

FROM CHRISTENDOM TO APOSTOLIC MISSION

Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age



Study Guide

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Session One

Introduction

We are living in a “change of ages,” in which the Church’s perennial responsibility to adapt to cultural realities is all the more urgent.

Questions for Understanding

- What is the task of every generation? (p. 1)
- What two things make "New Evangelization" new? (p. 2)
- Why do the authors say that the dominant "wound" affecting the Body of Christ is of an intellectual nature rather than a moral one? (p. 4)
- What helps to "understand and fend off the false gospels" of our day? (p. 5)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- “Taking the temperature” in our parish/school/family: where are we at?
- What are our current pastoral & evangelical strategies?

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Session One - Continued

Chapter One: The Place of a Ruling Imaginative Vision in Human Cultures

Every person and indeed every culture operates with a given set of assumptions about the nature of reality: a worldview or imaginative vision; our culture is transitioning from a place in which Christianity is the dominant cultural influence ("Christendom") to one in which it is merely one influence among others ("Apostolic age").

Questions for Understanding

- What do the authors mean by an "imaginative vision"? (p. 8)
- How do you answer the question, "Are things going in the right direction?" What does that reveal to you about your "imaginative vision"?
- What is the general critique of education? (p. 12)
- Briefly, what do the authors mean by a "Christendom culture"? (p. 13)
- Which of the situations offered had an "imaginative vision" more ready to accept the Gospel? Why? (p. 15-17)

- Can you think of an instance where how you saw influenced how you felt, and therefore, what you did?

Questions for Discussion & Action

- If you polled your parish/school/family about “how are things going?” what do you think are the subconscious criteria that people would use to answer that question? Finances? Physical health? Relationships? Spiritual vitality? Other? Which would be most important?
- What are the ways in which our larger culture does and does not correspond with the Catholic imagination?

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Session Two

Chapter Two: Christendom and Apostolic Modes-Advantages and Challenges

This chapter presents both the advantages and challenges found in a Christendom culture and in an Apostolic time.

Questions for Understanding

- What is the primary need of a Christendom culture? (p. 20)
- What readily available advantage can families count on in a Christendom culture? (p. 22)
- What is the whole Church tempted to lose in a Christendom culture? How is this effect identified in the actions of Christians? (p. 23 and 25)
- What primary needs are in an Apostolic Age? (p. 26)
- What life-changing advantage is available to the Body of Christ in Apostolic times? (p. 26)
- What are the temptations or challenges of an Ap[ostolic Age? (p. 27-28)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- Has your parish/school/family been operating out of a Christendom or Apostolic approach?
- What would it look like for your institution to (more deeply) embrace an Apostolic approach?

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Session Three

Chapter Three: The Current Climate

In order for us to engage in the work of the New Evangelization and implement Bishop DeGrood's vision for our Diocese (Lifelong Catholic Missionary Discipleship through God's Love) we must first stop approaching our age with a mindset more suited to a Christendom era.

Questions for Understanding

- What two things do we receive from Christ Jesus? How does this encourage us? (p. 29)
- The author says America, historically, is an "alloy". What things are in the mix of the alloy? (p. 30)
- What is the lesson of Quebec, Belgium, Spain, and Ireland? (p. 31)
- The authors create a "working principle". What is that? (p. 31)
- Do we live in a culture that is so corrupt that it is immune to the Gospel? What do we face? (p. 33)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- How can you help people in your parish/school/family more deeply live the Gospel?
- How can you help people in your parish/school/family see the Church for what it truly is?

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Session Four

Chapter Four: Devising a Pastoral Strategy for this Transitional Time, Part I

In order for us to engage in the work of the New Evangelization and implement Bishop DeGrood's vision for our Diocese (Lifelong Catholic Missionary Discipleship through God's Love) we must first stop approaching our age with a mindset more suited to a Christendom era.

