

# 10 Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

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## 1. Dignity of the Human Person

The foundation of all Catholic Social Teaching is the inherent dignity of the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God. The Church, therefore, calls for Integral Human Development, which concerns the wellbeing of each person in every dimension: economic, political, social, ecological, and spiritual.

“A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person. The person represents the ultimate end of society. The social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person... not the other way around.”

—**Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 132**

## 2. Common Good

We must all consider the good of others, and the good of the whole human family, in organizing our society—economically, politically, and legally. Human Dignity can only be realized and protected through our relationship with society-at-large. We must love our neighbour, locally and globally, and prioritize the good of the human family over commercial interests.

“God intended the Earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner.”

—**Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, 69**



### 3. Solidarity

Each of us is part of the human family and we are all interconnected and interdependent. Loving our neighbour has global dimensions. We must see ourselves in others and collaborate towards solutions. Solidarity is a recognition that we are “all in this together,” and is a commitment to strengthen community and promote a just society.

[Solidarity] is a word that means much more than some acts of sporadic generosity. It is to think and to act in terms of community, of the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. It is also to fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It is to confront the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced displacements, painful emigrations, the traffic of persons, drugs, war, violence and all those realities that many of you suffer and that we are all called to transform.

—Pope Francis, *World Meeting of Popular Movements 2014*

### 4. Preferential Option for the Poor

The moral test of any society is based on how the most vulnerable are treated. God’s love is universal, so this principle does not intend that we should focus on the poor to the exclusion of others, but rather that we are called to prioritize those who are in most need of our Solidarity.

The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; production to meet social needs over production for military purposes.

—Saint John Paul II, *Address on Christian Unity in a Technological Age, Toronto, 1984*

### 5. Stewardship of Creation

The Earth is sacred. Creation has its own intrinsic value. We have a responsibility to protect and to cherish the Earth’s ecological diversity, beauty and life-sustaining properties. Together, we must hold it in trust for future generations.

The family needs a home, a fit environment in which to develop its proper relationships. For the human family, this home is the earth, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility. We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion.

—Pope Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace 2008, 7*



## 6. Subsidiarity & the Role of Government

The state is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and develop the common good. Subsidiarity holds that such functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately. When they cannot, higher levels of government must intervene. This principle goes hand-in-hand with Participation, the principle that all peoples have a right to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society, and in the decisions that affect their community.

It is clearly laid down that the paramount task assigned to government officials is that of recognizing, respecting, reconciling, protecting and promoting the rights and duties of citizens.

—**Saint John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 77**

## 7. Participation

Human beings are social, and how we live together affects the dignity of the individual and the progress of society. All persons are entitled to participate in community, and in decisions that affect their lives, and cannot be excluded for any reason.

The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation, which is expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of a civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and a view to the common good.

—**Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No 189**

## 8. Rights & Responsibilities

We all have a right to those things which are required by Human Dignity. Rights arise from what we need to live as God intended us to. These are innately linked with our responsibility to ensure the rights of others—that we do not take more than is needed to fulfill our rights at the expense of another's.

A well-ordered human society requires that people recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties. It also demands that each contribute generously to the establishment of a civic order in which rights and duties are more sincerely and effectively acknowledged and fulfilled.

—**Saint John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 31**



## 9. Economic Justice

The economy must serve people, and not the other way around. All persons have a right to dignified work, and to fair wages and working conditions. Work is more than a way to make a living: it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

Global interconnectedness has led to the emergence of a new political power, that of consumers and their associations. This is a phenomenon that needs to be further explored, as it contains positive elements to be encouraged as well as excesses to be avoided. It is good for people to realize that purchasing is always a moral—and not simply economic—act. Hence the consumer has a specific social responsibility, which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise... A more incisive role for consumers, as long as they themselves are not manipulated by associations that do not truly represent them, is a desirable element for building economic democracy.

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 66

## 10. Peace

To be in right relationship with God and with each other. Peace is the fruit of Charity and the consequence of Justice. It is the sign of caritas in action.

Peace is not merely an absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice.

—Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 78