

Los Pequeños Pepper

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Cover: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton—
January 4

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Newsletter of Los Pequeños de Cristo
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We are an Archdiocesan-wide Catholic lay organization committed to a charitable defense of the Catholic Faith by means of education, communication, and prayer. We are devoted to the Roman Catholic Magisterium, the Holy Father, and to the bishops and clergy in union with him. Our members believe what the Church believes and we promote what the Church teaches. To this end, we believe that no individual, whether cleric or lay person, has the right to alter the substance of the gospel message or moral truths which have been inerrantly and infallibly held by the Catholic Church since Her founding.

Militia Caritatis Dei: More Than a “Silver Lining”

By Jon Merrill

The Catholic Church in his diocese having been “forced out of state-supported foster care and adoption services,” the American bishop said, the diocese’s organized charities, *as a result of being* “less dependent on government funding and less encumbered by intrusive state policies...*will be able to focus on being more Catholic and more charitable.*”

Bishop Paprocki is singing the “anti-statist” theme song of *Militia Caritatis Dei* (MCD)...though, since he sings it somewhat reluctantly, and under duress, it is understandable that he is singing it a bit off key. You see, the bishop’s diocese of Springfield, Illinois, USA, didn’t *voluntarily* become less dependent on government funding; it was *denied* that funding due to its refusal to compromise on a fundamental Catholic and natural-law principle. Bishop Paprocki calls the resultant ability of his diocese’s charities to be “more Catholic and more charitable” a “silver lining” to an otherwise unfortunate and negative situation.

A silver lining?? For a self-identifying “Catholic” organization; for an “official” Catholic organization; for an organization which supposedly operates explicitly and intentionally *as a Catholic organization*, “*being Catholic*” is just a silver lining? (The expression, “*being more Catholic*,” is, of course, logically and theologically incorrect. “Catholic,” by definition, is an all or nothing kind of thing. Either you are...or you are not. Bishop Paprocki was tacitly acknowledging that, due at least in part to all of that government funding, his diocesan charities were...*not*.) The use of that particular cloud/lining metaphor is troubling, and revealing.

The bishop, like all of us who care about the integrity of the organized-charitable mission of the Church, understands very well – *in theory* – that that mission is secondary, *very* secondary, to the only true and *real* mission of the Church, which is, in a word (or two), “*being Catholic*.” He knows from the books that organized Catholic charity and the material and spiritual good which it might accomplish are, if you will, only a kind of “silver lining” which appears, almost incidentally, as a *secondary* consequence of our being *truly Catholic*. But, in practice, in our well-intentioned zeal to help our neighbor, and in our pursuit of (an often ambiguously or tendentiously defined) “social justice,” he, and we, have gotten things mixed up. It’s “alleviating poverty” that has now become our primary mission. If in pursuing that worthy and ecumenical goal we can also *be Catholic*, or *remain Catholic*, or “*be more Catholic*,” well then, that’s very nice, and so much the better. But, we say, it’s not the essential thing. We now argue that we must not let over-scrupulous “Catholicity” get in the way of our *primary* object, “helping the poor.”

We have inverted the priorities. We have permitted “being Catholic” to become a relatively unimportant and definitely *nonobligatory* “silver lining” to the difficult and sometimes dirty work – “the *real* work” – that we organized “Catholics” do in behalf of the poor.

Dirty? Well, yes. For example, we explain: Given the current configuration of state-Church-society relations, we are practically *obliged* to take “dirty,” non-voluntary, coercively-extracted government money if we are to accomplish our primary, poverty-alleviation mission (and if we are to maintain an effective Catholic presence “in the public square,” per our Constitutionally-protected free-exercise rights – which we now understand mainly as getting our “fair share” of the government bounty). We don’t necessarily *like* taking the government money; and we suspect, based as it is on the coercion of many unwilling “donors,” that it is an ethically dubious “fundraising” technique; and we *know*, as Bishop Paprocki says, that it keeps us from “focusing on being more Catholic and more charitable,” but...what choice do we have? It’s a dirty business, but a *necessary*, humanitarian one...and somebody’s got to do it. Just remember: *It’s for the (material) good of the children*. And that’s the main thing; and that’s what we’re all about.

No, it isn’t. We’ve gone back to the books to check, and we see that it is *not* the main thing; that it is *not* what



A sampling of the *Militia Caritatis Dei*

we are all about; and that we *do* – as Bishop Paprocki has just been forced to discover – have a choice. And so, *MCD* is able to sing the song more positively and with more gusto than the bishop:

We are absolutely independent of governments; avoiding even the appearance of affiliation with any secular state, and rejecting, *both as a matter of charitable principle and of prudence*, any funding from governments. We believe that experience has amply demonstrated that it is a practical impossibility, given the nature of Catholic Faith-denying and even natural-law-ignoring secular governments, for a Catholic association to accept government money without compromising its Catholicity.

