

## Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching



"All of humanity must think of the parable of the rich man and the beggar. Humanity must translate it into contemporary terms, in terms of economy and politics..."

"We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, the Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors. In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility. Riches and freedom create a special obligation. And so, in the name of solidarity that binds us all together in a common humanity, I again proclaim the dignity of every human person: the rich man and Lazarus are both human beings, both of them equally created in the image and likeness of God, both of them equally redeemed by Christ, at a great price..."

Pope John Paul II, Homily at Yankee Stadium, October 2, 1979.

### 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. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition. 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 the poor and vulnerable.

### 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.

### Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

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 recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable 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'

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Today...the word "justice" is so commonplace...that it has come to mean everything and nothing. For some, it conjures up images of picket lines and angry protestors. For other, the word "justice" evokes the image of a blind-folded woman holding scales in one hand and a sword of retribution in the other. For still other, it evokes wronged victims having their day in court. Common to all these images of justice is some notion of vengeance or revenge. Whatever the debatable merits of these connotations, justice from a Christian perspective has an entirely different meaning... God's justice...is not principally about vengeance or retribution but about restoring people to right relationship with God, themselves, others, and the environment (pp.26, 27, **Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice by Father Daniel Groody, CSC**).


The Bible speaks of a just individual who is in "right relation" to God and others, with a special concern for those "others" who are powerless or marginal (Job 4:3f., 29:12-16, 31:16-19; Prov. 31:9). Justice conveys the sense of "rightness" or "integrity," things being as they should be... God is just when he acts as God should, defending or vindicating his people... People are just when they are in right relationship to God and to other humans...(pp. 23,24; **What Does the Lord Require? A Bibliographical Essay on the Bible and Social Justice by Fr. John Donahue, SJ**).


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 sisters and brothers 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 not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. 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.


## PAPAL & VATICAN DOCUMENTS


 **Rerum Novarum** (On the Condition of Workers). Pope Leo XIII. May 15, 1891


 **Quadragesimo Anno** (On Reconstructing the Social Order). Pope Pius XI. May 15, 1931.


 **Pacem in Terris** (On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty). Pope John XXIII. April 11, 1963.


 **Gaudium et Spes** (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). Second Vatican Council. December 7, 1965.


 **Populorum Progressio** (On Promoting the Development of Peoples). Pope Paul VI. March 26, 1967.


 **Octogesima Adveniens** (On the Occasion of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum). May 14, 1971.


 **Justice in the World.** Synod of Bishops. Rome, 1971.

 **Redemptor Hominis** (Redeemer of Man). Pope John Paul II. March 4, 1979.

 **Laborem Exercens** (On Human Work). Pope John Paul II. September 14, 1981.

 **Sollicitudo Rei Socialis** (The Social Concern of the Church). Pope John Paul II. December 31, 1987.

 **Centesimus Annus** (On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum). John Paul II. May 1, 1991.

 **Caritas in Veritate** (Charity in Truth). Pope Benedict. June 29, 2009.