

A Summary of Catholic Social Teaching

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In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* to rectify the abuses of the working class created by unjust practices throughout the Industrial Revolution. It endeavored to set out the responsibilities of labor, capital producers, government, and citizens to achieve justice and free market creativity and production. This entailed the condemnation of Marxist socialism as well as unrestrained capitalism while protecting the rights of individuals and private property. It is the founding document of Catholic social teaching.

Since that time every Pope has expanded the body of Catholic social teaching to apply not only to labor and the economy but also to family, political community, international community, war and peace, and the environment. The history of Catholic Social Teaching (hereafter “CST”) is rich and interesting, but beyond the scope of this volume. Our purpose in this brief treatment is to give a basic description of its major principles and areas of application so that the reader may delve into it more deeply according to his interests.

CST is expressed through about twenty encyclical letters and one conciliar document (*Gaudium et Spes*) spanning from Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* to Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*. Fortunately, the Pontifical council of Justice and Peace wrote a comprehensive document entitled Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church that organizes the content of the above encyclicals according to the six principles and six major areas of application. It is very well indexed and free online (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html). The following will briefly explain three dimensions of CST and its articulation in the compendium:

1. Doctrine or prudential judgement? (Section I)
2. The six principles of CST (Section II)
3. Seven major areas of CST application (Section III)

I.

Doctrine or Prudential Judgement?

There are three levels of authoritative pronouncements within the Catholic Church:

1. *Extraordinary Magisterium*—which is infallible and needed for salvation
2. *Ordinary Magisterium*—not infallible; subject to limited error, but even if it is in error, it cannot lead away from salvation.
3. *Prudential Judgement*—Not infallible; subject to change and error; not needed for salvation *per se*.

Papal encyclicals on social teaching contain both principles and *applications of principles*. Should both CST principles and their applications be considered Ordinary

Magisterium? Since the *principles* of CST lead the faithful to salvation and are not likely to change over time, they qualify for “Ordinary Magisterium.”

1. Conversely, specific *applications* of these principles may *not* be directly concerned with salvation and may change in different places and times. Therefore, they should be considered prudential judgments.

The Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace in its *Compendium on Catholic Social Doctrine* has declared that there are five major principles of CST which are binding on all the faithful:

1. The pursuit of the common good in a spirit of service,
2. The development of justice with particular attention to situations of poverty and suffering,
3. Respect for the autonomy of earthly realities,
4. The principle of subsidiarity (matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority),
5. The promotion of dialogue and peace in the context of solidarity. ¹

The Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace further declared in Section 565 that these five principles of CST are Ordinary Magisterium that obligates the Catholic faithful:

“These are the criteria that *must* inspire the Christian laity in their political activity. *All* believers, insofar as they possess rights and duties as citizens, are *obligated* to respect these guiding principles.”²

There is also a sixth principle of CST which is implicit in the above list of five which forms the foundation of virtually every Papal social encyclical, namely, the principle of the intrinsic dignity (worth) of every human being. Henceforth, I will refer to the principles of CST which are declared “Ordinary Magisterium” as the “*six general principles* of CST.”

We may now return to the distinction between the principles of CST and the *application* of the *principles* of CST. From the above it is clear that the six general principles of CST are Ordinary Magisterium, but as the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace and the US Catholic Bishops declare, the applications of these principles are prudential judgments. Section 568 of the *Compendium on Catholic Social Doctrine* states:

When reality is the subject of careful attention and proper interpretation, concrete and effective choices can be made.

¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2005. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. English trans by US Council of Catholic Bishops. (Washington D.C. US Council of Catholic Bishops) Section 565. Hereafter referred to as “Compendium of Social Doctrine.” This is a universally binding obligation of the faithful set out by a Pontifical Commission which has been affirmed by the Bishops and the Pope for many years. It therefore qualifies as Ordinary Magisterium.

² *Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine* Section 565.

However, an *absolute value* must *never* be attributed to these choices because no problem can be solved once and for all. ‘Christian faith has never presumed to impose a rigid framework on social and political questions, conscious that the historical dimension requires men and women to live in imperfect situations, which are also susceptible to rapid change’[1189].³

How does this distinction work out in our daily lives? Let’s take an example. The principle of the intrinsic dignity of every human being is evidently important for our salvation and will not change over the course of time (i.e. meaning that it qualifies for Ordinary Magisterium). However, certain applications of this principle – say, membership in a particular Union, which might help workers to obtain their appropriate dignity – does not necessarily lead to salvation and could very well change over the course of time. Such an application of the principle of intrinsic dignity would not qualify for Ordinary Magisterium, and would then be a prudential judgment.

II. Six Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

There are six major principles of Catholic social teaching on:

1. The intrinsic transcendent dignity of every human being
2. The principle of the common good
3. The universal destination of goods
4. The principle of subsidiarity
5. Participation in democracy
6. The principle of solidarity

We will discuss each in turn.

II.A The Intrinsic Transcendent Dignity of Every Human Being

The teaching of Jesus is unequivocal on this regard:

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me...Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me (Matt 25:40, 45).

When Jesus equates himself with the least of his brothers and sisters, He elevates everyone – including slaves, prisoners, and the poorest of the poor to His own inestimable Divine dignity. Since that time, the Christian church has recognized the equal inestimable dignity of every

³ *Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine* 2005, Section 568.

human being, bringing it into the realm of natural reason, natural law, and natural rights through the idea and reality of the inalienable rights to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and property. The Church embraces this as its central social teaching in *Rerum Novarum* and it has remained so to this day. This principle is a part of the Church's Extraordinary Magisterium and is therefore infallible and needed for salvation.⁴ The Church has based virtually all of its other social doctrines on this foundation stone—the inestimable dignity of all human life from conception to its natural end as well as the justification for the other six principles of CST. This doctrine is elucidated in the *Compendium* (Chapter III).

II.B The Principle of the Common Good

This principle extends the first principle to the domain of groups, communities, cultures, societies and states as the *Compendium* notes:

*The principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people. According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily”.*⁵

The Second Vatican Council goes on to explain that the common good is “the social and community dimension of the moral good.”⁶

To fulfill the principle of the common good, every individual, societal group and governmental body must commit themselves to certain ends and objectives described by the *Compendium* as follows:

These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom.⁷

Gaudium et Spes and several CST encyclicals exhort every Catholic to do their utmost individually, in community, and through participation in government to meet the demands of the common good in the best way possible. This is explained

⁴ See Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution of the Church*) Sections 12, 25-27, & 41. See also Second Vatican Council Declaration: *Dignitatis Humanae* 1

⁵ *Compendium Catholic Social Doctrine* 164 See also Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, 26

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Compendium*, 166. See also Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* 26

in detail below with regard to the seven major areas of the applications of CST (Section III).

II.C The Universal Destination of Goods

The expression “universal destination of goods” refers to the fact that God wills that His creation of the earth (and its fruitfulness) sustain *all* people. This means that *all* people have a right to share in the earth’s goods in order to meet their needs (and their families’ needs). These “needs” include not only the requirements for sustenance, shelter, and safety, but also for personal fulfillment—including work, community, education, and culture. The Compendium describes it as follows:

*The universal right to use the goods of the earth is based on the principle of the universal destination of goods. Each person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development.*⁸

At first glance, one might think that this principle advocates collectivism or socialism, but the Church has been very careful to advocate just the opposite—namely the advocacy of the universal right to share in the earth’s goods as well as the right to private property and the right to participate in the free market. Though these three economic rights could be conflictual when taken to extremes, the Church advocates that they be kept in a perpetual balance so that the intrinsic dignity of every human being and the principle of the common good can be fulfilled. The right to private property and to participate in a free market merit closer inspection.

