

Chapter 32

Catholic Social Teaching, Catholic Education and Religious Education



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Introduction

Contemporary Catholic social teaching originates around the time of the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (Pope Leo XIII, 1891). It is important, however, to recognise that the Christian concern for social justice and care of the poor and marginalised is rooted in biblical and historical traditions (Birge, 2009; DeBerri, Hug, Henriot, & Schultheis, 2003). In the Old Testament this tradition can be discerned in the holiness code (Lev 17-26) and the commitment to the care of the stranger (Exodus 22:21; 23:9). In the New Testament, the tradition can be discerned in gospel demands for social justice, love of neighbour and correct use of material possessions (Lk 12:13-21; 12:33-34; 14:33).

Catholic social teaching aims to uphold social justice and address the causes and effects of social injustice. It is based on the fundamental principle of the dignity of all human beings because all people are creatures of God who are created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, par. 108). This fundamental principle is at the heart of the key themes of Catholic social teaching: life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity and care for God's creation (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018). While the collation of these themes is very useful, Bergman (2011) cautions that we should beware of the reduction of Catholic social teaching to lists of principles or themes. The richness of Catholic social teaching needs to be understood in depth and cannot simply remain at the conceptual level. Tuohy (2005) understands Catholic social teaching as having two interconnected dimensions: the world of thought and the world of action. Catholic social teaching needs to be enacted and integrated into the lives of Catholic Chris-

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tians. The world of thought and world of action come together in a living faith that has a commitment to justice and the transformation of the world (DeBerri et al., 2003).

Some recent academic writing stresses the need for a much greater focus on Catholic social teaching in Catholic schools and religious education and a deeper and more nuanced knowledge, understanding and application of this teaching in the UK and in North America. Valadez and Mirci (2015) have constructed a socially just model of Catholic schooling. Grace (2013) argues for the need to ensure that Catholic social teaching is permeated across the curriculum in Catholic schools. He draws on *Caritas in Veritate* and proposes that this is a good starting point for exploring previous papal encyclicals and the wider literature on Catholic social teaching. Byron (2015) states that issues such as poverty and world hunger should be subjects for ethical and theological engagement in Catholic schools. This chapter argues for a deeper knowledge and understanding of the essential links between Catholic social teaching and Catholic schools and Catholic religious education. The essential links are necessary if a Catholic school is to be a genuine 'Christian community whose educational goals are rooted in Christ and his Gospel' (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988, par. 67).

The method adopted initially focused on a brief examination of some of the wider literature on Catholic social teaching. The method also incorporated the study of the relationship between Catholic social teaching and Catholic schools and religious education in the Vatican documents on Catholic Education. This was accomplished by using the key themes of Catholic social teaching listed above to identify and analyse explicit references to this relationship in these documents. This produced a considerable amount of data and it was decided to limit the discussion to: life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable and solidarity. The findings of the analysis could have been presented thematically but it was decided to present the findings in the context of the original documents and in chronological order. This approach supports a clear understanding of the progressive intensification and deepening of the discussion of the importance of the themes of Catholic social teaching for Catholic schools and religious education. Two themes (or aspects of themes) that emerged in more recent documents were chosen to be discussed in more depth.

The first section examines two key documents and demonstrates that they emphasise the centrality of Catholic social teaching for Catholic schools and religious education and the necessary role of Catholic schools in the process of generating a greater awareness and knowledge and understanding of Catholic social teaching. The next sections provide an overview of some of the key themes of Catholic social teaching that are relevant to Catholic education and religious education that emerge from a close reading of some of the major Vatican documents on Catholic education. The final sections explore two highly pertinent themes drawn from this close reading: the common good and the education of women and the poverty of Jesus and the preferential option for the poor. The chapter provides some new insights into how these themes can be discussed and understood in Catholic schools and religious education.

Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic School Education

Catholic social teaching is described as the Church's best-kept secret and there have been strenuous efforts made to raise greater awareness of recent papal social encyclical letters and the other sources of the Teaching among the members of the Church (DeBerri et al., 2003). Two seminal statements/reports on Catholic social teaching stress the importance of Catholic social teaching for the Church, and the importance of this teaching for Catholic education. In 1996, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales issued a statement entitled *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's social teaching*. They stress the importance of the social dimension of the gospel and one of the striking points raised in the statement is that Catholic social teaching is not optional (para. 42). The document states that Catholic social teaching is vitally important and Catholic schools and other Catholic educational institutions

...draw their Catholic character from their attention to Catholic doctrine (including Catholic social teaching), their regular collective worship, and the moral and spiritual content of the ethos that underlies their daily life. (par. 8)

The document explains that the richness of the sources of Catholic social teaching is not only contained in papal texts and other official documentation, but in a wider range of texts and in an oral tradition (par. 28). This is not intended to undermine the importance of social encyclicals but a reminder that Catholic social teaching has its roots in the scriptures and a wide range of sources within the Catholic Church.

In 1998, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published a summary report: *Sharing Catholic social teaching: Challenges and Directions*. They praise the good work being undertaken in the education of Catholic social teaching but comment that this is far from widespread and can be presented and taught in an inconsistent way. Similar to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, they also stress that the 'values of the Church's social teaching must not be treated as tangential or optional'. They call on those engaged in Catholic education, catechesis and social ministry to communicate the social teaching of the Church more fully. The United States Bishops propose that: 'If Catholic education and formation fail to communicate our social tradition, they are not fully Catholic'. The Bishops argue that this is a task for all those involved in Catholic education and catechesis not just for religion teachers. Nevertheless, Catholic schools and religious education are identified as being among the conduits that are very important for the sharing of Catholic social teaching.

These two documents provide concise and powerful statements about the significance of Catholic social teaching. They also identify the importance of ensuring that members of the Catholic community are aware of the content of Catholic social teaching and that it is essential to the educational endeavour of the Catholic school and religious education. Tuohy (2005) argues further that the Catholic school needs to reflect the two dimensions of Catholic social teaching, the world of thought and the world of action. It is important to highlight both the idea and practice of witness in the life of the Catholic school. The young people are in a position to learn about Catholic social teaching in religious education but must also learn how the study and

action can be integrated through the witness of the Catholic teachers and the activities of the Catholic school otherwise there may be a disjuncture in the learning and action process. Tuohy cites the example of young people from Catholic schools who are engaged in social outreach activities in local communities and who are unable to vocalise or witness to the connection of the activities with Catholic social teaching. The idea of witness presupposes the explicit understanding and articulation of the Christian basis and connection between both the study and the action.

The next section explores the key themes of Catholic social teaching that emerge from a close reading of some of the Vatican documents on Catholic Education. As has been stated above, the following themes will be highlighted: life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable and solidarity (Unites States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018). This will demonstrate that the commitment to these themes, rooted in the Catholic school witness to Christ and the gospel, is presented as an integral and necessary component of the rationale, operation and education in Catholic schools and in religious education.

Catholic Social Teaching in the Vatican Documents on Catholic Education

This section begins with *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) and concludes with *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion. Instrumentum Laboris* (2014). *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) is a short document and while there are some references to the principle of subsidiarity these relate to civic responsibility to provide schooling (par. 3). The document does state that all Christians have a right to a Christian education and this will help them in the Christian formation of the world and to contribute to the common good (par. 2). The Catholic School (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) makes reference to the contribution that the Catholic school should make to the creation of a more just society (par. 58). This would be consistent with its commitment to the Christian ideal. This contribution can be achieved by upholding the demands of justice and also by translating these demands into practice within the school community and within the daily life of the school. The Catholic School argues that Catholic schools can provide examples of true communities that aim to support the common good (par. 62). This living witness is in contrast to the increasing rise of individualism that can be observed in the contemporary world.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982) argues that the Catholic educator must adhere to the Christian concept of the person that involves God-given dignity and the idea of the solidarity of all people and teach this Christian concept (par. 18, 30). The Catholic educator must develop a keen social awareness and profound understanding of civic and political responsibility in themselves and their students and prepare young people to work to

improve social structures and be positive agents of change (para. 19, 30). The teacher is called to be attentive to the different sociological dimensions of the environment of the school in terms of local, national and international significance (par. 35). The educator requires to be adequately formed in the social teachings of the Church, which are recognised to be an integral part of Christian life (para. 65). The *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) comments that the love that God has demonstrated is the love Christians are expected to emulate (par. 85). This love needs to be both understood and practiced and this applies to children and young people in the Catholic school (par. 86). The Church extends this love to all people regardless of religion, nationality or race to ensure that they may all come to know the Lord (par. 87). The Church exercises ‘a preferential option for the less fortunate, the sick, the poor, the handicapped, the lonely’, and the approach to Christian social ethics is one that must always be founded on faith (par. 88–89).

