

Love, Life, and Dignity of the Human Person



*A Booklet to Help
Understand the Meaning
of Catholic Social Teaching*



Love, Life, and Dignity of the Human Person

*A Booklet to Help Understand the Meaning of
Catholic Social Teaching*

by

Rev. Leonard Andrie

*“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for
one of these least brothers of mine, you did for
me.”*

Matthew 25:40

This booklet is dedicated to the Blessed
Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Patroness of the Unborn.

Copyright © 2020 by Jennifer Spinler. Published 2020.

All rights reserved. All content may not be reproduced, in
whole or in part, without written permission of the author and
the copyright holder.

Editor: Jennifer Spinler

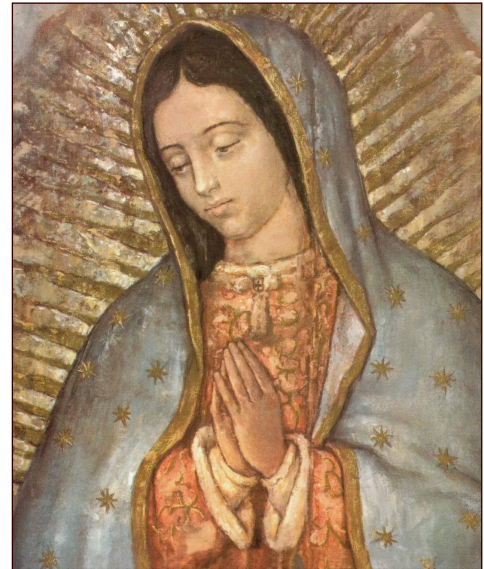
Designer: Jennifer Spinler

Cover design: Jennifer Spinler

Front/Back cover photograph: Courtesy of Jennifer Spinler; *Front*

cover illustration: *Creation of Adam*, (1508-1512) Michaelangelo

All other images and illustrations are in the public domain.



Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction: Catholic Social Teaching Overview.....	1
Principle 1: Life and Dignity of the Human Person.....	5
Principle 2: Call to Family, Community, and Participation....	11
Principle 3: Rights and Responsibilities.....	15
Principle 4: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.....	21
Principle 5: The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers.....	25
Principle 6: Solidarity.....	31
Principle 7: Care for God’s Creation.....	35
Appendix I: Catholic Social Teaching Prayers	41
Appendix II: Catholic Social Teaching Resources.....	45

Introduction

Catholic Social Teaching Overview



Adam and Eve in an Earthly Paradise (1800's), Johann Wenzel Peter

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the body of teaching concerned with creating a society that is in accord with God's divine will and, therefore, human flourishing (e.g., a life of virtue and creating healthy relationships). Simply put, men and woman can more easily achieve their perfection in a virtuous society rather than a corrupt one.

There are seven principles that undergird CST. These principles are all important, but they are not all equal. The order in which they are listed signifies their importance:

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 Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God's Creation

Principle 1: Life and Dignity of the Human Person. This principle is foundational for the other principles. Every person, male and female, is made in the image and likeness of God (Gn. 1:27). Therefore, every person must be respected

from conception to natural death. Unfortunately, the weak and poor suffer the most when this principle is violated.

Principle 2: Call to Family, Community and Participation. As noted in the first principle, we are all created in the image and likeness of God (who is a communion of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). If God is a communion of Persons, then we are also called to live in communion with God and in communion with one another. In other words, we are social beings and we need each other. Thomas Merton, twentieth century author and social activist, wrote a book titled, *No Man is an Island*, a collection of sixteen essays which centers on relationship with God, each other, and ourselves. In this light, the little “society” we call marriage and family (in light of God’s plan for salvation) is the basic building block of society. For this reason, marriage and family must be supported and upheld.

Principle 3: Rights and Responsibilities. This principle states that not only do we have a right to life, but we also have the right to conditions to live a decent life, and the right to have our basic needs met (e.g., food, healthcare, housing, education, and employment). Obviously, most people will not agree on which policies will better

achieve these goals. Also there is a legitimate disagreement in this subject area. However, this stands in contrast whether it is optional to support policies that help promote and protect the sacredness of life at all stages. It is important to remember that a right to a quality life is rooted in the right to life.

Principle 4: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable. God has a special, deep concern for the poor and for the vulnerable. Hence, we are called to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. One can measure the healthiness of a society by how well it treats its poor and vulnerable.

