CHAPTER 5

Developing an Evaluative, Ethical Framework

One of the authors of this book, Liz Collier, joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) as a volunteer for a year after graduating from college. She wanted to utilize her Spanish degree and escape Midwestern winters, so she applied to JVC: South. She was offered a job in a pro bono legal aid office in Houston, Texas, working full-time with asylum applicants who had fled persecution in their home countries and managed to enter the United States. She encountered many victims of rape, torture, and death threats, and some whose families had been murdered right in front of them. Despite the involvement of dedicated lawyers, every case except one that year was denied by an immigration judge. Liz tried to reconcile what was happening in the U.S. political and judicial system and the horrors that the asylum applicants had suffered with her Catholic faith. She knew much about the Church's teaching on such topics as abortion, euthanasia, sexual ethics, the sacraments, and the importance of a relationship with God. But she did not know what the Church had to say about the injustice she was seeing.

Toward the end of her year in JVC, a speaker introduced her to a body of the Catholic Church's teaching called Catholic social teaching (CST). This teaching was the missing link. It gave her a framework for reflecting on injustice and for discerning what her responsibility as a Christian might be. Her work with immigrants, and the revelation of CST, made her passionate about giving college students opportunities to work with vulnerable populations and to think through how to create a more just world. Her experience had enabled her to "see"; the resources of her faith and of CST enabled her to "judge." Together they laid the foundation for effective action.

Catholic Social Teaching

The Church has always pondered what it means for a person of faith to grapple with issues in the economic, political, and social spheres. Answers have developed and been conveyed in word and action through avenues such as homilies, pastoral letters, theological treatises, catechetical materials, religious orders, lay movements for justice, and nonprofit organizations working on behalf of the marginalized and vulnerable.

Beginning in 1891, an official body of written teaching was established with the promulgation of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, Rerum novarum (On the Condition of Labor). The phrase modern Catholic social teaching refers to the official body of teaching that began with this document. In Rerum novarum, the Church reflected on the realities that workers faced during the Industrial Revolution. It gleaned principles and values from Scripture, tradition, and other sources of wisdom to aid workers, unions, managers, and owners in determining their moral responsibilities. Since then, Church leaders at the local, regional, and global levels have continued to write about and give guidance on important social, political, and economic issues. Catholic social teaching develops as new issues emerge and the Church explores them in light of Scripture, tradition, and findings from disciplines such as economics, psychology, and political theory.

Migration has been an integral experience and a recurring metaphor throughout Jewish and Christian tradition. While the themes of welcoming the stranger and Christian hospitality arose often in the Church's history in response to migration issues, it wasn't until 1952 that an apostolic constitution dedicated specifically to migration was promulgated, Pope Pius XII's Exsul familia. Since then the Church's teaching on migration has developed as new issues emerge and the Church explores them in light of Scripture, tradition, and findings from disciplines such as economics, psychology, and political theory.
CST offers many concepts and principles central to understanding and evaluating issues of justice within the social, economic, and political spheres. This book focuses on four concepts that form part of the theological foundation of CST: human dignity, the common good, stewardship, and the preferential option for the poor.  

**Human Dignity**

The Church affirms the God-given dignity of every person and calls individuals to see themselves and everyone they encounter in this light. The book of Genesis makes clear that everything created by God is, at its core, good—it has an intrinsic goodness. When the creation story reaches the point where God creates humans, we learn that people are created in the “image and likeness” of God and that, with the addition of humankind, God sees creation as “very good” (Gen. 1:26,31). Therefore, Christians believe that God has created every person, regardless of age, ability, race, religion, socioeconomic status, education level, gender, or any other trait, with God's own image and likeness at the center of his or her being. This makes every human precious to God and worthy of being treated as such. How people care for themselves and treat others either nurtures their own and others' dignity or diminishes it. A close look at biblical accounts of Jesus' interactions with those he encountered reveals a deep love and respect for those to whom he ministered. Jesus treated everyone with reverence commensurate with their dignity.

Human dignity is central to CST's understanding of what it means to be human. Quoting Saint Pope John Paul II's 1991 papal encyclical *Centesimus annus*, the U.S. Catholic bishops write, "Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God's image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but from the persons they are." *Gaudium et spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1963)*, a Vatican II document, says, "This council lays stress on reverence for the human person; everyone must consider one's every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all life and the means necessary for living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus."  

