

Catholic Social Justice: Justice and Peace

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Christianity is well-known for its role as a patron of low-income countries, its criticism of discrimination and violence, and its contribution to the progress of many communities. Christians have been involved in eliminating a wide range of issues for centuries, and it often was associated with social justice initiatives. Catholic social justice differs from general principles because the former concentrates on addressing issues from the perspective of Christian ethics. The fundamental ideas remain similar. Catholic social justice applies Biblical values to eliminate poverty, discrimination, the deprivation of dignity, and environmental destruction.

Social justice is a principle that considers the interconnectedness of the state and society—the primary value that assigns responsibility for human actions. Viewing a community as a unity of individuals, social justice also believes that every member has specific obligations and rights from the political and social perspective. Resources are distributed unequally in a community, and often, the factors that foster this disparity relate to privileges, not a personal investment. Therefore, social justice means that people are responsible for the well-being of others if they possess an excessive amount of resources. Also, social justice regards political, economic, ideological, and social fairness as a nation's goal. From a broad perspective, social justice believes that the state also should create institutions and laws supporting people who were excluded from the community. Taxation, insurance, public education, and other state-funded initiatives are the results of social justice supporters.

Catholic social justice also believes in a similar concept, but its specificity depends on religious moral values. Namely, Catholic representatives have been historically using principles. The first steps towards social justice principles were created in 1891 “by Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*, which advocated economic distributism and condemned both Capitalism and Socialism” (Kizito & Juma, 2015, p.1). However, similar attitudes regarding social wellness were mentioned by St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. The use of principles relies on many written instructions in the Bible. Catholic social teaching has criticized radical economic systems and many political regimes that ignored the needs of society. Even before that, many Catholic missionaries had the responsibility to help low-income communities and promote economic, social, and psychological progress in them. Therefore, many activities and initiatives, viewed as the Church’s primary role, have influenced the future formulation of the Catholic understanding of social justice and its practical reinforcement.

This ethical principle views solidarity as the primary value for the individual because society should reform crucial issues. In particular, the Bible often refers to the human need to remain in a community. Family is also vital for Catholic social justice because it is a fundamental social unit. Therefore, from this perspective, society gains a significant role. A community is a combination of families that are bound by social, economic, political, and cultural relations. When individuals in society face severe issues, unity suffers as it is a reflection of humanity as a system. Catholic social justice promotes the idea of practical help,

not passive sympathy. The individual is fulfilled only in relationships with others, as one's actions towards the state reflect one's virtues: "The first thing we learn about the good life from the ancients and the natural law is that you cannot live a good life by yourself" (Sullins, 2014, p.174). Many Catholic social justice initiatives developed not only due to the distinct church's initiative but in communities with particular prevalent religious affiliations.

The sanctity of human life is an important element in Catholicism. According to this religion, all people's lives are equally important to God. Consequently, it is society's ultimate value. Because the Bible believes that human life has the highest significance, Catholic social justice criticizes a lack of access to healthcare and adequate living conditions. Many people are powerless because of the absence of resources: "How is someone supposed to get well when he or she is worried sick about money?... social injustice is a result of social conditions, and it can only be redressed with social change and changes in social attitudes" (p.178). Moreover, this principle also believes that poor political and economic support deprives individuals of the life they deserve. The notion of human life's importance disproves wars as a strategy for conflict resolution. Peace in Catholicism is the desired status for humanity to ensure that the least number of people die or faces physical and mental traumas. Similarly, the dignity of human life is a necessary part of Catholic social teaching because, from its position, all people are created in God's image. Catholicism also severely opposes discrimination, as all people are free regardless of their skin color and background. Being human is the main reason for gaining the right to equality.

Catholic social justice severely reprimands richness without meaning and offers distribution as a more rational approach to improving the financial state of individuals. Although Catholicism supports ownership, it believes that this advantage should not be a privilege of a small group of people. Contrastingly, it emphasizes that as many people as possible should be engaged in ownership and also have access to all national and natural resources. Individuals' well-being is necessary for societal progress, and economic distribution would help in achieving the common good. The state should not engage in a laissez-faire approach in the market. However, it should not also have a monopoly on resources. Charity, progressive taxation, and credit unions are some of the state actions supported by Catholic social justice. The poor receive the most significant support from the Church because of the Biblical teachings and the idea of reasonability. People should not own more than they need, and helping others and sharing resources is a vital idea: "All rights of property (including intellectual property) are subordinate to the rights of all to subsistence" (Clark, p.12). Economic thinking in Catholicism also views all factors that serve as obstacles to people's financial wellness.

While economic support is vital for social well-being, Catholic social teaching examines all elements of social involvement and believes in the concept of subsidiarity, which further leads to the importance of meaningful work. The notion of subsidiarity supports the idea that the organizations and institutions lower in the hierarchy should have a chance to accomplish their tasks and face constant yet bearable challenges. Likewise, the right to work is

necessary for individuals because simple distribution without a person's efforts would not foster the formulation of a strong personality. The state should provide people with the ability to develop professional skills and jobs and to resolve problems in their development. Similarly, eliminating obstacles that are impossible for an individual to overcome, Catholic organizations ensure that social justice does not live and function in place of people. Hence, investing in personal physical and mental resources in a job is the only way for a person to achieve success and satisfaction.

Even though Catholic social justice concentrates on the value of human life as its key priority, it also assigns responsibility to be compassionate to nature and protect it against degradation. Environmental issues have an enormous influence on the Church's contemporary focus. This social teaching views people as the rulers of Earth to be responsible for all life. Even if it is a resource for people to use, it should be done meaningfully and with respect because the planet's status reflects human treatment and moral position. Since the 2000s, the Church has been actively promoting the correlation between inequality, economic issues, and environmental challenges. The preference for protecting nature over business and economic progress is often emphasized: "The United States' Bishops put it well: 'the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion'" (Kizito and Juma, 2015, p.2). Catholicism provides support of environmental initiatives, but people in the following affiliation often engage in green activism and nature restoration.

Overall, Catholic social justice evolves and improves on the basis of Catholic social teaching postulates. Modern Catholicism applies Biblical principles in combination with adaptations to today's challenges. Viewing modern individuals in connection with the environment, society, politics, economics, and society is the correct approach to follow the Church's ethical principles. Therefore, initiatives and charity organizations are frequently guided by the idea to help individuals with limited access to the resources that are necessary for their development. Simultaneously, the Catholic social justice concept believes in the solidarity of people, which provides all individuals with rights and responsibilities that, when actualized, will serve the common good.

## References

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