FORMATION IN THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH*

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INTRODUCTION

In the past 30 years interest in the social teachings of the Church has wafted and waned with every issue of a social document by the Church magisterium. Much interest was generated by the theological reflections of Liberation Theology on Latin American realities. The 1971 statement of the Synod of Bishops declaring that “action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world are a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel” generated both interest and controversy in what the Church had to say about the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres of life.¹

The personality of Pope John Paul II, his pastoral visits to various parts of the Third World and his forthright statements there on socio-economic and political issues, his activities vis-à-vis his own country, Poland, shaking off the yoke of communism, have attracted more than casual interest in the world press. Consequently, his social encyclicals have had more than the usual coverage. The efforts of local churches to open themselves

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¹ Within the Church, the controversy had to do with the meaning of the word “constitutive.” Does it mean “essential” or does it mean “integral”? Paul VI’s 1974 apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, described the intimate linkage between liberation and salvation but without using any of the controversial words. Still his treatment of the matter put much of the controversy to rest.
to dialogue with their own particular milieu in the way that the
universal Church did with the world at Vatican II raised key issues
— and interest — regarding “the social question.”

All these, nevertheless, have not apparently erased the fact
that with regard to social teachings the general posture, even
within the Church, is one of ignorance. Appalling may not be
too heavy a word to describe the lack of familiarity that priests,
and even bishops, exhibit on this matter. Perhaps what a slim
but popular volume outlining the social documents of the Church
since Rerum Novarum asserts is not far from the truth — that
the social heritage of the Church is her “best kept secret.”² And
the secret seems to be shared only by specialists among the
clergy.

The social doctrine of the Church³ should be part of the normal
formation of the laity regarding “faith and morals,” for to them
especially belongs the task of renewing the social order. Here,
as in apparently most areas of religious and moral education,
the role of priests and religious remains dominant. The “emerg-
ing laity” has not yet fully emerged to take the leading role in
social transformation. But even were the laity to assume finally
their rightful role, priests and religious need to have an adequate
and functional grasp of the social teachings of the Church if their
preaching of the word of God is to be truly contextualized,
relevant and socially transformative.

This article then intends to give a general sketch of the
emphases that have to be given in the teaching of the social
document of the Church, and how the teaching has to be done
— both considered in the Asian context.

². Peter J. Henriot et al., eds., Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret
(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988).
³. “. . . two terms are used interchangeably: ‘social doctrine’ and ‘social
teaching’ of the Church. The nuances implied by each are not overlooked;
‘doctrine’, in fact, stresses more the theoretical aspects of the problem, and
‘teaching’ the historical and practical aspects, but both stand for the same
reality. Their alternate use in the Church’s social magisterium . . . indicates
their reciprocal equivalency.” Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the
Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests, Rome, 1988, no. 1.
I. SOME BASIC DIRECTIVES

In 1970 the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education published the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. On the need for knowledge regarding social issues, the document states:

#69. Right from their first Seminary years, and increasingly as they grow older and more mature, the students should be introduced to the social problems of their own country in particular. Their studies, their contact with people and the world around them, and the events of daily life should make them acquainted with questions and disputes of a social order, and they should come to grips with them, with their real significance, the pros and cons, problems and consequences inherent in them and learn to see where, in the light of the natural law and the precepts of the Gospel, just and equitable solutions are to be found.

#79. . . . However, since a solid training in social questions is of considerable importance in making for a successful pastoral ministry, efforts should be made to reserve a definite number of lectures, as many as are necessary, for the Social Doctrine of the Church in order that the students may learn the means of adapting the teaching and the principles of the Gospel to the life of society.

Other references regarding the study of sociology, training in the modern apostolate as in Catholic Action, together with practical works of the apostolate may be found in nos. 94 - 97 on "Strictly Pastoral Formation."

The new Code of Canon Law has a very brief reference in Can. 256 #2: "The students are to be instructed in the needs of the universal Church so that they have a concern for the promotion of vocations, for missionary questions, for ecumenical concerns and other more urgent issues including those of a social nature."

