

Contribution by FCAPP USA Group

An Urgent Message for Today's World: Can Catholic Social Teaching be spread even without the Christian Faith?

Lack of respect for human life at its beginning and end, human trafficking, wages that are insufficient to support a family, financial scandals and improprieties, abusive working conditions; all these and more are all too common facets of our modern world. A brief glimpse through most any newspaper reveals many articles that depict situations that cry out for the need for Catholic Social Teaching. However, many Christian leaders as well as laity are not well-versed or well-formed in CST. As our founder Saint Pope John Paul II noted, Catholic Social Teaching is perhaps the best kept secret in the Catholic Church. And so we are called to bring this doctrine to the attention of humanity.

Furthermore, not all business, professional, academic, and political leaders are Christian. Much of the world's economy and business is directed by multi-cultural and secular leadership. Additionally, many governments strictly dissociate themselves from any religious teachings lest they be accused of promoting a particular religion. At the other extreme are theocratic regimes exemplified primarily by Islamic states.

Posing a further challenge is the automatic resistance that some people will place towards any teaching labeled as Christian, especially Catholic. This is especially a problem in the United States. Even though the country and its laws were founded on Judeo-Christian principles, the concept of separation of religion from state has become so extreme that any principle or doctrine that is identified with a religious origin seems to be rejected outright.

But the principles of Catholic Social Teaching are really catholic in the broadest sense, meaning universal. Furthermore, these tenets may not be exclusively Catholic, that is to say, the same principles can be found in the doctrine of other religions. Cardinal McCarrick has shared his experience of presenting CST to an Asian Islamic group. After his talk, some of the hosts expressed their familiarity with these same principles as part of the social doctrine of their own faith as well.

In addressing other religious backgrounds, it is also imperative that we recognize the valid and proper representatives of these religions. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by fanatics who claim to be acting in the name of their religion but instead use it to advance their own goals. This is especially true of current Islam, which unfortunately is all too often tainted by the horrific violence perpetrated by modern-day extremists.

With regards to social doctrine, the tenets of the major religions have much in common. , Love of God and love of neighbor, forgiveness, charity, respect, compassion for the poor; these are all themes present in most religions. The Ten Commandments are explicitly part of Christianity and Judaism, and they also apply to other faiths as well. We must try to focus on the commonalities.

When presenting CST, we must also be careful to not appear overbearing or paternalistic which could be perceived as disrespectful of other religions. We also do not want to convey a sense of trying to take over another's religion; a non-Catholic might feel as if we are imposing a threat to their religious identity. Rather, we should adopt a fraternal approach that is free of any implied superiority, but rather emphasizes the commonality of our shared humanity. Intrinsic to this commonality are our CST principles: Dignity, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity.

For us as Christians, we must form ourselves with Jesus Christ. As Mahatma Gandhi once stated, "If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today." We have to display the message of the gospel in our own conduct. By our spirituality and humility, with our goal of being more like Christ, we can be an example to our brothers and sisters and serve as an inspiration for them to seek the light. The way we live our lives, inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, our mission of service and the actions we take are a vital way of preaching the Gospel. As we are told in the Book of James 2:26, "Faith without works is dead." As St. Francis of Assisi said "Always preach the Gospel; if necessary, use words."

In the gospel of John 14:6 we hear the words: 'Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.'" On the surface this seems to mean that only Christians will be able to spend eternity with the Father in heaven, but perhaps there is a broader meaning. Perhaps people of all faiths can be part of God's kingdom if they just act like Jesus, who was able to make peace by allowing himself to suffer even though he was innocent. He truly sacrificed for the common good. Furthermore, individuals, groups and countries could follow the ways of Christ by being quick to forgive, truly loving one another. Jesus perfectly demonstrates the Love and Mercy of our Heavenly Father.