

ELECTION YEAR SPECIAL REPORT 2020 – 7TH 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 seventh of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This seventh outline will provide an overview of the issue of socialism.

Socialism

Pope John XXIII stated in *Mater et Magistra* (“On Christianity and Social Progress”) that “No Catholic could subscribe even to moderate socialism.” (Saint John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 34)

The Church believes that socialism is a grave threat to the social order. Socialism violates the third major principle of Catholic Social Teaching: subsidiarity, or the belief that problems are best handled at the level in which they arise. Subsidiarity insists on limits to States intervention in the affairs of the family and society. As St. John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*, Subsidiarity “insists on necessary limits to the State’s intervention... inasmuch as the individual, the family and society are prior to the state, and inasmuch as the State exists in order to protect their rights and not stifle them.” (Saint John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 11)

Socialism, on the other hand, puts ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange of wealth exercised through the government and its officials. This type of power should not reside in the State. As Pope Benedict has taught:

We do not need a state which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 28)

That much power in the hands of the State dispossesses individuals and families of their autonomy. As Pope Francis has commented: “No actual or established power has the right to deprive peoples of the full exercise of their sovereignty.” (Pope Francis, *Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Bolivia, 9 July 2015*)

Furthermore, socialism treats people as groups, not individuals, including denying man his natural law right to private property for the common good. Saint Pope John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus* (“The Hundredth Year”), wrote that this error is:

Anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. (Saint John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 12)

This is why every Supreme Pontiff, from Pius IX in 1849 through Pope Francis, has opposed socialism. Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (“On Reconstruction of the Social Order”), went so far as to say that socialism is “Irreconcilable with true Christianity,” and thus “No one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist.” (Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 120)

In summation, if socialism is called ‘democratic socialism’ or ‘Christian socialism’ it remains, socialism – something the Catholic Church has clearly and forcefully spoken against as it deprives the individual of personal responsibility and attributes power to the State which belong in the hands of families and communities. A Catholic when voting, at every turn, must reject socialism as a legitimate principle of change.

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