Questions for Understanding

- What are the eight points for developing a pastoral strategy for this transitional time?
- What does an Apostolic Attitude prioritize compared to the priorities of a Christendom Culture? (p. 37)
- The Church in France should never have survived the 1800's, but it did and even thrived again. What does social analysis miss? (p. 39)
- What is a low of institutional life that impacts how we need to attend to our institutions in the future? (p. 43)
- What does "institution" mean and what are the hallmarks of healthy ones? (p. 42)

- How might these errors specifically affect our parish institutions? (p. 47)
- Consider societies , what is the "inner law of its nature"? What might we learn about our institutions from this "law"? (p. 49)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- How might you gain an apostolic attitude yourself, and help others to do the same?
- How might you help the people in your parish/school/family remain rooted in the Church's vision?
- What are some practices that you might undertake to incarnate the Christian vision?

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Session Five

Chapter Four: Devising a Pastoral Strategy for this Transitional Time, Part II

Having seen the need to develop pastoral & evangelical strategies better-suited to an Apostolic age, this chapter addresses some key points necessary for developing those strategies.

Questions for Understanding

- What do the authors say is necessary? Using the analogy of a general sending individual soldiers, one by one, against a well-trained opposing army? (p. 53)
- What temptations face devout and eager priests in the current day? (p. 55)
- A good "manager" doesn't guarantee an institution's survival in this apostolic age, but what will? (p. 58)
- What is Pope St. Paul VI's assertion about modern man? (P. 61)
- What is the false compromise that tempts those who fear the majority will not be with them? (p. 62)
- What are we in danger of transposing in our pursuit to be culturally influential? (p. 63)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- Where are the flames of faith already burning brightly in your parish? What can you do to fan those flames even more?
- Who comes to mind as an “impressive witness”? What might you learn from them?

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Session Six

Chapter Five: The Key Task: Conversion of the Mind to a New Way of Seeing, Part I

The key task before us is to renew our minds (cf. Romans 12:2) so that we see with a Christian imaginative vision. This portion of the chapter addresses the need to do so and introduces the Christian vision.

Questions for Understanding

- When surveys tell us that people have lost Eucharistic faith, what does this tell us from an Apostolic perspective? (p. 67)
- What is a rough outline of the Catholic Imaginative Vision that goes beyond the natural world? (p. 68)
- What is the great apostolic task of our time? What does this mean to you? (p. 69)
- Does the Catholic Imaginative Vision think that we can be fully happy in this life? What does that mean for our expectations, here and now? (p. 72 - 73)
- Is the Catholic Imaginative Vision seeing some things differently or seeing everything differently? (p. 74)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- Roughly speaking, what percentage of the people in your parish/school/family clearly have a Catholic vision?
- How can you help the rest in your institution adopt a Catholic vision?

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Session Seven

Chapter Five: The Key Task: Conversion of the Mind to a New Way of Seeing, Part II

The key task before us is to renew our minds (cf. Romans 12:2) so that we see with a Christian imaginative vision. This portion of the chapter addresses the vision which is currently prevalent in our culture.

Questions for Understanding

- At the hands of Enlightenment thinkers, Jewish and Catholic visions of heavenly perfection were transformed into what? How do you see that in the world around you? How does it affect our ministries (p. 76)
- What precarious position have the unfilled promises of Progressivism created in us? (p. 79)
- When we marginalize God, what is an unfortunate by-product? How do you see evidence of this theory in yourself or others? (p. 82)
- How has the Catholic Imaginative Vision of freedom become different in our current Imaginative Vision? (p. 85 - 86)

Questions for Discussion & Action

- What are some ways in which you and/or your institution as unknowingly adopted the prevailing modern way of seeing?
- How can you help others understand that they might be holding to the modern way of seeing instead of the Christian one?

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Session Seven - Continued

Conclusion: Readiness to Embrace the Times We are Given

Despite its influence, the prevailing vision is unsatisfying, precisely because it is inaccurate. We must have confidence in the Holy Spirit and His power to help ourselves and those around us embrace the true, Christian vision of reality.

Questions for Understanding

- Can you think of saints who lived in times of consumption and distraction but still heard the call of the Gospel and woke to a new vision of life?

Questions for Discussion & Action

- What concrete actions will you take to help those in your parish/school/family discern the movement of the Spirit in our time?
- How might you help them to engage in Bishop DeGrood's vision with joy, excitement and a sense of adventure?