A God of Life, A Civilization of Love

Catholic Social Teaching

On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired life-boat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in this club’s decorations and there was a special room where the club initiations were held. About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club’s life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some
members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown!\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{In imitation of Christ}, the church’s central task has always been “to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). This challenge has always been at the heart of the gospel message. Even though globalization has brought about some measure of human progress, many people today are still drowning at sea in the undercurrent of war, oppression, poverty, greed, abuse, drugs, fear, racism, meaninglessness, materialism, and many other perennial problems. Amidst these challenges, the church’s mission remains constant: to reach out to people who are shipwrecked in any way, to proclaim the God of Life, and to build a civilization of love.

Part of the difficulty in fulfilling this mission, however, involves not only the problems at sea but also the problems at the rescue stations. Institutional limitations, alongside the personal and collective failures of the church, can create a thick fog of suspicion in people’s minds that obscures the perception of the gospel message. The ancient maxim \textit{Ecclesia semper reformanda} means that the church, which is made up of fallible human beings, must be in a state of constant reformation in order to give more authentic witness to the light of Christ. Especially amidst the troubled waters of our times, it is good to take a step back from the scandals, corruption, and sins of the church in order to remember and reflect upon its central purpose.

One way to understand the church’s mission is to study its social teachings. While the two previous chapters examined the Christian vision of justice in light of biblical and patristic sources, in this chapter we will look more specifically at some of the principles that guide and govern that vision. These principles, drawn in large part from biblical and patristic wisdom, offer a systematic understanding of what the church believes (orthodoxy) and how it lives out what it believes (orthopraxy), particularly in the exercise of charity and justice. After some foundational considerations, we will examine the core

\textsuperscript{11} The original text, to which I have made slight modification, is from Theodore O. Wedel, “Evangelism: The Mission of the Church to Those Outside Her Life,” \textit{Ecumenical Review} 6, no. 1 (1953): 24.
content of Catholic social teaching as it presents the social demands of Christian faith in a God of Life. Understanding Catholic social teaching in light of a God of Life, and using it as an acronymic framework for its major themes, offers us a valuable moral compass, which can assist us as we seek to navigate our way through the troubled waters of our own day and age.

**CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: AN ETHICAL FOUNDATION FOR GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION**

In general terms, Catholic social teaching refers to all the principles, concepts, ideas, theories, and doctrines that deal with human life and society as it has evolved over time since the days of the early church. Catholic social teaching seeks to challenge those dimensions of society that diminish people's relationships with God, others, the environment, and themselves and to promote those factors that enhance these relationships. Catholic social teaching is not, however, a fixed, unchanging body of doctrine but a developmental understanding of the church's social mission in a dynamically changing world. While it draws heavily on theology, it also bases its reflection on philosophy, economics, sociology, and other social sciences. By linking theology with the academic disciplines, Catholic social teaching seeks to understand better the challenges of the current world and to provide an ethical foundation for global transformation.

In more specific terms modern Catholic social teaching refers to contemporary church and papal documents and encyclicals that address the social problems of today's world (tables 4 and 5). Although Benedict XIV (1740-1758) began issuing papal encyclicals in the eighteenth century, most scholars agree that this era of modern Catholic social teaching began with the publication of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. This document cre-

2. Kenneth R. Himes, ed., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005). For an introduction to the topic of Catholic social teaching, see also Himes, *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 2001). I would like to thank Ken Himes and Jeffry Odell Korgen for their helpful comments on this chapter. I am especially grateful to Liz Murdoch LaFortune for sharing her wisdom and insight as an experienced educator in Catholic social teaching and helping shape this chapter into its current form.


ated a “seismic shift” in Catholic teaching by placing the church in solidarity not with the economic and political elite of society but with the working class and the poor. Catholic social teaching recognizes that many today are poor not because of laziness but because of a system of structures, policies, and institutions that greatly diminish their options and keep them in poverty.

