

The Cardijn Canon: A Method of Theological Praxis in Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching

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ABSTRACT: The author situates the question of praxis in theological methodology and Catholic Social Teaching in relation to teaching ethics courses in Catholic higher education. The author uses a genealogical strategy to show that Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's See-Judge-Act methodology of theological praxis has become canonical in Catholic Social Teaching. The author shows that advocates of Cardijn's methodology include Pope Pius XI, Pope Pius XII, Saint Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, and Pope Francis. In addition, the author shows that Cardijn's methodology is used by the committee that drafts *Schema XIII*, the Conciliar document that becomes *Gaudium et Spes*. Besides its use in a Western European Catholic Context the author explains that Cardijn's methodology of theological praxis is appropriated at the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* in Medellin, Colombia (1968); Puebla, Mexico (1979); and Aparecida, Brazil (2007). The author also explains how Cardijn's methodology of theological praxis is integrated in ethics courses in order to develop students' ability to discern whether a current business, healthcare, or environmental practice is a sign of the kingdom of God or the anti-kingdom. For the author, Cardijn's methodology of theological praxis leads students to new insight about realities they are unaware and introduces them to the countercultural wisdom of the Catholic intellectual tradition, as well as the importance of moving beyond critical theological reflection and into the realm of social action.

KEYWORDS: Praxis, phronesis, method, methodology, Catholic Social Teaching, pedagogy

Is it plausible to claim that Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis has become "canonical" in twentieth-century Catholic Social Teaching?¹ To respond to this question I present a historical narrative that explains why Cardijn's method indeed ought to be considered canonical in twentieth-century Catholic Social Teaching.

To contextualize my claim, I present a primer on praxis followed by a brief overview of the early life of Joseph Cardijn. To provide evidence to support my claim I show that Cardijn's method was first blessed by Pope Pius XI and then publicly promoted by Pope Pius XII. To add depth to the evidence, I explain that Pope John XXIII confirmed his predecessors actions in a more "canonical" way when he appealed to Cardijn's method in *Mater et magistra*. I also show that Cardijn's method was used to construct "Schema XIII," the document that became *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican Council II. Furthermore, I show that Pope Paul VI also appealed to Cardijn's method in *Octogesima Adveniens and Populorum Progressio*. I then move beyond Rome to show that Latin American bishops appropriated Cardijn's method at meetings in 1968 at Medellin, Colombia; in 1979 at Puebla, Mexico; and in 2007 at Aparecida, Brazil. To bring my discussion back from Latin America to Rome, I briefly explain how Pope Francis reinterprets Cardijn's method in various public platforms, including in his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si*.² To conclude, I offer insight into a related question: other than provoke scholarly discussion of whether or not Cardijn's method has become "canonical" in twentieth-century Catholic Social Teaching, what does this discourse do for the Catholic Church today? My response is a brief explanation of how I draw from Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis for pedagogical purposes, specifically in courses such as Environmental Ethics, Business Ethics, Christian Ethics and HealthCare Ethics at Mount St. Joseph University. First, however, let us engage a primer on how praxis is defined and used in this essay.

¹Praxis is not simply the practical application of a theory. To describe it in a more robust way one could say praxis is an integral practice that aims to transform sociopolitical structures through practical action that is supported by critical theoretical reflection. For more, see what is considered to be one of the most authoritative modern texts on philosophical praxis: Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). For more on praxis in regard to pedagogy see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000).

²Pope Francis repackaged Cardijn's method at World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland. For more see <http://cardijnresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/look-decide-act-with-mary-and-pope.html>.

A PRIMER ON PRACTIS

United States philosopher Richard Bernstein explains “The Greek term ‘*praxis*’ has an ordinary meaning that roughly corresponds to the way that we now commonly speak of ‘action’ or ‘doing,’ and which is frequently translated into English as ‘practice.’”³ However, Bernstein adds the qualification that Aristotle primarily used *praxis* “to signify the sciences and arts that deal with the activities characteristic of man’s ethical and political life.”⁴

In modern times, German philosopher Karl Marx retrieved Aristotelian *praxis* with vigor. Bernstein explains that “*praxis* is the central concept in Marx’s outlook,” and “it is the basis for comprehending what Marx meant by ‘revolutionary practice.’”⁵ Because he understood *praxis* as revolutionary practice or action, Marx believed the primary task of philosophy was not only to interpret the world, but, rather, “to change the world.”⁶ In other words, Marx, like Aristotle, was critical of a Platonic approach (and, in Marx’s context, a Hegelian approach) where “truth was not discovered through investigation of the sensate material world,” but, rather, through *theoria*, “the rationalist intuition of abstract intellectual ideas, usually translated in English as ‘forms.’”⁷ For Marx, *theoria* was “nothing but the articulation of the rationality ingredient in *praxis*.”⁸

