Glossary: Critical Concepts

JPIC 203 – Catholic Social Thought: Justice in a Global Context

Part 1: Unit 1

_Apostolic Letters:_ These are formal teaching documents from the pope. They do not give dogmatic or doctrinal pronouncements. Rather, they give the pope’s counsel regarding questions of doctrine in light of situations that have arisen somewhere in or throughout the world. They are not as authoritative as a papal encyclical, which would be meant more for settling a controversial social or theological question.

_Capitalism:_ An economic and political system that depends on and is shaped by the profits of private companies rather than the government.

_Catholic Social Teaching (CST):_ A body of work containing papal encyclicals, apostolic letters, Vatican office and commission statements, global church council or synod statements, individual bishops’ pastoral letters, and the statements of regional groups of bishops or official episcopal conferences. These statements indicate an official stance of the Roman Catholic Church on a wide variety of issues affecting both our global and local communities.

_Catholic Social Thought:_ A body of work that encompasses the works of Catholic scholars and practitioners reflecting on CST, applying it, expanding it, and contributing to shaping it.

_Charity:_ Efforts to meet people’s immediate requirements for basic needs like shelter or food. Charity will always be necessary because emergencies – whether fires, floods, sudden illnesses, or urgent disasters – will always be a part of human life. Examples of charity include monetary donations to individuals or organizations, working to distribute food at a soup kitchen or food pantry, and running a homeless shelter.

_Episcopal Conferences:_ Groups of bishops gathered according to geographical region. These conferences play particular roles and have a certain authority over the region defined by the conference. This authority is not over and against the authority of any individual bishop in their own diocese.

_Feudalism:_ An economic and political system in which nobles have land and authority granted to them by a sovereign ruler in exchange for service and loyalty. The working class living within the land, which belongs to a noble, work the noble’s land, giving a tithe to the noble in exchange for protection.

_Human Dignity:_ In Christian theology, this refers to the value imbued in every human person by nature of their being creatures of God. It demands that every person be valued, respected and treated ethically.
Social Justice: Values that dispose people to identify and correct the root causes of social injustice. Social justice seeks complex, long-term solutions to the social problems. Ideally, justice moves us toward a world where charity is less often necessary. Examples of social justice efforts include: affirmative action programs, and skill development and job readiness programs.

Natural Law: An ethical methodology based on the idea that God has structured the universe with certain purposes in mind. Human beings can discern God’s will/purposes through careful observation of and reflection upon nature using reason. In CST, natural law is used largely to encourage an ethic that the Church teaches will support and promote human life, dignity, and flourishing.

Papal Encyclicals: Authoritative documents promulgated by popes. They are letters addressed to bishops, Catholics in general, and at times “all people of goodwill.” They deal with theological and social issues of significance, and they carry a high level of authority.

Signs of the Times: Happenings in the world, whether social, economic, cultural, or political, which the Church must observe and learn from. Their implications direct the Church’s mission.
Part 1: Unit 2

**Social Sin**: Sinfulness embedded in and arising from distorted cultural, economic, political, and social structures and institutions.

**Thomas Merton (1915-68)**: A Trappist Monk of the Kentucky Abbey of Gethsemani. His writings spanned from poetry to letters, short stories, autobiographies, and spiritual works. He became an influential intellectual force among academics and popular Catholicism in the U.S.

**Confessional**: The place, usually in a chapel, where a priest hears confessions during the sacrament of reconciliation.

**Penances**: Acts assigned to purify the penitent for sins. Its intention is to remove a barrier in the relationship between the penitent and God.

**Second Vatican Council (1962-5)**: The 21st ecumenical council, or gathering of the bishops from throughout the world to address questions that pertained to and were to be received by the whole church. The Council was marked by how the world’s bishops worked with their theological advisors and each other, using the tools of the Church’s past to encounter the questions facing the Church in the present.
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Part 2: Unit 4

Syllabus of Errors: A document promulgated by Pope Pius IX. It established a number of the Church’s positions through the condemnation of ideas associated with modernity, especially the secular philosophical and political movements of the time.

John Henry Newman, and Development of Doctrine (1801-90): Newman was an Anglican convert to Catholicism and a prominent 19th century Cardinal. He continues to be influential in Catholic intellectual thought. Newman believed that doctrines are not necessarily immediately clear and thus develop over the course of time with the application of reasons to established truths.

Nouvelle Théologie: A theological movement that dealt with social dimensions of the Catholic faith. It was based in a reinvestigation into the early sources of the Christian faith to address the questions of the present. It was in many ways a precursor to the Second Vatican Council.

Hierarchical Magisterium: This term refers to the specific kind of ecclesial teaching function and authority granted to the bishops of the Catholic Church as a college, or body of equals, with the pope as the head of that college. The term also functions as a proper name for that group.

Incarnation: In Christianity, God’s becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ.

