strongly – while he holds them!

In the Compendium there are 103 separate references to ‘The Common Good’. In fairness this is not a concept over which the Catholic Church has a monopoly. Noam Chomsky, the left wing American author, who attracted such a huge following during a recent visit here, wrote a book with that title in 1998. Let me quote you some extracts from that book:

“The goal is a society in which the basic social unit is you and your television set. If the kid next door is hungry, it’s not your problem. If the retired couple next door invested their assets badly and are now starving, that’s not your problem”.

“Boards of directors are allowed to work together, so are banks and investors and corporations in alliances with one another and with powerful states. That’s just fine. It’s just the poor who aren’t supposed to cooperate”.

“Now that...workers are superfluous, what do you do with them? First of all, you have to make sure they don’t notice that society is unfair and try to change that, and the best way to distract them is to get them to hate and fear one another”.

“...the power of business propaganda in the US...has succeeded, to an unusual extent, in breaking down the relations among people and their sense of support for one another”.

The Compendium takes a more restrained view of the relations between labour and capital but one which is no less powerful when it states in paragraph 279:

“The relationship between labour and capital often shows traits of antagonism that take on new forms with the changing of social and economic contexts. In the past, the origin of the conflict between capital and labour was found above all in the fact that the workers put their powers at the disposal of the entrepreneurs, and these, following the principle of maximum profit, tried to establish the lowest possible wages for the work done by the

employees. In our present day, this conflict shows aspects that are new and perhaps more disquieting: scientific and technological progress and the globalisation of markets, of themselves a source of development and progress, expose workers to the risk of being exploited by the mechanisms of the economy and by the unrestrained quest for productivity”.

You might ask what practical evidence is there of this risk exposure of workers. Well even in our own buoyant economy in which one bank can make a profit of €1.7bn, there are pressures created by the migration of industry to low cost locations of which we see regular examples. In tandem with this there is inward migration of people who are vulnerable to exploitation as evidenced by the Irish Ferries and GAMA cases and the capacity of employers to use people in this situation to undermine established rates of pay and conditions in the different sectors of the economy. We have seen in recent years, and despite minimum wage provisions, the emergence of the phenomenon of ‘The Working Poor’. Statistically 19 per cent of our population are deemed to be at risk of poverty. Of all those at risk of poverty in Ireland today almost one third live in households headed by a person with a job.

Yet it is true that Ireland has also benefited from globalisation through foreign direct investment. Part of the difficulty of current public discourse is that protagonists for or against globalisation often do not acknowledge the existence of these separate truths. The challenge is to find a way to deal with this situation, not to deny the reality of it. I will return to this point later.

In “The New Industrial Society” John Kenneth Galbraith coined the phrase “Private Affluence and Public Squalor” as a commentary on the type of society American was becoming. Forty years later, in 1999, the UNDP asked him to consider how the world had evolved in the intervening period. In essence he said that things had got worse but the main difference was that greed was now held to be a legitimate motivator of behaviour.

But has the world really become a more bitterly divided planet? At one level there has been significant progress. The Cold War, with all its oppression of freedom and proxy wars is over. More countries are functioning democracies today than at any time in the past. India and China have awoken and their economic progress has the potential to lift millions out of poverty and destitution.

Africa, on the other hand, remains what Tony Blair described as a “Blight on the Face of Civilisation”. To his great credit he, with Gordon Brown, tried to lead a campaign to bring that tragic continent into the world economy. But the situation for its 750 million people is profoundly depressing.

Some 36 of the 50 countries in Africa are currently affected by drought or on the brink of it. According to the World Food Programme 43 million people are experiencing severe food shortages. The problem is exacerbated by incredibly high levels of HIV/AIDS which is killing off a generation of agriculturalists as well as teachers and other key professionals. In many cases structural adjustment programmes imposed by the West have weakened African states’ ability to cope.

These same programmes have forced cuts in public spending and entrenched the culture of corruption which is so debilitating the institutional capacity of African countries. War and other forms of conflict cause millions to become refugees or “internally displaced persons”.

Some progress has been made on debt relief and trade liberalisation. Nevertheless, the poorer a country is, the less varied its economy is and the less well equipped it is to counteract the effects of drought and other climate challenges.

