

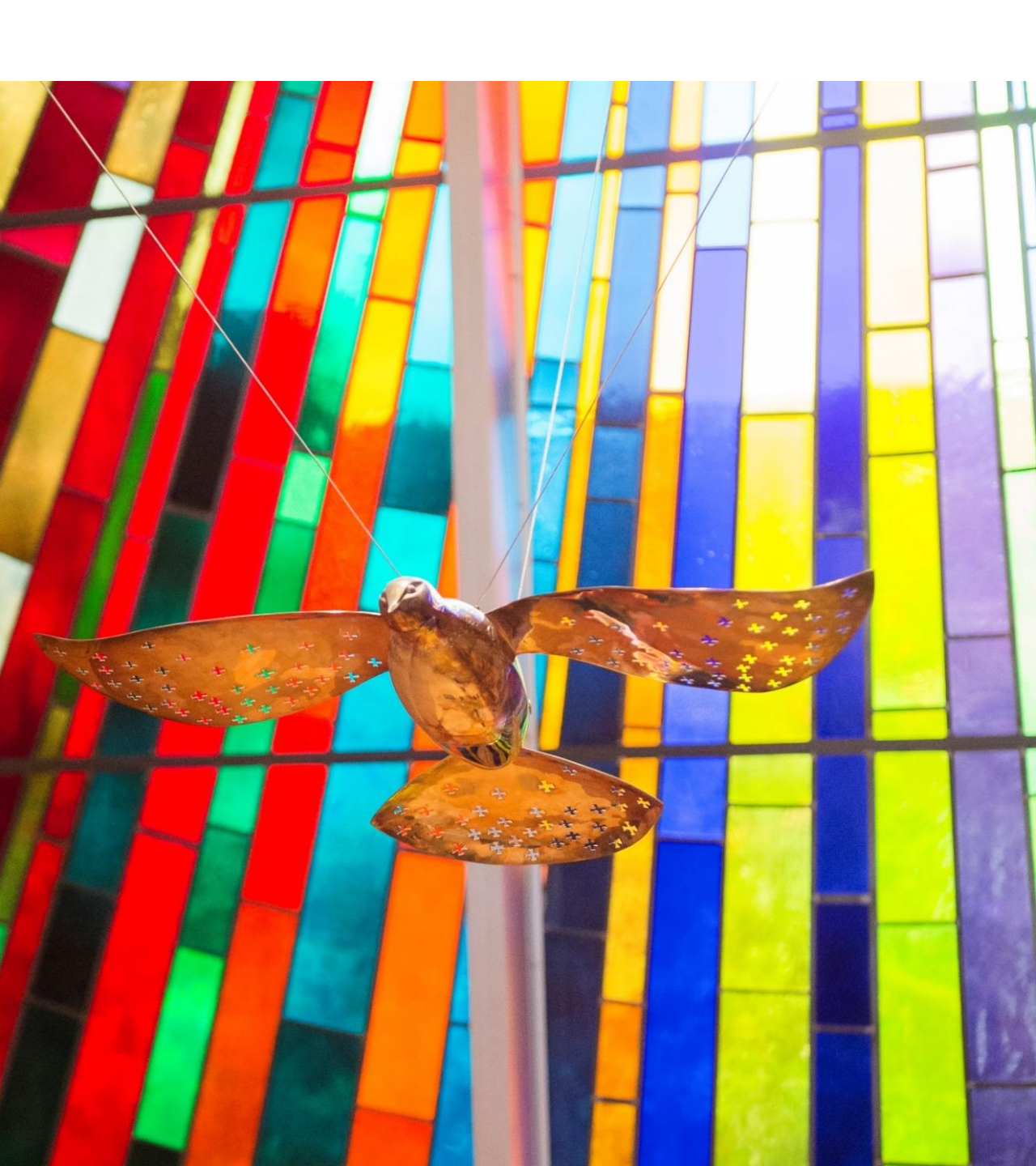


# Short Course in Theology

Catholic Social Teaching: Living the Gospel

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God of all truth and goodness,  
bless us as we gather here  
at Australian Catholic University.  
May we be strengthened  
in mind and heart to pursue  
what you inspire,  
with insight and deliberation,  
that our world may advance.  
In true wisdom and justice for all:  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*Catholic Social Thought:*  
*Theological foundations for action*

Go and do likewise

*Jesus*

*(Lk 10:37)*

The lawyer asks:

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus asked him,

*“What is written in the law?  
How do you read it?”*

# Some questions about Jesus' questions

- Which law?
- Whose law?
- What tools do we need to interpret “the law”?
- Where do we find these tools?

In *Gaudete et Exsultate* (164) we read that “those who think they commit no grievous sins against God’s law can fall into a state of dull lethargy. Since they see nothing serious to reproach themselves with, they fail to realize that their spiritual life has gradually turned lukewarm. They end up weakened and corrupted”. Let us no say “they”: it is all of us.... We proclaim the Ten Commandments and ‘parade ourselves’ as being the custodians of moral standards/values and good behaviour in society. Hypocrites at times? Yes! Why did we keep silent for so long?

*Sr. Veronica Openibo, SHCJ*

The Church has always had the duty of **scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.** Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.

*Gaudium et Spes, 4*



To respond theologically to concerns of **social conscience, mercy, justice, and restitution** (*concrete human existence*) is to enter into a continuous process of responding to Jesus' question with **deep reflection, discernment, decision-making and action** (*May God's Kingdom come*).