The key takeaway is that “Marx does not begin,” as does a Platonic methodology, “with a vision or norm of what ought to be, and then proceed to criticize what is, in light of this norm.”⁹ Contra Platonic and Hegelian methods, Marx’s *praxis* based approach, like that of Aristotle, first seeks a practical-critical understanding of the civic or political reality, which carries “important metaphysical and epistemological implications” in regard to overcoming “the dichotomy of the “is” and the “ought.””¹⁰

Ultimately, because Marx theorized human “self-development” as “a process” that is “the result of humanity’s own work,” he was able to show that what humans produce are not accidental by-products; they are the objectification and

³Bernstein, *Praxis*, xiii.

⁴Bernstein, *Praxis*, xiii.

⁵Bernstein, *Praxis*, 13.

⁶Bernstein, *Praxis*, 33–34.

⁷Joe Holland, “Introduction,” in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, ed. Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot, and Rodrigo Mejia (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 10.

⁸Bernstein, *Praxis*, 34. Ignacio Ellacuria, SJ, similarly claims that *theoria* is simply the ideological moment of *praxis*.

⁹Bernstein, *Praxis*, 71.

¹⁰Bernstein, *Praxis*, 71–2.

the concrete expression of what the human is.¹¹ What is crucial about Marx's insight is that it shows "the very nature or character of a human is determined by what one does or one's praxis, and one's products are concrete embodiments of this activity."¹² Marx's position on praxis became integral to later developments in various types of theological methodology, particularly in Latin American liberation theology.¹³ But, instead of jumping from Marx to Latin American Liberation Theology, as many scholars tend to do, let us first turn to Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, a forerunner in the development of modern methods of theological praxis.

Rev. Joseph Cardijn did not want to limit theology to *theoria* because he believed it detached religious faith from its political context, specifically the economic and cultural context shaped by the industrial revolution and laissez-faire capitalism. Rather, Cardijn's goal was to teach lay people how to reflect theologically on political, economic, and cultural realities in order to help them engage in practices or actions that would transform unjust realities judged as an affront to Christian vision of the Kingdom of God. To achieve this goal, Rev. Cardijn (later Cardinal) pioneered the See-Judge-Act method.

¹¹Bernstein, *Praxis*, 39–40.

¹²Bernstein, *Praxis*, 44.

¹³Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 5–24. The Boff brothers provide a thick description of the theological methodology associated with liberation theology. They write that the first step of an adequate methodology of theological praxis begins with dialogical action wherein the oppressed come together to discuss their situation and the causes of their oppression. In the second step the community reflects theologically on the situation of oppression. Here, the community judges realities experienced by their neighbor, especially the poor, in light of the life, deeds, and death of Christ, who makes the poor a focus of his praxis. The third step is where action takes place with the aim of liberation from an oppressive situation. The Boff brothers explain that this three-step method can be described differently according to context, however, Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method is explicitly mentioned as the 'pastoral method.' In another key passage the authors reassert that what is absolutely crucial is the pre-theological first step where personal contact is made with an oppressive reality. And, the second step is where an axial faith is used as *theoria* that seeks to transform history through critique and action inspired by the Gospel itself. What this means is that theology is a second act (*actus secundus*) where the articles of faith operative in the second generality, function as a hermeneutic that is able to theologize raw material in the first generality. For example, a methodological praxis ought to utilize scripture as the "*norma normans*" (norm of norms) and the "*norma normata*" (norming norm), to create an interpreting interpretation (*norma normans ut normata*), that judges situations according to the Spirit of Christ. Boff's most powerful claim, is, therefore, that the *norma normans ut normata* of theological hermeneutic reasoning (second generality) must become embodied in concrete life (third generality) where hermeneutics flowers into ethics.