Table 4. Catholic Social Teaching at a Glance: Documents of the Universal Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Key Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td><em>Rerum Novarum</em></td>
<td>Pope Leo XIII</td>
<td>A new working class after the Industrial Revolution</td>
<td>Human dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On The Condition of Labor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td><em>Quadragesimo Anno</em></td>
<td>Pope Pius XI</td>
<td>After the Great Depression; rise of dictatorships in Europe</td>
<td>Subsidiarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Reconstruction of the Social Order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td><em>Mater et Magistra</em></td>
<td>Pope John XXIII</td>
<td>Growing technological development alongside terrible poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America</td>
<td>Internationalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christianity and Social Progress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td><em>Pacem in Terris</em></td>
<td>Pope John XXIII</td>
<td>The cold war; building of the Berlin Wall; Cuban missile crisis</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peace on Earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td><em>Gaudium et Spes</em></td>
<td>Vatican II</td>
<td>Cold war and the arms race</td>
<td>Signs of the times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Church in the Modern World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td><em>Populorum Progressio</em></td>
<td>Pope Paul VI</td>
<td>Vietnam War; African nations fighting for independence</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Development of Peoples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6. While there is some variation in regard to which documents are considered part of the body of modern Catholic social teaching, these are some of the most commonly cited documents. Most of these documents are available online at the Vatican Web site at http://www.vatican.va/ and at http://www.osjspm.org/cst/ (accessed January 15, 2006). Some elements of this table are drawn from “Busy Christian’s Guide to Catholic Social Teaching” at http://salt.claretianpubs.org/cstline/tline.html (accessed February 14, 2006).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Key Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Octogesima Adveniens A Call to Action</td>
<td>Pope Paul VI</td>
<td>Worldwide recession; new political reform movements</td>
<td>Political Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Justitia in Mundo Justice in the World</td>
<td>Synod of Bishops</td>
<td>Political turmoil around the world</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Evangelii Nuntiandi Evangelization in the Modern World</td>
<td>Pope Paul VI</td>
<td>Problems of atheism, consumerism, secularism, hedonism, indifference</td>
<td>Evangelization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Laborem Exercens On Human Work</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II</td>
<td>Rise in power of multinational corporations; unemployment and exploitation of workers</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis On Social Concern</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II</td>
<td>Increasingly heavy debt in underdeveloped countries; unemployment</td>
<td>Underdevelopment, structural sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Redemptoris Missio The Missionary Activity of the Church</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II</td>
<td>Meaninglessness and confusion; rethinking of mission in contemporary world</td>
<td>Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Centesimus Annus The Centenary</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II</td>
<td>The needs of the poor are still not met</td>
<td>A new world order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The Catechism of the Catholic Church</td>
<td></td>
<td>Need for systematic understanding of the basic teachings of the church</td>
<td>Human communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Evangelium Vitae The Gospel of Life</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II</td>
<td>Abortion; death penalty; euthanasia: challenge of &quot;culture of death&quot;</td>
<td>Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church</td>
<td>Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission</td>
<td>Need for systematic understanding of social teaching of the church</td>
<td>Human solidarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The universal message of modern Catholic social teaching is directed to all nations and all peoples, and it is concerned with all aspects of the human being and the full human development of every person (PP 42). It is addressed not only to Roman Catholics but also to other ecclesial communities, other religions, and all people of good will. Its purpose is not to organize society but to challenge, guide, and form the conscience of the human community as it seeks a new social order (CSDC 81). Catholic social teaching sees the process of transformation as integral to its mission of evangelization (SRS 41), which it understands not as proselytism but as a way of helping people, under the light of the gospel, to relate to each other in life-giving ways. “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world,” note the bishops in Justice in the World, “fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation” (JW 6).

UNDERSTANDING CHARITY AND JUSTICE

In modern Catholic social teaching, and among those who comment on it, there is significant discussion regarding the relationship between charity and justice. It is a distinction that has evolved over time and a necessary one as we consider what is needed for social change. To some people, there is a sharp difference between these two terms whereby charity involves working to meet the immediate needs of others through direct service and direct aid to the poor, while justice involves institutional change and transforming unjust social structures. This line of reasoning seeks to bring out that personal acts of charity alone do not suffice to meet the demands of justice.8

The problem with this perspective, however, is that it reduces Christian charity primarily to almsgiving. Charity includes almsgiving but it involves much more. In Catholic social teaching, Christian charity (agapē) is a more

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comprehensive term that is at the core of the gospel message and is what makes justice possible (CCC 1889). It is not so much distinct from justice, but rather the fundamental virtue that underlies and animates the practice of justice. In other words, charity is that which is given out of love. Justice, though closely related, pertains to what each person is entitled to as a human being. Charity is “the theological virtue by which we love God above all things . . . and our neighbor as ourselves” (CCC 1822), and justice is “the moral virtue that consists in the . . . will to give their due to God and neighbor” (CCC 1807). As an expression of charity, justice begins with attention to the needs and rights of each person, but it also extends to working for social structures within larger social networks and institutions that foster life (CDSC 208).

Pope Benedict XVI in his first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est (26f.), speaks about “social charity” (DCE 29). He writes that the Christian call to charitable actions is born out of love, but “[l]ove . . . needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community” (DCE 20). Social charity, he notes, is directed toward the transformation of the social order, even though the state and the church have different roles in this process:

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time, she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply. (DCE 28)

The social mission of the church, then, expresses itself in terms of liberating the oppressed, calling to conversion the oppressors, and eliminating the structures of oppression. Challenging the sources of injustice, however, can create controversy and conflict, especially among those who benefit from these same structures.

The following story also helps clarify how charity must be expressed both in terms of direct aid and in terms of justice:

Once upon a time, there was a town that was built just beyond the bend of a large river. One day some of the children from the town were playing beside the river when they noticed three bodies floating in the water. They ran for help and the townsfolk quickly pulled the bodies out of the river.
One body was dead so they buried it. One was alive, but quite ill, so they put that person into the hospital. The third turned out to be a healthy child, who they then placed with a family who cared for it and who took it to school. From that day on, every day a number of bodies came floating down the river and, every day, the good people of the town would pull them out and tend to them—taking the sick to hospitals, placing the children with families, and burying those who were dead. This went on for years; each day brought its quota of bodies and the townsfolk not only came to expect a number of bodies each day but also worked at developing more elaborate systems for picking them out of the river and tending to them. Some of the townsfolk became quite generous in tending to these bodies and a few extraordinary ones even gave up their jobs so that they could tend to this concern full-time. And the town itself felt a certain healthy pride in its generosity. However, during all these years and despite all that generosity and effort, nobody thought to go up the river, beyond the bend that hid from their sight what was above them, and find out why, daily, those bodies came floating down the river.9

While charity expressed as direct aid begins with caring for the bodies that float down the river, charity expressed as justice also leads to transforming the social structures that cause bodies to flow down the river in the first place.

