

CALLED AND GIFTED: CHARISM AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the formulation of Catholic social teaching as a form of ministry structured in relation to charism. After situating the concept of charism theologically, it addresses the significance of charism as an organizing principle for the ministry of Catholic social teaching, referring in particular to the experiences of Oswald von Nell-Breuning and Dorothy Day. Finally, it suggests a form of ecclesial participation, such as the retrieval of mystagogy, that would facilitate the free and full exercise of charisms by all those called and gifted to serve the church in the formulation of Catholic social teaching.

In a 1998 statement, the United States bishops issued a call to action to Catholic educators and pastoral ministers to teach the Catholic social tradition. Noting the lack of integration of Catholic social teaching in educational programs, they lamented a general ignorance of these texts among the faithful. "More fundamentally, many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social teaching of the church is an essential part of Catholic faith."¹ Since then, many educators and pastoral ministers have responded to the bishops' concerns with innovative classes, initiatives, and pedagogical approaches.

While such efforts are laudable, they may not be sufficient to accomplish the integration of Catholic social teaching into the lived practice of discipleship among the faithful. To achieve this objective, I suggest, the church will need to develop new pathways of participation, inviting the faithful to engage Catholic social teaching as a form of ministry in direct service of the church's mission.

One path forward might begin with Pope John Paul II's account of the diversity of vocations among the faithful that he offered in his

¹*Origins* 28 (2 July 1998): 104.

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apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*. Gifted by the Holy Spirit, all are called to participate in the work of the church through various ministries.

Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works.²

Building on the pope's insight, the formulation of Catholic social teaching might be regarded as a kind of ministry structured in relation to charism. To explore this possibility, I will begin by situating the concept of charism theologically and then address its significance as an organizing principle for the ministry of Catholic social teaching, using the particular cases of Oswald von Nell-Breuning and Dorothy Day to illuminate salient points. These considerations will prepare the way for imagining practices that would allow for the free and full exercise of charisms by all those called to serve the church through the ministry of Catholic social teaching.

I. Charism Theologically Considered

As the council fathers considered a draft of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) during the second session of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens exhorted them to take seriously the theological importance of charisms. He urged his fellow bishops to notice and nurture "those charisms and impulses of the Holy Spirit, who very frequently breathes through Christian laymen who have no position of authority."³ Beyond mere *paraenesis*, he pressed the council to enflesh this theological vision by expanding the number and kind of observers invited to their proceedings. In particular, he argued, "Women too should be *invited* as auditors; unless I am mistaken, they make up half of the human race."⁴

Beyond the walls of the conciliar halls, Suenens pointed to the

²Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (January 6, 2001), no. 46.

³Léon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, "The Charismatic Dimension of the Church," in *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, ed. Hans Küng, Yves Congar, and Daniel O'Hanlon (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist, 1964), 33.

⁴*Ibid.*, 34, emphasis in the original. See also Léon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *Memories and Hopes*, trans. Elena French (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1992), 140; Pope Paul VI, "New Horizons for the Woman Religious (*E motivo*)," (8 September 1964), *The Pope Speaks* 10 (1964-1965): 17.

centrality of charisms in the life of the church. "Each and every Christian, whether lettered or unlettered, has his charism in his daily life, but—as St. Paul says—'All of these must aim at one thing; to build up the Church' (1 Cor.14:26, see 14:3-5)."⁵ He asked the council fathers to reflect upon evidence of charism at work among their own people:

Do we not all know laymen and laywomen in each of our own dioceses who we might say are in a way called by the Lord and endowed with various charisms of the Spirit? Whether in catechetical work, in spreading the Gospel, in every area of Catholic activity in social and charitable works? Do we not know and see in our daily experience that the action of the Holy Spirit has not died out in the Church?⁶

Suenens' intervention proved quite influential. The language of charism figures prominently in *Lumen gentium's* account of the church's ministry and mission. Paragraph 12 reads:

It is not only through the sacraments that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills . . . , he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (1 Cor.12:7).⁷

Lumen gentium relies on Paul's description of the diverse gifts freely given by the Holy Spirit for service to the church. They may accent and coincide with natural abilities, but they are distinguished precisely as charisms by their essential direction toward the common good of the ecclesial community.⁸ The council's Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (*Apostolicam actuositatem*) further specifies that believers have

⁵Suenens, "Charismatic Dimension," 31.

