



YOUTH CATECHESIS IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES ON THE BASIS OF THE SOCIAL CATECHISM DOCAT

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Introduction

The economic and social order of the Federal Republic of Germany is strongly influenced by Catholic Social Teaching. Without this, the German state is not understandable in the latter. The first decade of the Federal Republic from its foundation in 1949 on was a veritable peakphase of Social Catholicism. The German welfare state in particular is largely a clotted Catholic Social Doctrine, and despite all its remaining shortcomings it can be described as the institutionalization of the Good Samaritan. But the development of the social market economy as an ethical taming of capitalism was also shaped in Germany by Social Catholicism. Catholics played a decisive role in the architecture of the young state. Many of them were socialized in a Catholic milieu that was still largely intact at the time and were already involved in church, youth and social associations in their youth. They then incorporated their Catholic social-ethical orientation into their later involvement in politics,



business and society. However, the Catholic milieu no longer exists in Germany, and the numerous Catholic associations, like the Catholic Social Doctrine as well, have lost considerable social significance.

Against the background of its historical influence but also because of the orientations it provides for the complex world of today, the present article assumes that social catechesis based on the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church needs a firm place again in Pastoral Care for Youth, but also in the efforts for a new evangelization in Germany. It is in particular the youth that has the task of shaping the German society of the future based on ethical values. After some fundamental theoretical considerations on the importance of the Social Teaching of the Church for pastoral work and the new evangelization, an empirical view of the Catholic youth in Germany is given. Then, on this basis, the approach of a social catechesis based on the DOCAT, the Catechism on Catholic Social Doctrine developed especially for young people, will be presented and how it can be used in pastoral and catechetical practice.

1. Catholic Social Doctrine as an Indispensable Contribution to (New) Evangelization and Pastoral Care

From the perspective of the Christian faith and Catholic social ethics, the reality of the social is viewed from a holistic perspective. Politics and economics are questioned about the ultimate, not just the penultimate goal, about the comprehensively good and best for the life of every human being, and not just about what is right here and now in a concrete situation. According to the fundamental conviction of Catholic Social Teaching, all social systems of this world are systems for the production of certain expected and desired conditions, such as justice and solidarity. In the final analysis, they must have only one purpose: to prepare human being as an end in itself, as God's image with an immortal soul, for God



and his eternal love. “Charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine”¹ is how Pope Benedict XVI summarizes this basic approach.

In this sense, Christian thinking ascribes a broad horizon of meaning to the concept of justice, which in social-ethical considerations as social justice is usually the central concept. In the concept of justice, two related lines of thought are bundled together: An ancient Greek (Platonic) teleology of Eros, of desire and love as the ultimate right of human being, is connected with the biblical doctrine of creation and the idea of divine love for human being. Thus the concept of justice is placed in a purposeful perspective and thereby experiences an orientation towards a goal that lies beyond justice and yet can already be foreseen in it, namely that love of which the biblical tradition since the Book of Genesis fundamentally speaks.² The Church’s social doctrine thus makes an essential contribution to proclaim the gospel in the complex web of social relations.³ Social teaching is in that sense not a turning away of the Church from its actual mission, but social and political *diakonia* inspired by faith. In DOCAT, the basic direction is already clear in the first chapter: God’s master plan is love; also in the social context.⁴ In according to Pope John Paul II,

the Church’s social teaching is itself a valid instrument of evangelization. As such, it proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals one to himself. In this light, and only in this light, does it concern itself with everything else: the human rights of the individual, and in particular of the ‘working class’, the family and education, the duties of the State, the ordering of national and international society, economic life, culture, war and peace, and respect for life from the moment of conception until death.⁵

The respective society, its condition and its problems, must therefore be included in the missionary and pastoral efforts of



the Church. The most important Church document of this intertwining of pastoral and social-ethical perspectives is *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), the Pastoral Constitution “on the Church in the World Today”, adopted on the last day of the Second Vatican Council on 7 December 1965, which states, for example,

Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place produce the need, she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy and similar undertakings. The Church recognizes that worthy elements are found in today’s social movements, especially an evolution toward unity, a process of wholesome socialization and of association in civic and economic realms.⁶

Accordingly, the document also sets a sign for a new orientation of the Catholic Social Doctrine: It aims at a dialogical social ethics and a learning Church. Even with the circle of addressees, which goes far beyond the domestic sphere of the Church, the inclusive character of the Catholic Social Doctrine is emphasized, whose principles are understandable for everyone by means of reason.

In essence, Catholic Social Doctrine is based on the principles of personality, solidarity and subsidiarity as ethical building laws of a modern society.⁷ It emphasizes the central value of marriage and family as the nucleus of state and society. According to Article 6 of the “Grundgesetz”, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, they are therefore under the special protection of the state order.



2. Social and Political Youth Education within the Framework of a Christian-humanistic Education

The perfection of human being begins in the family. The human being is to be decisively promoted by the state and society in view of a holistic understanding of happiness and successful life. According to this view, the state and the economy are at the service of the *humanum*, understood as the core of the identity of every human person, and of building a humane society. The social doctrine with its original combination of ancient Jewish and Greek ethics of justice with Christian ethics of love is about a “full-bodied humanism”⁸. This can be characterized as follows: Human being is a person by nature and carries his purpose within himself. This is what the principle of personality stands for as the basic principle par excellence of social doctrine. One can also speak of a sacrality of the person⁹. Man is also a dialogical social being; he develops his personal nature through work and profession and education. Here lies the task of the state: namely, incentives are needed to heal human nature—think of the theological concept of original sin and a defect of human nature - and to focus on the good and the common good, through holistic education and models for every age group. In this view, education and training is always something derived and second, something which must correspond to the original image or idea, which must be formed in order to be authentic. We are thinking of an ideality that lies ahead of reality, whose spiritual insight makes it possible to cope with and shape reality and thus leads to a moral life plan.

Education succeeds in this respect if a perspective of meaning is conveyed “which takes into account the whole of human life in all its references”¹⁰ and thus also the references to society and its systems. Such a final horizon of meaning within the framework of humanistic education is offered by the Christian faith, the relevance of which can also be deciphered for the social sphere, for social and civic engagement. This is exactly what



happens in the Church's social proclamation and social teaching. In social-ethical education and social catechesis, the horizon of meaning of justice, which is extended to love, must be raised and opened up for people in the respective concrete contexts. Here in lies the pastoral dimension of Christian social ethics, which is referred to in this article with a view to the communication of Catholic Social Doctrine to the Christian youth in the German context. Social, economic and political education on the basis of social teaching, which at the same time takes into account the realities of life and ways of thinking of young people, should be an integral part of youth pastoral work and youth catechesis - so the thesis of this article. This is especially true in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society such as in Germany, where Christianity and the Church are subject to processes of change and shrinking and are increasingly losing their significance and influence on the shaping of society.

3. Situation of the (Catholic) Youth in Germany

These multi-layered social developments and the associated breaking off of traditions and loss of faith become almost magnifying glass to the younger generations in Germany, even among those who are baptized, come from a Catholic family and are ecclesiastically socialized. On the basis of findings from the sociology of religion, the religious educationist Clauß Peter Sajak concludes that the situation is alarming:

With Catholic children and young people, a more or less complete break with tradition has been apparent for some years: Elementary executions of Christian religious practice are unknown or are rejected because of their lack of entertainment value, fundamental Christian beliefs are not even known or are at least quickly forgotten, decisions on meaning and values in the concrete every day world are made without religious contextualization and justification—religion has nothing to do with actual life.¹¹



