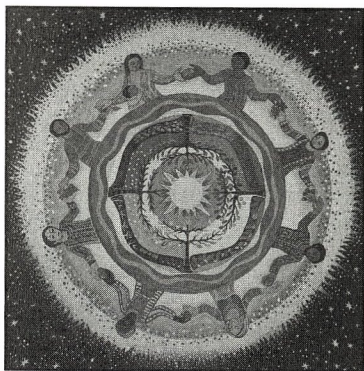


Living Justice

Catholic
Social Teaching
in Action



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Nine Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

In the previous four chapters, we examined many important questions that help us understand the significance and background of Catholic social teaching. Because of the great distance we have already traveled, we are now acquainted with the reasons for social action on the part of the Christian community, the historical development of the Church's social teaching, and the scriptural and theological sources of the documents that explain that teaching. In fact, it seems that we have accomplished almost everything except what many readers probably most desire: a detailed exploration of the content of that teaching we have heard so much about.

Chapter 5

It is time to reward your patience. This chapter is the “pay-off” as we investigate the actual messages contained in the encyclicals. Recall that the final columns of Table 1 provide a brief statement regarding the challenges and new messages of each of the twelve Vatican social teaching documents. This chapter offers a greatly expanded study of the central topics and arguments of these documents. Instead of marching through the encyclicals in chronological order, we will treat nine themes that form the heart of Catholic social teaching as it has developed over the course of its one-hundred-year tradition.

There is nothing magical about the number nine in this context, and nothing definitive about this particular listing of themes. Similar lists of various length have been compiled by other observers (for examples, see the first three items listed under chapter 5 in the “For Further Study” section). Although these lists rarely match perfectly, there is general agreement about the basic items that belong on a list of the core Catholic social teaching principles. Table 2 (see page 167) offers a listing of these nine themes along with several of the most important texts in the documents of Catholic social teaching that treat each theme.

I. The Dignity of Every Person and Human Rights

The claim that people have great worth and dignity is certainly familiar. In fact, it would be hard to think of a culture or religion that did not in some way affirm the value of human life. But the Catholic Church addresses the topic of human dignity in a special way that leads to some particularly firm conclusions about what is permissible both in individual moral choices and in ethical practices of entire societies. The positions staked out by Catholic social teaching on a wide range of issues is firmly embedded in a complete view of the origin, nature, and destiny of all people.

One key foundation of this picture of human life is that all humans are made in the image and likeness of God. This idea is found in the story of creation that comes to us from the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. Because we all somehow reflect the image of God in our rational minds and in our physical bodies, we are all entitled to be treated with respect and dignity. Because we are intelligent and free beings, God intends us to be immune from all slavery,

manipulation, or exploitation. At all stages of our lives—from the moment of conception through the vulnerable years of childhood and old age to the very moment of natural death—we deserve the care and attention that belong to beings of inestimable worth.

This insistence on the sanctity and infinite value of each human life has led the Catholic Church to uncompromising opposition to various threats to human dignity, including abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment. In its moral teachings, the Church has courageously held fast to a pro-life position on numerous controversial issues, advocating respect for all human life especially that of the vulnerable and outcast. Perhaps the most articulate spokesman on these matters among American Catholics was the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago. He wrote and spoke frequently about the topic of “a consistent ethic of life.” In advocating an attitude of profound respect for the sanctity of life at every moment of its duration, from conception to natural death, Cardinal Bernardin often used the biblical metaphor of the “seamless garment.” This comparison suggests that any attack against innocent life is an offense and potential threat to all human life.

One important aspect of human dignity is the notion of *equality*. The Catholic tradition interprets the key moments of the drama of human life in a way that treats all

people equally. From God's original bestowal of life (in the act of creation) to the sending of God's Son into the world to save us from sin (in the Incarnation) to the expectation of a final invitation into God's kingdom (in the Resurrection of the Dead), we recognize a fundamental equality in God's gracious activity. Of course, human social life has always been filled with many types of inequalities. When Catholic social teaching calls for a more equal sharing of political power, social status, and economic resources, it is merely extending the Christian doctrine of equal human dignity to the concrete realm of social existence. There are certain things that all children of God deserve, and when vast inequalities prevent people from attaining what they need to preserve their lives and develop their potential, people of faith must speak out against these injustices.

The twentieth century witnessed a remarkable movement toward a worldwide consensus regarding human rights. International covenants (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948) often base their arguments on the concept of human rights. Beginning especially with *Pacem in Terris* in 1963, the documents of Catholic social teaching also use the language of human rights as one way of expressing what is owed to all human beings by virtue of their dignity. Pope John XXIII dedicated *Pacem in Terris* to a full listing of the

Chapter 5

many types of human rights, calling these rights “universal, inviolable, and inalienable.” Because it was the first strong statement of a human rights position from the Church, this encyclical earned the nickname the “Catholic charter of human rights.” The convergence of worldwide opinion, both religious and secular in nature, around human rights is an encouraging sign for the prospect of greater cooperation and further improvement in the social conditions facing people of all nations and creeds.

But it is helpful to note that the Catholic view of human rights is distinctive because it is grounded on a complete theological framework, in which God is the ultimate source of our rights. The Catholic tradition of reflection on human rights is also special in that it always locates rights within human communities. In comparison, purely secular doctrines of rights have no similar foundation in a compelling portrayal of human nature and its origin. In a sense, they are doctrines without a solid theory behind them. They are exposed to the weighty charge that rights just seem to “float around,” sticking to people without any justification behind their passing claims.

While secular rights theories are certainly useful in speaking boldly about our immunity from being harmed by others, the claims they make have the shortcoming of not fit-

ting into a shared comprehensive view of the universe. Because they remain quite “thin,” such theories can offer little guidance on difficult questions such as how to resolve seemingly interminable conflicts of rights. The treatment of rights in Catholic social teaching reflects most of these same positive concerns and goals, but has the additional advantage of situating “rights talk” within a more satisfying and complete picture of the world. Because it is grounded in reverence for the sanctity of creation and its Creator, the Catholic approach to human rights can consider the entire web of relationships that connect God, the natural environment, persons, governments, and local communities.

2. Solidarity, Common Good, and Participation

This second item on our list serves as an important counterbalance to the first, and helps to prevent a rampant and destructive individualism. Rights should always be placed in the context of solidarity and concern for the well-being of the wider community. If we considered only the dignity and infinite

worth of the individual in isolation, we might forget that *rights* come paired with *duties*. All the things that persons have rightful claims to are necessarily matched with the things these same persons are expected to give back to others who depend upon them. The Catholic social encyclicals teach that to be human is to experience not only rights but also obligations to others.

