



- The Dignity of the Human Person
- Family and Community
- Solidarity & The Common Good
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Stewardship of God's Creation
- The Dignity of Work

The Dignity of the Human Person

The foundation of all CST is built upon the fundamental truth that each person is made 'in the image and likeness of God.'⁵ Thus it follows that 'every person's life and dignity must be respected and supported from conception until the end of their natural life on earth.'⁶ This is about ensuring that there is nothing which prevents an individual from growing and flourishing in all aspects of their being and recognising and speaking out and taking action when this is not so. This includes issues around each stage of life and especially the protection of the life of the unborn and older members of community as well as those born with disabilities. It also links to how we view and treat other people in our everyday encounters: how do we recognise others as a child of God?

As with all CST these principles relate to all people at a local, national and global level and the Church calls upon us to be aware and act upon injustices and inequalities.

Family and Community

*When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord,
they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;
and the favour of God was upon him.
...And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.⁷*

In the life of Jesus we see the importance of the family in enabling his human nature to grow and to flourish. For the Church the family is core to its being. 'The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called 'the domestic church', a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.'⁸ The home 'is the first school of Christian life and 'a school for human enrichment.'⁹ The Church therefore sees the family as the foundation to society and this is expressed in Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope: one of the four Constitutions from Vatican II 1964):

*'the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser
and harmonise personal rights with the other requirements of social life,
is the foundation of society.'¹⁰*

Because of the central importance of the family the Church is very clear in its expectations upon society and all those in positions of authority:

*All those, therefore, who exercise influence over communities and social groups
should work efficiently for the welfare of marriage and the family.
Public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect and promote their authentic nature,
to shield public morality and to favour the prosperity of home life.¹¹*

This principle can also be broadened out beyond the family to the local, national and global communities of which we are a part and what it means to be a neighbour. The Church's understanding of community is beautifully encapsulated in The Parable of the Good Samaritan.

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"
He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind';
and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"
"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."
But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"
In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers..."¹²*

Members of the Church are expected to help build and strengthen society. 'Beyond the family we're called to participate fully in the life of wider society. For most of us this means an obligation to participate fully in civil society and the political and economic life of the community. This could include involvement in movements for justice, volunteering with local community groups or active membership of work associations or trade unions.'¹³

Solidarity & The Common Good

God has created us to live in communion with one another. It is through life with others that we can flourish. However, living in communion with one another is about serving God and serving others and our own development and growth to full potential cannot be at the expense of the development and growth of another. The Common Good is about our interdependence upon one another as equal members of the human race, and how society and its organisations and structures should be for the benefit of all.

*Promoting the common good cannot be pursued by treating each individual separately
and looking for the highest 'total benefit', in some kind of utilitarian addition.
Because we are interdependent, the common good is more like a multiplication sum,
where if any one number is zero then the total is always zero.
If anyone is left out and deprived of what is essential,
then the common good has been betrayed.¹⁴*

In order to live according to the principle of the Common Good the Church recognises that 'respect for the person', as well as 'the social well-being and development of the group', and 'peace.'¹⁵ is also required.

Solidarity is part of the terminology used when talking about the Common Good. The word reminds us that 'Solidarity is the fundamental bond of unity with our fellow human beings and the resulting interdependence. All are responsible for all.'¹⁶

To summarise 'the common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons...This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love.'¹⁷

This principle of the Common Good is seen as the basis for family life as well as within larger social structures such as business and government.

Rights and Responsibilities

Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest and finally the necessary social services. In consequence, he has the right to be looked after in the event of ill health; disability stemming from his work; widowhood; old age; enforced unemployment; or whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood.'¹⁸

The Church has been clear in defining basic human rights which are founded on the dignity of the human person. However, the Church also recognises that one cannot have rights without responsibilities:

*The natural rights of which we have so far been speaking are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person.
These rights and duties derive their origin, their sustenance, and their indestructibility from the natural law, which in conferring the one imposes the other.
Thus, for example, the right to live involves the duty to preserve one's life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it.¹⁹*

Clear guidance as to what is expected of us in terms of our responsibilities is rooted in scripture. From the outset of his ministry Jesus makes clear his intentions and, in quoting Isaiah, sets out the expectations for his followers.

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."²⁰*

These responsibilities are enshrined in the Catechism as the Corporal Works of Mercy which consist of 'feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.'²¹

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable is about the emphasis which the Church places upon helping the poor and those who are vulnerable. The Corporal Works of Mercy above highlights this.

'The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition.' This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to 'be able to give to those in need.' It extends not only to material poverty but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty.'²²

The work of the Church in this area is vast. There are many missionary orders and charities who provide for the physical and spiritual needs of people everywhere. The Church in England and Wales also devotes two days in the Liturgical Year whereby charitable donations are made to support the work of CAFOD.

Charitable and educative organisations such as CAFOD and Mission Together enable us to develop an understanding of poverty in all its forms across the world and to recognise the ways in which this can be challenged. An important aspect of this principle is about restoring dignity to people so that they are enabled to live and work independently. This principle is also rooted in our belief that the resources of the Earth belong to all, and therefore 'not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life.'²³

Stewardship of God's Creation

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth²⁴

In the Creed we express our belief in God the Father as Creator. In the story of Creation, the scriptural basis for this principle, God also gives the human race everything that is needed to sustain life for all living creatures and 'dominion' over all of creation.

*The dominion granted by the Creator over the mineral, vegetable and animal resources of the universe cannot be separated from respect for moral obligations, including those towards generations to come.
Animals are entrusted to man's stewardship; he must show them kindness.
They must be used to serve just satisfaction of man's needs.'²⁵*

The Church's teachings show that we have a duty to ensure that the gift of Creation is shared with all and used wisely and respectfully to ensure its protection both now and for the future. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis has reminded us that the earth is our 'Common Home':

Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.'²⁶

Within this Encyclical Pope Francis explores the idea of environmental ecology as well as economic, social and cultural ecology as well as the ecology of daily life. We are being asked to consider the way in which all aspects of our lives and relationships to see if we can live in a better way for the benefit of ourselves and our own flourishing, but more importantly for the betterment of everyone and every living creature.

Part of this principle looks at the advantages and disadvantages created by technology.

Modern technology has given us a huge amount of benefits that have helped alleviate suffering and create new methods of solidarity among people.

At the same time we can also see how it has made it easier for us to become alienated from our environment, and it's given new and efficient ways to plunder the world's natural resources en masse. Care for Creation ensures that we don't neglect, but protect and respect the gift that is our natural environment.²⁷

The Dignity of Work

As with all the CST principles, the Dignity of Work is to be found in scripture and in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus himself worked as a carpenter before starting his ministry. References to work, particularly agricultural labour, run throughout scripture and it is seen as an important aspect of life. For the Church work is seen as a continuance of the gift of Creation whereby we are 'co-creators of God's world and work is part of our contribution.'²⁸ Work is also seen as something which brings dignity to the human person as it is the means 'of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community.'²⁹

The Church also recognises and upholds the concept that work serves so that we can live and not the other way around. Even more importantly, the Church is always ready to highlight issues of injustice and that 'a just wage is the legitimate fruit of work'³⁰

Another aspect of work which also links to the story of Creation, is the importance of rest. Periods of rest particularly on the Sabbath are important for the spiritual and mental well being of all. Time away from work allows the individual to be restored and revitalised and this time enables them to give of themselves to other aspects of their lives in the service of God and others.