



Catholic Social Doctrine

An Introduction to Church Teaching on Justice, Equality and Human Rights

SVP Young Adults

From Pope Leo XIII to the present day

Ever since Pope Leo XIII in 1891 shocked the wealthy with his call for a just wage and the right of workers to unionise, the Catholic Church has taught that the way societies organize is also a moral matter. Through landmark encyclicals issued by popes since *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has built up a wide-ranging body of teaching on justice, equality and human rights.

From The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Picture: The Allegory of Good Government by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1285-c.1348)





Justice & Mercy

For Jesus, a lack of concern for the poor is not a minor oversight but reveals that a person is at odds with God. This is illustrated in the Parable of the sheep and goats where the true sheep are those who have a heart for the hungry, the stranger, the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned ([Matthew 25:35 – 36](#)).

- “Learn to do good; seek **justice**, correct oppression; bring **justice** to the fatherless, and please the widow's cause,” (Isaiah 1:17).
- “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do **justice**, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).





“All of us need to experience a conversion in the way we see the poor. We have to care for them and be sensitive to their spiritual and material needs. To you young people I especially entrust the task of restoring solidarity to the heart of human culture. Faced with old and new forms of poverty - unemployment, migration and addictions of various kinds - we have the duty to be alert and thoughtful, avoiding the temptation to remain indifferent. We have to remember all those who feel unloved, who have no hope for the future and who have given up on life out of discouragement, disappointment or fear. We have to learn to be on the side of the poor, and not just indulge in rhetoric about the poor!





Let us go out to meet them, look into their eyes and listen to them. The poor provide us with a concrete opportunity to encounter Christ himself, and to touch his suffering flesh.



The problem which divides people today is not a political problem; it is a social one. It is a matter of knowing which will get the upper hand: the spirit of selfishness or the spirit of sacrifice; whether society will go for ever-increasing enjoyment and profit, or for everyone devoting themselves to the common good.

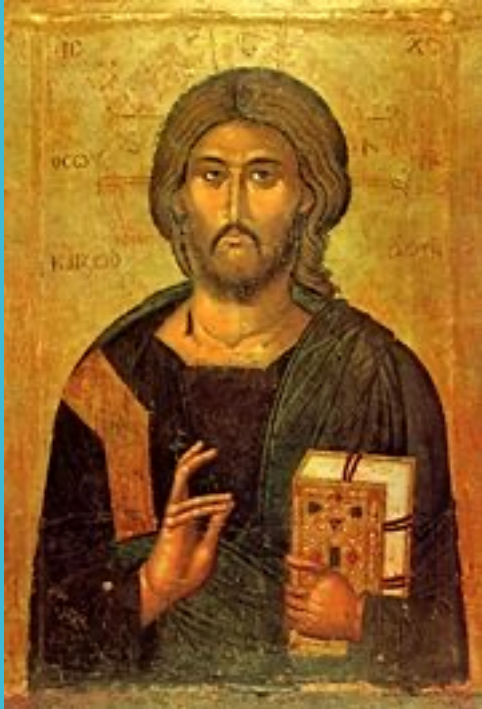


Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Founder of the Society of St Vincent de Paul

The poor are not just people to whom we can give something. They have much to offer us and to teach us. How much we have to learn from the wisdom of the poor! ...In a very real way, the poor are our teachers. They show us that people's value is not measured by their possessions or how much money they have in the bank. A poor person, a person lacking material possessions, always maintains his or her dignity. The poor can teach us much about humility and trust in God."

