

# CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 1<sup>ST</sup> OF 8

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 13

Since participation in political life is a moral obligation, Catholics need to form their conscience with the mind and heart of the Church on issues of consequence. This outline is the first of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This first outline will provide a framework to examine all the other issues effecting the human person by answering the question: what is Catholic Social Teaching?

## Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) “Is built on the foundation handed on by the apostles to the Fathers of the Church and then received and further explored by the great Christian doctors. It is attested to by the saints and by those who gave their lives for Christ.” Specifically, “It is an expression of the prophetic task of the supreme pontiffs to give apostolic guidance to the church of Christ and to discern the new demands of evangelization.” (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 12)

This prophetic teaching from the heart of the church, “Rests on the threefold cornerstone of human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity.” (Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 55) Along with the idea that we should search for the “common good” these are the preeminent themes of Catholic Social Teaching:

1. **Human Dignity:** Every human person conceived is made in the image and likeness of God and is thus deserving of fundamental rights and respect, including first and foremost, the right to life.
2. **Solidarity:** As Pope Francis has said we have a ‘common father’ and thus we all belong to one family. Being a part of one family we have a responsibility to care for one another.
3. **Subsidiarity:** The belief that problems are best handled at the level in which they arise. Subsidiarity then insists on limits to State’s intervention in the affairs of the family and society.

It is from the dignity of the human person that all of Catholic Social Teaching flows. Being made in God’s image and likeness, Catholic’s must defend the dignity of each human life especially when life is in its most vulnerable state. This is why in their 2020 introductory letter to “*Faithful Citizenship*” the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote:

*The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.* (<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-introductory-letter>)

Beyond the threat of abortion, Catholic Social Teaching communicates that the key to addressing issues of justice and the serious destruction of our society begins with the family. CST defines the family as “Founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny.” (Saint John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 39) Indeed, it is the family, “In which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person.” (CA, 39)

In summation, as we form our conscience, build a culture of life and love, and vote; it is imperative that we direct our minds and hearts, those whom we love, and those we encounter every day to the Church’s fruitful vision for the sanctity of life and the sacredness of the family. For it is from the family that “citizens come to birth” for the “development of society itself.” (Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42)

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