

# Editor's Introduction

*Faith in Action* was born out of concrete practical needs on the ground. I have often been asked to give sessions on the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to parish groups and grassroots communities. These talks usually last for an hour or two during their monthly meetings or recollection days. Even as I often acceded to these invitations, I would often have two nagging concerns with these requests. First, how can the Catholic Social Teaching be compressed into one or two hours? Even a talk on one encyclical, for example, *Laudato Si*, if it is to be effective, needs more than a day. Most Theology students take up “Catholic Social Teaching” in one or two semesters; they are not even confident to teach it to others after the course. The second question is: How many people do I reach if I give these talks myself? Even if I train a group of capable facilitators, they can only do as much.

Thus, the idea of formulating some learning modules for facilitators of grassroots communities was born. Any community formator, catechist or teacher can take hold of this book, study and prepare for a session or two, read the references more closely, gather the materials and tools required, and he or she is ready to impart the Catholic Social Teaching according to the needs, availability and capabilities of his or her own community.

It is our belief that learning and teaching the CST should not be monopolized by a few ‘experts.’ These prophetic reflections of the Church—written by the Magisterium in a systematic manner—first emerged out of the responses of the Christian faithful in and to their own challenging social contexts. The Catholic Social Teaching

therefore should not remain as a static doctrine inaccessible to many of us. It should be enfolded, appropriated and developed by all Christians in order to adapt them to our changing situations. These learning modules aim to facilitate these grassroots communal reflections so that our Christian communities continue to exercise their prophetic function in our times.

### **Our Best-Kept Secret**

The Catholic Social Teaching has been constantly described as the “best-kept secret of the Church.” Many people simply do not know it exists. When it is explained for the first time among lay groups, they say, “Why only now? The Church should have told this to us long ago.”

In fact, there was a time in the Philippine Church when CST provided a framework for reflection among peasant and labor groups, students in Catholic Action, and progressive Christian academics. But this hopeful movement in the churches faded and was replaced by concern for dogmatic precision and liturgical aesthetization in recent years. The coming of Pope Francis and his message “to go to the peripheries” gave birth to a new awareness of Christianity’s social mission. As they begin to take up the cause of the margins, Christians are again in search of a well from which to drink. We are led back to this “secret” source--the Catholic Social Teaching.

But what might be the reasons that this treasure has been kept a secret? I can think of three causes. First, the language of the encyclicals prevents it from reaching the ordinary person on the pew. It is technical, abstract and jargon-filled. It is often not accessible to people who do not have the experience of formal education or competence in theology. Even a trained catechist may not feel that confident about giving a workshop on the Catholic Social Teaching. One of the many good things about Pope Francis is that his speeches strike at the heart of people’s lives. But even if his encyclicals are more understandable, the frameworks used still need deeper explanation. In *Faith in Action*, we tried as much as possible to simplify the language and approach without diluting the main message. We painstakingly summarized the central principles in its historical context without avoiding their continuing debates. We also tried to use common images, local examples and familiar events in order to bring home the message. The

role of the facilitator is truly crucial, i.e., to bridge the gap between a CST document written in another time to the specific needs and concerns of his/her present community.

The second reason the CST remains a secret treasure is that by its nature it is called a “teaching” or “doctrine.” As such teachings are most often authoritative, didactic and prescriptive. We all know that any top-down approach fosters passivity and inaction and hardly encourages involvement and creativity from below. Contemporary sensibilities which put emphasis on participation and initiative are not receptive to imposed dogmatic pronouncements which these Church teachings appear to be most of the time. The learning modules in this collection make sure that the participants invest their own ideas and experiences, making them active contributors to the learning process and to the concretization of the Catholic Social Teaching in context. We believe that the CST is not a finished product—formulated by popes and bishops in the Vatican or elsewhere—and only needs to be applied on the ground. No; just as revolutionary movements contributed to the social ideas of individual encyclicals long time ago, so does the experience of our grassroots communities continue to shape and reshape the development of the Catholic Social Teaching in our times.

The third reason why CST meets resistance on the ground is its own message. Jesus was not accepted in his own hometown (Mk 6: 1-6). Then as now the message that he brings disrupts the everyday social arrangements people are accustomed to. His words announce God’s goodness, mercy and compassion. In his time, he dined with tax collectors and other sinners, forgave prostituted women and healed the untouchables, the sick and the poor. Through word and action, he denounced social exclusion, hypocrisy and violence. For this, he was thrown out of their villages, denounced by the authorities, and at the end of his life, was hurled up on the tree on top of that mountain one day. When the prophetic message of Jesus is preached in our times through the Catholic Social Teaching, the participants are challenged to do the same work that Jesus did. Many Christians recoil from such commitment that leads to one’s own crucifixion. The fearful and the timid keep its message secret. Only the courageous are willing to dare. *Faith in Action* is thus a book for the brave. It challenges us to be prophets like Jesus in our times.