Pope Francis' message for WYD 2014 on the Beatitudes





Social doctrine and formation

The Church's social doctrine is an indispensable reference point for a totally integrated Christian formation. The insistence of the Magisterium in proposing this doctrine as a source of inspiration for the apostolate and for social action comes from the conviction that it constitutes an extraordinary resource for formation; “this is especially true for the lay faithful who have responsibilities in various fields of social and public life. Above all, it is indispensable that they have a more exact knowledge... of the *Church's social doctrine*” [CL 60]. This doctrinal patrimony is neither taught nor known sufficiently, which is part of the reason for its failure to be suitably reflected in concrete behaviour.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 528 referencing John Paul II: Christifidelis Laici 60





Civil and Political Community

The Church's social doctrine is a privileged instrument of dialogue between Christian communities and the civil and political community. It is an appropriate tool for promoting and cultivating attitudes of authentic and productive cooperation in ways adapted to the circumstances. The commitment of civil and political authorities, called to serve the personal and social vocation of mankind according to their own areas of competence and with the means available to them, can find in the social teaching of the Church an important support and a rich source of inspiration.

CSDC 534





The Presence of the Laity

The presence of the laity in social life is characterized by service, the sign and expression of love, which is seen in the areas of the family, culture, work, economics and politics according to specific aspects. Complying with the different demands of their particular area of work, lay men and women express the truth of their faith and, at the same time, the truth of the Church's social doctrine, which fully becomes a reality when it is lived concretely in order to resolve social problems. In fact, the credibility of this social doctrine comes more immediately from the witness of action than from its internal consistency or logic.

CSDC 541





Picture by Tom Parsons

The Human Person

Among the areas of the social commitment of the laity, service to the human person emerges as a priority. Promoting the dignity of every person, the most precious possession of men and women, is the “essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family”.

CSDC 552 quoting CL 37





A culture of life; a defence of family

Promoting human dignity implies above all affirming the inviolability of the right to life, from conception to natural death, the first among all rights and the condition for all other rights of the person. Respect for personal dignity requires, moreover, that the religious dimension of the person be recognized. “This is not simply a requirement ‘concerning matters of faith’, but a requirement that finds itself inextricably bound up with the very reality of the individual”. The effective recognition of the *right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom* is one of the highest goods and one of the most serious duties of every people that truly wishes to ensure the good of the individual and of society. In the present cultural context, there is a particularly urgent need to *defend marriage and the family*, which can be adequately met only if one is convinced of the unique and singular value of these two realities for an authentic development of human society.

CSDC 553 quoting Donum Vitae; CL 39



Understanding Culture, Society and Politics

SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL,
SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC SYMBOLS AND
PRACTICES

Social and Political Culture

Fostering a social and political culture inspired by the Gospel must be an area of particular importance for the lay faithful. Recent history has shown the weakness and radical failure of commonly held cultural perspectives that prevailed for a long time, especially on the social and political levels. In this area, particularly in the decades following the Second World War, Catholics in different countries have been involved at high levels, which shows with ever greater clarity today the consistency of their inspiration and of their heritage of values.

CSDC 555





Economists

Economists, those working in this field and political leaders must sense the urgency of rethinking the economy, considering, on the one hand, the dramatic material poverty of billions of people and, on the other, the fact that “present economic, social and cultural structures are ill-equipped to meet the demands of genuine development”. The legitimate requirements of economic efficiency need to be better harmonized with those of political participation and social justice. Concretely, this means that solidarity must be made an integral part of the networks of economic, political and social interdependence that the current process of globalization tends to consolidate. In this effort of rethinking, well organized and destined to have an effect on the way economic realities are seen, associations of a Christian inspiration active in the economic field — organizations of workers, business leaders and economists — have a precious role to play.

CSDC 564 quoting John Paul II Message for the 2000 World Day of Peace, 14



**WE
MARCH
FOR
JOBS FOR ALL
A DECENT PAY
NOW!**

The duty to work

The awareness that “the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31) is not an exoneration from being involved in the world, and even less from work (cf. 2 Thes 3:7-15), which is an integral part of the human condition, although not the only purpose of life. No Christian, in light of the fact that he belongs to a united and fraternal community, should feel that he has the right not to work and to live at the expense of others (cf. 2 Thes 3:6-12). Rather, all are charged by the Apostle Paul to make it a point of honour to work with their own hands, so as to “be dependent on nobody” (1 Thes 4:12), and to practise a solidarity which is also material by sharing the fruits of their labour with “those in need” (Eph 4:28). Saint James defends the trampled rights of workers: “Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (Jas 5:4). Believers are to undertake their work in the style of Christ and make it an occasion for Christian witness, commanding “the respect of outsiders” (1 Thes 4:12).