Since the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, and later Francisco Suarez, the Church has recognized the need for a legitimacy of private property as an extension of the right to autonomy and self-governance (liberty). It is also recognized how private property increases responsibility, incentivizes labor and creativity, and help to provide autonomy for the family. The Second Vatican Council states in this regard:

Private property and other forms of private ownership of goods “assure a person a highly necessary sphere for the exercise of his personal and family autonomy and ought to be considered as an extension of human freedom ... stimulating exercise of responsibility, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberty.”⁹

St. Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suarez (among many others) recognized that private property was a condition necessary for privacy and self-governance long before the abuses of collectivism and Marxism. When these abuses were recognized after the Russian Revolution, the Church saw

⁸ *Compendium*, 172

⁹ Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, 71

private property as a fundamental need to avoid indentured servitude and “promiscuous dominion.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, the Church has never recognized “private property” as an absolute right, but rather as a relative one—subordinated to the universal right to share in the earth’s goods.¹¹ This means that the right to private property must be regulated so that the accumulation of wealth by some individuals will not lead to deprivation of the earth’s goods from other individuals or groups of individuals. Hopefully individual citizens will responsibly regulate themselves to prevent exploitation or severe deprivation of the world’s goods from others. If they do not, they force government to take on this role—a role which the Church believes is integral to the common good.¹²

The conditional right to private property also extends to the right to participate in a free market. Since the writing of *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has recognized not only the right to participate in free markets, but also the effectiveness of those markets for the creative, efficient, and optimized production of goods and services. The Compendium, borrowing from Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* states it this way:

*The free market is an institution of social importance because of its capacity to guarantee effective results in the production of goods and services. Historically, it has shown itself able to initiate and sustain economic development over long periods. There are good reasons to hold that, in many circumstances, “the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs”.[726] The Church’s social doctrine appreciates the secure advantages that the mechanisms of the free market offer, making it possible as they do to utilize resources better and facilitating the exchange of products.*¹³

Though a free market is essential to the efficient and creative production of goods and services, it cannot be left completely unregulated lest ethical problems (such as greed and pride) undermine workers and the economy itself. The eighty year history of industrial revolution abuses make this proclivity a virtual reality when markets are completely unregulated.¹⁴ For this reason, the state must regulate the free market to protect weaker parties from being exploited by stronger and wealthier ones. Though the state should not interfere with the ordinary means of production or the market itself, it must perform certain functions to protect laborers, weaker consumers, and the competitiveness of the marketplace. This means safeguarding workers from exploitation, consumers from price-gauging of inelastic goods (e.g. necessities such as bread), and the marketplace from monopolies and monopolizing tendencies.

¹⁰ *Compendium*, 176

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Compendium*, 347. See also Pope John Paul II Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 30, 40, & 41.

¹⁴ Pope Leo XIII is quite explicit about these abuses in the opening chapters of *Rerum Novarum*.

CST uses two of its principles (discussed below) to provide guidance and balance in setting guidelines for state actions within the marketplace—the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of solidarity. The Compendium summarizes this “mean” by appealing to Pope John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus*:

The action of the State and of other public authorities must be consistent with the principle of subsidiarity and create situations favourable to the free exercise of economic activity. It must also be inspired by the principle of solidarity and establish limits for the autonomy of the parties in order to defend those who are weaker. Solidarity without subsidiarity, in fact, can easily degenerate into a “Welfare State”, while subsidiarity without solidarity runs the risk of encouraging forms of self-centred localism.¹⁵

Let us now return to the third principle of CST—universal destination of goods. We may now summarize the principle with the above two important qualifications. Every person, in light of his transcendent soul made in the image and likeness of God, has a right to share in the goods of this earth and cannot be deprived of the goods needed to sustain humanely himself and his family. This principle does not mean that everyone must share equally in the goods of this world. The requirements of private property and free markets as well as differences in productivity, initiative, creativity, and education will give rise to inequalities of wealth, property, status, and privileges. However, such inequalities cannot lead to exploitative, oppressive, and unjust working conditions, wages, and distribution of inelastic goods (i.e. necessities for life and family). Thus the universal destination of goods should not preclude private property or free markets, but private property and free markets cannot lead to exploitative, oppressive, or unjust conditions for any party.

The universal destination of goods further entails the preferential option for the poor. In his address to the bishops of Latin America in Puebla, Mexico, this phrase was used to denote the obligation of all Christians to use the means at their disposal to help alleviate the oppressive conditions of the poor—particularly through meeting their needs of food, shelter, and health care as well as education, communication, and technological advancement.¹⁶ It also includes encouragement of the Church and influential citizens to rectify unjust and oppressive social and political structures (a mandate intrinsic to the principle of solidarity—see below IV.B.6). Whatever our status, we must be cognizant of the Gospel mandates to make a place in our heart, time, and action for the poor—whether it be through contributing funds, service to the less fortunate, exerting influence in the marketplace or politics, developing social entrepreneurial solutions, or other contributions befitting our talents, responsibilities, and abilities.

II.D

The Principle of Subsidiarity

¹⁵ *Compendium*, 351. See also Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*, 15

¹⁶ See Pope John Paul II, Address to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, Mexico (28 January 1979) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 71.

The principle of subsidiarity is a foundation of Catholic social teaching that *Quadragesimo Anno* elevated to utmost importance in social philosophy.¹⁷ It means that no higher (larger) social unit should undermine and absorb any lower (smaller) social unit—or stated the other way around, that preference for action within society should always be given to the lowest (the smallest) social unit that can accomplish it. For example if an individual or a family can accomplish a social action or duty, then they should be allowed to do it without interference from (or absorption into) a higher social unit (such as a community organization). Similarly if a local charity or a community organization can accomplish a particular social action or duty then it should be allowed to do it without interference from (or absorption into) a higher social unit (such as a city or state bureaucracy). Again if a local business can accomplish a social action for which it is designed, it should be allowed to do so without interference from a higher social unit (such as a state government).

The Church is interested in this principle for three reasons. First, she is interested in the autonomy of individuals as essential to the intrinsic dignity of transcendent beings made in the image of God. Without subsidiarity, higher social units would absorb the autonomy and the proper duties (and dignity) of individuals. Secondly, the Church is interested in the family—as the original unit through which love, religion, and morals are lived, practiced, and taught. Higher social units are perforce much less intimate than families, and they do not have the same care and specificity about religious and moral practice. To relegate family duties to community, city, or state organizations undermines this essential intimacy, care, and religious and moral practice which is deleterious to both individuals and society. Thirdly, the Church is interested in protecting community autonomy because local communities are much better suited to solve local problems than larger social units who care and understand far less than local communities.

Harkening back to *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, the *Compendium* urges all authorities in higher governmental and societal positions to observe the principle of subsidiarity to fulfill their ethical duty to protect the autonomy, dignity, and proper functions of lower social units:

*On the basis of this , all societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help (“subsidium”) — therefore of support, promotion, development — with respect to lower-order societies. In this way, intermediate social entities can properly perform the functions that fall to them without being required to hand them over unjustly to other social entities of a higher level, by which they would end up being absorbed and substituted, in the end seeing themselves denied their dignity and essential place.*¹⁸

There is a tendency in complex societies to allow larger social units—and even the state—to absorb the functions and duties of lower social units. This has the effect of undermining individuality, more intimate associations among people, and more effective local associations by replacing them with more bureaucratic, less intimate and less effective higher ones. If we allow

¹⁷ See Pope Pius XI 1931 *Quadragesimo Anno* in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* Section 23. See also Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*, 48.

¹⁸ *Compendium*, 186

larger social units to absorb the actions and responsibilities of smaller ones, we can expect to see a decrease in individual self-worth, individual initiative, familial intimacy, religious and moral practice, and local effectiveness. It is not enough for the Church to urge leaders within higher social, societal, and governmental units to observe their ethical duty toward subsidiarity. *All* citizens must be vigilant about maintaining subsidiarity by insisting on individual freedoms, family autonomy and rights, and the proper duties of community organizations, individual businesses, and local governments.

