

Principles of Catholic Social Thought

(1) Dignity of the Human Person

Each and every person is a unique individual with a social nature. The dignity of each and every person comes from their being made in the image and likeness of God, and as this dignity is a gift from God it does not lessen due to age, disability, income status, gender or race. “There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

(2) Principle of Participation

The development of the person is only brought about through social interaction (working with others, and in giving oneself to others), thus participation in social processes is a fundamental human right (as it immediately flows from the nature of the human person). Participation is a good in and of itself. Furthermore, it is both a human right and a human duty (part of one’s social obligations to the community).

(3) Principle of the Common Good

“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 of those conditions of social life which allows social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment’ (GS 26)” (CSD 163). The common good is not the sum total of individual goods, for it encompasses the good of all people and the whole person.

(4) The Universal Destination of Goods

“God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all men follow justice and unite in charity, created good should abound for them on a reasonable basis” (GS 69). “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth’s goods.” (CSD 171). All rights or property (including intellectual property) are subordinate to the rights of all to subsistence.

(5) Preferential Option for the Poor

“The Principle of the universal destination of good required that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern” (CSD 182). The development of the person is blocked by exclusion from participation in the economic spheres of social life (that is poverty). Poverty caused by exclusion extends to the social, cultural and spiritual spheres of life.

(6) The Principle of Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity states that larger entities should not assume the roles and functions of smaller entities unless it is absolutely necessary. It “protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and calls on the same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties” (CSD 187). The unwarranted assumption of roles and functions by larger authorities often lessen social participation and should only be undertaken to increase participation.

(7) The Principle of Solidarity

The necessary interdependence of social life needs to be grounded in an authentic concern for the well being of all persons. This is true for those we have direct interaction with and for those whose actions will affect, even if we never see them. The principle of solidarity 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).

(From CORI Justice: Values, Catholic Social Thought and Public Policy p.11-13)