

9- CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: Building a Civilization of Love

When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs not ours.

(St Gregory the Great: 540 - 604)

Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs. (St John Chrysostom: 347 – 407)

*Father and maker of all,
you adorn all creation with splendour and beauty,
and fashion human lives in your image and likeness.
Awaken in every heart reverence for the work of your hands,
and renew among your people a readiness to nurture and sustain
your precious gift of life.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.*

—from *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers – US Congress of Catholic Bishops*

Saint Teresa of Calcutta said “We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.” Catholic social teaching challenges to think of our responsibility to other more broadly than just meeting their needs for food clothing and shelter. There are also needs of being loved, feeling listened to, cared for, having a sense of belonging and being supported in spiritual needs. In all that we do in life, we seek to promote virtue and the spiritual values taught to us by Christ.

Our aim as Catholics, fed by the sacraments, is to take what we have been given and seek justice so that all “beloved children of God” (St Mother Theresa) can flourish and achieve the potential God has designed for them. This requires not just that we give of our excess resources, but that we give of our time and of our talents first to our families and then to everyone with whom we come in contact.

Video Links:

From the Womb to the Tomb: True Catholic Social Justice – Ascension Presents - Jackie and Bobby Angel (13 mins)

https://youtu.be/BarO_F-yK1U?si=19IK6vNyXSIBOPEX

The Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching – Gopher Catholic – Fr Jakle Anderson (6 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuUUORHswLw>

Suggested Scripture readings:

Psalm 82:3–4, Deuteronomy 15:7–11, Romans 12:9–21

Reading:

Gaudium et Spes - Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World –

Pope Paul VI (Dec 7, 1965)

Some Definite service (St John Henry Newman)

God knows me and calls me by my name....

God has created me to do Him some definite service;

He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.

I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow I am necessary for His purposes... I have a part in this great work;

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work;

I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it,

if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him;

In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him;

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end,
which is quite beyond us.

He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life,

He may shorten it; He knows what He is about.

He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers,

He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—
still He knows what He is about....

Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—

I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

ARTICLE 1

THE PERSON AND SOCIETY

I. THE COMMUNAL CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN VOCATION

1878 All men are called to the same end: God himself. There is a certain resemblance between the unity of the divine persons and the fraternity that men are to establish among themselves in truth and love.¹ Love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God.

1879 The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service and dialogue with his brethren, man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation.²

1880 A *society* is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. As an assembly that is at once visible and spiritual, a society endures through time: it gathers up the past and prepares for the future. By means of society, each man is established as an "heir" and receives certain "talents" that enrich his identity and whose fruits he must develop.³ He rightly owes loyalty to the communities of which he is part and respect to those in authority who have charge of the common good.

1881 Each community is defined by its purpose and consequently obeys specific rules; but "the *human person* . . . is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions."⁴

1882 Certain societies, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to the nature of man; they are necessary to him. To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions must be encouraged "on both national and international levels, which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs."⁵ This "*socialization*" also expresses the natural tendency for human beings to associate with one another for the sake of attaining objectives that exceed individual capacities. It develops the qualities of the person, especially the sense of initiative and responsibility, and helps guarantee his rights.⁶

1883 Socialization also presents dangers. Excessive intervention by the state can threaten personal freedom and initiative. The teaching of the Church has elaborated the principle of *subsidiarity*, according to which "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good."⁷

1884 God has not willed to reserve to himself all exercise of power. He entrusts to every creature the functions it is capable of performing, according to the capacities of its own nature. This mode of governance ought to be followed in social life. The way God acts in governing the world, which bears witness to such great regard for human freedom,

should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities. They should behave as ministers of divine providence.

1885 The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to all forms of collectivism. It sets limits for state intervention. It aims at harmonizing the relationships between individuals and societies. It tends toward the establishment of true international order.

II. CONVERSION AND SOCIETY

1886 Society is essential to the fulfillment of the human vocation. To attain this aim, respect must be accorded to the just hierarchy of values, which "subordinates physical and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones:"⁸

Human society must primarily be considered something pertaining to the spiritual. Through it, in the bright light of truth, men should share their knowledge, be able to exercise their rights and fulfill their obligations, be inspired to seek spiritual values; mutually derive genuine pleasure from the beautiful, of whatever order it be; always be readily disposed to pass on to others the best of their own cultural heritage; and eagerly strive to make their own the spiritual achievements of others. These benefits not only influence, but at the same time give aim and scope to all that has bearing on cultural expressions, economic, and social institutions, political movements and forms, laws, and all other structures by which society is outwardly established and constantly developed.⁹

1887 The inversion of means and ends,¹⁰ which results in giving the value of ultimate end to what is only a means for attaining it, or in viewing persons as mere means to that end, engenders unjust structures which "make Christian conduct in keeping with the commandments of the divine Law-giver difficult and almost impossible."¹¹

1888 It is necessary, then, to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the human person and to the permanent need for his *inner conversion*, so as to obtain social changes that will really serve him. The acknowledged priority of the conversion of heart in no way eliminates but on the contrary imposes the obligation of bringing the appropriate remedies to institutions and living conditions when they are an inducement to sin, so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it.¹²

1889 Without the help of grace, men would not know how "to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil, and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil only makes it worse."¹³ This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Charity inspires a life of self-giving: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it."¹⁴

THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

ARTICLE 3 SOCIAL JUSTICE

1928 Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.

I. RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN PERSON

1929 Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him:

What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.³⁵

1930 Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy.³⁶ If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role to remind men of good will of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims.

1931 Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity."³⁷ No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a "neighbor," a brother.

1932 The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."³⁸

1933 This same duty extends to those who think or act differently from us. The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require the forgiveness of offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies.³⁹ Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one's enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy.

II. EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCES AMONG MEN

1934 Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity.

1935 The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it:

Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.⁴⁰

1936 On coming into the world, man is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life. He needs others. Differences appear tied to age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and the distribution of wealth.⁴¹ The "talents" are not distributed equally.⁴²

1937 These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures:

I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others. . . . I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one. . . . And so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal,

with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another. . . . I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me.⁴³

1938 There exist also *sinful inequalities* that affect millions of men and women. These are in open contradiction of the Gospel:

Their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace.⁴⁴

III. HUMAN SOLIDARITY

1939 The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of "friendship" or "social charity," is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood.⁴⁵

An error, "today abundantly widespread, is disregard for the law of human solidarity and charity, dictated and imposed both by our common origin and by the equality in rational nature of all men, whatever nation they belong to. This law is sealed by the sacrifice of redemption offered by Jesus Christ on the altar of the Cross to his heavenly Father, on behalf of sinful humanity."⁴⁶

1940 Solidarity is manifested in the first place by the distribution of goods and remuneration for work. It also presupposes the effort for a more just social order where tensions are better able to be reduced and conflicts more readily settled by negotiation.

1941 Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity: solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples. International solidarity is a requirement of the moral order; world peace depends in part upon this.

1942 The virtue of solidarity goes beyond material goods. In spreading the spiritual goods of the faith, the Church has promoted, and often opened new paths for, the development of temporal goods as well. And so throughout the centuries has the Lord's saying been verified: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well":⁴⁷

For two thousand years this sentiment has lived and endured in the soul of the Church, impelling souls then and now to the heroic charity of monastic farmers, liberators of slaves, healers of the sick, and messengers of faith, civilization, and science to all generations and all peoples for the sake of creating the social conditions capable of offering to everyone possible a life worthy of man and of a Christian.⁴⁸