We sing *fortissimo* when we get to the phrases concerning “charitable *principle*.” For, though Catholics may in good faith differ among themselves over the extent to which the Church’s “welfare” or “humanitarian” agencies may prudently rely on secular-state aid (or on whether such agencies are even legitimate), when it comes to an organization which explicitly designates itself a “*charity*” – as does *Militia Caritatis Dei*, or “Catholic *Charities*” of Springfield – coerced and coercive secular-state financial support is, as a matter of principle, absolutely out of bounds:

Many modern “charities” rely for their very existence and mode of operation on the coerced, involuntary, unconscious “contributions” of taxpayers, most of whom (in the American case) are not Catholic. This is a sham; a simulacrum of Catholic charity. For “government charity” is a meaningless – or maybe, pernicious – contradiction in terms. True charity can only be freely, intentionally given; it cannot be taxed into existence. “Catholic” institutions which use this method of perpetuating themselves are operating unethically (for “a good end does not justify an evil means”) while perverting the meaning and practice of true Catholic charity. ...

It is unethical and immoral to use for purposes outside the proper scope of State action – e.g., charitable endeavors – money which has been coercively extracted from others through taxation. A “charity” which uses financial resources derived through taxation is collaborating with the partner government in theft. Organized charity is no more exempt from the obligation to be voluntary – by mere virtue of being organized – than is individual charity.

Goodness knows, if Bishop Paprocki’s recent rendition of that chant melody is not as robust as might be wished, we do not repine. One gives thanks that a bishop – *any* bishop, only *one* bishop! – is even making a stab at that chant. We pray only that he won’t have to sing solo for much longer. Perhaps, if neopagan American governments increasingly demand the unconscionable of Catholic organizations, another emergent “silver lining” will be Bishop Paprocki getting some episcopal company. (“When they feel the heat, they’ll see the light.”) At least enough to start a little schola capable of doing the chant justice.

For help, the future episcopal schola – and we – could do much worse than listen to a particularly clear, forthright, and unequivocal rendering given by the president of a popular Catholic news and education website, delivered in enthusiastic response to the now-we-can-be-more-Catholic remarks of Bishop Paprocki: “It is *never* good for a religious mission to be dependent on government. ... *Any situation* in which the Church receives funding through the government—whether for social services, education or ministerial stipends—is a disaster waiting to happen for the Church. ... The Church must *never* put herself in the position of being considered an agency of the State. ... When the Church or its agencies carry on their charitable and apostolic activities with funds provided by the State, they are *by that very fact* subordinated to the State in both perception and reality.” [my emphases]

In any case, we orthodox Catholics needn’t remain passive as we wait in anxious hope for the formation of that anti-statist choir of bishops. “All of us need to increase our sacrificial commitment to doing and supporting [government-free] *truly Catholic* charitable work.” And we can also thank, and possibly encourage, Bishop Paprocki by emphasizing to him and his semi-reformed, semi-government-free service organizations that being truly Catholic and truly charitable is not just a silver lining, *it’s the whole – white! – cloud*. It’s what it’s *all* about.

And, by the way, it’s what *Militia Caritatis Dei* is all about. ☞

Jon Merrill is the founder of Militia Caritatis Dei, a traditionally orthodox, catholically Catholic international charity which conspicuously rejects government funding.

USCCB Criticizes Pew Report on \$26.7M Advocacy Effort; Pew responds

CATHOLIC WORLD NEWS The director of media relations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has criticized a report by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life that found that the USCCB devoted nearly \$27 million to advocacy efforts. But the main researcher for the Pew effort defended the report.

“In trying to get a handle on advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill, Pew researchers compared apples and oranges and got lemons,” said Sister Mary Ann Walsh. “The report is named ‘Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, DC,’ and that’s where the misconceptions start. The report is less about lobbying than advocacy, and it defines advocacy as broadly as possible.”

Allen Hertzke, a University of Oklahoma political scientist who worked on the Pew report, pointed out that the study had been clearly described as an inquiry into “the broad efforts of religious advocacy organizations to help shape public policy, including educating the laity and the general public about the moral dimensions of policy concerns.” He added that while some readers might view the word “lobbying” in a negative light, the report was using a broader connotation. He explained that “when political scientists speak of ‘lobbying for the faithful’ or ‘lobbying for the environment,’ they are referring more broadly to the constitutional right of people to petition their government, not to the narrow IRS definition of lobbying.”

Hertzke added that budget figures made public by the USCCB made it more difficult to distinguish advocacy from other efforts. The USCCB budget category for “policy activities” includes a wide range of initiatives including publishing, public relations, and news service, he noted. Hertzke said that researchers “would welcome efforts by the Bishops Conference to delineate more precisely the financial support behind” the advocacy work of the USCCB.

