

## Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is often called the “best kept secret” in the Catholic Church. CST is rooted in Biblical revelation and the experience of proclaiming God’s justice, needed both within and outside of the Church throughout the past two millennia. Today, CST is a consensus-building voice for the dignity of human life, just labor practices, human rights, and the common human responsibility for eradicating poverty and promoting peace.

Life and dignity of the human person

Call to family, community, and participation

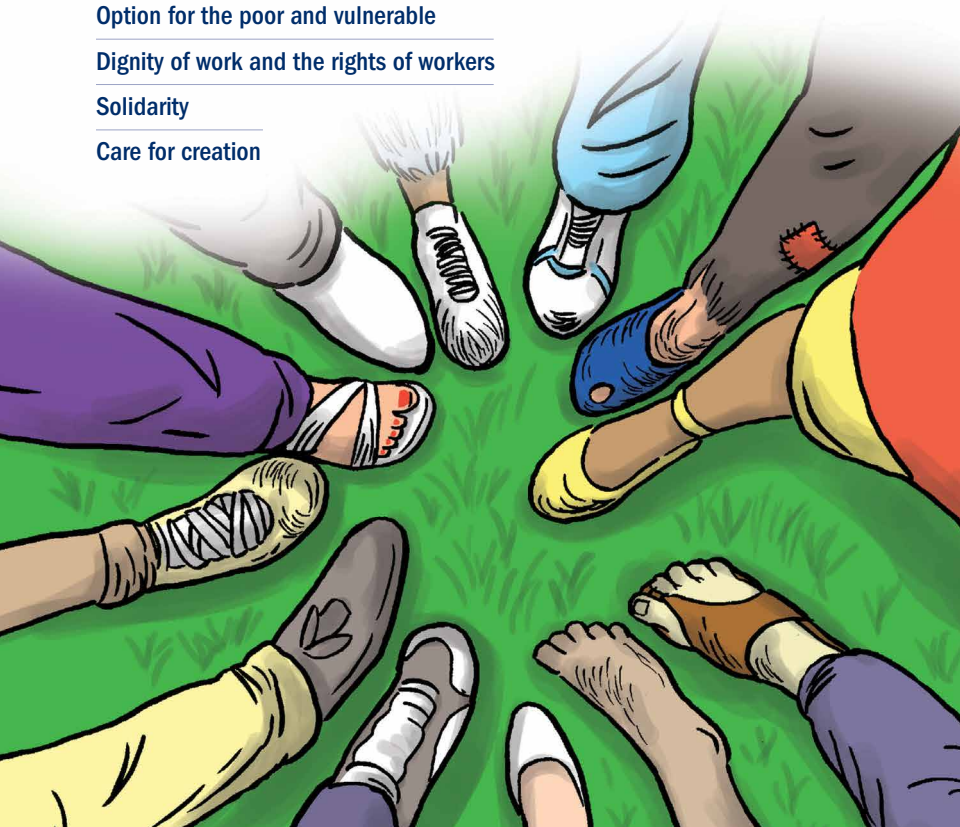
Rights and responsibilities

Option for the poor and vulnerable

Dignity of work and the rights of workers

Solidarity

Care for creation



# THE ORIGINS OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

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Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has been called the “best kept secret” in the Catholic Church. While this statement may be true, CST is neither strictly Catholic, nor is it only about social issues. At its core, CST is a set of essential beliefs common to Christians, as well as people of other religious traditions. These beliefs center upon the dignity of the human person, the justice that pertains to human community, and the nature of the God who ordains both dignity and justice.

CST has its origins in the mid-19th century. With the industrial revolution came a nearly insatiable demand for labor, which included low wages, unsafe working conditions, 12-hour days in fume-ridden factories, and the exploitation of children and the elderly. These harsh work expectations were accompanied by low wages, tenement housing, and open sewage. In these conditions, malnutrition, disease, and injury were all too common. All the while, the employers of the urban poor were able to grow painfully wealthy at their workers’ expense. Amidst the suffering of this period, Christian pastors, both Protestant and Catholic, began to notice the alarming state of their people. They, along with committed laborers in their congregations and parishes, helped to advocate for more just wages, more measured work hours, labor organization, and safer work and living conditions.

