

Catholic Social Teaching

As with last summer, I will do an extended series for my bulletin column. This summer we will look at the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST is the body of teaching concerned with creating a society that is in accord with God's 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 Catholic Social Teaching. They are all important, but they are not all equal. The order in which they are listed says something about their importance.

Principle 1: Life and Dignity of the Human Person. This principle is foundational for the others. Every person is made in the image and likeness of God and therefore 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. We are created in the image and likeness of God (who is a communion of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and therefore we are social beings. In other words, we need each other. Thomas Merton once wrote a book called, "No Man is an Island." 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 and therefore must be supported.

Principle 3: Rights and Responsibilities. This principle states that not only do we have a right to life, but also the right to conditions for living a decent life (e.g., food, healthcare, housing, education, and employment). Obviously, not everyone will agree on which policies will best achieve these goals. Hence, there can be legitimate disagreement in this area. This stands in contrast, however, whether it is optional to support policies that help promote and protect the sacredness of life at all stages. 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 concern for the poor and 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, 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.

Principle 6: Solidarity. We are one human family. After killing his brother Abel, God asked Cain where his brother was. Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God basically responded, "Yes, you are!" We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Therefore, we are called to seek peaceful and just resolutions to unjust situations or an unjust distribution of goods and services. In the last 40 years, we have become accustomed with the phrase "social justice," which 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 stewards of God's creation. We must be concerned not only for our present generation, but those that will follow. We show our respect for God our Creator by caring for creation. Pope Francis has done a great job of flushing out this principle with his recent encyclical *Laudato Si*.

We will look at each of these principles more in depth over the next seven weeks. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to know these principles and by God's grace, teach and draw from them to create a just and flourishing society. ~St. Therese, pray for us!

Goldy and His Family



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