Africa presents us with a unique moral dilemma. Even the best countries like Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya suffer corruption and human rights abuses. The Catholic Church has taken a strong role in advocating for increased aid for Africa, particularly the UN target

that 0.7% of GNP be allocated for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Even at its 2007 level of 0.5% of GNP Ireland spends in excess of ?813m in its ODA Budget. It is significant money and it cannot be most effectively used by financing individual projects. Most opinion in the development community supports direct budgetary support for African Governments. There is, however, a risk that such transfers will be corruptly or inappropriately used. Public opinion is not ready to accept this reality. Taking risks in an effort to lift Africa out of destitution is unavoidable and morally defensible. The plight of Africa's people is so terrible that we cannot insulate ourselves from these consequences. The desperate efforts of so many to emigrate to Europe are the most obvious manifestation of those consequences. Fortress Europe is not a viable long term option.

The range of problems with which all developed countries are trying to grapple may be summarised as follows:

- How to deal with large migration flows;
 - The failure of liberal democracy to prevent the growth of inequality
- and
- The unique influence of the United States in the world.

Globalisation is a phenomenon which excites either total opposition or zealous advocacy. Hundred of books have been written about it and its opponents include such establishment figures as George Soros and Joseph Stiglitz. Generally it is associated in the public mind with the rise of China as an industrial power and the migration of industry and services to that country and India respectively.

It is in fact a more complex process than that. The radical relaxation of anti-trust enforcement by the Regan administration in the 1980's allowed big companies to expand horizontally. Many producers, once they gained control over their markets, began to outsource less profitable operations. Many suppliers of these services became dependent on the big companies because they had few other pathways to the marketplace.

The increasing power of a few trade orientated companies over entire production and supply systems results in a variety of economic and political ills.

In a production system marked by extreme outsourcing, oligopoly does not result in the end of competition so much as the redirection of competition as leading companies capture more power to set supplier against supplier and worker against worker and even country against country. The latter arises in the battle for foreign direct investment and tax competition between countries to secure it. In reality it is not really the Chinese who are destroying Western jobs, or even globalisation as such, but rather the radical change in the structure of industry resulting in the power of the world's largest traders and retailers to pit producer against producer and to capture most or all of the gain from the arbitrage.

Anyone who doubts this analysis ought to go and see a recent film about Wal-Mart which controls 30 per cent of the US retail market. The recent controversy over the acquisition of the European steelmaker, Arcelor, by Mittal is another manifestation of the same thing. Likewise the mega merger of Proctor and Gamble and Gillette. Another example is the power over renewable energy systems of British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell.

So how can the interests of ordinary people and workers be protected in a world which is dominated by powerful corporate supply chains and is willing to accept destitution affecting 750 million people, growing inequality in the developed countries and the degradation of employment conditions? It seems impossible. And yet to accept that is to accept that people no longer have any influence over their own destiny. Such a conclusion would, it seems to me, run directly contrary to everything Catholic Social Thought stands for.

Human beings are capable of standing up for what is right but often they have to be pushed a long way before they do. Consider the United States today. Union organisation there has been pushed down to about 13 million or 12% of the labour force. Unions are unable, in many

cases, to stop employers from resiling from pension and health care provision. The automobile industry is a case in point. From an employers' perspective huge legacy costs make them uncompetitive against start up operations, like Toyota, which do not have those costs. Logically they try to shed those legacy costs and workers lose pensions and health care.

This is a serious development in a country that has virtually no universal public health or welfare provision. How will the citizens of the United States react to that? For how long will religious fundamentalism and the so called 'War on Terror' divert their attention from the reality that the kitty is bare as regards the state providing for them? For how long will they accept a combination of tax cuts for the super rich and increased military spending causing even further reductions in social programmes? What will happen when the "Baby Boomers" retirement clashes with the accumulated 2.5 trillion dollar deficit - which the economist Paul Krugman reckons the tax cuts will cost.

I would like to think that ordinary Americans would sweep the Republicans from office and, like Sweden, in the Thirties, install a new social democratic progressive era of long duration. I don't think it will happen though. Why? Because America has moved too far to the right over the past 30 years ever to come back to the values of Roosevelt's New Deal or a Johnson's vision of 'The Great Society'.

In 1968 a short time before he was assassinated, Robert Kennedy, made a powerful speech at the University of Kansas. In the course of it he said this:

"Even if we act to erase material poverty, there is another great task. It is to confront the poverty of satisfaction – a lack of purpose and dignity – that afflicts us all. Too much and for too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things.... The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy

of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile”.

Who could imagine anyone in the Democratic Party today making a speech like this? The Democrats never have been a Social Democratic party as we would understand it. Nevertheless, they have moved so far from their working class base as to mean nothing to those people. They fail to understand that it is not just neo-conservatives who care about moral and religious values. One unfortunate consequence of this is the split in the AFL-CIO (the US equivalent of Congress). Andy Stern led a breakaway group on the grounds that continued political funding of the Democratic Party would achieve nothing for working people and their organisation in trade unions.

