JPIC 203 Catholic Social Thought: Justice in a Global Context
Anna Floerke Scheid

Part II, Unit 4 Micro-Lecture: “Pillars of Catholic Social Thought”

You are about to begin Part II of Catholic Social Thought: Justice in a Global Context. In the next three units of the course, you will be introduced to the foundational themes of CST: human dignity, the preferential option for the poor, and solidarity and the common good.

Human dignity emerges in Catholic social thought from the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. *Imago Dei* is Latin for “image of God,” and this doctrine expresses the Christian belief that all human beings are created by God, loved and valued by God, and called to relationship with God. The concept of human dignity grounds CST because it affirms the fundamental worth of all human beings. There is nothing a person can do, fail to do, or undergo that strips them of this fundamental worth. One potentially controversial way of thinking about this is to say that the tortured and the torturer are both loved and valued by God, and are therefore deserving of a basic level of respect due to all human persons.

The preferential option for the poor affirms that while all people are equal in worth and dignity, some are more vulnerable than others. The poor, because of their vulnerability, marginalization, and comparative powerlessness, must receive *more and special* consideration in social and political life. As a guiding maxim, the preferential option for the poor suggests that all decisions – whether one’s personal decisions or decisions made by private or government bodies – should be made in light of how they will affect the poorest and most vulnerable among us. And no decision should be made that harms the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

Finally, solidarity and the common good reflect the ways in which all human beings are interconnected and interdependent. Solidarity is a social virtue that turns our compassion for suffering into a commitment to act in ways that promote the common good. The common good refers not just to what is good for me, as an individual, or for my immediate family. Instead, it points to the good of whole neighborhoods, communities, nations, and ultimate the entire world.