

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ANSWERS THE QUESTIONS OF OUR TIMES

Introduction

"How, then, shall we live?"

The Church's social doctrine offers us a way to live our life. "Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just." (DCE, 28)

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) contains a set of

1. 'Principles for reflection' to form our conscience,
2. 'Criteria for judgment' to evaluate the framework of society, and
3. 'Directives for action'

"On the one hand it is constant, for it remains identical in its fundamental inspiration, in its "principles of reflection," in its "criteria of judgment," in its basic "directives for action," and above all in its vital link with the Gospel of the Lord" (SRS, 3). Pope Saint John Paul II emphasized placing the insight brought upon by Catholic Social Teaching into the course and setting of our daily lives.

In the encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, he wrote that Catholic Social Thought "must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action" (CA, 57). 120 years of thought and reflection of applying the word of God to people's lives and the life of society, Teachings addresses such questions as:

- What form of government and economic system is best for promoting human freedom
- Why must faith be part of the public square
- What are the pathologies destroying our culture and how do we fix them
- How should we address the issues of developing countries
- What are the dangers of a "welfare state"... among many other vexing issues facing us.

Catholic Social Teaching proposes a three-part proposition of **free culture, free markets, and free politics** that create a **free society**.

Catholic Social Teaching and You

Whatever your career is being it Business, the Professions, or Academia; the principles of Catholic Social Teaching are to be applied to form your conscience for acting in the public square, to bring about a more just society. To do this is to engage, interact and affect those institutions in a positive way, is to act in charity. There are structures that need to be built, and there are structures of society that need to be destroyed. As Pope Saint John Paul II said, "To destroy such structures and replace them with more authentic forms of living in community is a task which demands courage and patience." (CA, 38)

Catholic Social Teaching and Charity

The social doctrine of the Church is written primarily for the laity to become the salt, light, and leaven in the world, and, through our activity bring about a more just and moral human environment in the political, economic, and cultural aspects of society. To do this is Charity. This type of Charity is different in action, but still morally connected to Corporal Works of Mercy, which are a major part of our parish ministry as well as our call for social work in secular organizations. Yet all action is to be performed under the divine theological virtue of Charity that is infused within us by the Holy Spirit.

What is the definition of Catholic Social Teaching?

Catholic Social Teaching is based upon a set of principles on which to form our consciences in order to evaluate the framework of society and to provide criteria for prudential judgment for current policy and action of a society. This teaching is "...built on the foundation handed on by the apostles to the Fathers of the Church and then received and further explored by the great Christian doctors. It is attested to by the saints and by those who gave their lives for Christ." (CIV, 12)

- Specifically, "It is an expression of the prophetic task of the supreme pontiffs to give apostolic guidance to the church of Christ and to discern the new demands of evangelization." (CIV, 12)
- "The Church's social doctrine is not a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Marxist socialism, nor even a possible alternative to other solutions less radically opposed to one another: rather it constitutes a category of its own. Nor is it an ideology, but rather the

accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in light of the faith and of the Church's tradition. Its main aim is to interpret these realities and thus to guide Christian behavior." (SRS, 41)

How does Catholic Social Teaching apply specifically to me?

- It is important to understand how our lives are shaped and influenced by the various institutions that comprise the fabric of our society, so we can engage, interact and affect those institutions in a positive way. Why? Because "The decisions which create a human environment can give rise to specific structures of sin which impede the full realization of those who are in any way oppressed by them" (CA, 38)
- There are structures of society that need to be destroyed. There are structures that need to be built. And, to "do" this - to actually be active in the world - to make this happen - is to act in Charity! As Pope Saint John Paul II again emphasized that, "To destroy structures and replace them with more authentic forms of living in community is a task which demands courage and patience. (CA, 38)
- Whatever your job or profession: being it Business; Policy Maker; Educator; Doctor; Lawyer or College Student, Catholic Social Teaching informs our conscience on how we are to interact with and impact on the framework of society.

Why should Catholics become acquainted with Catholic Social Teaching?

- Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus, called on Catholics to become acquainted with the social teachings of the Church so that, as Saint John Paul II the Great said, we can change:
 1. Our life styles;
 2. Our models of production and consumption, and;
 3. The established structures of power which today govern societies. (CA, 58)

How do Catholic Social Theory and Secular Social Theory differ?

- Catholic Social Teaching stands in marked contrast to the social theory of Hobbes and Locke. Catholic Social Teaching assumes we are inherently social reflecting our Trinitarian God, in whose image we are created, and whose own being is irreducibly

social. By contrast, social contract theory assumes we are inherently autonomous, committed to no higher moral grounding than our own self-interest.

- In fact, it is in this inherently social versus autonomous anthropology that Catholic Social Teaching provides such a compelling answer to the multiple problems of modernity.