Principle 5: The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers. Work serves people and not the other way around. In other words, people are more important than profits. This principle includes the right to productive work, to fair and livable wages, and to organize and join a union. Essentially, this principle is rooted in the principle that all people (including workers) have dignity. Therefore, their dignity must be recognized and upheld.

Principle 6: Solidarity. We are one human family. In the Old Testament, after murdering his brother Abel, God asked Cain where his brother was. Cain replied, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gn. 4:9).

God basically responded, “Yes, you are!” We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. For this reason, we are called to seek peaceful and just resolutions to unjust situations and/or an unjust distribution of goods and services. For over forty years, most of society has become accustomed with the phrase, “social justice.” This phrase focuses on the fair and just relations between individuals and society. Behind social justice is the principle that we are one human family and each person deserves an opportunity to equally participate in society.

Principle 7: Care for God’s Creation. We are all called to be stewards of God’s creation. Not only must we be concerned for our present generation, but we must also be concerned for the generations that will follow us. We show our respect for God, our Creator, by caring for all creation. In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis has done a wonderful job of elaborating this principle.

Resolution

As Catholics, we have a great responsibility to know and to live out these seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching. By God’s grace, may we teach others and draw from these principles to create a just, flourishing, and virtuous society.

Principle 1

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The first principle of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**, is the foundation for the other six principles of CST. As written in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Catholic Church teaches that the dignity of the human person is rooted in His (God’s) creation, in His image and likeness. Therefore, every human person is sacred and has dignity (CCC, 1700). From the opening pages of the Sacred Scriptures, starting with the book of Genesis, Genesis 1:26 states, “*Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness.*” If we are created in God’s image and likeness, then we could say that each person is not something (an object), but someone (a human person).

Following the scripture verse from Genesis 1:26, in Genesis 2:7, we learn that while God created all the animals, only human beings possess the breath of life. In other words, human beings are qualitatively different kind of creatures than animals. As human beings, we possess the “breath of life,” or the “divine spark.” As such, each person must be respected as “another self,” someone willed by God to live and to be loved by Him.

Additionally, as Catholics we believe that Jesus died for us all. In 2 Corinthians 5:15, St. Paul says, “He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” We strive, then, to see others with the eyes of Christ who laid His life down freely and willingly for every person.

Finally, we remember that each person is destined for life with God in Heaven. Every human person has what John Paul II (Pope St. John Paul II) called a “supernatural vocation” (i.e., a calling to share in God’s life for eternity). Therefore, our dignity is not only rooted in the fact that each person is the “fruit” of God’s creative love, but also in his or her calling to participate in Trinitarian (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) love. Our ultimate goal is to be with God forever in Heaven, to live in the Holy Trinity, to live in the heart of God.

Unfortunately, original sin has seriously distorted the truth that every person has dignity. Throughout the course of history, there have been serious attacks on human life. Sadly, at the present time in our culture and society, there is a continuation of attacks even more serious on human life at every stage (from the moment of conception to natural death). In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), John Paul II listed several crimes against humanity. Specifically, he writes,

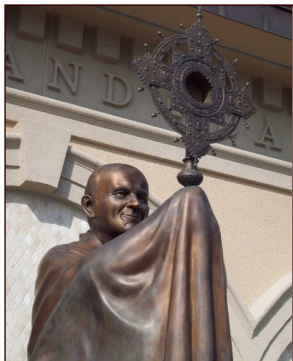
“Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator” (EV, 3).

The late pontiff provides an extensive list of actions that threatens life. Some actions are opposed to life itself (e.g., genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and willful self-destruction), and some actions are harmful to the integrity of the person (i.e., mutilation of the body – like forced organ harvesting).

John Paul II also lists insults against human dignity (e.g., subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children [human trafficking], and disgraceful, harmful

working conditions). In other words, there are attacks against life itself, and then there are situations contrary to the *quality* of life as God wills for us.

According to John Paul II, actions against life and conditions contrary to human dignity poison human society. Interestingly, he says that these actions do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer injury. People who attack the gift of life and/or insult human dignity are in need of conversion, especially conversion of heart. God, who is the giver of life, challenges us to trust in Him as He works through us to convert hearts. We must continue to be patient, loving, and truthful with our brothers and sisters who may continue these acts which indeed harm our society and culture.