America has a unique value system based on the heritage of the Pilgrim Fathers. It places a superior value on property and individualism. Labour rights are considered inferior to market deregulation and collectivism is frowned upon.

Europe is different. Deregulation of the labour market – one of the central institutions of a market economy – is a litmus test that shows how far any society allows capitalism to go. There has always been, ever since the Middle Ages, the idea of a just wage, which the Catholic Church supported, and which it continues to support as the Compendium makes clear. When Catholic societies embarked on capitalism in the nineteenth century they tried to retain the idea of the just wage for the worker and with it notions of the just price, just profit and even the just enterprise. They still do, and it's the reason Christian democratic parties in mainland Europe are as attached as they are to a less raw, or stakeholder-orientated capitalism.

What the Americans say instead is that capitalism is opportunity for all and risk for all; if you win that game you get lucky. It is the alternative tradition of Catholic capitalism, social market capitalism, or stakeholder capitalism – call it what you like – that is congenial to my outlook. As the Compendium puts it in paragraph 277:

“The Church’s social doctrine has not failed to insist on the relationship between labour and capital, placing in evidence both the priority of the first over the second as well as their complementarities.

Labour has an intrinsic priority over capital. This principle directly concerns the process of production: is an evident truth that emerges from the whole of man’s historical experience. This is part of the abiding heritage of the Church’s teaching”.

The whole European project was guided by people whose values were rooted in Catholic Social Thought. People like Jean Monnet and Jacques Delors particularly had a vision of a Social Europe in which the process of social dialogue between both sides of industry played a major part. Our own Social Partnership process is derived from that model and I agree with Senator Martin Manseragh when he said in his “Irish Times” column on 18 February, 2006:

“Right-wing critics claim partnership is undemocratic, as if democracy consisted only of parliamentary majority rule, rather than multi-layered participation in public affairs. While nominally Seanad Éireann is composed along corporatist lines, social partnership is much closer to the real thing. It is corporatism as an extra dimension to democracy, rather than as a substitute for it as envisaged by some in the 1930’s”

This finds a clear resonance in the Compendium - paragraph 307 states:

“Beyond their function of defending and vindicating, unions have the duty of acting as representatives working for “the

proper arrangement of economic life” and of educating the social consciences of workers so that they will feel that they have an active role, according to their proper capacities and aptitudes in the whole task of economic and social development and in the attainment of the universal common good. Unions and other forms of labour associations are to work in cooperation with other social entities and are to take an interest in the management of public matters. Union organisations have the duty to exercise influence in the political arena, making it duly sensitive to labour problems and helping it to work so that workers’ rights are respected”.

It would, of course, be a mistake to assume that there is unanimity of opinion on this point. Social Partnership has bitter opponents on the left and on the right. It is opposed on the left by Trotskyites and by others who believe in class conflict and see social reformers as simply propping up an unjust free market capitalism. It is opposed on the right by economic liberals who see social dialogue, and indeed trade unions, as an unwarranted interference with free markets. The latter have very strong support from the business press.

Within their lights they are both right. Social Europe and the social dialogue process is reformist rather than revolutionary. Equality springs from a belief that democratic societies are entitled to put constraints on markets. An activist state is required to enforce choices made by the community, to promote the primacy of the public realm and to make manifest the reality that the pre-condition for a just society is a narrowing of inequality. This clearly is anathema to the hard left and equally to the liberal right.

Nevertheless, the battle for the heart and soul of Europe does not involve the Trotskyites left. Their influence is too marginal for that. It is between Social Democrats and Liberals. Since the era of Jacques Delors the Liberals have been in the ascendant, to some extent because social democratic opinion has been in retreat for the last twenty years for reasons which I won’t go into now. But the defeat of

the Constitutional Referendum in France and The Netherlands may have halted the liberal advance. I should say, in passing, that I think the draft Constitution, particularly the Charter of Fundamental Rights, is a good document. It is clear, even if it is somewhat paradoxical, that it was rejected because of a resentment of the bellicose liberal attitudes of the Commission. I for one am glad that it happened although I hope that in time it will be possible to have it considered on its merits.

One encouraging development is the way the European Parliament dealt with the Services Directive. It is a good thing for democracy to see the Parliament coming centre stage and trying to work out a practical accommodation between economic and social matters. Doing so is completely in keeping with the tenets of Catholic Social Thought. As Paul Vallely says in his “The New Politics – Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty First Century”:

“The political problem of mankind is to combine three things – economic efficiency, social justice and individual liberty – and the modern age has lost the correct balance between the three elements of this political equation”.