What appears from a reading of the above documents is an apparent lack of consistency with other documents which consider human development as intimately linked with the preaching of the Gospel. So skimpy is their treatment of the social question as an imperative in the formation of priests that it seems to be treated only as an *obiter dicta*. 
They are in fact nothing more than brief expansions of the rudimentary recommendation of Vatican II’s *Optatam Totius* that seminarians “should be taught to use correctly the aids provided by pedagogy, psychology and sociology, in keeping with the regulations of ecclesiastical authority. They should also be carefully taught how to inspire and encourage apostolic action among the laity, and to promote various and more effective forms of apostolate. . . .” (no. 20).

In sum, the Vatican II decree on the training of priests *Optatam Totius* (1965), the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (1970), and the new Code of Canon Law (1983) in its chapter on the formation of clerics do not sufficiently consider the intimate linkage between human development and the preaching of the word of God and, therefore, do not adequately integrate the teaching of the social doctrine of the Church in the total formation of priests.

If gauged on the curricula of Philippine major seminaries, the above observation would also hold true regarding present formation processes.

This fundamental lacuna is, thankfully, filled by the *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests* which the Congregation for Catholic Education issued in 1988.

Linking social doctrine with salvation and integral liberation the *Guidelines* state: “Social doctrine . . . finds its origin in the very saving and liberating mission of Jesus Christ and the Church. It is connected with the experience of faith in the salvation and integral liberation of the people of God . . . .” (no. 15).

The *Guidelines*, therefore, enjoin that “a special place must be ensured, in harmony with philosophical and theological studies, for the teaching of this doctrine in the formation of future priests . . . .” (no. 2). “Required and elective courses on this discipline must be included in the program” of formation (no. 73). For this purpose, “it is absolutely necessary for knowledge about the major social encyclicals to be ensured during formation.”

4. Ibid.
The above observations point to the need for a Christology and ecclesiology which would properly integrate the Church's mission in the temporal order with her primary mission of evangelization.

In getting familiar with each of the social documents of the Church, not only should their doctrinal content be studied but also their historical, socio-economic, political and cultural context. The continuity and development of social teachings should be carefully studied and appreciated. This course should be taken at the collegiate or philosophy level after the course on social ethics. The course should cover nos. 14 to 28 of the Guidelines. In studying the documents, nos. 3 to 13 of the Guidelines would surely be likewise covered.

Such a course can then be followed by another, devoted to a general overview of the doctrinal content of the social teachings of the Church, their philosophical and theological, including biblical and patristic foundations, their functions as general principles, criteria for judgment and as directives for action. The course content would consist of nos. 30 to 65 of the Guidelines. But note that some of the course content could very well be treated in Moral Theology: Social Questions. And there could also be a course on the major social issues confronting the local church.

II. A COURSE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE — THE ASIAN SITUATION

In its "Index of Topics which may be Useful in Teaching the Social Doctrine of the Church in Seminaries," the Guidelines suggest a study of the social question of the Third World.5

The following is a general sketch of a suggested course dealing with "the social question" in Asia. The sketch can be adapted for a course on social issues in a particular country.

THE PROCESS OF THE COURSE

For such a study, I strongly recommend the use of a process called the Pastoral Spiral. The process was developed and

5. See Guidelines, Appendix I, sect. IV, no. 9.
popularized by the Bishops’ Institute for Social Action (BISA), sponsored by the Office of Human Development (OHD) which is the Social Action, Justice and Peace office of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).

A personal schematization of the Pastoral Spiral is on p. 17.

STAGE ONE: SITUATION/REALITY

This stage is concerned with “seeing” or “scrutinizing the signs of the times.” It involves more than an academic analysis of the situation and necessitates an “immersion-exposure” process of knowing the reality. Through “immersion” a more systematic knowledge of the reality by means of social and structural analysis would emerge. But in the context especially of Asia, mere social and structural analysis is not enough. It has to be complemented by cultural analysis which would explore the cultural underpinnings of the situation or reality under study.

STAGE TWO: REFLECTION IN FAITH

In this stage the analysis of reality goes deeper. Both the reality and its analysis are subjected to the light of faith and the teachings of the Church. The general question is: what do the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church say about the situation? Here the dynamic interplay or interaction between faith and life takes place. On the one hand, reality may clarify, or even suggest a direction for development of, the social teachings of the Church. On the other hand, reflection in faith may result in a denunciation of the situation. The second stage is, therefore, basically a process of faith-discernment.