Pope St. John Paul II Statue, Our Lady of the Angels Monastery, Hanceville, AL (2009);
Photo Credit: Jennifer Spinler

Resolution

Obviously, this is *extremely* challenging given the current state of our culture, especially in the United States. However, Mother Teresa (St. Teresa of Calcutta) reminds us that God does not ask us to be successful, but He asks us to be faithful. In order to remain faithful, making time for prayer each day is absolutely essential in this great endeavor.

Additionally, we must be willing to undertake some acts of penance or sacrifice according to your state in life (vocation). In doing some acts of penance and sacrifice, we unite our hearts with Christ's Most Sacred Heart, who offered His life for poor sinners (you and me). No one is perfect. We all suffer from concupiscence from original sin.

However, it is important that we ask God, our Father, to be merciful and patient with people who fail to see the great gift of life and dignity of every human person, just as we ask Him to be merciful with us when we fail to see the dignity of others in certain moments of our life. Trusting and knowing God will help us, let us remain confident in hope as we continue to advance a culture of life!



The Holy Family (1518), Raphael

Principle 2

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

If the first principle of Catholic Social Teaching teaches us that we are sacred (i.e., created by God and have dignity), then the second principle, **Call to Family, Community, and Participation**, reminds us that we are social beings who are called to contribute and participate to the well-being of our family, community, and society.

As mentioned in Principle 1, **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**, the opening pages of Genesis teach us that God willed to create the human person in His image and likeness as He said, “*Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness*” (Gn. 1:26). Notice the first person plural “us”. Let us make human beings in our image and likeness. The use of the “us” indicates that God is not a solitary being, but rather a Communion of Persons (The Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). If God is a Communion of Persons, then we will only find our fulfillment in our relationship with God, placing Him first in our lives, and then with one another. In this light, we have a right and a duty to participate in society, (i.e., in social institutions such as marriage and family, local commu-

nities, the Church, and government).

The most basic and fundamental social institution is marriage and family. Marriage and family is the primary social institution where faith is born and nourished, especially through the parents/legal guardians. It is in the heart of marriage and family life where moral values such as patience, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, hard work, and respect are taught. In short, marriage and family life is where we realize our God-given potential and dignity as men and women.

During his papacy, Pope John Paul II referred to the family as a little “domestic Church,” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 21). Our Tradition teaches us that marriage (between one man and one woman) is a sacrament. That is, it is a sign of and a means for making the love between Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church, present in the world today. In marriage and family life, we learn to love one another through the give and take present in relationships, including the opportunities for generosity and self-sacrifice.

As Catholics, we are called to help promote and support marriage and family life, which is the basic building block for creating a healthy society. If marriages and families are healthy and strong, then societies will be healthy and strong as

well. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. If marriages and families are not healthy and are weak, then societies will be weak and will not have a firm foundation.

There are many challenges with marriage and family life today. Societies suffer greatly when marriage and family life become strained and/or experience brokenness caused by communication problems between spouses and family members, divorce, abuse, infidelity, addiction, etc. The people who often struggle the most when there is brokenness in the family is the children. Children oftentimes experience great pain and trauma growing up in a family that is broken. In this light, we are called to help heal and rebuild the vital institution of marriage and family through our prayers and support for one another. May we remember those famous words by Pope John Paul II, “The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 75).

This principle also challenges us to participate in higher levels of society such as state/national governments and the Church. These institutions are only as strong and healthy as people of faith and goodwill contribute to them. At their best, these larger institutions serve individuals/families and particularly, the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable.

Finally, it is helpful to remember the principle of subsidiary, which holds that human affairs are best handled at the lowest possible level, those affected by decisions. In other words, state and national government should allow families to work out the problems present whenever possible, only stepping in when necessary. The goal of subsidiary is to help build a multi-layered civil society where institutions at all levels (individual, local, state, and national) work together for the common good and for the well-being of all people.

Resolution

In short, the more you can and are willing to contribute to a well-ordered society, the more you will have a greater opportunity to reach your full potential as a human being. If you strive to contribute to better society, then, God-willing, you will become a joyful saint for the glory of God.

Principle 3 *Rights and Responsibilities*

As indicated in the first two principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), we learn that each person has dignity and, given that we are social creatures, we learn of our call to participate in family and society. The third principle of CST, **Rights and Responsibilities**, may sound vague; however, the idea behind this principle is that we have a right to life, especially a right to a certain quality of life (e.g., food, healthcare, housing, education, and employment).

