

PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING/DOCTRINE

The Church believes that all decisions which affect society have a moral dimension. So, when making decisions which affect social, economic, political, cultural, and family life, the following principles are to be promoted, embraced and protected:

Foundational Principle: Principle of Human Dignity

[Comes into play in every decision. We explored this principle in November of 2007. Materials related to it can be viewed on our www.ssjohnandpaul.org website under "Grace Archives".]

Every human person is made in the image and likeness of God and is endowed with a dignity that is intrinsic, inalienable, and inviolable.

CORE PRINCIPLE: THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMON GOOD

[Comes into play in every decision but the foundational principle of human dignity is not to be violated.]

DECISIONS IN ANY ONE AREA MUST HONOR THE SUM TOTAL OF THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS WHICH ALLOW PEOPLE, EITHER AS GROUPS OR AS INDIVIDUALS, TO REACH THEIR FULFILLMENT MORE FULLY AND MORE EASILY.

- ◆ The human person is not an individual first and then chooses to join a society. Human persons are intrinsically social and so have both rights and responsibilities toward the communities they are part of.
- ◆ The common good does not mean that all persons have a moral claim of equal access and use of all goods. Rather, all have a claim on and a moral right to access those goods necessary for a basic human dignity.
- ◆ The state does not own the goods of all but does have the moral responsibility to ensure that the common good is achieved as fully as possible, while respecting the legitimate autonomy of individuals and groups.
- ◆ The welfare of the most vulnerable and marginal as well as their active participation in the decision-making process are a moral barometer on whether the common good is truly being achieved in a given society
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Questions to Consider:

- 1) What reasons would you give another person who asked you why they should honor this principle of the common good?
- 2) What are ways you see this principle actively lived out in our society?
- 3) What are obstacles in our own lives to living out the common good and where do we see it not honored in today's society?
- 4) How does our stewardship of our own time, talent and resources reflect this core principle of the common good? Where does it fall short?
- 5) How much of the common good should we leave to charity? How much should we build into our social systems?

Further Principles:

[help us protect the principle of human dignity and give concrete expression to the principle of the common good]

- ◆ **Universal destination of all the goods of the earth with a preferential option for the poor:** all resources are to be owned/used responsibly, exercising a preferential option for those most in need and on the margin
- ◆ **Subsidiarity and Participation:** Decisions are to be made at the lowest level of authority possible so that people are able to participate in decisions that affect their own life. Higher levels of authority may intervene only when such intervention is necessary to protect human dignity and the true common good.
- ◆ **Solidarity:** In all decisions we are to work at achieving solidarity with those we most vigorously disagree with, so that such differences do not lead to violence or insurmountable antagonism.

[NB: Principles are taken from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Vatican City, 2005. Sections of the Compendium to read/reflect on: #160-208. [Available online at www.vatican.va/offices/index.htm]

SOME DOCUMENTS OF OUR CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING TRADITION

1891 <i>Rerum novarum</i> (On the Condition of Labor, Leo XIII)	<u>Phase I: The Church Responds to Modern Industrial World: Dominance of Local/National Economic Realities</u>
1931 <i>Quadragesimo anno</i> (On Reconstructing the Social Order, Pius XI)	<u>context:</u> rise of “modern”, developing world, industrial capitalism and socialist alternatives as challenge to more stable agrarian, hierarchical, organic model of the past
1939 and following years, <i>Christmas Radio Messages</i> of Pius XII	<u>focal points:</u> 1) protection of family stability through paternalistic view of the common good 2) rights of workers to fair wages, acceptable working conditions, free association and the excesses of capitalism of the time 3) natural right to private property 4) acceptance of limited state intervention but condemnation of socialism
1961 <i>Mater et magistra</i> (Christianity and Social Progress, John XXIII)	<u>Phase II: The Church Looks at an Interdependent World: Dominance of International Political Realities</u>
1963 <i>Pacem in terris</i> (Peace on Earth. John XXIII)	<u>context:</u> experience of horror of two world wars, establishment of east-west political and economic blocs, arms race and Cold War, end of colonialism and need for “development”
1965 <i>Gaudium et spes</i> (The Church in the Modern World, Vatican Council II)	<u>focal points:</u> 1) greater emphasis on the common good as the work of all people as key moral criterion
1967 <i>Populorum progressio</i> (On the Development of Peoples, Paul VI)	2) expanded understanding of human rights beyond basic economic rights for workers
1971 <i>Octogesima adveniens</i> (A Call to Action, Paul VI)	3) greater emphasis on the social debt/responsible use of private property as well as the right to it
1971 <i>Justice in the World</i> , Synod of Bishops	4) right to participation of all in economy, culture and politics, grounded in appreciation of human freedom as essential to human nature
1974 <i>Evangelii nuntiandi</i> (On Evangelization, Paul VI)	5) inviolable dignity yet social nature of every person
Bishop Conference Documents like U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral letters <i>The Challenge of Peace</i> (1983) and <i>Economic Justice for All</i> (1986); Latin American Bishops’ Medellin conference (1986), Pueblo (1979), all fit in this phase as well	6) dialogic relationship of church and world 7) responsibility for nations to aid “developing” nations and recognition of stronger state intervention to achieve justice 8) social justice as constitutive dimension of the gospel 9) excesses of both western-style capitalism and Marxist socialism 10) preferential option for the poor, vulnerable, youth embraced by the Church as a whole
1979 <i>Redemptor hominis</i> (The Redeemer of Humanity, John Paul II)	<u>Phase III: Church in the Emerging Post-Modern, Post-Industrial World: Dominance of Global Cultural and Economic Realities</u>
1981 <i>Laborem exercens</i> (On Human Work, John Paul II)	<u>context:</u> breakdown of East-West bloc and failure of communist socialism as economic, political model; failure of developmental model for emerging nations and increased disparity between rich/poor nations, emergence of a world perspective
1987 <i>Sollicitudo rei socialis</i> (The Social Concerns of the Church, John Paul II)	<u>focal points:</u> 1) solidarity as core justice virtue
1991 <i>Centesimus annus</i> (The 100 th Anniversary Year, John Paul II)	2) battle for a culture of life, a civilization of love 3) priority of labor and human subject over capital 4) recognition of energy and potential of capitalist economic model but condemnation of current western-style capitalism’s greed, consumerism 5) the need to protect humanity’s openness to the transcendent: strong critique of secularism
1995 <i>Evangelium vitae</i> (The Gospel of Life, John Paul II)	<u>Phase IV: Church in the Global Village</u>
2005 <i>Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church</i> (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005)	<u>context:</u> emergence of internet and instant global contact; rise of the European union, China, and others to contest U.S. global dominance; re-emergence of disparity within nations as much as between nations; global environmental concerns
2005, <i>Deus caritas est</i> (God is Love, Benedict XVI)	<u>focal points:</u> 1) critique of excessive freedom and emphasis on truth as context for true freedom 2) protection of traditional understanding of marriage and family 3) greater emphasis on environmental concerns 4) desire to see teaching as a more systematic “doctrine” than open-ended, evolving teaching 5) re-focus on Church’s evangelical and charitable role as primary