Solidarity is a single word that captures a complex of meanings. It calls attention to the simple and easily observable fact that people are interdependent; they rely upon each other for almost all their biological and social needs. The complex fabric of social life, including human achievements such as language, art, culture, and education, testifies to the many ways we depend on shared efforts in all fields of human endeavors. Using the term “solidarity” means that we recognize human interdependence not only as a necessary fact but also as a positive value in our lives. We cannot realize our full potential or appreciate the full meaning of our dignity unless we share our lives with others and cooperate on projects that hold the promise of mutual benefit.

In his three social encyclicals, that is *Laborem Exercens* (“On Human Work”), *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, and *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II repeatedly calls solidarity an essential virtue of social life. He argues that God not only allows us to depend upon each other but absolutely wills us to share our-

selves in the context of intimate as well as larger groupings of our neighbors. To be human is to be a social being, one whose very life is and should be bound up with those around us.

Solidarity begins as an inner attitude and, when it has fully taken root within us, expresses itself through numerous external activities that demonstrate our commitment to the well-being of others. Just as children naturally reach out to their peers to build friendships, all humans have a natural propensity to form and nourish many social relationships. Catholic social teaching portrays each person as naturally fitting into the larger society. Except in unusual situations, such as being shipwrecked on a deserted island, human flourishing is always communal and social. The full features of our human nature and dignity come to maturity only in the context of community life, where many relationships develop and ripen.

Two especially important aspects of social life are summarized by a pair of terms frequently linked together in Catholic social teaching: *common good* and *participation*. To speak of the common good is to recognize that there are numerous rightful goals in life beyond our own private benefits. In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII defines the common good as “the sum total of those conditions of social living whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection” (no. 65). We all have an

obligation to promote the common good by making whatever contributions are necessary to improve the lives of others.

Consider one example that illustrates the obligation of all of us to promote the common good. One of the key conditions for human flourishing in society is the education and maturation of youth. Since this is often an expensive task, and since all of us ultimately have a stake in quality schools, it falls on every member of society to support education. We might imagine an elderly childless couple launching an argument to explain why they should not pay taxes to support education for future generations. Perhaps this couple would base their claims on the argument that they themselves will not benefit from costly improvements in public schools. At first blush, based solely on the logic of self-interest, such an argument seems to make a certain amount of sense. However, an understanding of common good that is consistent with Catholic social teaching would point to the obligation and necessity of all of us, however indirect our stake, to make significant sacrifices for such improvements that will bring broad benefits to society, including future generations.

The other related term is *participation*. As the tradition of Catholic social teaching has unfolded in its full appreciation of the equality of all members of society, the theme of equal participation has come to play a more and more important role in its documents. Each of us has at once a right and

a duty to participate in the full range of activities and institutions of social life. To be excluded from playing a significant role in the life of society is a serious injustice, for it frustrates our legitimate aspirations to express our human freedom. Anything that blocks full political participation (such as unreasonable restrictions on voting rights for minorities) or economic participation (such as racial or gender discrimination in education or employment) counts as a serious offense against human rights. A sincere regard for the common good will inspire concerned members of society to oppose such injustices and encourage full participation for all, regardless of differences of race, gender, or creed.

The ordinary way that people participate in the *economy* is through their labor. We will look at Catholic social teaching on questions of work and employment when we examine item six on our list of nine themes. The ordinary way for people to participate in the *political life* of society is through democratic activity that allows them to determine and influence the structures of government. When it is fulfilling its proper role, government is the instrument of a people, not something that drains their resources or threatens to control them. Government is legitimate when it assists our efforts to pursue a happy, prosperous and meaningful life without undue interference with our God-given liberties, including freedom of religion and conscience.

Catholic social teaching portrays government as the privileged agent of the common good and as a natural part of a well-ordered human community. The God who intends people to live together in society also enlightens our minds as we seek to organize our large-scale social cooperation. We naturally turn to the assistance of properly selected public authorities whose policies supplement our private efforts to order society justly. These government officials are entrusted with the task of safeguarding our rights and carrying out our duties to other members of society. Without government as an expression of our solidarity, we could do little to insure peace and advance the cause of social justice.

3. Family Life

Since solidarity is about our most basic sense of belonging to society, then we move next to the most basic unit of society to which we all belong in some way: the family. The family occupies a special place in Catholic social teaching; it is the most intimate sphere in which people cooperate and the first place where children learn about themselves, their individual identities, and their vocations within the wider society.

Church documents sometimes refer to the family as the “domestic church” because it is also where young people first encounter God, form their consciences, and learn moral virtues. Elsewhere it is referred to as the “first cell of society,” for no institution can substitute for the important social roles played by families. The responses of justice and charity that are called for in the social encyclicals depend upon decisions made along with our loved ones in the context of family life and on the level of the individual household.

The well-being of the entire society absolutely depends upon healthy families, committed marriages, and responsible parenthood. Family life is where we learn and practice the virtues of love and compassion that allow us to imagine alternatives to the ruthless competition and selfish individualism that we witness all too often in the business world and in our market-based society. Outside of family life, it is rare to witness a spirit of profound self-sacrifice and generous giving to others that does not count the cost to oneself. But within our families, we are not surprised by (and indeed almost expect) repeated acts of forgiveness and self-emptying love on the part of marital partners, parents, and their children. In a world of bewildering complexity and rapid, unpredictable change, the stable relationships of family and home life are like a safe port in a fierce storm. Families are the place where

the unconditional love of God is reflected in everyday human activities, where we gain a glimpse of the unity and communion that we hope to find in the Kingdom of God.

But we must also be on guard against excessive idealism about family life. Real-life families experience serious challenges and numerous problems, from within (stemming from their members, who are rarely saints) and from outside (stemming from the world beyond the household). To its credit, *Gaudium et Spes*, the 1965 Vatican II document that contains the most extended treatment of family life of any of the twelve Vatican social teaching documents, describes several of these challenges in a frank and eye-opening way. Several pages of this document are devoted to the problems encountered by families today. *Gaudium et Spes* introduces its survey of these problems with the compassionate observation that:

. . . serious disturbances are caused in families by modern economic conditions, by influences at once social and psychological, and by the demands of civil society (no. 47).