⁶Ibid., 32.

⁷Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992). All references to the texts of Vatican II will be taken from this source.

⁸See Hans Küng, "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," in *The Church and Ecumenism*, Concilium, vol. 4 (New York: Paulist, 1965), 51. See also the following contributions in *Retrieving Charisms for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Doris Donnelly (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Margaret M. Mitchell, "Be Zealous for the Greater Charismata": Pauline Advice for the Church of the Twenty-First Century," 22; John C. Haughey, "Charisms: An Ecclesiological Exploration," 2; and Avery Dulles, "The Charism of the New Evangelizer," 36. Finally, see René Laurentin, "Charisms: Terminological Precision," trans. Theo Westow, in *Charisms in the Church*, Concilium, vol. 109, ed. Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 7–8.

the right and duty to direct charisms toward the good not only in the church but in the world as well.⁹

The church's role is not to control these gifts but rather to discern them rightly and to encourage the recipients—that is, *all* of the faithful—to use them well. This is no small task. It requires a delicate balance between the freedom of the Spirit's action and appropriate ordering of ecclesial life via some mode of authority. Without organizing structures, charisms most likely would not find full expression. On the other hand, it is possible that certain exercises of authority could stifle the fruition and manifestation of gifts meant for the growth of the whole church and the common good of society.

As Cardinal Avery Dulles has rightly noted, charism and office do not stand in opposition. Proper exercise of the latter is in itself an expression of the former. Emphasizing his point, Dulles writes "It would be a mistake to imagine that charisms are always given in an unconvenanted and unpredictable way, without regard for a person's status and official responsibilities."¹⁰ Presumably, it would also be erroneous to assume that current ecclesial structures of participation account adequately for the breadth and depth of charisms given to the faithful. From this perspective, the main concern is not so much the opposition of charism and office as the obstruction of the full expression of the Spirit's gifts.

Remembering with Cardinal Walter Kasper that ecclesiology is a function of pneumatology,¹¹ it seems that charism grounds one's call to exercise particular ministerial responsibilities or to assume a certain role in the church. In fact, as in the case of Dorothy Day discussed below, charisms may impel their bearers to strike out into new ministerial terrain, creating the appropriate ecclesial practices along the way. René Laurentin's observation rings true: "The charisms show in the most obvious way the gifts through which the Spirit structures the Church by rousing from within the services and functions of the community according to the diversity and qualities of each member."¹²

Situating ecclesiology within the context of pneumatology, then,

⁹Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (*Apostolicam actuositatem*), no. 3. See also John Haughey's account of the conciliar approach to the concept of charism in "Connecting Vatican II's Call to Holiness with Public Life," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 55 (2000): 1–19.

¹⁰Dulles, "Charism," 34–35. In footnote 3, he points to his earlier treatment in "Earthen Vessels: Institution and Charism in the Church," in *Above Every Name: the Lordship of Christ and Social Systems*, ed. Thomas E. Clarke (New York: Paulist, 1980), 155–87.

¹¹Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith*, trans. V. Green (New York: Paulist, 1980), 138–39. See also Gotthold Hasenhüttl, *Charisma: Ordnungsprinzip der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 103ff.

¹²Laurentin, 10. See also Küng, "Charismatic Structure," 58.

has very practical consequences for ecclesial life. Specifically, it means that various forms of ministry will spring from the calls and gifts of the church's members and will be directed to the particular needs of the community. Ecclesial necessity prompts sustained discernment of each disciple's call and charisms, providing fertile ground for the emergence of vocation. Ministerial commitments take root as one's faithful response to God's call and the Spirit's gift. In this manner, charism serves as an organizing principle for structuring ministries with a view toward the fulfillment of the church's mission.¹³

II. Catholic Social Teaching as Ministry: Charism and Ecclesial Structures of Participation

The U.S. bishops' lament regarding insufficient knowledge of Catholic social teaching represents a compelling articulation of ecclesial need. Viewed in terms of charism, this unfulfilled ministry seems to suffer from a lack of adequate ecclesial structures to facilitate full participation in the generation and communication of Catholic social teaching by all those appropriately called and gifted.