STAGE THREE: RESPONSE, JUDGMENT, DECISION

At this stage a conscience-response is made regarding the situation or reality. The response could be either an affirmation or denunciation. A pastoral decision is made either to reinforce the positive situation, or to purify or change the negative. The decision does not remain at the level of the mind or of theory. It has to lead into PRAXIS.
STAGE FOUR: PLANNING

Praxis is not haphazard. It must be orthopraxis and requires adequate planning as to how the pastoral decision could be implemented realistically with the time and resources available. Such pastoral planning would be in line with strategic pastoral management.

STAGE FIVE: ACTION

This is where Praxis-proper is taking place. Praxis is a transformative experience. In the realm of social action, justice and peace, praxis is invariably communitarian in nature. The communitarian character of action in the socio-economic, political and cultural fields should actually pervade the whole process of the Pastoral Spiral. Action can refer to a series of activities organized and coordinated in order to transform the situation.

STAGE SIX: EVALUATION

Evaluation is undertaken at two levels — at the level of the action taken and at the level of the entire process from analysis to action. Is the action taken with regard to the situation effective? Is it transformative of the situation? Does it, for instance, genuinely bring the power of the Gospel to bear on the situation? At the level of process, is there consistency from stage one to stage four? Has the reality and power of the Lord’s grace been considered? What has prayer contributed to both the process and the action?

STAGE SEVEN: NEW SITUATION OR REALITY

The completion of a first Pastoral Spiral necessarily results in a new situation. Even where the expected transformation from the application of pastoral action has not materialized, a new learning and value, a deeper realization of the intransigence of the situation and of the need for better responses shall have emerged. There is thus a newness in the apparently old situation. A new Pastoral Spiral can begin.
Summing up: The Pastoral Spiral when used in the formation of seminarians in the social teachings of the Church is more than just an academic course. It incorporates what the Guidelines and the Ratio Fundamentalis require as necessary in formation, i.e., involvement in "the practical works of the apostolate." More specifically the Guidelines state: "During the period of formation, it is suggested that students be directed toward experiences of a pastoral and social nature which place them in direct contact with the problems studied" (no. 76). The Pastoral Spiral is also a method of discerning as well as of theologizing — contextually — both of which are necessary for formation to be integral. It is the Asian Bishops' formation program or BISA experience that is being translated into the seminary formation context.

SOCIAL ISSUES IN ASIA

The first step in the Pastoral Spiral process then is an encounter with the Asian situation. Identifying the major social issues in Asia, analyzing them through tools of social analysis, should be a personal and group task. Library research would be necessary but it should not take the place of personal and group participation.

First hand knowledge of some selected issues through immersion-exposure would be most advantageous. Certain values and attitudes emerge from personal and group participation especially when the process is by way of immersion-exposure.

What are the major issues that need to be studied? It is possible to cull them from the papers and Final Statements of various FABC plenary assemblies and from BISA reports. The statements and reports usually synthesize the thinking of an Asia-wide group. Through the years the issues have not changed very much. Undoubtedly, one required course on Social Justice in Asia would not be adequate to treat all the major issues in depth. Judicious selection is required.

A list of major social issues in Asia would include the following (the classification is tentative, an attempt to veer away from the usual social, political, economic, cultural quadrant of analysis):
On outlooks, values, and cultural attitudes:

1. faith-justice dualism in Asia
2. the challenge of religious pluralism
3. religious fundamentalism
4. secularism
5. models of development
6. modernization and industrialization
7. threats to culture, e.g., disintegration of the traditional values and patterns of life
8. unresponsive educational systems

In quest of justice:

1. massive poverty and under-development
2. widespread inequality, the widening gap between rich and poor
3. unjust economic, political structures and relationships
4. dependency and exploitation
5. multi-national corporations and local elites
6. unfair international business and trade relationships
7. external debt burden
8. lack of people’s access to resources and benefits of development
9. assaults against the dignity of human life and human dignity
10. the demographic problem

In quest of truth, integrity and freedom:

1. ignorance and illiteracy
2. corruption in public office
3. manipulation of mass media
4. authoritarian regimes, repression of freedoms
5. new forms of imperialism

In quest of peace and love:

1. threats to peace, e.g., militarism
2. ethnic conflicts
3. nuclear threats
4. arms trade

Special Sectoral Concerns:

1. alienation of youth
2. discrimination against women
3. problems of workers
4. problems of peasant farmers and fisherfolk
5. problems of tribal groups and minorities
6. refugees, slumdwellers, and overseas workers

There is no attempt in the above to be comprehensive or to prioritize. The issues are, however, those that often recur in FABC analysis of the Asian reality.

