

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1877-1948

In the annual courses of 2022 we will study three articles of the Catechism.

Please read through all the points in your own time.

We suggest that you form study groups to go deeper into one of the three articles. The groups will present the following points to the class on 1 July (CCC 4-5 on the course overview)

Points to study per group:

- Article 1: The Person & Society (1877-1896)
- Article 2: Participation in Social Life (1877, 1897-1927)
- Article 3: Social Justice (1877, 1928-1948)

Content of study group presentations:

1. Situate the Article in the context of the structure of Part III of the Catechism.
2. Overview of the content: Three main messages
3. Three relevant objections or misunderstandings you have experienced recently & why they matter (e.g.: their effect on how we understand ourselves & others, how we understand the vocation of the laity and freedom, how we act in family, professional & social life)
4. Impact of grasping these truths for people moving in a society that values individualism & autonomy, or seeing socialism as the alternative.
5. One idea that, as common ground, could be a starting point for dialogue with others.

Part III. Life in Christ,

Section 1. Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit

Chapter Two: The Human Communion

1877 The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son. This vocation takes a personal form since each of us is called to enter into the divine beatitude; it also concerns the human community as a whole.

Article 1

THE PERSON AND SOCIETY

I. The Communal Character of the Human Vocation

1878 All men are called to the same end: God himself. There is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men are to establish among themselves in truth and love.¹ Love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God.

1879 The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service and dialogue with his brethren, man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation.²

1880 A society is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. As an assembly that is at once visible and spiritual, a society endures through time: it gathers up the past and prepares for the future. By means of society, each man is established as an "heir" and receives certain "talents" that enrich his identity and whose fruits he must develop.³ He rightly owes loyalty to the communities of which he is part and respect to those in authority who have charge of the common good.

1881 Each community is defined by its purpose and consequently obeys specific rules; but "the human person . . . is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions."⁴

1882 Certain societies, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to the nature of man; they are necessary to him. To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions must be encouraged "on both national and international levels, which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs."⁵ This "socialization" also expresses the natural tendency for human beings to associate with one another for the sake of

attaining objectives that exceed individual capacities. It develops the qualities of the person, especially the sense of initiative and responsibility, and helps guarantee his rights.⁶

1883 Socialization also presents dangers. Excessive intervention by the state can threaten personal freedom and initiative. the teaching of the Church has elaborated the principle of subsidiarity, according to which "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good."⁷

1884 God has not willed to reserve to himself all exercise of power. He entrusts to every creature the functions it is capable of performing, according to the capacities of its own nature. This mode of governance ought to be followed in social life. the way God acts in governing the world, which bears witness to such great regard for human freedom, should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities. They should behave as ministers of divine providence.

1885 The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to all forms of collectivism. It sets limits for state intervention. It aims at harmonizing the relationships between individuals and societies. It tends toward the establishment of true international order.

¹ Cf. GS 24 # 3.

² Cf. GS 25 # 1.

³ Cf. Lk 19:13, 15.

⁴ GS 25 # 1.

⁵ John XXIII, MM 60.

⁶ Cf. GS 25 # 2; CA 12.

⁷ CA 48 # 4; cf. Pius XI, Quadragesimo anno I, 184-186.

II. Conversion and Society

1886 Society is essential to the fulfillment of the human vocation. To attain this aim, respect must be accorded to the just hierarchy of values, which "subordinates physical and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones:"⁸

Human society must primarily be considered something pertaining to the spiritual. Through it, in the bright light of truth, men should share their knowledge, be able to exercise their rights and fulfill their obligations, be inspired to seek spiritual values; mutually derive genuine pleasure from the beautiful, of whatever order it be; always be readily disposed to pass on to others the best of their own cultural heritage; and eagerly strive to make their own the spiritual achievements of others. These benefits not only influence, but at the same time give aim and scope to all that has bearing on cultural expressions, economic, and social institutions, political movements

and forms, laws, and all other structures by which society is outwardly established and constantly developed.⁹

1887 The inversion of means and ends,¹⁰ which results in giving the value of ultimate end to what is only a means for attaining it, or in viewing persons as mere means to that end, engenders unjust structures which "make Christian conduct in keeping with the commandments of the divine Law-giver difficult and almost impossible."¹¹

1888 It is necessary, then, to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the human person and to the permanent need for his inner conversion, so as to obtain social changes that will really serve him. the acknowledged priority of the conversion of heart in no way eliminates but on the contrary imposes the obligation of bringing the appropriate remedies to institutions and living conditions when they are an inducement to sin, so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it.¹²

1889 Without the help of grace, men would not know how "to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil, and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil only makes it worse."¹³ This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Charity inspires a life of self-giving: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it."¹⁴

⁸ CA 36 # 2.