In distinct ways, the experiences of Oswald von Nell-Breuning and Dorothy Day, together with other Catholic pacifists, testify to this systemic deficiency. Each of their cases may serve as a kind of contrast experience in which the process of formulating Catholic social teaching seems to have failed on the terms of charism.¹⁴ By revealing this shortcoming, their narratives prompt imagination of constructive possibilities for better fulfillment of this particular ministerial need.

Interpreting Charism in Light of Ecclesial Order: The Case of Oswald von Nell-Breuning

The principal author of Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, Oswald von Nell-Breuning was trained principally in theology and regarded himself as an autodidact in political economy. On the strength of his reputation in the Catholic labor movement in German-speaking Europe, he was asked to draft the text that would mark the fortieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*.

He proceeded under conditions of strict secrecy, being permitted to discuss the project only with his Jesuit superior general. The resulting text was almost entirely his own work. He met with Pius XI only

¹³On the normative function of ecclesial necessity for the elaboration of ministries within the church, see Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 204.

¹⁴On the dynamics of contrast experience, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 621–22.

once at the beginning of the process. Of Pius' few comments, Nell-Breuning remembered clearly the pope's observation that he had a poor typewriter.¹⁵ Otherwise, the superior general served as his sole conduit and bore formal responsibility for the document. Looking back forty years later, Nell-Breuning wrote, "[I]t seems to me that such a procedure, that allowed the whole bearing of an official document to be determined by a consultant—in order not to say by an editorial secretary—without establishing any counter check worth mentioning, seems frighteningly irresponsible."¹⁶

Furthermore, he noted, the text weathered several translations. Three Latinists, concerned mainly with linguistic fluidity while lacking expertise in the subject material, produced one version. Nell-Breuning was charged with reviewing the Latin text as well as the French and Italian renderings. He even checked the Spanish text, notwithstanding his limited knowledge of that language. After he penned the German copy, it went to publication without further review.¹⁷

Recalling that time, Nell-Breuning said he felt secure in his general educational background and, more importantly, he trusted that the Holy Spirit "would if necessary protect the Pope against his advisers" and guard official teaching from error.¹⁸ Apart from legitimate questions about the understanding of infallibility implied in this view, Nell-Breuning's confidence in himself and in the process indicates his belief in the function of charism. Assigned a task directed wholly to the service of the church, he proceeded ahead with trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. Still, remembering the experience with forty years' hindsight, he acknowledged some obvious procedural shortcomings. "What is distressing for me now," he wrote in 1971, "is the thought that even today, apparently, if the occasion arose, they would proceed in a manner similar to that for *Quadragesimo anno*."¹⁹

Nell-Breuning's narrative can serve as an invitation to take the function of charism more seriously in the ministry of formulating Catholic social teaching. It is difficult to imagine that among the church's faithful worldwide there were not appropriately gifted mem-

¹⁵Oswald von Nell-Breuning, "The Drafting of *Quadragesimo anno*," in *Official Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Richard McCormick and Charles E. Curran, Readings in Moral Theology, no.5, (New York: Paulist, 1986), 62. Frs. Desbuquois, Danset, and Muller were also asked to contribute to the editing process of the document but did not have any direct contact with Nell-Breuning. For more on this background, see Paul Droulers, *Politique Sociale et Christianisme: Le Père Desbuquois et l'Action Populaire*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1981), 152–56. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this source.

¹⁶Ibid., 67.

¹⁷Ibid., 67–68.

¹⁸Ibid., 61.

¹⁹Ibid., 68.

bers who could have collaborated fruitfully with Nell-Breuning. What pathways of participation would have been necessary to identify such people and draw upon their charisms?

Nell-Breuning's experience reveals the challenge of surrendering to the freedom of the Holy Spirit's movement within established matrices of ecclesial organization.²⁰ While his story highlights the dangers of erring on the side of hierarchical order at the expense of the Spirit's broader horizon of activity, the Catholic peace movement of the last century represents a bold point of contrast, illustrating the tenacious power of charism in forging novel practices of peacemaking to fill a gaping ministerial chasm in the church's realization of its mission.

