

# Catholic Social Teaching: An Introduction

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# What is Catholic Social Teaching (CST)?

- Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on the organization of society.
- Its program: „The restoration and completion of the social order according to the plan on salvation of the Gospel.“ (Pope Pius XII, *Quadragesimo anno*, 1931)
- “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6, 33)

# Catholic Social Teaching: Its Basic Understanding

- Pope Leo XIII states: “The well-being of the state and society depends on the religion with which God is worshipped.” In addition to God as the Creator of the invisible and visible world, who sustains all being in existence, Christians revere Jesus Christ as King, confessing the Holy Trinity.
- Whoever is in the truth of the faith listens to the voice of Jesus Christ (John 18:37), who is the author of all graces. In Christ all things are renewed (Ephesians 1:10). In him and through him, the Church has all the means to overcome the world, whose prince is the father of lies (John 14:30 and 8:44)

# The Origins of Catholic Social Teaching

- The publication of Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* in 1891 marked the beginning of the development of a recognizable body of social teaching of the Catholic Church.
- It dealt with promotion of justice and peace, now established as integral to the church's mission.
- In the years which followed there have been numerous encyclicals and messages on social issues; various forms of Catholic action developed in different parts of the world; and social ethics was beginning to be taught in schools and seminaries.

# The Roots of Catholic Social Teaching (1)

1. Divine Revelation: Old Testament & New Testament
2. “Natural Law“, which is “written“ in creation and the hearts of each human person
3. Tradition of Church as proclaimed by Church Fathers and Teachers
4. Pronouncements of the Magisterium of the Church regarding its doctrine (on morality)
5. Pronouncements of the Magisterium of the Church regarding social questions (Encyclical writings, declarations, speeches)

**Main function of the Church: Guardian of the faith and guardian of the moral law**

# The Roots of Catholic Social Teaching (2)

- If we speak of a Christian social teaching/doctrine, then this must first of all refer to the revelation of God which was granted to mankind by grace and testified to in the Holy Scriptures.
- The instruction of God is the unconditional path to man's salvation: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, so also on earth” (Matthew 6:9-10).
- God's instruction is first found primarily in the Decalogue.
- The highest commandment is love – in a right order (ordo amoris) :  
“Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your thoughts and all your strength. Secondly, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these two.” (Matthew 22:35-40)

# Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law (1)

- Fundamental question: What is the good and just life? (Socrates)
- Natural law as a question about the nature / the essence of man: What is man? - What corresponds to his nature? What makes man a man?
- “Natural law is man's knowledge of law and justice as a requirement of true manhood. It is at the same time the knowledge of human dignity as a ground of obligation of an absolute nature.” (J. Messner)
- Basis of natural law: Classical Metaphysics
- From the knowledge of the being of the human being, arises also an ought

# Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law (2)

- Natural law is a part of ethics, which forms the background and the standard for state regulations.
- The central question of natural law is that of justice.
- Natural law contains moral-legal principles/principles of an “order of existence” (Messner), which oblige the individual and the legislator, such as the inviolability of life, honor, property, personal freedom, respect for contracts or the respect of social authority.
- There are “existential purposes” by which man cultivates his life and the world: Self preservation (physical and psychically), self perfection, expansion of experience, procreation, benevolent participation in the welfare of fellow human beings, social association for the promotion of general benefit (zoon politicon), the acquisition of knowledge and the worship of God.



# The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (1)

Every commentator has his or her own list of key principles and documents, and there is no official canon of principles or documents.

- **Human Dignity:** Being in the image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give. Challenges: Abortion, euthanasia, surrogacy, mandatory vaccination, etc.
- **Solidarity:** Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.

# The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (2)

- **Subsidiarity:** Locating the responsibilities of social life in the smallest unit: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and responsibility and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.” (Pope Pius XI.)
- **Other potential principles:** Authority, charity, distributism, social justice, sustainability

# The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (3)

- The **common good** is the central concept of Catholic Social Teaching and can be seen as the overall goal of a community and can also be described as the “allround realization of **justice**“ (Johannes Messner): All present and future as well as material, political, cultural, and metaphysical/religious goals of a community are placed in right order to one another.
- The common good is a whole and this is more than the sum of the individual partial goals.
- The common good is the supreme goal of the state. Any state cannot exist without a minimum of social morality among its citizens. The state itself is in turn part of the moral order and moral values.



Thank you very much for your attention