Many of these problems come from perennial sources of hardship, such as poverty, illness, inattentiveness of family members, materialism, and irresponsibility. Others come

from newer pressures, such as overwork, modern rootlessness, the entry of more women into the workforce with resulting scarcity of reliable daycare, and the adjustments associated with divorce and blended families. Indeed, our thinking about family life itself is constantly challenged by the existence of new family patterns that do not conform to our accustomed notions of the nuclear family. Unlike in years past, households form and combine for nontraditional reasons and with new relationships between children and adults drawn from several generations.

On many of these items, wise public policies, such as social welfare programs, subsidized provision of quality daycare, medical leave, unemployment compensation, and retirement benefits can make a huge contribution to the health of millions of families. Pope John Paul II offers a comprehensive list of constructive government policies toward families in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. Some nations, particularly in Western Europe, are far ahead of the United States in adopting such family-friendly economic policies. Catholic social teaching suggests that any compassionate society will count the health of family life as among the highest priorities on its policy agenda.

4. Subsidiarity and the Proper Role of Government

Of these nine items, this one has the title that will probably baffle the most people. The term *subsidiarity* comes from the Latin word for “assistance,” and it refers to the way the various levels of society should relate to each and assist one another in bringing about the best outcomes for all people. The term was coined by Pope Pius XI who, in the 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, draws a distinction between “higher collectivities” on the one hand and “lesser and subordinate bodies” on the other hand.

The Pope’s message is about the proper division of labor among human institutions. For example, there are some tasks and goals that should be accomplished on the local level, and others that are more appropriate for larger entities such as national governments. While it is not always immediately clear which level applies best to a given task, the rule of thumb laid out in Catholic social teaching is to rely as much as possible on those solutions that are closest to the people affected and which employ the smallest groupings and mechanisms that are still effective. Abraham Lincoln was thinking of the same delicate balance when he stated:

The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do at all or cannot as well do, for themselves—in their separate and individual capacities.

This wise description of the proper balance to be struck in relying on government action is a better guide to real-life situations than the often quoted but simplistic motto, “he governs best who governs least.”

One of the benefits of the principle of subsidiarity is that it respects the natural groupings that people form with their neighbors. For example, if the people of a small village agree on a goal (say, building a road or cleaning up a polluted swamp) and have the means to accomplish it, they should avoid involving any larger bodies in the task. Pope Pius XI specifically mentions not only geographical but also vocational groupings (trade and professional bodies such as labor unions and the medieval occupational guilds they replaced) among those human associations that should exercise rightful autonomy where possible. Their activities should not be subsumed under larger umbrellas unless there is good reason and some real benefits from this shift.

But Pius XI hastens to add an insight that our common sense also suggests: there are many occasions when larger bodies can make a real and indispensable contribution to local

efforts. In terms of American government, we would speak here of the need for state or even federal assistance to supplement the efforts of municipalities and counties. In many projects, such as public works, building roads, infrastructure improvements, pollution control, and even police investigations, there is no substitute for government activity on higher levels.

As many moments in human history demonstrate, large-scale efforts of national governments are often the only effective means of marshaling the resources needed for immense and complex tasks. Without the authority and funding mechanisms of a centralized government, neither national defense nor a parks system nor many other desirable items would be possible. This insight is captured in the common expression, “you should have *only* the government you need, but also *all* the government you need.” While it will always be necessary to make judgments on a case-by-case basis, a good summary of the wisdom of subsidiarity is, “as small as possible, but big when necessary.”

Pope Pius XI lived in an age that was witnessing the growth of totalitarianism, including the threat of fascism as well as communism. His message to resist needless centralization echoes to our own day, when so many people also recognize the drawbacks and inefficiencies of an overreliance on large-scale government. It is certainly desirable to respect the

authority of local institutions, from voluntary associations to families themselves. Nevertheless, we must remember that national governments are not to be portrayed as our enemies but, rather, as the very instruments by which we join our efforts together when necessary to accomplish important goals that could not be addressed on local levels.

As long as our society maintains a robust set of medium-sized bodies and voluntary associations that bridge the levels between individuals and their national government, a healthy balance can be established that averts the threat of totalitarian control. People will still have the freedom to join clubs and participate in local affairs without feeling dwarfed by “big brother,” that is, an overactive and intrusive government. Most citizens will discover their richest satisfactions in belonging to not just a nation but also to organizations of like-minded people in groups such as the Knights of Columbus, Rotary, Elks Clubs, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and numerous leisure associations, from bowling leagues to golf clubs. Through these affiliations, society can progress smoothly, taking advantage of the efficiency of large-scale endeavors at the same time as it respects the rights and prerogatives of individuals and local bodies.

At the heart of the principle of subsidiarity, then, is the distinction between state and society. Catholic social teaching is always mindful that the strength and vitality of a people

goes far beyond its government structures and officials. However useful and necessary government action is, we must never forget that the state is just one small part of the larger society that it is meant to serve, never to control.

5. Property Ownership in Modern Society: Rights and Responsibilities

In chapter four, we took a look at the wise way in which St. Thomas Aquinas treated the difficult subject of private property. He recognized two competing values: the common good, and the individual ownership of property. As we saw earlier in this chapter, a true respect for the common good suggests that the material things necessary for a good life should be widely available for use by the whole human community. But the Catholic tradition also makes us aware of the benefits of individual ownership, which not only encourage the most efficient and the most orderly of property arrangements but also gives us an incentive to be productive and to care for the goods God has created.

Catholic social teaching has followed the path mapped out by Aquinas regarding property and has attempted to apply his principles to new situations in the modern world. From *Rerum Novarum* on, it has consistently defended the basic right to private ownership of property. But it has also adjusted its message to account for new situations and needs that place prudent limits on property holding and unlimited acquisition of goods. To ignore the needs of our less-fortunate neighbors, whether out of selfish motives or mere neglect, is to frustrate the very purpose of God in creating the material world we share. The Creator intends the common gift of the earth to be used for the nourishment and sustenance of all God's children, not just for the benefit of a few privileged members of society.

A good example of this type of limitation on the holding of property appears in the 1967 encyclical *Popolorum Progressio*. In paragraph 23 of that document, Pope Paul VI reminds us that:

... private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute and unconditional right. No one is justified in keeping for his [or her] exclusive use what he [or she] does not need, when others lack necessities.