One area where bodies regularly float down the river is along the U.S. border with Mexico. In addition to the canals, the bodies of undocumented immigrants are found in the mountains and deserts, where people die in their efforts to enter the United States to find work. In response to this problem, the bishops of Mexico and the United States have spoken out against the deaths of thousands along their border. While they urge individuals, communities, and governments to meet the immediate needs of immigrants and their families, they also challenge the global economic system that precipitates their migration in the first place and the political policies that compel them to travel into dangerous territory.10 In the area of immigration reform as well as other areas, the church’s commitment to social justice comes from the conviction that liberation begins now, in this world, on this earth, even while the


church waits in hope for the time when all relationships will be made right when Christ comes again in the end of time.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

While it recognizes the need and function of civil and criminal law, Catholic social teaching understands justice more broadly than simply in juridical terms. Because unjust laws that benefit the powerful and exclude the weak can become legalized in a disordered world, Catholic social teaching makes certain distinctions when speaking about social justice. Drawing on a rich intellectual tradition, especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas and later philosophical reflection, Catholic social teaching distinguishes three primary dimensions of social justice: commutative justice, contributive justice, and distributive justice (fig. 3).

Social Justice as Right Relationships: 
A Philosophical Framework

![Diagram of Social Justice as Right Relationships]

**Figure 3. Social Justice as Right Relationships: A Philosophical Framework**

11. For more on this topic, see Harold V. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).


13. This diagram draws in part from the fine resources available on Catholic social teaching from the Office for Social Justice, St. Paul-Minneapolis, http://www.osjspm.org/cst (accessed January 16, 2006). I am also grateful to Bill O’Neill, S.J., for his insights in developing it further with respect to rights, duties, procedures, and human dignity.
**Commutative justice.** Commutative or contractual justice deals with relationships between individuals, groups, and classes. This aspect of justice is the basic building block of society in that it deals with how individuals enter into relationship and agreements with each other. Commutative justice involves the give-and-take that is part of these relationships and the benefits and responsibilities that go with them. It seeks to ensure that human dignity and social responsibility are the basis of all economic transactions, contracts, and promises, recognizing that employers have an obligation to their workers to provide humane working conditions and to pay fair wages, and workers owe employers conscientious and diligent work in exchange for these fair wages (EJA 69).

**Contributive justice.** While commutative justice deals with the relationship of individuals with each other, contributive justice deals with an individual's relationship to society as a whole. It challenges those who take unfair advantage of a system in the name of claiming their rights without any reference to their responsibilities to a larger, collective body of society. Contributive justice recognizes the responsibility of individuals to the common good, which means that people have a duty to look out not only for their own welfare but also for that of others. Part of this obligation is fulfilled through participation in the civic life of a community, including paying taxes and voting.

**Distributive justice.** While individuals have a responsibility to the common good, the larger society has an obligation to individuals and groups as well. Distributive justice deals with the society's duty to the individual. It pertains to the relationship of the whole to the parts, and seeks to provide the minimum material resources that are necessary for individuals to have a humane and dignified life. As members of a human community, individuals have a right to have their basic needs met unless absolute scarcity makes this impossible. Distributive justice seeks the well-being of all members of a community, which means one's basic rights must be safeguarded and protected. It also puts special emphasis on protecting society's weaker members, advocating a greater solidarity with the poor.

Bringing commutative, contributive, and distributive justice together into one conceptual whole, social justice deals with how a society is organized and how its individuals and institutions are ordered and interact with each other. At the core of social justice is a respect for each person's human dig-

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14. The term "social justice" came into being with Pius XI in his encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno* (QA) in 1931 and his *Divini Redemptoris* (DR) in 1937. Philip Land, "Social Justice," in *The New Dic-
nity and an overall commitment to the common good. When such conditions are present, people have what is needed to grow into the realization of who they are called to be before God within the human community.

A GOD OF LIFE: A MATRIX FOR UNDERSTANDING CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Modern Catholic social teaching is a relatively large body of material, put together over a long period of time, written by various authors who used a variety of methodologies and addressed different social problems. All of these documents, however, draw their fundamental inspiration from one primary source: a common faith in Jesus Christ who reveals a God of Life. Many of the social problems addressed in Rerum Novarum in 1891 still exist today; some have even gotten worse. Moreover, many of the ethical concerns outlined by Leo XIII are sadly the same ones reiterated by John Paul II a century later.

Even though Catholic social teaching comprises a diverse body of teaching, as a whole we can identify discernible themes that remain relatively constant. Throughout the years, scholars have tried in various ways to synthesize this teaching into a systematic whole. Some have identified from seven to twenty themes that run through the documents. These treatments have been useful in identifying certain focal points of Catholic social teaching, but they have come up short in identifying a unifying thread that binds them all together. Building on these works, however, I would like to offer an overall matrix through which to connect these themes.

All of modern Catholic social teaching in one way or another speaks about A GOD OF LIFE who challenges the human community to build a civilization of love. If we look at A GOD OF LIFE as an acronymic matrix and an outline for this section, we can identify ten themes in Catholic social teaching: (1) A—analysis of social reality, (2) G—gratuity of God, (3) O—ordering of society toward the common good, (4) D—dignity of the human person, (5) O—option for the poor, (6) F—freedom as rights and responsibilities, (7) L—life as a sacred gift, (8) I—involvement of all people in creation of a new social order, (9) F—family of blood and family of humankind, and (10) E—environment and ecological stewardship. While we can identify other themes in Catholic social teaching, these arguably are the most important, and here we will explore these themes in more detail.

A GOD OF LIFE

Analysis of Social Reality

Catholic social teaching starts with the reality of the pressing social questions of each day and age and then analyzes them under the light of the gospel. These questions deal with work, family, war, racism, poverty, immigration, euthanasia, nuclear weapons, the economy, medical care, scientific research, politics, culture, abortion, capital punishment, the environment, and other areas that touch on human life, human dignity, and the common good. Catholic social teaching asks what demands such issues make on the human conscience, what values must be promoted, and what actions must be taken in order to achieve a just, ordered, and peaceful world. This analysis is a two-edged sword: on the one side, it critically assesses the negative dimensions of society that diminish ourselves, dehumanize others, and degrade the environment; on the other, it promotes the positive forces in society that dignify, humanize, and sustain the delicate bonds that unite us all as a human family.