Scripturally, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches us the parable of the rich man and the poor man named Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). The rich man, dressed in purple garments, dines sumptuously each day. Meanwhile, the poor man (Lazarus) lies by the rich man's door hungry, tired, and wounded. The poor man's condition is highlighted by the fact that dogs found him and licked his sores. Dogs always try to help, especially helping a person who is suffering physically and emotionally. Unfortunately, the rich man had no desire to help the poor man.

After the death of both the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus, there is a reversal of fortunes. The rich man is tormented greatly, while

Lazarus is comforted. In short, the rich man did not see Lazarus as his brother. Instead, the rich man viewed Lazarus simply as an “other” or a nuisance to him. There is a common theme in the Sacred Scriptures. We notice that more often than not that, as Jesus has taught us, “*the first shall be last and the last shall be first*” (Mt. 19:30).

Pope John Paul II commented on this specific gospel passage during his visit to the United States in 1979. While speaking at Yankee Stadium, he said, “We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors.” There are many Lazarus’ in our world who are hungry, tired, wounded, and are often ignored because of their appearance and socioeconomic class.



The Rich Man and the Poor Lazarus (1625), Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629)

The parable of Lazarus is a warning to anyone who lives as if the poor do not exist and/or as if the poor are the problem of someone else (e.g., the State, their family, or their own fault). Francis Cardinal George once remarked, “The poor need you to draw them out of poverty, and you need the poor to keep you out of hell.”

What does it mean to have rights? A right is a justified claim. There two types of rights: natural rights and created rights.

1. Natural rights, such as a right to life, belong to us because we are human beings. To violate natural rights is an assault on human dignity.
2. Created rights arise from some human interaction. For example, with created rights, a person enters into a contract. You, as a human person, have a right to receive compensation from a product or service that you provide for others. Created rights may also arise from the nature of a relationship. For instance, children have a right to receive food, clothing, and an education from their parent(s)/legal guardian(s).

If a person possesses a right, then another person has a duty to provide it. Hence, this is the reason why this principle is called

Rights and Responsibilities. Obviously, the challenge is determining who, whether an individual/group, has the responsibility of fulfilling the rights that other people possess.

Additionally, once it is determined who will fulfill the rights (e.g., the State), there may be legitimate disagreements regarding how the rights will be met. For example, people have a right to decent housing. How will this right be fulfilled? There may be many disagreements regarding how to best provide housing for those with low income.

Furthermore, people also have a right to decent food. There will also be disagreements regarding how the poor receive food (e.g., from a food shelter, EBT cards, tax credits, etc.). The Church relies on the expertise and good will of competent lay people to help create and pass policies that will help people, especially the poor, experience a decent livelihood for themselves and for their family.

On a personal level, after taking care of our basic needs and necessities, especially for our family, we have a duty to help the poor as much as possible, especially those around us, those in our community, and even those we know who struggling in distant places. We have a responsibility of seeing others as children of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, we must do our best to help them experience a quality human life.

Resolution

Let us not be like the rich man who remained callous to the needs of Lazarus! There are Lazarus' all around us who cry out for our help. Some practical ideas to help the poor include the following:

1. Buying/bringing food, clothing, and hygiene products to a local shelter.
2. Making some kits with basic necessities to hand out for those in need.
3. Serving a meal at a local shelter.

There are many opportunities for us and for our families to help those who need/depend on us. We must remember that the poor are also God's children. They are the fruit of love and are created for love. Therefore, they need our love, care, and support.

Jesus' calls each one of us to be His hands and to be His feet, to "slake Jesus' thirst" for love as Mother Teresa was so fond of saying. This humble servant of the Lord reminds us, "Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely, and the unwanted according to the graces we have received, and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work." Indeed, may we do our part to serve Jesus in the poor with confidence and great love!

Principle 4

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The fourth principle of Catholic Social Teaching, **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**, focuses on the call of action for us to help the poor and the invitation for us to exercise charity.

Throughout Sacred Scripture, it is abundantly clear that our Lord has a deep love for the poor. Deuteronomy 15:11 states, *“The land will never lack for needy persons; that is why I command you: ‘Open your hand freely to your poor and to your needy kin in your land.’”* And in Psalm 34:7, there is a passage about the poor crying out to the Lord, *“This poor one cried out and the Lord heard, and from all distress saved him.”*

In the Gospel of Matthew, there is the well-known passage regarding the Judgment of the Nations. Nations are brought before the Son of Man (Jesus), who separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep, placed on His right, provided for the basic needs (i.e., food, drink, clothing, etc.) of the least of Jesus’ brothers (Mt. 25:31-40). However, the goats failed to provide for them. Placed on Jesus’ left, the goats go off to eternal punishment (Mt. 25:46).

