

Answers to Questions about Catholic Social Teaching

The following questions and answers are from an introductory work on Catholic social teaching entitled [Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching](#) by Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. This material is used with the kind permission of [Paulist Press](#).

1. What is meant by Catholic social teaching?

There is a broad and a narrow understanding to the expression Catholic social teaching. Viewed one way, Catholic social teaching (hereafter CST) encompasses all the ideas and theories that have developed over the entire history of the Church on matters of social life. More commonly, as the term has come to be understood, CST refers to a limited body of literature written in the modern era that is a response of papal and episcopal teachers to the various political, economic and social issues of our time. Even this more narrow understanding, however, is not neatly defined.

No official list of documents exists; it is more a matter of general consensus which documents fall into the category of CST. Some documents, for example *Rerum Novarum* (an encyclical letter by Leo XIII) are on everyone's list while the Christmas radio addresses of Pius XII are cited by some but not all as part of the heritage. Most people, when referring to CST, use Leo's 1891 encyclical as a benchmark for the beginning of the tradition of social teaching. Yet not only did Leo write important encyclicals on politics before *Rerum Novarum* but a number of his predecessors promulgated significant statements on a variety of social matters. Thus, it can be argued that since the modern papal practice of issuing encyclicals began with Benedict XIV (1740-1758) many of these pre-Leonine letters should be considered part of CST. (Michael Schuck's book *That They Be One* is a fine overview of the entire body of social teaching found in the papal encyclicals.)

Clearly, the expression CST is elastic, sometimes designating an expansive body of material and at other times used in a more constricted sense to identify a limited number of papal and episcopal writings dating from the papacy of Leo XIII. Perhaps we can understand the term Catholic social teaching as an effort by the pastoral teachers of the church to articulate what the broader social tradition means in the era of modern economics, politics and culture.

2. It would seem from your remarks that some statements or even parts of statements have more authority than others. So am I a so-called bad Catholic if I disagree with my bishop about a political or economic issue?

Again, the topic cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. It is not just the person teaching that matters; it is also what is being taught. In the documents we are talking about, those which form the body of CST, you will find teaching from those who are charged with the responsibility of being the official pastoral teachers of the Church, but you will find within these documents all different sorts of teachings. Some of the teaching is close to the heart of the Gospel and other materials represent informed, sensitive, prudent judgments but not core beliefs of the Catholic faith.

Much of CST entails judgments involving a complex process of bringing moral values into dialogue with a variety of historical and empirical elements. The competence of the Church to teach is always rooted in its fidelity to God's revelation. When CST states a moral principle, such as the duty to care for the poor, it is difficult to see how a person could challenge the teaching and not be losing touch with the gospel. But when a document of CST offers a judgment about whether this or that economic policy provides a marginally better advantage for the poor we are dealing with another kind of teaching.

A good example of distinguishing between different levels of teaching can be found in the American bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace. One finds there the explicit declaration "that not every statement in this letter has the same moral authority. At times we [the bishops] reassert universally binding moral principles. . . . At other times we reaffirm statements of recent popes and the teaching of Vatican II. Again, at other times we apply principles to specific cases" (The Challenge of Peace, #10). Now it would be nice if all the documents of CST made these distinctions clear and even identified which claims fit into which category, but that is not the case. So we need to be careful readers to avoid claiming either too much or too little authority for a given teaching.

3. Why does the church get caught up in political and economic issues that others should be dealing with instead of doing the one thing the Church is supposed to do, serve the spiritual dimension of life?

It may seem at times that the church is meddling in affairs which it should leave alone. And I will not defend the details of every statement the church has made about public life. But your question goes beyond specific disagreements and questions CST in principle.

One of the contributions of Vatican II to CST was to place the social mission on firm theological foundations. You can find the position in *Gaudium et Spes*. The basic framework of the argument made by the bishops moves in four steps:

1. The council fathers state that the church “is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person” (#76). This commitment to human dignity has religious significance since it is rooted in a religious claim about the mystery of creation. The biblical account of Genesis tells us that each human being is made in God’s image.
2. At the same time we must be able to fulfill this charge of being “a sign and a safeguard” without the church becoming simply another humanitarian organization or one more social welfare agency. Our mission is not political but religious, to be of service to the reign of God.
3. By emphasizing the religious mission of the church there is no attempt to dismiss the importance of earthly life. The power of God’s reign must reach out to transform all aspects of human existence; it must not be reduced to some otherworldly realm apart from our temporal lives.
4. Therefore, political, social and economic consequences flow from pursuit of the church’s religious mission. The bishops cite four areas where the religious mission spills over into social concerns: commitment to the defense of human dignity, promotion of human rights, fostering unity among members of the human family, and discerning the deeper significance of human work and activity (see *Gaudium et Spes*, # 40-43).

In sum, while the church must transcend every political system because of its religious mission it must still engage the social order due to the implications its religious mission has for temporal life.