Analysis should include an inquiry into their interrelationships, their root causes, their structural support, and their impact on Asian societies. Seminarians also have to identify, analyze, and explore the positive elements in Asian society that are signs of renewal and social transformation.

REFLECTION IN FAITH

In view of the Asian situation, a number of social teachings of the Church would have to be emphasized by the course. Their philosophical, scriptural, theological roots as well as their development in history would have to be explored with the seminarians.

The following principles, criteria for judgment, directives for action and themes need emphasis (there is no attempt here to be sequential):

1. Integral Development: development as "the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human" (PP); critique of models of development; the development of the person, the whole person, and of all persons; development as both material and spiritual; the primacy of "being" over "having."
2. Social Justice and the Common Good: as applied both at local and international levels; equity and fairness in business and trade; fair distribution of and access to resources and benefits of development; a sense of service and of the common good as requirements of authority; the common good as the right of all sectors of society, requiring integral development.

3. Peace and Active Non-Violence: peace as the fruit of justice; the path to peace by way of peace; forms of violence; violence in various ideologies; the disarmament debate; wars and conflicts; strategies of non-violence; development as the new name of peace; the Asian notion of peace and non-violence.

4. Love and Preferential Option for the Poor: the linkage between justice and love; love beyond justice; love of preference for the poor, solidarity with the poor — a Church of the Poor; poverty as evil and as evangelical; social ministry with the poor; reconciliation.

5. Universal Purpose of Created Goods and the Right to Private Property: everyone's access to the goods of the earth as a primary principle; private property as a relative right; the subordination of private property to life, the social dimension of private property; the renewal of private property — urban land reform, agrarian reform; democratization of wealth.

6. Human Dignity and Solidarity: the human person as the fundamental path for the Church; human rights — universality; defense and promotion of the dignity and rights of the human person; religious freedom; solidarity as evangelical love; solidarity between peoples, between countries; North-South relations; East-West relations; international solidarity.

7. Freedom, Participation and Co-Responsibility: the directive function of the State and subsidiarity; democracy; power as service for the common good; everyone's access to decisions in the different areas and levels of social life; conscientization and organization of the poor; empowerment of people for participation; the role of non-governmental organizations and people's organizations in development.

8. Integrity of Creation: stewardship; ecological degradation; ecosystems; sustainable development; ecological ethics and policies; the Asian concept of harmony with creation.
9. **Faith, Culture and Ideology**: the concept of ideology; ideology as a blueprint for development; capitalism and socialism; the primacy of faith over ideology; assessing ideologies in Asia; cultural changes today; dialogue between culture and faith; inculturation and development; the Church in a minority situation; inter-religious dialogue for development; social communications and the promotion of culture and social justice.

10. **Church and Politics**: Christian socio-political commitment; roles in the Church regarding socio-economic and political involvement; guidelines for political involvement; the problem of graft and corruption; renewing the political order; democratizing power.

11. **Work**: value and dignity of work; work as "the key to the social question"; primacy of work over capital; the social function of capital; workers’ rights and duties; work crisis in Asia; unemployment and underemployment; the problem of just wages; co-management; the role of workers’ organizations; strikes; agrarian workers and the problem of feudalism and tenancy; the right to land; the social function of capital; the plight of overseas workers; slumdwellers, simple fisherfolk.

12. **Women**: dignity and rights; the condition of women in Asian societies; exploitation and degradation; the role of women in social transformation.

Such are the major principles, values and themes that I would consider as urgently needed. By no means do I consider the listing as comprehensive. A more systematic reflection on the social teachings of the Church as they impinge on the Asian situation would surely reveal other emphases needed.

Seminarians themselves should do the reflection in faith, make pastoral decisions and plan how such decisions could be implemented both in and outside the seminary insofar as their program of formation allows.