## Selected CST Themes

There are many approaches to study the Catholic Social Teaching. Most books on CST tackle each social encyclical one by one, place them in their individual socio-historical contexts, discern the principles they use, and see how each pope wants Christians to respond to the challenges of their times. Even as this method promises to be most faithful to the message of each encyclical on the academic level, it can also be dry and uninteresting to most audiences outside the classroom. What *Faith in Action* does is to approach it through the CST predominant themes. Pedagogically, these familiar topics easily touch base with people's burning issues and concerns. Pastorally, their applications are directly connected with the everyday living out of their Christian faith.

There are many themes that we can draw out from the Catholic social tradition. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) mentions the following topics: rights of the human person, family, human work, economic life, political community, international community, safeguarding the environment, and promotion of peace. Other themes can be added to the list: option for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity and development, gender, community and participation, role of government and subsidiarity, ownership and universal destination of goods, and so on. For lack of space and time, we have chosen only six major themes that we think are the most urgent in our context.

These learning modules start with a general introduction to Catholic Social Teaching in order to orient the participants on its main concepts, principles, methods, spirituality and challenges of the Church's social mission. The main body tackles three crucial social issues: political participation, peace-building, and ecology; and highlights the problems faced by three vulnerable groups of social agents: workers, women and the socially excluded. As we reflect on these social concerns, we also ask what does the Church say about these issues in our present times. We follow the see-judge-act process as we consider these themes so that the participants themselves contribute their experience to the analysis of the situation, the understanding of the principles, and the living out of these values. The book ends with a module on the re-appropriation of CST in the Philippine context in

order to show how our bishops and other leaders take inspiration from the social encyclicals and apply, modify or re-read their principles as they saw fit.

Other themes also intersect with our chosen emphases: subsidiarity is discussed under political governance; universal destination of goods is tackled under human labor; corruption is taken up under political participation; while the themes of common good, rights of the human person and the preferential option for the poor permeate all the modules. We are aware that the themes we have chosen do not exhaust the whole of Catholic Social Teaching. This initial attempt aims to invite others to continue reflecting on other relevant CST themes, and to make them available in modular form to our grassroots communities.

### **Our Process**

When we embarked on this project, we intended to bridge different worlds—theology and community organizing; academic expertise and popular education; cognitive learning and visual/performing arts. The intention is to make CST accessible to grassroots communities not only on the level of the mind, but also in the realm of their emotions in all the dimensions of their everyday lives.

In order to understand the Catholic Social Teaching, we invited a group of theologians to capture for us the essential principles and applications of the CST themes we have chosen to develop. They wrote their reflections and these articles, published in St. Vincent School of Theology's *Hapag* journal collection entitled *Catholic Social Teaching: Reflections from the Philippine Context* (2010), now serve as part of the modules' resource materials. These theologians did a series of workshops with our module writers who are all experts in popular education and community organizing. From these sessions, the writers composed the modules, formulated the activities and suggested points for reflection to make the sometimes abstract principles accessible to people on the ground. From hereon, it was back-and-forth consultation and discussion between the theologians and module writers in order to sharpen the shape and content of the module.

Our experience taught us two things. First, well-thought-out participatory activities and accompanying communal reflection make

the liberating CST concepts touch base with people's experiences. Second, popularizing content does not necessarily mean sacrificing the important complex debates that accompany them. We tried our best to maintain this crucial balance in all the modules.

When the modules had taken shape, we invited artists to put life into the conceptual learning models. First, Ditsi Carolino, a renowned documentary filmmaker, read through the modules and placed her expertise into making them alive in the stories of real persons whose lives she captured on film. These documentaries serve as testimonies that CST should not only be studied and understood, but also to be lived in the everyday. Second, we also invited Gary Granada, a celebrated composer and concert artist, to express the CST message in song. He and another artist, Bayang Barrios, more powerfully articulate the Christian prophetic calling in music what could not be expressed in words.

*Faith in Action* is mainly intended for a Catholic Christian audience. However, the seminar-workshops can also be open to other Christian groups, members of other faiths and civil society organizations who are interested in the Catholic social tradition. The learning modules were originally conceived to help community formators, pastoral workers and facilitators in their work of formation of grassroots. But it can also be used by teachers in schools, catechists, seminary teachers and other change agents. It can also be distributed to seminar participants for their personal continuing education.

There is also a suggested time-frame, i.e., number of hours and days, for each module. However, any community facilitator can decide how much of the module should be given, depending on the available time of the participants, level of engagement with the subject matter and the structure of the seminar-workshops.

### **Our Intended Contribution**

What does *Faith in Action* intend to contribute to the growing body of literature on the Catholic Social Teaching? I would like to identify four areas: see-judge-act as way of life, critical engagement with doctrine, liberative pedagogy, and reflection on the CST in the Philippine context.

### *See–Judge–Act as a Way of Life*

The process of see-judge-act adopted from the method of reflection among the Young Christian Workers movement of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn has long been considered the methodology of the Catholic Social Teaching. We also adopt it in the learning modules that follow. But beyond method, we also see the see-judge-act process as the spirituality behind the Catholic Social Teaching. The life of a mature Christian is a process of responsibly analyzing the situation (see), of discerning God's presence/absence in them (judge), and planning/acting what best responds to God's will in our times (act). More than content or method, CST is a way of life for responsible and discerning individuals within their socio-economic and political worlds. CST is not just learning a "teaching" or memorizing a doctrine. It is leading a certain kind of life, following a way, i.e., the prophetic way of Jesus. It is our dream that, with the help of these modules and the activities therein, the grassroots communities will practice this way of responsible discernment (of seeing, judging and acting) as individuals and as groups in both critical and ordinary events of their lives.