A few selected examples of corresponding findings: Whoever is looking for well-founded information about how young people live, think and believe in Germany will find it in the Shell Youth Study¹². It is an empirical study of the attitudes, values, habits and social behavior of young people in Germany and a reference work of empirical youth research. To this day, the main Christian-religious places of learning in Germany¹³, apart from the family, are denominational religious instruction in secondary schools, including state schools, and the parish with its sacramental catechesis in the context of preparations for receiving First Communion and Confirmation.¹⁴ According to the current Shell Youth Study from 2019 on the topic of youth and religiosity in Germany, however, faith has become considerably less important for Catholic young people over the past 20 years: Only for 39% of Catholic youth, faith is important. Only 18% of them pray at least once a week. Only 38% of Catholic youth stated that they came from a religious or very religious home. However, despite various scandals, the Catholic Church in Germany does not have such a bad reputation among young people as one might think: "I think it's good that the Church exists", said 75% of the Catholic youth.¹⁵

Another exemplary relevant source: In preparation for the Synod of Bishops on the topic of "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" in October 2018, the Federation of German Catholic Youth (BDKJ) conducted an online survey among 16 to 29-year-olds.¹⁶ It also showed that the declining number of young Catholics in Germany shows an equally declining attachment to the church-institutionally constituted faith. In contrast, the willingness of young people to get involved in social and ecological issues is enormously high, as demonstrated by their large participation in the annual 72-hour campaign, a large-scale multi-project work¹⁷ of the BDKJ, as well as the involvement of many young Catholics in the Fridays for Future movement, for example as Christians for Future. Herein lie opportunities for pastoral work, catechesis



and new evangelization. This ultimately general trend towards a willingness to engage young people in social, project-related activities shows that a modern Pastoral Care for Youth and catechesis that focuses on the social and political sensitivity and commitment of young people can be promising.

4. DOCAT as a Useful Instrument of Modern Youth Pastoral and Social Catechesis Appropriate for Young People

My predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, gave you a youth catechism, the YOUCAT. Today I would like to give you another book, the DOCAT, which contains the social teaching of the Church. The title contains the words 'to do' and 'catechism'. The DOCAT answers the question 'what to do?' - and it is something like a manual that helps us to change ourselves first of all, and in the end, the whole world, with the Gospel.¹⁸

With these sentences begins the Foreword by Pope Francis to the DOCAT presented internationally at the World Youth Day at the end of July 2016, which contains a popular and youth-oriented presentation of the Catholic Social Doctrine in the style of the YOUCAT youth catechism. The Pope is convinced that the Social Teaching of the Church can help many people worldwide. In particular, he places his hope in the youth: "I wish for a million young Christians, preferably a whole generation, who are 'social doctrine on two feet' for their contemporaries."¹⁹ That is a noble goal. An important step is that the entire development phase of DOCAT is also characterized by the active participation of those who are the addressees: Teenagers and young adults, especially young Catholics, have discussed the text, contributed their questions and suggestions or contributed to the visually appealing presentation of the book through photographs. The book was not simply made for others at the theologian's desk, but the target group itself was significantly involved in its development.



On 320 pages in 12 chapters with a total of 328 questions and answers and numerous illustrations, the DOCAT is a didactic instrument that addresses the social and political challenges facing humankind today. Bishops' Conferences, parishes and church (youth) groups around the world hold events to draw attention to the project and familiarize Catholic youth with the social teaching of their Church. A DOCAT app published for the book contains a video with Pope Francis calling on young people to study the social teaching and wishing for one million social experts. In Germany, DOCAT also attracted the attention of politicians: the then Federal Minister of Social Affairs, Andrea Nahles, praised the book as an "important orientation aid"²⁰ when she presented the German edition in 2016.

In the meantime, DOCAT has been translated into many languages and has thus finally become a global project, an international Compendium of the Social Teachings of the Church, not only for young people. In addition, there is now also a DOCAT app, with which one can find out about the Social Teachings of the Church in a playful way and thereby network internationally.