*“What is written in the law?  
How do you read it?”*

**Social Conscience**



**Deep reflection  
(See)**

**Mercy**



**Discernment**

**Justice**



**Decision-making  
(Judge)**

**Restitution**



**Action  
(Act)**

In *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII affirms the process of **See, Judge, Act** as a way of reading and responding to the signs of the time:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one **reviews** the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a **judgement** on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one **decides** what the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: **observe, judge act.**

# The following are some Papal Encyclicals and other documents that deal with Catholic Social Teaching.

## **Pope Leo XIII**

Rerum Novarum *Capital and Labour* 1891

## **Pope Pius XI**

Quadragesimo Anno *Reconstruction of the social order* 1931

## **Pope John XXIII**

Mater et Magistra *Christianity and Social Progress* 1961

Pacem in Terris *Peace on Earth* 1963

## **Second Vatican Council**

Gaudium et Spes *Joys and Hopes* 1965

Dignitatis Humanae, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 1965

## **Pope Paul VI**

Populorum Progressio *On Development of Peoples* 1967

Octogesima Adveniens *A Call to Action* 1971

## **Synod of Bishops**

*Justice in the World* 1971

## **Pope John Paul II**

Laborem Exercens *On Human Work* 1981

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis *The Social Concern of the Church* 1987

Centesimus Annus *The One Hundredth Year* 1991

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* —  
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004

## **Pope Benedict XVI**

Deus Caritas Est *God is Love* 2005

Caritas in Veritate *Charity in Truth* 2009

## **Pope Francis**

Evangelii Gaudium *The Joy of the Gospel* 2013

Laudato Si' *On Care for our Common Home* 2015

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of 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.

*Justice in the World, Synod of Bishops, 1971*

The permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine are:

- 1. the dignity of the human person,**
- 2. the common good,**
- 3. subsidiarity,**
- 4. solidarity.**

These principles, the expression of the whole truth about the human person known by reason and faith, are born of “the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarised in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society”.

Just as faith, hope and love are essential to the life of discipleship, this understanding of justice makes it mandatory as a characteristic of pastoral activity as well as of all spirituality. The effort to work for the dignity of all persons, a greater equity in the way the earth's resources are produced and distributed, and better ways to ensure participative processes and human solidarity can no longer be seen as peripheral to the life of discipleship and Christian spirituality.

# Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

*(compiled by Fr Paul Devitt)*

## **Principle 1 Dignity of the Human Person**

Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society. This principle is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God. The person is the clearest reflection of God among us.

## **Principle 2 Common Good and Community**

The human person is both sacred and social. We realise our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. Human beings grow and achieve fulfilment in community. Human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society. How we organize our society — in economics and politics, in law and policy — directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to “love our neighbour” has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.



### **Principle 3 Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor. The “option for the poor,” is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community.

The option for the poor is an essential part of society’s effort to achieve the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.

### **Principle 4 Rights and Responsibilities**

Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency – starting with food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities — to one another, to our families and to the larger society.

## **Principle 5 Role of Government and Subsidiarity**

The state has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights and build the common good. All people have a right and a responsibility to participate in political institutions so that government can achieve its proper goals.

The principle of subsidiarity holds that the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately. When the needs in question cannot adequately be met at the lower level, then it is not only necessary, but imperative that higher levels of government intervene.

## **Principle 6 Economic Justice**

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions. People have a right to economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life.

Catholic teaching opposes collectivist and statist economic approaches. But it also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice. Distributive justice, for example, cannot be achieved by relying entirely on free market forces. Competition and free markets are useful elements of economic systems. However, markets must be kept within limits, because there are many needs and goods that cannot be satisfied by the market system. It is the task of the state and of all society to intervene and ensure that these needs are met.

## **Principle 7 Stewardship of God's Creation**

The goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. There is a “social mortgage” that guides our use of the world’s goods, and we have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. How we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship, a sign of our respect for the Creator.

## **Principle 8 Promotion of Peace and Disarmament**

Catholic teaching promotes peace as a positive, action-oriented concept. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements.” There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.

## **Principle 9 Participation**

All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. It is wrong for a person, or a group, to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.

## **Principle 10 Global Solidarity and Development**

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. Authentic development must be full human development. It must respect and promote personal, social, economic, and political rights, including the rights of nations and of peoples. It must avoid the extremists of underdevelopment on the one hand, and “super development” on the other. Accumulating material goods and technical resources will be unsatisfactory and debasing if there is no respect for the moral, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the person.

I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that.

Gus Speth, former Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

# Integral Ecology

The heart of *Laudato Si'* proposes an **integral ecology** as a new paradigm of justice; an ecology “which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings”(15). Ecology is the relationship of living organisms and the environment: “Everything is closely interrelated.” All of creation is a web of life that includes “human and social dimensions.” We ourselves are a part of nature. “Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an **integral ecology, which clearly respects human and social dimensions**” (137).

- I. Environmental, Economic and Social Ecology (138-142)
- II. Cultural Ecology (143-146)
- III. Ecology of daily life (147-155)
- IV. The Principle of the Common Good (156-158)
- V. Justice between Generations (159-162)

Spirituality is not something on the fringes, an option for those with a particular bent. None of us has a choice. Everyone has to have a spirituality and everyone does have one, either a life-giving one or a destructive one. No one has the luxury of choosing here because all of us are precisely fired into life with a certain madness that comes from the gods and we have to do something with that. We do not wake up in this world calm and serene, having the luxury of choosing to act or not act. We wake up crying, on fire with desire, with madness. What we do with that madness is our spirituality.

Spirituality is more about whether or not we can sleep at night than about whether or not we go to church. It is about being integrated or falling apart, about being within community or being lonely, about being in harmony with mother earth or being alienated from her. Irrespective of whether or not we let ourselves be consciously shaped by any explicit religious idea, we act in ways that leave us either healthy or unhealthy, loving or bitter, in community or alienated from it. What shapes our actions is our spirituality.