4. Even if I accept that the church should be involved in public life, or perhaps can’t help but be involved, that does not settle how it should be involved in a nation which believes in the separation of church and state? (What about the first amendment?)

You are absolutely right. The question of why the church is involved is distinct from how the church should be involved. If you understand that the church’s social mission is a consequence of its religious mission, that means certain activities which are legitimate for other nonreligious institutions may not be so for the church. So there are self-imposed limits that the church should accept in order to avoid its religious mission becoming overwhelmed by political or economic goals, e.g. endorsing a political party or movement as the Catholic party or movement.

But what you state suggests there may be limitations which are not self-imposed but rather required by the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution. We must remember that the constitutional separation of church and state means that organized religion will receive neither favor nor obstruction from the state. What is unconstitutional is state establishment of religion or prohibition of the free exercise of religion. The amendment prohibits what the state can do in respect to any church. Nothing in the first amendment should be interpreted as separating the churches from society nor religion and morality from public life. On all matters in the public forum, organized religion is free to speak and act. Whether the religious voice gets heard is another matter and will depend on the persuasiveness of its message.

5. Is there a basic perspective or idea that runs through the documents of CST?

Remember when I explained how the church explains its social mission that I quoted the bishops at Vatican II who said the church “is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #76)? It can be said that the human person is the fundamental concern of the social teaching. But it is a certain understanding of the person that CST presents. Perhaps one could say that understanding is marked by the two fundamental claims of human dignity and human sociality.

Certainly, human dignity is a recurring theme in the documents. So much else that is said flows from the foundational claim about the dignity of the person made in the image of God. But we must appreciate that the God in whose image we are made is Trinitarian. That is, we believe within the very nature of God there is an eternal celebration of loving communion.

A corollary to the claim that human beings are creatures made in the image of a Trinitarian God is that people are created for love. We exist for the purpose of entering into the experience of loving communion. Human beings are not meant to live in isolation but are meant to live in community with each other. We find ourselves precisely in the act of giving ourselves away to another and receiving the gift of another into our lives. Sociality is a key hallmark of the Catholic view of the human: “for by our innermost nature the person is a social being” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #12). This understanding of the person lends itself to a view of community as natural and necessary if persons are to achieve their full stature. Or, in the words of the American bishops, “Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community” (*Economic Justice for All*, #28).

6. You mentioned individualist and collectivist errors. What are you talking about?

If one looks at the papal literature, especially the earlier documents, there is evident opposition to what is judged to be the twin evils of modern society, liberalism and socialism. This may cause confusion unless we realize that today in the U.S. we use these terms differently than in CST.

Liberalism in CST is actually closer to what many in this nation think of as conservatism or, more accurately, libertarianism. That is, liberalism in its earliest formulations championed free market capitalism, minimal state activity in public life and personal liberty in cultural matters. It was a theory that valued individual freedom above other goods. CST identified such a social theory as being individualistic in the extreme.

Socialism according to CST can be seen as an overreaction to liberalism. Socialists opposed laissez-faire capitalism and encouraged state intervention, even control, of the economy. Personal liberties were to be overridden in the name of the good of society. And, even more troubling, socialism was viewed as antithetical to religion due to its materialism. As well, family and other social groups could be overwhelmed since it was collectivist in the way it related the individual to the state.

Thus, liberalism and socialism, as they were defined in CST, became the incarnation of individualism and collectivism, respectively. Liberalism and socialism have evolved a great deal over time, of course, as has CST. But the authors of CST have generally understood the Catholic vantage point as more attentive to issues of community than liberalism allows while not ignoring the values of personal freedom as it charges socialism does. So one might see CST as a tradition that tries to strike a balance between two faulty extremes. In doing so it has developed affinities with other communitarian approaches

7. Doesn't starting with human dignity feed the American emphasis on the individual instead of the community? Maybe we should stress the communitarian approach instead.

I appreciate the sentiment behind your question, but there is a fundamental misconception which we must be clear about if we are to understand CST. The misconception is to read human dignity in an individualistic manner. When the Catholic tradition speaks of human dignity, it understands that the realization of dignity will always be in the context of community. There are a variety of ways this can be demonstrated but let me suggest one approach.

If you look at the two stories of creation found in the book of Genesis you see the teaching that human beings are essentially social. In the second account of creation God states: “it is not good for the human being to be alone” (Gen. 2,18). There is the insistence that the person is meant to be in relationship, and so the reason humans are created as male and female is precisely so that they be driven to seek each other. Humanity is meant for companionship.

In the earlier creation account of the first chapter we read: “And so God created the human being in God’s image; in the divine image did God create the human being, male and female did God create them” (Gen. 1:27). Now the point is not that to be in the divine image means to have gender. God is neither male nor female; God is relational. For the Hebrew writer God is the God who creates in order to enter into covenant with the creature. God is relational and to be in the image and likeness of such a God means that humanity is meant to be in relationship. We are our true selves when we are in relationship not as isolated beings.