In the previous subsection we noted that there seems to be an inherent tension between the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of solidarity, for the former seeks to vest authority and power in the lowest possible social units while the latter *seems* to vest authority and power in higher social units. As we shall see below (Section II.F), solidarity is not interested in vesting power and authority anywhere, but rather in seeking the common good and mutual care for as many as possible.

II.E Participation in Democracy

Since *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the Church has been a champion of democracy and participation in democracy as not only a right, but a duty of every citizen. Democracy, as a *right* of citizens is derived from two more fundamental s-- the intrinsic transcendent dignity of every human being and the principle of subsidiarity. Alternatively, participation in democracy is a *duty* of every citizen. This is also derived from two more fundamental s—the principle of the common good and the universal destination of goods.

In order for the Church to maintain all four of its more fundamental s, She must at once urge every state and societal structure to observe every individual's right to self-governance and individual participation in the larger community—and She must also urge every citizen to participate in the democratic process not only by voting but by using every other means of participation (e.g. participation in local hearings, public discussions, and even protests) to urge civil authorities to take care of those who have less influence and social status.¹⁹ She must also urge citizens to be vigilant about allowing people of influence to receive unfair and unearned privileges within the civil society that undermine justice and the common good.

II.F The Principle of Solidarity

Like the principle of subsidiarity, the principle of solidarity is viewed as a most fundamental social principle affecting every citizen's participation in social and civil structures as well as those social and civil structures themselves. Though solidarity is an ideal for all social and civil structures, it is first and foremost a moral virtue in every individual. We might define that virtue as a concern and determination to orient social and civil structures toward justice and the common good—and to find ways to change unjust social structures that are contrary to the common good. Summarizing *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the *Compendium* describes it as follows:

¹⁹ See *Compendium*, 190-191. See also Pope John II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 44-45. See also Pope John XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, in *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 55.

Solidarity must be seen above all in its value as a moral virtue that determines the order of institutions. On the basis of this principle the “*structures of sin*” that dominate relationships between individuals and peoples must be overcome. They must be purified and transformed into *structures of solidarity* through the creation or appropriate modification of laws, market regulations, and juridical systems.²⁰

The principle of solidarity applies not only to social structures of particular community, state, and nation, but also to social and market structures among nations throughout the world. This means that citizens must be vigilant about assuring that international market forces and global political structures are oriented toward justice and the common good—that is, that they do not exploit or oppress less wealthy and less influential peoples and nations. If they do, citizens should do what they can to rectify these unjust and oppressive relationships so that those nations have the opportunity to forge a way out of their economically and politically challenged conditions. Two particularly important vehicles for doing this are education and the introduction of inexpensive new technologies that will advance communication, agriculture, energy production, and banking/financing. Social entrepreneurship has been quite successful in accomplishing these objectives without making recourse to governmental solutions. There are dozens of examples of this new generation of social entrepreneurs, two of whom, for example, have affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in developing countries.²¹ If citizens find it difficult to move the wills of governmental and international authorities, they might want to investigate this new generation of social entrepreneurs and find ways to support them.

III.

Seven Societal Contexts in Which to Apply CST Principles

There are seven major social contexts which Christian citizens must safeguard, maintain, and make more just through the application of the six principles of CST:

1. The family (discussed in Chapter 5 of the *Compendium*)
2. The working environment (discussed in Chapter 6 of the *Compendium*)
3. The economic/business community (discussed in Chapter 7 of the *Compendium*)
4. The political community (discussed in Chapter 8 of the *Compendium*)
5. The international community (discussed in Chapter 9 of the *Compendium*)
6. The environment (discussed in Chapter 10 of the *Compendium*)
7. The pursuit of peace and the situation of war (Section III.G).

²⁰ *Compendium*, 193.

²¹ See for example the work of Iqbal Qadir (current professor at MIT) who started Grameenphone and Gonofone in his native Bangladesh making cell phone communication so inexpensive that it is available to almost everyone. See also the work of James Tooley who is currently organizing networks of inexpensive private schools throughout the world using a remarkable model of integrated private initiatives. Currently his and others' work is positively affecting the education of tens of thousands of students in developing countries. The model is described in his book *A Beautiful Tree* which won the Sir Anthony Fisher prize in the UK.

We will discuss each in turn.

III.A The Family

Family is foundational, and so also the sacrament of Marriage on which it is based, because it is the original and most influential context into which human life is born and formed, and the most fundamental constituent of local communities, societies, and the state.²² Thus it is the culture of every person's origin and the building block and conduit of all other forms of culture and community. As noted above (with respect to the principle of subsidiarity), the family is the most intimate and caring social unit, imparting not only psychological and social stability, but also moral and religious teaching and practice. Therefore it is incumbent on all Christians not only to care for their own families, but also for the structure, stability, and welfare of all families within society.

In view of this, the Church recognizes the family to be the most foundational social structure, and sees the proper rearing of children—the bringing of new transcendent eternal life into the world—as its most important purpose. Thus the family (and the proper rearing of children) provides the basis on which the Church defines marriage and sexual morals. Yes—the Church derives its definition of marriage and sexuality from Jesus, but these teachings are seen within the context of the stability and proper functioning of the family. Hence, it should come as no surprise that the Church sees Jesus' teaching about the indissolubility of marriage within the context of providing a stable, loving, moral, and religious family in which to raise children. The centrality of family (and the raising of children—eternal and transcendent beings) goes beyond the ideal of indissolubility to issues such as having one male father and one female mother, the exclusivity of marital partners, and even the openness to children within marriage.

Furthermore, it should come as no surprise that the Church sees Jesus' teaching on sexuality within the more foundational context of its view of marriage and family. For Christ and the Church, sexuality is not an end in itself—it is a support for the exclusive, covenant love of marriage whose purpose is to provide a stable, loving, moral, and religious context for the raising of children. We might say, then, that the family (the generation and raising of transcendent eternal beings) is the foundation on which the Church builds its view of marriage—and that this view of marriage is the foundation on which She builds Her view of sexuality. Looking backwards, the Church's view of sexuality is derived from Her view of marriage which is derived from Her view of family—and is inseparable from them.

Interpreting Jesus' teaching about the intention of His Father to make sexual union the exclusive domain of covenant love in marriage, the Church views sexual relationships outside of marriage to be contrary to God's will. Inasmuch as God's will is oriented solely toward the good of human beings both in this world and toward the life to come, She holds that sexuality outside the marriage covenant (exclusive commitment) will undermine the maturity, capacity for love, generativity, and commitment to God for those engaging in it. In short, engaging in any sexual

²² See Pope John Paul II *Familiaris Consortio*. See also *Compendium*, Chapter Five.

relationship outside of the covenant love of marriage is destructive of the self, the capacity to relate to others, and our commitment to God. The idea that the Church should adapt to the contemporary view that sexuality can be an end in itself is tantamount to saying that the Church should ignore the teachings of Jesus and allow people to undermine their potential for covenant love, family, and commitment to God. Obviously, the Church is obligated by Jesus' mandate to Her and the conscience of its leadership to support God's custody over sexuality. Thus She will always teach the indissolubility of marriage and the sole place of sexuality within marriage.

So what must Christians do to uphold and promote the family within society?

1. Enter into marital relationships with the intention of exclusive, and indissoluble commitment to each spouse and to be open to bearing and raising children.
2. Provide an example to friends and community of good marriage and the raising of children.
3. Practice and uphold Jesus' and the Church's view of exclusive indissoluble marriage and the proper place of sexuality within it.
4. To use the principle of subsidiarity to protect the autonomy and dignity of the family within the larger social context.
5. To help other families with advice, friendship, and other forms of support.