Since the beginning, attention to the poor has been an essential part of the Church’s mission.

For instance, after the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, James, Cephas, and John gave Paul their right hands in partnership in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. St. Paul adds, “*Only we were to be mindful of the poor, which is the very thing I was eager to do*” (Gal. 2:10).

In this light, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said that exercise of charity is not optional, but rather the exercise of charity is one of the Church’s essential activities. Specifically, he said, “The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 22). For Benedict, service to the poor is as essential as administering the sacraments and preaching the gospel. In fact, serving the poor is preaching the gospel, (i.e., the gospel of charity).

Mother Teresa (St. Teresa of Calcutta) is known for her deep love for the poor. When she saw and helped the poor, she saw and helped “Jesus in his most distressing disguise.” This saintly little servant of the Lord once said you could summarize the gospel in five words, “You-did-it-to-me.”

For Mother Teresa, holiness meant keeping “Jesus in the Eucharist” and “Jesus in the poor” together. Her love for Jesus in the Eucharist “carried over” into her service for the poor. Beautiful-

ly, she once remarked, “I have an opportunity to be with Jesus 24 hours a day.” She was with Jesus in the pew at Mass, in Eucharistic Adoration, in the hospital, and in the slums. What a gift this is from the Lord – to see Christ in all and to make His love present to all!



Mother Teresa (Stained Glass) St. Patrick Catholic Church Wolverhampton, England (2014), Deb Lowe

Who are the poor in our midst? When most people think of the poor, they first think of people who lack material goods. The materially poor include, but are not limited to, unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, the terminally ill, immigrants, victims of injustice and oppressions, and/or those struggling just to survive in society today.

Furthermore, Pope St. John Paul II remarked that the Church’s preferential option for

the poor goes beyond material poverty. Specifically, he says, “This option is not limited to material poverty, since it is well known that there are many other forms of poverty, especially in modern society – not only economic but cultural and spiritual poverty as well” (*Centesimus Annus*, 57). Cultural poverty is when society ignores or abuses the weak and the vulnerable, while spiritual poverty is an attitude of independence, (i.e., the attempt to live as if God does not exist or He is irrelevant to our lives).

Practically, God calls us to address both the immediate needs of the poor (the person before us), as well as the systemic problems that cause poverty. Not only are we called to give directly to the poor (both financially and personally), but we are also called to support public policy that will help improve their lives.

Resolution

In short, the principle of serving the poor is very challenging. However, Pope Francis reminds us, “Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor” (Address to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 06/14/13). May we never lose hope when we encounter the materially, spiritually, and culturally poor.

Principle 5

The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

The fifth principle of Catholic Social Teaching, **The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers**, focuses on the gift of work, the meaning behind work, and our dignity, rights, and expectations as an employee/employer.

The dignity of work is rooted in the theology of creation. After God created the first man, the opening pages of the Book of Genesis reads, “*The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it*” (Gn. 2:15).

The Lord, God could have created the world in a perfect state. However, in His perfect wisdom, He chose to create the world in a “state of becoming” (i.e., in a way that needs to be perfected). Out of love for us, the Lord gives us the opportunity to cooperate with Him in perfecting His work of creation. In short, work is a gift not to be taken for granted!

To put this in perspective, think of a child who asks his or her parent to help with a project, “Mom, Dad, can I help you?” The parent’s response, “Sure, you can help me (us).” The parent(s) may not need their child’s help, but they

are happy to receive the help from their child. God does not need us. However, He willed for us to be born, and He delights in giving us the opportunity to share in His creative work.

Additionally, work perfects us as human beings. Think of a job where you had to learn or develop the skills necessary to accomplish it. For instance, teachers work in perfecting ways to communicate content so that their students can receive and understand it. Lawyers develop their analytical and research skills to argue cases for their clients. Doctors and nurses acquire knowledge about the human body and how respective medicines and care heal it when sick. Regardless of the occupation, through work, you grow in virtue by developing the necessary skills to accomplish the task at hand.

Unfortunately, because we are fallen and are born with original sin, we can become enslaved to work. Work exists for people and not the other way around. There was an insidious phrase that appeared on the gate entering Auschwitz: *Arbeit macht frei* (German meaning, "Work sets you free"). This phrase is far from the truth. Our freedom is rooted in God, who alone is truly free. We use our God-given gifts, our freedom, in our work to glorify God and to contribute to the good of our world.