Therefore, when CST affirms the dignity of the person this is not a reading of the person as an isolated individual. Rather, the communitarian emphasis of CST situates human dignity within a dense web of relationships. Human beings are most fully alive, most truly in touch with the dignity of their nature, when they are able to acknowledge the profound links existing between themselves and God, other persons and the rest of creation.

8. What are the human rights that the church endorses today?

It was John XXIII who provided the first attempt at a list of human rights endorsed by the church (*Pacem in Terris*, # 11-27). The 1971 Synod of Bishops proposed a right to development (*Justitia in Mundo*, chap. 1) and John Paul II has recently written of a right to a safe environment (*The Ecological Crisis: a Common Responsibility* [1990 World Day of Peace Message], #9) and to economic initiative (*Centesimus Annus*, #43). So reflection on human rights continues within the tradition of CST and new rights have been asserted since John’s 1963 roster. In short, CST offers no fixed and precise list of human rights but has developed a rather comprehensive roster.

In his “Address to the 34th General Assembly of the United Nations” John Paul II provided an updated roster of “some of the most important” human rights which the church endorses:

the right to life, liberty and security of the person; the right to food, clothing, housing, sufficient health care, rest, and leisure; the right to freedom of expression, education and culture; the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the right to

manifest one's religion either individually or in community, in public or in private; the right to choose a state of life, to found a family and to enjoy all conditions necessary for family life; the right to property and work, to adequate working conditions and a just wage; the right of assembly and association; the right to freedom of movement, to internal and external migration; the right to nationality and residence; the right to political participation and the right to participate in the free choice of the political system of the people to which one belongs (#13).

As you can tell, CST embraces a wide array of human rights. It is a list much closer to the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights than those established as constitutional in the United States. While CST maintains that human rights should be recognized by law in all nations, it is aware that, at present, human rights will be moral claims that are only sometimes recognized by civil law. Translating moral rights into legally binding rights is one of the aims of the church's teaching.

9. Why have human rights become so important to CST?

There are at least two ways, strategically and substantively, I can respond. Strategically, John Paul II has pursued an approach that permits him to proclaim the social message of the gospel to a diverse world. Basically, John Paul II has argued that there is no single pattern of social organization that must be followed. Various nations and cultures can follow different political, economic and social strategies as deemed fitting. But, whatever social order is adapted must be at the service of human rights.

We might see human rights as providing the framework within which societies must operate. This framework does not determine the specifics of social organization and practice but it does set the limits within which a good society functions. In effect, the strategic import of human rights for CST is as the means of articulating a universal message despite the broad array of cultures and social systems found in our world.

The church embraces human rights for the substantive reason that we have come to see the intimate connection between them and human dignity. This is an example of how CST has evolved as a result of its interaction with other political ideas. When nineteenth century popes heard liberals' cry for personal rights they interpreted this plea, in some cases rightly, as an exaggerated individualism. But as liberalism's understanding of freedom was modified over the course of events the Church came to appreciate the centrality of freedom to human dignity. By the time of Vatican II the bishops could state: "Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within the person" (*Gaudium et Spes*, #17).

The Church also reflected upon the place of rights-language in explaining the meaning of the common good. In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII wrote “in our time the common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties are maintained” (#60). Achieving the common good at the expense of the person’s rights is a false proposition. Human rights spell out the standards of personal well-being that any conception of the common good must embrace.

10. Can you explain what is meant by the common good?

This term is often invoked in CST. Perhaps the most commonly cited explanation is John XXIII’s succinct description of the common good as “the sum total of conditions of social living, whereby persons are enabled more fully and readily to achieve their own perfection” (*Mater et Magistra*, #65). For CST the common good is not an aggregate term, the totality of individual goods. Rather, there are goods that are only experienced in common, as shared, or they are not experienced at all.

The common good also suggests that the good of each person, the well-being of the human person, is connected to the good of others. That is, human beings only truly flourish in the context of a community. Our well-being is experienced amidst a setting in which other persons also flourish. From this perspective we can say two things: Each of us has an obligation to contribute to the common good so that human life can flourish and no description of the common good can exclude concern for an individual, writing off some person or group as unworthy of our interest. That is why human rights claims have become an important dimension of the common good in CST, no one should be denied the basic goods needed to join in the life of the community.

The centrality of the common good in CST reflects the communitarian outlook of the tradition and a commitment to serve the common good is a means whereby the dignity of each person is given its due.

11. When I hear language like “serve the common good” I begin to worry about personal freedom. Some talk about the common good sounds an awful lot like socialism. Isn’t the common good a socialist idea?

No, not at all. Of course, a lot depends on how you define your terms but CST draws upon classical sources like Aristotle as well as patristic and medieval sources such as Augustine and Aquinas for the idea of the common good. These far predate the advent of modern socialism. What CST reflects, as I have mentioned previously, is a communitarian outlook which highlights the claims that arise out of social life. It is a way of thinking as old as the prophets when they called upon Israel to care for the “widow,

orphan and alien” or Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan in which the neighbor is a category broader than most of us would define it.

