

## **We The People: CST on the Common Good**

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### Notes/Outline:

#### Common Good

- Lead with Laudato Si' treatment of this principle: Chapter IV, Section IV (Reading/interpreting)
- Explain LS Ch. I Section V (esp. para. 49) on Global Inequality in our Common Home
- Ground these points in CST principles as developed by the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace in the Compendium on the Social Doctrine: emphasize Universal Destination of Goods (in terms of inequality) and Participation and Solidarity (in terms of democracy)
- Further develop the relationship between these principles as developed by Hollenbach, SJ: emphasizing problems of isolation (in its many forms) and tyranny (which generates exclusion, eliminates participation/solidarity, denies the excluded social goods, and relies on power/force to achieve objectives). Then discuss the need for deliberative democracy for the common good (being open to persuasion rather than staunchly refusing to change one's mind. Otherwise, we degrade political deliberations into something like economic bargaining. In such a case, I might add, businesspersons would prevail as politicians...)
- Turn briefly to Faithful Citizenship, articulating their views of their "preeminent priority" of abortion and the dissenting bishops concerns (see controversy over the inclusion of the full quote from para. 101 of Gaudete et Exsultate on the ideological error of relativizing social engagement so as to focus on one particular issue). I may also emphasize the basis of their logic in the JPII approved 2002 Doctrinal Note on Participation of Catholics in Public Life: para. 3-4.
- But even in that document, para 4, "The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine..." Likewise in Faithful Citizenship (per Fr. Topel's point), para. 42, "As Catholics we are not single-issue voters." Racist behavior is also intrinsically evil, alongside abortion and a voter in good conscience "may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support". The moral character of candidates is important for discerning voting choices. Indeed, the whole notion of the common good is deeply bound up with virtue ethics.
- Finally, my suggestion is that, given all the above complexities, the Catholic laity need to practice deliberative democracy amongst ourselves in discerning choices: bring about more common good in the Catholic Church rather than letting the Church get divided and polarized in alignment with political parties. Doing so could also help alleviate the current political crises because we are part of generating that crisis.

I could always skip or abridge the last few bullet points in the interests of time and save them for the Q&A. I won't get into Charles Curran's views unless pushed by a conservative on the abortion point. I might mention that the Compendium only discusses abortion in 3 paragraphs, and 1 of these deals with the moral acceptability of pro-life Catholic politicians supporting abortion laws: they "could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences..." Doctrinal Note para 4, Compendium para. 570.

(Btw, if you are wondering, why I am breaking down these quotes to such minute detail, this has to do with my training in the History of Philosophy and the Contemporary Continental European Tradition where we analyze and interpret texts in careful detail. This is part of the methodology I bring to my scholarship on CST).

#### Talk Transcript:

Thank you for inviting me to speak on this panel. I was asked to comment on what the Catholic Social Tradition (CST) teaches about the Common Good as we seek to form our consciences during this election season. In this talk, I'd like us to begin by thinking about what the common good means, starting with teachings of Pope Francis. CST evolves as Popes "read the signs of the times" so it makes sense to begin with where we are today with our current (wonderful Jesuit!) pope. The first handout I distributed from *Laudato Si'* contains relevant passages from *Laudato Si'* that I think you'll find it easiest to read rather than listen to being read. You may also like to take these home and think about them in your own time. (I do appreciate that given the climate crisis, we need to discern wisely about when we will use paper!) After considering how Pope Francis writes about the Common Good, especially in its relationship with Inequality, I'd like to turn to the larger body of CST with which these ideas exist in continuity. Drawing especially from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church generated by The Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace (which mainly concludes with the writings of Saint John Paul II), I will articulate the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and

explain their interconnection and interdependence. Then, I will turn to some writings on the Common Good in Christian Ethics by David Hollenbach, SJ. From his work, I will emphasize some of his thinking about deliberation in democracy as a counter to the problems tyranny and isolation. Finally, as time permits, I hope to turn briefly to the USCCB document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, and will discuss some challenges for conscientious Catholic voters that this document brings to the fore. You will find relevant quotes on the second handout provided. Ultimately, my recommendation in light of these challenges is for the Catholic laity to find creative avenues to bolster deliberations amongst ourselves so that devoted Catholics may bring about healing within the Church itself regarding political issues over which we have come to be divided. (Incidentally, I served on a panel about 8 years ago called “Devoted, but Divided” cosponsored by the ICTC.) The hope would be to bring about more common good within the Church, which given the Catholic influence on American politics, has a chance to reverberate in the broader polity. I offer this talk up as a service in the hopes many of us hold for healing in this time of political (and other) crises.