⁹ John XXIII, PT 36.

¹⁰ Cf. CA 41.

¹¹ Pius XII, Address at Pentecost, June 1, 1941.

¹² Cf. LG 36.

¹³ CA 25.

¹⁴ Lk 17:33.

IN BRIEF

1890 There is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men ought to establish among themselves.

1891 The human person needs life in society in order to develop in accordance with his nature. Certain societies, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to the nature of man.

1892 "The human person . . . is and ought to be the principle, the subject, and the object of every social organization" (GS 25 # 1).

1893 Widespread participation in voluntary associations and institutions is to be encouraged.

1894 In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, neither the state nor any larger society should substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies.

1895 Society ought to promote the exercise of virtue, not obstruct it. It should be animated by a just hierarchy of values.

1896 Where sin has perverted the social climate, it is necessary to call for the conversion of hearts and appeal to the grace of God. Charity urges just reforms. There is no solution to the social question apart from the Gospel (cf CA 3, 5).

Article 2

PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL LIFE

I. Authority

1897 "Human society can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous unless it has some people invested with legitimate authority to preserve its institutions and to devote themselves as far as is necessary to work and care for the good of all."¹⁵ By "authority" one means the quality by virtue of which persons or institutions make laws and give orders to men and expect obedience from them.

1898 Every human community needs an authority to govern it.¹⁶ The foundation of such authority lies in human nature. It is necessary for the unity of the state. Its role is to ensure as far as possible the common good of the society.

1899 The authority required by the moral order derives from God: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."¹⁷

1900 The duty of obedience requires all to give due honor to authority and to treat those who are charged to exercise it with respect, and, insofar as it is deserved, with gratitude and good-will.

Pope St. Clement of Rome provides the Church's most ancient prayer for political authorities:¹⁸ "Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord, and stability, so that they may exercise without offense the sovereignty that you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honor, and power over the things of earth to the sons of men. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given to them, they may find favor with you."¹⁹

1901 If authority belongs to the order established by God, "the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free decision of the citizens."²⁰

The diversity of political regimes is morally acceptable, provided they serve the legitimate good of the communities that adopt them. Regimes whose nature is contrary to the natural law, to the public order, and to the fundamental rights of persons cannot achieve the common good of the nations on which they have been imposed.

1902 Authority does not derive its moral legitimacy from itself. It must not behave in a despotic manner, but must act for the common good as a "moral force based on freedom and a sense of responsibility":²¹

A human law has the character of law to the extent that it accords with right reason, and thus derives from the eternal law. Insofar as it falls short of right reason it is said to be an unjust law, and thus has not so much the nature of law as of a kind of violence.²²

1903 Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it. If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience. In such a case, "authority breaks down completely and results in shameful abuse."²³

1904 "It is preferable that each power be balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it within proper bounds. This is the principle of the 'rule of law,' in which the law is sovereign and not the arbitrary will of men."

¹⁵ John XXIII, PT 46.

¹⁶ Cf. Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*; *Diuturnum illud*.

¹⁷ Rom 13:1-2; cf. 1 Pet 2:13-17.

¹⁸ Cf. as early as 1 Tim 2:1-2.

¹⁹ St. Clement of Rome, *Ad Cor.* 61: SCh 167,198-

200.

²⁰ GS 74 # 3.

²¹ GS 74 # 2.

²² St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh I-II*, 93, 3, ad 2.

²³ John XXIII PT 51.

II. The Common Good

1905 In keeping with the social nature of man, the good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good, which in turn can be defined only in reference to the human person:

Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together.²⁵

1906 By common good is to be understood "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment

more fully and more easily."²⁶ The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority. It consists of three essential elements:

1907 First, the common good presupposes respect for the person as such. In the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Society should permit each of its members to fulfill his vocation. In particular, the common good resides in the conditions for the exercise of the natural freedoms indispensable for the development of the human vocation, such as "the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience and to safeguard . . . privacy, and rightful freedom also in matters of religion."²⁷

1908 Second, the common good requires the social well-being and development of the group itself. Development is the epitome of all social duties. Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on.²⁸

1909 Finally, the common good requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defence.

1910 Each human community possesses a common good which permits it to be recognized as such; it is in the political community that its most complete realization is found. It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies.

