

Some Essential Documents of Catholic Social Teaching

There has been many papal and conciliar statements, from *Rerum Novarum* by Leo XIII in 1891 to the works of Pope Francis. They have articulated a number of paired principles, including the right to private property and the universal destination of the goods of this world; the duty of obedience to legitimate authority and the double-edged principle of subsidiarity; the duty of governments to work for the common good and the principle of solidarity as well as the right to authentic human development. From the very beginning of the Church, Catholic Social Teaching has regularly exhibited a concern with three interrelated areas: the economic, the political, the familial/cultural. CST cannot be reduced to any one of these.

Some of the classic texts and crucial concepts:

Rerum Novarum (The Condition of Labor) by Pope Leo XIII (1891) – the defense of the right to form unions and the right to private property as something needed to do one's duties to one's family; the rejection of socialism; the just wage; relation of the Church to the secular state.

Casti Connubii (On Christian Marriage) by Pope Pius XI (1930) – defense of the traditional vision of marriage as indissoluble (against the weakening of marriage by Lambeth); marriage and family as crucial pillars of the social order.

Quadragesimo Anno (After Forty Years) by Pope Pius XI (1931) – the social obligations inherent in ownership and wealth; family wage; duties to God, family, and country as the source of certain rights; distinguishing communism from socialism; suspicions about *laissez faire* capitalism; the principle of subsidiarity; higher-level authorities should not usurp what lower-level authorities can successfully manage but out to intervene when lower-level authorities need assistance.

Mater et Magistra (Christianity and Social Progress) by Pope John XXIII (1961) – natural law and human dignity as foundation stones for solid principles of social ethics; concern for marriage and family in discussions about economic development.

Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth) by Pope John XXIII (1963) – the Augustinian idea that true peace is the tranquillity of order; need for mediating institutions: individuals and civil authorities.

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) by the Second Vatican Council (1965) – on the roots of modern atheism; the need for a social ethic and not just an individual ethic; sanctity of marriage and family.

Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples) by Pope Paul VI (1967) – economic development as a path to world peace.

Humanae Vitae (Of Human Life) by Pope Paul VI (1968) – defense of the traditional vision of marriage, the intrinsic connection between the ends of union and procreation, the problems with contraception, and the vision of marriage and family as crucial to the social order.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World) by Pope Paul VI (1975) – religion as what forms and transforms culture; the place of social ethics in evangelization.

Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) by Pope John Paul II (1981) – technology and production as the “objective sense” of work; the dignity of the worker and the “subjective sense” of work; the priority of labor to capital; the importance of dignified work; a spirituality of work.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern) by Pope John Paul II (1987) – differences in the modern world; authentic human development as spiritual and material, cultural and economic.

Centesimus Annus (On the Hundred Anniversary) by Pope John Paul II (1991) – on the fall of communism in 1989 and the need to reconstruct the social order; on the right of private property and the duties of solidarity under distributive justice; on the spiritual roots of human culture and on Christ as the model for human life.

Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of the Truth) by Pope John Paul II (1993) – on the proper use of scripture in moral theology; refutation of certain erroneous trends in current moral thinking, including faulty understandings of the relation between law and freedom, conscience and truth, fundamental option theory, the nature of the moral act, teleology, and evaluating consequences.

Evangelium Vitae (Gospel of Life) by Pope John Paul II (1995) – differentiating the Culture of Life from the Culture of Death; explaining the Church’s position on abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment, including reflections on the social order.

Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason) by Pope John Paul II (1998) – an account of the Church’s view on faith and reason, including applications for sound reasoning on the social order.

Deus Caritas Est (God is Love) by Pope Benedict XVI (2005) – defense of the traditional Catholic view of sexuality, marriage, love, and charity against the arguments of the Masters of Suspicion (Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche); defense of the duty and the right of the Church to teach the principles of Catholic social thought in the public arena; explanation of the duties of the state to work toward providing systems for administering justice; the duties of charity.

Spe Salvi (In Hope We Are Saved) by Pope Benedict XVI (2007) – an explanation of crucial differences between rational expectation and true Christian hope; the role of prayer, suffering, and judgment in enhancing hope; the relation between Christian hope and the social order.

Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth) by Pope Benedict XVI (2009) – an account of the ways in which divine revelation ought to exert an influence on economic theory and economic structures; the perspective of Augustinian political realism; the importance of always yoking together issues of marriage and family with issues of law, economics, and politics.

Laudato Si (Praise be to You, o Lord) and *Amoris Laetitia* (On Love in the Family) by Pope Francis (2015, 2016) – documents on human ecology and an ethics of the environment; reflections on love and marriage.