Human dignity and the duty of each person and community to ensure that everyone's dignity is realized is at the heart of the Church's teaching on migration. In his 2014 Message on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis stated,

> While it is true that migrations often reveal failures and shortcomings on the part of States and the international community, they also point to the aspiration of humanity to enjoy a unity marked by respect for differences, by attitudes of acceptance and hospitality which enable an equitable sharing of the world's goods, and by the protection and the advancement of the dignity and centrality of each human being.

Pope Francis has made it his practice to greet refugees individually and hear their stories. After Pope Francis visited the U.S.-Mexican border, Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley observed, "[Pope Francis] always begins with the person, with his or her dignity, with their humanity, with their needs, and with the dangers they face each day. His ministry has consistently been about reaching across boundaries and frontiers, which seem impregnable, but in fact are open to human initiatives and humane policies." O'Malley went on to say that while we may tend to categorize people on the move as migrants or refugees, Syrians, or Muslims, these categories do not capture the deepest truth of migration: "Before all else in every migrant, refugee, or family escaping danger and destitution we meet..."

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the human person, sharing our humanity, sharing our vulnerability to conditions of war, conflict, poverty, and discrimination." It is this striving to look into the eyes of each immigrant and hear their stories that the pope believes moves the human heart to protect the sanctity of these lives. In response to President Trump's January 27, 2017, order "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," which, among other things, blocked Syrian refugees from entering the United States, CRS's president and CEO, Sean Callahan, explained that refugees already go through "extreme vetting" and "Christian faith calls on us to serve people based on need, not creed. We are called to welcome the Stranger. This is a time for the United States to be the Good Samaritan."8

The Common Good

Also central to the Church's understanding of what it means to be human is our social nature—we belong to each other. People live their lives in communities: families, neighborhoods, schools, places of employment, places of worship, cities, and nations. People meet their physical, social, spiritual, educational, and emotional needs within communities, which also play an integral role in who we become. These communities provide role models, value systems, and frames of reference, while also meeting people's basic needs. The systems that surround individuals and communities must provide goods, resources, opportunities, and conditions for people to flourish. 

The human person's social nature underlies Catholic social teaching's principle of the common good.9 Gaudium et spes defines the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment."10 This means that

7. Ibid.

individuals, communities, political entities, and other organizations have a responsibility to work together to provide everyone with that which is necessary for human flourishing. According to CST, these necessities go beyond basic food, clothing, and shelter, to include education, healthcare, freedom to worship, and even leisure time. They cover the human person's physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. "The common good does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity. Belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains, common . . . because only together is it possible to attain it, to increase it and safeguard its effectiveness."11 CST charges each person with discerning how he or she can contribute to the common good, to meet the needs and foster the flourishing of others. Individuals consider what they have to give in light of the needs of others.

Stewardship

Every member of the human community has passions, resources, and abilities. If all people contribute to the community, they exercise and enhance their own dignity and build the common good. The book of Genesis presents humans as cocreators with God. Humans have a responsibility to care for God's creation; they also have a responsibility to use their gifts to cooperate with God's continuing work of creation. According to Saint Pope John Paul II, creation means both the natural world and that which people have developed using natural resources. The participation of every person strengthens a community's pursuit of the common good. Needs go unmet when some are kept from participating and others view their talents, possessions, and resources as solely their own. All of creation is meant to serve the entire human community. While individuals may possess certain resources, according to Catholic social teaching these gifts are to be shared. In other words, all goods have a social destination. This means people are caretakers, or stewards, of their gifts, their talents, their resources, and the natural world. They are obligated to use their gifts in the service of their community. This does not mean that there

Global Migration

 shouldn't be private property. Stewards consider how to serve others through the use of their gifts and possessions, which may include financial resources, a car, the ability to read, a job skill, or other resources. “God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice, tempered by charity.”

When visiting migrants on the Italian island of Lampedusa, Pope Francis recounted the Spanish comedy where the townspeople of Fuente Ovejuna kill their tyrant governor in such a way that no one knows who is guilty. When the judge asks who killed the governor, he is simply told, “Fuente Ovejuna,” meaning, everyone and no one. Pope Francis likened this to the way many people deal with the migrant crisis:

The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others; it doesn’t affect me; it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business.