How does Christ fit into Catholic Social Teaching?

- While Catholic Social Teaching is quite useful as a guide for living in and creating a civil society, it should be remembered that CST, as Saint John Paul II emphasized, "...proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself..." (CA, 54), should impart the larger society through education for a common good.

What are the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

- There are three fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching, the greatest of which the Church insists is the first:
 1. Human Dignity: this is the prime principle! Then there are
 2. Solidarity and
 3. Subsidiarity.

Of what practical use is Catholic Social Teaching?

- Catholic Social Teaching informs us that good governance and good economic systems find ways of fostering Human Dignity, Solidarity and Subsidiarity. (CA, 15)
- It places economic freedom parallel to political freedom; recognizing that free enterprise, *rightly understood and implemented*, is currently the best available vehicle for systemically caring for the physical needs of the poor, and a *true* global economy is the key way to create lasting development and, thereby, peace.

The following are several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

- **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

- **Call to Family, Community, and Participation**

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society in economics and politics, in law and policy directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially poor and vulnerable people.

- **Rights and Responsibilities**

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities, to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

- **Preferential Option for the Poor**

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition instructs us to put the needs of poor and vulnerable people first.

- **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

- **Solidarity**

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice." The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our brothers and sisters demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

- **Care for God's Creation**

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is a requirement of the Catholic faith as enshrined in the encyclical, "Laudato Si", promulgated by Pope Francis in the year 24th May, 2015. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

Other Papal Encyclicals

- **Centesimus Annus**

"In this new encyclical, the Holy Father provides us with reasons to hope in a modern society which would obey the Church's social teachings. The Pope also gives us, at the same time and by the same teaching, new reasons and motivation to further evangelize the world." *The Promises of Centesimus Annus*

- **Laborem Exercens**

John Paul II wrote the Encyclical "Laborem Exercens" in 1981, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of Leo XIII's Encyclical "Rerum Novarum" on the question of labor. It was signed on September 14, feast of the Holy Cross. In it he develops the concept of man's dignity in work, structuring it in four points: the subordination of work to man; the primacy of the worker over the whole of instruments and conditioning that historically constitute the world of labor; the rights of the human person as the determining factor of

all socio-economic, technological and productive processes, that must be recognized; and some elements that can help all men identify with Christ through their own work.

The Encyclical has an introduction and four chapters: "Work and Man," "Conflict Between Labor and Capital in the Present Phase of History," "Rights of Workers," and "Elements for a Spirituality of Work." catholic-pages.com

- Populorum Progressio

"Pope Paul VI wrote the encyclical Populorum Progressio in 1967 to address the world economy and its effect on peoples around the world. At this time many nations saw their economic development stall, while others continued to grow at a record pace. In the document he talks about the rights of workers to a just wage, job security, reasonable working conditions, and to join a worker's association."

justmecatholicfaith.wordpress.com

- Pacem in Terris

"In *Peace on Earth*, Pope John XXIII contends that peace can be established only if the social order set down by God is fully observed. Relying extensively on reason and the natural law tradition, John XXIII sketches a list of rights and duties to be followed by individuals, public authorities, national governments, and the world community. Peace needs to be based on an order 'founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practice in freedom.'" educationforjustice.org

- Mater et Magistra

"Pope John XXIII begins this encyclical by reviewing the major points of *The Condition of Labor* and *The Reconstruction of the Social Order*. He notes that new political, social, and economic developments have necessitated Christianity and Social Progress. He confirms previous papal teaching on the value of private initiative, just remuneration for work, and the social function of private property. John XXIII then treats the questions of agriculture and aid to developing countries. He urges a reconstruction of social relationships according to the principles of Catholic social teaching and states the responsibility of individual Christians to work for a more just world."

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- Rerum Novarum

"In *Rerum Novarum* Pope Leo XIII examines the situation of the poor people and workers in industrialized countries. He states several important principles that should guide the response to these people. He then articulates the role of the Church, workers and employers, and the law and public authorities in working together to build a just society. Employers are given the major role as agents for change."

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Conclusion

In conclusion, as Laity, we believe the Church's social teaching is an integral to our identity and mission as Catholics. This is why we seek a renewed commitment to integrate and to share the riches of the Church's social teaching in Catholic education and formation at every level. This is one of the most urgent challenges for the new millennium. As John Paul II has said, "A commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 51).

In the nutshell, Catholic Social Teaching is a great treasure reserved to Catholic Christians by Christ Jesus, His body that can solve our psychosocial and socio-political lifestyle as a society for a common good. This I believe will flourish our call for the journey of synodal process of the local Church.

Compiled by Samuel K. M. Amanor

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