It is important to note that some scholars argue that Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method reflects Aristotle's description of *phronesis*. Philosopher David Lutz claims that while Cardijn indeed deserves credit for his development of the See-Judge-Act method, he did not create it *ex nihilo*.¹⁴ Rather, Lutz explains the method reflects a development within the Catholic intellectual tradition, with roots in pre-Christian, Greek philosophy. For example, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes *phronesis* as an intellectual virtue "concerned with practice; so that it needs knowledge both of general truths and of particular facts, but more especially the latter."¹⁵ Philosopher Richard Kearney describes Aristotelian *phronesis* as "a form of practical wisdom capable of respecting the singularity of situations as well as the nascent universality of values aimed at by human actions."¹⁶ And, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre sums up Aristotle's view of *phronesis*, or practical reasoning, as that which guides a person in "the right action to do in each particular time and place," which is "what ethics is all about."¹⁷

In addition to those who argue that Cardijn retrieved Aristotelian *phronesis* to construct his See-Judge-Act method, others argue it more likely reflects Thomas Aquinas's description of prudence. St. Thomas Aquinas's account of the virtues, which is both Aristotelian and Christian, adds an analysis of *phronesis*, or *prudentia* in Latin, that is more systematic and detailed than Aristotle's. For example, Aquinas explains that while the moral virtues determine the ends at which we should aim, "it belongs to prudence rightly to counsel [*consiliari*], judge [*iudicare*], and command [*praecipere*] concerning the means of obtaining a due end."¹⁸ Aquinas sometimes calls these three steps "acts of the practical reason": "Prudence consists in acts of the practical reason, viz. 'counsel,' 'judgment' about what has been counseled, and 'command.'"¹⁹ At other times, however, Aquinas explains that taking counsel "belongs to discovery."

¹⁴I am indebted to Dr. David Lutz for his masterful insight on the connections between Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method and Thomas Aquinas's description of the virtue of prudence. Most of what follows on this connection was discussed by Dr. Lutz at the "Lay Movements as Structures of Grace: The Legacy of Cardijn, the See-Judge-Act Method, and Catholic Action in the Americas," Conference at Mount St. Joseph University, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2018.

¹⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 1141b.

¹⁶Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002), 143.

¹⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2010), 154–162.

¹⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd and rev. ed. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920), IIa IIae, q. 47, a. 10.

¹⁹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 53, a. 4.

The second act is “to judge of what one has discovered.” Finally, commanding “consists in applying to action the things counselled and judged.”²⁰

In addition to this insight from Aquinas himself, several authors agree that the See-Judge-Act method is rooted in Thomistic philosophy. John N. Kotre refers to “Observe-Judge-Act” as “a formula straight from Aquinas.”²¹ According to Edward L. Cleary, “The methodology of see-judge-act (even if it owed something to Marxist praxis) came from Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on prudence.”²² Terrence G. Kardong, OSB tells us: “Besides echoing *sapiential* pragmatism, insistence on concrete action is typical of ancient monasticism, which was much more a lifestyle than a theory. This kind of thinking lies behind Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on the parts of prudence: observe, judge, act, a triad that was the heart of Jocist theory in the years after World War II.”²³ According to L. Ian MacDonald, “The work of the lay Catholic activists was inspired by the motto of Thomas Aquinas, *Voir, Juger, Agir* (Observe, Judge, Act).”²⁴ Tércio Bretanha Junker writes, “The “see-judge-act” method . . . has its incipient development in Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica, Treatise on Prudence and Justice*, IIa IIae q. 47 a. 8).”²⁵ Bernard V. Brady cites a paragraph about Cardijn’s method in John XXIII’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra*: “First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act [*aspicere, iudicare, agere*].”²⁶ Brady then comments, “John XXIII is summarizing the characteristics of the virtue of prudence as explained by Thomas Aquinas.”²⁷ In *Laymen, Vatican II’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: Text and commentary*, Dominican writer Francis Wendell OP explains, “The See, Judge, Act method, conceived by Thomas Aquinas, activated by Cardinal Cardijn, and canonized by Pope

²⁰Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 47, a. 8.

²¹John N. Kotre, *Simple Gifts: The Lives of Pat and Patty Crowley* (Kansas City: Andrew and McMeel, 1979), 39.

²²Edward L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 4.

²³Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 7.

²⁴L. Ian MacDonald, *From Bourassa to Bourassa: Wilderness to Restoration*, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 86.

²⁵Tércio Bretanha Junker, *Prophetic Liturgy: Toward a Transforming Christian Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 20.

²⁶John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, 15 May 1961, 236. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.

²⁷Bernard V. Brady, *Essential Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 37.

John XXIII, is indeed a continuing process and a discovery that is invaluable to the layman. It keeps the person with his feet in the order of reality and his head and heart in the realm of faith.”²⁸ And, Thomas J. Bushlack concurs: “Aquinas defines prudence as “right reason in action” (*Summa theologiae* II-II 47.2). A simple way to summarize the stages of prudence is provided by the phrase “see, judge, act.”²⁹ Whether or not Cardijn explicitly draws from the well of Aquinas is unknown, but the similarity does indeed make the argument plausible. To learn more let us move into a discussion of Joseph Cardijn.