CSDC 264





Picture by Pham Yen

From agricultural societies to industrialisation

For centuries the Church's message was addressed to agricultural societies, characterized by regular cyclical rhythms. Now the Gospel had to be preached and lived in a new "*areopagus*", in the tumult of social events in a more dynamic society, taking into account the complexities of new phenomena of the unimaginable transformations brought about by mechanization. At the centre of the Church's pastoral concern was the ever urgent *worker question*, that is, the problem of the exploitation of workers brought about by the new industrial organization of labour, capitalistically oriented, and the problem, no less serious, of ideological manipulation — socialist and communist — of the just claims advanced by the world of labour. The reflections and warnings contained in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII are placed in this historical context.





The role of the State and civil society in promoting the right to work

Employment problems challenge the responsibility of the State, whose duty it is to promote active employment policies, that is, policies that will encourage the creation of employment opportunities within the national territory, providing the production sector with incentives to this end. The duty of the State does not consist so much in directly guaranteeing the right to work of every citizen, making the whole of economic life very rigid and restricting individual free initiative, as much as in the duty to "sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis".

CSDC 291 quoting Centesimus Annus 48



The family and the right to work

Work is "a foundation for the formation of family life, which is a natural right and something that man is called to". It ensures a means of subsistence and serves as a guarantee for raising children. Family and work, so closely interdependent in the experience of the vast majority of people, deserve finally to be considered in a more realistic light, with an attention that seeks to understand them together, without the limits of a strictly private conception of the family or a strictly economic view of work. In this regard, it is necessary that businesses, professional organizations, labour unions and the State promote policies that, from an employment point of view, do not penalize but rather support the family nucleus. In fact, family life and work mutually affect one another in different ways. Travelling great distances to the workplace, working two jobs, physical and psychological fatigue all reduce the time devoted to the family. Situations of unemployment have material and spiritual repercussions on families, just as tensions and family crises have negative influences on attitudes and productivity in the area of work.

CSDC 294 quoting John Paul II *Laborem Exercens* 10; *Familiaris Consortio* 23; Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, art 10





Women and the right to work

The persistence of many forms of discrimination offensive to the dignity and vocation of women in the area of work is due to a long series of conditioning that penalizes women, who have seen “their prerogatives misrepresented” and themselves “relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude”. These difficulties, unfortunately, have not been overcome, as is demonstrated wherever there are situations that demoralize women, making them objects of a very real exploitation. An urgent need to recognize effectively the rights of women in the workplace is seen especially under the aspects of pay, insurance and social security.

CSDC 295 quoting Laborem Exercens 19





Immigration and Work

Institutions in host countries must keep careful watch to prevent the spread of the temptation to exploit foreign labourers, denying them the same rights enjoyed by nationals, rights that are to be guaranteed to all without discrimination. Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life. In this context, the right of reuniting families should be respected and promoted.

CSDC 298





The dignity of workers and the respect for their rights

The rights of workers, like all other rights, are based on the nature of the human person and on his transcendent dignity. The Church's social Magisterium has seen fit to list some of these rights, in the hope that they will be recognized in juridical systems: the right to a just wage; the right to rest; the right "to a working environment and to manufacturing processes which are not harmful to the workers' physical health or to their moral integrity"; the right that one's personality in the workplace should be safeguarded "without suffering any affront to one's conscience or personal dignity"; the right to appropriate subsidies that are necessary for the subsistence of unemployed workers and their families; the right to a pension and to insurance for old age, sickness, and in case of work-related accidents; the right to social security connected with maternity; the right to assemble and form associations.

CSDC 301





The right to fair remuneration and income distribution

Remuneration is the most important means for achieving justice in work relationships. The “just wage is the legitimate fruit of work”.

They commit grave injustice who refuse to pay a just wage or who do not give it in due time and in proportion to the work done (cf. *Lv 19:13; Dt 24:14-15; Jas 5:4*).