Let us begin with Pope Francis’ writings on the Common Good in *Laudato Si’*. A section is dedicated to the topic in Chapter Four, Integral Ecology, after Pope Francis has laid out the interlocking dimensions of ecology broadly conceived: environmental, economic, social, cultural, and daily life (human) ecologies. In para. 156, quoting the Vatican II document *Guadium et Spes*, On the Church in the Modern World, Francis offers the now classic and oft repeated definition: The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment”.<sup>[122]</sup> It’s worth noting the

emphasis on social groups here, as well as the notion of fulfillment for both individuals and social groups. There is a deep interconnection between the flourishing of the individual person who has human dignity and the flourishing of community. Humans flourish in social relations: families, communities, countries, the broader world, or as Francis calls it, the common home. In addition, the term “sum” should not be interpreted in a utilitarian or economic sense, because it is not about summing up privatized individual preferences, whatever they happen to be, or however they were formed.

Next, let us look at paragraph 157. Much of what I have just explained is captured here:

157. Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity. Outstanding among those groups is the family, as the basic cell of society.

Here, we see the emphasis in CST on human rights, the concept of integral human development (which was developed extensively by Bededict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*), the principle of subsidiarity, which encourages participation and decision making at local levels, and the emphasis on human persons living in families.

Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.

Here, we see a connection between peace and order (which I have found remarkable in many encyclicals: a scholarly topic I find intriguing because fecund in its implications).

Note also here Francis’ focus on the relationship between distributive justice and the common good. Distributive justice concerns equity in distribution of various resources:

economic and otherwise. Many advocates of social justice promote more equitable distributions to be administered in part by state apparatuses. Pope Francis here, following previous popes emphasizes a clear role for the state. Also, please note the connection Pope Francis draws not only between the common good and distributive justice but also between these concepts and peace. He warns that injustice at the level of distribution leads to violence. The relationship between an “economy of exclusion and inequality” and violence is one that he made quite powerfully in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Recall that his statements on economics drew broad criticism from American conservatives at the time. Around that time, the ICTC led a stimulating Faculty Summer Study Group in which we explored the connections between various economic structures and myriad forms of violence.

Finally, let us look at paragraph 158:

158. In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world’s goods, but, as I mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,<sup>[123]</sup> it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good.

Here, as with 157, Pope Francis builds on his ideas from *Evangelii Gaudium* and connects these points to key principles and values of CST. Here I note in particular: solidarity, a preferential option for the poor, and the universal destination of goods. In Chapter II of *Laudato Si’* on the Gospel of Creation, Section VI, he calls this last principle: The Common Destination of Goods. In that section, as elsewhere in his

writings, and in line with the tradition of CST, Pope Francis emphasizes how poverty and inequality undermine the common good. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis explores inequality and challenges to the common good by reframing ecology more broadly in terms of “care for our common home,” so issues of environmental degradation and climate change must be understood as tightly connected to those of poverty and inequality. A healthy environment is a common good, and our common home involves integrally caring for multiple domains that together foster the common good for everyone on the planet.

Indeed, at the very beginning of the encyclical, Pope Francis discusses Global Inequality amongst the many environmental problems we face in our common home. I will not read this quote out loud, but I invite you to read it yourself. I’d like to note his emphasis on exclusion in discussing poverty.