JOSEPH CARDIJN AND THE SEE-JUDGE-ACT METHOD

Born to a Catholic working class family, November 13, 1882, in Schaerbeek, a suburb of Brussels, Belgium, Léon Joseph Cardijn matured in a time defined by the democratic revolution in France, laissez-faire capitalism, and the industrial revolution. Cardijn’s youth was also the time of *Rerum Novarum*.³⁰ Inspired by these social, political, economic, and religious movements, as well as his contact with young factory workers, Cardijn realized his vocation was to become a priest.

When Cardijn entered the major seminary he became “absorbed” in the works of controversial nineteenth-century French “social Catholics” such as Frédéric Ozanam (founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society), Alphonse Gratry and Léon Ollé-Laprune.³¹ At the seminary Cardijn also learned of *Le Sillon*,

²⁸Peter Foote, *Laymen, Vatican II’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: Text and Commentary* (Chicago: Catholic Action Federations, 1966), 61; cited from Mary Irene Zotti’s *A Time of Awakening: The Young Christian Worker Story in the United States, 1938 to 1970* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1991), 263. In addition to Wendell, Kristien Justaert notes the root of Cardijn’s method is Thomistic. For more see, Kristien Justaert, “Cartographies of Experience: Rethinking the Method of Liberation Theology,” *Horizons* 42, no. 2 (December 2015), 249.

²⁹Thomas J. Bushlack, *Politics for a Pilgrim Church: A Thomistic Theory of Civic Virtue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 114.

³⁰Pope Leo XIII issues *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. The Latin title, meaning “new things,” refers to the Industrial Revolution. Rooted in the classical Catholic-Aristotelian understanding of politics in service of the common good, the document teaches that there are “correlative rights and duties of both capital and labor” and that “workers’ unions” are legitimate. *Rerum Novarum* is ultimately acknowledged as the foundation of modern Catholic Social Teaching as well as the cornerstone of a papal policy that is adopted by Leo’s successors, who issue encyclicals on its fortieth, seventieth, eightieth, and one-hundredth anniversaries. For more see Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 144.

³¹Stefan Gigacz, *The Leaven in the Council: Joseph Cardijn and the Jocist Network at Vatican II*, Ph.D. diss., University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia. Obtained in private email exchange with author in 2017.

the lay democratic movement and magazine founded by Marc Sagnier.³² What is key to note is that Olle-Laprune, and, his most famous student, Maurice Blondel, and Blondel's student, Sagnier, were concerned with a certain philosophical methodology that was based on practical reason, the examination of action, and real life. Such was the methodological perspective favored by the young Cardijn.

After his ordination Cardijn took what he learned at seminary and initiated a specialized Catholic Action Movement named *Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienn* (Young Christian Workers) in Brussels.³³ At meetings of these young Christian workers, Cardijn integrated the See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis that he perfected while imprisoned by the Germans during World War I. Later in his life Cardijn explained the logic of his method: "life must be one of the essential bases of a sound theology, it is . . . a methodological base without which we would only be making artificial gestures, aiding and abetting the divorce . . . between religion and the world."³⁴ Cardijn suggests this type of methodological realism, rooted in everyday life, helps laity be "formed first of all by the discovery of facts, followed by a Christian judgment, resulting in the actions they plan, the plans they carry into effect, the responsibilities they shoulder."³⁵ But, why is such a methodological perspective identified as praxis?

CARDIJN'S METHOD FROM ROME TO LATIN AMERICA AND BACK AGAIN?

After decades of ministerial success with his Catholic Action Movement, Cardijn was invited to the Vatican to meet with Pope Pius XI.³⁶ After their meeting in March of 1925 Pius XI blessed "the aim, method, and organization of the J.O.C."³⁷ Cardijn later wrote that Pius approved the movement because he recognized "the church must be rooted in the realities of life."³⁸ But, how is this blessing of Cardijn's method received?

Stefan Gigacz's research shows that the first public papal reference to the See-Judge-Act method was by Pope Pius XII in his address to the International YCW Pilgrimage to Rome on August 25, 1957. Gigacz translates the key statement from Pius XII:

³²Gigacz, *The Leaven in the Council*.

³³Eugene Langdale, "Introduction," in *Challenge to Action: Addresses of Monsignor Joseph Cardijn* (Chicago: Fides, 1955), 7–12.

³⁴Joseph Cardijn, *Laymen into Action*, trans. Anne Heggie (London: Geoffrey Chapman LTD, 1964), 148–149.

³⁵Cardijn, *Laymen*, 150.

³⁶Langdale, "Introduction," 7–12.

³⁷Cardijn, *Laymen*, 35.