Sister Walsh conceded that USCCB budget reports may have contributed to the inaccuracy that she detected in the Pew report. “It got its figures from a USCCB consolidated financial statement that listed all kinds of USCCB activities as ‘policy activities,’” she continued. “The USCCB may share in the blame for Pew’s skew given its own lack of precision in the statement Pew studied; but ‘policy’ here cannot be equated with ‘public policy.’”

Sister Walsh added: “The USCCB does engage in government relations—not in electioneering—and has three full-time staff assigned to the task. None of them hands out money and the cost of their efforts reaches no where near \$26 million ...

“In estimating advocacy expenses, Pew included costs for the Communications Department, including publishing, media relations, digital media, and Catholic News Service. A look at the activities of these offices suggests something beyond lobbying/advocacy.

“Publishing, for example, has spent most of this year working on the revised Roman Missal ... Digital media, which conveys church teaching through modern means, boasts of some terrific efforts. Its most popular site by far is the Scripture readings page ... Pew says my own Office of Media Relations does advocacy. Perhaps the occasional blog seems like that, but I spend more time writing about new appointments in dioceses, religious education, vocations to priesthood and the plight of nuns whose retirement funds are woefully underfunded.” ☞



Allen Hertzke, Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma and primary researcher of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life report, “Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, DC.”



Sister Mary Ann Walsh, Director of Media Relations for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Pornographic Pandemic - We Are Awash in Porn

Catholics have a duty to fight against pornography and its devastating spiritual and societal consequences

By Patrick A. Trueman

In a conversation with a priest in my diocese, I shared my spiritual director's report that every other confession he hears from men involves the sin of pornography. The pastor's response was shocking: "Oh, it's much worse than that!" Since then, this sad reality has been confirmed by many others: The sin of pornography is overwhelming Catholic men.

Pornography is now more popular than baseball. In fact, it has become America's pastime, and we are awash in it. Porn is on our computers, our smartphones, and our cable or satellite TV. It's common in our hotels and even in many retail stores and gas stations. For many men - and, increasingly, women - it is part of their daily lives.

Yet, Catholic teaching on the subject is clear. Use of pornography is a "grave offense." The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "Pornography ... offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others" (2354).

In *Life of Christ*, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen wrote, "The penalty of those who live too close to the flesh is to never understand the spiritual." Hardcore pornography on the Internet offers an ocean of perversion. It takes the mind where it should never go, loosening its moral moorings and leaving it adrift in a treacherous sea of sin. That is the fate of those who give themselves over to pornography: They find themselves alone with their images and an insatiable appetite for more.

While astounding to many, users of pornography eventually put religion, marriage, family, work and friendships secondary to their desire for pornography. They may want to change, to go back to life as it was before porn, but most will return and descend further. Dr. Mary Anne Layden, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at the Center for Cognitive Therapy, likens pornography to crack cocaine. In a testimony to the U.S. Senate in November 2004, she noted, "This material is potent, addictive and permanently implanted in the brain."

Sadly, for the regular consumer of pornography, confession and contrition are normally not sufficient to break from pornography because, like drug abuse, pornography is not just a bad habit - it is often an addiction.

A DESIRE THAT DOES NOT SATISFY

Addiction to pornography is now commonplace among adults and is even a growing problem for children and teenagers. Few who are addicted will get help, and the consequences can be lifelong and severe.

Pornography's addictive strength is a result of long-term, sometimes lifelong, neuroplastic changes in the brain. Psychiatrist Norman Doidge, author of the best-selling book *The Brain That Changes Itself* (Penguin, 2007), writes, "Pornography, by offering an endless harem of sexual objects, hyperactivates the appetitive system. Porn viewers develop new maps in their brains, based on the photos and videos they see. Because it is a use-it-or-lose-it brain, when we develop a map area, we long to keep it activated. Just as our muscles become impatient for exercise if we've been sitting all day, so too do our senses hunger to be stimulated" (108).

With pornography, in other words, our brain's pleasure system that excites our desires is activated, but there is no real satisfaction. This explains why users can spend endless hours searching for pornography on the Internet.

Doidge further notes that porn viewers develop tolerances so that they need higher and higher levels of stimulation. Thus, they often move to harder, more deviant pornography. More than a decade ago, Margaret A. Healy, adjunct professor at Fordham University School of Law, and Muireann O'Brian, former head of End Child Pornography, Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT), observed a link between adult and child pornography. Since that



time, scores of current and former law enforcement authorities have noted that many adult porn consumers will eventually move to child pornography, even if they are not pedophiles and had no interest in such material at first. These findings account, in part, for the prevalence of child pornography in the world today.

Viewing porn changes the user's attitude toward sex, his or her spouse and society. He or she uses sexual fantasies to get aroused, tries to get partners to act out pornographic scenes, is more likely to engage in sexual harassment and sexual aggression, and views sex as a casual, non-intimate, recreational privilege. Laydon and other clinical psychologists have reported that, ironically, erectile dysfunction is commonly associated with constant porn use among men. One reason for this is that the constant search for sexual images and often-accompanying masturbation lead to dissatisfaction with one's spouse. After all, a man's wife cannot possibly maintain an image that competes with the women in the fantasy world of pornographic videos and images. The regular porn consumer sets himself up for disappointment and the almost-certain disintegration of his marriage.