In the culture of a nation like the United States, where individualism is the ruling presumption, any rival perspective which upholds personal duties and obligations that accrue from the experience of shared life defies the conventional wisdom. As such it can be branded as socialism. Doing so may permit some to dismiss CST as being part of a failed social philosophy like the discredited approaches of twentieth century communism. That is why it is important to be clear about what we mean.

Extreme renderings of personal freedom or unregulated markets are at odds with appeals to the common good. When properly understood, however, democratic freedoms or market-based economics are not antithetical to the common good. Indeed, the argument of CST is that neglect of the common good leads to the undermining of such political and economic arrangements. Calling attention to the common good is simply a way of pointing out that human beings are not meant for isolation but are essentially social creatures who achieve their perfection in and through the creation of genuine community where pursuit of the good is a shared endeavor.

12. What do you mean by solidarity?

Solidarity is a term that defies neat definition in CST. The Catechism of the Catholic Church likens it to “social charity” (#1939). It is a modern term that can make older claims about an organic society and natural sociality understandable to a contemporary audience. Solidarity is more than what is commonly meant by the word interdependence. The fact that we are linked to one another in a variety of ways is interdependence. But individuals may acknowledge this fact while being resentful or indifferent toward it, even as they take advantage of the others with whom they are interconnected. Interdependence does not rule out domination or exploitation.

Solidarity, on the other hand, moves interdependence to another level, beyond acknowledging the fact of interdependence. Solidarity shapes the response we should have to interdependence, evoking within us a desire to build the bonds of common life. As a virtue, solidarity, in the words of John Paul II, is not a feeling of vague compassion but a “firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #38). Solidarity shapes the character of a person so that mere recognition of interdependence is transformed into a commitment to the common good. It is solidarity that enables people to devote themselves “to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (*Ibid.*).

Virtues, such as like solidarity, shape our character and our actions should flow from our character. Part of what it means to be a person of integrity is that there is a fit between personal character and behavior. But we all know that acting on our beliefs can be helped or hindered by the environment in which we find ourselves. For example, it is easier to be cooperative and forgiving when we find ourselves with people who also seek cooperation or are willing to admit their own faults and forgive the errors of others. We can, in short, create social conditions which facilitate solidarity or frustrate it.

13. You said that the biblical meaning of justice is different than the usual way the word is understood by Americans. What do you mean?

One of the great benefits of travel to a foreign country is that we can step outside our usual points of reference and see life in a new way. So often what we take for granted is explained by our cultural location. If we have grown up and lived only in the United States we have imbibed quite a few assumptions that people of another culture might find odd and certainly not self-evident.

Reading the Bible can be like a visit to a foreign land for it offers a very different outlook than the conventional thinking of many of us. Whereas we tend to favor impartiality when determining justice the Bible provides evidence of God's bias toward the weak and poor. While we often resort to considerations of merit when discussing justice, the God of the Bible looks more at need. There is a strong tradition of property rights in the United States., but the Bible records the ancient ideal of jubilee where land is redistributed. When Americans consider justice it is frequently procedural, that is, we set up fair and impartial rules and whatever emerges as the end result is judged as just. In the scriptures justice is more an end-state; it is the establishment of shalom, a community of peace where right relationships are restored.

This is not to argue that the culture of this nation is antibiblical or somehow fundamentally at odds with the Christian vision. I simply wish to point out there is a difference in perspective between how justice is frequently portrayed in the Bible and how many in U.S. society think about justice. The traditions can be mutually enriching for American Catholics. CST, to the extent that it draws upon the biblical tradition, will speak with a voice that challenges what frequently are the conventionally accepted premises of our culture.

14. Could you say more about social justice and how it relates to the other forms of justice?

CST relies upon a traditional three-fold distinction of legal, distributive and commutative justice. Legal justice pertains to the common good and covers those aspects of determining what an individual's responsibility is to the community, be that society or the state. So the obligation to obey laws which serve the common good arises from legal justice. Or the obligation to contribute one's fair share of time, talent and/or money to the common good is due to legal justice. Recently, some have used the expression contributive justice rather than legal justice. The reverse side of legal justice is distributive justice, which addresses the relationship of the community's responsibility to the individual. How are we to apportion the benefits and the burdens that exist in the community? Distributive justice is the aspect of the virtue which rules these decisions. Various approaches to distribution exist, but generally speaking, CST gives prominence to the category of need as the first for assessing fair distribution and one's ability or resources when assessing burdens. So only after the basic needs of all are taken care of should other factors be permitted to influence distribution of goods, and with regard to burdens those who have more are expected to bear more.

Commutative justice is that realm of justice which governs the relationships of individuals to one another. We should remember, however, that a modern corporation is frequently understood as a moral person. Thus, the relationship of an employee to a business may be directed by norms of commutative justice. So fair dealing between employer and employee, between consumer and vendor, between borrower and lender is the sort of relationship which fall under the rubric of commutative justice.