The optimistic vision of the Christian social ethic needs to be applied in the context of the many injustices in the contemporary world (par. 91–92). It is important that the Christian message is taught (and understood) as being rooted in scripture, especially the gospels (par. 74). The document also explicitly recommends that important Church documentation is read or studied by young people (where appropriate) in a number of footnotes (for example, 66, 76). It is important to note that in footnotes 94 and 95 it is stated that ‘students should become aware of at least some of the Church’s major social documents’. The *Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) outlines many of the manifestations of social malaise including the increasing divide between the rich and the poor and the subsequent challenges facing Catholic schools throughout the world (par. 1). The document reiterates the importance of the dignity of the individual and the role of the Catholic school as an important community that serves society and presents its work as a work of love (par. 4, 9, 18).

There is a strong emphasis on Christian anthropology and the importance of the dignity of the person in *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools. Reflections and Guidelines* (2002) (par. 5, 6, 31, 34, 35, 36, 60). There is also a strong emphasis on the role of consecrated persons providing a lived example of practicing solidarity and the option for the poor, promoting justice, peace, responsible participation and gender equality in education (par. 30, 46, 64, 69–79). The document stresses the role of the school as forming persons who can counteract the serious damage in the world caused by social injustices and the ravages of ecological plundering (par. 34). The school can promote positive relationships and can be a model for a society that is founded on peace and harmony (par. 43). The Catholic school is an important place for intercultural education and to demonstrate openness to other cultures and an understanding of other cultures (par. 66–67). This has become increasingly significant in the context of contemporary migration patterns (par. 65).

The issue of gender equality in education is mentioned in paragraph 79 and it is stated in paragraph 64

In various parts of the world Catholic schools and numerous religious families are active in assuring that women are guaranteed access to education without any discrimination and that they can give their specific contribution to the good of the entire community.

There is a significant emphasis on the poverty of Jesus (para. 6–7 and 10) and the preferential option for the poor. The extended discussion on poverty and the preferential option for the poor (par. 69–77) advocates proposing the ‘content of the social doctrine of the Church through educational projects’ (par. 72). There is also a commitment to listening to the voice of the poor in the school and a reconfiguring of the educational activity to suit their needs. The defence of children’s rights is also highlighted in this document (par. 74). School education involves promoting awareness of the cultural roots of the young people, their respect for other cultures and an education for peace (para. 78–79).

Educating Together in Catholic Schools (2007) states that the Catholic school can become a site for the discernment of what can be considered positive in the world, what is in need of transformation and what injustices are to be overcome (para. 46). The concise *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (2009) comments on the importance of the formation and personal development of young people in religious education in schools, the fostering of the ‘development of personal and social responsibility and the other civic virtues’ and the contribution to the common good of society (par. 10).

Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools. Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love (2013) is focussed on intercultural dialogue and intercultural education that is grounded in the understanding and respect of the dignity of every person, the interconnectedness between people and cultures and solidarity and justice and peace (par. 12, 13, 21, 33, 34, 37, 38, 63, 73). The rise of globalisation and the impact of migration has amplified the interconnectedness of peoples (par. 4, 13). Religion is recognised as having an important role in the promotion of the individual, the common good and the support of the social community (par. 10). One of the most important roles of dialogue is that it ‘must be cultivated for people to co-exist and build up a civilization of love’ (par. 20). This will help realise the aim of education—the role in creating a more united and peaceful world (par. 20). The discussion on the different interpretations of pluralism is instructive as it demonstrates that the intercultural approach preserves the dignity of individuals and encourages genuine encounter between cultures, rather than the more limited relativistic and assimilationist approaches (par. 21–28). Catholic schools are called to truly base education around the human person, commit to the person as a person in communion and engender a new sense of the person who belongs to society (par. 46).