The task of analysis begins with an accurate description of the world as it is and then asks, what kind of world God wants, what kind of society humans need, and what kind of system the environment can sustain. In analyzing the “signs of the times,” modern Catholic social teaching seeks to understand what the Narrative of the Gospel says to a global society marked, especially in the West, by advanced industrial capitalism. While Catholic social teaching recognizes the positive dimensions of capitalism, it also asserts that the capitalist system has limits, and, if undisciplined and unchecked by moral parameters, it will diminish if not destroy the integrity of the human community.

Catholic social teaching analyzes the social order on global and local levels through documents addressed to the universal and regional church (tables 4 and 5). The documents addressed to the universal church offer the broad theological contours and moral principles derived from its faith in a God of Life and shed light on the major social questions of the world. The documents addressed to the regional churches deal with how these universal principles are appropriated and adapted, and they are further elaborated upon through various talks, speeches, and papers of individual church leaders. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC) published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace synthesizes many of the teachings of the universal and regional church and marks a step forward in presenting a systematic understanding of Catholic social teaching. Together these docu-

15. For more on the method of social analysis in Catholic social teaching, see Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003).
ments seek to communicate what this teaching means within the specific challenges on state, national, and continental levels (SRS 9; OA 4).

**Table 5. Catholic Social Teaching at a Glance: Documents of the Regional Churches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Key Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Brothers and Sisters to Us</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Political freedom but racial and social inequity</td>
<td>Racial equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Cold war; nuclear arms race</td>
<td>Nuclear disarmament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Increased immigration; exponential growth in Latino population</td>
<td>Multiculturalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Economic Justice for All</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>33 million poor in 1986 and 8 million unemployed in the U.S.</td>
<td>Economic justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>To the Ends of the Earth</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Contamination of air, water, land; ozone depletion</td>
<td>Environmental stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Environmental crisis; burden on the poor</td>
<td>Natural ecology; social ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>International injustice; regional wars; arms trade</td>
<td>Peacemaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The Struggle Against Poverty: A Sign of Hope in Our World</td>
<td>Canadian Bishops</td>
<td>Economic disparity in the world</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Context</th>
<th>Key Concept</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Ecclesia in America</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II</td>
<td>Economic polarization between North America and Central and South America</td>
<td>Globalization of solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Global warming</td>
<td>Stewardship; economic initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope</td>
<td>U.S./Mexican Bishops</td>
<td>Restrictive immigration policies; increased deaths at border</td>
<td>Justice and immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food</td>
<td>U.S. Bishops</td>
<td>Concentration of power; globalization</td>
<td>Food, farmers, and farm workers</td>
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**Central and Latin America**

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<td>Vatican II reforms in Latin America</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>The Puebla Conference Documents</td>
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<td>John Paul II's visit to Mexico, affirming Medellin</td>
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17. These documents are published in various texts and are available online at the Spring Hill College Theological Library Web site at http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/cstdocs.htm (accessed February 14, 2006).
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**Asia**

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<td>1974</td>
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<td>A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<td>Bishops of England and Wales</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Towards the Common Good</td>
<td>Bishops of Ireland</td>
<td>Globalization of Irish economy; disparity in who benefits</td>
<td>Success; responsibility to the common good</td>
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As it analyzes the cultural, political, economic, social, and religious structures that govern the development of civilization, Catholic social teaching addresses the problems that impede development, such as hunger, illiteracy, inadequate health care, poor sanitation, environmental contamination, corruption, political and economic instability, and inadequate social infrastructures (PP 56-61). Catholic social teaching denounces these maladies as contrary to the will of the God of Life. At the same time, it announces the will of this same God through its commitment to peace, justice, and human rights (RM 42).

A **GOD OF LIFE**

**Gratuity of God**

If analysis begins with reality, then Christian theology begins with God’s gratuity. The gratuity of God means that all is a gift: all that we are, all that we own, all that we live in, and all those to whom we belong. In contrast to a society that more and more sees life in terms of self-generating accomplishments and hard-won possessions, Catholic social teaching believes that everything flows as a gift of love from a God of Life. From the beginning, man and

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woman, created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26-27), are called to embody visibly God’s gratuity in a garden of life, where human beings are called to cultivate the land and be stewards of the goods of the earth (CSDC 26). Catholic social teaching recognizes that God’s gratuity is an unmerited gift, but it also makes demands on us as we seek to live and love as God does (Jn 13:34).

Catholic social teaching bases its ethical principles on the belief that God’s gratuity is manifested especially in the gift of God’s Son, who comes to earth not because of human merit but because of God’s own desire to offer new life and to heal a broken world. Unless one sees God’s gratuity as the starting point for ethical reflection, personal and social morality can be perceived as a set of arbitrary rules and regulations set forth by a policing God or a rigid and imposing church leadership. Personal and social morality flow above all from God’s a priori free gift of life and free gift of self, and morality flows as a response to love, from a desire to give as one has been given to, to love as one has been loved, to conform one’s life according to the Life-Giver. To follow Jesus, then, means patterning one’s life on God’s graciousness and mercy, of loving others without condition, of seeing one’s connection to a common human family that is created by a God of Life, burdened by sin, but redeemed by love. It is only from the gratuitous love of God revealed in Jesus Christ that the church even begins to speak of social justice and a new morality.

A GOD OF LIFE

Ordering Society toward the Common Good

For each human being truly to develop as God intends, Catholic social teaching speaks about the imperative of ordering society according to the common good of all peoples. Catholic social teaching sees the common good as the sum total of the social conditions that enable individual people and groups more fully and readily to reach human fulfillment through the just ordering of society (GS 26, 74).

