

11. PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING



Catholic social teaching relates to matters dealing with the collective welfare of humanity. The teaching is especially concerned with the poorest members of society. This concern echoes the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and recalls the teachings of Jesus Christ recorded in the New Testament.

The social teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith. The Church, in its social teaching and its ensuing social mission, seeks to be true to the demands of the Gospel.



Human Dignity

Every person is created in the image of God. Therefore, each and every person is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. The dignity of the person grants them inalienable rights – political, legal, social, and economic rights. This is the most important principle of Catholic Social Teaching because it is from our dignity as human persons that all other rights and responsibilities flow.



Human Equality

Equality of all people comes from their inherent human dignity. There are many differences amongst people — differences in gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, education, interests, abilities, appearance, ideological outlook, cultural background and so on. These differences are part of God's plan, but discrimination against anyone on the grounds of any of these differences is not. All people must be treated equally.



Respect for Human Life

All people, through every stage of life, have inherent dignity and a right to life that is consistent with that dignity. Human life at every stage is precious and, therefore, worthy of protection and respect.



The Principle of Association

The human person is not only sacred but also social. The way we organise society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to develop. People achieve fulfilment by association with others – in families and other social institutions. As the centrepiece of society, the family must be protected, and its stability never undermined.



The Principle of Participation

People have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Everyone has the right not to be shut out from participating in those institutions necessary for human fulfilment, such as work, education and political participation.



The Principle of the Common Good

Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good. The common good is about respecting the rights and responsibilities of all people. The individual does not have unfettered rights at the expense of others, but nor are individual rights to be subordinated to the needs of the group.



The Principle of Solidarity

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to one another transcend national, racial, economic, and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. The principle of solidarity requires of us that we do not concern ourselves solely with our own individual lives, but live and act in solidarity with the entire human race. We need to be aware of what is going on in the world around us.



Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable

Our Catholic tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. The good of society as a whole requires it. It is especially important that we look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.



The Principle of Stewardship

We have a responsibility to care for the gifts God has given us. This includes the environment, our personal talents, and other resources.



The Universal Destination of Goods

The Earth and all it produces are intended for every person. Private ownership is acceptable, but there is also a responsibility to ensure all have enough to live in dignity. If we have more than we need, there is a social mortgage to pay to ensure others do not go without.



The Principle of Subsidiarity

No higher level of organisation (such as government) should perform any function that can best be handled at a lower level (such as families and local communities) by those who are closer to the issues or problems.



The Integrity of Creation

We are becoming more aware that a religious outlook and an ethical system have to embrace every living thing. The extent of ozone depletion, deforestation, extinction of species, contamination from toxic and nuclear wastes, and global warming indicates that human beings have been behaving as callous masters of a pliant earth, taking whatever they want from it. We must recognise that everything belongs to God and we are merely guests on God's earth. We must treat the earth as we do our home.

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