

Notable quotations from

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions

U.S. Bishops, 1998

Far too many Catholics are not familiar with the basic content of Catholic social teaching. More fundamentally, many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith. This poses a serious challenge for all Catholics, since it weakens our capacity to be a Church that is true to the demands of the Gospel. We need to do more to share the social mission and message of our Church.

Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith.... Because this commitment to social justice is at the heart of who we are and what we believe, it must be shared more effectively.

We offer these reflections to address the pressing need to educate all Catholics on the Church's social teaching and to share the social demands of the Gospel and Catholic tradition more clearly.

If Catholic education and formation fail to communicate our social tradition, they are not fully Catholic.

The focus of this statement is the urgent task to incorporate Catholic social teaching more fully and explicitly into Catholic educational programs. This must be undertaken in the context of efforts to share the faith in its entirety and to encourage Catholics to experience the gospel call to conversion in all its dimensions. Recognizing the importance of this broader goal of Catholic education and formation, we call for a renewed commitment to integrate Catholic social teaching into the mainstream of all Catholic educational institutions and programs.

Our social heritage is unknown by many Catholics. Sadly, our social doctrine is not shared or taught in a consistent and comprehensive way in too many of our schools, seminaries, religious education programs, colleges, and universities. We need to build on the good work already underway to ensure that every Catholic understands how the Gospel and church teaching call us to choose life, to serve the least among us, to hunger and thirst for justice, and to be peacemakers. The sharing of our social tradition is a defining measure of Catholic education and formation.

The values of the Church's social teaching must not be treated as tangential or optional. They must be a core part of teaching and formation. Without our social teaching, schools, catechetical programs, and other formation programs would be offering an incomplete presentation of our Catholic tradition. This would fall short of our mission and would be a serious loss for those in our educational and catechetical programs.

Central to our identity as Catholics is that we are called to be leaven for transforming the world, agents for bringing about a kingdom of love and justice.

Just as the social teaching of the Church is integral to Catholic faith, the social justice dimensions of teaching are integral to Catholic education and catechesis. They are an essential part of Catholic identity and formation.

We seek to encourage a more integral sharing of the substance of Catholic social teaching in Catholic education and catechesis at every level. The commitment to human life and dignity, to human rights and solidarity, is a calling all Catholic educators must share with their students. It is not a vocation for a few religion teachers, but a challenge for every Catholic educator and catechist.

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. It offers moral principles and coherent values that are badly needed in our time. In this time of widespread violence and diminished respect for human life and dignity in our country and around the world, the Gospel of life and the biblical call to justice need to be proclaimed and shared with new clarity, urgency, and energy.

The Scriptures say, "Without a vision the people perish" (Prv 29:18). As Catholics, we have an inspiring vision in our social teaching. In a world that hungers for a sense of meaning and moral direction, this teaching offers ethical criteria

for action. In a society of rapid change and often confused moral values, this teaching offers consistent moral guidance for the future. For Catholics, this social teaching is a central part of our identity. In the words of John Paul II, it is "genuine doctrine" (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 5).

As bishops and pastors, we believe the Church's social teaching is integral to our identity and mission as Catholics. This is why we seek a renewed commitment to integrate and to share the riches of the Church's social teaching in Catholic education and formation at every level. This is one of the most urgent challenges for the new millennium. As John Paul II has said, "A commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 51).

We strongly support new initiatives to integrate the social teachings of the Church more fully into educational and catechetical programs and institutions. Many catechists and Catholic teachers do this every day by weaving these ideas into curricula and classrooms. They introduce their students to issues of social justice. They encourage service to those in need and reflect on the lessons learned in that service. Yet in too many schools and classrooms, these principles are often vaguely presented; the values are unclear; the lessons are unlearned. We support the task force's clear call for new efforts to teach our social tradition and to link service and action, charity and justice.

We call on publishers of Catholic educational materials to continue and to strengthen efforts to incorporate the principles of Catholic social teaching into all materials and disciplines in addition to providing resources specific to Catholic social thought.

The test for our Church is not simply have we "kept the faith," but have we shared the faith. As we approach the jubilee of the Lord's birth, we seek to support and to encourage renewed efforts to make the social dimensions of our faith come alive in caring service, creative education, and principled action throughout the Catholic community.

Catholic education is one of the most important forums for sharing and demonstrating our Church's commitment to human dignity and social justice. Catholic educators and catechists can best share this message of hope and challenge for the future. We support and encourage them for this holy work.