Prophetic Unstructured Participation: The Case of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Pacifists

More than once, Dorothy Day recalled Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara's remark to Maurin: "Peter, you lead the way and we [bishops] will follow."²¹ While O'Hara's comment seems benign enough when applied to ostensibly uncontroversial works of mercy like feeding the hungry, it takes on a more ambivalent hue when seen in the light of the bishops' generally reluctant response to the Catholic Workers' pacifism.

Like the works of mercy, pacifism represented for Dorothy Day yet another application of the guiding ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. But, as the crucible of World War II revealed, the U. S. bishops were generally under-equipped and unwilling to support her claim that pacifism was an appropriate and theologically valid option for the faithful. After reading one of many expositions on conscientious objection published in *The Catholic Worker* during the war years, Bishop James McIntyre, later to become a cardinal archbishop, admitted to Dorothy, "We never studied these things in the seminary."²² Forty years later, though, the U.S. bishops acknowledged the significance of Day's contribution to the American Catholic peace movement. *The Challenge of Peace* affirmed the legitimacy of active nonviolence and emphasized the common presumption against the use of force shared by both pacifism and just war theory.²³

²⁰For a fine summary of the long history of this tension between charism and institution in the Christian tradition, see Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Ministries. A Relational Approach* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2003), 60–75.

²¹"Holy Obedience," in *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 169. See also "The Case of Cardinal McIntyre," in *A Penny a Copy. Readings from The Catholic Worker*, ed. Thomas C. Cornell, Robert Ellsberg, and Jim Forest (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 136.

²²"The Case of Cardinal McIntyre," 136.

²³See Philip Land, *Catholic Social Teaching As I Have Lived, Loathed, and Loved It*

Forty years' hindsight also brings into sharper relief the painful price that Dorothy Day and other Catholic pacifists paid for their stance during the Second World War and its aftermath. Essentially, no structures of support existed for pacifists within the Catholic Church. In a blunt but accurate assessment, one that unfortunately still bears relevance for the U.S. Catholic Church in the present, Patrick Coy argues that during World War II, the bishops "neither nurtured Catholic consciences in a manner befitting their clear pastoral responsibilities within the church, nor did they use whatever 'moral wisdom' there is in the just-war tradition to help the whole nation examine the ethics of the war it was waging."²⁴ In five American pastoral statements on war and peace promulgated during the war years, the issues of conscientious objection and obliteration bombing were conspicuously absent.²⁵

Far from being deterred by such deafening magisterial silence, Day blazed a path through the void. The Catholic Worker movement through its sponsorship of the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors (ACCO) provided, in Gordon Zahn's estimation, the only "viable Catholic witness against American participation in World War II."²⁶

In addition to the reticence of the church's moral leaders, Catholic pacifists also had to contend with *active resistance* on the part of some clergy. Indeed, Catholics applying for conscientious-objector status often incurred staunch opposition from church officials called to give expert testimony before the draft board.²⁷ Zahn recounts one particular episode in which the pastor of a Catholic registrant testified that "no Catholic has a right to be a conscientious objector and that he could not be claiming exemption on his religious training and teaching."²⁸

(Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), 103. See also "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," in *Catholic Social Thought*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), nos. 117–20. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to Catholic social teaching documents will be taken from this source. For a summary of the scholarly debate among just war theorists regarding the language of "the common presumption against the use of force," see my chapter, "Whose Justice? Which Relationality?" in *Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence*, ed. Gerald W. Schlabach (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, forthcom-ing).

²⁴Patrick G. Coy, "Conscription and the Catholic Conscience in World War II," in *American Catholic Pacifism. The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*, ed. Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 58.

²⁵*Pastoral Letters of the American Hierarchy, 1792–1970*, ed. Hugh J. Nolan (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1971).

²⁶Gordon Zahn, *Another Part of the War. The Camp Simon Story* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 33.

²⁷Gordon Zahn, *War, Conscience, and Dissent* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), 147–48.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 147.

When Day testified before the House Committee on Military Affairs in 1940, she pointed out to Senator Edward Burke that Catholics would not be protected by the proposed legislation that would exempt from combat "any member of a 'religious sect whose creed or principles forbid its members to participate in war in any form.'"²⁹ At the same hearing, a priest representing the National Catholic Welfare Conference advocated an exemption for seminarians and then took the opportunity to chastise Day for presuming to speak for Catholics on the issue. She replied simply, "'We are speaking for lay people, and they are the ones who fight the wars.'"³⁰ An estimated 135 American Catholics claimed conscientious objection over the course of World War II, and sixty-one of them served prison sentences ranging from eighteen months to five years.³¹

When questioned some years later by James Finn about whether the hierarchy supported lay efforts in the peace movement, Dorothy replied, "No. I would say that we have been left to our exploration of the field, with perfect freedom to continue. . . ."³² She understood the wisdom of Bishop O'Hara's comment to Peter Maurin, and along with other Catholic Workers, she happily embraced the church's charge to the laity to venture forth and as she put it, "to make the mistakes."³³ However, she vigorously objected to the clergy's lapses in moral leadership, particularly in the work of conscience formation. "The shepherds are not feeding their sheep," she lamented. "But they themselves have not been fed. . . ."³⁴

The witness given by Day and other Catholic pacifists during and after World War II brims with the signs of charism at work, along with what Karl Rahner called the *burden* of charism.

So we must also be able to have the courage (for this can be the precise function given by the Spirit to a particular member of the Church), to say No in the Church, to make a stand against certain

²⁹Eileen Egan, "Dorothy Day: Pilgrim of Peace," in *A Revolution of the Heart, Essays on the Catholic Worker*, ed. Patrick G. Coy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 79, citing U.S. Congress, Hearings of the House Committee on Military Affairs, 30 July 1940.

³⁰Egan, 79, quoting from her conversation with Day in Tivoli, New York, August 1964. See also Earl Boyea, "The National Catholic Welfare Conference: An Experience in Episcopal Leadership, 1935–1945" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1987).

³¹Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War. Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 55–56.

³²James Finn, *Protest: Pacifism and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1967), 379.

³³"The Case of Cardinal McIntyre," 136.

³⁴"The Gospel and the Retreat," in William D. Miller, *All Is Grace. The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1987), 115; see also "The Case of Cardinal McIntyre," 137.

demands and spirits, even before the official hierarchy itself has been alarmed. In fact, such a protest can be God's means of rousing his ministers to act.³⁵

The humble witness and fortitude of those gifted to serve the church by creating new forms of participation *is itself* a form of ministry. As one of the Catholic conscientious objectors who served during World War II at Camp Simon,³⁶ Zahn notes that later developments in Catholic social teaching on war and peace at Vatican II and afterward represented a welcome "ex post facto validation" of his stance. But, the witness of Catholic conscientious objectors stands on its own, he writes, because "most of them were already totally convinced that they were making a Catholic witness even though their spiritual leaders and fellow communicants did not accept the fact."³⁷ Together with other Catholic pacifists, they understood their position not as one of defiance but rather as a conscientious witness in service of the church's mission. Invoking Newman's theory of doctrinal development, Robert Ludlow argued that like Catholic social teaching on slavery, the church's teaching on war and peace was also undergoing development and those espousing pacifism as Catholics were actually contributing substantially to this process.³⁸

III. Viewing the Ministry of Catholic Social Teaching in Light of Charism

The narratives of Nell-Breuning and the Catholic pacifists represent contrasting but faithful modes of contributing to Catholic social teaching. In different ways, both cases indicate the need for alternative approaches to this ministry that might establish a vibrant relationship between the charisms of the faithful and corresponding structures of ecclesial organization that facilitate appropriate use of the Spirit's gifts for fulfillment of the church's mission. By attending to the intersecting categories of method and form that constitute the framework of Catholic social teaching, in the remainder of this essay I will build on ecclesial tradition to explore the liturgical practice of mystagogy as one

³⁵Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 77.

³⁶Camp Simon was a Civilian Public Service placement sponsored by ACCO and intended for Catholics.

³⁷*Another Part of the War*, x.

³⁸See Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread. The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 207–08, referring to Robert Ludlow's articles in *The Catholic Worker* 17 (March 1951): 1, 6; *The Catholic Worker* 18 (July–August 1951): 1; *The Catholic Worker* 19 (January 1953): 1; *The Catholic Worker* 20 (October 1953): 1.

means of broadening participation in the ministry of Catholic social teaching.