Marital love is meant to be a total giving of oneself to a lifelong, faithful partner. It is a trusting, selfless giving. By contrast, pornographic sex is selfish, demeaning and mechanical. In his catechesis on the theology of the body, Pope John Paul II emphasized that there is a "moral goodness" in marriage, which is faithfulness. That goodness can be adequately achieved only in the exclusive relationship of both parties. Too many people miss out on that unique goodness of marriage and settle for the temporary, perverted and unfulfilling excitement of pornography.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

A father has a duty to keep his children from pornography and a sacred obligation to set an example of purity for his family. What greater authority could a father have about the harms of pornography than the words of Christ?: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).

If you have become a porn consumer, ask yourself this: Am I the same man who professed fidelity to my wife on my wedding day? Fidelity cannot be maintained if one consumes pornography. Wives of porn consumers feel as though their husbands are committing adultery. Affairs of the mind are every bit as destructive as affairs of the heart.

Divorce lawyers report a high correspondence between pornography consumption and divorces. One 2004 study in *Social Science Quarterly* titled "Adult Social Bonds and Use of Internet Pornography" revealed that persons having an extramarital affair were more than three times more likely to have accessed Internet porn than those who did not have affairs. Further, those ever having engaged in paid sex were 3.7 times more apt to be using Internet porn than those who had not.

If you have a porn habit, your children may follow. Many pornography addicts report that their first exposure to porn was the discovery of their parent's porn collection, which started them on a life of sexual confusion and exploitation. A 2006 survey of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children revealed that 79 percent of youth gain unwanted exposure to pornography in the home.

To a child, pornography normalizes sexual harm, according to Dr. Sharon Cooper, a pediatrician at the University of North Carolina. "Research has shown that the prefrontal cortex - the home of good judgment, common sense, impulse control and emotions - is not completely mature until children are 20-22 years of age," she explained. The introduction of pornography to the brain's prefrontal cortex is therefore devastating to key areas of a child's development and may be life-altering. "When a child sees adult pornography ... their brains will convince them that they are actually experiencing what they are seeing," Cooper added. In other words, what a child sees in porn is what they believe is reality.

Some children will actually emulate what they see in pornography and experiment on siblings, relatives and friends. Many studies show that children exposed to pornography initiate sexual activity at an earlier age, have more sex partners, and have multiple partners in a short period of time. A 2001 study in the journal *Pediatrics* also found that teenage girls exposed to pornographic movies have sex more frequently and have a strong desire to become pregnant.

Pornography is now more popular than baseball. In fact, it has become America's pastime, and we are awash in it. Porn is on our computers, our smartphones, and our cable or satellite TV, in our hotels and retail stores and gas stations.

Resources

- *Morality in Media* provides a website — PornHarms.com — that offers peer-reviewed research on the harm of pornography and resources to protect men and their families from these harms. Founded by Jesuit Father Morton Hill in 1962, *Morality in Media* is the nation's oldest anti-pornography organization and is supported by the Knights of Columbus. Visit moralityinmedia.org.

- The Order's Catholic Information Service makes available in booklet form: *Blessed Are The Pure In Heart: A Pastoral Letter on the Dignity of the Human Person and the Dangers of Pornography* (2007) by Bishop Robert W. Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo. To request the booklet, visit kofc.org/cis.

THERE IS HELP AND HOPE

Thankfully, there are organizations, counselors and resources that provide hope for those suffering from the destructive effects of pornography on children, marriages, relationships and society. Many who have been addicted - adults and children alike - have been helped through counseling or online exercises offered by recovery services. It is critical, however, that each person and each family does a reality check. Ask yourselves whether you and your family are protected from the scourge of pornography. Do you have adequate parental control or filtering software on your home computer? Is the computer in an open area of the home? If you have children, have you talked to them about the spiritual and social cost of pornography? Do you have premium cable or satellite channels on your TV that offer pornography as regular fare?

If you are viewing pornography or indecent material, you are harming your very soul and perhaps those of your children and your spouse. The biblical warning is severe: "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" (Mk 9:47). At a minimum, make sure that your computer both at home and in the office is filtered and that you have an "accountability partner" - perhaps your wife or a good friend - who has access to your computer and the sites you visit. Finally, get involved in the war on pornography. It is worth the fight for you, your family and your nation. ☞

This article originally appeared in Columbia magazine, the magazine of the Knights of Columbus, New Haven, Connecticut, November 2011 and is reprinted here with their permission.