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As they fought for these labor rights, Christian pastors noticed how well the Gospel aligned with their plight. They began to revisit the meaning of the Kingdom of God, Jesus' attention to the sick, and parables which drew attention to the abuse of the poor. Likewise, pastors noticed that this very Gospel was aligned with the Old Testament prophets, who condemned the Israelites' systemic abuse of the poor in their midst. The Christians of Europe and the Americas came to realize that they, too, were part of a social system that ignored the dignity of the human person, resisted the true meaning of labor, and caused great injustice to the human community. As such, they realized that the biblical call to justice applied to them.

Because of the advocacy of many local pastors, bishops, and lay leaders, these injustices came to the attention of global Christian leaders. One of these leaders was Pope Leo XIII, who authored the first work of modern Catholic Social Teaching, entitled *Rerum Novarum*, on the rights and duties of capital and labor. Pope Leo XIII began what is now more than a century of official Catholic teaching devoted to a concern for social justice and care for the poorest among us. These concerns have allowed CST to encompass issues such as war and peace, international trade and diplomacy, access to education, human rights, and the dignity of family life.

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# Life and dignity of the human person



Every person is created in the image and likeness of God intentionally. Because of this, every person deserves respect not because of what they do, but because of who they are: an intentionally created being.

## Applies to such issues as:

Irreducibility and mystery of the person  
Sanctity of developing life  
End of life care

Galations 3:28

## Representative books:

*If This is a Man*, Primo Levi  
*Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean  
*The Violent Bear It Away*, Flannery O'Connor  
*Gaudium et Spes*, *Evangelium vitae*



# Call to family, community, and participation



The call to become fully human cannot happen in isolation. Humans learn to love, forgive, speak, and even move through the gift of interaction with other humans.

## Applies to such issues as:

Racial and gender equality

Access to education

Religious freedom

Romans 15:5-7

## Representative books:

*The Betrothed*, Alessandro Manzoni

*Zeitoun*, Dave Eggers

*Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis



# Rights and responsibilities



Human rights flow from the relationships we have as persons in community. Being human, each person has an innate response when rights are denied and s/he naturally cries out for justice. Awareness of due rights such as food, shelter, water, safety, places a demand on us to be responsible for protecting the rights of all.

## Applies to such issues as:

Democratic participation  
Human rights  
Civic welfare

Tobit 4:7

## Representative books:

*A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens  
*The Power and the Glory*, Graham Greene  
*Little Bee*, Chris Cleave  
*Half of the Sky*, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn  
*Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII



## Option for the poor and vulnerable



God's love of the poor takes precedence. If one person is suffering, all persons are affected and diminished.

### Applies to such issues as:

Care for the marginalized—of ethnicity, gender, age, etc.

Care for migrants, immigrants, and refugees

Attention to the sick and suffering

### Representative books:

*American Salvage*, Bonnie Jo Campbell

*The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander

*The Price of Inequality*, Joseph Stiglitz

*Nickle and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich

*Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI

Isaiah 58:6-7



# Dignity of work and the rights of workers



Work, as first exemplified by God's generous and creative act, brought forth the universe and life as we know it. Work brings a means of human fulfillment on both an individual and communal level and so, it can foster creative human power. Through work, we ease the burdens of daily living, overcome challenges and contribute to the common good.

## Applies to such issues as:

Living wage, employee benefits, and labor organization  
Equal pay for equal work  
Safe working conditions

James 5:4

## Representative books:

*The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy Day  
*The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck  
*The Jungle*, Sinclair Lewis  
*Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII  
*Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II





# Solidarity



Human beings are essentially social beings, and through interdependence, are able to build great societies, form deep relationships, overcome extreme crises and solve crippling diseases which plague humanity.

## Applies to such issues as:

International trade relief

Just war and reconstruction

Willingness to dialogue among nations

## Representative books:

*The Needs of Strangers*, Michael Ignatieff

*On the Side of the Poor*, Gustavo Gutierrez

*Think and Act Anew: How Poverty in America Affects Us All and*

*What We Can Do About It*, Larry Snyder

*Mater et Magistra*, Pope John Paul XXIII

*Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI

Matthew 5:9



# Care for Creation



St. Francis taught that all creation reflects the Creator's love and is therefore deserving of reverence and respect. Even the ability to care for creation is a gift that humans are called to take up and act upon.

## Applies to such issues as:

Responsible stewardship of the environment

Renewable energy

Resisting unjust domination over animals, plant, and the earth

## Representative books:

*Oh, Pioneers*, Willa Cather

*Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis

*Care for Creation*, Ilia Delio and Keith Warner

*My Antonio*, Willa Cather

*Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II

*Laudato Si*, Pope Francis

Romans 1:20

