

**“Social Justice: The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching”**  
**A Course for Deacon Aspirants**  
**Pontifical College Josephinum**

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Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has been referred to as the Church’s “best kept secret.” The purpose of this course is to introduce the basic principles of this teaching, its place within Catholic doctrine, and the principle of social justice as a central component of CST. Catholics in recent years have had considerable difficulty reconciling their faith, including the explicit teachings of CST, with the political choices offered in American politics. This course will consider Catholic Social Teaching’s relation to contemporary American ideologies. It will examine the policy implications of CST for various "hot" topics related to social justice. The course is designed for the Aspirancy Year of deacon formation as a core intellectual formation component. However, any deacon candidate, deacon, or colleague in ministry may find this introduction useful for his ongoing formation in Catholic teaching.

**Course Objectives**

At the conclusion of this course, aspirants will have the ability to:

- Identify and explain the 7 themes of Catholic Social Teaching
- Describe the centrality of justice to these themes
- Describe the location of CST within Catholic theology
- Demonstrate the ability to find CST within key Church documents
- Describe how CST differs from political, social, and economic ideologies
- Distinguish the works of charity from the works of social justice
- Apply the principle of social justice to selected political, social & economic controversies

**Required Texts**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Documents of Vatican II

*Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Liberty)

*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love)

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel)

*Note: In general, it is better to read the assignment for each week BEFORE listening to the week’s lecture.*

## Course Outline

### *Week One: Moral Theology and Catholic Social Teaching*

The human person is at the center of Scripture and of Catholic teaching. For biblical religion and for Catholicism, the human person is always a person in relationship – with God, family, community, and specific social circles (friendships, employment, and so forth). CST describes of Catholic doctrine regarding the person in political, social, and economic relationships.

#### *Week One Objective:*

- Describe the location of CST within Catholic theology

#### *Reading Assignment and Individual Report:*

*Gaudium et Spes*, Part I, §§1-45  
CCC, §§1699-1748

#### *Group Assignment: Conference Call*

### *Week Two: Principles of CST*

What is the origin of CST? What are the components of CST? Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Social Doctrine. Charity and Justice.

#### *Week Two Objectives*

- Identify and explain the 7 themes of Catholic Social Teaching
- Describe the centrality of justice to these themes
- Ability to distinguish the works of charity from the works of social justice

#### *Reading Assignment and Individual Report:*

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, all

#### *Group Assignment: Forum Question/Discussion Topic*

### *Week Three: Catholic Social Doctrine (CSD) and the Ideologies of our Time*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and CSD. Ideology and CSD. The Church and Freedom. Social Justice and Life Issues

#### *Week Three Objectives*

- Demonstrate the ability to find CSD within key Church documents
- Describe how CSD differs from political, social, and economic ideologies
- Describe Church teaching on religious freedom

#### *Reading Assignment and Individual Report:*

CCC, §§1877-1960, 2234-2330  
*Dignitatis Humanae*, all

#### *Group Assignment: Conference Call*

Week Four: Poverty, Inequality, and Economic Justice

CSD principles and poverty; inequality of income and wealth; Poverty: causes and responses

- \* Government responsibility
- \* Family and Individual responsibility
- \* Church responsibility

*Week Four Objective*

- Apply the principle of social justice & other CSD principles to poverty, inequality, and economic controversies

*Reading Assignment and Individual Report:*

*Gaudium et Spes*, §§63-76

CCC, §§2401-2463

*Group Assignment: Forum Question/Discussion Topic*

Week Five: Global Social Justice; Immigration

CSD principles and the global economy; justice across national boundaries; CSD and immigration debates

*Week Five Objective*

- Apply the principle of social justice to international & immigration controversies

*Reading Assignment and Individual Report:*

*Gaudium et Spes*, §§77-93

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§50-75, 176-258

*Group Assignment: Conference Call*

Week Six: The Deacon's Role in Social Justice

What responsibility does the deacon, as an ordained clergyman in the Catholic Church have for teaching and living CSD? What opportunities in the parish and the diocese are there to teach and live this component of Church doctrine?

*Week Six Objective*

- Apply the principle of social justice to diaconal life and ministry

*Final Individual Assignment:*

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§76-109

*Group Assignment: Forum Question/Discussion Topic*

### **Final Examination:**

- What responsibility does the deacon, as an ordained clergyman in the Catholic Church, have for teaching and living CSD? What opportunities in the parish and the diocese are there for YOU to teach and live this component of Church life?
- If Catholic Social Doctrine is the primary responsibility of the laity, how are clergy (*especially deacons*) to relate to this responsibility?
- How are YOU experiencing the Church's call to engage in charity and justice?

### **Grading of Participation in Conference Calls and Discussion Forums:**

Participation is important for the sake of other members of the class as well as the individual. The class is not simply a group of individuals but a unit in which mutual assistance in learning is necessary. As a seminar, learning in this course must come from the knowledge, experience, and questions of ALL participants.

Although a class participation grade is more impressionistic than grading a test or a paper, it performs a critical evaluative function. Class participation grades measure performance every day.