There is one more dimension of upholding the family to which Pope John Paul II calls us—namely to do everything within our power to create a culture of life.²³ Inasmuch as bearing and raising of children is the most important purpose of family, it is incumbent on Christians to build a culture in which the sacredness and preciousness of life is recognized, appreciated, and supported. Without this culture of life (i.e. a culture of death), we can expect that the intrinsic transcendental dignity of every child will not be recognized, let alone appreciated and supported. Quite the opposite—children will be “under attack”, and as we can see, the killing of innocent preborn children will not only be permitted, but hailed as a great social triumph.

Furthermore, we can expect that families with large numbers of children will also come under scrutiny—and may also be marginalized socially and civilly. This will allow society to promote “more noble” objectives than bringing eternal transcendental life into the world—such as increased wealth, social status, disposable income, and creature comforts. This trend will lead inevitably to an increased concern for Level One (materialistic and sensual) objectives and Level Two (ego-comparative) objectives—and a concomitant decline in Level Three (contributive and generative) objectives and Level Four (transcendent and religious) objectives. As the culture becomes more egocentric and narcissistic, the society which it animates will grow weaker and less unified. This trend is already having significant consequences throughout Europe, and is beginning to manifest itself in the United States and Canada. Even as these negative cultural and societal consequences are becoming increasingly apparent, the myth of overpopulation continues to be promulgated by some cultural leaders who simply ignore the data of increased per capita wealth amidst rising population due to significant advances in the technology of agriculture, energy production, communication, education, and structural engineering.²⁴ If we are to uphold

²³ See Pope John Paul II *Evangelium Vitae*

²⁴ See Paul Zane Pilzer 1991 *Unlimited Wealth: The Theory and Practice of Economic Alchemy* (New York: Crown)

the family, the significance and value of children, and the lives of the unborn, we will have to put Catholic Social Teaching into action in three other ways within the culture:

1. Use the six principles of Social Ethics (given above in Section I) to defend the life, personhood, and inalienable rights of the unborn—and to reverse the legal decisions upholding abortion,
2. Uphold the rights and inestimable dignity of children within the culture and the state by challenging the myth of overpopulation and other sophistical arguments against children.
3. Promoting the transcendental dignity (and transphysical soul) of human beings and helping others to make the transition from Level One-Level Two purpose to Level Three-Level Four purpose (see the conclusion to this book, Section II).

In light of the above, we cannot afford to naively hold that we are promoting social justice and upholding Catholic social teaching without being strong advocates of the Church's teaching on family and children, for if the fundamental value and dignity of family and children is culturally and societally undermined, the society will soon move to a dominant Level One-Level Two culture. Moreover, its most fundamental social unit will be undermined, and the value of its most precious constituent—its children—undervalued. As will be explained in the conclusion to this book, this portends an aggressive, callous social environment leading to a societal implosion. This societal fabric will weaken the opportunities to apply any of the six principles of Catholic social teaching, for the intrinsic transcendental dignity of every human person—the foundation of the other five s—will be unappreciated and perhaps unrecognized. Let us resolve then to uphold the dignity and value of children and the family at least as much as the other five social contexts of Catholic social teaching—the working environment, the economic/business community, the political community, the international community, and the environment.

III.B The Working Environment

The Old Testament, Jesus, St. Paul, and the Church, all attest to the importance and dignity of work in our temporal and even spiritual lives. Using one's gifts, time, and talents create and produce goods and services to help sustain the lives of others in the community is intrinsically good and an integral part of life's purpose.²⁵

The abuses of the Industrial Revolution moved Pope Leo XIII to write the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, to protect the dignity of workers, prevent their exploitation, uphold their right to organize, and to assure humane working conditions and just wages. The Pope's intention was not only to rectify the abuses of unregulated capitalism, but also to present a Christian alternative to Marxism and Fascism which were becoming more popular in their attempts to correct the abuses of unregulated capitalism. To do this, the Pope crafted a middle course substituting government regulations and labor unions for Marxism's state ownership of the means of production.²⁶ The *Compendium* summarizes the contribution of *Rerum Novarum* as

²⁵ See *Compendium*, 261-266.

²⁶ See Pope Leo XIII *Rerum Novarum* in *Acta Leonis XIII*, 10-11. See also Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 1-6 which sums up the prophetic nature and accomplishments of *Rerum Novarum*

follows: “*Rerum Novarum* is above all a heartfelt defence of the inalienable dignity of workers, connected with the importance of the right to property, the principle of cooperation among the social classes, the rights of the weak and the poor, the obligations of workers and employers and the right to form associations.”²⁷ Building on this foundation, Pope Pius XI (*Quadragesimo Anno*), and Pope John Paul II (*Centesimus Annus and Laborem Exercens*) elaborated what might be called a constitution of the rights and duties of labor and laborers. They address the following four major issues:

1. The dignity of work (including the proper relationship between labor and capital and the proper relationship between labor and private property)²⁸
2. The right to work (including the role of the state in promoting it, the proper relationship between family and work, and the rights of special groups—children, women, immigrants, and agricultural workers)²⁹
3. The rights of workers (including just remuneration, humane working conditions, and the right to organize and the right to strike)³⁰
4. Solidarity among workers (including the importance of unions and other labor associations)³¹

Next to its prolific work on the intrinsic transcendental dignity of every human being and the dignity and rights of the family, Catholic social teaching has distinguished itself in its defense of the dignity and rights of workers. It was the initial point from which Pope Leo XIII entered the world of Catholic social teaching, and it remains one of its major pillars to the present day because of the centrality of work—along with the family—in human dignity, rights, and fulfillment.

III.C The Economic/Business Community

Some economists have proffered the myth that the “science of economics” is morally neutral, because it simply assesses the results of its dispassionate laws (the laws of supply and demand, microeconomic analysis and macroeconomic analysis). The objective of microeconomic analysis is to find the ideal price, quantity, and means to produce various products, while the objective of macroeconomic analysis is to determine the money supplied, lending rates, and other aggregate features of the economy necessary to avoid recession and unacceptable rates of inflation. Though these enterprises at first seem more quantitative than ethical, the devil lies in the details. There are countless dimensions of economic analysis that must be subject to the scrutiny of ethical s, particularly those that effect competitiveness among firms, humane wages (as opposed to ideal wages to optimize productions), prices of inelastic

²⁷ *Compendium*, 268.

²⁸ See Pope John Paul II *Laborem Exercens* 4,6,11,12,14, & 19; also Pope Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno* AAS, 23; Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus* 31,32,41, & 43. See also the summary of these in *Compendium* 270-286.

²⁹ See *Compendium*, 287-300. See also Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, 26; Pope Leo XIII *Rerum Novarum Acta Leonis*, 11; Pope John Paul II *Laborem Exercens*, 9,10,12,14,16,17,& 18.

³⁰ See *Compendium* 301-304; Pope John Paul II *Laborem Exercens* 18 &19; Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* 67-68.

