

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

Dignity of the Human Person

As children of God created in God's image, human persons have a preeminent place in creation. Human dignity is the result of human existence. It is not earned by achievements or bestowed by any authorities other than God. It is not dependent on race, creed, color, economic class, political power, social status, culture, personal abilities, gender, sexual orientation or any other dimensions by which people discriminate social groupings.

Rights and Responsibilities

All human persons enjoy inalienable rights. These rights belong to the person because of his or her being a person; they are not granted by society or government. Nor are they earned by achievement, wealth or any other measure of human production. These rights are realized in community. They are essential for the promotion of justice, human development, and solidarity. They are to be respected and protected by all the institutions of society and by all members of society. With human rights come the responsibilities to honor and protect the rights of all others and to build the kind of society that protects and nourishes the rights of all.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The option for the poor and vulnerable is a principle in Catholic social thought which give priority attention to the needs and rights of those who are economically disadvantaged and, as a result, suffer oppression and powerlessness. Based upon the principle of the sacred dignity of each and every person, this principle calls us to look first to those whose dignity is most often ignored, overlooked, at risk, or disdained.

Promoting Peace

Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among humans and among nations. Catholic social thought calls forcefully for an end to the arms race and widespread trafficking in arms. Progressive disarmament is essential to future security. In order to promote peace and the conditions of peace, an effective international authority is necessary.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Work can and must serve an individual's humanity and dignity. Work is the way that humans share in the activity of God and express their sacred dignity as human persons, children of God. Workers have the right to wages sufficient to support a family, to health care, leisure, pension and accident insurance and a decent work environment. Work is necessary for earthly progress and the development of God's Reign on the earth. (On Human Work)

Solidarity

We all belong to one human family. As such we have mutual obligations to promote the rights and development of all people across communities, nations and the world, irrespective of national boundaries. In particular, the rich nations have responsibilities toward the poor nations, and people with wealth and resources are linked in the divine economy with those who lack them. Those who remain untouched or unchanged by the suffering of their brothers and sisters around the world are suffering from serious spiritual underdevelopment. They need solidarity for their own salvation. The structures of the international order must reflect true biblical justice.

Care for God's Creation

People are to respect and share the resources of the earth, since we are all part of the community of creation. By our work we are co-creators in the continuing development of the earth.

Community and the Common Good

The common good is the total of all those conditions of social living – economic, political, sociological and cultural – which make it possible for women and men readily and fully to achieve the perfection of their humanity. Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good. In Catholic social thought, the common good is not simply the sum of individual goods. It is not, as in utilitarian ethics, the sum of the good of the greatest number of people. That approach presumes that some people will, realistically, be left out or excluded from the benefits of social advance – and accepts that fact. Catholic social thought emphasizes and insists upon the participation of each and every person in the common good. It stands in challenging contrast to many contemporary cultures' heightened individualism.