



# **The Social Teaching of St. John Paul II**

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# Renewed Interest in Catholic Social Teaching



- The recent publication of Pope Leo's *Magnifica Humanitas* (MH) has brought added attention to Catholic Social Teaching (CST).
- MH is not fundamentally about artificial intelligence, but about safeguarding and promoting the human person, human dignity, the common good in the age of artificial intelligence.
- Its first two of five chapters present the history, foundations and principles of CST.



# Renewed Interest in Catholic Social Teaching



- Pope Leo applies those principles to various questions arising from artificial intelligence: technology, work, truth, democracy, ecology, freedom, a civilization of love, war and others.
- Pope Leo underlines how the dignity of the human person must come first and that AI must promote the common good. It must be guided by human dignity, justice, solidarity and moral responsibility. He reminds us that AI cannot replace conscience, wisdom and relationships.
- He cites John Paul II more than 50 times.



# St. John Paul II & Catholic Social Teaching



- With John Paul II there was a major turn in the history of CST.
- Background on Pope John Paul II.
- Prior to John Paul II, from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), to Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), to John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961), to Paul VI's *Popolorum Progressio* (1967) there had been a focus on grounding the Church's teaching on the natural law and reason. Even in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) of the Second Vatican Council, the section on the political community, war, peace, the family, was not really tied into its beautiful anthropological section.





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- Moreover, prior to him, CST was a little disjointed, as popes tried to address various social issues that had arisen.
- John Paul II gave CST a much clearer starting point, systematic method and epistemological structure, as a part of the Church's moral theology.
- That starting point came from his work on Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, which emphasized "Christ fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (22) and "man cannot find himself except in the sincere gift of himself" (24).



# St. John Paul II & Catholic Social Teaching



- GS' double-insight — a firm Christian theological anthropology — was developed in his first and programmatic encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) and then found its way into pretty much everything he taught.
- We see it in his writings on human sexuality (theology of the body), God's mercy (*Dives in Misericordia*), the dignity of women (*Mulieris Dignitatem*), family (*Familiaris Consortio*), moral theology (*Veritatis Splendor*), faith and reason (*Fides et Ratio*), the protection of human life (*Evangelium Vitae*), priestly formation and life (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*), human suffering (*Salvifici Doloris*), ecumenism (*Ut Unum Sint*), and art (*TOB, Letter to Artists*).



# St. John Paul II & Catholic Social Teaching



- But we see it in particular in the way he approaches topics of CST.
- The 2004 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, authorized by John Paul II, lists several themes of the Church's social teaching: marriage and family, human work, economic life, political community, international community, the environment and peace. He centers all of these questions on the human person.
- But we will focus in particular on his three major social encyclicals, dedicated fundamentally to work, development, economics and the political community.





# St. John Paul II & Catholic Social Teaching



- His three major social encyclicals are:
  - Laborem Exercens (1981)
  - Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987)
  - Centesimus Annus (1991)
- In these he approached the subject of human work, development, and the pillars of a free and virtuous society within the perspective of this Biblically-rich theological anthropology.





# Laborem Exercens (1981)



- Background
- Summary of Core Teachings
  - Work is a fundamental dimension of man's life on earth
  - The primary basis for the value of work is man himself
  - Jesus, the way of the Church, who fully reveals man to himself, reveals the fundamental redemptive meaning of human work.
  - Men and women cannot be treated as merchandise or "objects" but are "subjects" at the workplace. Otherwise, their work becomes alienating. The primacy of labor over capital.



# Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987)



- Background
- Summary of Core Teachings
  - Expansion of the “subjectivity” of work, found in Laborem exercens, to all citizens and members of organizations
  - Globalization, unrestricted by ethical principles, will cause havoc on those in developing countries.
  - A theologically-grounded theory of human development that takes economics seriously but emphasizes the primary of the spiritual.
  - Conversion on the part of the powerful is needed.
  - Conversion is also necessary on the part of developing countries, to eliminate corruption, dictatorial and authoritarian forms of government.



# Centesimus Annus (1991)



- Background
- Summary of Core Teachings
  - The fall of communism was above all because of a distorted anthropology that sought to understand the person exclusively at the level of material desires while excluding spiritual values.
  - The Free Economy and the distinction between “good” and “bad” capitalism (42)
  - The free and virtuous society is a network or complex of three parts:
    - a democratic political community
    - a free economy and
    - a vibrant, public moral culture.





# Centesimus Annus (1991)



- Summary of Core Teachings
  - Freedom is intrinsically tied to moral truth, and hence truth and training in authentic freedom are essential for democracy.
  - Poverty is above all a problem of exclusion
  - Some important goods cannot be satisfied by market forces.
  - The need for the development of a true economic personalism (30-43)
  - The principal cause of wealth is the person and his ideas
  - The person works within a community
  - Work involves a practical realism
  - Man's vulnerability to sin must not be forgotten





## Further Reading



- **Syntheses** — *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; *The Social Agenda: A Collection of Magisterial Texts*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2000.
- **St. John Paul II** — *Centesimus Annus*, 1991; *Laborem Exercens*, 1981; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987
- **Benedict XVI** — *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005 (19-42); *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009; Inaugural Session of the Fifth General Conference of CELAM, part IV, “Social and Political Problems”
- **Pope Francis** — *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013 (176-258); *Laudato Si'*, 2015; *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020.
- **Pope Leo** — *Magnifica Humanitas*, 2025.

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## Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.  
Believe what you read.  
Teach what you believe.  
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.



Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts. You may also follow postings of articles, homilies and teachings on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

You can also subscribe to the podcast of daily homilies, lectures and talks through Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and iHeart Podcasts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,  
*Msgr. Roger J. Landry*

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Calling Us to Holiness, 12th Thursday (I),  
Memorial of St. Josemaria Escrivá, June 26,  
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Asks, Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and  
Blood of the Lord, June 22, 2025

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the Priest, Diocese of San Angelo Clergy  
Days, June 11-12, 2025



Thank **you!**