³⁸Cardijn, *Laymen*, 35.

You want to live a profound, authentic, Christian life, not just in the secret of your consciences, but also openly, in your families, in your neighborhood, in the factory, in the workshop, in the office, and also to show your sincere and total belonging to Christ and the Church. Your solid organization, your method summed up in the well known formula: “See, judge, act,” your interventions on the local, regional, national and international levels, enables you to contribute to the extension of the Reign of God in modern society and to enable the teachings of Christianity to penetrate with all their vigor and originality.³⁹

The next Pope, John XXIII, would not only confirm his predecessors blessing of Cardijn’s method but would describe it in a more “canonical” way.

In 1961 Pope John XXIII issued the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. It states: “Teachings in regard to social matters for the most part are put into effect in the following three stages: first, the actual situation is examined; then, the situation is evaluated carefully in relation to these teachings; then, only is it decided what can and should be done in order that the traditional norms may be adapted to circumstances of time and place. These three steps are at times expressed by the three words: observe, judge, act.”⁴⁰ What is crucial about John’s confirmation of Cardijn’s method is the statement that follows the words: observe, judge, act: “It is important for our young people to grasp this method and to practice it. Knowledge acquired in this way does not remain merely abstract, but is seen as something that must be translated into action.”⁴¹ In addition to John’s “canonical” confirmation of the Cardijn’s method, the Second Vatican Council provided an opportunity for the method to move further toward “canonical” status in Catholic Social Teaching.

Schema XIII was the working draft of what ultimately became *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. As Gigacz’s research shows: “In October 1964, after much criticism of an earlier draft of the Schema, the Central Sub-Commission adopted the See-Judge-Act method to re-draft the final version.”⁴² In fact, “The Commission instructed: To the maximum extent possible each (drafting) sub-commission should: start from the facts; bring a Christian judgment in the light of the Gospel and Catholic

³⁹For more see <http://cardijnresearch.blogspot.com/2014/10/see-judge-act-from-john-xxiii-to-pope.html>.

⁴⁰Pope John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, No. 236.

⁴¹Pope John XXXI, *Mater et magistra*, No. 237.

⁴²A copy of the original report of the Central Sub-Commission meetings that made the decision to use the See-Judge-Act method to write *Gaudium et Spes* is available at the Archives of the *Institut catholique de Paris*. And, it can be found at <http://www.joseph-cardijn.com/1964-schema-xiii-adopts-see-judge-act>. The original document “Vatican II, Schema XIII, *Réunion Sous Commission Centrale*, was constructed October 17–20, 1964.

tradition from the Fathers up to contemporary documents of the Magisterium; indicate concrete orientations for action.”⁴³ In other words, those in charge of drafting *Schema XIII* used Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method to construct the document that Pope Paul VI promulgated to conclude Vatican Council II in 1965.

And, as I mentioned earlier, Pope Paul VI appealed to Cardijn’s method in both *Populorum Progressio* and *Octogesima Adveniens*. Fr. Allan Figueroa Deck suggests that the influence of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn on Pope Paul VI is undeniable.⁴⁴ Deck also suggests that an examination of *Populorum Progressio* reveals that Pope Paul VI not only “put into practice” Cardijn’s “observe, judge, act” method but “enthusiastically received it as a simple but powerful way to help those on the margins connect their faith with real life.”⁴⁵ In Paul’s Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method is also apparent: “It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church.”⁴⁶

Now, let us move on to learn how Cardijn’s method of theological praxis was a source of inspiration to the Latin American bishops who constructed Catholic Social Teaching documents at meetings of the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (CELAM) in Medellin, Colombia (1968); Puebla, Mexico (1979); and, Aparecida, Brazil (2007).

The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops took place between August 24 and September 6, 1968, in Medellin, Colombia. The *Justice, Peace, and Poverty* documents produced at Medellin show that the Bishops drew inspiration from Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis. For example, each of the final documents were divided into three sections. Part I in each of the documents is titled either: Pertinent Facts, The Latin American Situation and Peace, or the Latin American Scene. Part II in each of the

⁴³The original states, “*Méthodes de travail : I. L’organisation interne de chaque sous-commission et ses travaux relèvent de l’autorité de son Président, 1. Dans toute la mesure du possible, chaque sous-commission devra : partir des faits ; porter un jugement chrétien, à la lumière de l’Évangile et de la tradition catholique, depuis les Pères jusqu’aux documents contemporains du magistère. indiquer des orientations concrètes d’action (aspect pastoral).*” For more see <http://www.josephcardijn.com/1964-schema-xiii-adopts-see-judge-act>.