Furthermore, this principle reminds us

that workers have rights, rights that are rooted in their inherent dignity as a human being. For example, workers have a right to a just wage (a wage commensurate for the work they provide and to raise a family). They have a right to safe working conditions. Workers have a right to participate in the fruit of their labor they give to others. In other words, employers should not see their employees merely as an instrument for profit. They are people who have dignity. Finally, this principle says that workers have a right to leisure and rest, benefits, maternity/paternity leave, healthcare, and adequate support for their retirement.

Along with rights to a just wage, to safe working conditions, and to participate in the fruit of their labor, this principle reminds us that workers have specific responsibilities from their employer. Workers must provide labor for a fair wage, must be honest in regards to their work and how they spent their time, must be open to working as part of a team, and must respect that employers have a right to create a balanced budget and receive a reasonable profit for their investment.

Traditionally, this principle has focused on what was once referred to as "blue collar" laborers or manual laborers. As modern society has

undergone significant change in the last hundred years, this principle is beginning to address “white collar” laborers (i.e., those in professional, managerial, or administrative work).

Recently, the Church has been challenged to address new situations such as creating a Christian culture in the workplace, insisting on ethical business transactions, workers maintaining balance between work and family, and using wealth properly (e.g., giving back to the community, to the poor, and to the Church). In 2012, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published, *The Vocation of the Business Leader* to address Christian leaders in business.

Finally, this principle reminds us to prayerfully reflect on our purchasing decisions. We are challenged to pay attention to how products/services are produced and provided. The goal is to purchase ethically produced products (i.e., from organizations that pay their workers a just wage, treat their employees with respect, and conduct business ethically). In short, this principle reminds us that the greatness of a business is measured by the way it treats its workers.

Resolution

May we always strive to give God our very best

whether in our study or in our occupation. Also, may we always strive to show respect and uphold the dignity of each individual who is created in the image and likeness of God.



The Angelus (1857-1859), Jean-François Millet

Principle 6

Solidarity

The sixth principle of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), **Solidarity**, is not just a feeling that we act upon, but rather a commitment to the well-being of another person. Solidarity is also a virtue (i.e., a habit whereby you work for the good of others because they are children of God).

This principle of CST is based on a few assumptions. First, it assumes that if God is our Creator, then all human beings are His children and are loved by Him, regardless of race, nationality, and belief(s). On July 8, 2015, during his speech in Bolivia, Pope Francis remarked, “We cannot believe in God the Father without seeing a brother or sister in every person, and we cannot follow Jesus without giving our lives for those for whom he died on the cross.”

Additionally, this principle assumes we are social creatures, and, as such, we need one another to flourish as human beings. In other words, God has given us all special gifts unique to us to be used for the sake others. Similarly, He has given others gifts to be used for our sake. In short, God did not create us to be alone, but He wills for us to live in this present moment, so that we may grow in holiness in a communal setting through a mut-

ual sharing of material and spiritual gifts that God has specifically given to each of us individually.

Solidarity stands in contrast to the radical individualism that we regularly experience in our culture. Individualism is the philosophy that the private good of the individual (e.g., his or her desires, interests, and goals) takes precedence over the state and/or a social group. Individualism also views community as an unfortunate necessity, and it views others as an obstacle to individual freedom.

Solidarity, on the other hand, while acknowledging the dignity and rights of each individual, reminds us that as individuals, we remain part of a community, and we can only reach our fulfillment within the context of a community. St. Paul uses the metaphor of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians to teach us that we grow and suffer together as one. Specifically, he says, *"If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy"* (1 Cor. 12:26).

Additionally, there has been an unfortunate movement in our culture focusing on differences and what divides us from one another. We are all aware of the talking points on injustices arising from differences in nationality, race, sex, and income. Consequently, our culture experienced (and still experiences) a tremendous amount of

fragmentation wherein groups see each other not as interrelated, but as enemies.

In this light, the virtue of solidarity is extremely critical for our present time. How beautiful when persons are willing to try to transcend cultural, political, social, and geographic differences to embrace the other as a person (i.e., someone made in God's image).

