

THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

The teachings of the Gospel and the Church on God's plan for humanity are not only about how individuals should live, but also about the right ordering of human society. This is to be in accordance with truth, love, justice and peace – illuminated, restored and fulfilled in Christ. Salvation is for the whole person, and for all people together.

Our true homeland is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and we do not have on this earth a lasting city (Heb 13:14). Yet God's will is that we plant seeds of the final Kingdom through our actions on our pilgrim journey through this world, restoring all things in Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Transformation of society through Christ – culture, science, art, economics, business, politics, etc. – is the special mission of the laity: we are to build a civilisation of love. As the Gospel permeates the world, the God-given natural identity of things is not destroyed but fulfilled.

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) opened a new era in developing Church teachings on these matters, drawn from divine revelation. These teachings do not concern technical issues of economics, or specific political programs – the Church as such has no special expertise or divine guidance in such things. Rather, the social doctrines taught by the Magisterium of the Pope and Bishops concern the general religious and moral principles that must guide political, economic and other social realities. The laity put these into effect in concrete reality using their own discernment and expertise concerning particular situations – the Church does not bind the faithful to one or other specific solution.

THE SOCIAL NATURE OF HUMAN PERSONS

- Human beings, created in the image of God, are persons: they have intelligence and free will.
- Each person is unique and unrepeatable, and has a transcendent dignity.
- We are social by nature: we come into being and develop only in relationship with others.
- This reflects the Holy Trinity: three persons, utterly one in being and nature.
- We are not mere cogs in a machine: society exists to serve the human person.
- The family and the State are societies corresponding most directly to human nature.
- Widespread participation in voluntary associations is to be encouraged.
- The principle of subsidiarity is that neither the State nor any larger society should substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies.
- Society is not meant to be morally neutral: it should promote the exercise of virtue.
- Sin has damaged society: conversion of hearts is needed, and appeal to the abounding grace of Christ.

HUMAN RIGHTS

- Human rights are founded on the dignity of the person. Recognised by reason and confirmed by faith, they derive from God, and are universal, inviolable and inalienable.
- Rights and responsibilities go together; to every right corresponds the duty of others to respect it.
- Basic rights include the right to life (from conception till natural death); to grow up in a united family; to education; to work; to establish a family; to religious freedom. Nations also have rights.

THE FAMILY

- The family is the first natural society and the vital cell of all society.
- Marriage as the indissoluble union between one man and one woman was established by God in creating the human race, as the natural foundation of the family.
- No power can modify the basic reality of marriage, or abolish the natural right to enter into it.
- Christ raised marriage between the baptised to the further dignity of being a Sacrament.

THE COMMON GOOD

- The common good is “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily”.
- It has three elements:
 1. Respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person;
 2. Prosperity – the development of society’s spiritual and temporal goods;
 3. The peace and security of the group and of its members.
- We must all work for the common good. The common good of the whole human family calls for an organisation of society on the international level.

AUTHORITY AND THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY

- All authority is ultimately from God, and derives from him its moral force and obligation.
- Every human community needs an authority in order to endure and develop.
- The existence of the State derives from human nature, and thus belongs to the order given by God.
- The choice of constitution and appointment of rulers belongs to the free decision of citizens.
- Different political constitutions are legitimate, as long as they contribute to the community’s good.
- Democracy best ensures the right of the people to choose and replace its rulers.
- Division and balance of powers helps ensure the rule of law prevails, not arbitrary personal will.
- Authority must be committed to the common good of society, and use morally acceptable means.
- Unjust laws are not binding in conscience: there is a right and duty of conscientious objection.
- Armed resistance to political tyranny can be legitimate, but under strict conditions.
- A healthy civic community needs participation and information, with the media truly at its service.
- Church and State, mutually independent and self-governing, should cooperate to serve human beings.

FREEDOM

- God has given us the dignity of freedom, by which we each shape our world, and our very selves.
- Our created freedom is limited: it is always freedom in the truth, not ‘freedom from the truth’.
- Freedom respects the moral law of goodness inscribed in our natures by God, or it destroys itself.
- Political authority must guarantee the conditions for the exercise of freedom.
- It may only limit freedom when someone is violating the rights of others or the common good.
- Religious freedom is fundamental: within the above limits, it is not to be restrained.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Respect for the human person considers the other as “another self.”
- The equality of human beings concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.
- Differences among persons also belong to God’s plan, who wills that we should need one another.
- Our equal dignity calls us to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities.
- Solidarity is when a group has a common interest. Seeing each other as brothers and sisters, we are concerned for the welfare of each and all, leading to the sharing of spiritual and material goods.
- The Gospel leads us to have a ‘preferential option for the poor’, giving priority to their needs.

THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND WORKERS

- Work is part of God’s original plan for human beings, his image, who fulfil themselves partly by activating their capacities to help shape and cultivate this world, and further the common good.
- Work is a duty, both to develop ourselves and to serve others: idleness is harmful, activity is a good.
- Yet work is not our final goal: God is. Weekly ‘sabbath rest’ (a right) ensures work is not our idol.
- Because of original sin, work became a toil and burden.
- A Christian taking this burden on in union with Christ brings redemption into this negative aspect.
- The dignity of work derives not primarily from what is produced, but from the fact that it is the self-realisation of a human person.
- Thus ‘work is for man, not man for work.’ The worker is not a mere instrument of production.
- So in the scale of values, labour has priority over capital, which is more a means to an end.
- The goal should be for workers to share in ownership, management and profits.
- Work expresses and enhances the worker’s human dignity, is necessary to maintain a family, to have a right to property, and to contribute to the common good.
- Thus work is a right, which must be made available to all who are capable of it.
- Full employment is a necessary objective of a just society.
- The State, business, organisations, unions, all contribute to the conditions ensuring this.
- These various agents must support families, not penalise them.
- Women’s right to work and their equality in the workplace must be defended, in such a way that their specific vocation is taken into account.
- Rights of the vulnerable (e.g. children, immigrants) must be defended and exploitation prevented.
- Agricultural work merits special attention; in some countries land redistribution is needed.

THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

- Workers’ rights include a just wage; rest; a physically and morally safe work environment; old-age pension, insurance; social security for maternity; the right to assemble and form associations.
- A wage is not guaranteed as just, simply from the employer and employee having agreed to it.
- A just wage takes into account what is needed for workers and their families to live worthily.
- Workers have the right to strike, when necessary, and other means to gain their rights have failed.
- Unions for defending the rights of workers have a key role to play.
- Industrial relations should be marked by cooperation for justice rather than antagonism.
- Globalisation and technological change present opportunities and challenges; the good of the human person will always remain at the centre of evaluating issues of work and economy.

ECONOMIC LIFE

- The goods of this world primarily have a universal destination: God intends them for all people.
- Within this context, private property is legitimate and a right – but wealth exists to be shared.
- Morality and economics are distinct but related. Efficiency is itself an important value so that resources are not wasted, yet economic growth cannot be at the expense of whole groups.
- Economic initiative is a basic value and right; the State should limit this only for the common good.
- ‘Capitalism’ understood as a system recognising the positive role of business, the market, private property and free human creativity is affirmed by the Church – but not a system where economic freedom is unrestrained by a legal framework to protect broader human freedom and well-being.
- The free market and the State act in complementary ways for the common good.
- Business serves the common good – economic and social goods of those involved, and of society.
- A business rightly pursues profit, but also respects broader human values and the dignity of all.
- Consumers should make responsible choices. ‘Consumerism’ pursues possessions and artificial needs at the expense of deeper human goods – truth, beauty, goodness, communion with others.
- ‘Being’ is more fundamental than ‘having’.
- The financial system serves economic growth, but must not become an end unto itself.

STEWARDSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- God created our world as good, entrusting it to humanity to care for its harmony and development – a ‘garden’ of which we are stewards. (cf. *Gen* 2:15)
- The world in its harmony and beauty has value in itself; it gives glory to God, and leads us to a sense of mystery and gratitude.
- Wounded by human sin, the world shares also in Christ’s redemption, and is destined at the end to be fully purified and renewed: the new creation.
- By the spiritual power of intellect, we share in the light of God’s mind: though bodily we are part of, and at one with, the material universe, we also surpass it, and have a certain ‘mastery’ over it. Science and technology are in themselves positive.
- But use of science and technology must always respect human persons, as well as other creatures, their nature and interrelationships. Our use of the earth must not be arbitrary, but must stay within the limits and conditions inherent in God’s original gift. The sense that all is God’s creation leads to ecological respect.
- So we avoid the false extremes of seeing nature as a mere object subject to our absolute domination, exploitation, consumption and quest for profit; or on the other hand, ‘divinising’ nature and earth, placing them above human dignity (or even making nature untouchable, with human activity seen as a mere blight upon it).
- The earth is our common home, and care for the common good of the environment is a universal duty. This is part of our responsibility not only to people of our own time, but also to future generations. Resources must be used equitably; it is often the poor or indigenous peoples who suffer most from environmental degradation.
- Among many issues indicated as needing urgent attention are biodiversity; climate; pollution; water; deforestation; energy; non-renewable resources; urban decline.
- Wisdom is needed to harmonise different goods, such as economic growth and environmental care, and to take into account uncertainties in our knowledge.
- Population policy is one part of development strategy, but may never contradict the wider sphere of moral values and the total good of the human person: a holistic ‘human ecology’ that respects human life, sexuality and freedom as God planned.
- Environmental responsibility concerns individuals; the state; and the international community. Dialogue, research and information are essential.
- God calls us to conversion to an ‘integral ecology’ permeating life, spirituality and culture; to lifestyles not of greedy consumption and waste, but sacrifice and sharing.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- The human race is one family, and there should be international community and cooperation for our common good.
- International law is key to international order; national sovereignty is important though not absolute.
- The Church favours some universal public authority arising from mutual agreement, though not so as to replace individual sovereign states.
- International cooperation is needed in the fight against poverty and for development; dealing with the issues of foreign debt; and safeguarding the collective good of the environment.

