

Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine (Catholic Moral Thought)

J. Brian Benestad

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How can the Catholic faith help not only Catholics, but all people, build a just and flourishing society?

The Catholic Church contributes first and foremost to the common good by forming the consciences of the faithful. Faith helps reason achieve a proper understanding of the common good and thereby guides what individuals need to do to live justly and harmoniously. In this book, J. Brian Benestad provides a detailed and accessible introduction to Catholic social doctrine (CSD), the Church's teachings concerning the human person, the family, society, political life, charity, justice, and social justice.

Church, State, and Society explains the nuanced understanding of human dignity and the common good found in the Catholic intellectual tradition. It makes the case that liberal-arts education is an essential part of the common good because it helps people understand their dignity and all that justice requires. The author shows the influence of ancient and modern political philosophy on CSD philosophy and examines St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, papal social encyclicals, Vatican Council II, and postconciliar magisterial teaching. Benestad highlights the teachings of popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI that the attainment of the common good depends on the practice of the virtues by citizens and leaders alike.

The book is divided into four parts. The first treats key themes of social life: the dignity of the human person, human rights, natural law, and the common good. Part two focuses on the three principal mediating institutions of civil society: the family, the Church, and the Catholic university. Part three considers the economy, work, poverty, immigration, and the environment, while part four focuses on the international community and just war principles. The conclusion discusses tension between CSD and liberal democracy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

J. Brian Benestad is professor of theology at the University of Scranton and the author of numerous book chapters and journal articles published on Catholic social doctrine. He is editor of *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*.

"Professor Benestad treats complicated issues with subtlety and yet at the same time offers a broad and comprehensible introduction from which an interested reader, whether in the classroom or not, can profit wonderfully. . . Church, State, and Society is the best introduction to Catholic social doctrine I have encountered, and it is well worth the investment." -- Nova et Vetera

"Against the backdrop of cacophonous disputes about the meaning and application of Catholic Social Doctrine, Brian Benestad has presented a magisterial work of considerable extent and admirable clarity. . . Benestad's book provides a great service to those trying to understand Catholic Social Doctrine. His erudition and his care in making key distinctions are essential to understand such a complex body of doctrine. He subtly charts a course through the minefields of contemporary arguments about Catholic Social Doctrine, getting to the theoretical source of these disagreements: the relation of Catholic Social Doctrine to both the Church's older tradition of political reflection and the new forms of political thought and practice that modernity originates. . . In short, Benestad's excellent volume is the best treatment of Catholic Social Doctrine as a whole and a precious reminder of the intrinsically problematic character of modern democracy." -- Perspectives on Political Science



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