

EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THEMES FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS

"Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways."
(GDC, #105)

"The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ."
(CT5) All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ."
(GDC, #80)

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

Opening Prayer

Take a moment to place yourself in the presence of God's Spirit, then prayerfully read and reflect on the following passage:

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.
(Luke 4:16-22)

Article 12

Catechesis & Social Teaching Becoming Gospel Convicts

by Matthew Hayes

Based on paragraphs #101, 102, 104, 157, and 163 in the *General Directory for Catechesis*

Preparing to Read

In preparing to read this article, please reflect on and discuss with others the following:

1. What are some of the general themes of Catholic social teaching?
2. What are the major Church documents that speak about Catholic social teaching?

When one reads Catholic Church documents about catechesis, the social justice tradition is clearly situated at its heart. *The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* identifies moral formation and missionary initiation as two of the central tasks of catechesis. Moral formation challenges the catechist to "transmit to the disciples the attitudes of the Master himself," fostering an "interior transformation" resulting in a capacity for "moral testimony" that "must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel" (see CT 29f). Missionary initiation seeks to equip the disciples of Jesus "to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives" through the nourishing of "evangelical attitudes" (*GDC*, #85-86). In June 1998, the United States Catholic bishops described sharing of the social tradition as a "defining measure of Catholic education and formation" (*Sharing Catholic Social Teaching [SCST]*, p. 3).

Social teaching is at the heart of catechizing, yet a recent compilation of Catholic social teaching called it "our best kept secret." In June 1998, the U.S. bishops wrote of "the urgent task to incorporate Catholic social teaching more fully and explicitly into Catholic educational programs" (*SCST*, p. 2).

A clue to the gap between the vision of and the practice of the integral connection between catechesis and social teaching is found in the *GDC* as it describes the three dimensions of catechist formation: being, knowing, and savoir-faire ("know how") (*GDC*, #238). To effectively catechize and nourish evangelical attitudes, the catechist must be on the journey of interior transformation; know the social justice tradition; and have the "know-how" to assist learners. The learners are to bring the "assets" of "a consistent moral framework," centered on the themes of Catholic social teaching, into the "public square" (*Faithful Citizenship*, pp.10-11).

Being; Becoming Convicted

Some years ago a poster read: "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" A catechist of Catholic social teaching must

become convicted of the relevance of the Gospel. As the U.S. bishops' plan for adult faith formation indicates, an adult Catholic is one who can "explore the applications of the Church's moral and social teaching in personal, family, professional, cultural, and social life;" and "understand the importance of *servicing those in need, promoting the common good, and working for the transformation of society* through personal and social action" (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, p. 33). The catechist, as the "soul of every method" (*GDC*, #156), has to catechize about social teaching from the lifelong process of giving evidence that he or she is continually attempting to live it as an adult convict.

Knowing: Understanding the Charges

The catechist has to understand the social teaching of the community that motivates him or her into social action. Again, the adult faith formation plan gives direction. The adult is one who should "study the Church's teaching on the *dignity of the human person* in its social doctrine . . ." (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, p. 30). It no longer can be a "best kept secret"!

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a basic starting point to reflect on and understand the social teaching of the Church. Part three "Life in Christ," section 2, offers a tool for reflection on the relevance of the Beatitudes, the sermon on the mount, and the Commandments on contemporary issues. Another tool is session one ("Exploring Catholic Social Teaching") in the *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, which introduces the learner to the general themes of Catholic social teaching.

(This is also an excellent guide to introduce others to Catholic social teaching.) An extensive reference, though limited by its publication date of 1987, is *Our Best Kept Secret: The Rich Heritage of Catholic Social Teaching*. To understand the communal implications of Catholic social teaching, the catechist can reference the 1992 U.S. bishops' statement *Communities of Salt and Light*. The 1998 bishops' statement, *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice*, is helpful to reflect on the challenge as an individual disciple. To

From the General Directory for Catechesis

The call to conversion and belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom—a Kingdom of justice, love and peace, and in whose light we shall be judged—is fundamental for catechesis. (*GDC*, #102)

All forms of poverty, "not only economic but also cultural and religious" (CA 57; see CCC 2444), are a source of concern for the Church. (*GDC*, #103)

Catechesis shall:

" . . . situate the message of liberation in the perspective of the 'specifically religious objective of evangelization' . . ." (EN 32; see SRS 41 and RM 58)

" . . . present Christian social morality as a demand and consequence of the 'radical liberation worked by Christ' . . ." (LC 71)

" . . . arouse in catechumens and those receiving catechesis 'a preferential option for the poor' . . ." (SRS 42; CA 57; LC 68. See CCC 2443-2449) (*GDC*, #104)



gain insight into social teaching as one of the core convictions of Catholicism, with educational and catechetical implications, one can consult chapter eight ("A Faith That Does Justice") in Tom Groome's book *Educating For Life*. Finally, a continual study and reflection upon those who have lived as "Gospel convicts" is a means to be mentored by the communion of saints. A reference here is *A Passion For Life*.