1911 Human interdependence is increasing and gradually spreading throughout the world. the unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy equal natural dignity, implies a universal common good. This good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to "provide for the different needs of men; this will involve the sphere of social life to which belong questions of food, hygiene, education, . . . and certain situations arising here and there, as for example . . . alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world, and assisting migrants and their families."²⁹

1912 The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: "The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around."³⁰ This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love

[25](#) Ep. Barnabae, 4,10: PG 2, 734.

[26](#) GS 26 # 1; cf. GS 74 # 1.

[27](#) GS 26 # 2.

[28](#) Cf. GS 26 # 2.

[29](#) GS 84 # 2.

[30](#) GS 26 # 3.

III. Responsibility and Participation

1913 "Participation" is the voluntary and generous engagement of a person in social interchange. It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person.

1914 Participation is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society.^{[31](#)}

1915 As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life. the manner of this participation may vary from one country or culture to another. "One must pay tribute to those nations whose systems permit the largest possible number of the citizens to take part in public life in a climate of genuine freedom."^{[32](#)}

1916 As with any ethical obligation, the participation of all in realizing the common good calls for a continually renewed conversion of the social partners. Fraud and other subterfuges, by which some people evade the constraints of the law and the prescriptions of societal obligation, must be firmly condemned because they are incompatible with the requirements of justice. Much care should be taken to promote institutions that improve the conditions of human life.^{[33](#)}

1917 It is incumbent on those who exercise authority to strengthen the values that inspire the confidence of the members of the group and encourage them to put themselves at the service of others. Participation begins with education and culture. "One is entitled to think that the future of humanity is in the hands of those who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and optimism."^{[34](#)}

[31](#) Cf. CA 43.

[32](#) GS 31 # 3.

[33](#) Cf. GS 30 # 1.

[34](#) GS 31 # 3.

IN BRIEF

1918 *"There is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13:1).*

1919 *Every human community needs an authority in order to endure and develop.*

1920 "The political community and public authority are based on human nature and therefore . . . belong to an order established by God" (GS 74 # 3).

1921 Authority is exercised legitimately if it is committed to the common good of society. To attain this it must employ morally acceptable means.

1922 The diversity of political regimes is legitimate, provided they contribute to the good of the community.

1923 Political authority must be exercised within the limits of the moral order and must guarantee the conditions for the exercise of freedom.

1924 The common good comprises "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (GS 26 1).

1925 The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members.

1926 The dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good. Everyone should be concerned to create and support institutions that improve the conditions of human life.

1927 It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society. the common good of the whole human family calls for an organization of society on the international level.

Article 3

SOCIAL JUSTICE

1928 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.

I. Respect For the Human Person

1929 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 defense 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.³⁵

1930 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.³⁵ 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.

1931 Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity."³⁷ 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 behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a "neighbor," a brother.

1932 The duty of making oneself a neighbor 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."³⁸

1933 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 offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies.³⁹ 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.

³⁵ John Paul II, SRS 47.

³⁶ Cf. John XXIII, PT 65.

³⁷ GS 27 # 1.

³⁸ Mt 25:40.

³⁹ Cf. Mt 5:43-44.

II. Equality and Differences Among Men

1934 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.

1935 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, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.⁴⁰

1936 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.⁴¹ The "talents" are not distributed equally.⁴²

1937 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.⁴³

1938 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.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ GS 29 # 2.

⁴¹ Cf. GS 29 # 2.

⁴² Cf. Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:27.

⁴³ St. Catherine of Siena, Dial. I, 7.

⁴⁴ CS 29 # 3.

III. Human Solidarity

1939 The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of "friendship" or "social charity," is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood.⁴⁵

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."⁴⁶

1940 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.

1941 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.

1942 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":⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, SRS 38 40; CA 10.

⁴⁶ Pius XII, *Summi pontificatus*, October 20, 1939; AAS 31 (1939) 423 ff.

⁴⁷ Mt 6:33.

⁴⁸ Pius XII, Discourse, June 1, 1941.

IN BRIEF

1943 Society ensures social justice by providing the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain their due.

1944 Respect for the human person considers the other "another self." It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person.

1945 The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.

1946 The differences among persons belong to God's plan, who wills that we should need one another. These differences should encourage charity.

1947 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.

1948 Solidarity is an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones.