

SCRIPT
FORMING SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

1. **PURPOSE OF THE TALK:** I would like to focus on two of the three objectives you have set for yourselves: 1) to re-root catechetical directors in the mind of the Church through the optic of the new evangelization; and 2) to enable catechetical directors to appreciate and re-engage themselves in the renewal of particular churches in our country. There are two elements here: new evangelization and renewal of local churches.

New Evangelization is proclaiming the gospel with “new ardor, new methods, and new expressions” (St. John Paul II to Latin American Bishops 1983) As catechists, you are in the forefront of experiencing new ardor and trying out new methods and expressions in evangelizing the youth. The 2016 National Catechetical Study, despite its admitted limitations, may provide some indicators of your present ardor, methods, and expressions. It reveals, for instance, that 52% of those surveyed were happy being catechists while about 60% were committed as catechists. Does this represent new ardor? I would not be competent to answer the question. How does the fact that about two thirds of our catechists are ages 41-65 while 91% of their students are still in grade school, 77% of these have parents who do not go to church, are separated, or jobless, impact on our work as catechists? Certainly, a new ardor, methods, and expressions are needed here.

Renewal of local churches, on the other hand, begins with renewal of parishes. Hence, my talk shall deal with this year’s CBCP thrust of “parish as communion of communities.” My talk shall cover both mainstream communities as well as communities in the peripheries, with focus on the latter.

My topic is “Forming Social Conscience.” What is conscience? How is it formed? How do we form social conscience?

2. **DEFINITION: Well-Formed Conscience.** Let me go through quickly through some points with whom I know you are familiar...

We know that conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while avoiding evil. Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith. As stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right” (CCC. 1778).

Conscience formation begins with a desire to embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics, this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Faithful Citizenship). It is also important to examine the facts and

background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God (Faithful Citizenship). Catholics must also understand that if they fail to form their consciences in the light of the truths of the faith and the moral teachings of the Church they can make erroneous judgments.

3. But what is social conscience? WHY Form Social Conscience? “Redemption has a social dimension because “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also . . . social relations.” To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds...Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 178).
4. WHY Form Social Conscience: “An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it...” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 183).
5. PERSONAL CONVERSION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: “It is necessary, then, to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the human person and to the permanent need for his inner conversion, so as to obtain social changes that will really serve him. The acknowledged priority of the conversion of heart in no way eliminates but on the contrary imposes the obligation of bringing the appropriate remedies to institutions and living conditions when they are an inducement to sin, so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it.” (CCC 1888).
6. GRACE FOR STRIKING A BALANCE: “Without the help of grace, men would not know how ‘to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil, and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil only makes it worse.’” This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Charity inspires a life of self-giving: ‘Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.’ ” (CCC 1889)
7. CONTENT for Forming Social Conscience: Foremost amongst those teachings are the four basic principles of Catholic social doctrine: the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 160).
8. HUMAN DIGNITY AS BEGINNING AND END POINT: Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role

to remind men of good will of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims. (CCC 1930). Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity." (CCC 1931) From this principle stems the most fundamental human right – the right to life.

9. COMMON GOOD: By common good is to be understood "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." (GS 26:1) The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority. It consists of three essential elements (CCC 1906): presupposes respect for the person as such (CCC 1907), requires the social well-being and development of the group itself (CCC 1908), and requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order (CCC 1909). Each human community possesses a common good which permits it to be recognized as such; it is in the political community that its most complete realization is found (CCC 1910). The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: "The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around." (CCC 1912) The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good (Faithful Citizenship, US Bishops 48)
10. SUBSIDIARITY: "It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and political expressions to ...which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth." (Faithful Citizenship, US Bishops 45). The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that ...larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions, yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good (Centesimus Annus, no. 48; Dignitatis Humanae, nos. 4-6 as cited in Faithful Citizenship 48)
11. SOLIDARITY an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones. (CCC 1948). Solidarity is connected to PARTICIPATION which is the voluntary and generous engagement of a person in social interchange. It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. (CCC 1913). Participation is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society. (CCC 1914). As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life. The manner of this participation may vary from one country or culture to another. "One must pay tribute to those nations whose systems permit the largest possible number of the citizens to take part in public life in a climate of genuine freedom." (CCC 1915).

12. HOW TO FORM? Thank you for bearing with me patiently in my review of matters familiar to you. My question is how such content for forming social conscience can be incorporated into our modules and lesson plans. Here catechists share something in common with seminary formators: the student, parishioner, or seminarian they are trying to form have already been formed by their families. We build on this and realize we can only do so much. I recall my own social-conscience formation. My personal journey through family experiences, school experiences, seminary formation, and catechizing the peripheries. Family experiences: mommy scolding me for laughing at my friend who tripped, Dad and Mom using own vehicle to pick up wounded people, and Dad parking his car well. Grade school catechesis of Baltimore catechism. Catechizing the peripheries. My realization: we need to turn to the subject and not treat them as objects to deposit our content. We need to start where they are. This holds true for our students 74% of whom are in public school while 59% are in parishes as well as for those in the peripheries. Let me share some insights of my journey of forming the social consciences of those in the peripheries.
13. MEANS to form social conscience: Preparing street children for first communion during the 51st IEC. Lessons learned: need to enter the world of street children: modules, visual aids, and structured learning activities, like “scavenging game” Flores de Mayo with street children (include also pics of Fr. Mhar) Lessons learned: make room for street children and creative approach, like dramatizing the mysteries of the rosary – Liturgy-based catechesis, like short comments built into the mass – Lectio Divina keyed to Homiletic Director. Lessons learned: – 33DMG. Lessons learned: ask a team of Millennials to help you decode what is meaningful for them (pic of Jillian and Jenine with me) – FSTP and tree planting Lessons learned: learning by doing and mixing age brackets – Lectio Divina during Labang – Lessons learned: the power of the Word of God in the bible
14. OPPORTUNITIES for Forming Social Conscience: Contemporary socio-economic and political challenges. But we need to examine our own mindsets as catechists and as parishes and identify what hinders us from reaching out to the peripheries...also need to work more closely with parishes. Parishes must reach out to communities in the peripheries in this year of “Parish as Communion of Communities.”