



SOCIAL JUSTICE



"Learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." Isaiah 1:17 (NABRE)

Social Justice is a cornerstone of Catholic teaching, rooted in the Gospel message of love, mercy, and solidarity. It reflects the Church's commitment to uphold the dignity of every human person and to promote the common good in all aspects of society. Drawing from Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and centuries of tradition, Catholic Social Justice principles call us to transform the world by addressing systemic inequalities, fostering peace, and advocating for the vulnerable and marginalized.

At its heart, social justice emphasizes that all people are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27) and are endowed with inherent dignity and worth. This dignity is not contingent upon race, gender, economic status, or any other human condition but flows from our shared nature and divine origin. As such, society and its institutions are tasked with respecting and protecting this dignity through just laws, equitable structures, and compassionate service.

The Church's social teaching provides a framework for navigating the challenges of modern society, offering moral guidance on issues ranging from poverty and inequality to environmental stewardship and human rights. These teachings are not abstract ideals but practical principles meant to inspire action, challenging us to live out our faith in service to others.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) and Sacred Scripture provide a framework for addressing modern social challenges. Below, key principles are outlined to guide understanding and reflection.

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God's Creation

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The principle of **Life and Dignity of the Human Person** is foundational to Catholic Social Teaching and is explicitly supported by the Church. It affirms that every human life is sacred, as each person is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27; CCC 1700, 1929). Human dignity is not only inherent but also elevated through Christ's redemptive sacrifice, calling all to participate in the divine life (CCC 1701-1702).

The Catechism emphasizes that the dignity of life must be respected and protected from conception to natural death (CCC 2270-2277). This includes opposing practices that directly undermine the sanctity of life, such as abortion (CCC 2271), euthanasia (CCC 2277), and capital punishment (CCC 2267, as revised by *Evangelium Vitae*). Additionally, CCC 1930 underscores that respect for the human person entails recognition of the rights that flow from this dignity. These rights existed before society and are superior to society in the sense that they are inherent to human nature, given by God, and not granted by societal structures. These fundamental and inalienable rights serve as the basis for the moral legitimacy of authority. When these rights are disregarded, society and authority undermine their own legitimacy and risk relying solely on force or coercion.

Furthermore, societal structures and laws must respect and uphold the dignity of all people, especially the poor and vulnerable (CCC 1931, 1944-1948), fostering justice and promoting the common good (CCC 1905-1909). These teachings challenge individuals and institutions to create a culture of life that prioritizes the dignity and sanctity of every human person.

Questions for reflection:

- In what ways are you actively participating in the life of your community, parish, or workplace? How could you do more?
 - What responsibilities do you have as a Catholic to address issues like poverty, inequality, and discrimination in your community?
 - Are our laws and society's approach to these issues in line with Catholic social teaching?
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Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The principle of **Call to Family, Community, and Participation** emphasizes the central role of the family as the foundational unit of society and the importance of active participation in community life. The Church teaches that the family is "the original cell of social life" (CCC 2207) and that participation in social, economic, and political life is both a right and a duty for all individuals (CCC 1913-1917). Society flourishes when families are supported and individuals contribute to the common good, respecting the dignity of every person. This principle challenges Catholics to build just communities where every person can participate meaningfully, particularly the marginalized, and to promote policies that strengthen families and foster communal bonds.

Human dignity is closely tied to the ability to engage in family and community life. However, various societal issues erode this dignity and disrupt the bonds of family and community, such as:

- **Capital punishment:** Undermines the sanctity of life and contradicts the call to reconciliation and restoration.
- **Same-sex marriage:** Diverges from the Catholic understanding of marriage as a union between one man and one woman ordered toward procreation and family life.
- **Legalized abortion:** Violates the right to life, the foundational principle of all human rights.
- **Materialism and pornography:** Objectify individuals, reducing relationships to transactions and gratification rather than love and mutual respect.
- **Unrestrained commercialism:** Exploits resources and people, prioritizing profit over the common good.
- **Drug trafficking and abuse:** Destroy lives, families, and communities, fostering violence and dependency.
- **Euthanasia:** Denies the intrinsic value of life, especially in its vulnerable stages.

These issues undermine the Church's call to foster authentic family life, communal bonds, and participation in societal structures that promote the common good. The Church calls for action to promote inclusion and defend the common good (CCC 1927).