There is some hope too in the fact that the conservative parties in Sweden, Canada and Britain are moving towards the centre ground. I suspect too that Angela Merkel would not have achieved the level of popularity she has as leader of a Centrist Government had she become a CDU Chancellor. Personally though, if I were a citizen of those countries I would continue to wear a clove of garlic just in case... Francis Fukuyama in “The End of History and the Last Man” argued that the end of the Cold War represented a victory for capitalism red in tooth and claw. A lot of people are putting a lot of effort into proving this hypothesis but they are wrong and the signs are to be found by those that seek them.

With the new imperialism being resisted in both the Muslim world and Latin America, growing international demands for social justice and ever greater doubts about whether the environmental crisis can be solved

within the existing economic system, the pressure for political and social alternatives will increase. The particular form of society created by 20th Century communist parties failed because it ignored the human person's right to individual freedom and will never be replicated. But the quest for a just society will not be abandoned. The best definition of the just society that I have seen is by the Polish and Jewish Sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman who said when asked to speak about it:

“What would the just society be like? The only answer I can offer in good conscience is that a “Just Society” is a society which thinks it is not just enough, which questions the sufficiency of any achieved level of justice and considers justice always to be a step or more ahead. Above all it is a society that reacts angrily to any case of injustice and promptly sets about correcting it”.

Europe, built on the heritage of Catholic Social Thought, offers the best possibilities for a just society. The mission of the European Union is no longer to prevent warfare within its territory – such would be unthinkable today – but rather to tame globalisation in the service of mankind. Europe, given the dysfunctional state of America, is quite simply, the hope of the world.

Earlier I mentioned the difficulties of all countries in managing migration flows. It is an acute challenge for Europe and Ireland is in the cockpit of that challenge.

With the opening of our labour market to the 10 new countries of Eastern Europe the non-national component of our workforce rose to 9 per cent in less than 18 months. Germany took 30 years to get to that point. This poses a unique challenge, in justice, to our society. I want to try to relate it to our discussion today because I think most people will admit that the role of the trade union movement is central in this matter.

During the course of the second Nice Referendum the accession of the 10 new members was not expected to produce the numbers of immigrants it did. Congress campaigned strongly in favour of the Nice

Referendum. We took the main burden of argument against those who said that the country would be swamped by people coming to take Irish jobs. We do not regret taking that stand but we have to admit that we underestimated the push-pull factors that subsequently attracted people here. The evidence available at the time, based on the empirical experience of the entry of Spain, Portugal and Greece, suggested that migration overall would be small and negligible for Ireland given its peripheral location. What essentially undermined that analysis was a combination of Ireland's decision not to avail of the derogation contained in the Nice Treaty to open up its labour market and the opposite decision by the other 12 countries to do so. We were not alone in forming the judgement we did because the ESRI forecast relatively modest numbers of net immigrants of 5000 in 2004, 14,000 in 2005 and 19,000 in 2006. As we now know, there was net immigration of 53,400 people in the year to April 2005 and this has continued to increase.

What Congress offers employers and Government is a bargain. We retain the principle of labour mobility but it must be on our terms. Our terms will require the protection of indigenous and non-Irish nationals alike from exploitation and displacement. The measures we propose will not offend against genuine economic efficiency but they will invoke an equal commitment to social justice.

This requires a legal framework, the allocation of sufficient resources to ensure enforcement and strong enough sanctions to promote a culture of compliance.

I mentioned at the outset that Catholic Social Thought is sometimes regarded as the Church's best kept secret. That is true of the times we are in but it wasn't always so.

Catholic Social Thought attracted advocates in the Thirties where motives were probably genuine but they put it at the service of a political ideology which would be abhorrent to most people today. Prominent academics like James Hogan of UCC and Michael Tierney of UCD made common cause with reactionary intellectual priests like

Fr Edward Cahill and Fr Edward Coyne to promote a sort of corporatism as an alternative to democracy rather than enhancement of it. The Blueshirts were the political manifestation of that stream of thought. It must be acknowledged, however, that some Catholic figures, like Fr Flanagan, stood out against this thinking and, indeed, a Christian Brother from Derry actually died fighting for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. As you know, mainstream Catholic opinion supported Franco and the Blueshirts who fought – or at least went to Spain ostensibly to fight – on his side.

In the Fifties and Sixties, the Jesuits, to their credit, gave Catholic Social Teaching a new impetus. Many generations of trade union activists participated in adult education programmes through the Catholic Workers' College, later the College of Industrial Relations.