Although the term "social justice" was given passing reference in some Vatican documents before Pius XI, it was that pope who made it a common term in CST. Subsequent popes have frequently appealed to social justice. While exact precision in the way the term is used in CST is not to be found, one theologian has suggested we think of it as a "political virtue," having to do with the "creation of patterns of societal organization and activity" whereby human rights are respected and participation in social life is guaranteed for each person (David Hollenbach, "Modern Catholic Teachings Concerning Justice" in *Justice, Peace, and Human Rights*, pp. 16-33). This corresponds with the revised Catechism that sees social justice as governing "the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1928).

Social justice is necessary if we are to have communities where commutative, distributive and legal justice flourish. To assess a topic through the lens of commutative

justice requires that we acknowledge also the setting in which the moral actors are situated. For example, the late Monsignor John Cronin, an advisor to the American bishops on economic matters, described a controversy in the late 1950s when he argued that according to commutative justice payment of a living wage was a requirement of all employers. If correct, this argument placed a huge burden on some employers in industries where profit margins were slim or in business sectors that were in recession. Cronin records how he was challenged to rethink his position once he understood the requirement of a living wage fell under the principle of social justice, not commutative justice. (John Cronin, "Forty Years Later: Reflections and Reminiscences" in a collection of essays on CST edited by C. Curran and R. McCormick, *Readings in Moral Theology: Official Catholic Social Teaching*).

Thus, it was not the individual employer acting in isolation who had to pay a living wage. Rather, it was a duty of society to reorganize economic life so that payment of a living wage was possible by responsible employers and social assistance would be available to supplement the income of those workers who could not earn such a wage due to inadequate productivity or economic hard times. Similar sorts of examples about the misreading of obligations could be given about legal justice (requiring an unemployed person to contribute monetarily to the common good) or distributive justice (treating the duty of feeding the hungry as if it fell to an individual acting alone). Without consideration of social justice the burdens placed on individuals or groups to act justly become unwieldy and unrealistic. Social justice is an essential dimension to the moral life since it makes other forms of justice feasible as norms to obey.

15. I am a little confused. I have heard of original sin and actual sin that is mortal or venial. Where did this social sin idea come from?

My apologies if I confused you. Social sin is a term of fairly recent vintage; it is meant to capture our understanding of one aspect of the mystery of evil. Since you are familiar with the language of original and actual sin let's look at that for a moment.

Original sin presumes no act of the will on our part; we inherit it. But actual sin is different. Remember one of the traditional conditions for mortal sin, a species of actual sin, is that it requires full consent of the will to an evil. So the tradition has used "sin" to name evil that is both voluntary and involuntary. How can we do that? By using modifiers like "original" or "actual" with the word sin to show we are talking about sin in different ways. We are talking about the mystery of evil in both cases but original sin and actual sin are quite different experiences of evil.

What this indicates is that within the Catholic tradition the mystery of evil is understood as so profound that we must use a variety of terms to describe it adequately. So all talk of sin employs analogy. An analogy describes what is similar amidst difference: love is blind, war is hell, the car is a lemon. These are all examples of analogy.

We use the same word “sin” to describe similar but different realities. Original sin, actual sin, sinful deeds, sinful temptations or attitudes, mortal sin, venial sin, social sin, sinful structures -- all these and other expressions are trying to name something similar, the mystery of evil. But the term sin alone lacks a certain precision if it can be used to describe all these aspects of evil. So we use the modifier social to signify sin in a particular sense, as it is found in the culturally produced practices and institutions of social life.

16. Among the key social institutions is the state. What is the role of the state according to CST?

CST has a high view of the state because the state is understood first as an institution that serves the common good. Few things are so clearly expressed in CST as the claim that the state is to protect and promote the common good. Pius XII made the point that “the state, then, has a noble function; that of reviewing, restraining, encouraging all those private initiatives of the citizen which go to make up national life and so directing them to a common end” (“Address to Eighth International Congress of Administrative Sciences,” August 5, 1951). John XXIII saw this role as the rationale for the state’s very existence: “the whole reason for the existence of civil authorities is the realization of the common good” (Pacem in Terris, #54).

Viewing the state this way then leads to a more positive evaluation of its role in social life rather than an outlook that envisions the state as a necessary evil or even an oppressive authority stifling individual freedom. That said, one can still discuss a host of other matters such as the proper role of the state vis-a-vis other social institutions, what form of government is best, what the power of the state is. CST has expressed itself on these matters and has further specified the role of the state. But the key idea is that the state must serve the common good of society.

17. What are those norms governing the state’s role?

Two norms are especially important: subsidiarity and socialization. Regarding subsidiarity, the classic text is from *Quadragesimo Anno*. Pius XI wrote: “It is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance of right order to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies” (#9). Put more concretely, the person in need looks to

the family for help; if the family is in need one looks to the neighborhood or local community; if it is the town in need one looks to the county; if the county requires assistance one looks to the state; and if the state cannot meet the need one turns to the national government. Thus, recourse for assistance should not automatically be to the national government but there is no opposition to such recourse if circumstances require it.