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Cloisters and Cocoons: Matrimony in the Trinity

By Marie P. Loehr

We are all zygotes in the "womb" of God. What if God got an abortion?
- Response to Roe v. Wade, 22 January 1973

Traditional paintings of the Annunciation show the Angel Gabriel appearing to Our Lady as she prays. He announces the Incarnation of Jesus Christ to her in the midst of her prayer. It is keeping with the description Luke

gives of her, concerning the astounding events she experiences from the Annunciation on. "But Mary kept all these things in mind, and treasured them in her heart." [Luke 2:20] Even this pondering is contemplative prayer, in the presence of God.

We're reminded of Sara in the *Book of Tobias*. Beset by demons, her marriage bed is death to every bridegroom who enters it to consummate his union with her. Then Raphael presents Tobias to her parents as a groom, and gives him strict instructions on how to exorcise these demons. Before the marriage may be consummated in the flesh, the couple must persevere in prayer before the Lord, which delay of gratification is a form of fasting as well as prayer. We know some demons can only be cast out by prayer and fasting. Christ tells us so.

This is the context all marriages, their consummation and conceptions



Sara and Tobias

should have. This spiritual foundation should be the core of all marriage preparation.

Prayer puts us in the presence of God—the practice of the interior life, which alone fills external life with meaning and truth. It is the practice of contemplation and its overflow into daily life that brings all our external actions to fruition. This is as true in the marital cloister and vocation as it is in the priestly and religious.

The child conceived in an atmosphere of Christ love and contemplative prayer should have a spiritual Head Start on preparation for his vocation, be it marriage or priesthood or religious life.

What is contemplative prayer, or the interior life?

It is the simple seeking of God in *everything*. As the “Morning Offering” says, “we offer thee all our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day in union with your Sacred Heart . . . “It is that simple and that difficult. It unites us with Christ in ALL. It is intimate, friendly conversation with God—which is what prayer is, part of the normal interior dialogue we carry on daily with ourselves, only now including God. It is a persevering focus on this unvoiced prayer, not ignoring external actions, but transforming those, too, into a form of prayer, by offering them with God, through God, in God.

Pregnancy is a time and state easily transposed from inward attention to the child growing in the womb to interior conversation with that child and with God, at the same time. In such periods of quiet reflection and concentration on the child in God, and God in the child, the mother can let go daily tensions and relax. Catherine of Siena says, speaking of such communion with God: . . . “the soul is then in God, and God in the soul, as the fish is in the sea, and the sea in the fish.” [“A Foretaste of Divine Providence,” *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, TAN Classics, p. 3]

We may say likewise that the baby is in the mother, and the mother in the baby, in just the way fish and sea, God and us are meshed and interior to one another. The womb is a cloister for the baby—a protective cocoon.

Here is where marriage preparation begins for us all. Do we scoff at the idea? A zygote, an embryo, a fetus in marriage preparation! *Puh-leeze!* What nonsense is this? It is fact.

From the moment of conception onward, the child is being conditioned in various ways, shaped and influenced and affected by various streams of input. All that input conditions reactions and responses even in the womb. There are three primary sources of input, either positive or negative, or a mixture.

1] **The genetic combinations created by the fusion of the parental DNA.** Here is where marital “two-in-one-flesh” becomes concrete and tangible. Genes are coded for physical, emotional, intellectual, creative, and even certain spiritual potentialities. It is in our DNA that spirit intersects with flesh, and each affects the other. Good genes, good outcomes, maybe. Problem genes, problem outcomes, maybe. Neither nature nor nurture are destiny. Grace trumps and transfigures all, if we are open to God.

2] **The chemical input from the mother’s hormones, nutrients, and medications.** Food, drink, medications all introduce various chemicals—good or bad—into the baby’s physiological formation and development. We’re very aware of that these days. We are not so aware that even muscle tension, nervous system reactions, and hormone release also factor into the baby’s development and womb health. A peaceful mother is more likely to foster a peaceful unborn child and a peaceful neonate. A scared or agitated mother is more likely to deliver an a panicky or agitated newborn. Again, this is not set in stone. These are only indicators for possible good or problem outcomes. We may never second guess grace. We can and should cooperate with it, however, in every way open to us.

3] **The influence of the extrauterine environment.** As the baby grows and its nervous system and sensory organs come on line, so to speak, it can hear and register sounds and activity beyond the cloister of the womb. *The Wall Street Journal* ran a story back in the late 1980s about a couple whose baby was mistakenly switched after delivery, in the hospital nursery. How did the parents know to ask for blood and DNA tests? The baby they were given did not know its name or recognize the stories and songs they had read to it while it was in the womb. Their baby had responded even in the womb to the sound of their voices, to recognition of its repeated name, to the songs and stories.

When they were taken into the nursery and called the baby’s name, only one newborn raised its head and tried to find where the voice was coming from. When they sang the songs that had stirred it most in the womb, it waved its hands and feet, and cooed. The tests were done, and their parenthood was corroborated. Intellectual input is also possible and influential for the baby in the womb. Where there is peace and affection outside the womb, the baby will record and react to that, too.

