



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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SEVEN THEMES OF 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, we highlight several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

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 our social teaching. In our 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**. We believe that every person is precious, that 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.

More on Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The person is not only sacred but also social. **How we organize our society** -- 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. We believe 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.

More on Call to Family, Community, and Participation

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 our families, and to the larger society.

More on Rights and Responsibilities

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

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

More on Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

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 Gods 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.

More on Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

Solidarity

We are **one human family** whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers and sisters keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our 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.¹ The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

More on Solidarity

Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our **stewardship of creation**. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of Gods creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

More on Care for God's Creation

This summary should only be a starting point for those interested in **Catholic social teaching**. A full understanding can only be achieved by reading the papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents that make up this rich tradition. For a copy of the complete text of **Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions** (No. 5-281) and **other social teaching documents**, call 800-235-8722.

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1 Paul VI, **For the Celebration of the Day Of Peace** . . . (Rome: January 1, 1972).

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