³¹ See *Compendium* 305-309; Pope John Paul II *Laborem Exercens* 8,10, & 20; Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* 68.

goods (necessities), accessibility of credit, and several other areas. Economic laws are designed to find the most efficient ways of doing things—ideal prices, ideal quantities, ideal levels of credit, etc. But these efficiencies can, as the Industrial Revolution showed us, be incredibly exploitative—toward workers, the poor, and those without political influence, etc. These gray areas require considerable ethical scrutiny which incited the Church to provide some basic guidelines. The *Compendium* summarizes the intent of these guidelines as follows:

Just as in the area of morality one must take the reasons and requirements of the economy into account, so too in the area of the economy one must be open to the demands of morality: “In the economic and social realms, too, the dignity and complete vocation of the human person and the welfare of society as a whole are to be respected and promoted. For man is the source, the centre, and the purpose of all economic and social life”.³²

The Church has no wish to modify the laws of economics or the methods for financing and initiating business enterprises. However it is exceedingly interested in assuring that economists, financiers, and business owners do not narrow the focus of business enterprises to the most efficient means and ends of production—or to the maximization of shareholder wealth. In this sense, the Church separates itself from a vision of economics like that of Milton Friedman who declared that “the business of business is to maximize shareholder wealth.”³³ Instead, the Church proposed, long before it became popular, a “stakeholder” view of business, which holds that the objective of business is to maximize shareholder wealth while respecting and contributing to its stakeholders—that is, its customers, employees, vendors, and community (including its surrounding environment). According to Richard DeGeorge, “A stakeholder analysis of an issue consists of weighing and balancing all of the competing demands on a firm by each of those who have a claim on it, in order to arrive at the firm's obligation in a particular case.”³⁴

Pius XI long ago recognized that customers, employees, and community have a *claim* on business enterprises because of their contributions to it. Every business executive has the responsibility of assessing these claims and responding to them within the scope of establishing efficient means of production and competitive profits for its investors. It should be mentioned, that this way of doing business has been found to be a far better model for guaranteeing the long term liability of a business—and therefore for guaranteeing *long-term shareholder wealth*. Why? Because customers who believe they have been treated with fairly will return to purchase more. Employees who believe they have been treated fairly will not only have high morale and loyalty, but also contribute creativity, personal initiative, and higher effort to company objectives. Community members who believe that they have been treated fairly attempt to accommodate

³² *Compendium*, 331.

³³ This is called the “Friedman Doctrine” which says that the only social responsibility of any company is to maximize profits and to assure that some of those profits are distributed to the shareholders—nothing more. See Milton Friedman 1970 “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits” in the *New York Times Magazine* (September 13, 1970).

³⁴ Richard DeGeorge 2009 *Business Ethics (7th Edition)* (Pearson) p.192

those businesses and provide incentives for them to grow, etc. Thus stakeholder analysis is not only good ethics, it is also good business.³⁵

Though the Church uses different language to speak about stakeholder analysis it covers all of its major points:

1. Business owners have an obligation to serve the interests not only of the shareholders, but also those who contribute to and are affected by it. The *Compendium* states it this way,

In this personalistic and community vision, “a business cannot be considered only as a ‘society of capital goods’; it is also a ‘society of persons’ in which people participate in different ways and with specific responsibilities, whether they supply the necessary capital for the company’s activities or take part in such activities through their labour.”³⁶

2. Business owners are responsible not only for establishing the most efficient means of production and the increase of profits, but also for guaranteeing the personal dignity and rights of all those who work for it or relate to it. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states the following:

Business owners and management must not limit themselves to taking into account only the economic objectives of the company, the criteria for economic efficiency and the proper care of “capital” as the sum of the means of production. It is also their precise duty to respect concretely the human dignity of those who work within the company.³⁷

3. Civil authorities have a right to tax and impose regulation on private enterprises in order to prevent exploitation, provide social goods, protect competition, and assure fair practices to customers, employees, and other stakeholders. The *Compendium* phrases it as follows:

- 4.

With a view to the common good, it is necessary to pursue always and with untiring determination the goal of a proper equilibrium between private freedom and public action, understood both as direct intervention in economic matters and as activity supportive of economic development. In any case, public intervention must be carried out with equity, rationality and effectiveness, and without replacing the action of individuals, which would be contrary to their right to the free exercise of economic initiative.³⁸

³⁵ See Robert Spitzer 2000 *Spirit of Leadership: Optimizing Creativity and Change of Organizations*(Seattle: The Pacific Institute Press) pp.295-308

³⁶ *Compendium*, 338. See also Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*, 43.

³⁷ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2432

³⁸ *Compendium*, 354. See also Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*, 43.

See also Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*, 43.

5. Private non-profit organizations (NGOs) are essential to supplying social goods to the needy as well as education and spiritual goods for citizens. The state should observe the principle of subsidiarity and allow private non-profits the space to raise funds and to provide social, educational, and religious goods as they see fit to enhance the lives and spirits of citizens. There is good reason to believe that the intrinsic motivation of the leaders of these non-profits is much higher than state officials. Moreover, the state should not deliver religious or spiritual benefits or try to take over all educational endeavors.³⁹

As can be seen, CST's approach to business and the economy is one of ethics and balance—that is, introducing ethical objectives into the marketplace alongside of stakeholder analysis and a balance between private enterprise, civil authorities, and private non-profit organizations.

III.D The Political Community

Since the time of St. Augustine, the Church has explicitly recognized that the political community is not a higher reality than the individuals that constitute it.⁴⁰ Furthermore human persons cannot be reduced to mere social units, political units, or economic unit within the political community. The political community arises out of the individual persons who assent to it and it is for those individuals as well as those who are affected by it both inside and outside its boundaries. We might say that the perennial Catholic social teaching is similar to the declaration of Abraham Lincoln that government, is “of the people, by the people, for the people ...”⁴¹ The origin of the declaration may by now be clear—the principle of the intrinsic transcendent dignity of every human being combined with the principle of subsidiarity.

In view of this prioritization, the Church has and will always reject any form of totalitarianism, Marxism, extreme socialism, or extreme statism. These forms of political community not only eclipse the freedom and dignity of the individual and violate the principle of subsidiarity (absorbing family, community, non-profit, and local government prerogatives into its generic influence), but also detract from creativity, personal initiative, and efficient production within the marketplace. To avoid these extremes, CST advocates a democratic form of government that is complemented by a strong sense of individual rights which are adjudicated by a court system responsible for upholding those rights.

Catholic social teaching begins with the cornerstone of political community—the individual, social, transcendent human being. The *Compendium* states it as follows:

The human person is the foundation and purpose of political life.
Endowed with a rational nature, the human person is responsible

³⁹ See *Compendium*, 357

⁴⁰ See St. Augustine *The City of God* (New York: Image/Doubleday) Book XIX; pp 427-482

⁴¹ Abraham Lincoln “Gettysburg Address.”

for his own choices and able to pursue projects that give meaning to life at the individual and social level.⁴²

In a democracy, the will of the political community is determined by a plebiscite or by representational government (whose officials are elected). This has the good effect of allowing the will of the people to determine the common good for the nation. Remarkable as democracy is, it has one major drawback—it is not necessarily based on the will of *all* the people, but rather the *majority* of the people. This leaves those in the minority in a vulnerable position, because even in the best democracy, the majority could abuse, marginalize or ostracize people who are in a minority position. These minorities could be ethnic minorities, religious minorities, socio-economic minorities, and political minorities. So how can they be protected?

Recall from Section I above, that three Catholic thinkers—St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Fr. Francisco Suarez-- discovered the solution to this problem of potentially extreme injustice—namely, the inalienable rights to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and property, which belong by nature to every human being in order to guarantee their just desserts and claim to minimal justice. The state does not give these rights to anyone—they belong to everyone by their very human existence. If the state does not give them, then the state cannot take them away—unless they have been used to harm the rights of others. Moreover, these rights are based on every human beings just claim to minimum justice, and as we have seen from St. Augustine, justice is higher than the positive law. If the positive law contradicts justice, then the positive law is “no law at all,” and should not be enforced or obeyed. Why is this important? Since individual rights are higher than the positive law, then the power of the state must uphold them for everyone—even if the will of the majority is to ignore or reject those rights. Thus, inalienable rights are the invaluable safeguard for protecting all minorities—and adjudicating minorities’ claims against the state, its laws, or the manifest will of a majority which is contrary to those rights.⁴³

The political community’s responsibilities do not stop at protecting and promoting the inalienable rights of its citizens. It is also responsible for promoting the *common good* among them. This means providing social goods (such as roads, water, police protection, defense), for all individuals within its boundaries, taking special care to protect the rights of everyone *equally*. Thus the political community must guarantee an atmosphere where every individual has access to the necessities of life, education, dignified work, and entrance to the free market so that he can exercise his creativity, personal initiative and practical efforts to sustain and enhance himself, his family, his community, and his religion.⁴⁴

Since the Catholic Church holds that the sovereignty of a social group or nation rests in the people as a whole, and that the people can vest this sovereignty in elected representatives, and that these representatives must be sworn to uphold the inalienable rights of all people while seeking to represent the majority, She advocates for a constitutional democracy sworn to uphold both the inalienable rights of individuals as well as defined constitutional rights.⁴⁵

⁴² *Compendium*, 384. See also Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, 25

⁴³ This is summarized in the *Compendium* 387-398.