In the very next paragraph, the Pope indicates the contemporary injustice that prompted him to repeat this long-held

Christian prohibition against the hoarding of wealth. Those who hold a great deal of property (Paul VI was probably thinking about the wealthy owners of Latin American *latifundia*, or landed estates) hurt the poor when they allow their plantations to lie fallow for long periods of time while nearby landowners are close to starvation. The encyclical reaches the judgment that if these tracts of land are “extensive, unused or poorly used” and if these ownership patterns “bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation.”

To *expropriate* property means to take it from its present owner, a course of action not normally recommended in the documents of Catholic social teaching. The earliest social encyclicals strenuously opposed any attempts to seize property, especially socialist and communist programs of nationalization of industry and agricultural lands. According to *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), this form of socialism was against the natural law and an injustice to all property holders. But by the 1960s, social conditions had changed so much that several recent popes have modified the teaching to reflect new challenges. Even before Pope Paul VI's 1967 argument that some expropriation might be justified in extreme conditions, Pope John XXIII had discussed the need to consider more property as the common posses-

sion of the people of a nation. He presented these arguments in paragraphs 51–67 of his 1961 social encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. Let us look at what he says in this passage.

Pope John spends many paragraphs of *Mater et Magistra* surveying recent global developments, such as vast improvements in technology, transportation, and communication. He notes:

One of the principle characteristics of our time is the multiplication of social relationships, that is, a daily more complex interdependence of citizens. . . . These developments in social living are at once both a symptom and a cause of the growing intervention of public authorities in matters. . . .

Our understanding of property must also adjust to these changed circumstances. Because all people are increasingly dependent upon certain types of industrial production (such as electricity, oil, and communications), the companies that make up these industries must be more responsive to the needs of all people.

John XXIII calls this process of guaranteeing greater accountability and social responsibility “socialization,” and he identifies government as its primary agent. Alongside the familiar private obligation upon each of us to pursue the common good, the Church had now come to recognize the

legitimacy of public and governmental efforts to exercise socially responsible use of property. By no means does this suggest that all property should be collectivized or that all industries should be nationalized. Rather, it implies that the social character of property can be safeguarded when certain key utilities are regulated or perhaps even owned by the entire people, represented by their government. To us today, this is not really such an unfamiliar idea; many utilities, even in the United States, are considered to be in the public domain or are at least regulated by various government agencies to prevent harmful monopolistic behavior by private corporations.

The notion of socialization was widely misunderstood when *Mater et Magistra* first appeared. Some people, for example, confused it with “socialism.” William F. Buckley, a prominent Catholic intellectual and political correspondent, commented: “*Mater si, Magistra no.*” With this Latin phrase, he meant that he would continue to consider the Church his spiritual “mother” but no longer a reliable “teacher” on social issues. Buckley and other free-market conservatives feared that John XXIII was advocating not only the prudent limitation of private ownership of property, but its utter elimination. They did not trust the principle of subsidiarity to guard against the rampant centralization of the functions of government. Nor did they welcome the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* which, four years later in 1965, reaffirmed

socialization as an important principle to advance the common good and the rights of the most vulnerable members of modern interdependent societies.

We have already seen Pope Paul VI's treatment in 1967 of the occasional necessity of expropriation of private property. Twenty years after that comment in *Popolorum Progressio*, Pope John Paul II introduced yet another way of thinking about limitations upon private property. In paragraph 42 of *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, he wrote:

. . . the goods of this world are equally meant for all.
The right to private property is valid and necessary,
but it does not nullify the value of this principle.
Private property, in fact, is under a social mortgage.

Anyone who has ever held a mortgage on a house surely knows what this means. Just as we cannot truthfully say that we own a house until the mortgage is completely paid off, we cannot really say that we are the final owners of the material gifts that come from God. As long as we remain God's handiwork, our holding of property is strictly conditioned on fulfilling our social obligations to the rest of God's creatures. To see our property as coming under a "social mortgage" means that we cannot disregard the needs of the less fortunate, use our property in ways that harm them, or exclude them from full participation in society. John Paul II's

words, like those of several of his predecessors who issued social encyclicals, give us much to think about regarding the social dimension of the property we hold.

6. The Dignity of Work, Rights of Workers, and Support for Labor Unions

As we saw in chapter three, the historical origin of the tradition of Catholic social teaching is bound up with the Church's concern for workers. Social Catholicism in the nineteenth century was dedicated to improving the conditions of labor wherever possible. In many ways, the Church was ahead of its time in advocating for better treatment of workers. Today we take for granted many of the original goals of these early church efforts. Government has become the instrument that now enforces prevailing labor protections, at least in most industrialized nations. These include minimum wage laws, safety and health regulations, pension plans, social insurance, and the rights of workers to organize into labor unions.

The two encyclicals with the most extensive treatment of labor issues are *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 and *Laborem Exercens* in 1981. Although separated by ninety years, they share at least one remarkable feature in common: both show a tendency to move back and forth rather quickly between the worlds of abstract theological reflection and practical principles of worker justice. This “quick passage” from eternal truths to specific measures reflects the great confidence shared by both their authors that the nitty-gritty reforms advocated in these documents are fully congruent with the will of God for the world. Both Leo XIII and John Paul II hold up an ideal of worker justice that demands close attention to the concrete conditions that face workers in the actual workplace and in the labor markets that determine the availability of work and the terms of their employment. While both popes respect the fact that the great diversity of conditions complicates the way broad principles of worker justice are applied from place to place, neither is afraid to insist on the importance of concrete measures, such as “living wages” and reasonable work hours, for the entire workforce.

Perhaps the most controversial of the positions regarding work staked out within Catholic social teaching concerns the Church’s support for labor unions. Workers’ rights to organize and enter into collective bargaining are considered an important outgrowth of other human rights, such as the

right to free association and the right to participate fully in the economic and political life of society. Of course, we all know that labor unions have often been criticized on a number of grounds, sometimes with good reason. For example, we often hear them associated with corruption, favoritism, and the threat of disruptive and potentially violent strikes. They also are accused of driving up the cost of doing business and sacrificing the international competitiveness of domestic industries because of the allegedly excessive wage demands they make.

Clearly, there are some problematic aspects of union activity. Yet Catholic social teaching contends that a world without labor unions would witness a much less favorable environment for achieving justice and an equitable sharing of the earth's resources. Without the ability to combine their voices through organized labor, workers would be at the mercy of their far more powerful employers who might take advantage of their inferior position. Labor unions are crucial elements in the overall balance of power in the economy, and Catholic social teaching consistently portrays them as playing a constructive role in the pursuit of economic justice. Indeed, it is increasingly a source of concern that in many places unions seem to be on the decline. As unions represent a smaller and smaller percentage of the overall workforce and enjoy a lower profile in our economic life, the power of work-

ers to bargain effectively to protect their rights will unfortunately diminish greatly.