Being a steward requires one to act in ways commensurate with one’s particular situation. This could mean choosing a career where one works with vulnerable populations, advocates for others, or serves the community in other ways. It might mean volunteering with a local organization or group, donating money or services, engaging in civil disobedience, or organizing people to tackle an issue together. This participation, or stewardship, enhances everyone’s dignity and also the common good. Respecting human dignity, acting as a steward, and fostering the common good are all interconnected.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

Many people throughout the world suffer marginalization by systems, social structures, and civil and political leaders. These people are the subject of a fourth principle of CST: the preferential option for the poor.

This principle derives directly from Scripture. The Old Testament repeatedly instructs God’s people to hear and respond to the cries of the poor, know their needs and attend to them, and forgive debts. These Scriptures frequently single out the widow, the orphan, and the alien as particularly vulnerable people, unable to meet their own needs within the boundaries set by society, and therefore in particular need of help. In Christian Scripture and tradition, Jesus’ birth and early years comprise a story of being “on the move,” including his family’s flight from their homeland due to persecution.

12. Gaudium et spes, no. 69.
14. Examples include Deut. 15; Job 34:25–28; Ps. 34; Prov. 21:13; 22:22–23.
by the political powers of that time.17 Throughout the New Testament, Jesus interacts with those who are diminished by the social, religious, and political structures of his day, such as women, Samaritans, and tax collectors. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells his hearers that their salvation is dependent upon feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison, and welcoming the stranger. To be Christian means giving preferential treatment to those whose human dignity is diminished. To be Christian also means welcoming and helping those whose communities are not flourishing. While all people are to be viewed as brothers and sisters because they are precious in God’s eyes, those with the most pressing needs must be central to Christian stewardship.

Since the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has lived out the preferential option for the poor, particularly on migration issues. While continuing the many ministries already in place at the Vatican, he also asked seminaries, convents, and other groups in the Italian Church to house as many immigrants as they could. These groups coordinated with the Italian government and Caritas Internationalis to provide beds for seven thousand migrants.18 Italian bishop Nunzio Galatino said that the Pope’s “teaching is taking us back to the very core of the Christian message, which prevents, for those who want to accept it and live it, turning their backs on the needy.”19 Many faith-based organizations take this option for the poor as their raison d’être. Catholic Relief Services is one such organization that embodies this preferential option in their self-understanding: “In every economic, political and social decision, a weighted concern must be given to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. When we do this we strengthen the entire community, because the powerlessness of any member wounds the rest of society.”20 Since most migrants leave their homes due to violence, poverty, lack of economic opportunity, the effects of climate change, and other dehumanizing conditions, their plight generally falls under this preferential option.

Applying CST to the Issue of Migration

Christians committed to justice use the concepts of human dignity, stewardship, common good, and preferential option for the poor, as well as others developed by the Catholic tradition, as a lens to examine contemporary social issues, including immigration. A key document to emerge from such examination is “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope” (2003), written collaboratively by the bishops of the United States and Mexico.22 In this document, the bishops demonstrate how the foundational concepts of CST can be a lens through which people see the plight of migrants and then act on their behalf. In developing the teaching on migration, the bishops gathered as much information as they could from people involved with migration—from Border Patrol agents to migrants, the faith communities that help migrants, and government officials. These are two characteristics of the process through which CST develops: (1) gathering sources of wisdom and insight from many disciplines and the lived experience of people involved in the issue at hand, in order to determine what enhances or diminishes dignity, community, justice, and the experience of the most marginalized, and (2) assessing the knowledge gained in light of Scripture and tradition. The history of hospitality to the stranger, the migrant experience of the Israelites and the Holy Family, along with the history of migration to the Americas and relationship of Christianity to the history of migration, inform how people view the complicated issues of migration.

The Church’s teaching on migration has come to focus on five principles:23

1. **People Have a Right to Find Opportunity in their Homeland.** Central to one’s human dignity is one’s homeland. Language, religion, culture, and geography indelibly form who people are and give them

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19. Ibid.
21. To learn about the broader set of principles that make up CST, see “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,” www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm.
23. Ibid.
a “home.” Most people want to live their lives in the land of their birth. The vast majority of people who migrate do so because they are not able to meet their basic needs in their homeland. Because one’s birthplace is central to one’s identity, the first priority is to work for resolution of the issues that cause people to migrate from their places of origin.

2. People Have a Right to Migrate to Support Themselves and Their Families. If remaining in one’s own country is not feasible, then this second principle applies. People who are not able to find employment and opportunity in their homelands must be able to move to a location where they can meet these needs. This right to migrate means that there is a corresponding duty on the part of those who live in areas with opportunity to show hospitality.