Conflict outside the womb will also have its effect inside—besides the stress chemicals that flood the fetus. In some areas of the world, physical abuse of the mother by the unborn baby’s father increases the chances of miscarriage or stillbirth by 50%. Constructive behaviors, destructive behaviors—all these shape or doom the child. Even before birth...

Yet we know that even this is not destiny. We are born with free will. There are bad apples in every delicious bushel. There are good apples on rotting trees. We are shaped by all these things in the womb and out of it. We are also shaped by sin and grace—and God prevails.

Still, parents—if you want your children to grow straight and marry treasures, look to your own marriages and examine



them from the standpoint of Scripture and Christ. Parents, examine yourselves and what sort of template for marriage you've imprinted in your children.

Marriage preparation begins in all that we spill into the womb, consciously or not. It continues through early childhood, elementary school, adolescence where we learn Christ, love Christ, live Christ--or not, through you, as well as their teachers in school or CCD.

Let bishops and priests and religious look to their preaching and practice as well. You too are providing marriage prep by all your words, but by your pastoral actions and behavior, even more.

In fact, everyone in the role of teacher will find example far more potent than any words. Parent, teacher, pastor, bishop . . . example is primary.

Dom Chautard says in his classic, *The Soul of the Apostolate*:

If the priest is a saint, . . . the people will be fervent; if the priest is fervent, the people will be pious; if the priest is pious, the people will at least be decent; if the priest is only decent, the people will be godless. **The spiritual generation is always one degree less intense in its life than in those who beget it in Christ.**

This is as true for parents as for priests.

Finally Matrimony, like Orders, must be rooted in the Trinity one way or another. If it is not, it is always in jeopardy. Shakespeare says in Sonnet 116:



Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken . . .

We know of only one such constant love—and that is God's love. What does "true" mean in this context?

It means straight, right, plumb--minds meshed with one another, in agreement, in likeness. The Navajo would call this *hozho*. *Hozho* means peace, beauty, harmony, order . . . To read part of the Navajo prayer of blessing is to recall the Lorica of St. Patrick:

Beauty [Christ] before me,
Beauty [Christ] behind me,
Beauty [Christ] beside me.

To walk in beauty is to walk in Christ. In Christ alone we find peace, beauty, harmony, order. A Buddhist would agree that this is "true mind." Only in Christ are we in our true mind, and minds. This is what it means to root Matrimony in the Trinity and its commitment, communion and creativity.

With Christ, *hozho*. Without Christ . . . the disorder, confusion and disintegration we see around us every day.

Good marriages begin with lifelong, *spiritual* marriage prep, including parental and pastoral input and example, the development of the interior life, *i.e.*, walking in beauty with Christ, and appropriate examinations of Eucharistic marriage at each level of education.

It's our choice, each one of us has a responsibility for achieving this Church-wide marital "veritas in caritas." Matrimony in the Trinity—its cloister and cocoon—begins with each one of us, walking in the beauty who is Christ every day of our lives.

In living this prayer with Christ, in the cloister of the Trinity, we will discover that the cocoon opens, and the living water of the Spirit spills into all the activities of our external lives as well, transforming them in Christ and true commitment, communion and creativity. ☞

This is Marie Loehr's final column. Rest in peace; you are sorely missed.

The Seven Themes of Catholic Social Justice

By Stephanie Block

Having laid the preliminary foundation of its 30-week program – namely introducing participants to its structure and the need for a “tender,” compassionate spirit – JustFaith introduces the USCCB’s “Seven Themes from Catholic Social Teaching.”

The “themes” under discussion have been promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) as a pedagogical tool for introducing Catholic social teaching to a broader audience. JustFaith introduces them in the early sessions of its program and has participants watch the video “In the Footsteps of Jesus: Catholic Social Teaching at Work Today,” which according to the USCCB description “presents a comprehensive overview of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching, along with a summary of the scriptural and historical context for their development.”ⁱ

For those who aren’t already familiar with these themes, in their bare form they are:

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God’s Creation



Wow.

A more fleshed-out version can be read at the USCCB website.ⁱⁱ Which-ever version one examines, there are two primary criticisms to be leveled against this list. One is that theme 7 is not humanly possible. The other is that the list presents only a very anemic reflection of the body of Catholic thought about social justice. A third concern is how JustFaith intends to use this list in contrast to how the Church has intended its body of social teaching to be used.

“WHO HAS MEASURED THE WATERS...?” [Is 40:12]

Theme 7, as explicated in the fuller version, “We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation,” proposes a preposterous task. There’s no such mandate in Catholic social teaching or in the Scriptures. Stewardship of the galaxies and management of angels, to name a few elements of creation, is an awfully grand enterprise that’s completely out of our league.