Grades will be on the following scale:

A = always participates in discussions and conversations; always demonstrates evidence of having done the required reading; asks thoughtful questions concerning reading and lectures; demonstrates open and fair mindedness; respects the materials and questions of others; shows serious interest in the material; demonstrates ability to reason carefully and to grasp logical argument and errors; is not afraid to demonstrate what he/she does not understand by asking questions; enjoys friendly, intellectual combat; does not attempt to dominate discussion.

B = frequent participation in discussions and conversations; frequently demonstrates evidence of having done the required reading; doesn't usually ask questions but is usually able to respond thoughtfully to questions; demonstrates open and fair mindedness; respects the materials and questions of others; shows serious interest in the material; demonstrates good ability to answer straight forward questions, but less ability to reason carefully and to handle logical argument and detect logical errors.

C = participates little; has not shown evidence of having done the required readings; displays average interest in the material; demonstrates average ability to reason verbally.

D = irregular participation.

F = no participation in online calls and discussion forums.

## **Grading of Individual writing Assignments**

All written assignments will be graded as follows:

A = An excellent essay or paper; the organization is tight; the argument is carefully controlled; the facts are correct and appropriate to the thesis of the assignment; it exhibits unusual resourcefulness, insight, imagination, and sophistication. Such an essay can also see problems in materials; can articulate assumptions underlying arguments; and can state themes from their beginning to their conclusion. It is written in clear sentences, in readable standard English, with paragraphs organized to express coherent thought, using the correct words to say precisely what is meant; avoids vagueness and lack of clarity. A very good essay plus “pizzazz.”

B = A paper that is good to very good; it is well organized, factually correct, solidly documented, and thoughtfully argued; a solid piece of work. Such an essay shows knowledge of the materials, but does not show the connection between parts of the materials/or see the problems with the materials, at least not very clearly. It does not state the assumptions underlying the materials and/or does not trace themes from their beginning to their conclusion. This kind of essay is written in clear sentences and readable thought; mostly avoids vagueness and lack of clarity.

C = An adequate paper; the argument is somewhat routinely conceived; the organization is unwieldy or major points are omitted; some facts may be incorrect or inappropriate to the materials; but the paper covers the main points adequately. Such an essay faithfully repeats the points made by the readings or lectures, but shows little understanding of them beyond repetition. It sometimes uses unclear or incorrect terminology, and its paragraphs are not as clearly organized as possible.

D = A poor paper; badly organized; many facts are incorrect or inappropriate, or appropriate facts are missing; little self-consciousness about the point being made. Such an essay does not write clear sentences in readable standard English and/or does not organize coherent paragraphs and uses words imprecisely.

F = A paper which is not for this class, which answers a question that wasn't asked, or which is a half-hearted act of desperation. To receive an "F" a student must show little knowledge of the readings and discussions.

## Resources for Catholic Social Doctrine

### Recent Papal Encyclicals

John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987)  
John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991)  
John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995)  
Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2006)  
Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009)  
Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)

### Vatican II Documents

*Gaudium et Spes*  
*Lumen Gentium*  
*Dignitatis Humanae*

### Vatican Statement

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004)

### U.S. Bishops' Statements

*The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (1983)  
*A Good Friday Appeal to End the Death Penalty* (1999)  
*Putting Children and Families First* (1992)  
*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (2011)  
*Economic Justice for All* (1986)  
*A Decade after Economic Justice for All* (1996)  
*Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics* (1998)  
*Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice* (1998)  
*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (2000)

### Books

Benested, J. Brian, *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine* (Catholic University of America Press, 2011)  
Charles, Rodger, S.J., *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (Ignatius Press, 1999)  
Clark, Meghan J., *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights* (Fortress Press, 2014)  
Cochran, Clarke E. and David Carroll Cochran, *Catholics, Politics, and Public Policy: Beyond Left and Right* (Orbis Press, 2003)  
Cochran, Clarke E. and David Carroll Cochran, *The Catholic Vote: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Orbis, 2008)

- Heyer, Kristin E., *Prophetic and Public: The Social Witness of U.S. Catholicism* (Georgetown University Press, 2006)
- Himes, Kenneth R., OFM, *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paulist Press, 2013)
- Massaro, Thomas, S.J., *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011)
- Massaro, Thomas, S.J., and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *American Catholic Social Teaching* (Liturgical Press, 2002)
- Mich, Marvin L. Krier, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1998)

### Some Helpful Websites

- U.S. Catholic Bishops <http://www.usccb.org/>
- Catholic Social Thought Page [www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/cst.html](http://www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/cst.html)
- Livesimply organization's Catholic Social Teaching Online <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/>
- Center of Concern's Education for Justice Project <http://www.educationforjustice.org/>
- Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Office for Social Justice's Document Collection <http://www.osjspm.org/page.aspx?pid=491>
- Theology Library at Spring Hill College -- sections on Catholic social teaching generally and on specific issues <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/>
- America (Jesuit weekly magazine) [www.americamagazine.org](http://www.americamagazine.org)
- Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good (liberal) [www.catholicsinalliance.org](http://www.catholicsinalliance.org)
- Commonweal magazine blog (liberal) [www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog](http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog)
- Network (liberal) [www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org)
- First Things (conservative; ecumenical but Catholic foundations) [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)
- Catholic Answers (conservative) <http://www.catholic.com/>