Imago Dei: Literally, “image of God.” It refers to the doctrine that all people are created in the image and likeness of God.
Part 2: Unit 5

**Marxism**: A political philosophy that raises up the working class over and against the bourgeoisie, or dominant class. It is a response to negative aspects of capitalism and the class struggles that result.

**Common Good**: This refers to the shared good of a whole community, marked by shared public goods.
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Part 2: Unit 6

Catechism of the Catholic Church: A collection of official church teachings on myriad questions relating to faith, morality, and doctrine.

Virtues: Inclinations to behave in good and moderate ways, in accordance with reason. It is the opposite of vice.

Globalization: The phenomenon of global trade and interaction within the new technological age marked by increasing interdependence. It involves global connections between people, organizations, governments, and companies. Scholars debate the exact effects of this phenomenon, both positive and negative.

Social Security: Government monetary assistance to people unable to secure an adequate income because of their social situation
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Part 3: Unit 7

Cold War (1947-91): A post-Second World War conflict that arose between the two emerging super powers: the United States and the Soviet Union. It was ultimately a confrontation between a capitalist power and a communist power, one that influenced the shape of local military conflicts globally where this philosophical difference would become the crux of the fight between parties. Additionally, the Cold War included an arms race in which the two super powers sought to build greater, more powerful weapons.

Colonialism: This refers to the political control and often habitation by the citizens of a more powerful country over a less powerful one. This has largely been practiced by Western European and North American countries occupying nations in the global south, where they found and exploited the resources that drove the industrial revolution.

Cuban Missile Crisis: A specific confrontation in October 1962 when the Soviet Union deployed missiles to Cuba within range of the Southern U.S. coast. This escalated tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Enlightenment: A philosophical movement that dominated modern Europe from the late 17th through the 18th century. Its emphasis was on the importance of reason and the individual over dogma and tradition.

Gulag: The Soviet Union’s agency in charge of forced labor camps under Joseph Stalin during and after the Second World War.

Neo-colonialism: Political and economic manipulation of the governments of developing countries by more powerful countries in a post-colonial world.

Nikita Krushchev (1894-1971): Leader of the Soviet Union following Joseph Stalin and during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He pushed for the Soviet Union’s space program, made the Soviet Union less repressive, and strengthened the Soviet Union militarily.


Political liberalism: A political philosophy based on the notion of a fundamental equality and freedom of all persons. It is the foundation for the notion of universal human rights.
**Principle of Subsidiarity**: A tool in CST that suggests that social problems should be addressed and resolved at the lowest social level possible and the highest social level necessary.

**Smith’s “Invisible Hand”**: An image that tries to illustrate the notion that an individual’s self-interested actions, particularly in the economic realm, will redound positively upon the community as a whole. This image is often used to promote unregulated free market capitalism.

**Theory of Political Realism**: A political philosophy that urges governments to pursue their own self-interest and presume that other nations will also pursue their own self-interest.

**United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**: A United Nations’ declaration, following the Second World War, that expressed those rights to which all human beings are entitled.
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Part 3: Unit 8

**Just Peacemaking Theory**: A relatively newly developed theory that proposes ten practices meant to minimize violent conflict.

**Just War Theory**: A long-standing Christian tradition that places restraints on when to resort to and how to conduct warfare. The theory has been adopted into the secular sphere insofar as it serves as a foundation for international law on warfare.

**Pacifism**: In its most absolute form, the belief that violence and/or coercive force are never morally justifiable.
Anthropocentrism: The tendency to view human beings as the center of creation, or the most significant and superior species of creatures.

Biodiversity: The variety of living things.

Christology: A branch of Christian theology which studies Jesus Christ. Christology may explore the divinity of Jesus Christ, the humanity of Jesus Christ, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the implications of Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ for other branches of theology.

Dualism: In Christianity, a heretical belief that the world can be neatly divided into two parts: good and evil, light and darkness, spiritual and material. Dualism typically aligns goodness with immaterial reality, such as reason or the human soul, and evil with material reality from the human body to all other matter.

Ecosystems: A group of living organisms that are linked together in a food chain and process of energy exchange. In an ecosystem each organism has a part to play in the health of the overall health or well-being of the ecosystem.

Eschatology: A branch of Christian theology that studies Christian perspectives on death, eternal life, the resurrection of the body, and other Biblical teachings regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ, the end of the world, and the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Instrumental value: The significance of a person or thing based on its usefulness.

Intrinsic value: The significance of a person or thing in and of itself without reference to its usefulness.

Logos: In Greek, literally “the word.” In Christianity, Logos refers to the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. Christians believe the Logos becomes human in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.

St. Francis of Assisi: (1181-1226) The chosen patron of Pope Francis I. St. Francis of Assisi is known for his voluntary poverty and simplicity, and his capacity to see God in all creatures and creation. Founder of the Franciscan Order of Catholic priests.