CSDC 302





**It is our RIGHT
to STRIKE**

The right to strike

The Church's social doctrine recognizes the legitimacy of striking “when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit”, when every other method for the resolution of disputes has been ineffectual. Striking, one of the most difficult victories won by labour union associations, may be defined as the collective and concerted refusal on the part of workers to continue rendering their services, for the purpose of obtaining by means of such pressure exerted on their employers, the State or on public opinion either better working conditions or an improvement in their social status. Striking “as a kind of ultimatum” must always be a peaceful method for making demands and fighting for one's rights; it becomes “morally unacceptable when accompanied by violence, or when objectives are included that are not directly linked to working conditions or are contrary to the common good”.

CSDC 304 quoting CCC 2435; RN 11; LE 20; CCC 2430





The importance of unions

The Magisterium recognizes the fundamental role played by labour unions, whose existence is connected with the right to form associations or unions to defend the vital interests of workers employed in the various professions. Unions “grew up from the struggle of the workers — workers in general but especially the industrial workers — to protect their just rights vis-à-vis the entrepreneurs and the owners of the means of production”. Such organizations, while pursuing their specific purpose with regard to the common good, are a positive influence for social order and solidarity, and are therefore an indispensable element of social life.

CSDC 305





Business and its goals

Businesses should be characterized by their capacity to serve the common good of society through the production of useful goods and services. In seeking to produce goods and services according to plans aimed at efficiency and at satisfying the interests of the different parties involved, businesses create wealth for all of society, not just for the owners but also for the other subjects involved in their activity. Besides this typically economic function, businesses also perform a social function, creating opportunities for meeting, cooperating and the enhancement of the abilities of the people involved. In a business undertaking, therefore, the economic dimension is the condition for attaining not only economic goals, but also social and moral goals, which are all pursued together.

CSDC 338





Profits

The social doctrine of the Church recognizes the proper role of profit as the first indicator that a business is functioning well: “when a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed”. But this does not cloud her awareness of the fact that a business may show a profit while not properly serving society. For example, “it is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, and yet for the people — who make up the firm's most valuable asset — to be humiliated and their dignity offended”. This is what happens when businesses are part of social and cultural systems marked by the exploitation of people, tending to avoid the obligations of social justice and to violate the rights of workers.

CSDC 340 quoting CA 43 & 35; Mater et Magistra 53; CCC 2424





Role of business owners and management

Business owners and management must not limit themselves to taking into account only the economic objectives of the company, the criteria for economic efficiency and the proper care of "capital" as the sum of the means of production. It is also their precise duty to respect concretely the human dignity of those who work within the company. These workers constitute "the firm's most valuable asset" and the decisive factor of production. In important decisions concerning strategy and finances, in decisions to buy or sell, to resize, close or to merge a site, financial and commercial criteria must not be the only considerations made.

CSDC 344 quoting CA 32 & CCC 2432





Action of the State

The action of the State and of other public authorities must be consistent with the principle of subsidiarity and create situations favourable to the free exercise of economic activity. It must also be inspired by the principle of solidarity and establish limits for the autonomy of the parties in order to defend those who are weaker. Solidarity without subsidiarity, in fact, can easily degenerate into a “**Welfare State**”, while subsidiarity without solidarity runs the risk of encouraging forms of self-centred localism. In order to respect both of these fundamental principles, the State's intervention in the economic environment must be neither invasive nor absent, but commensurate with society's real needs. “The State has a duty to sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis. The State has the further right to intervene when particular monopolies create delays or obstacles to development. In addition to the tasks of harmonizing and guiding development, in exceptional circumstances the State can also exercise a substitute function”.

CSDC 351 quoting CA 48; CCC 2431





Taxes and Public spending

Public spending is directed to the common good when certain fundamental principles are observed: the payment of taxes as part of the duty of solidarity; a reasonable and fair application of taxes, precision and integrity in administering and distributing public resources. In the redistribution of resources, public spending must observe the principles of solidarity, equality and making use of talents. It must also pay greater attention to families, designating an adequate amount of resources for this purpose.

