



# THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

## 3. Social Justice

### Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority. (1928)*

#### I. RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN PERSON

##### ***The transcendent dignity of man***

Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him:

“What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defence and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.” (John Paul II). (1929)

##### ***Human rights flow from this dignity***

Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role to remind men of good will of these rights, and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims. (1930)

##### ***Respect for each other***

Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that “everyone should look upon his neighbour (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.” No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behaviour will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a “neighbour”, a brother. (1931)

The duty of making oneself a neighbour to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Mt 25:40) (1932)

##### ***Hatred of others is against human dignity***

This same duty extends to those who think or act differently from us. The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require the forgiveness of offences. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies. (Cf. Mt 5:43-44) Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one's enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy. (1933)

#### II. EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCES AMONG MEN

##### ***Made in the image of God all enjoy equal dignity***

Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity. (1934)

The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it:

“Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.” (Vatican II). (1935)

##### ***Differences of gifts and talents***

On coming into the world, man is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life. He needs others. Differences appear tied to age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and the distribution of wealth. The "talents" are not distributed equally. (Cf. Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:11-27) (1936)

These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures:

"I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others... I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one... And so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another... I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me." (St Catherine of Siena) (1937)

### ***Sinful inequalities***

There exist also *sinful inequalities* that affect millions of men and women. These are in open contradiction of the Gospel: "Their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace." (Vatican II) (1938)

## **III. HUMAN SOLIDARITY**

### ***Solidarity is based on our common origin and destiny in Christ***

The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of "friendship" or "social charity", is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood. (Cf. John Paul II) An error, "today abundantly widespread, is disregard for the law of human solidarity and charity, dictated and imposed both by our common origin and by the equality in rational nature of all men, whatever nation they belong to. This law is sealed by the sacrifice of redemption offered by Jesus Christ on the altar of the Cross to his heavenly Father, on behalf of sinful humanity." (Pius XII) (1939)

### ***Solidarity is manifest in the distribution of goods and a just social order***

Solidarity is manifested in the first place by the distribution of goods and remuneration for work. It also presupposes the effort for a more just social order where tensions are better able to be reduced and conflicts more readily settled by negotiation. (1940)

Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity: solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples. International solidarity is a requirement of the moral order; world peace depends in part upon this. (1941)

### ***Spiritual solidarity***

The virtue of solidarity goes beyond material goods. In spreading the spiritual goods of the faith, the Church has promoted, and often opened new paths for, the development of temporal goods as well. And so throughout the centuries has the Lord's saying been verified: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6:33).

"For two thousand years this sentiment has lived and endured in the soul of the Church, impelling souls then and now to the heroic charity of monastic farmers, liberators of slaves, healers of the sick, and messengers of faith, civilization, and science to all generations and all peoples for the sake of creating the social conditions capable of offering to everyone possible a life worthy of man and of a Christian." (Pius XII) (1942)

## **IN BRIEF**

- **Society ensures social justice by providing the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain their due. (1943)**
- **Respect for the human person considers the other "another self." It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the intrinsic dignity of the person. (1944)**
- **The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it. (1945)**
- **The differences among persons belong to God's plan, who wills that we should need one another. These differences should encourage charity. (1946)**
- **The equal dignity of human persons requires the effort to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities. It gives urgency to the elimination of sinful inequalities. (1947)**
- **Solidarity is an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones. (1948)**