The first encyclical of modern Catholic social teaching to take up the theme of a just ordering of society was Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum. Written in the context of the exploitation of workers during the Industrial Revolution,

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this document offered a vision of society based on a humane understanding of work, the right to own property, the principle of collaboration (instead of class conflict), the dignity of the poor, the rights of the weak, the obligation of the rich, the establishment of justice, and the right to unionize.\textsuperscript{23} Forty years later, after the Depression and economic crisis of 1929, Pope Pius XI published \textit{Quadragesimo Anno}. As economic polarities began to worsen around the globe, the document stressed that capital must cooperate with labor and not exploit it (QA 23). One hundred years after \textit{Rerum Novarum}, recognizing that the current global economy still had not met the needs of the poor, Pope John Paul II wrote \textit{Centesimus Annus} in order to look at the common good with respect to the needs of the whole human family (CA 58).

One of the fundamental ways in which society must be ordered is according to economic justice. It measures the health of an economy not in terms of financial metrics like Gross National Product or stock prices, but in terms of how the economy affects the quality of life in the community as a whole (EJA Intro 14). It states that an ordered economy must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do \textit{for} people? What does it do \textit{to} people? And how do \textit{people} participate in it (EJA 1)? Most of all, it puts a strong emphasis on what impact the economy has on the poor.\textsuperscript{24} It argues that the world’s resources should be shared equitably, that the rights of workers ought to be respected, that economic decisions (and those who make them) must be more accountable to the common good, and, in brief, that the economy be made for human beings and not human beings for the economy.

Meeting the demands of the common good and the requirements of distributive justice challenges the lifestyles, policies, and social institutions that negatively influence the poor (EJA Intro 16). Catholic social teaching seeks the transformation of policies and systems created by individual and collective acts of selfishness, which become institutionalized (and even legalized) in society and contribute to underdevelopment and the degradation of the poor (SRS 36). As they examined social structures in light of the common good, the U.S. bishops noted, “Decisions must be judged in light of what they do \textit{for} the poor, what they do \textit{to} the poor, and what they enable the poor to do \textit{for themselves}” (EJA 24).

The struggle for a more ordered society is also directly related to the search for peace, and therefore much of Catholic social teaching is built around the

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vision of a peaceful society.\textsuperscript{25} Peace is an important dimension of Catholic social teaching, but a thorough treatment of it goes beyond the scope of this chapter. Here it is enough to note that peace is the fruit of justice and is integrally related to the development and empowerment of poor people and poor countries (CA 5). Much more than the absence of war or the balance of power between enemies, peace is the result of a rightly ordered society and ultimately is a gift that flows from the God of Life (CP 68).

A GO\textsuperscript{D}D

IGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

A society is ordered, according to Catholic social teaching, when it is structured and functions not according to the maximization of profit, the needs of a nation, or the greed of the disordered human heart but, beyond all else, according to the intrinsic worth, freedom, and dignity of every human person (GS 26). Catholic social teaching believes that human beings, created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26-27), have by their very existence an inherent value, worth, and distinction. This means that God is present in every person, regardless of his or her race, nation, sex, origin, orientation, culture, or economic standing. Catholic social teaching asserts that all human beings must see within every person both a reflection of God and a mirror of themselves, and must honor and respect this dignity as a divine gift (GS 26-27).

Catholic social teaching pays particular attention to those in society whose dignity is diminished, denied, or damaged, or those who, when they are no longer deemed useful, are rejected and discarded, or those who are dehumanized in their jobs. Many workers today feel alienated in their work, as if they are no more than a disposable cog in a massive industrial machine, with no creative connection to their labor and no promise of meaningful work.\textsuperscript{26} Catholic social teaching advocates in particular for those whom society discards as unproductive, upholding the rights of the poor, the elderly, the sick, and others who are vulnerable. In giving voice to the God of Life, the church


Believes that a central dimension of its mission is to promote the dignity of every person and to speak out when the poor, the least, and the weak are most threatened.  

A God Of Life Option for the Poor

In light of the vast disparity between rich and poor nations and rich and poor people, one of the principal means through which the church defends human dignity is by giving priority to the needs of the poor. Rooted in the Beatitudes, the poverty of Jesus, and his attention to those in need, the option for the poor expresses the church’s commitment to stand alongside those whom society dismisses as insignificant, and to work with them for their integral liberation and human development. The option for the poor goes through all of modern Catholic social teaching and particularly the writings of John Paul II:

This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. . . . Given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires . . . cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. (SRS 42)

This option includes a commitment not only to people but also to cultures whose very existence is endangered by the process of globalization.

The option for the poor is also a way of empowering all people to participate in the common good, which begins by responding to the needs of all, especially those with the greatest need (EJA Intro 16). It requires reaching out to those who are weak in any way, speaking for the voiceless, defending the defenseless (EJA Intro 16) and empowering them to be agents in the making of their own destiny. The option for the poor is also a way of reminding us that, as children of a common Creator, we are all responsible for each other (SRS 38). It seeks to give expression, in part, to the eschatological promises of the Kingdom of God, where those now excluded will find a place at the table of the common banquet (SRS 33, PP 47).

John Paul II said that this option means that “[t]he needs of the poor must

take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the max-
imization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled
industrial expansion; the production to meet social needs over production for
military purposes.”28 It affirms that the single most important criterion of the
health of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members and how it
responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies (EJA 123). This
theme of the option for the poor will be explored in more depth in chapter 7
on liberation theology.