⁴⁴ See the *Compendium*, 389

⁴⁵ See *Compendium*, 394-395.

Beyond this, the Church insists that the people as well as their elected representatives are bound by the moral order—that is to adhere to the basic, universally recognized precepts of justice, so that no political official should violate the silver rule (due unnecessary harm) deprive a person without cause of life, liberty, and property, deprive a person of what is justly owed to them or belongs to them, or act in a way which is clearly contrary to the accomplishment of the common good. As explained above (Section I), these prescriptions of justice do not have to be explicitly assigned to political authorities by the positive law, because they belong to the natural law written in the hearts of every human being—what legal authorities would call “bonum per se” (the good in itself) and “malum in se” (evil in itself).⁴⁶

The Church holds that the precepts of the natural law are sufficiently evident that reflective citizens should be able to recognize when the positive law violates these evident prescriptions of natural justice. If citizens recognize such a violation of the natural law by the positive law, they have the right to conscientious objection—to refrain from doing what they believe in conscience is fundamentally unjust or immoral.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Christians also have the right to resist positive laws that violate the precepts of natural justice through civil disobedience.⁴⁸

Catholics who aspire to political office should do so only with the intention to maintain the precepts of natural justice, to defend the inalienable rights of everyone, and to pursue the common good. Political office should never be used to aggrandize oneself, bring undue privileges, or to give some constituents unfair advantage over others for the sake of monetary rule engaging in bribery or any form of corruption is immoral.⁴⁹

The media can be an indispensable help for informing the constituents of a democracy about issues and candidates, but it could also be a manipulative propaganda machine if it is motivated by ideology and/or profits. Therefore it is incumbent upon the leaders of the media establishment to present the truth about issues and candidates, trying to avoid deception by either omission or commission. Leaders of the media establishment should be concerned to promote the common good, be fair, and to avoid undermining various points of view to promote personal preferences or ideology.⁵⁰

“Society” refers to the conglomerate of free associations of people within a political community. Hence, a society is constituted by religious associations, ethnic associations, sociopolitical associations, business and economic associations, and cultural associations. These associations have the right to exist within a political community so long as they do not violate the inalienable rights or precepts of natural justice of its citizens. A “state” is a political community (within a particular geographical boundary) with a governing body having political authority to legislate, administrate, and to render legal judgements. A state in which the political

⁴⁶ In US Law and Common Law, ignorance is no excuse for violating a precept considered to be “malum in se.” It should be recognized as wrong by any person of conscience.

⁴⁷ See *Compendium*, 399.

⁴⁸ See *Compendium*, 400.

⁴⁹ See *Compendium*, 412-413.

⁵⁰ See *Compendium*, 416.

community has *freely vested* its sovereignty in a government and political authorities is a “democratic state,” but a state in which political authority is imposed on the political community by external force is a “totalitarian state.” The Church is opposed to the repression of freedom and the imposition of authority on a political community—and so She is opposed to totalitarian states.

The Church teaches that society (and the free associations that constitute it) is of more fundamental importance than the state. It gives the state its purpose, and not vice versa. Therefore, the society can never be viewed as a mere extension of the state, and the state cannot suppress it or the many groups constituting it unless one or more of those groups violates the precepts of natural justice or inalienable rights of its citizens.

As noted above, every state must be open to all free associations that respect the inalienable rights and the precepts of natural justice of its citizens. Therefore every *religious* association has the right to exist in any legitimate state. The principle of the intrinsic transcendent dignity of every human being requires freedom of religion within any legitimate state. This means that any person within the state should be allowed to practice his religion so long as that practice does not violate the inalienable rights or precepts of natural justice of other people. Furthermore, the state should not encourage or give undue influence to any religion or to secularism (non-religiosity).⁵¹ This corresponds quite closely to the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;”

Within the scope of the freedom of religion, the Catholic Church deserves the right to be independent and self-governing, free of influence or coercion from the state similarly, the Church must respect the autonomy and self-governance within a democratic state that uphold inalienable rights. The Church should not ask the state to give it preference in particular rulings, laws, or judgements. However, the Church has the right to point to moral failings within the states (that violate the inalienable right so or the precepts of natural justice of the people within its boundaries). This closely resembles the so-called doctrine of the separation of Church and state.⁵² This separation between Church and state does not entail non-cooperation. Indeed, the Church and the state should cooperate with each other to best serve the needs of its citizens and the common good. In sum, the Church and the state should cooperate with one another for the individual and common good so long as this cooperation does not lead to favoritism of one religion over another or to the restriction of particular religions or religious liberty.⁵³

III.E **The International Community**

CST defines the international community as follows:

⁵¹ See *Compendium*, 421-423. See also Second Vatican Council *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1-7.

⁵² This phrase was first used by Thomas Jefferson to interpret the first amendment of the Constitution (in a letter in 1801 to the Danbury Baptist Association) since that time it has been cited frequently by the Supreme Court (see *Reynolds v. US*).

⁵³ See *Compendium*, 424-425.

The international community is a juridical community founded on the sovereignty of each member State, without bonds of subordination that deny or limit its independence. Understanding the international community in this way does not in any way mean relativizing or destroying the different and distinctive characteristics of each people, but encourages their expression.⁵⁴

In order to promote international cooperation to avoid war and unnecessary disputes, and to avoid prejudice (and marginalization based on prejudice) it is necessary to have a body of international law and some international legal structures to facilitate cooperation among states without interfering with their sovereignty. These international laws and legal structures should support the natural law on international cooperation which is of higher significance than the internal laws of any particular state. The *Compendium* describes this as follows:

Universal respect of the principles underlying “a legal structure in conformity with the moral order” is a necessary condition for the stability of international life. .. Juridical and theological reflection, firmly based on natural law, has formulated “universal principles which are prior to and superior to the internal law of States”, such as the unity of the human race, the equal dignity of every people, the rejection of war as a means for resolving disputes, the obligation to cooperate for attaining the common good and the need to be faithful to agreements undertaken (*pacta sunt servanda*). ..⁵⁵

CST affirms the need for intergovernmental structures, such as the United Nations and international courts, to assure that the fundamental natural laws noted above will be effective within and among different nations. However these intergovernmental structures/organizations cannot become *de facto* a “global super-state”⁵⁶ and therefore, must respect the sovereignty of every nation. The only way to guarantee this is through *mutual agreement* among nations – both weak and strong.⁵⁷ The ideal would be if every nation throughout the world would agree to a set of natural laws (based on fundamental natural principles) for the common good to be administered without prejudice by an international organization or organizations.

The principle of intrinsic transcendent dignity of every individual and the principle of solidarity requires that all nations – as well as citizens having influence and means – cooperate and contribute to the overcoming of world-wide poverty and to development within substantially undeveloped nations. The degree of cooperation among nations depends on the resources, expertise, and capital available for these efforts – beyond the reasonable needs of the nation itself as determined by its citizens. It is incumbent on governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and social entrepreneurs (within the free market system) to set aside time,

⁵⁴ See *Compendium*, 434. See Pope John Paul II “Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations” (5 October 1995), 9-10.

⁵⁵ *Compendium*, 437.