This willingness does not mean that we must accept all beliefs and ways of life that are being taught in our culture. We can respect the views of other people, including their beliefs and lifestyles, but we must also have the courage to critique actions/behaviors contrary to God's will, human reason, and the common good. To live this out well, it takes humility and maturity to debate ideas and lifestyles, while simultaneously display compassion and love someone as they are, weak and imperfect, just as we are weak and imperfect.

Finally, we must not forget that the practice of solidarity is an essential part of our Catholic faith. Concerning this, St. John says, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen"* (1 John 4:20). In other words, your love for God is expressed and measured by your love for neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40).

Practically, **Solidarity** is one of the most challenging principles to live out in our daily life. On September 22, 2013, Pope Francis visited Cagliari for a pastoral visit where he met with the poor and with prison inmates. During his visit he said to them, “This word solidarity runs the risk of being deleted from the dictionary because it is a word that bothers us. It bothers us, why? Because it requires you to look at another and give yourself to another with love.”

While it can be painful at times to love others, our Catholic faith repeatedly teaches us that love, even a small, single act of love, always brings life for you and for others to give yourself away in love. While it may be hard to live this principle out well, let us remember to pray these three little words, “Come, Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit will give us the gifts we need to love God and to love our neighbor for His sake.



The Heavenly and Earthly Trinities (1675-1682), Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

Principle 7

Care for God's Creation

As mentioned in the previous principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), we, as Catholics, have a responsibility to uphold and care for the life and dignity of the human person. If caring for the human person is critical to live in a healthy and fruitful society, then caring for God's creation (i.e., animals, plants, food, and etc.) is also critical. The seventh and final principle of CST, **Care for God's Creation**, teaches us how essential it is to be mindful of and care for all creation.

In the Book of Genesis, it is written that the Lord God created the first man and placed him in the garden in Eden. Eden is described as a beautiful place, including a river that divides and waters the whole land. There is gold, bdellium, and lazuli in the land (Gn. 2:12).

After placing the man in the garden, the Lord God instructs him to cultivate and care for it (Gn. 2:15). The traditional translation is “to till” and “to keep” the garden. In other words, the man is given the opportunity to share in God's creative activity (work) and the responsibility of keeping (or caring) for the garden. Notice how the fifth principle of CST mentions the rights and dignity of workers (tilling), and this principle mentions

the call to care for God's creation (keeping). There is no separation. As a gardener, there is always work and care to do to help the garden stay beautiful and to help the garden flourish. This example also holds true for us to help cultivate a healthy and fruitful society by how we take care of creation.

As Catholics, we are formed to have what we could call a "sacramental vision" of reality. That is, through the eyes of faith, we see God's beauty, goodness, and truth inscribed in the created order. Creation "speaks" of God's splendor, His grandeur, and His life. For instance, in the series, *Planet Earth*, a person watching the series cannot help experience wonder and awe at the amazing beauty and variety of life on our planet. We are called to be good stewards of our planet, a place we call home.

As with the sixth principle of CST, **Solidarity**, this principle is rooted in a couple of assumptions. First, this principle assumes that our care and concern for the earth is an expression of our love for God. Imagine if a person created something extravagant and another person mis-handled or even destroyed it. The creator would rightly feel disrespected and hurt by the other person's action(s). Essentially, contempt for creation is nothing short of contempt for God, our Creator.

Additionally, our care for creation assumes that everything and everyone in the world is connected. As noted in St. Paul's Body of Christ analogy, just as the whole body suffers when one member suffers (1 Cor. 12), so the whole human race suffers, especially the poor, when parts of our fragile environment are abused. In short, we are not only connected as a human family (solidarity), but we are connected to the created world.

Furthermore, this principle assumes we are not only connected to the environment and one another today, but we are also connected to the generations that preceded us and will follow us in the years to come. The phrase for this is sometimes called, "intergenerational solidarity" (i.e., the idea that we are connected to those generations who follow us and will also rely upon the environment for their survival and well-being). In his Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, the Holy Father, Pope Francis addresses the topic of intergenerational solidarity as he says,

"Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual bene-

fit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us” (Laudato Si, 159).

Practically, what are some actions we can do as individuals or as a community to help foster greater care for God’s creation? Pope Francis challenges each person to examine his or her lifestyle (*Laudato Si*, 203-208). He warns against “compulsive consumerism” that attempts to relieve the emptiness in the human heart. Along with reducing consumption, the Holy Father mentions putting healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic, and social power. Ultimately, your purchasing decisions and your voice have power to affect real change to our culture and society.

