

Why I Am Catholic

The Common Good.

Since its beginning, the Catholic Church has always focused on the good of the community more than the individual. Of individual sacrifice for the greater good. Protestant denominations, begun between 1520 and the 1700s as the focus became more about the individual, realizing personal potential and one's personal relationship with God—above and even separate from the community and God's divine plan—historically focus more on the individual. Catholicism historically is focused on the collective body—we more than me.

As a side, the United States historically struggles with the we/me dynamic: rugged individualism versus national interest (ex. Civil War battle of states rights versus the republic).

We see the concern for the Common Good in the early Church: "The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common." (Acts 4:32) "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." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1906)

The common good requires: 1) "respect for the person"; 2) "the *social well-being* and *development* of the group itself" (any kind of group, including a nation); and 3) "peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order." "In the name of common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Society should permit each of its members to fulfill his vocation." (1907)

"Development is the epitome of all social duties. Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on." (1908)

Peace "presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the *security* of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defence." (1909) "The unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy equal natural dignity, implies a *universal common good*." (1911)

Individual responsibility is part of this. "Participation is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society." (1914)

The Church has a very different role and "bears a mission distinct from that of political authorities: the Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end. She strives to inspire right attitudes with respect to earthly goods and in socio-economic relationships." (2420)

All of this comes from the Love Commandments: The Love of Neighbor which is rooted in the Love of God. And Matt 25:40, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."