Method

By proceeding from the premise that ecclesiology is a function of pneumatology and using the theological concept of charism as the main organizing principle, I have already adopted a particular method for examining the tradition of Catholic social teaching. At first glance, this method seems to involve a deductive movement from the principle of charism to application in concrete ministries. But, the discernment of discrete charisms proceeds through the animating activity of the Holy Spirit, a radically inductive process: The Spirit moves “just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor. 12:11). Thus, the dependence of ecclesiology upon pneumatology implies an inductive approach to structuring ecclesial participation, including the ministry of generating Catholic social teaching.

This pneumatological understanding of ecclesial ministries points to a related issue of epistemology. The method used to structure the ministry of Catholic social teaching is distinct from *and prior to* intra-textual methodological commitments. Charles Curran has argued persuasively that a shift toward a historically-conscious anthropology in the first century of Catholic social teaching resulted in a move from a more deductive to a more inductive method within the texts themselves.³⁹ In theory, an inductive textual approach has the potential to draw from a greater diversity of human experience. In practice, however, the ministry of generating Catholic social teaching documents has been largely reserved to ordained clergy, even though ordination is not a prerequisite for the proper exercise of this service to the church.

So, while the textual method of Catholic social teaching may have become more inductive over time, the preponderance of clerics assigned to the key decision-making roles in the formulation process means that the interpretive lens used to organize the data or to identify the signs of the times has reflected a relatively narrow band of human experience and epistemology. In terms of charism, it also means that the experience and wisdom of others called and gifted by the Spirit to contribute to the formulation of this teaching have not been tapped to fulfill this ministerial need. Thus, as Nell-Breuning’s narrative illustrates, the method chosen for structuring the ministry of Catholic social teaching determines the kind and scope of agency that informs the method of the texts themselves.

³⁹Charles E. Curran, “The Changing Anthropological Bases of Catholic Social Ethics,” *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 284–318.

Standing in the lengthening shadow of the millennial threshold provides a fresh vantage point for discerning the most effective methods for furthering the ministry of Catholic social teaching. Some encouraging signs of the times at the national and regional levels suggest that it may be possible for those holding positions of ecclesiastical authority to write social teaching texts in collaboration with a broader cross-section of the faithful who are called to serve the church in this way. The procedural models of dialogue and consultation employed in the U.S. bishops' pastorals on peace and the economy represent a step in this direction. At the regional level, the Appalachian bishops' texts *This Land Is Home to Me* (1975) and *At Home in the Web of Life* (1995), as well as the Pacific Northwest bishops' *Columbia River Pastoral Letter* (2002) transparently and explicitly acknowledge the direct role of lay collaborators in the drafting process.⁴⁰ In the Latin American context, the Puebla document issued by the region's bishops in 1979 benefited from input at the local level, and the most recent gathering of the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Brazil relied upon consultation at the diocesan level.⁴¹ I will explore the liturgical practice of mystagogoy as a more deliberate and inclusive model for broadening participation in the drafting process in a moment, after attending to some considerations of form related to these methodological issues.

Form

In *Rerum novarum*, Leo XIII chose to address the pressing social concerns of his time in the form of an encyclical, a magisterial genre of considerable authoritative weight and universal reach. Extra-ecclesially, to convey social teaching through this type of document signaled that the Catholic Church was assuming a public leadership role in society's efforts to address the socioeconomic aspects of its communal life. Marking the centennial of this encyclical, John Paul II

⁴⁰Elsewhere, I have contextualized this point in terms of the power dynamics that affect lay collaboration. See Margaret Pfeil, "Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: Strategic Appropriation of Catholic Social Teaching," in *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for the Church*, ed. Colleen Griffith, Century 21 Series, ed. James F. Keenan and Patricia De Leeuw (New York: Crossroad, forthcoming).

