

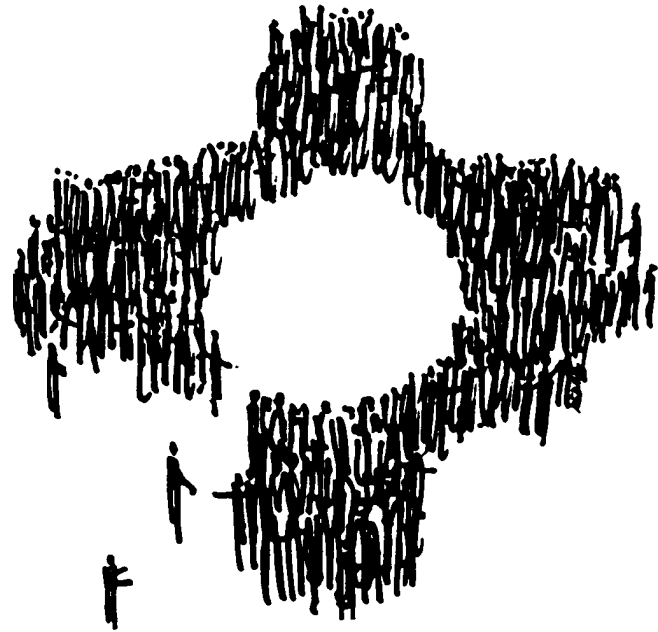
# Fostering Faith Insert for Catechist Formation

## The Cry of the Oppressed: Teaching Social Justice Issues

### Theme

Catechesis and Catholic Social Teaching are related because of the Gospel Message of salvation and liberation that can be found in the story of the Israel people, the teachings of Jesus Christ and the documents of the Catholic Church.

Completing this study lesson will give the catechist one hour of credit toward catechist certification in the curriculum area of Moral Life.



### Catechist Competencies

As a result of this study, the catechist will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the origins of social justice as it relates to scripture.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of catechesis and Catholic Social Teaching.
3. Articulate the meaning of the Option for the Poor and Catholics' responsibilities to the poor.
4. Provide projects that offer opportunities for Catholics to stand in solidarity with the poor and/or advocate on their behalf.

This lesson examines the origin of social justice in scripture as it relates to the cry of the oppressed. We will look at how Catholic Social Teaching's *Option for the Poor* causes the Catholic community to stand in solidarity with the oppressed. Lastly, we will learn how, as catechists, you can foster a spirituality of justice in your catechetical programs.

When looking at how to define the term social justice and how it relates to scripture, one must first separate the terms and look at them individually. The term *social* is defined in the Webster dictionary as "the interaction of the individual

### Catechism References

GDC # 105, CCC #225

**W**hat does "the cry of the oppressed" have to do with catechesis? Isn't catechesis the passing on of our Catholic faith?

The *General Directory for Catechesis* describes catechesis as "nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways." (GDC # 105) If one reads scripture correctly and understands the true liberating message of the Israel people, then he or she can understand how the message of salvation and liberation is intertwined with catechesis. In fact it is the cry of the oppressed that can be most linked to the readily used term *justice* or *social justice*.



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and the group, or the welfare of human beings as members of society.” When one looks at scripture there are two dynamics of the word *social* that need to be considered — God and humanity. In scripture and in our Catholic faith, God is described in Trinitarian terms — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is one in three persons. “The divine persons are relative to one another because it does not divide the divine unity; the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships, which relate them to one another. (CCC # 255) The essence of relationship describes the communal and social dynamic of God.



When we look at how human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, we can see the social dynamic and how all things are connected. Likewise if we look at how creation was formed and fashioned out of love, because God is love we are introduced to the justice component of God. Webster defines *justice* as the administration of law; the act of determining rights and assigning rewards and punishment; to act justly. Webster treats this term very analytically and relative to how society should function; what is right and what is wrong. In scripture the term justice is intimately linked with God’s characteristic of love. Love is such an abstract term that it is hard to define. However, 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 states, love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does

not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves. Love never fails.

If we compare the two definitions from Webster and scripture we see that one is more focused on societal order and how it functions and the other is more focused on the values which human beings should embody that help society function orderly and lovingly. Thus the term of justice being rooted in love seeks right relations between God, humanity and creation.

Therefore when we think about what catechesis has to do with social justice we can see that it has everything to do with it. For we serve a God who created us as sacred social beings to live in right relationship with one another. Faith is the belief in God and how we as the people of God respond to one another in our everyday lives.

One principle that was established in the Bible both in Old and New Testament is God’s special concern for the oppressed or poor. We see this principle displayed in the Old Testament particularly as it deals with the Israel people being liberated from the oppression in the Exodus story. God hears the cry of the oppressed, sees the forces labor and the mandate to kill baby boys and responds in love by sending a savior, Moses, to proclaim the liberty of the people of God. The special emphasis on salvation, liberation and naming the people of Israel God’s people emphasizes God’s special concern for the oppressed or poor.