⁴⁴Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., “Commentary on *Populorum Progressio*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Kenneth R. Times, O.F.M (Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2005), 297.

⁴⁵Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J. “Commentary,” 299.

⁴⁶Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, No. 4. http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

documents is titled either: Doctrinal Basis, Doctrinal Reflection, or Doctrinal Motivation. And, Part III in each document is titled either: Projection for Social Pastoral Planning, Pastoral Conclusions, or Pastoral Orientation. In other words, each document first “Sees” reality then “Judges” it from the position of Christian doctrine in order to prepare pastoral plans for “Action.” And, if there is any doubt that the bishops drew from the well of Cardijn at Medellin, a brief look at the concluding “Message to the Peoples of Latin America” clearly shows the influence of the See-Judge-Act method. For example, the bishops wrote that the new historical era “requires clarity in order to *see*, lucidity in order to *diagnose*, and solidarity in order to *act*.”⁴⁷

The Third General Conference of Latin American bishops took place in 1979 at Puebla, Mexico. Ernesto Valiente claims that the bishops who wrote the Puebla document, like those who constructed the Medellin documents, drew inspiration from Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis.⁴⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez likewise notes: “Puebla’s conviction is the fruit of praxis.”⁴⁹

The use of Cardijn’s method of theological praxis was made most explicit, however, at the Fifth General Conference at Aparecida, Brazil in 2007. Valiente explains that before the 2007 meeting twenty two national episcopal conferences critiqued the preparatory document that ignored Cardijn’s “see, judge, act” method in favor of an ahistorical Christology.⁵⁰ As a result, a task force from CELAM crafted a working “synthesis document” that reinstated the See-Judge-Act method. For example, in part I, “The Life of Our People Today,” the bishops state: “in continuity with previous general conferences of Latin American Bishops, this document utilizes the see-judge-act method.”⁵¹ The bishops explain that with Cardijn’s method the Church is able to see Latin America reality, judge it according to Jesus Christ in order to enact the spreading of the kingdom of God.⁵² And, moreover, the Latin American bishops explain that the method has been successful in enabling “us to combine systematically, a faithful perspective for viewing reality; incorporating criterions from faith

⁴⁷General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1977), 574.

⁴⁸O. Ernesto Valiente, “The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America,” *Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2012): 812.

⁴⁹Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 151.

⁵⁰Valiente, “The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America,” 819.

⁵¹General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *The Aparecida Document: V* (Lexington, 2014), No. 19.

⁵²General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Aparecida*, No. 19.

and reason for discerning and appraising it critically; and accordingly acting as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.”⁵³ What is noteworthy is that at Aparecida, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected by the other bishops to chair the committee charged with drafting the final document. Why does this matter? Because the man who explicitly used the See-Judge-Act method to construct the Aparecida document became the first Pope to explicitly appeal to Cardijn’s method in Catholic Social Teaching since Pope Paul VI.

POPE FRANCIS AND THE CARDIJN CANON

Pope Francis recently used Cardijn’s method of theological praxis to interpret the natural environment as a *locus theologicus*. In *Laudato Si* Cardijn’s See, Judge, Act method is apparent in Francis’s statement that he will review the best scientific research today, then consider principles from Judeo-Christian tradition, and, in light of this theological reflection, advance proposals for dialogue and action, both on an local and global level.⁵⁴ Francis justifies his approach by stating: “theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract, unless they are grounded in a fresh analysis of our present situation.”⁵⁵

In his address to volunteers at World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland, Pope Francis reinterprets Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method in the form of Listen-Decide-Act. Specifically, Pope Francis states: ”In the Gospel mystery of the Visitation (cf. Lk 1:39–45) . . . we can see an icon of all Christian volunteer work. I would take three attitudes shown by Mary and leave them to you as an aid to interpreting the experience of these days and an inspiration for your future commitment to service. These three attitudes are listening, deciding and acting.”⁵⁶ Clearly, Pope Francis has a penchant for Cardijn’s method of theological praxis. Now, I want to ask: so what? What does all this historical research “do” other than provoke scholarly discussion of whether or not Cardijn’s method has become “canonical” in Catholic Social Teaching? To answer this question I want to briefly discuss how I draw from Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis for pedagogical purposes.

⁵³General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Aparecida*, No. 19.

⁵⁴Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, No. 15.

⁵⁵Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, No. 17.

⁵⁶For more see <http://cardijnresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/look-decide-act-with-mary-and-pope.html>.