⁵⁶ *Compendium*, Section. 441

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

expertise, and resources to make these contributions to global development where and when they have access. At the very least, special provision should be made to help developing nations gain access to free markets and to subsidize loans for infrastructure and business incubation. Furthermore, provision should be made to provide essential needs for the impoverished – and above all, the highest degree of education attainable. Creative efforts should be made to share education through distance technologies, share the infrastructure for new technologies, and to share administrative expertise with developing countries. Without this solid educational, technological, and administrative foundation – along with the promotion of a solid legislative and juridical framework – access to free markets and low cost loans will be at best fictitious, and at worst, a road to further indentured servitude to wealthier nations.

III.F The Environment

The abuses of the environment caused by the industrial revolution at the turn of the century alerted the Church to the need to protect the environment from long term abusive, polluting, and depleting activities of industries and governments. The threat to a sound environment in the future became critical at the time of the Second Vatican Council, at which point the Council declared that the Church must make the protection of the environment one of its special charges.⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II gave special attention to this dimension of Catholic Social Teaching in *Centesimus Annus*⁵⁹ and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,⁶⁰ and Pope Francis brought this issue into full light by dedicating an entire encyclical letter to it -- *Laudato Si*.⁶¹ The Church teaching emphasizes a *balance* between the “environment as resource” and “the environment as home.” The environment provides necessary resources for human beings to maintain a healthy and productive life – food, drink, shelter, energy, and the elements for necessary technological growth. The Church encourages nations to share resources and support developing nations in the acquisition of resources needed to sustain their populations, and to assure that certain nations do not consume (and permanently deplete) the majority of the world’s resources. Furthermore, the Church teaches that the proper use of these resources should not lead to their exploitation in such a way that the environment (as common home) is undermined now or in the future.⁶² Pope Francis extended this principle by making concrete recommendations in four specific areas – pollution, climate change, clean water, and biodiversity.

Some of Pope Francis’ recommendations make specific judgments about the use of fossil fuels and other resources. Though they have the endorsement of many in the scientific community, they do not by any means enjoy unanimity, and they should be viewed as prudential judgments – and not as doctrinal teaching (see Section II.A above). The key principle for

⁵⁸ Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* 35.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 37-40.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28.

⁶¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* -- www.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

⁶² *Compendium*, 461.

Catholics forming their consciences is to use their best judgment as well as the recommendations of the Holy Father to find ways of balancing the use of resources in the following areas:

1. The balance between wealthier and poorer nations in accessing resources.
2. The balance between resources needed to sustain life and the use of resources injurious to the environment.
3. The balance between the resources needed to sustain life and the permanent depletion of those resources.

Since scientific opinion is not unanimous on where these balances occur, it is difficult to determine the uses of resources that are socially irresponsible – that is, uses of resources that unnecessarily cause poverty or injury, cause irreparable harm to the environment and world climate, and a permanently injurious depletion of resources. Nevertheless, the multiple “grey areas” in these critical balances do not excuse individuals from seriously considering the above questions – or determining specific ways in which they or their organizations can help the environment (or at least avoid injuring it).

There is another “grey area” that presents hope for the environment, but further ambiguity about moral responsibility – *new technological advances*. As noted above, the bleak Malthusian prediction that scarce resources and unlimited wants will cause poverty, war, and other social disruption has been proven false time and time again by the creation of new technological means to multiply and use resources – as well as to clean the environment.⁶³ Though we must be very conscious to do what we can to prevent the artificial causes of global warming, pollution, and the decline of biodiversity, there may well be several new technological solutions to these problems beyond the abandonment of fossil fuels and increasingly parsimonious use of resources.⁶⁴ Furthermore, there are several new technological solutions to the food crisis on the horizon, which will not only multiply food, but make food available locally in the poorest and harshest environments irrespective of climate conditions.⁶⁵ Availability of clean water will continue to increase because of new “low-tech” and “hi-tech” solutions.⁶⁶ These new technologies will be available almost everywhere in the world and will transcend environmental and climate conditions. The extreme reduction in cost for energy, water, food, and

⁶³ See Paul Pilzer 1991 *Unlimited Wealth*.

⁶⁴ There are several new cost efficient ways to scrub fossil fuels and to recover the residues of fossil fuels from the atmosphere. Furthermore, the probable success of fusion power will make fossil fuels *per force* obsolete.

⁶⁵ The most notable advance is the high-level of research being done into huge multi-level hydroponic vertical farms. Since these vertical farms are completely enclosed, they are impervious to insects, diseases, and climate conditions. Furthermore the regulatable frequencies of the light used to grow the products in these farms and the precise regulation of temperatures (with no soil requirements and recyclable water) will allow ten harvests per year instead of 1.5 harvests. Therefore, a 5-square mile, 25-story vertical farm could yield a thousand times the crop yield per acre as conventional farming techniques. There is currently only one obstacle to building these farms – the high cost of energy. If fusion power becomes a reality, the price of energy per megawatt hour will drop to a mere fraction (less than 1%) of current power production techniques.

⁶⁶ New low-tech filtration systems can be made by making containers out of straw and local soil that can eliminate a significant amount of the impurities in local water. Additionally, new high-tech solutions are becoming cost efficient, such as devices using only salt and energy to continuously purify large quantities of water at the source. This will allow water purification to occur in every small village. The availability of salt and affordable power will make this possible.

material resources has great promise for solving the world's resource crises and sustaining the environment. All that is required to implement these new technologies is *the charitable resolve* of influential individuals, industries, and wealthier nations to share these advances irrespective of lower rates of profitability. As each of these technologies emerges, it will be incumbent upon the developers of these technologies as well as the nations in which they are developed – to sacrifice some of their entitled profits to help alleviate the world's environmental and resource problems. Failure to do so would be a grave moral failure contrary to the will of the Creator.

The Church also encourages responsible juridical regulation of the environment by both individual nations and the international community.⁶⁷ Evidently, these regulations are subject to the balances and ambiguities mentioned above. These balances and ambiguities require that legislators within nations find the most prudential course of action to protect the environment while allowing the proper use and development of resources by responsible industries. This is best worked out by a dialogue between scientists, industrial users, citizens of local communities, and government officials who are charged with finding a proper balance to protect the environment both now and in the future. International treaties among nations will be much more challenging because environmental protections in developing countries could inadvertently retard the development of industry and social infrastructure. Furthermore, it is difficult to know how to balance fairly the needs of different countries with vastly different resources and economic potential. The Church encourages all nations to enter into voluntary international protocols to continually increase environmental protection even at the cost of reasonable (non-onerous) sacrifices to the industrial base of wealthier countries. Without such reasonable sacrifices, such needed protocols would be severely undermined. These reasonable sacrifices may well be as necessary as the non-destructive use of resources to guarantee a healthy environmental home for future generations. In this sense, they are morally incumbent upon the industrial bases of wealthier nations.⁶⁸

III.G The Pursuit of Peace and the Situation of War

The pursuit of peace on every level is a mandate of Jesus Christ, and is integral to the beatitudes – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Mt. 5:9). The idea of peace (*shalom*) is integral to every aspect of the Old Testament – from the nature of God to the purpose of the Israelite nation. It is even the greeting extended from one person to another. The duty to pursue peace applies to family members, neighbors, and in Jesus' view, to enemies. It is the duty of individuals and communities as well as societies and states, and is the principal outgrowth of justice and charity. The *Compendium* phrases it as follows:

Peace is a value and a universal duty founded on a rational and moral order of society that has its roots in God himself, “the first source of being, the essential truth and the supreme good”. Peace is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Rather it is founded on a correct understanding of the

⁶⁷ *Compendium*, 468-469.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

*human person and requires the establishment of an order based on justice and charity.*⁶⁹

Injustice threatens peace, because unfair treatment, deprivation of justly acquired property, and deprivation of the necessities of life lead to resentment and desperation, both of which can incite agitation and violence. Unrest and violence are almost certainly the outcomes of the absence of a just societal and governmental order.⁷⁰

Yet justice alone is not sufficient for an ongoing pursuit of peace – this requires charity (*agapē* love).⁷¹ Individuals and groups will no doubt make mistakes and act unjustly, making forgiveness (an integral part of charity) a necessary part of a peaceful social order. Furthermore, compassion (also a part of charity) is needed to overcome deeply embedded inequities within social structures that prevent people from rising above a state of social deprivation. A deep sense of contributive altruism that seeks equal opportunities for everyone (irrespective of economic, social, and ethnic background) is needed to guarantee peace within the social order over the long term.