The humble responsibility to which Catholic social teachings *does* exhort the human race to attend is outlined in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: humans must *safeguard* their environment, far as they can. It doesn’t have quite the lofty ring to it as “care of creation” but, at least, it’s *do-able*.

DEFICIENT

The seven themes give an impression of the Church’s social doctrine that is dangerously too small.

Consider the following analogy. A teacher of scripture, wanting to give students a handle on a complex topic, develops the Biblical theme that the Bible is concerned with the historical information about a particular Semitic tribe.

There’s nothing inherently untrue about this theme; the scriptures do contain considerable information about this.

However, this isn’t *all* that the scriptures contain. There are many other “themes” and many other ways of organizing the material contained in scripture for teaching purposes. Furthermore, any theme, if not presented in a proper context, is distorted, leading a student to mistakenly conclude perhaps that the Bible is *only* concerned about this tribe and nothing else.

The teacher's choice of emphasis is *meaningful*. In this analogy, we understand that the teacher wishes to leave students with a relationship to the scriptures that is quite different from that of a teacher whose Biblical theme is, say, that the Bible describes God's intervention in the history of fallen mankind.

We find a similar problem with the "Seven Themes from Catholic Social Teaching." It isn't that they aren't present within the body of Catholic social teaching but that they aren't *all* that's there. Further, stripped of the context that elevates the information they convey, they lose much of their importance. In a Godless world, human dignity is difficult to uphold.

Therefore, in the understated language of the Church, we might say that the effort to present Catholic Social Teaching via these seven "themes" is *deficient*. They don't take us far enough – to where we really need to go to be compassionate Christians.



Corporal works of mercy are not the same thing as "social justice." (painting by Pieter Bruegel)

The praxis-oriented activist, impatient with words and anxious for deeds, is likely to dismiss this criticism as niggling. He wants to get on with the doing...but in that case, has failed to absorb Nouwen's warning, read by JustFaith participants in a previous session: "Here we are touching the profound spiritual truth that service is an expression of the search for God and not just of the desire to bring about individual or social change." ⁱⁱⁱ

So we must observe what Catholic social teaching says about itself – that "social action is an integral part of her evangelizing ministry" and is an "instrument of evangelization." ^{iv} The compassion we bring of our own selves into this broken world is too small. No matter how brilliant the organization, how scientific the systemic restructuring, they aren't large enough band aids to cover such wounds.

What is required is more radical "good news" – a potential for healing – that can only be procured from God.

"Aw, come on," says the activist, "just give your cup of water to the thirsty and shut up about it, already."

We can do that, of course...and we must. But then,

we're not discussing Catholic Social teaching but a simple, corporal work of mercy. They are related but not the same.

Corporal works of mercy – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, ransoming the captive, and burying the dead – are what the social justice crowd calls acts of "direct service."

Catholic Social teaching encourages such acts, of course, but is concerned about other things, as well. Its defense of the human person and, therefore, its defense of doing acts of mercy in response to that person, is predicated on God's liberating action in history. Human solidarity, rights, and responsibilities make scant, if any, sense outside this context.

Unlike the "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Justice" document, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* – which JustFaith also references throughout the course – grounds social action in God's bosom rather than man's. It concerns something more than merely peaceful, prosperous human coexistence and mere human compassion.

Of themselves, in other words, the themes fail to address salient – foundational – concepts, such as the grounding of any social action in authentic Catholic formation (how can one make social judgments about war and peace or economic well-being if one has no understanding of how Christ and his Church understand these issues?) or the evangelical mission intrinsic to it or the fact that the *Church's* mission is religious, not political or, most significant of all, that social justice can never be built on human consensus but must be positioned on moral truth. These concepts don't sit well at the secular table. They are fundamental, however, to a just society.

BLUEPRINTS?

One of the most confusing aspects of studying Catholic social doctrine is sorting between principles and practical solutions. The *Compendium* puts it nicely, explaining that it serves "as an instrument for the moral and pastoral

discernment of the complex events that mark our time; as a guide to inspire, at the individual and collective levels, attitudes and choices that will permit all people to look to the future with greater hope and trust.”

Catholic social doctrine doesn't endorse particular programs or organizations; it defines genuine human welfare and then provides principles to discern which programs and organizations serve it. These are quite different functions which are important to keep distinct or the Church (actually, not the Church, *per se*, but people speaking as if they were representatives of the Church) runs the danger of dictatorially imposing flawed human designs as if they were divine.

