



EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

2016 Reflections

Article 12. Catechesis and Social Justice

By Lorraine S. DeLuca

In the 2001 article on “Catechesis and Social Teaching,” Matthew Hayes wrote about Catholic Social Teaching being “our best kept secret.” Until more recently this may still have been true, but with Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’ - On Care for Our Common Home*, I believe this is changing. Pope Francis did not write this in a vacuum but followed in the footsteps of his two predecessors, Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. But, with this encyclical the Pope has brought Social Catholic Teaching to the forefront, melding the theme of care for God’s creation with its six others themes. He presents a holistic approach on how to live a relationship with God, our neighbor and all of God’s creation. In this and his others writings, such as *Misericordiae Vultus* proclaiming the extraordinary Year of Mercy, Pope Francis insists that the Church not remain on the theoretical level but must be very concrete in its actions. While our mission is to bring the Good News of Jesus to the world, this is to be done on a daily basis by every Catholic Christian not just in words but through actions of mercy, peace, and justice.

How should this perspective be incorporated into catechesis? In catechesis, everything that is taught should inform who we are as followers of Christ and how we live. Everything we do flows from who we are as beings created in the image and likeness of a loving God. We mold ourselves in the likeness of Jesus when we live as loving human beings, and in doing so we ratify God’s sentiments at the creation of human beings stated in Genesis 1:31, “God saw that all he had made was very good.”

We learn and experience love first in our families, but need to extend it outward to the ever growing community as we age. Often times in our parishes, service to others is one of the requirements of the Confirmation program. Students are asked to complete a certain number of hours for “service projects.” There is nothing wrong with asking those in our catechetical programs to live the Works of Mercy, but rather than just something that is required as part of sacramental preparation, formation about and living the Church’s Catholic Social Teaching should permeate all our catechetical programs from those for the youngest to our adult faith formation experiences.

Matthew Hayes rightly focused on the role of the catechist in bringing Catholic Social Teaching alive for students, but I believe that PCLs and Diocesan Offices can and should play a role in this as well. If you minister on the diocesan level, do your catechetical guidelines specifically call for unpacking Catholic Social Teaching and engaging students in service on all grade levels? As a PCL, do you guide

your catechists by making them aware of appropriate opportunities in the parish and wider community with which they can engage their students?

One of the objectives of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Beaumont is to integrate Catholic Social Teaching into all the formation we provide. This is done whether we are offering adult bible study or courses of theology by asking the “So what?” question, meaning “what does this (teaching, scripture passage) have to do with who we are what we are called to do?” This requires critical reflection, as Matthew Hayes stated, and is something that can be used for all ages. There already exist many ways that parishioners are living out our Catholic Social Teaching, but are people, whether children, youth, or adults given the opportunity to reflect on their service action either before or after completing it? I believe that this is often the missing aspect of evangelizing catechesis, and I have seen this first hand in one of our parishes. Year after year many parishioners come forward to put on a health fair for those living in the more needy area of our city, but the parishioners never come together to reflect on their actions in light of Christ’s teaching in Matthew 25. “Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty...?” Likewise, do Confirmation students take time to reflect on their experiences of service? Something as simple as asking them to write a one page reflection on what they least liked doing, most liked doing, and why, will start them down the road of critical reflection about their faith.

As you can see, it is not really difficult to add elements to catechetical programs and processes to make them more evangelizing, and thus evangelize both those who offer themselves in service and those who witness and benefit from the service. It just takes being more conscious of referring what is taught and done to our Catholic Social teaching so that Catholics of all ages can become more of what they already are—humans created for love who are reflecting love in what they do.

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