



Salve Regina University

Catholic Social Teaching

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents. In these brief reflections, several of the key themes that are at the heart of Catholic social tradition are highlighted.

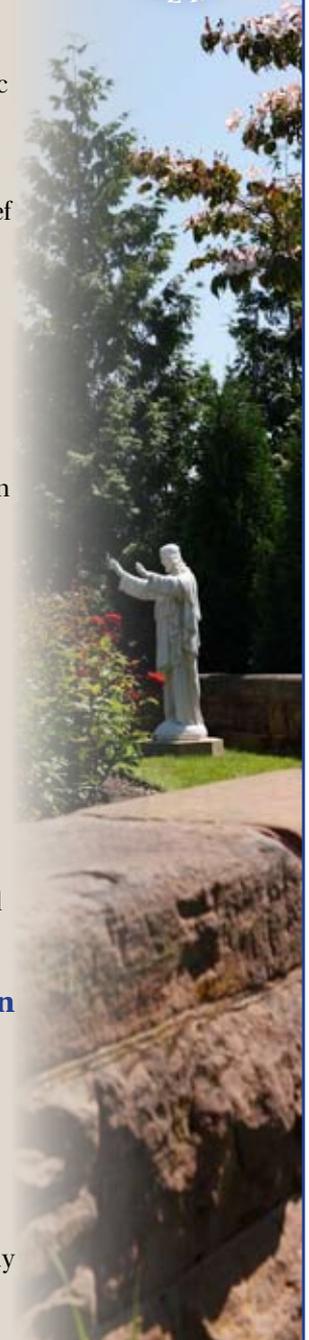
Themes of Catholic Social Teaching:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

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 social teaching. In 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. It is believed that every person is precious, 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.

Call to Family, Community and Participation

The person is not only sacred but also social. How society is organized—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. 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.



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 families and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test is how the most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) instructing to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

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.

Solidarity

As one human family, whatever the national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences, there is responsibility to all brothers and sisters, wherever they may be. Loving one's neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that, "If you want peace, work for justice." The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Love for all sisters and brothers demands that peace be promoted in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

Care for God's Creation

Respect for the Creator is shown by stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan; it is a requirement of the faith. People and the planet must be protected, living the faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