Subsidiarity reflects CST's opposition to the reduction of human association outside the family to just one form. Subsidiarity prevents any sort of collectivist or totalitarian outlook that permits the state to dominate all other forms of communal life. It is a norm that warns against any state assuming too great a role in public life, but it also warns a state not to fail in fulfilling its duties to promote the common good.

For this latter reason subsidiarity must be balanced by another procedural norm, socialization, described by John XXIII (*Mater et Magistra*, #59-67) and adopted by Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*, #25). Socialization notes that the growing complexity of modern life and the experience of various forms of interdependence result in a tendency to form new organizational structures both public and private. A larger role for the state, then, while not without its dangers, is not wrong in principle. Indeed, it may be necessary to achieve "an appropriate structuring of the human community" (*Mater et Magistra*, #67). The error is to rely upon a single ideological premise to settle all cases (either a simple opposition to government action or the consistent appeal to national government for intervention). Rather, the proper balancing of the two procedural norms of subsidiarity and socialization is to serve solidarity (see Q. 33).

18. Can we summarize subsidiarity to mean that "smaller is better" or "the less government the better"?

Not exactly, although some have tried to use it that way, as an argument against government. That would, of course, contradict what has just been said about the state being a highly prized social institution in CST. The Latin root of the word is the noun *subsidium* which means help, aid or support. In other words, the principle of subsidiarity has to do with the degree of aid or assistance needed in order to accomplish a task or meet an obligation.

In CST the idea is that one should seek assistance at the closest level to the agent or agency in need. When a smaller social unit is either unable or unwilling to meet the obligation it becomes necessary to turn to the larger social unit. Some agents are simply overwhelmed by a need or a problem and require the resources of a larger social entity.

For example, it is doubtful that even extended families can address social problems such as street crime or drug trafficking. Larger social institutions must be utilized.

At other times, an agent is able but simply refuses to satisfy reasonable expectations and a larger social agency must intervene. This is precisely what happened in the U.S. civil rights struggle when some southern states refused to enforce desegregation policies. In response the federal government stepped in to correct unjust practices.

Instead of “the less government the better” the principle might be better summarized as “no bigger than necessary, no smaller than appropriate.”

19. I’m not sure I understand this idea of “co-creation,.” Can you say a little more about it?

In the twentieth century, a line of reasoning that might be called creational has emphasized work as co-creation, that is, it is through work that human beings both shape and build the world. In doing so they fulfill the mandate of Genesis where Yahweh calls humankind to serve as a faithful steward of God’s creation. At another level work is also the means whereby persons develop themselves. So also in this way men and women participate in God’s ongoing creative activity fashioning both the world about them and themselves. It is in this way that we can speak of ourselves as co-creators; acting in concert with God’s grace, humanity exercises a creative role in the historical development of ourselves, our society, our world.

The spirituality of co-creation should not ignore the penitential and eschatological aspects but it highlights two other dimensions of a Christian understanding of work. Through our freedom and self-awareness, God has invited us into a unique relationship that allows us to see our work as more than just meeting our own needs. Humanity’s role in the plan of creation is to cooperate with the Creator in fashioning a created order that reflects the grandeur and purpose of God.

Second, our work, whatever it is, has the element of a personal calling, a vocation. We ought to discern, develop and direct our personal talents and gifts so that the work we do becomes both a response to God’s call and a means of following Christ. For men and women to be good workers is as much a way of discipleship as being a good spouse, parent or friend.

20. Among the basic rights of labor which CST has proposed is that of a just wage. What is meant by a just wage?

This expression, a just wage, is also termed within the tradition a living wage, a family wage or just compensation. It is a fundamental teaching of CST for it is closely linked to human dignity. People have a legitimate claim based on their dignity to those essential material goods that meet basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, health, education, security and rest---this is the minimum condition of wage-justice. Ordinarily, it is to be expected that an able-bodied person will obtain the basic goods through labor, either as the fruit of one's work or in exchange for it. This is a long-standing presumption within the tradition.

By the time of Leo XIII, however, this presumption had been undercut due to the working of the labor market in the emergent industrial order. Classical liberalism's defense of free markets included the principle of free contract, that is, a just contract was one that the signees entered into freely. In practice, this meant many workers desperate for a position took jobs for paltry wages that were inadequate for meeting basic needs for themselves and their dependents. Leo forthrightly criticized such an approach and challenged the doctrine of free contract by asserting that justice, not freedom, is the governing norm of contracts. And justice, rooted in human dignity, meant that a just wage is one which allows a worker and family to live in "reasonable and frugal comfort" (*Rerum Novarum*, #34).

Later popes such as Pius XI and John XXIII have acknowledged that determination of a just wage entails assessment of specific and concrete social conditions: the fiscal health of the business, the cost of living, market forces, the role of other actors--local, national and international. There is no fixed, one size-fits-all approach to defining a just wage. But the conviction is that wages must be determined by more than free consent of the contractual parties. As such, concern for justice and rights must be factored into determination of what constitutes a just wage.

