

CAN CST PRINCIPALS BE DISTORTED? (Left leaning Catholics do)

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) addresses issues like poverty, workers' rights, the role of the state, private property, and the common good. It emphasizes principles such as human dignity¹, subsidiarity², solidarity³, and preferential option for the poor⁴, while rejecting socialism and critiquing unchecked capitalism.

The Catholic Church has historically condemned socialism in its official teachings, viewing it as incompatible with core Christian values. Popes from Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum*) onward have argued that socialism almost always promotes atheism, abolishes private property, violates subsidiarity by centralizing power in the state, and subordinating individuals to oppressive collectivism⁵.

For instance, Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) declared socialism irreconcilable with Church teachings, even in moderate forms, due to its flawed concept of society.

Pope John Paul II echoed this in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), critiquing socialism's anthropological errors and praising market economies when oriented toward human dignity.

However, CST's emphasis on social justice, wealth redistribution for the common good, support for unions, and state intervention to protect the vulnerable has led to perverting it as socialism.

Many left-leaning Catholics interpret these elements as aligning with democratic socialism or social democratic policies, arguing that CST's radical egalitarianism critiques capitalism and calls for systemic changes like employee ownership and welfare provisions.

They claim that the Church's condemnation of socialism targets extreme, atheistic forms of socialism (like Marxism) rather than all redistributive systems.

These interpretations, however, distort CST to advance their socialist agendas. Equating CST's call for charity and solidarity with state-mandated socialism ignores the Church's defense of private property, subsidiarity, and warnings against collectivism.

For example, observe modern political rhetoric—such as demands that government must “guarantee dignity” through extensive intervention—twists CST into a justification for socialism.

Most significantly communism or socialism “hijacks” CST's compassion for the poor while rejecting its theological foundations which is that every human person, created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), possesses inherent, sacred, and inviolable dignity. That is the foundation of a moral vision for society and demands respect and protection for every human life—including the unborn.

Prominent Catholic commentators like Bishop Robert Barron have publicly stated that CST condemns socialism outright while embracing market economies⁶.

In summary, while official CST explicitly rejects socialism, some Catholics on the left selectively emphasize its social justice aspects to promote socialist-like policies, which has to be seen as a distortion.

- 1 Dignity of the human person:** The foundational principle of Catholic social teaching that every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, possesses inherent, sacred, and inviolable dignity. This is the foundation of a moral vision for society and demands respect and protection for every human life.
- 2 Subsidiarity:** The principle that decisions and responsibilities should be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralized competent authority possible. Higher levels intervene only when necessary.
- 3 Solidarity:** The principle that we are one human family—interconnected regardless of differences—calling for mutual support, collective responsibility, and a firm commitment to the common good, justice, and peace for all.
- 4 Preferential option for the poor:** A core principle in Catholic Social Teaching that calls for prioritizing the needs, dignity, and well-being of the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized in society. Rooted in Scripture (Matthew 25:31-46) and papal encyclicals like *Rerum Novarum* and *Laudato Si'*, it urges individuals, communities, and institutions to make decisions and policies that favor those in poverty, ensuring justice, solidarity, and the common good over self-interest wealth accumulation.
- 5 Collectivism:** A social, political, and economic principle emphasizing the priority of group goals, collective ownership, and community welfare over individual rights and interests.
- 6 Market economy:** An economic system where the production, distribution, and pricing of goods and services are primarily determined by the interactions of buyers and sellers in competitive markets, guided by supply and demand rather than government control.