Alongside its support of labor unions, Catholic social teaching contains many additional messages about work. Here labor is portrayed as neither a necessary evil nor merely a means to the end of supporting family life; rather, labor is presented as something that is intrinsically good for us. In our work, we can discover rich meaning and develop our potential. Even in the humdrum routine of daily life in the workplace, work is more than a taxing or boring necessity. Engaging in labor opens up new avenues of communication and planning with our colleagues, with whom we toil for common purposes and build up mutual respect. Work represents an opportunity to collaborate with others and to contribute our special talents to the wider society.

Besides its practical benefits, human labor also includes theological significance, as it contains our response to the God who invites us to become co-creators of the material world. This is why human work should never be treated as a mere commodity, something to be bought and sold in a cavalier way, in impersonal markets. This is also why workers must not be treated as just another cog in the huge machine of production, an attitude that offends the dignity of all. These concerns are especially prominent in *Laborem Exercens*, where John Paul II repeatedly insists on the “priority of labor

over capital.” Through labor, we pursue not only a job or a career, but a vocation—a calling in which we are summoned by God to develop our capabilities and to follow the Carpenter from Nazareth on our path of discipleship. Catholic social teaching is a great resource for future efforts to develop a full-blown *theology of work* and indeed to discover a *spirituality of labor* appropriate for our age.

7. Colonialism and Economic Development

A major topic of Catholic social teaching in the last half-century concerns the legacy of colonialism and the challenge of economic development in the poorest parts of the world. Everyone agrees that there are large and disturbing gaps between the world’s richest and poorest lands. Most people further agree that the history of European colonialism and superpower imperialism have played an important role in causing these glaring disparities. The remaining differences of opinion concern the specific assignment of blame and the hard task of choosing the wisest strategy to address global poverty and underdevelopment today.

Catholic social teaching weighs in on these complicated topics by offering two sets of ideas. The *first* is the more consistent part of its message. The Church repeatedly reminds us that we all have a moral obligation to care deeply about world poverty and to do all we can to address this scourge against our common humanity. Despite the artificial divisions of people into races, religions, and nations, we are all part of one human family. Hunger and disease in any part of the world should be a concern for all of us and should demand our urgent attention. The strenuous efforts of people in the richest nations to combat poverty in the poorest lands, even thousands of miles away, are essential expressions of human solidarity.

Repeated calls for “mutual assistance among nations” and “taking into account the interests of others” are sprinkled throughout paragraphs 157–211 of Pope John XXIII’s 1961 letter *Mater et Magistra*, the first section of any social encyclical to deal extensively with global poverty. The message that we cannot remain indifferent to any human suffering, no matter how far away it might be, is heard frequently in practically all the social encyclicals since then. If we are indeed to fulfill our role as “our brother’s keeper,” then we must fight the temptation of selfishness and isolationism, and truly involve ourselves in advancing the well-being of the very poorest residents of our planet. While we often hear the

expressions “First World and Third World” or “North and South,” we are called to look beyond these artificial divisions to the deeper unity of all those who share the earth.

The *second* way Catholic social teaching addresses poverty and underdevelopment is to invite believers to ponder the causes of these problems and to offer suggestions for improvement. This message is harder to summarize because the advice offered by church leaders has shifted over time. At first the proposals in the encyclicals remained cautious and halfhearted, as they focused mainly on the level of urging individual moral enlightenment and recommending the practice of virtues such as charity and prudence. This may be quite understandable, since it is much easier to call attention to problems such as world poverty than it is to enter the controversial arena of debate over the precise causes and most effective solutions to these problems. But as the seriousness of global poverty became clearer, the Church felt a new urgency to get beyond the level of vague recommendations, such as *Mater et Magistra's* somewhat timid call for “international cooperation.” In a post-colonial age, Catholic social teaching needed to get more specific about the changes that were so desperately needed. The time had come to start asking about specifics: What kind of cooperation? To fight which evils? To change which structures?

Among the church leaders most impatient for sweeping changes were the bishops assembled at the Second Vatican Council, including Pope Paul VI, who presided over the end of the Council and led the Church until 1978. Because the bishops at Vatican II were assembled from all over the world and shared close quarters for many months, they had ample opportunity to consult with one another. They talked frequently about the dire condition facing millions, and compared notes about how their efforts to be good pastors were so often frustrated by the desperate poverty that discouraged, disrupted, and even claimed millions of lives in their various homelands.

Several inspiring passages in *Gaudium et Spes* reflect the concern and sincere search for solutions on the part of the world's bishops. An especially stirring section, paragraphs 63 to 72, includes a lament over the state of a world in which, all too often, "luxury and misery rub shoulders." Paul VI, the first pope to travel widely outside of Europe, went even further in addressing the Church's concerns about maldistribution. He dedicated major sections of three important social teaching documents (*Popolorum Progressio*, *Octogesima Adveniens*, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*) to the problem of world poverty. Here and in many other writings and speeches, Pope Paul sincerely wrestled with the urgent puzzle of what should

be done by the Church, by individual nations, and by international agencies to address global underdevelopment.

The writings of Paul VI ushered the Catholic Church into a new era of reflection and advocacy regarding international economics. After the 1967 encyclical *Popolorum Progressio*, there was no turning back to the former timid approach that consisted mostly of hand-wringing and moralizing about how the wealthy should find it in their hearts to offer charitable assistance to the destitute. The Pope boldly identified the vast inequalities between rich and poor as unjust results of sinful structures of world trade and finance that shut the majority of the world's population out of opportunities for self-improvement. While some of the blame might be placed on past generations and the inheritance of European colonialism from previous centuries, the continuation of these imbalances must be confronted and condemned.

Pope Paul VI contended that economies must be restructured to serve true human needs, not the wants of the most affluent. He advocated such measures as: 1) land reform in the Third World; 2) an end to export-maximizing policies that warped local economies by favoring the production of goods that would be most profitable for a few, not most useful for the many; and 3) more generous international aid to support micro-development and to increase the availability of credit to farmers and townspeople in Africa, Asia, and Latin

America. Measures such as these are designed to place more of the tools required for self-improvement in the hands of those who currently have no access to these critical resources.

