

## Catholic Social Teachings of the Universal Church – Part 3

- The Third of Three Installments on the Fundamentals
- Principles to Guide Us in Dealing With Today's Difficult Problems
- Grounded in Church Tradition, Scripture, and Natural Philosophy

### Today - More on Catholic Social Principles

With this article we complete our exploration of the ten key Catholic Social Teaching themes. These collectively are the themes we will use as principles from which to judge our way forward on difficult public and moral issues of the day.

#### #8: The Universal Destination of Goods

This theme speaks to the call to share the earth's resources in a way that benefits all peoples, not just the privileged few in terms of individuals or nations. This principle recognizes the right to ownership of private property but not in such a way that the common good is destroyed. This principle also recognizes that power should be used to facilitate sharing of resources, not to perpetuate the gaps we find between the "haves" and the growing classes of "have nots".

(Environmental stewardship also fits here but is so important it has its own category below.) The bottom line is that the resources we control as individuals should be sufficient for oneself and for one's family. The same can be said of nations' resources – to be shared for the benefit of many. This principle is in great contrast to the excessive materialism and consumerism which we observe and can easily fall into as individuals.

#### #9: The Stewardship of God's Creation

Catholics believe that the earth, its environment and all its resources are gifts from God. Stewardship of the earth, Scripturally based in Genesis, is seeing much wider attention and adoption in today's world of challenging environmental conditions. Caring for the environment is a common good and common duty of all individuals and governments, of all corporations and other kinds of organizations. We are all called to promote the protection of pure water, renewable energy sources (wind, solar, etc.), animal life in all its diversity and forms, and mineral and timber resources.

#### #10: Peace

Our Catholic faith challenges us to maintain peace at local, national and international levels. Peacemaking starts at home with our attitudes and relationships which play out in a small scale in our homes and neighborhoods. On a larger scale, peace is a national objective which entails not just the absence of war but a quest for justice and concern for the human condition and dignity of all peoples. The teachings about peacemaking challenge us to pursue alternatives to war - through adoption of better communications among nations, promotion of international organizations like the UN, reduction of the arms race, and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Part of the quest for peace is to reflect on the very high cost of war and war making preparations and realize that from a human, economic and social perspective war is usually the most costly choice in terms of impacting the common

good. Part of the quest for peace is also to take early note of the causes of war – corruption, lack of opportunity and a general hopelessness – and to work to bring factions together and bring opportunities to those who are the victims of the powers that be.

### We Have a Summary of Catholic Social Principles

We have briefly explored 10 themes which describe the breadth and depth of the Catholic Social Tradition – a tradition rooted in the teachings of Jesus and articulated by the Church in the context of modern societies especially over the last 117 years since the revolutionary papal encyclical of Pope Leo XIII entitled, *Rerum Novarum* – On the Condition of Labor - in 1891. Since that landmark teaching, the Church has gradually refined its thinking and how it articulates the message to all who will listen.

### Going Forward

Our challenge now is to reflect on these themes and begin to apply them to the public social, economic, cultural and religious pluralism issues of our day. This is not easy. This will take mental and verbal practice as we have occasion to dialog with others. Considering the entrenched positions of those in our culture who would divide us, those holding on to economic and political power, this is challenging indeed. So our journey to applying social teachings may involve some false starts, and certainly will require going back and rereading and reflecting on the themes and principles in order to "see through" the fancy language, the contrived logic and the false choices served up in our society. In the end, with God's truth and grace behind us, we will come to a thoughtful and consistent position.

### Some Pointers for Beginners in Social Action

- Take this journey a step at a time
- Keep the love of neighbor in a central position
- Test everything you hear through the public media against the principles you have learned
- Be very skeptical of self proclaimed "Catholic" sources which promote culture wars and differences rather than a culture of reaching for the common ground
- Pray for discernment and guidance
- Read through some source and reference materials
- Continue to read these articles which will now begin to apply the teachings to current day issues

### For More Detail

Try this section from the US Bishops web site:

[www.usccb.org/sdwp/](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/)

Deacon Bob Wallace    November 2008

Representative Sources:

1. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB, Nov 14, 2007 – see [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org) which is one of the U.S. Bishop's several permanent web sites on social concerns, peace and justice issues.
2. *Catholic Social Teaching – Our Best Kept Secret* by Edward DeBerri, James Hug and others, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2004, Orbis (There may be later editions). This is an excellent overview of the many documents published by the Church in the last 120 years. This document was / is a project co-sponsored by the Center of Concern ([www.coc.org](http://www.coc.org))
3. *Principles, Prophecy, and a Pastoral Response – An Overview of Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, revised edition, 2001, U.S. Catholic Bishops
4. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican, June 2004 (Available from the Vatican web site: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va), just search on the English title.)
5. *Gaudium et Spes* (literally “Joy and Hope”) commonly known as “The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”, Second Vatican Council, December 8, 1965 (Available from the Vatican web site: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va), just search on the Latin title.)
6. *A Nation for All*, by Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, Jossey-Bass / Wiley, 2008

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe how you see the distribution of wealth in the U.S. You can do this in terms of wages, homes, lifestyles, access to opportunity or other factors that you observe. (Universal Destination of Goods, #8)
2. One economic theory, variously called “supply side” or “trickle down”, advocates lower taxes for high income persons with the assumption that they will spend their income and benefit the lower classes who produce the goods and services which the more wealthy buy. Does this theory of economics / tax policy seem to be consistent or inconsistent with principle #8? Why or why not?
3. Environmental concerns are apparent today (eg, extremes of weather), but people disagree with whether the environmental stress we experience is largely man made or not? What do you believe and why? Are you basing this belief on science which you understand or on other factors? (Stewardship of God's Creation, #9)
4. Are you aware of a recent up-tick in religious organizations working for a cleaner environment, a world which is less impacted by burning fossil fuels? Can you cite which organizations are in the forefront and what they are doing?
5. There are a growing number of voices which claim that we (US / NATO) have not really been winning the wars we have fought in the last 50 years. Describe why you feel we have won or did not win the following wars: Korea (1950-53), Vietnam (1959-75), Yugoslav Wars (roughly 1995-2001), Gulf War I (1990-91), Iraq War (2003-2008), Afghanistan War (2001-2008). (Peace, #10)
6. If you are aware of the “just war” principles (see Catholic Catechism, para. 2309), describe whether the Bush Doctrine of Preemptive War (used as a justification for the Iraq war) was consistent with the just war principles or not. In light of the results of that war, do you think the just war principles need revision? Why?