

7 Themes of Catholic Social Teaching Through The Lens of Human Trafficking

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1. LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of Catholic social teaching. Archbishop Chaput in Philadelphia puts it best when he says, “If every human being is made in the image of God and loved infinitely by his or her Creator, then human trafficking is a kind of blasphemy, a sacrilege; a crime against God himself. The same reverence for human life that drives Christians to speak out for the poor, the disabled, the immigrant and the unborn child should lead us to work against human trafficking and to help its victims.”¹

“God formed each of us and knows us intimately.” (Psalm 139:13-16)

2. CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

The person is not only sacred but also social. 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. This organization of society moves from the basic unit, the family, to the larger community while ensuring that everyone participates. The emphasis on the larger social group counterbalances unregulated individual rights².

“Love one another, contribute to the needs of others, live peaceably with all.”
(Romans 12:9-18)

3. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

“To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.” (Proverbs 21:3)

4. OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

“He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19)

1 Catholic Philly.com. Human dignity and human trafficking. June 19, 2013.

<https://catholicphilly.com/2013/06/weekly-message-from-archbishop-chaput/human-dignity-and-human-trafficking>

2 California Catholic Conference. The Call to Family, Community and Participation.

<https://cacatholic.org/article/call-family-community-and-participation>

5. THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are laboring among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, and to show esteem for them with special love on account of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.” (1Thessalonians 5:12-13)

6. SOLIDARITY

We are all therefore called to actively and unceasingly seek to assist our brothers and sisters who find themselves the victims of the scourge of modern slavery and human trafficking³.

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him.” (Romans 10:12)

7. CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Armed conflict, displacement, climate change, natural disasters and poverty are factors that increase desperation and subsequently, vulnerability to trafficking⁴.

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (Romans 8:18-21)

³ REsource. Catholic Social Teaching – Why we should be slavery free. April 19, 2021

<https://resourcecem.com/2019/08/02/catholic-social-teaching-why-we-should-be-slavery-free/>

⁴ UN News. Global perspective, Human stories. July 30, 2019 Conflict, climate change among factors that increase ‘desperation that enables human trafficking to flourish’, says UN chief. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1043391>