Catholic schools espouse a fundamental witness to the gospel and the love of God for all people (par. 61). This witness means an openness and love to others and for their culture: ‘Catholic schools are, by their very vocation, intercultural’ and have a significant responsibility for intercultural education (par. 50, 61). The dialogue that takes place in schools will allow pupils ‘to share universal values, such as solidarity, tolerance and freedom’ (par. 63). Catholic schools are encouraged to envision themselves beyond the restrictions of the knowledge-based society and promote a wisdom-based society (par. 66). This is an education that supports students to evaluate facts in the light of values and take on responsibility and exercising active citizenship. The schools must teach knowledge of different cultures and the school curriculum should enable the students to reflect on the major problems of the time,

such as the 'unequal distribution of resources, poverty, injustice and human rights denied' (par. 66).

The document adds that one of the roles of good teachers in Catholic schools is that they recognise that they have a connection with the local area and that they understand contemporary social problems (par. 83). *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion. Instrumentum Laboris* (2014) reiterates that a characteristic of Catholic schools is that there is respect for individual dignity and uniqueness (par. II, 1.). The Catholic school should view those who are poorer, or more fragile or needy, as the most important students in the school (par. II, 5.). The education in a Catholic school must be imbued with an ethical dimension and dare young people to change both society and the world and to serve the community (par. III).

The short examination of some of the Vatican documents on education has demonstrated that, commencing with *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), there has been an explicit focus on some of the key themes of Catholic social Teaching and the implications for Catholic schools and the education of young people in Catholic schools. The God-given dignity of each individual and the importance of respect for all persons are frequently highlighted in the documents. Great importance is attached to the Catholic school witnessing to the gospel and the love of God for all and upholding and applying principles such as justice and peace, solidarity, preferential option for the poor and contribution to the common good, setting an example to young people to emulate in their lives. This focus on the themes of Catholic social teaching has intensified and deepened since the publication of *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997). Some themes are highlighted and discussed in more depth in more recent documents, for example: the construction of a civilization of love; a commitment to intercultural education; preferential option for the poor and gender equality for women. This is partly due to the development of the concomitant thinking on these themes in Catholic social teaching and theology.

There are also references in the documents to the role of the Catholic teacher. The Catholic educator is called to be formed in the social teaching of the church and embody these values in his/her life and work. This has implications for the ways in which Catholic teachers are educated, formed and continue to be formed in future professional development. Eick and Ryan (2014) argue that there is a challenge for Catholic teacher education to 'help pre-service teachers to develop a critical social consciousness informed by Catholic social teaching' (p. 27).

In some of the documents there is an emphasis on the young people being educated in the social teaching of the Church following the example of their teachers and through study of relevant documents. This is an important focus for the curriculum in Catholic schools and especially for religious education. The focus on Catholic social teaching in religious education will help in the formation of the young people who are then able to identify the causes and effects of social injustices and be in a position to help counteract these injustices and assist in the Christian transformation of society.

This chapter will now explore two themes that have emerged from this examination: the common good and the education of women and the poverty of Jesus and the preferential option for the poor and the marginalised.

The Common Good and the Education of Women

The idea of the contribution of the Catholic school to the common good is one that is fundamental to the aim of Catholic schools. Catholic schools cannot be understood to be in isolation from the world but exist in the world and for the world. The common good is inclusive, it is for the good of all people and the whole person (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, par. 164–165). This necessarily involves all members of society and Catholic schools have recently been called to an openness to others and the cultivation of a civilization of love. It is instructive to return to the issue of the commitment to the education of women that is raised in *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools. Reflections and Guidelines* (2002). The education of girls and young women is highly relevant in terms of the aspirations of human rights thinking in the contemporary world. Education is a well-attested human right that has been iterated in The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights agendas. The most recent is the Sustainable Development Goals. This right to education has led to the target that all girls and boys without discrimination are able to complete free quality education at primary and secondary levels by 2030. Latest reports indicate that this is slowly being achieved at primary level but not at other levels. This is reflected in the gender imbalance in levels of literacy: there are around 796 million illiterate people in the world and, disproportionately, two-thirds are women, many of whom live in rural areas (Women Watch, 2012). *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools. Reflections and Guidelines* (2002) explains that this commitment to the education of women contributes to the common good as women can then ‘contribute to the good of the entire community’ and by doing so are able to participate more fully in society. It is important to acknowledge and discuss in the religious education class the significant advances (and some of the continuing debates) in the Church’s teaching on the issues of equality and the equal dignity of both women and men that originate and develop from the 1980s (Dorr, 2012). The promotion and realisation of equal opportunities in school education for boys and girls is a less well-known but crucial part of these advances.