⁴¹On the Puebla process and his own archdiocesan practice of circulating questionnaires at the parish level to inform his pastoral letter following Puebla, see Oscar Romero, "The Church's Mission amid the National Crisis," (Fourth Pastoral Letter, 6 August 1979), in *Voice of the Voiceless*, trans. Michael J. Walsh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 117, and *Monseñor Oscar A. Romero. Su Pensamiento*, vol. 7 (San Salvador: Talleres de Imprenta Criterio, 2000), 142 (homily, August 6, 1979). Regarding the preparations leading up to the CELAM V meeting in Aparecida, Brazil (May 13–31, 2007), I am relying on an oral presentation given by Msgr. Carlos Quintana, Executive Director, Secretariat for Latin America, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Los Angeles, California (June 9, 2007).

noted that *Rerum novarum* established “a lasting paradigm for the church,” giving it “‘citizenship status’ as it were, amid the changing realities of public life. . . .”⁴² Intra-ecclesially, as Donal Dorr has argued, *Rerum novarum* “ensured that social issues could no longer be treated as marginal or secondary to the mission of the Church, or as an ‘optional extra.’”⁴³

From the late nineteenth century forward, the encyclical as a form came to be regarded as a tool of the ordinary papal magisterium “to treat . . . problems that are primarily social and ethical in scope.”⁴⁴ Thus, precisely as an encyclical, *Rerum novarum* prepared the way for later magisterial teaching to take up socioeconomic issues and to cast them in moral terms.

In his apostolic letter *Octogesima adveniens*, written for the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, Pope Paul VI judged *Rerum novarum* to signify the point at which the church began to work out its social teaching in history. But, even as he commemorated Leo XIII’s labor encyclical, he faced the signs of his own times. His choice to mark this milestone with an apostolic letter rather than an encyclical was perhaps emblematic of the particular challenges emerging from within the church of 1971, among them the tumultuous wake following Paul VI’s promulgation of the encyclical *Humanae vitae* three years earlier.⁴⁵ As an apostolic letter, *Octogesima adveniens* enjoyed neither the universal scope nor the high level of authority of an encyclical. In both form and method, this text seemed to reflect an important datum of the early post-Vatican II years, namely the church’s own acknowledgement of the historical conditioning of its social message as it attempted to address “a wide diversity among the situations in which Christians—willingly or unwillingly—find themselves according to regions, socio-political systems, and cultures.”⁴⁶ Paul VI’s approach to this task in *Octogesima adveniens* reflected a certain epistemological humility and historical consciousness that was relatively new to Catholic social teaching:

⁴²Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus* (May 1, 1991), no. 5.

⁴³Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 15.

⁴⁴Claudia Carlen, “Introduction,” *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 1 (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publishing Co., 1981), xvii-xviii. See also Francis G. Morrisey, “Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law,” *The Jurist* 50 (1990): 105–06.

⁴⁵For possible interpretations of Paul VI’s choice to use the form of the apostolic letter rather than an encyclical in this case, see Christine E. Gudorf, “Commentary on *Octogesima adveniens* (*A Call to Action on the Eightieth Anniversary of Rerum novarum*)”, in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching. Commentaries & Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 318–19.

⁴⁶*Octogesima adveniens*, no. 3.

In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church.⁴⁷

Paul's assessment points to the intersection of method and form. A message of universal scope may be too broad to give sufficient attention to the concerns of particular regions and marginalized voices. Alternatively, more inclusive methods of articulating Catholic social teaching could take shape around the principle of charism and perhaps yield new and diverse *forms* of teaching.

New forms may emerge from the ecclesial community's acknowledgement of the various modes of authority found in the teaching and learning church and of the possibilities for creative collaboration among them. This may have been what the theologian Joseph Ratzinger had in mind when, as Joseph Cardinal Frings' personal secretary, he drafted an intervention at Vatican II proposing that lay people could fulfill roles in the Roman Curia.⁴⁸

Along the same lines of encouraging broader participation in the work of the church, Francis Sullivan has suggested that episcopal conferences could make better use of the plenary council. As an institutional form, this structure would permit college presidents, some seminary rectors, religious superiors, and a certain number of priests and lay people to exercise a consultative role in the council's deliberations.⁴⁹ Sullivan has also noted that the pope could use the synod of bishops to invite consideration of teaching that he would like to set forth in an encyclical. Within this framework, the pope could grant the bishops a deliberative rather than a consultative vote, thus linking their participation more closely to the decision reached with the pope.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Octogesima adveniens*, no. 4.