A GOD OF LIFE
Freedom as Rights and Responsibilities

Above all, Catholic social teaching is not about rules, regulations, or burden-
some instruction but about genuine, spiritual freedom. This freedom has two
central dimensions: freedom from sin and freedom for love. More than sim-
ply freedom to do whatever one wants without outside interference, such
freedom seeks to safeguard human dignity by protecting human beings against
the burden of oppression and exploitation. At the same time it summons peo-
ple, who are endowed by God with a free will, to carry the weight of human
duty by contributing to the common good through service to others. This
response, shaped by Christian faith, is other-oriented, and Catholic social
teaching regards self-gift and self-sacrifice as the highest expression of the
liberated heart.

In the language of Catholic social teaching, such freedom is spoken of in
terms of fundamental rights and fundamental responsibilities. Freedom means
that human beings are endowed with certain inherent, inviolable, inalienable,
and universal rights (PT 9).29 These rights involve the fulfillment of basic
material needs and the protection of certain relationships. They include the
right of people to “choose their state of life and set up a family, the right to
education, work, to their good name, to respect, to proper knowledge, the
right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard their pri-
vacy, and rightful freedom, including freedom of religion” (GS 26). These
rights ensure that people have access to adequate food, clothing, housing,
medical care, schooling, work, and social services, all of which are necessary in
order to live dignified lives.

28. John Paul II, “Address on Christian Unity in a Technological Age” (Toronto, September 14,
1984), Origins 14, no. 16 (October 4, 1984): 249, 5.
29. For more on rights and responsibilities, see David Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict, Woodstock
Alongside these fundamental rights, Catholic social teaching also speaks about incumbent responsibilities and duties to the common good. That is to say, rights and responsibilities go hand and hand in Catholic social teaching. As John XXIII observed, “To claim one’s rights and ignore one’s duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other” (PT 30).

The fundamental rights involve not only civil, political, cultural, and social rights, but also economic rights (EJA Intro 17), which include the right to private property. Catholic social teaching acknowledges that private property can be an incentive to productivity and a way of administering society in an efficient way, but it does not consider it an unrestricted right, since the goods of the earth are meant for the benefit of all and so that all peoples may develop.30 John Paul II puts it in this way: “Private property, in fact, is under a ‘social mortgage,’ which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods” (SRS 42). In other words, private property is a right in Catholic social teaching, but it is not an absolute right, since we are not the final owners of any property, and there is a communal dimension even to all that we consider “private.” Gaudium et Spes even goes so far as to say that persons in extreme need “are entitled to take what they need from the riches of others” (GS 69). To deny the exigencies of distributive justice with a mistaken belief that God “blesses” a privileged few while neglecting the masses of poor people in the world is tantamount to heresy.

In our contemporary global culture, as economic interests often take priority over all other concerns, Catholic social teaching brings the primacy of rights to the forefront of decision making. In its concern for the common good, it eschews those mentalities and practices of hoarding and accumulating personal fortunes while the rest of the world suffers in misery. While Catholic social teaching sees the value of wealth creation through markets and incentives, wealth creation is described as only a means, setting the conditions for possible human flourishing. Accordingly, economic efficiency is not an end in itself but only has value in the context of communitarian and egalitarian values of an overarching vision of the common good.31 Catholic

30. Some philosophers today make a distinction between strong rights and weak rights. Strong rights, like rights to life, are inviolable and essential to human dignity and security. Weak rights, like rights to property, are important to individuals but are subject to the needs of the common welfare and can be modified or revoked, if common needs are greater. See R. Dworkin, Taking Rights Seriously (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 267-79.

social teaching underscores the belief that with increased power comes increased accountability, with great wealth comes great responsibility, and with human rights come human duties.

A GOD OF LIFE

Life as a Sacred Gift

Catholic social teaching weaves the golden thread of the sacredness of human life through all of its major documents. This idea appears more than thirteen hundred times in the documents to the universal church. Catholic social teaching gives expression to the value of human life in all of its stages, in all of its dimensions, in all of its manifestations. To affirm the sacrosanct value of all life does not mean that Catholic social teaching denies the reality of death, but rather that all human beings are endowed with a biological and spiritual gift that must be honored and respected.

Catholic social teaching also affirms that this life is brought to a completely new level through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, who brings new creation and gives new life: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). This does not mean that Catholic social teaching is interested only in the spiritual life of peoples or even just prolongation of biological life, but rather in a quality of life that reflects the designs of a provident God who desires the full and integral development of each person in community. In defending, promoting, and cultivating life, Catholic social teaching is concerned with life in this world, life in the next, and the relationship between the two.

In some statements, Catholic social teaching weaves this golden thread of life into a single piece of theological clothing called the "seamless garment."32 The "garment" is a direct allusion to Jesus' crucifixion, when the Roman soldiers divided and distributed his garments and gambled over them (Mt 27:28, 35). This "garment" also gives symbolic expression to Jesus' solidarity with those who suffer unjustly and are sentenced to death in one form or another. Catholic social teaching reiterates that life should not be torn apart in any form, possessed or disposed of in any way by any authority.

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32. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was the first to introduce this notion of the “seamless garment.” For a copy of this text, see “A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue” (William Wade Lecture Series, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, March 11, 1984), available at http://priestsforlife.org/magisterium/bernardinwade.html (accessed February 13, 2006).
The notion of the seamless garment also affirms that there is a consistent ethic of life from conception to death that runs through all social problems, "from womb to tomb." Catholic social teaching actively promotes "a culture of life," while at the same time it denounces a "culture of death," especially as it is manifested in murder, genocide, abortion, torture, subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, war, racism, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling and exploitation of women and children, disgraceful working conditions, sexism, poverty, euthanasia, capital punishment, life-threatening pollution and other such evils (EV 3, 40, 56ff.; EA 63; EJA 179).