The Poverty of Jesus and the Preferential Option for the Poor and Marginalised

Participation, as has been seen above, is strongly encouraged in the Catholic school and the principle of solidarity draws attention to the interconnectedness and interdependence between individuals and peoples and the concomitant understanding of mutual responsibility that requires social action (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, 192). The recognition of the inequalities and injustices in the world has led to the contemporary articulation of the preferential option for the poor. The preferential option for the poor can be broadened to all those who are marginalised and excluded such the disabled, the refugee and the asylum seeker. In this regard, it

is helpful to return to Jesus and consider how the life of Jesus can be used in religious education to illustrate this point.

As has been seen above there have been references to the poverty of Jesus in a number of recent major documents on Catholic Education and this is a useful teaching aid in discussing aspects of Catholic social teaching in religious education. The poverty of Jesus, as outlined in the stories of his birth and his lifestyle, can be used in discussions on poverty and the preferential option for the poor. I wish to highlight a feature of the poverty of Jesus that can be interpreted in a contemporary way: the story of Jesus as part of a refugee family that is contained in Matthew's gospel. This is a pressing issue as the global number of displaced persons has recently reached 65.6 million people, including twenty-two and a half million refugees (UNHCR, 2017). In the infancy narratives in Matthew's gospel the holy family flee to Egypt to escape the massacre of the innocents instigated by Herod (Mtt 2: 13-23). The historicity of the massacre and the flight into Egypt is questionable, though the historicity of this story is less important than the meaning and significance of this story. The use of different literary resources and devices is a feature of the biblical tradition (McBride, 1999). The flight to Egypt is linked to some key figures and events in the Old Testament. The story can be perceived to link the flight to Egypt with the story of the patriarch Joseph in Egypt and in Babylon during the Exile. Further, the story connects the birth of Jesus to the birth of Moses and the story of Moses subsequently being saved from the Pharaoh's edict to slaughter the first-born males of the Israelites. One contemporary interpretation explains that the story indicates that Jesus and his family are refugees (Houston, 2015). The family is forced to flee from their own land to escape persecution and danger. The story of Jesus as a refugee is designed to demonstrate that he has shared in the historical experience of the Jews as displaced people in Egypt at the time of Moses. Jesus has shared this experience of being displaced and can be understood to be in solidarity with the millions of people who are displaced throughout the contemporary world.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has argued for a deeper knowledge and understanding of the essential links between Catholic social teaching and Catholic schools and Catholic religious education. This argument has been initially supported by the use of documents by two Bishops' Conferences focussed on the importance of Catholic social teaching for Catholic schools and religious education and the role of Catholic education in teaching and disseminating Catholic social teaching. The argument was further supported by an examination of Vatican Documents on Catholic Education to discern the explicit relationship between Catholic social teaching and Catholic schools and religious education. A number of key themes were selected for discussion and two contemporary themes were explored in more depth.

Catholic social teaching is at the heart of the Church's realisation of its God-given responsibility to uphold social justice and address all forms of social injustice.

It is not optional or tangential or of lesser importance. It is a powerful witness to the contemporary world that the Church continues to make this commitment to the transformation of the world by its living faith. Catholic schools, which are a major part of the educational aims and initiatives of the Catholic Church, must constantly strive to fully integrate Catholic social teaching into the life and the witness of the school to the values of Jesus Christ and the gospel. This is a task for all members of the Catholic school community and, in particular, the teachers and young people. Catholic social teaching has a special place in the curriculum of the Catholic school, notably in religious education. The worlds of thought and of action highlight the necessary interaction between the study of Catholic social Teaching and enactment. This means that the study of Catholic social teaching and the social outreach activities must be better understood as being inextricably and explicitly linked to each other. The aim is to form young people from Catholic schools to prepare them to take up their rightful place in the world and transform the world through Christian love and social justice.

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