Sometimes in our reflection on development issues, the word *tools* is used metaphorically, standing for educational and employment opportunities. In other instances, we are talking about tools in the literal sense. Micro-development projects that supply sewing machines to women's cooperatives in Africa or farm implements to villagers in Central America are the practical forms of assistance that produce tangible results to improve the lives of the most vulnerable. Often what is required is not necessarily an outright gift but, rather, access to credit and marketing arrangements that make possible modest income-generating activities such as handcrafts and fish farming. To its credit, the Church has sponsored numerous projects such as these through Catholic Relief Services, Caritas International, and similar faith-based organizations, but far more needs to be done through international agencies, religious and secular alike. If global solidarity is to have real meaning beyond pleasant-sounding phrases, then Christians and all others must commit themselves to these concrete measures to restructure the world economy, even where these measures may entail sacrifices on the part of the rich.

The path taken by Paul VI was continued by John Paul II, whose three social encyclicals also emphasize the structural

dimensions of global injustice and maldistribution of resources. Especially in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, John Paul bemoans the growing gap between rich and poor nations, frequently contrasting the superabundance enjoyed by a few with the desperate struggle for survival experienced by so many. He condemns the excesses of wasteful consumerism and materialism as evidence of a distortion he calls “super-development.”

Elsewhere in *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, the Pope identifies a number of “structures of evil,” including the crushing burden of international debt, the arms race, and a form of economic domination often termed “neo-colonialism.” John Paul II denounces these harmful trends and patterns which are responsible for the worsening plight of the poorest as they suffer from the effects of unemployment, a housing crisis, illiteracy, and other obstacles to their full human development. In prophetic words in paragraph 37 of that encyclical, John Paul attributes many of these global problems to two basic social sins: the “all-consuming desire for profit” and the “thirst for power.” These evils have come to resemble idolatries in the modern world. We will examine the notion of “social sin” or “structures of evil” more fully in chapter seven.

It may be hard for average Christians to know how to respond to the Church’s challenging message about worldwide economic development. Most middle-class churchgoers in the

affluent nations may have a vague sense of guilt about living in a society that somehow benefits from the cheap labor and resources extracted from Third World nations, but they probably have few ideas of how to go about making improvements. After all, when Paul VI called for a “civilization of love” or John Paul II urged a “more authentic development,” they had in mind a thorough restructuring of worldwide patterns of trade, production, and finance that would spread the benefits of economic life more widely. Although Catholic social teaching seeks to energize us to attack these problems, the staggering dimensions of the task ahead can easily paralyze us.

Because none of us in isolation has sufficient power to change the large economic and political structures that determine present conditions, our model of change will have to be one of gradual and modest action, each of us pitching in as we are able. But even if our progress is measured in baby steps rather than giant leaps, we cannot ignore the call to all Christians to contribute in some ways to alleviate the suffering of our poorest neighbors here and abroad. Besides being individually generous with the goods we personally control, we are urged by Catholic social teaching to look for new expressions of solidarity with the poor. We might join campaigns for worker justice, boycott products from sweatshops, or pressure Congress and the World Bank to forgive more of the staggering world debt.

These and similar action steps of our own design can be creative ways of responding personally to the general call to global responsibility that comes from the Church. It is understandable, of course, that most of the time our energies and imaginations are focused on the smaller circle of our families, workplaces, and neighborhoods. But we should also take to heart the insightful (if somewhat clichéd) bumper-sticker message, to “think globally, act locally.”

8. Peace and Disarmament

In the documents of Catholic social teaching, the goal of justice is closely linked to the ideal of peace. The proper ordering of God’s creation includes not only prosperity and a fair distribution of resources but also the security and stability that is so well summarized in the Hebrew word for peace: *shalom*. Meaning more than just a temporary absence of open hostilities, the ideal of *shalom* calls us to a thorough respect for all our neighbors in relationships that are characterized by an ever deeper trust and a commitment to providing mutual assistance.

Of course, history has taught us many hard lessons that lead us to expect anything but the full attainment of the ideals

of shalom. Every human age has witnessed wars, civil strife, genocide, and ethnic conflict of greatly disturbing proportions. Our inhumanity to one another has been sparked by greed, hatred, and sometimes even allegedly religious motivations. Christian responses to war and violence must go beyond merely vague feelings of distress and regret to genuine and effective strategies of peacemaking. Of all the possible approaches to the task of building peace, the two dominant Christian approaches to peace are pacifism and the just-war theory.

In chapter four we noted the development of the just-war theory as one Christian response to the conflicting values present in the real world of human sin and division. From the start, Christians rejected the extreme position of the “total war” approach as completely opposed to the teachings of Christ, but after a few centuries questions began to surface about whether some types of “limited warfare” might be allowable. Starting with Augustine, Christian thinkers began to justify the use of force against unjust aggressors in certain circumstances as the most appropriate way to respond to the command to demonstrate love for others with all the means at our disposal.

The Christian presumption against violence gave way to the noble desire to protect the innocent from harm. Many believers reached the conclusion that the best we can do in these difficult situations is to limit the damage while we

defend innocent civilians by means of the deadly force we otherwise would choose to avoid. Taking up arms in justified causes such as these came to be referred to as *strange acts of love*, undertaken with the same reluctance that parents feel when they are forced to discipline their unruly children. Because it insists on employing the absolute minimum of force to achieve the objective of resolving conflicts, the just-war theory at its best can never be used as a “fig leaf” to exact disproportionate revenge or to support militarism or extreme nationalism. The just-war theory came to form the mainstream of Christian reflection on violence for many centuries, and the documents of modern Catholic social teaching generally assume this stance in the few places where they treat issues of war and peace in any detail or at any length.

Recall that chapter four’s treatment of the just-war theory was intended to illustrate how human reason serves as an important source of Catholic social teaching and Christian ethics in general. The point we were making there was that theologians reasoned their way to the criteria of the just-war theory, rather than finding this approach in any other already existing Christian source. Another of the four sources we examined is revelation, specifically Scripture. When we look at the New Testament, and particularly at the Gospels in their portrayals of the life and teaching of Jesus, we find no obvious support for the just-war theory, or for any approach that

would permit the use of force, even to defend innocent lives. Jesus did not lift a finger to save his own life and, in fact, rebuked those who drew the sword to defend him. Many of the sayings of Jesus lend credibility to the pacifists' claim that a true follower of Christ follows a strict policy of nonviolence, never resorting to force for self-defense or even in defense of innocent neighbors.

