

USCCB CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING – Seven Basic Principles

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has published a very fine, brief summary of the Catholic Church's Social Teaching, based on the Gospels, Papal Encyclicals, and the documents of Vatican II. The following document summarizes their seven basic principles. If you would like a handy copy of the Bishop's statement, please contact Bernie Silbernagel at bsilbernagel@gmail.com. Further references are also included below:

LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

"Human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Every person is precious, people are more important than things, and the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person."

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

"How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. We believe that people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and the vulnerable."

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

"The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency."

OPTION FOR THE POOR AND THE VULNERABLE

"The basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by the deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25: 31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first."

THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

"The economy must serve people and not the other way around. Work is more than a way of making a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative."

SOLIDARITY

"We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. Our love for all our brothers and sisters demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict."

CARE FOR GOD’S CREATION

“We show our respect for our creator by our stewardship of creation. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. The environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.”

Further References:

Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice, by Daniel G. Groody, Orbis Books (2009)—A fine introduction to the teaching of the Church and its implications by a founder of the JustFaith movement. It contains the history of the basic social teaching of the church and reflections on it.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2005). This book was one of pope John Paul II’s fondest desires, carried out by the Commission under the direction of Cardinal Renato Martino. It is well organized by themes.

Catholic Social Thought, The Documentary Heritage, edited by Daniel O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon. This volume contains the papal encyclicals on social teaching since Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, key Vatican II and Post-Conciliar documents and basic principles from the US Council of Catholic Bishops.

Modern Catholic Social Teaching, edited by Kenneth B. Himes. Commentaries on the documents in *Catholic Social Thought*.