Catholic Social Thought and Conversion

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of two conversions. The first responds to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and leads to Baptism. The call to conversion, however, “continues to resound in the heart of Christians” and is “an uninterrupted task for the whole Church.”

This second conversion is critical to Catholic social teaching. Pope John Paul II described conversion as a call to revise all the different areas of life, “especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good.” Pope Francis teaches that 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.”

Conversion is about metanoia, Greek for “a change of mentality.” Even more, conversion involves a Gospel vision of the world, which requires “leaving behind our worldly way of thinking and acting, which so often heavily conditions our behavior.”

A lifelong process, conversion takes personal struggle and occurs best in the context of a larger faith community.

To embrace peace: We choose “the disarmament of the human heart and the conversion of the human spirit to God who alone can give authentic peace.”

To pursue economic justice: We place people before “the worship of the ancient golden calf [that] has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy.”

To preserve the earth: We choose a simple lifestyle to “break with the logic of mere consumption” and promote agricultural and industrial production that will “respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic needs of all.”

To end personal and institutional racism: We end “not only individual prejudice but also the use of religious, social, political, economic, or historical power to keep one race privileged.”

To promote solidarity: We “recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property.”

To care for the needy: “We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market” and embrace “decisions, programs, mechanisms, and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment, and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality.”

Ultimately, true conversions embrace the countercultural Gospel priorities of Pope John Paul II:

The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; production to meet social needs over production for military purposes.

Such a difficult conversion to stand against “a world that is increasingly estranged from Christian values” must be inspired by prayer and Scripture reading, supported by a vibrant faith community, and nurtured by daily practice.

ENDNOTES

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1427.
2 Ibid, no. 1428.
3 Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in America, 1999, no. 27.
4 Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 2013, no. 183.
6 Ibid., no. 32.
9 Ibid., no. 284.
10 Evangelii, op.cit., no. 55.
13 Evangelii, op.cit., no. 189.
14 Ibid., no. 204.
16 The Challenge of Peace, no. 277.