CARDIJN'S METHOD AS CLASSROOM CANON

Over the past few years I have used Cardijn's method as a foundational teaching tool in various ethics courses. What I have learned is that when students are taught how to use Cardijn's method they are able to develop strong critical thinking skills and a desire to change unjust business, environmental, or healthcare practices. To facilitate such learning I reconfigured Cardijn's method as "eschatopraxis."⁵⁷ *Eschatopraxis* is a method that forces students to confront reality with the wisdom of the Christian eschatological tradition. In other words, *eschatopraxis* asks students to consider an "Empirical-Eschatological-Empirical"⁵⁸ methodological movement where students learn to (1) confront the ethical and moral logic of a real historical practice or action through an embodied, carnal, visual experience of a sociopolitical and/or economic issue; (2) make a critical judgment of historical reality using the "eschato-" logic of Jesus's kingdom of God with the goal of (3) creating action-oriented strategies to provoke change in the sociopolitical and/or economic reality under investigation.

My pedagogy of *eschatopraxis* ultimately aims to build on the work of Catholic educator Tom Groome as well as liberation theologian and martyr Ignacio Ellacuria. Both Groome and Ellacuria argue that Jesus's notion of the Kingdom of God should be the ultimate purpose, or *telos*, of Christian education. For example, Groome claims that because Jesus's purpose in life was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God Christian religious education must necessarily provide Christians with a methodology that is capable of enacting the values associated with Jesus's Kingdom of God.⁵⁹ In a similar fashion, Ellacuria claims that because "the fundamental object of the mission of Jesus was the Reign of God" it should not only "be the object of ecclesial praxis and the ideological moment of that praxis."⁶⁰ But, all "theological subjects should arise within the framework of the Reign of God and in its historical realization (not only in theoretical interpretation but also in projects and actions)."⁶¹

⁵⁷For more about the original source of this word see Carl E. Braaten, *Eschatology and Ethics: Essays on the Theology and Ethics of the Kingdom of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1975), 121 and 141.

⁵⁸My method mirrors Thomas Groome's Life-Faith-Life model. For more see *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991).

⁵⁹Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), 33–34 and 35–36n4.

⁶⁰Ignacio Ellacuria, "Theology as the Ideological Moment of Ecclesial Praxis (1978)," in *Ignacio Ellacuria: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2013), 265.

⁶¹Ellacuria, "Theology as the Ideological Moment, 265.

In the classroom I use Ellacuria's idea of historicizing the Reign of God to shift learning toward an "active dimension of knowledge" that "is not purely praxic, as Aristotle wanted." Following Ellacuria I believe students must be taught that Christian knowledge must be "*poesis-based*," in the sense that knowledge "has to objectify itself in exterior realities beyond the active immanence of one's own interiority and subjective intentionality."⁶²

To meet learning goals that ask students to engage not only in a process of critical thinking, but also of "productive doing," my method of *eschatopraxis* provides students with a structure that facilitates five movements. First, I use my own publication to lecture about the epoch-defining twentieth-century Catholic turn to methods of theological praxis and the practical theological interpretation of historical reality as a *locus theologicus*. Second, I disseminate a handout and explain how to use an integrated model of two methods of theological praxis: Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method and Joe Holland and Peter Henriot's pastoral circle method. Third, I ask students to begin step one from the handout. For example, I ask them to confront a specific historical reality such as mountain top removal, fracking, global poverty, immigration, abortion, drug addiction, or the business practices of Wall Street Firms through the medium of documentary video. In addition to the documentary, I require students to use the Cardijn/Holland handout to do additional research to gather empirical data related to the reality under investigation. To facilitate this process I provide students with blackboard links to journal and newspaper articles that offer extra environmental, economic, political, sociological, and/or ethnographic data relevant to the historical reality under investigation. Fourth, I facilitate the development of students critical thinking skills from a Christian perspective by explaining not only what Jesus's meant when he said the Kingdom of God; but, also, how Jesus's Kingdom of God idea can be used to critique some of the morally questionable business practices, healthcare practices, environmental practices, and sociocultural phenomena I mentioned earlier. What is key to the fourth movement is that I do not locate the Kingdom of God in some Triumphant second coming postponed till some future date. Rather, students learn how Jesus historicizes the kingdom through his praxis with sinners, publicans, the sick, lepers, Samaritans, pagans, and women through his life.⁶³ In other words, students learn how Jesus's praxis models the *bonum morale* (moral good) that is foundational to contemporary Christian praxis.⁶⁴

⁶²Ignacio Ellacuria, "Laying the Philosophical Foundations of Latin American Theological Method (1975)," in *Ignacio Ellacuria: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2013), 83.

⁶³Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 140.

⁶⁴Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 144–147.