To review, it is hard not to notice the seamless thread of life that runs through all seven principles of CST. We defend and celebrate the gift of human life at all stages (Principle 1), a human life that requires others to reach its full potential (Principle 2). Each human life not only has God-given rights, but also responsibilities to others (Principle 3). Special care and support is needed when this life is poor and vulnerable (Principle 4). The dignity of each human life, whether as an employee or employer, must be upheld (Principle 5). Final-

ly, each human life is not only connected to the rest of the human family (Principle 6), but also to the created world, a world that requires our constant care (Principle 7).

By God’s grace, may we express our love for Jesus Christ and our beautiful Catholic faith by teaching, celebrating, and living the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching. In doing so, we will improve our world, glorify God, and God-willing, become a saint!



*Family of Saints - Martin Family Basilica of Notre-Dame d'Alençon Alençon, France (2019),
Photo Credit: Jennifer Spinler*



Holy Family St. Joseph Catholic Church; Omaha, NE (artist unknown)

Appendix I

Catholic Social Teaching Prayers

Prayer for Respect for Human Life

God of life and love, you created us in your image and sent your Son to bring us life. Instill in us a respect for all life, from conception to natural death. Empower us to work for justice for the poor. Nourish us that we may bring food to the hungry. Inspire us to cherish the fragile life of the unborn. Strengthen us to bring comfort to the chronically ill. Teach us to treat the aging with dignity and respect. Bring us one day into the glory of everlasting life. We ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Families

We bless your name, O Lord, for sending your own incarnate Son, to become part of a family, so that, as he lived its life, he would experience its worries and its joys.

We ask you, Lord, to protect and watch over this family, so that in the strength of your grace its members may enjoy prosperity, possess the priceless gift of your peace,

and, as the Church alive in the home,
bear witness in this world to your glory.
We ask this thought Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer for Basic Rights

Lord of Wisdom, awaken us
to our duty to care for the basic needs of all
people.
Strengthen with hope
people denied their human rights and freedoms.
Provide us all with the voice to cry out
for justice for the poor and the oppressed.
Amen.

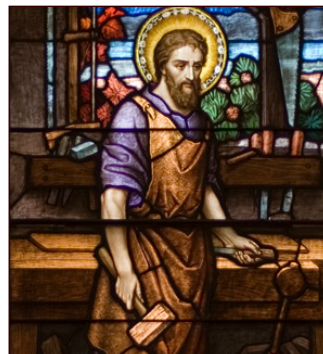
Prayer for the Poor by Mother Teresa

Make us worthy, Lord,
to serve those people throughout the world
who live and die in poverty and hunger.
Give them through our hands, this day,
their daily bread, and by our understanding
love, give them peace and joy.
Amen.

Prayer to St. Joseph for Dignity and Rights of Workers

O Glorious St. Joseph, model of all those who are
devoted to labor, obtain for me the grace to work

conscientiously, putting the call of duty above my
natural inclinations, to work with gratitude and
joy, in a spirit of penance for the remission
of my sins, considering it an honor to employ
and develop by means of labor the gifts
received from God, to work with order, peace,
moderation and patience, without ever
shrinking from weariness and difficulties, to
work above all with purity of intention and
detachment from self, having always death
before my eyes and the account that I must
render of time lost, of talents wasted, of good
omitted, of vain complacency in success, so fatal
to the work of God. All for Jesus, all through
Mary, all after thine example, O Patriarch, St.
Joseph. Such shall be my motto in life and in
death.
Amen.



St. Joseph the Worker St. Joseph Catholic Church; Omaha, NE (artist unknown)

Prayer for Solidarity

Almighty and ever-living God,
empower your one human family to join hands
on our journey of faith.

Send us your spirit of hope,
so that we may work
to alleviate human suffering
and foster charity and justice
in our world.

Amen.

***Prayer for Protection of God's Creation - Blessing
for the Products of Nature***

Blessed are you, O God,
Creator of the universe,
who have made all things good
and given the earth for us to cultivate.
Grant that we may always use created things
gratefully and share your gift with those in need,
out of the love of Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.
Amen

Appendix II

Catholic Social Teaching Resources

1. The Sacred Scriptures
2. The Catechism of the Catholic Church
3. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) - Catholic Social Teaching (Foundational Documents)
4. Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
5. Catholic Charities

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes



“Look, the heavens, even the highest heavens, belong to the Lord, your God, as well as the earth and everything on it.”

Deuteronomy 10:14