The Catholic Social Science Central Institute (Katholische Sozialwissenschaftliche Zentralstelle, KSZ), as the responsible institute of the German Bishops' Conference, has played a major role in creating and also promoting the use of this completely new and unique medium to popularize the Social Teachings of the Church, especially among young people. For the work of the KSZ, DOCAT is a tool that can be used in a variety of ways, not least in international project cooperation for Christian social-ethical education. Correspondingly positive experiences with the concrete work with DOCAT have already been gained in social-ethical training courses and seminars in Romania and Georgia.



In many workshops with DOCAT and on many occasions since then, one can experience how young people can be inspired in a modern way by faith in God who is love, and also in social matters. In the parishes and youth groups, in confirmation groups and youth projects, the catechism is therefore a useful instrument.

DOCAT is also a suitable means of fulfilling the objective of Christian social catechesis, as formulated in the recent *Directory for Catechesis* of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization:

Catechesis, with the help of the social teaching of the Church and by adapting its offer to the lifesituation of the individual, makes it possible to look at reality in the spirit of the Gospel and creates an awareness of existing sinful structures which have negative effects on the social fabric and the environment. In addition, it motivates the faithful to commit themselves to the common good both in everyday life and on a broader level in a more direct social and political commitment²¹.

However, the medium of catechism is not very popular for many catechists and religious educators in Germany. Due to the experience of generations of Catholics with an authoritarian form of catechesis, which consisted mainly of memorizing sterile catechism sentences in the context of strict frontal teaching, the medium of catechism was rejected more and more frequently in the period after the Second Vatican Council as “barren instrument in the space of spiritual-spiritual encroachment”²². However, the key lies not in the abolition of the catechism, but in the form of catechesis based on the renewed religious education principles of subject orientation, experience orientation, educational orientation and dialogicity established in the German context.²³

The learning material, didactic instruments such as a catechism, are of course ultimately only one of several factors



in successful teaching and learning processes. The methodology is also important and the personality of the catechist should not be underestimated.²⁴ Social catechesis, too, must always be considered and shaped as a holistic process²⁵ if it is to bear fruit. A catechism such as DOCAT, however, ensures that the content dimension of social-ethical education remains indispensable. It reliably concentrates on the whole of the Church's Social Teaching in an understandable language, without simplification, and thus in a didactically meaningful form that is suitable for young people. The content of DOCAT, the connection between justice and love as the proprium of the Church's social doctrine unfolded in the first part of this article, can be an appealing approach, especially for young people, which shows that the shaping of society and politics must by no means remain merely brittle technical questions. Content, form and action should harmonize in social catechesis. Holistic social catechesis encourages to do this love, to engage in and for society. DOCAT goes into this in detail in its final chapter.²⁶ Especially a youthful idealism and a fresh courage of young people to denounce grievances is a good breeding ground for this.