CSDC 355



Savings and consumer goods

Purchasing power must be used in the context of the moral demands of justice and solidarity, and in that of precise social responsibilities. One must never forget “the duty of charity ..., that is, the duty to give from one's ‘abundance’, and sometimes even out of one's needs, in order to provide what is essential for the life of a poor person”. This responsibility gives to consumers the possibility, thanks to the wider circulation of information, of directing the behaviour of producers, through preferences — individual and collective — given to the products of certain companies rather than to those of others, taking into account not only the price and quality of what is being purchased but also the presence of correct working conditions in the company as well as the level of protection of the natural environment in which it operates.

CSDC 359 quoting CA36





Globalization: opportunities and risks

Our modern era is marked by the complex phenomenon of economic and financial globalization, a process that progressively integrates national economies at the level of the exchange of goods and services and of financial transactions. In this process, an ever growing number of those involved in the economic sector is prompted to adopt a more global perspective concerning the choices that they must make with regard to future growth and profits. The new perspective of global society does not simply consist in the presence of economic and financial bonds between national forces at work in different countries, which have moreover always been present, but in the pervasiveness and the absolutely unprecedented nature of the system of relations that is developing. The role of financial markets is becoming ever more decisive and central.

CSDC 361



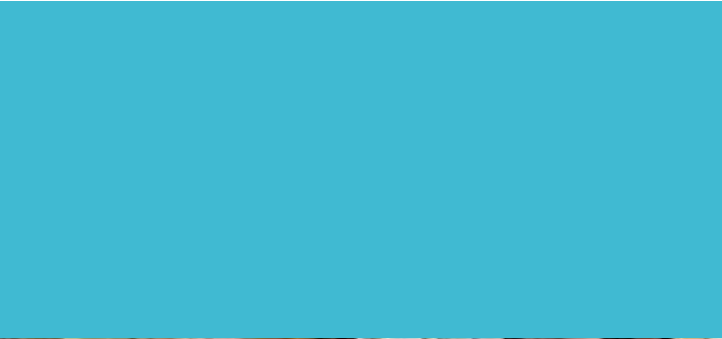


International Trade

The Church's social doctrine has time and again called attention to aberrations in the system of international trade, which often, owing to protectionist policies, discriminates against products coming from poorer countries and hinders the growth of industrial activity in and the transfer of technology to these countries. The continuing deterioration in terms of the exchange of raw materials and the widening of the gap between rich and poor countries has prompted the social Magisterium to point out the importance of ethical criteria that should form the basis of international economic relations: the pursuit of the common good and the universal destination of goods; equity in trade relationships; and attention to the rights and needs of the poor in policies concerning trade and international cooperation. Otherwise, “the poor nations remain ever poor while the rich ones become still richer”.

CSDC 364





The International Financial System

A financial economy that is an end unto itself is destined to contradict its goals, since it is no longer in touch with its roots and has lost sight of its constitutive purpose. In other words, it has abandoned its original and essential role of serving the real economy and, ultimately, of contributing to the development of people and the human community. In light of the extreme imbalance that characterizes the international financial system, the overall picture appears more disconcerting still: the processes of deregulation of financial markets and innovation tend to be consolidated only in certain parts of the world. This is a source of serious ethical concern, since the countries excluded from these processes do not enjoy the benefits brought about but are still exposed to the eventual negative consequences that financial instability can cause for their real economic systems, above all if they are weak or suffering from delayed development.

CSDC 369





Political community, the human person and a people

The human person is the foundation and purpose of political life.

The political community originates in the nature of persons, whose conscience "reveals to them and enjoins them to obey" the order which God has imprinted in all his creatures: "a moral and religious order; and it is this order — and not considerations of a purely extraneous, material order — which has the greatest validity in the solution of problems relating to their lives as individuals and as members of society, and problems concerning individual States and their interrelations". This order must be gradually discovered and developed by humanity. The political community, a reality inherent in mankind, exists to achieve an end otherwise unobtainable: the full growth of each of its members, called to cooperate steadfastly for the attainment of the common good, under the impulse of their natural inclinations towards what is true and good.

