



## CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: OUR PERENNIAL TRADITION

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*An authentic Faith—which is never comfortable or completely personal—  
always involves a deep desire to change the world,  
to transmit values, to leave the earth somehow better than we found it.*

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 183.

The present moment demands that we rise above endless and useless discussion regarding terminologies and their underpinnings. While names mean different things for different people, the realities they describe, and our commanded response remain.

The University of the Incarnate Word abides by the Catholic Church’s call to remain faithful to the demands of the Gospel when faced with these realities, as clearly expressed in Matthew 25:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’

When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’

And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me no food, I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’

Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’

He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’

And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

In order to respond to this command from Jesus Christ, the University of the Incarnate Word employs modern Catholic social teaching (CST), which has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. Consequently, CST is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society.

In concrete terms, modern CST is a body of Catholic doctrine that offers a framework for understanding and addressing social issues. Its constitutive elements are:

- ◇ Scripture: Hearing the Word of God and putting it into practice.
- ◇ Sacraments: Celebrating the Word of God in a communal way that is expressed in prayer (i.e., reflection), worship (i.e., celebration), and lived action
- ◇ Social Mission: Concrete acts that put into practice the following core principles and themes:

### **Promotion of Human Dignity**

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. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. 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.

### **Promotion of 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.

### **Promotion of 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.

### **Promotion of the Common Good**

This principle stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people and indicates the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. It does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity. Belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains "common", because it is indivisible and because only together is it possible to attain it, increase it and safeguard its effectiveness, with regard also to the future. Just as the moral actions of an individual are accomplished in doing what is good, so too the actions of a society attain their full stature when they bring about the common

good. The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good.

### **Promotion of Solidarity**

Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity. Never before has there been such a widespread awareness of the bond of interdependence between individuals and peoples, which is found at every level. The very rapid expansion in ways and means of communication “in real time”, such as those offered by information technology, the extraordinary advances in computer technology, the increased volume of commerce and information exchange all bear witness to the fact that, for the first time since the beginning of human history, it is now possible — at least technically — to establish relationships between people who are separated by great distances and are unknown to each other.

In the presence of the phenomenon of interdependence and its constant expansion, however, there persist in every part of the world stark inequalities between developed and developing countries, inequalities stoked also by various forms of exploitation, oppression, and corruption that have a negative influence on the internal and international life of many States. The acceleration of interdependence between persons and peoples needs to be accompanied by equally intense efforts on the ethical-social plane, in order to avoid the dangerous consequences of perpetrating injustice on a global scale. This would have very negative repercussions even in the very countries that are presently more advantaged

### **Promotion of Subsidiarity**

Subsidiarity is among the most constant and characteristic directives of the Church’s social doctrine. It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities; in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and political expressions to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth. This is the realm of civil society, understood as the sum of the relationships between individuals and intermediate social groupings, which are the first relationships to arise, and which come about thanks to the creative subjectivity of the citizen. This network of relationships strengthens the social fabric and constitutes the basis of a true community of persons, making possible the recognition of higher forms of social activity.

### **Promotion of the Universal Destination of Goods**

This principle requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern. To this end, the preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force.

### **Promotion of the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods.

Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without health care and, above all, those without hope of a better future.

The Church' love for the poor is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, by the poverty of Jesus and by his attention to the poor. This love concerns material poverty and also the numerous forms of cultural and religious poverty.

The Church's, since her origin and in spite of the failing of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. Prompted by the Gospel injunction, "You have received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8), the Church teaches that one should assist one's fellow human in her/his various needs and fills the human community with countless works of corporal and spiritual mercy.

Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God, even if the practice of charity is not limited to almsgiving but implies addressing the social and political dimensions of the problem of poverty.

In her teaching the Church constantly returns to this relationship between charity and justice: When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice.

The Council Fathers strongly recommended that this duty be fulfilled correctly, remembering that what is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity. Love for the poor is certainly "incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use" (cf. Jas 5:1-6).

A basic moral test of this principle 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.

### **Promotion of 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.

### **Promotion of 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.

### **Promotion of Integral Human Development**

Integral Human Development (IHD) refers to a holistic approach to development that emphasizes the well-being of the whole person and every person, encompassing material, spiritual, social, cultural, and political dimensions. It moves beyond purely economic or technological progress to focus on the flourishing of individuals and communities, promoting human dignity, justice, and the common good.