In the New Testament we see Jesus demonstrate this same principle in his proclamation of mission in Luke 4:18. He states, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” Similarly the same sentiment is expressed in Luke 6:30 in the beatitude when Jesus teaches that “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.” Given how Jesus taught and lived his life with the poor and oppressed his witness sets criteria for how one is to respond in faith to similar situations.

Not only does scripture point us to the standard by which the people of God should operate, Church Tradition emphasizes this in Catholic Social Teaching. This is an articulation of papal encyclicals, conciliar documents and episcopal statements developed over the centuries by our Church Fathers to provide wisdom and revelation to the people of God.

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## Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

- **Human Dignity**
- **Community and Common Good**
- **Rights and Responsibilities**
- **Option for the Poor**
- **Participation**
- **Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers**
- **Stewardship of Creation**
- **Solidarity**
- **Role of Government**
- **Promotion of Peace**

There are several principles of Catholic Social Teaching that provide insight about how the people of God should respond in love and justice. One of the themes is *the Option for the Poor*. “The Church appeals to everyone to recognize a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable to defend and to promote their dignity and to ensure that they can participate fully in society. A basic moral test of a society is how it’s most vulnerable members are faring” (Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education, pg. 24)

This single measure can be used to implement social justice in catechetical programming. Many teachers wonder how to incorporate social justice in catechesis. By asking this single question to students it becomes obvious that more can be done on behalf of the poor or oppressed. One only has to look at the horrific tragedy that took place with Hurricane Katrina. The people who were left behind and unable to evacuate were poor, elderly and sick. No one thought to take care of them. Most often the poor or oppressed are overlooked and denied access to avenues of influence. So the people of God must stand in solidarity with them and provide preferential treatment to balance out the injustice poor people face daily.

Many teachers, parents and students are thinking of ways to share what they have to help the evacuees of the Katrina

hurricane. This is a perfect time to introduce Catholic Social Teaching and scriptural support to the classrooms. What a teachable moment, and how great would it be to emphasize all year the Option for the Poor. Reminding students that this is not something that we are called to do just in crisis, but we are to live out our godly lives this way helps to make this teaching real. Perhaps each year a catechist could pick a particular theme of Catholic Social Teachings. There are other wonderful elements such as human dignity, common good, solidarity, and care of God’s creation. Once students really understand their calling from God they will begin to develop a spirituality of justice. As in Micah 6:8, they will act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God.

The Office of Peace and Justice of the Archdiocese of Chicago also offers special projects in which parishes can participate. Catechists and their children can get involved in all the direct service programs, helping at a food pantry or soup kitchen, collecting clothing, toys, toiletries, etc. In addition to Operation Rice Bowl, they can do Food Fast. Food Fast is a program through CRS that provides children an opportunity to experience hunger within a specific country. Their website is listed under “Departments” on the Archdiocese of Chicago website [www.archchicago.org](http://www.archchicago.org).



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Similarly, there are other Catholic or educational websites that offer good perspectives on issues of social justice:

- U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops  
[www.usccb.org/index.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/index.shtml)
- Center of Concerns  
[www.coc.org](http://www.coc.org)
- Catholic Relief  
[www.catholicrelief.org](http://www.catholicrelief.org)
- Oxfam  
[www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)
- United Nations News Page  
[www.un.org/new](http://www.un.org/new)

One additional resource is available from the USCCB: “Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenge and Directions” Publication No. 5-281 United States Catholic Conference. (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/socialteaching.htm>)

Using these resources can help you foster a spirituality of justice and assist you in the passing on of our faith.

Start now for the cry of the oppressed has reached the ear of God.

## Review Questions

1. What is the relationship between Catechesis and Catholic Social Teaching?
2. What does the cry of the oppressed have to do with the Option for the Poor?
3. What is the Catholic response to the Option for the Poor?
4. How does a tragedy like Hurricane Katrina demonstrate the plight of the poor?

## Practical Application/Critical Thinking

1. In the practical sense, what does it mean to say the Trinitarian image of God and the concept of love are representative of our understanding of social Justice?
2. How can God’s plan of salvation bring about liberation for today’s poor people?
3. What challenge does the Option for the Poor offer for Catechetical Leaders in their lesson planning?
4. Describe some of the resources you have discovered in the media or on the suggested websites that have helped you

grow in your understanding of the Catholic perspective on social justice, particularly about the poor.

5. How can you help your students become aware of the ways the local church ministers to the poor?

## About the Author

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<b>Moral Life:</b>	The Cry of the Oppressed: Teaching Social Justice Issues

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This lesson is the last that will appear in print in *The Sower*. The whole set may still be downloaded from the OFC website. Please watch for future offerings for catechist formation on in *The Sower* or on the website. The youth ministry newsletter will appear in this place starting with the Spring 2006 issue.