There are many versions and traditions of pacifism. Some of these are inspired by the New Testament and are practiced by communities of Christians, such as the Mennonites and several other groups which began as offshoots of the Protestant Reformation. Within modern Catholicism, advocates of pacifism have been rare, but some branches of lay movements, such as the Catholic Worker, have been outspoken in support of a strict nonviolence lifestyle. The issue of who actually qualifies as a pacifist becomes complicated when we start considering distinctions between related schools of thought, such as "nonviolence," "nonresistance," and "passive resistance to evil." Despite the complexity of the topic, suffice it to say that, until quite recently, pacifism seldom received much serious attention in Catholic circles.

We would look in vain through the twelve Vatican social teaching documents for a detailed treatment of the relative merits of pacifism and the just-war theory. The encyclicals

generally assume that a proportionate and carefully ordered use of force, when justified by a serious threat to a nation or to innocent people, can qualify as a socially responsible reaction when other options have been exhausted. Several times, popes take the opportunity to decry how regrettable the resort to violence is, urging negotiation as an alternative to counterattacks to aggressors. Although several of the documents use phrases such as “never again war!” the basic stance of the encyclical tradition remains in the just-war camp. However much they hate war, popes have been reluctant to deny states the right they claim to engage in what they consider to be legitimate defense. The principle that warfare might be justified under certain conditions remains dominant in Catholic social thought.

Especially noteworthy is *Pacem in Terris*, the 1963 encyclical written by John XXIII, one of several recent popes who witnessed the horrors of war firsthand. John had served in the Italian army during World War I and was terrified by the prospect of further escalating violence, especially if it were directed against civilians. He wrote *Pacem in Terris* in the wake of the Berlin and Cuban Missile Crises, when the super-power rivalry had recklessly placed the world on the brink of nuclear war. His plea for peaceful resolution of differences is poignant, especially where he dedicates fifteen paragraphs (nn. 109–119 and 126–129) to a description of the merits of

disarmament and negotiation. Pope John even quotes the words of his predecessor, Pius XII, the Pope who agonized so long over the bloody course of the Second World War, which swept around his lonely perch in the Vatican: “Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war.”

There are several recent indications that Catholic social teaching is moving toward a position that is somewhat closer to pacifism, as more doubts are cast on how the just-war theory is applied in modern circumstances. Obviously, in a nuclear age, it is hard to imagine how the just-war criteria (which prohibit disproportionate responses and the targeting of civilians) can justify many of the ways current weapons are likely to be used. In light of the ever present threat of quick escalation of hostilities from rifles to tanks to nuclear weapons, we should be hesitant to justify the use of even conventional weapons, especially in tense regions such as the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. Further, many voices within and beyond the Church have pointed out how often the just-war theory has been misused in cynical efforts to cover up self-interested aggression. Pope John Paul II, in several statements issued during the 1990s (on the occasions of the Persian Gulf War and later air strikes by the United States and its allies against Iraq and in the Balkans), scolded world powers for a premature resort to force before the full range of peaceful channels had been exhausted.

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Perhaps the two most significant indications of a more favorable view of pacifist stances within Catholicism came not from recent popes but from gatherings of bishops. First, Vatican II's document *Gaudium et Spes* specifically advocates the rights of conscientious objectors or, as it describes them, "those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms" (no. 79). This novel addition to Catholic social teaching opens the way to seeing this pacifist response to the military draft, at least on the individual level, as a justifiable position worthy of respect. Second, the United States bishops' 1983 pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace" went to great lengths to explain the pacifist position and treated it more sympathetically than any other major document of the Church. It lifted up the contribution of this minority position in taking seriously the universal call to commit ourselves to peacemaking and to begin this task within our own hearts and through the lifestyle choices we make. By returning to the New Testament and paying close attention to the signs of the times in a dangerous world, Catholic social teaching may be on the brink of passing a further negative judgment on almost all forms of warfare.

If we follow the U.S. bishops' call to take seriously the task of peacemaking, we will soon discover that we are not alone in walking this path of shalom. The Christian tradition contains many rich resources beyond official church teach-

ings that feed our hunger for knowing and pursuing the way of peace. Spiritual writers such as St. Francis of Assisi and social commentators such as Leo Tolstoy offer inspiring words that challenge us to imagine a world of true and lasting harmony. Organized groups such as Pax Christi and Plowshares extend to us opportunities to pursue activism dedicated to building a more peaceful world.

Perhaps the greatest American Catholic witness to peace comes from the Catholic Worker, a lay movement founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Although best known for publishing a newspaper and sponsoring remarkable houses of hospitality for the needy, members of the Catholic Worker count among their primary goals the building up of a firm witness to peace. The 1987 document "Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker" explains the inspiration and principles of this approach to peacemaking:

Jesus calls us to fight against violence with the spiritual weapons of prayer, fasting, and noncooperation with evil. Refusal to pay taxes for war, to register for conscription, to comply with any unjust legislation; participation in nonviolent strikes and boycotts, protests or vigils; withdrawal of support for dominant systems, corporate funding, or usurious practices are all excellent means to establish peace.

Even those who are unable to adopt for themselves all aspects of this approach may affirm the utter dedication of the Catholic Worker movement to offer alternatives and shape our lives so that peacemaking becomes one of the central concerns of our everyday lives. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and their followers for supplying this extraordinary vision for the pursuit of holiness and shalom in the modern world.

9. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

In one sense, the notion of the “preferential option for the poor” is relatively new to Catholic social teaching, as this phrase appeared in no papal social encyclical until 1987, and in no church documents at all until 1979. But in another sense, the notion of the preferential option for those who are weak and vulnerable has been present within the Christian tradition from the very start. The ministry of Jesus, in both words and deeds, was deeply wrapped up with this commitment to the well-being of the least fortunate. Without using the actual phrase “preferential option,” the Church has prac-

ticed this option in many ways, formal and informal, as it has placed concern for the most vulnerable members of society among its top priorities.

Echoes of the preferential option for the poor are strong in the stirring opening sentence of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ (no. 1).

In identifying itself with the concerns of the poor, the Church is here interpreting its entire mission as one of service to those in need. Bringing the gospel to people in the fullest sense means caring simultaneously for their many needs, spiritual and material. The Church is most clearly itself when it is acting on the imperative to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable—the ones Jesus Christ so loves.