Beneath the denunciation of all these evils is the affirmation that human life must be the fundamental criterion against which all economic, political, social, and cultural progress is measured. In arguing for this consistent ethic of life, and while admitting certain distinctions, Catholic social teaching affirms that one cannot be against one injustice and yet for another. As Martin Luther King, Jr., once observed, "[I]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The church, for example, recognizes that both abortion and capital punishment tear at the very fabric of life to which the church gives witness. Even while the analysis of abortion and capital punishment may differ, in the end the argument against them comes to the same place by defending life, regardless of any moral precondition. It recognizes that destructive actions not only harm, hurt, or injure the victims, but they also degrade, diminish, and dehumanize those who inflict injury. A civilization of love cannot exist without being firmly grounded in a respect for life.

A GOD OF LIFE

Involvement of All People in Creation of a New Social Order

While Catholic social teaching notes that one of the primary functions of government is to protect the rights of individuals, a primary responsibility of individuals is to contribute to the progress of the human community. Catholic social teaching emphasizes that all people must become involved in the construction of a new social order, even if they do so in differing capacities. This means that justice must be worked out on all levels of society, from the most local to the most global, from the family to the highest echelons of government.

As globalization puts more and more decisions into the hands of high-level political and economic leaders, and more people feel left out of the economic,
social, and political forces that dominate their lives, the notion of involvement becomes increasingly important. Excluding people from participation goes against the grain of the social nature and communal vocation of human beings (EJA 78). The social vision of Catholic social teaching maintains that individuals and their families do not exist for the state, but vice versa.

Sometimes Catholic social teaching speaks about involvement and participation in terms of “subsidiarity.” Originally coined in 1931 by Pope Pius XI in Quadragesimo Anno, “subsidiarity” comes from the Latin word “assistance.” Subsidiarity means that the exercise of power should be made by the smallest possible and most local units of society (QA 79). Catholic social teaching recognizes that some tasks should be handled at the local level and others at larger, more national levels. Believing that most often the best decisions are made at the local level, closest to the people who will be most affected by them, subsidiarity means handing decision making downward to smaller entities. It can also mean moving it upward to larger entities, even to transnational bodies, if this better serves the common good and protects the rights of people. 34 Subsidiarity, in this sense, becomes a corrective against the concentration of power and resources in the hands of a privileged elite. It helps put limits on government and keeps it from assuming totalitarian control over smaller constituencies, such as individuals, families, and local organizations, in ways that would render them powerless.

Catholic social teaching sees responsible citizenship as a virtue and involvement in the political process as a moral obligation. 35 The United States Bishops remind Catholics, “Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power.” 36 At the very least, voting is the most basic way of participation, and therefore failure to vote is a moral failure (CCC 2240). A God of Life challenges all to be involved in building a civilization of love.

A GOD OF LIFE

Family of Blood and Family of Humankind

As relational creatures, we cannot come to know who we are and what we are meant to become unless we understand to whom we belong. Catholic social


teaching understands the family as the primary network of relationships in which a person develops and therefore is the most fundamental cell of society and the church (PT 16; LG 11). In a time when there is a greater emphasis on individual competition and market productivity—both of which take their toll on human relationships—Catholic social teaching devotes a great deal of attention to the promotion and protection of family life. Catholic social teaching is thoroughly concerned with every aspect of society that negatively impacts family relationships, and it challenges those forces that threaten the ties between family members (EJA 93). It recognizes that the future of the planet is integrally related to the relative health of family life (GS 47), and consequently it advocates for the protection of the marriage bond, living wages, medical care, housing, religious liberties, and even the right to migrate when necessary (FC 46).

Beyond any national, social, cultural, racial, economic, and ideological differences, Catholic social teaching understands one's personal family is an integral part of a larger global human family. This notion is closely connected to both the theme of the option for the poor and the theme of human solidarity. Solidarity is a form of friendship and social charity that binds together all members of the human family.\textsuperscript{37} John Paul II argued that solidarity is profoundly linked to a more global sense of responsibility, and he warned against equating it with a "feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (SRS 38).

Racism and xenophobic attitudes are the antithesis of solidarity and only further alienate people from each other and blind us from seeing our connection to a God of Life and to each other. The church denounces as contrary to the movement toward a civilization of love any attitude or policy that discriminates against the weak, handicapped, infirm, elderly, immigrants, children, homeless, foreigners, or those from different denominations or religions. John Paul II believed that human beings enslaved by attitudes of racial prejudice and ethnic animosity live in a moral bankruptcy and that their only recourse to ethical solvency is human solidarity.\textsuperscript{38}

Concern for the family of humankind means responding to human hunger, misery, and poverty. Because we share a fundamental interconnectedness with


each other, not only does indifference to the suffering of others deprive the poor, but it also diminishes the rich. As long as glaring economic and social imbalances persist, peace is impossible (MM 157).

**A GOD OF LIFE**

**Environment and Ecological Stewardship**

Care for creation extends not only to our brothers and sisters but also to the environment itself. Catholic social teaching addresses not only issues of the human environment that pertain to the family and the ordering of society, but also issues of the natural environment that pertain to the care of the earth. Catholic social teaching defines ecological stewardship as “the ability to exercise moral responsibility to care for the environment,” and it implies protecting the environment and intelligently using resources necessary for what humans need today while at the same time conserving these resources and safeguarding them for future generations. In other words, ecological stewardship is a way of protecting our earthly home, safeguarding its resources, and extending solidarity to those who come after us.