### *Critical Engagement with Social Doctrine*

Any ordinary Catholic has always been taught to follow and obey Church doctrines. We were given the impression that Church teachings, dogmas and norms are beyond question. We were taught to abide by them in the spirit of what Pilate says in another context: "What I have written, I have written" (Jn 19:22). We think doctrines do not evolve and develop; we consider them as eternal and universal norms. And that all we need to do is to apply them to all places at all times. We think that their applications may change but that these doctrines do not. This knowledge was demonstrated during the most recent Synod on the Family (2015). On the one hand, the bishops agreed that there is a need of a different type of theology that can learn from the difficult experiences on the families in our times. On the other hand, some bishops also said: "We never wished to change doctrine, only to change the application of the doctrines to particular cases. The doctrine cannot change."

But the great theologian, Cardinal John Henry Newman, had argued close to two centuries ago that change has already been present

in the Bible and tradition from the beginnings of the Church. Newman wrote: “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” Vatican II also said: “There is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience...” (*Dei Verbum*, 8).

Thus, if the Catholic Social Teaching is a process of engagement with the changing situations where Christians find themselves, it should also evolve and develop. New consciousness and novel experiences challenge age-old beliefs and practices. As the world develops, our understanding of ourselves also changes, so does our grasp of the faith and its doctrines. Change is not a sign of our infidelity to the Church; it is an expression of our commitment to the message of liberation which Jesus brings. In *Faith in Action*, we have set some activities where participants have the opportunity to inquire, challenge and evaluate the viability and relevance of CST principles from the perspective of the grounds where they come. There is also a space for criticism of CST from other sectors and fields. If the Church attentively listens to these voices, it can learn from their spiritual and practical experiences. Their reflections can be a new source of the evolving Catholic social thought. In other words, we believe that ordinary people on the ground, with or without formal theological training and expertise, are themselves acting as real theologians when they reflect on their experiences and witness to the mission of Jesus in their everyday contexts.

### *Liberating Pedagogy*

There have been numerous modules on the Catholic Social Teaching—some of them quite academic, others more popular. *Faith in Action: Catholic Social Teaching on the Ground* is a new addition to this growing literature. Conscious of Paolo Freire’s critique of “banking education,” we aimed for a liberative pedagogy. This means that we intend as much as possible to lessen the gap between the teacher (the active depositor) and the student (the passive recipient). In liberating education, we view the participants’ experiences as the basic matrix of the learning process from where all their questions and insights emerge.



Freire writes, “people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.” If there is any role to the facilitator, he or she becomes a guide or “midwife” to the birthing of new ideas, fresh realization and renewed action. In the process, the participants come out of the sessions as more mature and critical Christian adults, aware and equipped to transform the world with their Christian mission.

With liberating pedagogy also come other sources and manners of learning that may help heighten awareness in the educational process. The film documentaries, songs for reflection and meaningful liturgies can cement realizations of participants, rally them to a vision and strengthen their resolve to change their situations. Common activities like games, art making, and small-group discussions engage the participants’ psycho-motor and social skills. We leave it to the creativity of the facilitators to maximize these resources to enhance the whole learning process.

### **CST in Philippines**

One of the main contributions of *Faith in Action* is the reflection on how the Catholic Social Teaching is appropriated in the Philippine context. Individual thematic modules include reflections from local ecclesial and secular sources. The activities, stories and examples come from the Philippine context. As we explain the international context of the encyclicals, we also punctuate it with discussions of parallel local issues. For instance, the module on political participation discusses the issue of corruption in the Philippines. The modules on the environment, peacebuilding, women and the socially excluded end with examples from the Filipino experience. But the last module entitled “Catholic Social Teaching in the Philippine Context” specifically reflects on the how the Philippine Church, particularly the statements of the CBCP, re-interpret the social encyclicals from the view of the challenges of our own local context and history. This module also focuses on the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines as the concretization of Christianity’s social message in contemporary times. Our aim is to make the Filipino Christian aware of how far we have inculturated CST in our context.

Few months after he was elected to the papacy, Pope Francis said to a group of people in Rome:

Charity that leaves the poor person as he is, is not sufficient. True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice, it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer. It asks—and it asks us, the Church, us, the City of Rome, it asks the institutions—to ensure that no one ever again stand in need of a soup-kitchen, of makeshift-lodgings, of a service of legal assistance in order to have his legitimate right recognized to live and to work, to be fully a person.

It is our hope that studying the Catholic Social Teaching and living it out may slowly lead the Church, not only its leaders, its experts and theologians, but especially the ordinary women and men in our grassroots communities to be given their proper place at God's table, not as passive recipients, but as active agents of God's goodness and mercy to the world.

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