

Key Concepts Underlying Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social teaching is based on some key concepts. By applying these concepts to different social issues, the Church makes judgments about the correct direction to follow.

The Common Good

When conditions exist in society that allow all people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their human and spiritual fulfillment more fully and more easily, the common good is achieved. It is important that we understand what the common good really means; it isn't just doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. A decision's impact on every person must be taken into account.

Responsibility of Political Authority

Although some people may be cynical about politics and government, the Church teaches that political authority (also called the state) has an important role: to defend and promote the common good of civil society. Policy makers at all levels of government should ensure that each person has access to the resources needed to lead a truly human life: "food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on"¹ (*Catechism*, 1908). These needs are often referred to as basic human rights.

Human Dignity

The homeless man on the street, the immigrant who crosses our borders illegally, even the prisoners in our jails all share the same human dignity that we have (remember Matthew 25:31–46). Because of this God calls us to consider every human being as "another self" (*Catechism*, 1944).

Human Solidarity

Solidarity means that we are to think in terms of friendship and charity toward our brothers and sisters in society. We are one. It's like being connected by invisible threads to every other person in the world. When one of us is suffering, that suffering is transferred down those invisible threads to all of us. As a starting point, solidarity means distributing the world's resources so that each of us gets our fair share and no one is suffering because of physical need.

1. Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 26 § 2.

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