⁴⁸ Joseph Cardinal Frings (Archbishop of Cologne), Intervention, November 8, 1963, General Congregation LXIII, *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. 2, part 4 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972), 616–18. On Ratzinger's role in drafting this intervention, see Henri de Lubac, *Entretien autour de Vatican II: Souvenirs et Réflexions* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1985), 123.

⁴⁹ Francis Sullivan, "The Magisterium in the New Millennium," *America* 185/5 (27 August–3 September 2001), 13–14; see also Canons 439–46 on particular councils in *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, ed. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

⁵⁰ Sullivan, 15.

A Mystagogical Approach

Extending this same logic, it is possible to conceive of structures to facilitate direct and broad participation by laity, religious, and priests in the generation of Catholic social teaching, and the mystagogical method used in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), I suggest, offers a promising path in this direction. In the liturgical practice of the early church, mystagogy provided a means for those recently initiated into the ecclesial community to process their sacramental experience in all its fullness. Holding the mystery of their experience together with the church's teaching, they entered more deeply into the life and mission of their new community. At the same time, the mystagogical process drew the larger ecclesial community into a renewed commitment to discipleship as they extended their support to the neophytes. As Kathleen Hughes' work shows, the experiential, communal, and dialogical qualities of mystagogy have been retrieved in contemporary form in the RCIA process and could find even broader sacramental application.⁵¹

Analogously, the mystagogical method could be adapted to the ministerial work of generating and communicating Catholic social teaching. At the parish level, ecclesial communities could be invited to reflect prayerfully together on the signs of the times in conversation with the resources of the Catholic social tradition. Gradually, particular issues of concern might surface, as well as a growing awareness of those in the community who possess the appropriate gifts needed to interpret and organize these insights. Those chosen by each local community could then be invited to continue the mystagogical process together with the local ordinary or a regional gathering of bishops, refining their understanding of the issue being addressed and collaborating with others along the way as needed.

The mystagogical approach has the capacity to draw upon the ecclesial resources of both charism and institutional order, allowing each to serve the good of the whole community. In the process, previously under-utilized modes of authority might emerge. Remembering the case of Dorothy Day, for example, it seems that Catholic social teaching could better reflect the authority of witness and experience, particularly of those on the societal and ecclesial margins. Few remain unmoved before the photo of a calm but firm, seventy-five-year-old Dorothy Day seated on the picket line in solidarity with César Chávez and the United Farm Workers' cause in Fresno, California in 1973. With law enforcement officers towering above her, she would soon be

⁵¹Kathleen Hughes, *Saying Amen. A Mystagogy of Sacrament* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 13ff.

arrested for the last time. "August 1. Up at 2 a.m., picketed all day, covering many vineyards," she wrote. "Impressive lines of police all armed—clubs and guns. We talked to them, pleaded with them to lay down their weapons. . . . I told the other police I would come back the next day and read the Sermon on the Mount to them."⁵²

Could that iconic image, perhaps viewed in the context of a communal penance service, serve as a contemplative tool of discernment for U.S. Catholics in the process of articulating an ethical response to the pressing issues around immigration and labor that so urgently mark this present moment in history? Mystagogical contemplation of the church's moral exemplars represents a fresh method of generating and communicating Catholic social teaching, one conversant with textual modes of authoritative teaching but at the same time supple enough to drink deeply from the liturgical well, including the sacramentality of prophetic witness.

A Catholic social teaching text issuing from this sort of mystagogical process would represent the bishops' teaching, but it would gain significant credibility and staying power as a fruit of the church's liturgical practice of mystagogy, experientially rooted in the ecclesial community to whom it is addressed. It would spring from the collective ministerial efforts of those recognized by the ecclesial community as called by God and appropriately gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the church in the formulation of Catholic social teaching.

Conclusion

Beneath the U.S. bishops' concern regarding insufficient knowledge of Catholic social teaching among the faithful lies the more fundamental challenge of letting the Spirit's gifts give rise to ecclesial structures appropriate to the church's mission. According to the theological principle of charism, new ministries emerge in response to the needs of the church at a given time and take shape precisely around the gifts of those called to serve in a particular way. Viewing the generation and communication of Catholic social teaching as a ministry and practicing it through liturgical mystagogy would allow ecclesial communities to create pathways of participation in accord with charism.

⁵²"A Brief Sojourn in Jail," in *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings*, 254.



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