

A CST Guide to a More Just Future

By Jane Deren, Ph.D.

As people of faith who are called to hope, we can begin to imagine and plan for a better future even in this dark time. In a recent meditation, Pope Francis refers to “the breath of the Spirit that opens horizons, sparks creativity and renews [sister and] brotherhood and makes us say, ‘I’m present’ in the face of the enormous and urgent task that awaits us.”¹ Especially in these times, the Holy Spirit can “inspire us with a new

one is expendable, no lives should be worth less than others; we are called to give voice to this belief when anyone may be suggesting otherwise. Active concern and responsible behavior on all levels

that suggest otherwise must be challenged, again and again. CST’s **option for the poor** calls us to rethink all structures and systems, always asking how every policy, program, and/or legal initiative will

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imagination of what is possible,” prompting us “not to be closed in or manipulated by fixed or outmoded methods or decadent structures” and moving us to “make new things.”²

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) offers guidance as we ponder what kind of new world we wish and work for. At the center of CST is the concern for the **life and the dignity of the human person**, of all human persons. No

in our communities and in our world is primary. These traits will continue to be crucial to protect and support life as we choose to become more and more present to the human suffering of this pandemic and its aftermath.

The basic CST teaching on **economic justice** is crucial to building a new world: economies should exist to serve people—people do not exist to prop up economies. Any political decisions

impact, indirectly or directly, those in poverty, in the short and long term, in normal times and in times of great stress. As Francis urges, we need to discard “decadent structures” and creatively rethink systems that diminish rather than spark human flourishing for all members of the human family, especially those who have existed on the margins of society.³

REFLECTION

To practice **solidarity** and reduce the long-term economic and social inequalities based on race, class and ethnicity in this society, an understanding of the past is essential to build a more just future. Generations of African Americans have endured poverty, social stress, limited access to good health care, to education, to economic opportunities and decent housing; this past created the conditions for the high mortality rate of African Americans struck down by Coronavirus. (The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has concise background resources on the long history of discrimination in this country: see Backgrounders at bit.ly/35DZCP5)

Practicing solidarity with those at the margins challenges us to continuously push elected officials to make significant changes in systems that benefit just a few while so many do not have resources to live a life of dignity. The **common good**, another CST core principle, is never served when huge corporations benefit while small, local businesses struggle to survive; as citizens, we can demand that much better systems of business loans with rigorous oversight and just tax breaks be put into place. Doing our homework on these systems is a necessary part of good citizenship.

Workers' Rights have had a central place in modern Catholic Social Teaching since the Industrial Revolution, when Pope Leo XIII called attention to the plight of workers in the new factory system of production. The current situation in the U.S. reveals that many workers still do not have safe working condition along with just living wages, basic benefits, and job security, nor do they have safety nets such as wage subsidies. (See related EFJ article: [Migrant Workers' Rights and COVID-19](#)). Pope Francis has recently called for a universal basic wage as a way to ensure justice for workers in this era and beyond.

Among the basic **rights and responsibilities** that CST promotes is the right to healthcare; with so many workers losing their jobs, the current U.S. policy of tying healthcare to employment—which

no other developed country does—fails in a major health crisis. We are also witnessing the problems of for-profit medical care, including the uneven abilities of hospitals to handle the current pandemic. A major part of our responsibilities as citizens moving forward post-pandemic is to support an informed, creative discussion on health care alternatives.

Finally, our attention cannot be focused only on what is happening within our own borders. **Care for Creation** has demonstrated that only working as one human family can we begin to renew the sacred earth. Pope Francis reminds us that we are one interrelated, International community and that **authentic human development** that allows all humans to flourish, not merely survive, is still a universal goal for the Church's social teaching. Compassion for people in poor countries has to be nurtured as we face daunting concerns about their growing food insecurity as well as lack of basic health supports. (These are often connected to environmental problems--and solutions.) Today, here and now, Francis declares, is where we need to let the Spirit enter, to "break all the fatalism in which we have immersed ourselves."⁴ We need to return to God's world and work, to become the creative architects and the dynamic protagonists of a common future, responding as a community rooted in the Love that is expressed in Catholic Social Teaching.

Endnotes

¹ O'Connell, Gerard. "Pope Francis Shares His Vision for Covid-19 Aftermath." America Magazine, April 17, 2020. <https://www.americamagazine.org/fait/2020/04/17/pope-francis-shares-his-vision-covid-19-aftermath>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

REFLECTION

Reflection Questions

1. What is the “fatalism” Pope Francis refers to? How do we break out of it and move beyond it? What in our faith and who in our faith communities can help us move beyond negative fatalism?
2. We are challenged to “do our homework” and learn as much as we can about the unjust systems and structures in our society and the broader world. Why is this often a daunting task? How can we find ways to integrate ongoing learning on social issues into our regular lives? Who (including communities) can help us, motivate us, and support us?

fatalism: an idea or belief that events are fixed in advance so that human beings are powerless to change them.

Faith in Action

- Identify one issue you have become especially concerned about during this time, and identify others who are working on this issue. Set aside study time to focus on the issue, and seek out creative responses to transforming the systems and structures. Join with a group working for change; keep in touch with lawmakers and elected officials about creative ways to deal with the issue.

Prayer

Loving God, move us to love in concrete ways
As we seek a better future for all of your children.
Open our eyes to the values of social teaching of the Church;
give us the energy and the courage to reject fatalism.

Grant that we may be guided by Catholic Social Teaching
So we may be a part of creating
The systems and structures of grace
That will allow all human life to flourish.

Nurture hope in our hearts, guide us forward
And give us a sustaining vision
Of a renewed human community
In a renewed Creation.

Amen