CSDC 384 quoting Pacem in Terris 258





A political community

The political community finds its authentic dimension in its reference to people: “it is and should in practice be the organic and organizing unity of a real people”. The term “a people” does not mean a shapeless multitude, an inert mass to be manipulated and exploited, but a group of persons, each of whom — “at his proper place and in his own way” — is able to form its own opinion on public matters and has the freedom to express its own political sentiments and to bring them to bear positively on the common good. A people “exists in the fullness of the lives of the men and women by whom it is made up, each of whom ... is a person aware of his own responsibilities and convictions.” Those who belong to a political community, although *organically* united among themselves as a people, maintain an irrepressible *autonomy* at the level of personal existence and of the goals to be pursued.

CSDC 385





The Spiritual aspect

The primary characteristic of a people is the sharing of life and values, which is the source of communion on the spiritual and moral level.

“Human society must primarily be considered something pertaining to the spiritual. Through it, in the bright light of truth men should share their knowledge, be able to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations, be inspired to seek spiritual values, mutually derive genuine pleasure from beauty of whatever order it be, always be readily disposed to pass on to others the best of their own cultural heritage and eagerly strive to make their own the spiritual achievements of others. These benefits not only influence but at the same time give aim and scope to all that has bearing on cultural expressions, economic and social institutions, political movements and forms, laws, and all other structures by which society is outwardly established and constantly developed”.

CSDC 386 quoting PC 286



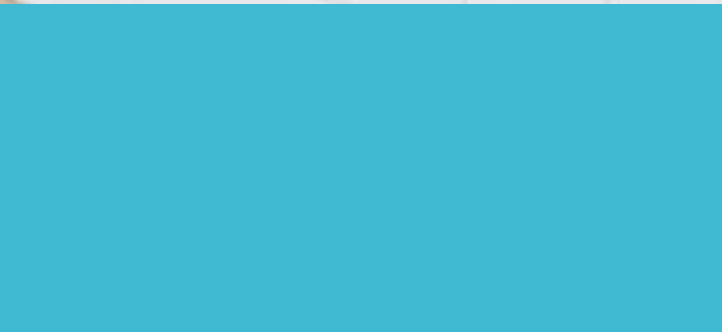


Political Authority

Political authority must guarantee an ordered and upright community life without usurping the free activity of individuals and groups but disciplining and orienting this freedom, by respecting and defending the independence of the individual and social subjects, for the attainment of the common good. Political authority is an instrument of coordination and direction by means of which the many individuals and intermediate bodies must move towards an order in which relationships, institutions and procedures are put at the service of integral human growth. Political authority, in fact, “whether in the community as such or in institutions representing the State, must always be exercised within the limits of morality and on behalf of the dynamically conceived common good, according to a juridical order enjoying legal status. When such is the case citizens are conscience-bound to obey”.

CSDC 394 quoting Gaudium et Spes 74





Instruments for political participation

Political parties have the task of fostering widespread participation and making public responsibilities accessible to all. Political parties are called to interpret the aspirations of civil society, orienting them towards the common good, offering citizens the effective possibility of contributing to the formulation of political choices. They must be democratic in their internal structure, and capable of political synthesis and planning.

Another instrument of political participation is the referendum, whereby a form of direct access to political decisions is practised. The institution of representation in fact does not exclude the possibility of asking citizens directly about the decisions of great importance for social life.

CSDC 413





A political community at the service of civil society

The political community is established to be of service to civil society, from which it originates. The Church has contributed to the distinction between the political community and civil society above all by her vision of man, understood as an autonomous, relational being who is open to the Transcendent. This vision is challenged by political ideologies of an individualistic nature and those of a totalitarian character, which tend to absorb civil society into the sphere of the State. The Church's commitment on behalf of social pluralism aims at bringing about a more fitting attainment of the common good and democracy itself, according to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and justice.