Now, briefly, let me turn to the *Compendium* and provide a brief rundown of their framing of CST. Before discussing the principles of CST, the *Compendium* devotes considerable time to discussing the Human Person and Human Rights, emphasizing the personalist philosophy of the Church (a person is a someone, not a something, a being made in the image of God) as well as the variety of dimensions of personhood. Human Dignity is a foundational principle of CST and infuses all the other principles. The *Compendium* states that the other principles of CST boil down to 3: the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity. They state that several of these principles contain related principles. They refer to the principle of the universal destination of goods as a principle whose “significance” becomes apparent as one of the “numerous implications of the common good” (para. 171). This principle means that the goods of creation were

intended to be shared by everyone, that even economic goods have an “origin” and “purpose” for all humanity that “exclusion” and “exploitation” violate (174). Humans have rights to the “common use of goods” (172) because the ultimate source and meaning of goods is God (171), and even property rights and must be “subordinated” to this principle (172). This principle is tightly connected to the “preferential option for the poor”. Another key principle of CST, participation (in community life: cultural, economic, political, and social), is framed here as an implication of subsidiarity, and related with democracy. They discuss the importance of freedom and shared participation in democracy (hence our ICTC series on We The People), and strongly emphasize the connection to the principle of solidarity and the “need to encourage participation above all of the most disadvantaged” (189). The Church sees all of the principles of CST as having a “unity” and “interrelatedness” (162). So, in thinking about the common good as it intersects with the political sphere of communal life, we must consider the principles of human dignity, universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, participation, and solidarity. All of these principles need to be animated by the way of love (caritas/agape) and grounded in the fundamental values of truth, freedom, and justice (Compendium Chapter Four: VIII, VII) as they are applied to practice, discernment, and the formation of conscience. (All paragraphs cited from *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004.)

Now, what does a prominent Jesuit scholar of Christian Ethics say about the Common Good? I refer to a slightly older book that I bought at a Jesuit Justice Conference, which Fr. David Hollenbach signed with best wishes for my work for the common good. (I heartily received his best wishes as I prepared for this panel!) Much of

the book is dedicated to arguing for a need for a society formed around the values of liberalism and tolerance to incorporate concern for the common good in our collective decision-making. He draws from a variety of sources, including those of secular philosophers and sociologists. What interests me initially is his reference to research from 20 years ago that predicts a major crisis for the polity of the U.S. and hence the world due to various rifts developing in the middle class (Hollenbach, 2002, Chapter One). The significance of considering this earlier scholarship in responding to today's political crisis reminded me of a comment made by Fr. Romano Guardini in *The End of the Modern World*, composed just a few years after the second world war. In reflecting on the Nazi Zeit in Germany, he states: "Monstrosities of such conscious design do not emerge from the calculations of a few degenerate men or of small groups of men; they come from processes of agitation and poisoning which have been long at work" (Guardini, 1998, p. 86). Incidentally, Pope Francis is a big fan of Guardini and makes liberal use of this text in *Laudato Si'*.

Hollenbach goes on to argue that a variety of problems exist in society that liberalism with its central value of tolerance are insufficient to address. Among these, he focuses on globalization, environmental issues, poverty, social isolation, and what we now refer to as structural racism (Hollenbach 2002, Chapter Two). He calls for a public philosophy concerned with the sharing goods, drawing on writings by Michael Sandel (Ibid). Following, Charles Taylor, he then argues that a variety of values taken by liberalism to be individualistically understood, are actually common goods in nature. "Since cultures are shared, social realities, the good of a culture that supports freedom is a shared good. The freedom that results in such a culture is a shared good as well."



(Hollenbach 2002, p. 76). Even, “self-determination is participation in communal give-and-take... responding to and interacting with others” (Ibid, p. 77). Tolerance is likewise a shared good (p. 69). Hollenbach builds his arguments drawing on the works of Iris Murdoch, Hannah Arendt, and Martin Buber. He also develops them in relation to Catholic thinkers informed by CST, who view the person as finding fulfillment in community: “the common good of public life is a realization of the human capacity for intrinsically valuable relationships” (Ibid, p. 81).

As another part of his theoretical framework for thinking about a public philosophy oriented toward the common good, Hollenbach develops the notion of intellectual solidarity. Intellectual solidarity is needed in a pluralistic society in which we don’t already agree on a vision of the common good (because of religious and other differences). It is “intellectual work” to envision shared conceptions of the good for our life in common. Of the avenues he identifies for such intellectual solidarity, the ones I mention here are “deliberation, reciprocity, civility” and “dialogic universalism” (Hollenbach, 2002). The latter comes out of Vatican II in particular.