21. Is the church's teaching on capitalism one of approval or disapproval?

This is one of those questions where the answer can only be given once it is clear what is meant by capitalism. John Paul II put the question to himself about whether capitalism is a model to be followed. He answered: "If by capitalism is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the

affirmative..." (Centesimus Annus, #42). So clearly there is an understanding of capitalism that the church approves.

On the other hand, John Paul also stated: "But if by capitalism is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative" (Ibid.). Very much in keeping with the legacy of CST, John Paul is wary of a capitalism which exalts freedom to the extent that justice, rights, the common good and human dignity are sacrificed. This is why he stipulates that economic freedom be understood in the context of a "strong juridical framework." A false capitalism takes one part of human freedom, economic liberty, and makes of it the whole story.

Within CST there is an appreciation for the utility and virtues of a market economy. But this fundamental acceptance of a free market economic model is always tempered by concerns that self-interest not override the common good, that unregulated freedom not lead to exploitation of others or of creation, that appreciation for material prosperity not create false understandings of human development and well-being.

Perhaps a fair summary of the position of CST on capitalism is that it gets a conditional approval; it is not inherently wrong but false renderings of capitalist economics, which have existed in the past and continue in the present, must be opposed.

One can comb through the documents of CST and find a list of ills in capitalism to be remedied. It is possible to arrange the list of papal concerns under four headings: (a) establishment by the state of a juridical framework to regulate market operations, (b) communal provision of basic goods/services for all, (c) promotion of personal and group morality, and, finally, (d) protection of voluntary associations and other elements of civil society (Daniel Finn, "John Paul II and the Moral Ecology of Markets" in *Theological Studies*, vol. 59 [1998] pp. 662-79).

Juridical framework means that government must establish fair and wise regulations that permit markets to function optimally for human well-being while still respecting individual freedom. Second, any economy must see to it that no one is deprived of essential goods or services because of not having sufficient capital. However the economy operates, it must have in place a means whereby the community can guarantee that a person's basic material needs are satisfied.

One of the dangers in modern times is that market forces are being extended into areas of life where they do not belong. Just as the extension of government into all realms of

social existence violates the principle of subsidiarity so, too, something similar can be said about economic markets. It is important that social groupings of family, church, neighborhood, fraternal and sororal clubs, recreational and educational organizations and the like should function by their own logic and ethos, not that of the market.

22. Has the teaching on private property evolved over the years?

Private property serves several worthwhile ends according to CST. It permits workers to meet their basic temporal needs; it also allows workers to gain some financial stability for their families; it offers security for the future, especially in old age; it rewards hard work and frugality; it serves as a means of protecting personal liberty; it permits workers to be creative and to exercise self-determination. In addition, the social institution of private property is a useful way to see to it that people will assume responsibility for the proper care of God's creation (#5-7).

A right of possession of property, however, ought not be equated with right of use. People may abuse their possessions and use them improperly. Such abuse should be challenged and may even be restrained for the common good: "Public authority, in view of the common good, may specify more accurately what is licit and what is illicit for property owners in the use of their possessions" (#49). Abuse does not cancel the right of private property ownership. The corollary of this is also true; regulation of use does not violate the right of ownership of private property (Ibid.).

The development of the teaching on private property has been in the direction of underscoring the social dimension of private property. Pius XI affirmed the "twofold aspect of ownership, which is individual or social accordingly as it regards individuals or concerns of the common good" (Quadragesimo Anno, #45). Pius XII retrieved the patristic theme of the universal destiny of all goods as the context for thinking about private property (June 1, 1941 Pentecost Address). There can be a diversity of ownership schemes that should be left to particular customs and statutes of a society. Any such scheme "remains subordinated to the natural scope of material goods and cannot emancipate itself from the first and fundamental right which concedes their use to all" (Ibid.).

In effect, the raising up of the social dimensions of ownership has led CST to insist not only on the individual right of private property but the "social duty essentially inherent in the right" (Pacem in Terris, #22). Paul VI explicitly denied that the right to private property can be considered "an absolute and unconditioned right" for "the right to private property must never be exercised to the detriment of the common good"

(Populorum Progressio, #23). This principle extends to the case that “the common good sometimes demands expropriation” (#24).

According to John Paul II all property has a “‘social mortgage,’ meaning it has an intrinsically social function based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods” (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, #42). While it remains true private property is a right that is “valid and necessary” it is important in the face of widespread poverty to affirm “the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all” (Ibid., italics in original).

23. What does CST mean by the just war tradition?

The heart of the tradition is the belief that war is a rule-governed activity. War is part of the moral world, not apart from it. Unlike pacifists who cannot accept that war is a correct moral choice, or others whose zealotry leads them to think war is simply about winning at whatever price, the just war proponent argues that meaningful moral lines can be drawn in initiating wars and in waging them.