In this way, may be youth catechesis with DOCAT can make a new contribution in transmitting the faith and in preventing Catholic Social Teaching, which once so strongly influenced the Federal Republic of Germany, from becoming "the church's best kept secret" for the Catholic youth in Germany.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Pope BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 2
- ² Cf. Current and on the basis of the new social encyclical *Fratelli tutti*: Peter TURKSON / Peter SCHALLENBERG, *Fratelli tutti. Eine theologische Sozialethik der globalen Nächstenliebe* (= Kirche und Gesellschaft No. 475) (Mönchengladbach, 2020).
- ³ Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Kompendium der Soziallehre der Kirche*, no. 62 (Freiburg i.Br. 2006).
- ⁴ Cf. Austrian Bishops' Conference, ed., *DOCAT. What to do? The Social Teaching of the Church* (without place 2016), 15-32.
- ⁵ Pope JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, no. 54 (1991).
- ⁶ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no. 42 (1965).
- ⁷ Cf. Alois BAUMGARTNER / Wilhelm KORFF, "Sozialprinzipien als ethische Baugesetzlichkeiten moderner Gesellschaft: Personalität, Solidarität und Subsidiarität," in: *Handbuch der Wirtschaftsethik*, Band 1 (Gütersloh, 1999), 225-237.
- ⁸ Pope PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, no. 42 (1967).
- ⁹ Cf. Hans JOAS, *Die Sakralität der Person* (Frankfurt/M., 2011).
- ¹⁰ Jochen SAUTERMEISTER, "Moralische Normen unter dem Anspruch ethischer Rationalität. Anmerkungen zu moraltheologischen Lern- und Einsichtsprozessen," in: Stefan KOPP, ed., *Kirche im Wandel. Ekklesiale Identität und Reform* (Freiburg i.Br., 2020), 239-263, here 240.
- ¹¹ Clauß Peter SAJAK, „Der Schlüssel ist die Beziehung – Warum der Katechismus nicht die Lösung für die Glaubenskrise ist,“ in: Clauß Peter SAJAK / Michael LANGER, ed., *Kirche ohne Jugend. Ist die Glaubensweitergabe am Ende?* (= Theologie kontrovers) (Freiburg i. Br., 2018), 120-130, here 121.
- ¹² The Shell Youth Study is available on the Internet at: <https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/shell-jugendstudie.html> (last access: 11.11.2020). A summary in English can also be found here.
- ¹³ Cf. on these three central religious places of learning in the German context, Clauß Peter SAJAK, "Religiöse Bildung und Erziehung in der Transformationskrise – Versuch einer Bilanz,“ in: Clauß Peter SAJAK / Michael LANGER, ed., *Kirche ohne Jugend. Ist die Glaubensweitergabe am Ende?* (= Theologie kontrovers) (Freiburg i. Br., 2018), 17-44, here 24ff.
- ¹⁴ Cf. To this Ulrich RIEGEL, „Die Weitergabe des Glaubens in Zeiten gesellschaftlichen Wandels,“ in: Stefan KOPP, ed., *Kirche im Wandel. Ekklesiale Identität und Reform*, (Freiburg i.Br., 2020), 376-398.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Shell Youth Study is available at: <https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/shell-jugendstudie.html> (last access: 11.11.2020).
- ¹⁶ Cf. the material on the Youth Synod on the homepage of the BDkJ is available at: <https://www.bdkj.de/themen/jugendsynode> (last access: 26.11.2020).
- ¹⁷ To the homepage of the project is available at: <https://www.72stunden.de/> (last access: 26.11.2020).



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- ¹⁸ Pope FRANCIS, *Preface to the Youth Catechism DOCAT*, 10.
- ¹⁹ Pope FRANCIS, *Preface to the Youth Catechism DOCAT*, 13.
- ²⁰ Quoted after the report in the online church magazine *Kirche+Leben*, available at: <https://www.kirche-und-leben.de/artikel/was-tun-ethisches-handbuch-fuer-jugendliche-erschienen> (last access: 26.11.2020).
- ²¹ Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Direktorium für die Katechese* (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 224), 2020, no. 390.
- ²² Bernard MEUSER, "Der verlorene Schlüssel – Warum Katechese den Katechismus braucht," in: Clauß Peter SAJAK/Michael LANGER, ed., *Kirche ohne Jugend. Ist die Glaubensweitergabe am Ende?* (= Theologie kontrovers) (Freiburg i. Br., 2018), 109-119, here 115.
- ²³ Cf. For example, Reinold BOSCHKI, *Einführung in die Religionspädagogik* (Darmstadt, 2008).
- ²⁴ Cf. SAJAK, "Der Schlüssel ist die Beziehung," 129.
- ²⁵ Cf. The German Bishops, *Katechese in veränderter Zeit*, Bonn 3. Auflage 2016, 25ff.
- ²⁶ Cf. DOCAT, nos. 275-297.

