

God & Caesar: Summer Sessions on Catholic Social Doctrine
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**First Things First: Justice & Charity, Obedience & Authority, The
Common Good, and Subjectivity & Association**

Quotation #1 – “Putting First Things First,” by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus,
(1990)

- The first thing to be said about public life is that public life is not the first thing...religion must be given priority.
- Religion that is captive to public life is of little public use. Indeed, such captivity produced politicized religion and religionized politics, and the result, as we know from bitter historical experience, is tragedy for both religion and public life.
- Religion best serves public life by relativizing the importance of public life, especially of public life understood as politics. Authentic religion keeps the political enterprise humble by reminding it that it is not the first thing.

Quotation #2 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2246

- It is part of the Church’s mission to pass moral judgments even in matters related to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it.
- The means—the only means—she may use are those which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstances.

Quotation #3 – *The Unity of the Nations* by Joseph Ratzinger, pg. 12-13
(1962)

- The [biblical worldview] constantly looks forward to the moment when all peoples will make their way, pilgrim-like, to Mount Zion and when Jerusalem will be the capital and center of a unified humanity, yet it sees this not as a mission that can be carried out in a directly political fashion but rather as an eschatological hope whose accomplishment is God’s doing.

Quotation #4 – *The Unity of the Nations* by Joseph Ratzinger, pg. 101 (1962)

- Augustine himself loved the Roman state as his fatherland, and he was lovingly concerned with its existence. But, inasmuch as all such structures once were and still continued to be earthly states, they had only a relative value and were not worthy of ultimate concern.
- Ultimate concern had to do only with the eternal homeland of all human beings, the *civitas caelestis*, the “heavenly city.”

Quotation #5 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2239-2240

- It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom. The love and service of one's country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity. Submission to legitimate authorities and service of the common good require citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community.
- Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country.

Quotation #6 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1807

- Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor.
- Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.

Quotation #7 – *Caritas in Veritate*, by Benedict XVI, §6 (2009)

- On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice.
- On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion.

Quotation #8 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1822

- Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.
- Jesus makes charity the new commandment.
- By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.”
- And again: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Quotation #9 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1901

- The diversity of political regimes is morally acceptable, provided they serve the legitimate good of the communities that adopt them.
- Regimes whose nature is contrary to the natural law, to the public order, and to the fundamental rights of persons cannot achieve common good of the nations on which they have been imposed.

Quotation #10 – *Biblical Passages on Obeying Governmental Authority*

- Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (Romans 13:1-7).

- Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. (1 Peter 2: 13-14)
- We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

Quotation #11 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2199

- The fourth commandment is addressed expressly to children in their relationship to their father and mother, because this relationship is the most universal. It likewise concerns the ties of kinship between members of the extended family. It requires honor, affection, and gratitude toward elders and ancestors.
- Finally, it extends to the duties of pupils to teachers, employees to employers, subordinates to leaders, citizens to their country, and to those who administer or govern it.
- This commandment includes and presupposes the duties of parents, instructors, teachers, leaders, magistrates, those who govern, all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons.

Quotation #12 – *Quas Primas*, by Pius XI, §19 (1925)

- When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony. Our Lord's regal office invests the human authority of princes and rulers with a religious significance; it ennobles the citizen's duty of obedience.

Quotation #13 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1903

- Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it. If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience.

Quotation #14 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1889

- Without the help of grace, men would not know how to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil, and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil only makes it worse.
- This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it.
- Charity inspires a life of self-giving: Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Quotation #15 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1906

- By common good is to be understood the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority.

Quotation #16 – *Caritas in Veritate*, by Benedict XVI, §7 (2009)

- To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it.
- To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally.
- The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity.

Quotation #17 – *Centesimus Annus*, by John Paul II, §48 (1991)

- The principle of subsidiarity must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.

Quotation #18 – *Centesimus Annus*, by John Paul II, §13 (1991)

- From the Christian vision of the human person there necessarily follows a correct picture of society.
- According to the whole social doctrine of the Church, the social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good. This is what I have called the “subjectivity” of society.

Quotation #19 – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2244

- Every institution is inspired, at least implicitly, by a vision of man and his destiny, from which it derives the point of reference for its judgment, its hierarchy of values, its line of conduct.
- Only the divinely revealed religion has clearly recognized man's origin and destiny in God, the Creator and Redeemer. The Church invites political authorities to measure their judgments and decisions against this inspired truth about God and man.
- Societies not recognizing this vision or rejecting it in the name of their independence from God are brought to seek their criteria and goal in themselves or to borrow them from some ideology.
- Since they do not admit that one can defend an objective criterion of good and evil, they arrogate to themselves an explicit or implicit totalitarian power over man and his destiny, as history shows.

Quotation #20 – “On the Indispensability of Christianity in the Modern World,” in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics* by Joseph Ratzinger

- What threatens democracy today? There is the inability to be reconciled with the imperfection of human affairs. The demand for the absolute in history is the enemy of what is good in it.
- A state upheld by morality, this is, by freedom, is never complete, never entirely just, never secured. It is imperfect, like man himself.
- The continued existence of pluralistic democracy...urgently requires that we have the courage to accept imperfection and learn again to recognize the perpetual endangerment of human affairs.

Quotation #21 – *Epistle to Diognetus* (circa 130 AD; author unknown)

- Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life.
- With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.
- And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country.

Further Readings on Political Life and the Faith

- 1.) *Caritas in Veritate* by Pope Benedict XVI (free online)
- 2.) *Centesimus Annus* by Pope John Paul II (free online)
- 3.) *God and Caesar: Selected Essays on Religion, Politics, and Society* by Cardinal George Pell
- 4.) *Render Unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life* by Archbishop Charles Chaput
- 5.) *Citizens Yet Strangers: Living Authentically Catholic in a Divided America* by Kenneth Craycraft, Ph.D., J.D.