**III. VALUE FORMATION AND SPIRITUALITY OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

Knowledge of the social teachings of the Church is not an end in itself. Its more important functions are to serve as an indispensable aid for the formation of a mature social conscience.
and for pastoral leadership. Skills in facilitation and organization will be necessary if priests are to lead in the empowering of people so that they can assume their rightful task of renewing the social order. Value formation for social renewal is, therefore, an essential task.

The values which candidates to the priesthood must form within themselves through the years of formation are: a love of preference for the poor, respect for human dignity, a commitment to solidarity and to social transformation, respect for the integrity of creation, sensitivity to religious pluralism, commitment to dialogue as a transformative human and religious value, active non-violence, a deep sense of the common good, an orientation towards service, participation and co-responsibility in the task of evangelization and liberation, a centering on Christ as liberator.

The above values likewise spell out certain elements of the spirituality that has to be developed. It could be called a spirituality of social transformation.

The Final Message of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC at Bandung, Indonesia on 27 July 1990 stated that the “spirituality for our times” is “nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia.” Authentic discipleship is credible only by witness. It integrates every aspect of Christian life and removes any dichotomy between faith and life, between love and action. An abiding sense and awareness of God, his presence and mystery brings complete trust in the Lord. “Renunciation and simplicity, compassion for and solidarity with all, especially with the poor, meekness and humility — virtues promoted by active non-violence — are some of the significant features of the spirituality we need . . . it is a spirituality of harmony” that challenges the disharmonies of our Asian world.

To the above, we add the reflections of the Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly in Tokyo, Japan in 1986 on Lay Spirituality. “Discipleship is rooted in the realities of Asia. Christian spirituality must be incarnated. It grows and matures in the midst of continuous tensions and struggles with the destructive powers of sin and its consequences, of conflict and injustice. Christian spirituality must also be Christocentric and inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, the Liberator.” It is also ecclesial and communitarian,
based on the word of God which speaks not only in the Scriptures and in the Church but also in "persons and events, in the ebb and flow of life." To be a disciple of Jesus is to become a memory of him and this fact impels the disciple "to seek the Reign of God in the world, to be poor, to thirst for justice." It is an immersion into the wellspring of Asian reality so that it may have life. "Communion, solidarity, compassion, justice, love are keynotes of a spirituality of discipleship."

IV. SEMINARY FORMATORS IN SOCIAL TEACHINGS

It is now rather clear that the formation in the Social Doctrine of the Church is not the task of just anyone who may have the time to do so. The Guidelines require the professor to have the following qualifications: he should be "chosen from among the best, and to master solid doctrine, adequate pastoral experience together with a good spiritual and pedagogical formation." He must also "have a broad and deep theological formation, competency in social morality and knowledge at least of the basic elements of the modern social sciences." Likewise required is a close collaboration with professors "of morality, dogmatics and pastoral care in order to ensure the coherence, unity and solidarity of their teaching."

I would simply add to the above the need for a teacher: who has in-depth knowledge of the socio-economic, political, and cultural realities of Asia and of his own country; who is also a witness in terms of the values and the spirituality that I have already indicated.

CONCLUSION

In 1990 the FABC Plenary Assembly resolved: "that the social doctrine of the Church be part of formation in faith for everyone, at all levels of laity, religious and clergy" and "that the formation of a faith-inspired social conscience be a priority task in catechesis, media, schools and other apostolates of formation." It would seem from the above resolution that the resolution of the 1974 FABC Plenary Assembly in Taipei (some fifteen years ago!) has not been really implemented. The 1974 resolution stated: "that
the social teaching of the Church especially of the 1971 Synod on Justice be organically incorporated into the body of Christian instruction and preaching at all levels; in catechisms for children and adults, in courses of formation for the laity and religious, and above all in the theological and pastoral formation and renewal of priests, young and old."

In this Year of the Social Teachings of the Church celebrating the centennial of the great social encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, it is to be hoped that some serious efforts by Asian Seminary Rectors and Formators will be made to implement the resolution. Integral evangelization is, after all, the mission of the Church and, therefore, formation for saving liberation, far from being foreign to the evangelization process cannot be separated from it.

The task in the formation of priests in Asia is most important. It reaches into future generations and determines to a large extent our way of being Church in Asia, beyond the third millenium.

THE PASTORAL SPIRAL

Reflection in faith

New situation/reality

Situation/reality

Evaluation

Response/Judgement/Decision

PRAYER

LOVE

Planning

Action