The note to co-facilitators in week four's program materials seems to confuse the matter. It states: “Catholic social teaching is part of the Church's effort to translate a tradition of God's love and justice into a blueprint for practical action. Catholic social teaching attempts to speak to how God's reign expresses itself, for example, in human rights or workplace values or legal responses to human deprivation or injustice. And it wades into the entire human arena of decision-making: neighborhood, politics, economics, international relations, corporate behavior, personal finances, etc. Suddenly, faith can look very earthy – and *risky*, controversial, politicized, challenging, and even dangerous [this week's reading includes a passage about Dom Helder Camara]. And so it is.”^v



Dom Helder Camara

At best, we can say this is an ambiguous statement – though inclusion of the liberationist Dom Helder Camara's thought suggests otherwise. At worst, it appears to suggest that if the JustFaith program ends up concluding (which it does) that something like, oh say, Alinskyian organizing is the logical conclusion of its 30-week efforts, this is the mind of the Church (which it isn't). Yes, that *is* dangerous.

JustFaith participants are given “Excerpts of Social Teaching” cards, with the “Seven Themes” printed on them, and instructed to carry the card with them to all future session. “We will refer to these principles throughout the remainder of the program.” The facilitator notes explain that “Each theme will be covered in a reading” from the *Compendium*...meaning that the *Compendium* will be used as a support for elaborating the “Seven Themes.”

Which “lens” will it be? Will JustFaith tout secularized “justice” – which is often unjust – or teach with the mind of the Church? Much will depend on what individual facilitators and participants are able to bring to the discussion. If they read the entire *Compendium*, rather than isolated passages, the deficiencies of working from the “Excerpts of Social Teaching” cards could be surmounted. If they read only isolated passages from the *Compendium*, along with liberationist materials, the result will be profoundly distorted.

Preparative reading for week four includes excerpts from *The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching* (revised edition) by Marvin L. Krier Mich. The first excerpt concerns the “Seven Themes.” Mich explains that while “the bishops term these seven themes of Catholic social teaching as ‘starting points,’ this text [*The Challenge*...] recommends that we *start with our own experience*.” (p. 9. emphasis in original)

The novice student, in other words, is not encouraged to first understand Church principles before applying them to his own life and the world at large, but to first think of his own emotional reactions. “This methodology reverses the order of theory and practice. Earlier understandings emphasized *theory as knowledge* and *practice as the application* of the knowledge. Following this older approach, social ministry was considered merely a matter of applying Church teaching to the situation at hand. The new understanding of the theory-practice relationship gives new status and higher priority to our lived experience.” (p. 9-10)

To be able to posit such a position – to place experience against doctrinal teachings – is to miss that doctrinal teachings are not just any theories, subject to continual reconsideration. Doctrinal theories are true and cannot be contradicted by individual experience, any more than individual experience contradicts that two and two equal four.

However, by saying that lived experience has a “higher priority” than the mere “theory” of Church social teachings, participants are subtly encouraged to consider if Church teaching isn't largely irrelevant. Does failure to avoid pregnancy using Natural Family Planning methods trump the Church's injunction against artificial contraception? In the minds of many Catholics, trained in the “new theory” of social analysis, it does. Clearly, this is not a valid way to introduce *Catholic* social teaching.

Works swell for teaching liberationism, however. ☞



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Endnotes

- i. Product explanation: www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?sku=5-444
- ii. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>
- iii. Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill, and Douglas Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, (Doubleday Image Books) 1982, p. 29 – from the assigned reading for the JustFaith program.
- iv. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, # 66 -67, referencing John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 5.
- v. “JustFaith Catholic Version, week 4, 2011-12,” p. 4.

This article is third in a series examining the 2011-2012 JustFaith program materials. Other articles in the series, as they are written, are available at Spero News: www.speroforum.com.



The inscription is a Latin elegiac couplet:

*sum novus ut pura puer ortus
virgine Christus.
Sic tibi sit foelix hic novus
annus, homo.*

*I am as new as Christ child born
of a virgin pure,
Mortal, may your new year be
just as happy and sure.*

January Calendar

Los Pequeños Monthly Meeting
January 20, 2012
Call (505) 293-8006 for information.

Pro-life Prayer:
Planned Parenthood Abortuary
701 San Mateo Blvd.
Holy Innocents Chapel:
(505) 266-4100
Times: Daily 8 AM – 3 PM

Helpers of God's Precious Infants
Planned Parenthood Abortuary
701 San Mateo Blvd.
Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays: 8 AM – 11:30 AM
Wednesdays: 12 Noon – 3:00 PM
For more information, call Phil Leahy:
(505) 440-3040

Mass at the Holy Innocents Chapel
Tuesdays, Thursdays: noon
Fridays—Extraordinary Form of the Mass: 9:30 AM
For more information, call
(505) 266-4100



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“I must say that, among educated people, politics occupies far too great a proportion of time. . . . In truth, questions of higher spirit cannot even be compared to the sort of blinking frivolity of politics. The ultimate problems of life and death show the colossal nature of this difference even more. Modern mankind is characterized precisely by the loss of the ability to answer the principal problems of life and death. People are prepared to stuff their heads with anything, and to talk of any subject, but only to block off the contemplation of this subject. This is the reason for the increasing pettiness of our society, the concentration on the small and irrelevant.”

- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

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