



Catholic Social Teaching and the Jubilee Year of Hope

When Pope Francis designated 2025 as a Jubilee Year and gave it the theme of Hope, he did not know that he would be called home to the Father part way through the year, and that another would be chosen to care for the Church. The idea of Hope drew together many of the great themes of Francis's pontificate, especially mercy, justice, and God's unending love for all His Creation. The Jubilee of Hope also encapsulates many ideas in the Social Teaching of the Church, to which Pope Francis himself was an important contributor. Catholic Social Teaching inspires the work of CAFOD in its efforts to help all our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest.

Our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, chose for himself the name Leo partly to recall Pope Leo XIII, who led the church from 1878 to 1903, and is generally regarded as the father of modern Catholic Social Teaching.

What is Catholic Social Teaching (CST)?

Catholic Social Teaching is the official teaching of the Church on matters to do with the right ordering of society. Its fundamental principle is love. Its guiding idea is the dignity of each person and of all creation.

Core themes are the innate worth of all people, made in the image and likeness of God; the goodness of creation; peace and justice; bridge building and universal fraternity; and, as



POPE FRANCIS 1936–2025

‘Embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important.’

— Pope Francis, 2013

‘Sisters and brothers, especially those of you experiencing pain and sorrow, your silent cry has been heard and your tears have been counted; not one of them has been lost!... The resurrection of Jesus is indeed the basis of our hope. For in the light of this event, hope is no longer an illusion.’

—Pope Francis, Easter, 2025

was whispered by Cardinal Hummes to Pope Francis at his election, the need always to ‘remember the poor’.

What did Pope Leo XIII have to say, back in the nineteenth century?

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum*, ‘Of New Things’. Pope Leo XIII highlighted the principles necessary to bring about a just society: he was particularly concerned about poverty, exploitation, and poor working conditions in the industrial world, arguing for the protection of workers’ rights and for a just wage. His namesake Pope Leo XIV, speaking recently about a contemporary ‘New Thing’, Artificial Intelligence, has picked up on Leo XIII’s arguments about how such inventions and developments must enhance the good of all, not enslave and dehumanise some for the benefit of a few.

What have other Popes said through the twentieth century?

There have been many important statements of CST: here are just a few examples:

- In 1931, Pope Pius XI used his social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (‘In the Fortieth Year’) to condemn both fascism and communism. He also addressed child exploitation in the context of the Great Depression.
- After WW2, and following on from Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* (‘Peace on Earth’, 1963), Pope Paul VI in 1967 published *Populorum Progressio* (‘The Progress of Peoples’), in which he famously stated that ‘development is the new name for peace’ and went on to warn about the increasing risks of conflict when inequalities grow.
- Pope John Paul II made several very important contributions to CST, including an encyclical celebrating the centenary of Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, entitled *Centesimus Annus* (‘The Hundredth Year’, 1991). In this teaching, he condemned the excesses of capitalism, the ‘idolatry of the market’ and the ‘insanity of the arms race’.

Did Pope Benedict also contribute to CST?

Absolutely! For example, in 2009 he published the beautiful encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (‘Charity in Truth’, or a better translation would be ‘Love in Truth’). Here, Benedict XVI focused in detail on economic and social issues, including an attack on free-market fundamentalism, and stressed the need for a functioning society to be grounded in an ethic of love. Subjects discussed include hunger, the environment, migration, sexual tourism, bioethics, cultural relativism, global poverty, injustice and the arms race.

‘Love – *caritas* – is an extraordinary force that leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth.’

Caritas in Veritate

What about Pope Francis? The late Pope's interventions in CST were extraordinarily powerful, especially in the fields of social justice and environmentalism. Early in his pontificate, he published *Evangelii Gaudium* ('The Joy of the Gospel'), introducing many of the central themes of his teaching regarding the injustices embedded in contemporary life, while also stressing what became his repeated calls for Christians to be people of joy.



The 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* has been the piece of Catholic teaching that has had most influence on the world beyond the Church, as well as inspiring a wide range of new groups and activities among Catholics. In this work, Francis embeds his teaching on the environment in biblical theology and in the constant teaching of the Church on our responsibility, as Christians and as humans, to care for our common home. For Francis, ecology is not just a matter of the love of nature, but of social justice. It is the world's poorest who suffer worst from climate change and pollution, while having done least to cause it. The late Pope suggests (para. 217) that what is needed is 'an "ecological conversion", whereby the effects of [Christians'] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.'

'Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin.'

Laudato Si'

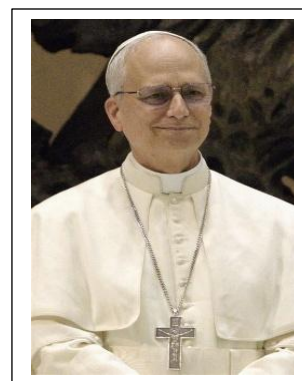
Closely linked to *Laudato Si'* is Pope Francis's 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* ('Brothers All': also a quotation from St Francis of Assisi), written partly in response to the Covid pandemic. In this work, Francis develops the *Laudato Si'* themes of 'Our Common Home' and the need for social justice, by promoting the universal relatedness ('fraternity') of all humanity.

'Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.'

Fratelli Tutti

What happens next?

We don't know precisely where Pope Leo XIV, led by the Holy Spirit, will take CST, but we can be sure that it will be in continuity with the teaching of his predecessors, and will be founded on the teachings of Christ Himself. In the short time since his election, our new Holy Father has already spoken out on the need to build bridges for ecological and social justice, and made specific interventions such as calling on aid to be allowed into Gaza and hostilities to end. (Source: Vatican news.) In a recent message to the Network of Universities for the Care of Our Common Home, Pope Leo XIV expressed his joy at the



Network's commitment to 'engaging in a synodal work of discernment in preparation for COP30'. He acknowledged the universities' efforts to reflect on 'a possible reconciliation between public debt and ecological debt' - a theme highlighted in the message released for World Day of Peace. (Source: Vatican news.)

How can I find out more?

The Vatican website publishes online all the teachings of the recent popes, all the way from Leo XIII to Leo XIV. You can find them at https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/index.htm. While the major documents, including the Encyclicals, are not exactly easy reading, they do repay careful study. Fortunately, various people have done a lot of the work of distilling their teaching. A good summary of the main documents of CST, along with lots of other resources, can be found at <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/about/catholic-social-thought> (we've used it in the production of this brief account). There's great stuff also on the Caritas Social Action Network website (<https://www.csan.org.uk/>).

What can I do?

There are many ways in which Catholics are called to put CST into practice, including prayer, financial support, campaigning, advocacy on behalf of all our brothers and sisters, and the way we live our lives.

At St Vincent's in Altrincham, where this leaflet was produced, we regularly pray for peace after weekday Masses and hold Pray and Reflect sessions in response to national and international events as they arise. We also organise collections and other actions in support of the poor and marginalised. At Pentecost 2025, our CAFOD/Justice and Peace group invited parishioners to sign CAFOD's Jubilee petition against the crippling burden of debt suffered by many poorer countries. We collected signatures at all the masses on our parish Jubilee weekend, which were returned to CAFOD head office, who will be presenting them, alongside those from many other parishes in the country, to our government.

More information on this campaign can be found at <https://cafod.org.uk/news/campaigning-news/global-debt-crisis-explained>

'We still see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth's resources and marginalises the poorest.'
Leo XIV Inaugural Mass, May 2025