3. Sovereign Nations Have the Right to Control Their Borders. The third principle respects the boundaries that nations have created in the political sphere. This right is not absolute, however: people cannot be refused entry solely to enable the receiving country to maintain a high standard of living. This duty relates most strongly to those countries that have opportunity available. This principle flows from the CST conviction that the human person precedes the state, which means that human dignity and human flourishing are ultimate realities that precede the current human-created political structures and rules. While those structures and rules should be respected, they are not more important than the right of human beings to support themselves and their families. The goods of the earth and all human-created resources are a gift from God to the entire human community. Countries that are on the receiving end of migration are required to be stewards of their accessible resources.

4. Refugees and Asylum Seekers Should Be Afforded Protection. This is a challenging principle today because of the more than sixty-five million people who have had to flee their homes. The pressure this migration places on countries in surrounding regions creates hardship for many, which requires the global community to work to resolve the problems prompting migration, house people during their transition, and find permanent homes for people outside of the refugee camps. The bishops are concerned about the incarceration rates faced by people who flee one country and enter another without permission. They are concerned also about asylum cases not being adjudicated in a fair and consistent manner. Many laws govern these cases, most of which are unknown to those who have fled persecution and violence. Lack of understanding of the receiving nations’ complex immigration laws often results in people being deported back to countries where their lives are in danger.

   Everyone deserves protection, particularly those in the most vulnerable positions in society. This is due to everyone’s inherent dignity, as well as the Catholic understanding that diminishing anyone’s dignity diminishes everyone’s dignity. The jails and detention centers where migrants are often held are not environments conducive to fulfilling the needs of someone experiencing a crisis. Often even minimal basic human needs go unmet. Frequently government officials adjudicate cases inadequately or even unfairly, to the detriment of the common good. Because migrants often are the most vulnerable, they do not have economic power, political power, or connections of any kind in the receiving country. They are voiceless, in need of the voices and protection of people in the receiving communities.

5. The Human Dignity and Human Rights of Undocumented Migrants Should Be Respected. The centrality of the human dignity and human rights of “the other” need to frame any discussion of migration. When the “see” step is neglected, the humanity of the migrant disappears. When coupled with the myths about immigration, the rhetoric surrounding the plight of undocumented people can result in ill-conceived policy proposals and dehumanizing treatment of some of society’s most vulnerable human beings.

Rights and Stewardship

Most of the Church’s principles on migration include the term “right.” If a person has a “right” to something, then there is another person or community that has a duty, or responsibility, to ensure that the right is realized. Impediments to the realization of rights are often the causes of migration. Stewardship begins when people
ask themselves what they can contribute: What work can I perform that might serve others? What expertise do I have that can help at the micro- or macro-level of the issues faced by migrants? What resources do I have that might serve the most vulnerable in my community? The causes of migration require a wide range of expertise to tackle. Opportunities to work on behalf of others are many.

Reflect and Discuss

1. In what ways has your dignity been enhanced and developed by others? In what ways has it been diminished?
2. In what ways have you enhanced someone else's dignity? Have you ever diminished someone else's dignity?
3. Make a list of everything you believe must be part of the common good for everyone in the community truly to flourish.
4. Describe someone you know who is a steward of his or her talents, passions, or resources. How might you mirror this person in supporting the common good?
5. In what ways have you been or might you be a steward over your talents, passions, or resources?
6. As noted, the Scriptures claim that God hears the "cries of the poor." Who are these poor today? In what ways are people responding to these cries?
7. What about Catholic social teaching do you find most compelling? What needs further clarification?

Part 3

Act—Responding on Behalf of Refugees, Internally Displaced People, and Migrants

Part 1 explored some realities of global migration today, and part 2 introduced Catholic social teaching (CST), which provides ethical and theological principles for evaluating migration issues. Part 3, addressing step three in the see-judge-act process, explores individual and collective responses to unjust situations affecting migrants, one of the most pressing ethical issues of our time. Many of the courses of action that one might take involve participating in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work with immigrants; some of these options are explored in chapter 6, with special attention to the work of Catholic Relief Services. Another important avenue for change involves working with local and national governments to achieve immigration reform; chapter 7 examines the problems with the current system in the United States, together with proposals for bringing the system more in line with CST. Finally, chapter 8 considers some of the factors that lead concerned individuals to get involved—to proceed from concern to action.