Nevertheless, from the Thirties through to the Sixties the Church was a cold place for people with left leaning sympathies. In part this was shaped by an anti-Communist paranoia characteristic of the Cold War period. It has been said of that period that if five members of a left wing group held a meeting, one would be a representative of the CIA, one would be Special Branch and two would be looking out for the interests of John Charles McQuaid.

The emergence of Catholic policy in Ireland post independence was unusual in a European context. Many European countries developed along separate confessional lines most notably, for example in the trade union movement. Many European countries have separate Catholic, Protestant and secular socialist trade union centres. The same pattern emerged in politics. That didn't happen in Ireland because it was assumed that everybody more or less subscribed to a Catholic orthodoxy.

On the whole this was not, I think, healthy, although as a child of the Fifties I have no sense of the oppressive society that one would judge it to have been in retrospect. Yet it cannot be denied that any significant social legislation from the equal pay directives of the Seventies on

came from Europe and was, in many cases, resisted by legislators here. The irony of this is that, as I have argued earlier, the European Social Market construct is based on Catholic social values.

So my thesis is that the Irish Church has made many mistakes in the last eighty years. Its authoritarianism has damaged it and concealed from full public evaluation the richness of its social teaching.

But things are different now. Many Church organisations are strong advocates of social justice. People like Fr Seán Healy and Sr Brigid Reynolds have been to the forefront of public debate about social and economic policy. Trocaire is a strong advocate for justice in relation to our policy towards the Developing World.

I am surprised that Noam Chomsky attracted such an enormous following when he came here. He is one of the most powerful intellects in the world today but I doubt that all these people who attended his lectures occupy the same political space that he does.

What this confirms in my own mind is that people, while displaying all the attributes of individualism and consumerism, still feel uneasy about the enormous growth of corporate power in a globalised world on the one hand, and the diminution of social solidarity on the other. They have no reference point against which to critically evaluate these trends. In short they no longer have a value system.

This is the challenge for the Church in the modern world. It has to transcend its own recent humiliation and the pre-occupation with defining morality only in terms of sexual morals – which lets face it; it can no longer credibly do anyway. Catholic Social Thought, as presented in the Compendium, is not about that. It is about a code of Christian ethics and values designed to promote the common good. People of faith and people of no religious conviction but who care about the common good will see it as timely and engage with it. It should cease to be the Church's best kept secret!

Lord Patten, in his book “Not Quite a Diplomat” seems to take a sceptical view of Catholic Social Teaching:

“The identification of the EU with the Catholic Church and Catholic political and social teaching has always made it a harder sell in Britain than it might otherwise have been”.

Chapter 2, Page 47

and again:

*“Catholic social policy has always caused anxiety, mixing (as it often does) wafflingly well meaning and incompatible aims with a **dirigiste** instinct increasingly out of sympathy with the times”.*

From what I have said so far you will not be surprised when I say that I take a more benign view. I am a Social Democrat and Mr Patten is a Conservative, and British Conservatives have not much empathy with even mainland European Christian Democrats, even if Mr Cameron is moving his party towards the centre ground. Then again the centre ground in Britain has defined by Mr Blair who has not much regard for European Social Democrats. So we are at odds.

But let me qualify my point by saying that I consider the best manifestation of Catholic Social Thought – as represented by the political equation embracing economic efficiency, individual freedom and social justice – to be found in the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries are always in the top ten for competitiveness, productivity and social cohesion. The Nordic countries have high levels of public services supported by high levels of taxation. They are the direct antithesis of the Anglo Saxon model that European liberals want us to adopt.

The only complication in this is that the Nordic countries are in the Lutheran tradition!

Pope Benedict's first encyclical makes it clear that there is no room in the community of believers for a poverty that denies anything essential for a dignified life...the concept of neighbour is universalised.

There is a recently produced film about the life and times of Johnny Cash. One of Johnny's best albums was recorded in Folsom Prison. He was a man who had a sense of what it meant to love your neighbour. When he asked his record company to make the recording they didn't want to do it. There is a scene in the film where the man in charge of the record company said to him:

"Look John, your fans are all Christians. They won't want to see you giving comfort to a gang of rapists and murderers".

Johnny replied:

"Well they ain't Christians then".

I started off by explaining why I thought the parable of the Good Samaritan needed to be interpreted for the modern world. However, Matthew 25 (31-46) is direct and more explicit:

*"I was hungry and you never gave me food;
I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink;
I was a stranger and you never made me welcome;
Naked and you never clothed me;
Sick and in prison and you never visited me".*

It does not, it seems to me, require much intellectual effort to see how this powerful injunction applies to our times. The Good Samaritan acts immediately and without qualification to relieve the urgent physical suffering of another person. Remember too that the Good Samaritan is a foreigner!