CSDC 417





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Many experiences of volunteer work are examples of great value that call people to look upon civil society as a place where it is possible to rebuild a public ethic based on solidarity, concrete cooperation and fraternal dialogue. All are called to look with confidence to the potentialities that thus present themselves and to lend their own personal efforts for the good of the community in general and, in particular, for the good of the weakest and the neediest. In this way, the principle of the “subjectivity of society” is also affirmed.

CSDC 420



Man and the environment

A correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself. In this latter case, one can go so far as to divinize nature or the earth, as can readily be seen in certain ecological movements that seek to gain an internationally guaranteed institutional status for their beliefs.

The Magisterium finds the motivation for its opposition to a concept of the environment based on ecocentrism and on biocentrism in the fact that "it is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value. Thus man's superior responsibility can be eliminated in favour of an egalitarian consideration of the 'dignity' of all living beings".

CSDC 463





Christian culture has always recognized the creatures that surround man as also gifts of God to be nurtured and safeguarded with a sense of gratitude to the Creator. Benedictine and Franciscan spirituality in particular has witnessed to this sort of kinship of man with his creaturely environment, fostering in him an attitude of respect for every reality of the surrounding world”.

CSDC 464





CREATION

and God saw that it was good...

The environment, a collective good

Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good, destined for all, by preventing anyone from using “with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate — animals, plants, the natural elements — simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs”. It is a responsibility that must mature on the basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator. “One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the ‘cosmos’ ”.

CSDC 466 quoting CA 40; Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 34





Peace – Fruit of love and justice

Peace is a value and a universal duty founded on a rational and moral order of society that has its roots in God himself, “the first source of being, the essential truth and the supreme good”. Peace is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Rather it is founded on a correct understanding of the human person and requires the establishment of an order based on justice and charity.

Peace is the fruit of justice, (cf. Is 32:17) understood in the broad sense as the respect for the equilibrium of every dimension of the human person. Peace is threatened when man is not given all that is due him as a human person, when his dignity is not respected and when civil life is not directed to the common good. The defence and promotion of human rights is essential for the building up of a peaceful society and the integral development of individuals, peoples and nations.

CSDC 494





The commitment of the lay faithful

The essential characteristic of the lay faithful who work in the Lord's vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1-16) is the secular nature of their Christian discipleship, which is carried out precisely in the world. "It belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will". By Baptism, the laity are incorporated into Christ and are made participants in his life and mission according to their specific identity. "The term 'laity' is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful who, by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world".

CSDC 541 quoting Lumen Gentium 31





Lay Catholics are disciples of Christ starting with the sacraments, that is, by virtue of what God has wrought in them, marking them with the very image of his Son Jesus Christ. It is from this divine gift of grace, and not from human concession, that is born the threefold “munus” (gift and duty) that characterizes the lay person as prophet, priest and king, according to his secular nature.

It is the proper duty of the lay faithful to proclaim the Gospel with an exemplary witness of life rooted in Christ and lived in temporal realities: the family; professional commitment in the world of work, culture, science and research; the exercise of social, economic and political responsibilities. All secular human realities — both personal and social, including various environments and historical situations, as well as structures and institutions — are the context in which the lay Christian lives and works. These realities are places where God's love is received; the commitment of the lay faithful must correspond to this vision and is to be considered an expression of evangelical charity; “for the lay faithful to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well”

CSDC 542, 543





The witness of the lay faithful is born from the gift of grace, recognized, nurtured and brought to maturity. This motivation makes their commitment in the world significant and is opposed to the characteristics of action that are proper to atheistic humanism, which lack an ultimate basis and are circumscribed within purely temporal limits. The eschatological perspective is the key that allows a correct understanding of human realities. From the standpoint of definitive goods, the lay faithful are able to engage in earthly activity according to the criteria of authenticity. Standards of living and greater economic productivity are not the only valid indicators for measuring the total fulfilment of the human person in this life, and they are of even less value when considering the life to come, “for man's horizons are not bounded only by the temporal order; living on the level of human history, he preserves the integrity of his eternal destiny”

CSDC 544 quoting CF 24; GS 76





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<https://www.svp.org.uk/svpyoungadults>

