

# SOCIAL TEACHINGS

It sounds so simple, but life is both our right and our responsibility. We must each be an active participant of humanity, working not only for our benefit, but for the good of all people. This means we must be more aware of issues of social justice and good environmental stewardship, and integrate that awareness into our daily actions.

Each of us has the ability to make the world a safer, healthier and happier place for ourselves and for tomorrow's generation. As we follow the Way of the Heart, let us transform that ability into reality; let us actively live out justice, peace and respect for life.

## **Key Themes of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church**

### **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

Every single human being is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore each and every human being has dignity and is worthy of respect. This respect entails respect for their rights. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that human life is sacred, from conception to natural death.<sup>1</sup> Since every human being has dignity, every human being should have “everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom.” ([Guardium et Spes](#), #26)

The sacredness of all human life -- regardless of gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, race -- is valued. The emphasis is on people over things, being over having.

### **Dignity of Work, the Rights of the Worker and Economic Justice**

There is dignity in work. Through work, human beings participate in creation and help realize God's plan on earth. Work honors the gifts and talents that God has given to each one of us. Work is ‘for the worker, and not the worker for work’. Likewise, the economy must serve people, and profit cannot be the ultimate goal or purpose of economic activity. No human being can be reduced to a means of profit, because to do so is to enslave that person, which goes against his or her inherent dignity as a human being.<sup>2</sup> The Church teaches that workers have certain rights, including just wages which provide them the means to live a human life and care for their family<sup>3</sup>, the right to gainful employment, freedom from unjust discrimination, and to join unions and to strike when it is necessary<sup>4</sup>.

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

We each have rights and responsibilities. Every human being has the right to life and to the means of proper development of life - food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical attention, necessary

social services, security in case of sickness, inability to work, old age, or any other situation when through no fault of their own, a person is deprived of the means to provide for themselves.<sup>5</sup> These natural rights are inseparable from responsibilities and we all have the responsibility to respect those rights.<sup>6</sup>

The right to private property is not an absolute or unconditional right and must never be exercised when it goes against the common good. No one has the right not to share what he or she does not need when there are people who lack the necessities to live a dignified life.<sup>7</sup> In order to guarantee the common good, we must both protect human rights and fulfill our responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

### **Preferential Option for the Poor**

The test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.<sup>9</sup> Due to their special situation in society, the Church teaches us that the poor deserve preferential respect,<sup>10</sup> because if a society is to provide justice for all, the poor, the powerless, the marginalized have the most urgent claim.<sup>11</sup> The Church's option for the poor calls us to help those who are the most vulnerable, thereby strengthening the whole community, which is wounded when some of its members are marginalized and denied basic rights.<sup>12</sup> When there is extreme disparity between individuals, there is scandal against social justice and human dignity.<sup>13</sup> Such imbalance and scandal are also threaten lasting peace.<sup>14</sup>

### **Solidarity**

Solidarity helps us see other people and nations as our neighbors.<sup>15</sup> We are one, human family and we must go beyond our differences. We are called to overcome barriers of race, religion, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and economic status and work for global peace and justice.<sup>16</sup> Solidarity is determination to commit oneself to the common good, because we are all one family and we are responsible for each other.<sup>17</sup> Solidarity prevents rich nations from being indifferent to the poverty and lack of basic human rights experienced by people living in other nations.<sup>18</sup>

### **Stewardship of and Care for Creation**

God gave humans dominion over the earth's resources. However, the goods of creation are intended for the common good of all human beings and we are responsible for caring for the earth, using its resources wisely, and preserving these resources for future generations. We must respect the integrity of all creation.<sup>19</sup> Humans should treat animals with kindness because they are God's creatures and their existence glorifies him.<sup>20</sup> Animals are entrusted the stewardship of human beings and it is morally permissible to domesticate them or use them for food and clothing. However, it goes against human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.<sup>21</sup> We show respect for the Creator by caring for all of his creation.



## PAPAL DOCUMENTS

- 1891, [Rerum Novarum \(On the Condition of Labor\)](#) *Pope Leo XIII*. Equitable relations between capital and labor, rich and poor.
- 1931, [Quadragesimo Anno \[After Forty Years\] \(On the Reconstruction of the Social Order\)](#) *Pope Pius XI*. Justice as norm for social relationships that allow personal growth.
- 1961, [Mater et Magistra \(Christianity and Social Progress\)](#) *Pope John XXIII*. Response to unequal distribution of world's wealth and resources.
- 1963, [Pacem in Terris \(Peace on Earth\)](#) *Pope John XXIII*. Christians called to eliminate poverty and promote human rights and peace.
- 1967, [Populorum Progressio \(On the Development of Peoples\)](#) *Pope Paul VI*. Speaks to challenges of development for all peoples.
- 1971, [Octogesima Adveniens \(Call to Action\)](#) *Pope Paul VI*. Appeals for greater justice in all areas of life. Encourages Christians to reflect and to act.
- 1981, [Laborem Exercens \(On Human Work\)](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Work expresses and increases human dignity. People are subjects of work, not its objects.
- 1987, [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis \(On Social Concern\)](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Names "structures of sin." Calls for solidarity and "option for the poor" by wealthy nations.
- 1990, [Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Message for January 1, World Day of Peace.
- 1991, [Centesimus Annus \(Hundredth Year\)](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Identifies failure of socialist and market economies. Calls for a society of work, enterprise, and participation.
- 1995, [Evangelium Vitae \(Gospel of Life\)](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Calls for transformation from culture of death to life. Value and inviolability of human life from womb to tomb.
- 1997, [Developing Special Concern for the Homeless](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Lenten message for first year of preparation for Jubilee 2000.
- 1998, [Fides et Ratio \(Faith and Reason\)](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Faith and reason support each other and are basis for planetary ethics.
- 2002, [No Peace without Justice, No Justice without Forgiveness](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Message for World Day of Peace, January 1.

2004, [\*\*An Ever Timely Commitment: Teaching Peace\*\*](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Message for January 1, World Day of Peace.

2003, [\*\*Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment\*\*](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Message for January 1, World Day of Peace. 40th anniversary of [\*\*Pacem in Terris\*\*](#).

2005, [\*\*Do Not Be Overcome by Evil But Overcome Evil by Good\*\*](#) *Pope John Paul II*. Message for January 1, World Day of Peace.

2005, [\*\*Deus Caritas Est \(God Is Love\)\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Christian love links love of neighbor and justice.

2006, [\*\*In Truth, Peace\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Message for World Day of Peace, January 1.

2006, [\*\*Urbi et Orbi\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Christmas message calling for removal of barriers to peace.

2007, [\*\*The Human Person, the Heart of Peace\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Message for World Day of Peace, January 1.

2007, [\*\*Sacramentum Caritatis \(Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist\)\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Letter stresses social dimension of Eucharist.

2008, [\*\*The Human Family, a Community of Peace\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Message for World Day of Peace, January 1.

2009, [\*\*Fighting Poverty to Build Peace\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Message for World Day of Peace, January 1.

2009, [\*\*Caritas in Veritate \(Charity in Truth\)\*\*](#) *Pope Benedict XVI*. Message for World Day of Peace, January 1.