Properly understood, just war thinking is not pro-war or an advocacy of violence. “The Church’s teaching on war and peace establishes a strong presumption against war which is binding on all; it then examines when this presumption may be overridden, precisely in the name of preserving the kind of peace which protects human dignity and human rights” (Gaudium et Spes, #70).

If one accepts just war thinking, three things must be remembered: (1) the burden of proof is on those who would override a moral duty not to kill or harm another; (2) to say that such a duty may be overridden in one case is not to override the duty in all cases; (3) the means of overriding should be as compatible as possible with a sense of regret for overriding the obligation not to kill.

CST has developed its just war criteria in response to three questions: Why can force be used? When can force be used? How can force be used?

Answering the first question requires the articulation of what has come to be called the criterion of just cause. Various understandings of what counts as a just cause have been offered over the centuries. Modern Catholic teaching has pretty much restricted the use of violent force to resistance to another’s aggression. Recently, there have been arguments to permit some cases of aid to innocents being abused by their government, what is called humanitarian intervention.

Making a case for a just cause is just the beginning of the process. I will follow the American bishops in explaining the additional criteria that address the questions when to go to war and how to wage war (The Challenge of Peace, #87-99).

Competent authority: any decision to go to war must be made by the person or persons who are duly empowered to act on behalf of the common good.

Comparative justice: this refers to the need to determine which side is sufficiently right in its complaint about the other side.

Right intention: closely linked to just cause, this criterion calls for scrutiny of the motivation for war.

Last resort: all reasonable peaceful alternatives must be tried before taking up arms.

Probability of success: although often hard to assess, the idea is to avoid senseless or irrational use of force.

Proportionality: this refers to some calculation of whether the good to be obtained by war outweighs the harm which will be caused.

When the criteria for why and when are addressed it remains to assess the means. It is important to evaluate the methods employed by combatants. As frequently acknowledged, there are crimes in war even if war itself is not a crime.

24. What is the remedy for the gap between rich and poor?

In a word development, but this term requires explanation since one finds in CST an evolution in its usage. One might say that there has been development in the church's teaching on development!

Although John XIII called in 1961 for increased financial aid and emergency assistance to poor nations where this was needed, he realized the underlying causes of the plight of the world's poor had to be addressed in a new way. The year he wrote *Mater et Magistra* was also the beginning of the U.N. First Development Decade. There was optimism that something akin to the Marshall Plan, which helped rebuild postwar Europe, might happen in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

John laid out three basic norms for development: (a) the internal affairs of poor nations should be reformed to ensure efficiency and fairness (#167-68); (b) all efforts should be made to avoid a cultural imperialism by which economically advanced nations disrupt the cultural systems of aid recipients (#169-71); and (c) new developments in

international economic life should not lead to an economic colonialism that replaces the older political colonialism experienced by a number of the poor nations (#172).

Paul VI articulated a threefold obligation of the richer nations: the duty of human solidarity, the duty of social justice and the duty of universal charity (*Populorum Progressio*, #44). The first duty pointed out the need for generous and wisely planned aid to poorer nations (#45-55). The second duty of social justice required nations to address in a systematic manner the necessary reform of the economic framework governing international trade (#56-65). Finally, Paul wrote of the duty of charity that called for sensitivity to cultural differences and respect for local customs, as well as hospitality toward immigrants and a spirit of mutual collaboration between rich and poor (#66-75).

Taken together, these guidelines articulate the elements of what makes for just development. Important as it is, however, “just” was but the first modifier to precede the noun development in CST. The next expression was integral development.

25. What is “integral development”?

Paul VI was troubled by the lack of progress in addressing development during the 1960s. He wanted to clarify the Catholic perspective on the goal of development since in his mind some approaches to the question were reductionistic, focused only on increasing the gross national product of a nation or the average per capita income of a person.

Paul emphasized that “development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and the whole person” (*Populorum Progressio*, #14). The pope was clear that “increased possession is not the ultimate goal of nations nor of individuals. All growth is ambivalent.” The ambivalence owes to the fact that economic well-being is essential, but it is also a trap hindering true development if the person makes economic goods the supreme good (#19).

For Paul there are stages that lead to integral development. “The passage from misery toward the possession of necessities, victory over social scourges, the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture” are all important, indeed essential, first steps. Also needed are “increased esteem for the dignity of the others, the turning toward the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace.” Even more humanizing are “the acknowledgment by the person of supreme values, and of God their source and their finality.” Finally, human development climaxes with “faith, a

gift of God accepted by the good will of the individual, and unity in the charity of Christ” which permits us to share in the very life of God (#21).

John Paul II has also picked up on the idea that development has a richer meaning than the single goal of economic improvement. For John Paul, development is not the same as the myth of progress in the West nor can it be confused with consumerism.

Development has an economic dimension but is not solely economic (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #28). Genuine development is integral; it has moral and spiritual dimensions as well as political, cultural and economic (#27-34).