Questions for reflection:

- Do our laws and institutions support meaningful participation for all?
 - How can we address inequalities, such as those faced by immigrants and refugees?
 - How can Catholics influence political and social systems to better reflect the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?
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Rights and Responsibilities

The principle of **Rights and Responsibilities** emphasizes that every person has fundamental rights rooted in their inherent dignity as a child of God, as well as corresponding responsibilities to respect the rights of others and work for the common good. The Church teaches that society must ensure respect for individual rights, which include the necessities of life such as food, work, education, and healthcare (CCC 1907-1908). Alongside these rights, individuals are called to fulfill their duties to others and society, contributing to peace and justice (CCC 1905-1909). Rights and responsibilities are interconnected. While individuals possess rights that must be respected, they also carry the responsibility to fulfill their moral obligations, work toward the common good, and protect the rights of others.

Questions for Reflection:

- Where do you see examples of these rights being violated, and how can we respond as Catholics?
 - How do our society and its laws promote or hinder access to basic human necessities?
 - What can we do to advocate for greater social well-being and inclusivity for the marginalized in our community?
 - How do our societal structures and laws work to maintain peace and security?
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Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The principle of the **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable** calls for Catholics to prioritize the needs of those most marginalized in society, recognizing their inherent dignity and the moral imperative to care for them. The Church emphasizes that love for the poor is a hallmark of Christian charity, urging us to make ourselves "a neighbor to others and actively serve them" (CCC 1932). This includes combatting discrimination in all its forms, as such injustices deny individuals their fundamental rights and dignity, creating barriers to their full participation in society (CCC 1935). Addressing systemic injustices and ensuring access to the basic necessities of life—such as food, clothing, shelter, and education—are essential to enabling the vulnerable to flourish (CCC 2443-2447). By caring for the least among us and working to eradicate discrimination, we fulfill our moral duty to uphold the dignity of every person and Christ's call to love and serve Him through others (Matthew 25:40; CCC 2449).

Question for reflection:

- Does our society achieve this?
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The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The principle of **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers** emphasizes that work is not merely a means of earning a living but a way of participating in God's creative action and contributing to the common good (CCC 1897-1898). The Church teaches that work honors the gifts of the Creator and allows individuals to fulfill their potential while serving society (CCC 2427). Workers must be treated with respect and justice, with their rights to fair wages, safe working conditions, and the ability to organize being upheld (CCC 2434). The economy must serve people, ensuring that work prioritizes human dignity over material gain and fosters both individual and societal flourishing (CCC 2428). Through their labor, individuals actively contribute to building a just and equitable society, reflecting their role as co-creators with God.

Questions for reflection:

- How does your work, whether in your career, home, or community, reflect your dignity as a child of God and contribute to the common good?
 - In what ways can we, as individuals or as a society, ensure that workers are treated justly, with fair wages, safe conditions, and respect for their rights?
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Solidarity

The principle of **Solidarity** calls for Catholics to recognize that all people are interconnected as members of the human family, transcending national, cultural, and economic differences. The Church teaches that solidarity is both a moral virtue and a social principle, requiring us to work for the common good and stand with the marginalized and oppressed (CCC 1939-1940). True authority, in harmony with solidarity, seeks the common good and employs morally licit means to achieve it, fostering justice and unity within society (CCC 1903). Solidarity also demands a commitment to peace, equitable distribution of resources, and upholding human dignity and rights (CCC 1941-1942). By living in solidarity, we reflect Christ's unity with humanity and fulfill the call to love our neighbor as ourselves, fostering peace and respecting the dignity of all (CCC 1931).

Questions for reflection:

- How can you actively stand in unity with those who are marginalized or suffering in your community?
 - In what ways does your daily life promote the common good and reflect Christ's call to love your neighbor?
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Care for God's Creation

The principle of **Care for God's Creation** emphasizes humanity's responsibility to steward the earth and its resources as a gift from God. The Church teaches that God entrusted creation to humanity, commanding us to "*cultivate and care for it*" (Genesis 2:15; CCC 2415). This stewardship requires respect for the integrity of creation, ensuring that natural resources are used sustainably and justly, with consideration for future generations (CCC 2415-2418). Environmental degradation, driven by greed and exploitation, contradicts our moral responsibility and harms both humanity and the planet. By caring for creation, we honor God as Creator and contribute to the common good.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can you practice greater care for God's creation in your daily life, such as through conservation or sustainable living?
 2. In what ways can your community or parish take action to protect the environment and promote stewardship of natural resources?
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Conclusion

Catholic Social Justice is a call to live out the Gospel by upholding the dignity of every human person, promoting the common good, and standing in solidarity with the vulnerable and oppressed. Rooted in Scripture and the teachings of the Church, these principles challenge us to transform society through love, justice, and service, reflecting the Kingdom of God on earth. By embracing these teachings, we become co-workers with Christ in building a world where peace, equity, and human flourishing prevail.

References:

- Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891).
- John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991).
- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015).