PEACE: THE FRUIT OF JUSTICE AND LOVE

- Peace is more than the absence of war or the balance of power: it is the tranquillity of order, and the fruit of justice and love.
- A war of aggression is intrinsically immoral.
- However, a state can legitimately defend itself against aggression, as long as the conditions stated by 'just war doctrine' are rigorously verified by those with responsibility for the common good:
 - (1) the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
 - (2) all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
 - (3) there must be serious prospects of success;
 - (4) the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. (The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.)
- Armed forces existing for this purpose truly contribute towards peace.
- Members of the armed forces must resist orders to commit crimes against the law of nations.
- Innocent victims and civil populations are especially to be defended.
- General, balanced and controlled disarmament is to be pursued.
- 'Deterrence' as a strategy gives rise to strong moral reservations.
- The use of weapons of mass destruction is condemned by the Church.
- The promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the Church's mission of continuing Christ's work of redemption on earth.

Some of the major documents of the Church's Social Doctrine

Pope Leo XIII	<u>Rerum Novarum</u>	(15 May 1891)	Rights of workers and the poor; just ordering of society; right to private property; rejection of socialism; right to form unions; collaboration rather than class struggle.
Pope Pius XI	<u>Quadragesimo Anno</u>	(15 May 1931)	40 th anniversary of <i>Rerum Novarum</i> ; crisis of 1929; subsidiarity, solidarity, co-operation.
	<u>Non Abbiamo Bisogno</u>	(29 June 1931)	Protest against abuse of power by the fascists in Italy.
	<u>Mit Brennender Sorge</u>	(14 March 1937)	Encyclical against Nazism (smuggled into Germany, read out in all Catholic churches).
	<u>Divini Redemptoris</u>	(19 March 1937)	Against atheistic communism.
Venerable Pope Pius XII	<u>Christmas Radio Messages</u>	(1939-55)	Peace; international order; democracy; morality and law; progress in technology.
Pope Saint John XXIII	<u>Mater et Magistra</u>	(15 May 1961)	Building communion with all people in truth, justice and love; unjust disparities of wealth; issues for farmers; international aid; centrality of personal dignity.
	<u>Pacem in Terris</u>	(11 April 1963)	Universal peace; personal rights and duties; equality; State authority and its limits; international order; refugees; minorities; disarmament; universal public authority.
Second Vatican Council	<u>Gaudium et Spes</u>	(7 December 1965)	The common good; love of neighbour; equality; social justice; marriage and family; culture; economy and society; politics; solidarity between peoples; peace.
	<u>Dignitatis Humanae</u>	(7 December 1965)	The right to religious liberty (freedom from coercion) grounded in dignity of the person.
Pope Saint Paul VI	<u>Populorum Progressio</u>	(26 March 1967)	True development of the whole person and of all people; global solidarity and justice.
	<u>Octogesima Adveniens</u>	(14 May 1971)	Issues of urbanisation; the condition of young people, women; unemployment; discrimination; emigration; population growth; media; the environment.
Pope Saint John Paul II	<u>Laborem Exercens</u>	(14 September 1981)	Dignity of workers, work; workers' rights; spirituality of work.
	<u>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</u>	(30 December 1987)	20 th anniversary of <i>Populorum Progressio</i> ; justice, solidarity with Third World.
	<u>Centesimus Annus</u>	(1 May 1991)	100 th anniversary of <i>Rerum Novarum</i> ; teaching developed, in light of fall of communism.
	<u>Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church</u>	(2 April 2004)	
Pope Benedict XVI	<u>Caritas in Veritate</u>	(29 June 2009)	Link of development, charity and truth; issues of inequality, environment, globalisation.
Pope Francis	<u>Laudato Si'</u>	(24 May 2015)	Care for 'our common home': stewardship of the environment, and its spirituality.