Even in the midst of radical injustice, violence cannot be considered a proper response. Though one may be compelled to defend oneself by the use of force (see below), the Church (putting its faith in the mandate of Jesus) admonishes us to avoid in every way possible the use of violence, not only because “violence begets violence” but because it corrupts our souls – making us turn from love to anger, resentment, and destruction. The *Compendium*, following Pope Paul VI, phrases it as follows:

*Violence is never a proper response. With the conviction of her faith in Christ and with the awareness of her mission, the Church proclaims “that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.”*⁷²

In view of this, war is considered unacceptable as a solution to the problems of national boundaries and injustice – and a war of aggression is in every way immoral. Such wars cause unbelievable harm to countless innocent victims whose rights are violated by aggression which is almost certainly avoidable. All wars of aggression should therefore be avoided, and every means should be brought to bear by powerful nations and international organizations to negotiate and to mediate potential conflicts that entail such aggression.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Compendium* 494.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* 78 and Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* 76.

⁷² *Compendium* 496.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 499.

Nevertheless, the Church acknowledges a legitimate right to self-defense and national defense in the event of a war of aggression.⁷⁴ This right arises out of an aggressor unjustly attacking a country, compelling that country to defend its citizens by force of arms. There are four major conditions governing the use of force set out by the Catholic Church (called “The Just War Doctrine⁷⁵”):

1. The damage caused by the aggressor must be lasting, grave, and certain.
2. All other means to put an end to the aggression must be shown to be impractical or ineffective.
3. The damage inflicted on the enemy to prevent the aggression cannot be greater than those of the aggressor itself.
4. There must be a reasonable prospect of success.⁷⁶

The application of these four principles is quite complex, but there have been several ethical treatments that attempt to systematically articulate it.⁷⁷

Every nation has a right to raise a military force for its legitimate defense and the defense of peace. Those who serve in the military are in no way unethical or immoral, and are considered to be agents of truth, justice, and peace.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, military personnel are bound by the natural law above the positive law and military orders that contravene the natural law. Thus, military personnel must resist complying with orders that are criminal or in other ways violations of the natural rights of every human being (see above Section I.D).⁷⁹

Every state legitimately using military force to resist unjust aggression must take every possible step to minimize harm to innocent civilians – not only harm to their lives and bodies but also harm to their liberty and property. Perpetrating avoidable “collateral damage” to innocent victims is immoral, and international courts have the right to legitimately redress these crimes.⁸⁰ Any attempt to engage in ethnic cleansing or the eradication of a particular ethnic or religious group (genocide) must be resisted – even by the use of force – by the international community, and the perpetrators of such crimes against humanity punished by the rules of international law.⁸¹ If the innocent are attacked (and their human rights significantly violated) in a nation that cannot

⁷⁴ Ibid, 500.

⁷⁵ This doctrine had a long development within the Catholic Church, beginning with St. Augustine (In *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* Book 22 sections 69–76) and *City of God* Book XIX and further developed by St. Thomas Aquinas (in *Summa Theologica* II-II, Q. 40). The doctrine was expanded and formalized by the School of Salamanca, which was an influential post-reformation Catholic intellectual movement initiated by Francisco de Vitoria, O.P., and named after the University of Salamanca in which it resided. The Jesuits took control of the school after the Dominicans which brought the Catholic Church from the Medieval era to the Modern era particularly in the originative works of Francisco Suarez as well as Luis de Molina and Giovanni Botero. These philosophers formalized the doctrine of inalienable rights, just war, international law, and economic rights for the Catholic Church. They were also precursors to modern economic theory (including the legitimate charging of interest for loans formerly considered to be usury).

⁷⁶ Ibid citing *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2309.

⁷⁷ See for example Paul Ramsey 2002, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers)

⁷⁸ *Compendium* 502.

⁷⁹ *Compendium* 503.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 505.

⁸¹ Ibid, 506.

defend itself against a more powerful aggressor, then it is incumbent upon the international community to defend the rights of the innocent even if it must use the force of arms to do so.⁸² Such defense must adhere to the guidelines and four conditions of the just war doctrine elucidated above. CST elaborates several other precepts concerned with war and the pursuit of peace:

- The legitimate use of economic and political sanctions as disincentives to those who are threatening peace.⁸³
- The common, multilateral agreement to reduce weapons of mass destruction.⁸⁴
- The prohibition of a cold war style arms race.⁸⁵
- The prohibition of the conscription of children into the military or into fighting situations.⁸⁶
- The prohibition of terrorism in any form – and the profanation of God’s name and nature by proclaiming terrorist actions to be His will – or to proclaim terrorists as martyrs in the eyes of God.⁸⁷

As can be seen, the Church’s articulation of the precepts of war and peace are very well nuanced and follow the six principles of its social teaching applied to both individuals, societies, political entities, and the international community. It serves as a model not only for Catholics, but also every secular society, for it is based primarily on the natural law and natural rights that have become the cornerstone of every free nation. Indeed Pope John XXIII addressed his famous encyclical on peace and war (*Pacem in Terris*) to *all* men:

To all men of good will who are called to a great task to establish with truth, justice, love and freedom new methods of relationships in human society.⁸⁸

IV. Conclusion

As can be seen, the Catholic Social Teaching is incredibly extensive, giving guidance to our individual and collective minds on just about every topic of ethical relevance to the modern world. It is built on six great principles of individual human dignity, personhood, and rights coming from within the Church herself and later accepted and appropriated by most secular societies and governments (including the *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights*):

1. The principle of non-maleficence.
2. The principle of no unjust law.
3. The principle of universal personhood.
4. The principle of inalienable rights.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, 507.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 508-509.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 509.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 512.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 513-515.

⁸⁸ Pope John XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, 1.

5. The principle of the necessary hierarchy of rights.
6. The principle of the intrinsic limits to human freedom.

Using these principles of *individual dignity* as a foundation, the Church extended its teaching into the *social* and *societal* domain through six additional principles. Since these six principles apply similarly to all seven areas of the social and societal domain, we might view the Church's social teaching as a matrix with its principles along the Y axis and the seven social domains along the X axis as follows:

Principles	Family	Working Environment	Political Community	Economic Community	International Community	Ecological Environment	Peace and War
Individual dignity							
Common Good							
Universal destination of goods							
subsidiarity							
Democracy							
Solidarity							

If you the reader review the seven elements in Section II.C – the seven areas to which CST is applied – you will notice that at least four or more of the six principles of Catholic Social Teaching are integral to the analysis in each of those areas. There is a remarkable logical and ethical consistency in matching principles with areas of application. You may also notice the incredible balance achieved by the Second Vatican Council and the popes who issued social encyclicals – a balance between the rights of labor and the common good versus free markets, between abhorrence at war and the need for a just war, between national sovereignty and the need for legitimate international courts, between the environment as resource and the environment as home, etc. Though the principle of subsidiarity gives primacy to smaller more intimate groups – family before community, community before society, society before state, and state before international governing bodies -- the Church also gives great latitude to larger social and governmental units so long as they do not undermine the smaller ones. The balance, judiciousness, and logical application of Christ’s teaching to the complex array of contemporary societies, states, and the international community seems to manifest more than just rationality. It manifests the height of compassion (seen in the heart of Jesus) articulated through the best that the natural sciences, social sciences, political theory, and philosophy have to offer. It is not only a guide to social ethics, but a light to the world.