The worldwide church inherits the actual phrase “preferential option for the poor” from documents of the 1979 meeting of CELAM, the abbreviation for the Spanish words translated as the episcopal conference of Latin America. At that meeting in Puebla, Mexico, as at the previous CELAM meeting in Medellin, Colombia in 1968, the bishops of those

lands so sharply divided between extremes of rich and poor boldly identified the Church with the struggles of the poor. This decisive shift was not meant to exclude anyone from the life or concerns of the Church, and certainly was not an invitation to pass judgments upon certain people because their bank accounts were too large.

Rather, the significance of this shift lies in the way it reverses a centuries-long pattern that had warped the proper understanding of the mission of the Church. As long as the Church was perceived as aligned with the wealthy landholders of Latin America, it would remain a hindrance to the full human development of the poor in that region. If the vast majority of people continued to see the Church as a tool in the hands of the upper-class bosses who were indifferent to their well-being, then this perception would prevent the Church from ever becoming the “True Church” of the poor Jesus.

Clearly, the significance of this sudden about-face in the Church’s self-understanding was hard to explain outside of Latin America. To observers from other continents where social class divisions were never as sharp, it hardly made sense. The Church is always meant to be an agent of reconciliation between all people, so it may be misleading to think of the Church as “taking sides” in any way at all. The forceful restatement of the Church’s mission was only necessary in

Latin America because of the need to correct a long history of clerical abuse and warped priorities.

Vatican social teaching had never gotten off on such a wrong track. From its very beginning, when nineteenth-century European Social Catholicism started to notice and address the plight of hard-pressed working families, this tradition of social concern had consistently expressed the Church's mission to act as Jesus had acted in befriending the poor of his time. In fact, the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* contains a passage in which Pope John Paul II interprets *Rerum Novarum's* call, a full century earlier, to improve the conditions of workers as a manifestation of the "preferential option for the poor" long before the phrase was coined. John Paul points to the similarity between the Church's role as advocate of the poor in 1891 and 1991 as evidence of the "church's constant concern for and dedication to categories of people who are especially beloved to the Lord Jesus" (no. 11).

The entire tradition of Catholic social teaching, including all nine themes we have surveyed in this chapter, can be interpreted as a unified effort on the part of church leaders to encourage a more humane society where the most vulnerable members are better protected from harm. With its limited financial resources, the Church itself can do only so much to advance the lives of the poor. However, popes and

bishops, as the official voices of the Church, have exerted great efforts to speak publicly about political, economic, and social issues that have profound impact upon the prospects of our neediest neighbors. The rationale for all the Church's efforts in this regard may be summarized precisely as the desire to make a preferential option for the poor.

If these church efforts really do bear fruit, then what would the results look like? If the message of justice and peace within Catholic social teaching takes root in the hearts of many believers, these people would work energetically for a better world, a world characterized by not only acts of individual *charity* but also structures of *justice* and equity for all people. Discrimination and unfair barriers to progress would be eliminated. True human development would be fostered by wider access to property and socially responsible policies of businesses and governments throughout the world. We would measure all our institutions, from schools to corporations to social clubs, by how they treat all members of society, especially the poorest. Priorities would be altered so that more of the benefits of our richly blessed world would find their way toward those who currently possess the least. In a prosperous age like ours, no one should be excluded from a fair set of opportunities or experience the disturbing fear of permanent powerlessness.

Catholic social teaching includes a call for involvement in collaborative efforts to invite all people into the social mainstream; it is not an ethic for lazy or complacent people. To adopt the principles of Catholic social thought is to agree that we all need to work hard so that full participation is extended to all, without favoritism or discrimination. We all have something to contribute to the common good, and all may benefit from the gifts that we bring to the common table of human community and solidarity.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of these nine themes of Catholic social teaching do you consider most important? Are certain ones more foundational than others, which build upon the more basic ones?
2. How would you explain the principle of subsidiarity to a child, using the simplest possible language? Do you think that this technical-sounding idea is at root a “common-sense” principle that almost anyone can understand if it is explained properly?

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3. How good are the tools given to us by recent Catholic social teaching on private property? Do you think we strike the proper balance between the individual and social functions of property when we speak of 1) socialization, 2) the "social mortgage on property," and even 3) the possibility of a justified expropriation of some means of production?
4. Besides the positions mentioned in section 6 of this chapter, such as support for organized labor and basic worker rights, what else could the Church be doing to foster a sense of the dignity of all human labor? Can you think of concrete measures for spiritual enrichment, theological education, or outreach programs that would demonstrate greater church commitment to improving the lives of all who work?
5. Many readers might feel that the Church's treatment of families (see section 3 of this chapter) is too sketchy to be of much help. What more should the Church say about family life and the challenges facing all families today?

6. Do you find yourself favoring the approach of the just-war theory or of pacifism? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these Christian approaches to the task of peacemaking?
7. Do you see the “preferential option for the poor” as mostly a new element of the Church’s social message or mainly as a continuation of what came before? How would you defend your opinion?

Table 2

Key Texts for Nine Themes in Catholic Social Teaching

Theme	Most Important Texts
The Dignity of Every Person and Human Rights	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> 8–38 <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 12–19 <i>Centesimus Annus</i> 6–11
Solidarity, Common Good, and Participation	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> 98–108 <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 26–32, 68–75 <i>Sollicitudo rei Socialis</i> 35–40
Family Life	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 47–52 <i>Octogesima Adveniens</i> 13 <i>Laborem Exercens</i> 10, 19
Subsidiarity and the Proper Role of Government	<i>Quadragesimo Anno</i> 76–87 <i>Mater et Magistra</i> 51–77, 122–77 <i>Pacem in Terris</i> 140–1
Property Ownership in Modern Society: Rights and Responsibilities	<i>Quadragesimo Anno</i> 44–52 <i>Mater et Magistra</i> 51–67, 104–21 <i>Centesimus Annus</i> 30–43
The Dignity of Work, Rights of Workers, and Support for Labor Unions	<i>Rerum Novarum</i> 1–3, 20–1, 31–8 <i>Mater et Magistra</i> 68–81 <i>Laborem Exercens</i> 1–27
Colonialism and Economic Development	<i>Mater et Magistra</i> 157–211 <i>Pacem in Terris</i> 121–5 <i>Popolorum Progressio</i> 1–87
Peace and Disarmament	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> 109–119 <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 77–90 U.S. Bishops’ “The Challenge of Peace”
Option for the Poor and Vulnerable	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 1 <i>Octogesima Adveniens</i> 23 <i>Centesimus Annus</i> 11