This is not an exhaustive list. There are many resources the catechist can draw on to understand the social teaching of the Catholic community. The important question is for the catechist to "always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (1 Peter 3:15).

Savoir-faire: Developing Convicts

What are the specific steps a catechist can use to develop a conviction about the relevance of Catholic social teaching in the minds and hearts of learners?

Using the image of sowing the seeds of faith (Mark 4:3-8) from the GDC, how can the catechist prepare the soil so a rich harvest of social action is the result? The best catechetical methodology for social justice is modeled on the dynamics of the Emmaus story in Luke (Luke 24:13-35).

Jesus, as catechist, enters into relationship with the travelers, questioning them about their life experience. He uses their responses as a catalyst to explain the tradition of the Scriptures. In the breaking and sharing of bread, their "eyes were opened" and, with the conviction that Jesus was alive, they reversed direction going back to the community they had left to share the news.

Catechizing for social justice action can model the dynamics of the Emmaus account by empowering learners to begin to see differently. Ira Shor, in his work *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, characterizes critical thinking as a process of seeing the ordinary in extra-ordinary ways. This is what happened on the journey to

Emmaus. Through questioning, conversation, and experience of the "ordinary" Jewish ritual of blessing and breaking bread, the disciples saw the world with new eyes.

Paulo Freire, a noted Brazilian educator who worked to empower individuals and change structures of oppression in his country, became known for an educational method of consciousness raising. The catechetical process is an attempt, in the power of the Spirit, to raise the consciousness of learners about a Gospel perspective on the situation in which the learner is living.

Steven Brookfield, a colleague of Shor, has built on the foundation of Freire, describing processes to develop adults as critical thinkers. Brookfield described five phases that people move through in becoming critical thinkers: 1) trigger event, 2) appraisal, 3) exploration, 4) developing alternative perspectives, and 5) integration (*Developing Critical Thinkers*, pp. 26-28).

In educating for justice, a "trigger event" can be an experience that causes an individual to begin to become aware of a situation or circumstance in a new way. For example, a trigger event may be a direct experience with the homeless within a city, or with single parents struggling to make ends meet. From this experience, one begins a process of appraisal and exploration to identify the assumptions and/or consequences

for self or others. The "alternative perspective" comes from the social justice tradition of the community, with integration flowing into a new perspective and action.

A powerful catechetical methodology for all ages of learners (also built on the foundation of Freire) is the basic dynamic of the "shared praxis," articulated by Tom Groome in *Christian Religious Education* (chapters 9-10). Groome articulates five movements to the process:

- 1 Naming the present action in which learners are invited to "name their own activity concerning the topic for attention."
2. Critical reflection in which learners are invited to "reflect on what they do,

Reflection Questions for Individuals and Groups



Select some of the following questions to help you assimilate your understanding of this article.

1. What new insights about the relationship between catechesis and social teaching did you gain from this article?
2. The catechist, as the 'soul of every method' (*GDC*, #156), has to catechize about social teaching from the lifelong process of giving evidence that he or she is continually attempting to live it as an adult convict." What is your reaction to or the implications of this statement for you and your parish?
3. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
4. As you look at the catechetical process of shared praxis, what aspects are you comfortable with and what do you find most challenging?
5. What events or experiences in your life have been "conscious-raising"?
6. What is the role and importance of critical thinking in raising the consciousness of learners about Gospel values and attitudes?
7. Having read this article, what implications and challenges do you find for your personal life?

and what the likely or intended consequences of their actions are."

3. Presentation of the community's tradition in which the catechist "makes present to the group the Christian community Story concerning the topic at hand and the faith response it invites."

4. Dialogue in which learners are invited to "appropriate the Story into their lives in a dialectic with their own stories."

5. Response in which learners are invited to "choose a personal faith response for future action." (*Christian Religious Education*, pp. 207-08)

A final tool to mention is the ACT-REFLECT-TRANSFORM (ART) methodology that is explained with examples and age adaptations in the *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*. This volume outlines a process of three

sessions to move learners into a reflection on social teaching with study sheets included.

These are examples of methods that can be used to develop consciousness and action on behalf of our Catholic social justice tradition. The key to *savoir-faire* (the "know-how"), to developing Gospel convicts, is the relationship of listening and questioning that the catechist has with the learners. Through this process, the learner is drawn into a consideration of the tradition and its relevance for his or her life situation. With the help of the Spirit, the learner's "eyes are open," and he or she views the situation in a new way with different attitudes and actions. One becomes a Gospel convict.

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Closing Prayer



Good and gracious God, you call us to be your people, echoing your Word and presence through our ordinary lives as we strive to bring about your reign in our world today. We pray that we will continue to recognize and respond to your presence as we go forth to evangelize our world with your good news and promote a new vision and new direction for the catechetical ministry of all people. We ask for your blessing and intimate presence on our ongoing journey of conversion, becoming disciples who will transform the world through proclaiming and living Gospel values.

We ask this in your name. Amen.

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For Further Reading

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