



To love God and neighbor: An Anglican perspective

A foundation document of the CES by Rev Canon Dr Ray Cleary

Rev Canon Dr Ray Cleary outlines how caring for the poor and oppressed is an integral part of Anglicanism. He points out that words of faith, without deeds, diminishes Christian discipleship.

Christians and communities of faith have provided food for the hungry, care for the sick and frail, and refuge for the sojourner, the homeless, the orphan and aged, as an expression of the two great commandments:

To love God and to love one's neighbour.

Anglicans in Australia have expressed this tradition of hospitality and service through local parishes, welfare and community agencies like Anglicare Victoria and the Brotherhood of St Laurence and in their own lives by joining community agencies as volunteers and in donating money. Through all expressions of Anglicanism in Australia at both parish and Diocesan levels, this ministry of compassion and social justice has been an integral part of Anglican ethos and strategy to reach out and to embrace children, young people, the aged, the homeless and families, where life is a struggle, resources often minimal and opportunities limited.

The warrant for the work of the Church in a ministry of social justice as an integral part of its mission is to be found in the life and ministry of Jesus himself, who healed the sick, welcome the rejected and outcast, dined with those who were despised and offered forgiveness as the victim of humanity's inhumanity. Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophetic tradition, expressed in the words of the Prophet Micah:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

A ministry of social justice is not an optional extra for those who seek to walk faith fully as a disciple in the footsteps of Jesus. Nor is it to be understood only as acts of charity or goodwill.

Serving the poor, engaging the homeless, feeding the hungry, are without doubt, compassionate acts. The Gospels illustrate how Jesus expressed his understanding of this task in words found in Luke's Gospel:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

A further reading of Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus (also found in the other synoptic Gospels) particularly in the "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:20f) and Mary's Song (Luke 1:46), sees Jesus, not only doing good, but also challenging the religious and political leaders of the day for their exclusion strategies, protection of privilege, and failure to distribute God's bounty with Justice. Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount, and his accounts of the Judgement of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46) is a stark reminder that in the face of the naked, homeless and hungry, there is the presence of the one who calls us to love one another as he loves us. Matthew also reminds us that wealth is part of God's bounty to be shared with others.

Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, reminds us how the whole of creation waits in hope in anticipation for the fulfilment of God's plan, where all will live in harmony with their God and each other. Christians are called to work with God in fulfilling this promise – a promise which is both a here and now challenge, as well as a future event. This challenge is more than an individual's responsibility. It exists at the heart and centre of our response to God as a community of faith. A ministry of social justice, of reaching out to those in need, of advocating for the other, the refugee and the exploited, cannot be ignored or justified on ideological or economic grounds. It is an imperative grounded in Scripture and expressed by Jesus in his ministry. Christians are called to emulate Jesus in their own lives.

21 November 2006