Hollenbach describes deliberative democracy as a process of “give-and-take” in democracy where people bring their worldviews to discussion, listen to others respectfully and allow their views to be “evaluated” and “transformed”. (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 143) It is “not government by unanimous consensus.” (Ibid, p. 144) Rather, “Real deliberation is based on the hope that greater mutual understanding and perhaps some new areas of agreement can emerge when human beings listen to each other attentively and speak to each other respectfully” (Ibid, p. 142). Hence, he thinks virtues

need to be cultivated, such as civility, as well as solidarity and reciprocity. Hollenbach points out that when this process turns into one where citizens approach politics with stances like “I want x” from which they refuse to budge, they are not engaged in deliberation. Instead, the political process gets degraded into a form of bargaining, something that would be more appropriate in the economic sphere. Under such a scenario, I might point out, that it would be wealthy businesspersons rather than civically minded politicians who would prevail as political leaders. Participation by everyone is important for this process. Isolation of peoples and communities harms deliberative democracy, which in turn generates further isolation. (Hollenbach, 2002).

Hollenbach considers “a democratic republic (itself to be) a shared good” (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 68). In contrast, tyranny could never bring about the common good by its very nature. Drawing from Aristotle and St. Aquinas, Hollenbach remarks that: “a tyrant is a ruler who uses governmental power for the ruler’s own private good or for the good of some faction, rather than for the good of all members of the community being governed. Tyranny, like war, makes it impossible for many to share in the life of society in a way that actualizes their potential both as persons and as contributing members of the community. A tyrannical regime treats those it oppresses as if they did not really belong to the society. The tyrant or tyrannical in-group claims the social good as its own fiefdom.” (Ibid, p. 68). Democracy instead requires inclusive participation, informed by solidarity, virtue, and respect for persons. We need to cultivate authentic deliberation in our polity for the health of democracy, and hence the common good.

Finally, let us turn briefly to some of the challenges facing Catholic voters as we form our consciences in discerning candidates in the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching on the common good. In the second handout, I bring to your attention a document that the USCCB issues to assist Catholics in voting during elections. The most current one was reissued from 2015 with a *New Introductory Letter*. If you read the Catholic news, you will discover that there was some controversy amongst the bishops about this letter, especially the paragraph excerpted from Pope Francis' *Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness*. Some bishops wanted the entire quote from para. 101 to be included in the letter, but they were ultimately outvoted. I include on the handout the first page of the *Bishops' Introductory Letter* with the abridged Pope Francis quote, along with the full quote and its context from the 2018 Exhortation. I encourage you to review these documents carefully in your own time. You can find the entirety of these documents online.

For our purposes, I point out that the USCCB identify abortion as their “preeminent priority”, and emphasize this teaching of the Church first in their 2015 letter. The order of this presentation and the reasoning put forth may be traced to the JPII Approved 2002 Doctrinal Note on Participation of Catholics in Public Life: para 3-4. But even in that document, para 4, “The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine...” Likewise in *Faithful Citizenship*, para. 42, “As Catholics we are not single-issue voters.” Racist behavior is also intrinsically evil, alongside abortion and a voter in good conscience “may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support”. The

moral character of candidates is important for discerning voting choices. Indeed, the whole notion of the common good is deeply bound up with virtue ethics.

My final suggestion, which emerged for me while deep in contemplation regarding these complexities, is that the Catholic laity need to practice deliberative democracy amongst ourselves in discerning choices. We need to bring about more common good in the Catholic Church rather than letting the Church get divided and polarized in alignment with political parties. The Catholic community itself (in the U.S. and elsewhere) needs to be able to heal from these divisions. Doing so could also help alleviate the current political crises because we are part of generating that crisis.

Thank you for your attention. Let me now hand this conversation off to Professor Jaycox and Fr. Topel to take us deeper into the realms of conscience and the common good.

## References

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