

Book Review

Dal Toso, G., Pompey, H., Gehrig, R., & Dolezel, J. (2015). *Church caritas ministry in the perspective of Caritas-theology and Catholic social teaching*. Olomouc, Czech Republic: Palacky University.

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Following the example of Jesus, Christians are compelled to extend God's love to the needy in the form of charitable service including organized, institutional social service. Despite this deep and pervading commitment, it was not until the early 20th century that a Catholic theology of charity or Caritas-Theology (CT) was first developed and articulated, primarily at German universities in Muenster and Freiburg. This geographically limited theological reflection only found expression in official Catholic documents in 2005 with Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. Given the large number of charitable social services, with millions of volunteers and professionals, the authors of this short book hope to correct this lack of attention. With this English translation they also hope to introduce CT to relevant audiences in the United States (p. 8).

Demonstrating CT's multifaceted nature as closely related to Catholic Social Teaching (CST), each of the authors develops a different aspect of CT while identifying significant implications for the Church's charitable mission.

The first essay articulates its purpose in its title: "Ministry of Charity—Canon Law Rules and Theological Inspiration: The *Motu Proprio* "Intima Ecclesiae Natura." The author Giampietro Dal Toso is the current Under-Secretary of the Papal Council *Cor Unum*, which concerns itself with the Catholic Church's charitable and human relief efforts. Dal Toso explores the legal implications of CT with an analysis of Benedict XVI's document

Intima Ecclesiae, which provides a "legislative framework" for the charitable work of the Church, given how closely that work is related to the Church's identity as called to service (p. 13).

Threaded throughout Dal Toso's essay is the notion of *diakonia* (service) as an essential part of the Church's mission. Despite the critical role of service, he notes that there is little legislative guidance from the universal church, hence the need for Benedict's document. Although some would view the law as a limiting factor in the work of charity, Dal Toso argues that the law can assist charitable work by providing legal protection to those served as well as to those engaged in service (p. 16).

The importance of *diakonia* is further developed as he examines the theological inspiration of *Intima Ecclesiae*. Scripturally this inspiration is rooted in the Gospel of John: "God is Love." It is God's act of love towards us, especially as reflected in the ministry of Jesus Christ, which serves as the foundation of the Church's work of love. This love is articulated not only in the work of preaching and worship, but also in the work of charity/*diakonia* including Christian social work (cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* [#25]). As an essential dimension of the Church, the work of charity and service cannot be reduced to welfare for the needy; charity, like preaching and worship, has an evangelical and ministerial character (19-20). Consequently, Dal Toso highlights the importance of education for all those involved in charitable work, including social workers, with a focus on professional and spiritual

training that goes beyond social ethics and embodies the principles of CT (p. 25).

The second essay is written by Heinrich Pompey and entitled “Caritas-Theology—Theological foundations and shape of the Church’s Charitable Ministry.” Pompey is the Professor Emeritus of the Department of Caritas Science and Christian Social Welfare at the University of Freiburg, Germany, and is a long-time proponent of the study of Caritas as a unique discipline. In his essay, Pompey offers a conceptual framework for the understanding of CT. His focus is to build on the thought of the three most recent Popes who emphasized the unique Christian character of charitable work.

Pompey’s primary message is that the Church’s work of charity cannot simply exist as a glorified social services project. In fact, there are some unique implications that flow from the special nature of how the Church engages in this kind of work. For the American understanding, it is important to note that when Pompey and his colleagues refer to *caritas* or *caritas* ministry they are referring to the institutional charitable work of the Church, including social work, as an expression of the Church’s diaconal character. The foundation of this work, Pompey argues, should be CT. It is Pompey’s hope to clarify the “practical-theological consequences” of CT, especially as developed by Benedict XVI (p. 37).

Fundamental for Pompey’s analysis is the uniqueness of *caritas* ministry as differentiated from other forms of humanitarian care. This unique identifier is the fact that the Catholic Church’s charitable work includes care for the soul as part of its all-encompassing work of service to the total person. Referencing *Intima Ecclesiae* he notes the responsibility of leadership, especially the local Bishop, in ensuring the quality of the charitable work of his diocese as a holistic experience within a “community of faith, hope and love” (p. 40).

At the core of his thought is a personal encounter with Christ through those involved in a *caritas*

moment. The helper and the helped meet the suffering and reconciling Christ in each other. Love is the motivator and the guiding force of the social service provider. With this love as inspiration, the helper provides for material needs but also serves as a spiritual healer and, in an ecclesial context, as a messenger of the Good News. The “revitalization of faith, hope and love” is at the heart of the practical implications of CT (p. 55). For Pompey the role of the community as the locus of this revitalization cannot be understated. For the Catholic charitable and social worker, this includes participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (p. 72).

To be sure, this spiritual and ministerial approach to the Church’s charitable work does not imply that professional training and skills are not required. In fact, the ministerial outcomes of charity are enhanced and secured by compliance with professional standards and training. Both expertise and a caring heart are needed to qualify as ecclesial charitable work (pp. 78-79). Ultimately, Pompey achieves his goal of articulating a theology that provides meaning to the Church’s charitable work as well as placing the work of charity at the very heart of the Church’s existence.

Rainer Gehrig is the author of the third essay entitled “Training and Formation on Caritas-Theology (CT) and Catholic Social Teaching (CST).” Gehrig is the Master Program Coordinator of the International Institute of Charity and Volunteerism at the Catholic University San Antonia in Murcia, Spain. In his essay, Gehrig explores the question of situating CT as a “cornerstone for education on practical theology and CST as a converging discipline in this formation process” (p. 93). He begins by offering an outline of the fundamental meaning of CT.

By providing basic definitions and a historical overview of CT, Gehrig clearly introduces the challenges and promises of this theology. These initial explanations would have been helpful to the reader at the beginning of the book, especially for those who are new to CT. This is uniquely true for American Catholics in that *caritas* means something

specific to Europeans and generally refers to the charitable or social service work of the Church. In the United States, *caritas* is often simply translated as “charity,” which may mean a monetary gift to help those in need. It may also mean the organization itself that is receiving charity. This is an important distinction if CT is to be understood and explored outside of its current European context.

After an extensive overview of the history of CT as well as an overview of its current context in Germany, Spain, France and the Czech Republic, Gehrig begins his comparison of CT with traditional CST. While a simplification, the core of the difference is that CT is practiced (with appropriate theological/theoretical reflection) on the micro-level, whereas CST offers a broader understanding of Gospel’s social implications for the lives of those served by the Church’s mission.

Particularly enlightening is Gehrig’s distinction between “Mercy Charity” and “Justice Charity” (p. 115). Mercy Charity can be considered as an “aid-function” of the Church, while Justice Charity references the Church’s “advocacy function.” Each of these functions relates to the Church’s charitable work (Charity/Aid) and Catholic Social Teaching (Justice/Advocacy). This is not a dualistic approach but rather one of complementarity. Gehrig notes that the classic justice categories of “solidarity” and “subsidiarity” are “intensified” and “improved existentially” with a social service mission that is powered by faith, hope and love (p. 116). Gehrig reiterates the call of the other authors to include CT as part of the training of Catholic social service providers (p. 123).

In the final essay, Jakub Doležel writes about the “Complementarity of the Caritas Practice and Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in the Perspective of ‘Dual Focus’ of Social Work Practice.” Doležel, a Professor of Christian Social Work at Palacký University in Olomouc, Czechia, continues the thesis of the preceding writers while highlighting the uniqueness of CT as it applies to the field of social work. Doležel offers three conclusions in his essay.

First, that the “socio-pastoral mission” of the church is expressed in the charity of the Church as well as CST, each autonomous but also complementary. Like the other authors, Doležel highlights the disparity between the treatment of CT and CST, followed by an overview of the history of the two distinct but complementary paths that each has taken. This complementarity is highlighted in Doležel’s identification of three scriptural moments: the interconnection between love of God and love of neighbor (Mt 22); the expansion of love beyond family and tribe (Lk 10) and the confirmation of God’s identity as love and his intervention in human affairs as an expression of that love (John 3). These moments, along with the New Testament’s “sensitivity to the requirement for justice” strengthen his argument for the complementarity of charity and justice (p. 131).

The second conclusion deals with the “constructive enrichment” between CST and CT. Doležel notes that *caritas* often draws its inspiration from CST but rarely in the reverse (at least not in an explicit and intentional way). To demonstrate his point Doležel examines social work theories and their differentiation between interventions on the macro and micro levels. It is this dual focus of social work that highlights the complementarity of CST and CT. On the one hand, the macro-level focuses on organizations and communities with an emphasis on structural changes guided by social justice. On the other hand, the micro-level social worker directs attention to the needs of individuals and smaller entities often guided by a sense of Christian love (p. 146).

This contention leads to the third conclusion, that there must be a different understanding of the relationship between CST and the practice of *caritas*. Rather than just assuming that *caritas* is dependent on CST, Doležel believes that it is on the micro-level of *caritas* that this social teaching draws its meaning and relevance.

It is this last conclusion that highlights the concern of all of the authors of this work: that any

discussion of justice as expressed in CST and lived in its social service mission is in danger of losing its connection to Jesus' call to love—*caritas*. Their solution is to advocate for the practice of *caritas* and its concomitant theology as a source for CST, which takes on contemporary urgency with the call by Pope Francis for the Church to extend itself deeply into the disenfranchised periphery of society with mercy. Perhaps “mercy” may be the best unifying term for both justice and charity. This volume succeeds as an attempt to bring this concern and proposed solution into Catholic social practice and theology of the English-speaking world, especially the United States. It is an effort that deserves attention from social justice thinkers as well as Catholic practitioners in charitable and social work ministries.