But, how do I teach students this foundational knowledge? I open the discussion of the Kingdom of God and Christian eschatology by introducing students to the work of Catholic theologians such as Joseph Ratzinger, Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino. I also present the work of contemporary Irish Philosopher Richard Kearney and Protestant theologian Vitor Westhelle. By drawing from these sources I am able to introduce variations on the theme of eschatology, including the classic Roman Catholic theological perspective, the Latin American Liberation theological perspective, and a postmodern philosophical perspective. Because of this strategy I am able to teach students how to develop a spatial eschatological hermeneutic that prepares them not only to read signs of the times, but, more importantly, to read the signs of places.⁶⁵ More specifically, my method of *eschatopraxis* prepares students to look for signs of the anti-Kingdom in places that are populated by the faces of those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, and in prison (MT 25:35–40). But, how do I move students from theory to praxis toward *poiesis*?

In the fifth movement I conduct travel seminars in order to immerse students in institutions and non-profit organizations whose vision and mission are based on theological practices of justice and charity associated with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. My strategy is founded on research from one of my early publications where I argue that students learn about religious and theological practices most effectively through pedagogies that are experience-based, context-situated, and practice-centric.⁶⁶ By integrating a travel seminar component into the curriculum I am able to move beyond status quo teaching practices that focus on disseminating ideas and propositions to “brains-on-a-stick.”⁶⁷ By integrating travel seminars I follow a number of educators who suggest that experiential, context-situated, practice-centric forms of immersion learning tend to have profound influence on student learning because they involve the whole person and not simply

⁶⁵Pedro Casaldáliga, *Creio na Justiça e na Esperança* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1978), 211. I resourced Casaldáliga’s quote from Vitor Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space: The Lost Dimension in Theology Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xi. Casaldáliga is quoted as saying “only later I understood that the signs of the times need to be complemented with the signs of places.” By adding the word “places,” Casaldáliga calls for a more contextual, localized emphasis in the task of hermeneutics.

⁶⁶Robert Pennington, “Liturgical Laboratories: Consider a Case Study for an Additional Credit Component for Comparative Theology and World Religions Courses,” *Journal of Religious Education* 62, no. 3 (2015).

⁶⁷James K. A. Smith, “Keeping Time in the Social Sciences: An Experiment with Fixed-Hour Prayer and the Liturgical Calendar,” in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith & Learning*, ed. David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 141.

the mind. Rather than focus on propositional reasoning skills travel seminars incorporate experiential and embodied forms of learning so that the essential *modus operandi* of the pedagogic action enables students' knowledge to emerge in and through contextual, practice-centric forms of learning. Thus, travel seminars facilitate a poiesis-based form of learning that overcomes the habit of seeking truth at the level of disembodied, theoretical ideas. In this way, I think I honor, in my own classroom, the canonicity of Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method of theological praxis in modern Catholic Social Teaching.

CONCLUSION

In this article I showed why Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's See-Judge-Act method ought to be considered "canonical" in twentieth-century Catholic Social Teaching. To contextualize my claim, I provided a primer on praxis followed by a brief overview of the early life of Joseph Cardijn. To provide evidence to support my claim I showed that Cardijn's method was first blessed by Pope Pius XI and then publicly promoted by Pope Pius XII. To add depth to the evidence, I explained that Pope John XXIII confirmed his predecessors actions in a more canonical way by appealing to Cardijn's method in *Mater et magistra*. I also showed that Cardijn's method was used to construct "Schema XIII," the document that became *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican Council II. Furthermore, I showed that Pope Paul VI also appealed to Cardijn's method in *Octogesima Adveniens and Populorum Progressio*. I then moved beyond Rome to explain that Latin American bishops appropriated Cardijn's methodology at meetings in 1968 at Medellin, Colombia; in 1979 at Puebla, Mexico; and in 2007 at Aparecida, Brazil. To bring my discussion back from Latin America to Rome, I briefly explained how Pope Francis reinterprets Cardijn's methodology in various public platforms, including in his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si*.⁶⁸ To conclude, I offered a brief explanation of how I draw from Cardijn's method of theological praxis for pedagogical purposes, specifically in courses such as Environmental Ethics, Business Ethics, Christian Ethics and HealthCare Ethics at Mount St. Joseph University.

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⁶⁸Pope Francis also repackaged Cardijn's method at World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland. For more see <http://cardijnresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/look-decide-act-with-mary-and-pope.html>.

mission work. Dr. Pennington then earned a Masters degree in Theology from Xavier University, followed by a Ph.D. in Practical Theology from St. Thomas University in Miami, Florida. Dr. Pennington is currently an assistant professor of religious studies, specializing in ethics, at Mount St. Joseph University.

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