Catholic social teaching asserts that we have reached a “critical point” with the environment. The collective decisions that chart our current course have resulted in the contamination of the earth through air, water, and ground pollution, as well as new illnesses, global warming, the erosion of the ozone layer, the destruction of rain forests, the extinction of species, the depletion or near exhaustion of nonrenewable resources, and the imminent threat of nuclear annihilation. Such problems put the entire human family at risk (QA 21). It is sobering to consider that if the environment goes, nothing else will matter, for we will no longer be a global home in which any human life can survive.

Care of the earth is also connected to concern for the poor, not only because the earth is “mother” but also because the poor, in the places they are forced to live, more often suffer the effects of contamination, toxic wastes, and even ecological disasters. In December 1984, for example, more than eight thousand residents of Bhopal, India, died after an industrial accident at a

40. Ibid.
Union Carbide pesticide plant.\textsuperscript{43} Beyond the catastrophic human costs, this accident created an ecological calamity that is still felt today; its contaminated wastes are yet to be cleaned up. Moreover, the poor feel the brunt of natural disasters as well. As seen in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the United States in 2005, the poor are frequently the ones who are left behind, many because they do not have the finances or options to leave endangered areas.

The ecological problem is integrally related to the problem of consumerism, which devours the resources of the earth in an excessive and disordered way (CA 37). Industrialization has fueled unprecedented consumption patterns that are ecologically unsustainable. They are based more on a desire to have and to enjoy rather than on a desire to be and to grow (CA 37). Only when a spirit of solidarity, sacrifice, and restraint shapes our common quest for a better world will human beings realize the call to renew the earth as a faithful response to a God of Life.

"A GLOBALIZATION OF SOLIDARITY"

Catholic social teaching neither naively condemns the process of globalization nor uncritically embraces it. Rather it seeks to discern both its positive and negative dimensions as the church journeys toward a horizon of hope with faith and trust in a God of Life. It recognizes the positive dimensions in drawing together countries, economies, cultures, and ways of life with fresh approaches and a growing recognition of the interdependence of the human family and the international community.\textsuperscript{44} At the same time, it sees that the social problems of today now have a worldwide dimension and have reached a new magnitude never before seen in human history. In light of the current global challenges, it offers an invaluable set of ethical coordinates that can help steer the ship of globalization in the right direction.

Whatever else in human society changes because of the whole process of globalization, the moral vision of Catholic social teaching will continue to rest on the foundation of human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity (EA 55). Whatever else globalization means to the development of some parts of the world and in particular to some individuals who benefit from it, Catholic

\textsuperscript{43} For more on the option for the poor and the environment, see Stephen Bede Scharper, "Option for the Poor and Option for the Earth: Toward a Sustainable Solidarity," in The Option for the Poor: An Interdisciplinary Reader, ed. Daniel G. Groody and Gustavo Gutiérrez (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{44} Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "Contribution to World Conference Against Racism," 2.
social teaching will continue to evaluate the results in terms of how the current structures of society help create a more just social order, how they help the poor, how they contribute to the international common good, and how they foster genuine development.\textsuperscript{45} Whatever else emerges on the economic, political, and social horizon, Catholic social teaching will continue to measure progress as “a globalization without marginalization,”\textsuperscript{46} or as John Paul II called it, a “globalization of solidarity” (EA 55).

**Building a Civilization of Love**

To advance a “globalization of solidarity” means, in Paul VI’s words, “building a civilization of love.” One manifestation of this civilization became evident after a tsunami hit South Asia on December 26, 2004, leaving more than three hundred thousand dead and millions homeless. After this tragedy, individuals and organizations from around the world offered donations and collective resources in response to the catastrophe. One family from Texas offered their life savings of $25,000 to alleviate the pain of these people. Some organizations gave millions of dollars in aid to meet the massive human need. The globalization of institutions, networks, and systems that make this kind of relief possible offer unprecedented potential for doing good and addressing the pressing areas of human need and suffering around the world.

While such offers of direct assistance are noteworthy, every hour more than twelve hundred children die of preventable diseases, which adds up to the equivalent of three tsunamis each month.\textsuperscript{47} The ignorance and indifference to these people and other such injustices indicate that there is indeed much work that still needs to be done. The drowning of human beings in social ills of every kind makes incredible demands on human conscience, whose pressing needs cannot help but call to conversion all individuals and all institutions in the world, all of whom share a common responsibility to serve a world in distress. For the church to be a credible, prophetic voice in a world of injustice, it must first embody that which it hopes to realize in a global society (JW 40). Even when its own witness is imperfect, however, Catholic social teaching ultimately seeks to give expression to something greater than itself: that pres-


ent among us is a God of Life, who offers us a path to healing and transformation as we commit ourselves to building up a civilization of love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Catholic social teaching is often referred to as the church's best kept secret. Why is it a secret and what keeps it from being better known?
2. As you analyze reality from your own social location, what principles of Catholic social teaching are most pertinent and relevant?
3. Discuss this statement: "If the environment goes, nothing else will matter, for we will no longer have a global home in which any human life can survive."
4. Some people argue that the Catholic Church has no authority and should have no role in political matters. What is your opinion?
5. What imbalances in society does Catholic social teaching seek to address?
6. List some concrete examples from your own experience that would distinguish charity from justice.
7. In what ways have you seen injustices of society made legal?
8. What are the positive dimensions of capitalism? Its pitfalls?
9. Why is progress in the current global system not measured against the value of life?
10. In what ways could the economy become more centered around people and not just profit?
11. In what ways has the church itself not lived up to the principles of Catholic social teaching?
12. Discuss this statement: "Action on behalf of justice is a constitutive part of preaching the gospel."

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND STUDY