

Catholic Social Teaching: An Integrative Framework for Theology and Economics

Bruno Petrušić

University of Zadar

Abstract

The relationship between theology and economics has long been marked by tension, stemming from their distinct epistemologies, methodologies, and objectives. However, Catholic Social Teaching (CST) offers a robust integrative framework for bridging these disciplines, both at the level of content and methodology. CST provides a coherent vision that encompasses the moral, spiritual, and material dimensions of human life, addressing the profound questions of human dignity, justice, and the common good that are central to both theology and economics. This work seeks to explore how CST can function as a conceptual and methodological bridge between these fields, offering a holistic approach to understanding and addressing pressing contemporary economic challenges.

At the heart of CST is the theological methodology of “see, judge, act,” which reflects a dynamic engagement with the theology of the “signs of the times.” This concept, rooted in the Second Vatican Council, emphasizes (re)interpreting historical and social realities in light of the Gospel. By identifying and analyzing these signs—such as inequality, environmental degradation, and exclusion – CST calls for ethical reflection and action that align with the principles of justice and solidarity. The “see, judge, act” framework provides a methodology that resonates with economics, offering a structure for engaging with empirical realities, ethical evaluation, and practical implementation of solutions. It enables CST to serve as a bridge between theology and economics by fostering dialogue grounded in real-world challenges while maintaining theological depth and integrity.

At the core of CST lies a vision of the economy that transcends the reductionism of homo economicus, emphasizing instead the inherent dignity of the human person and the primacy of relationships and solidarity over individualism and profit-maximization. Instead, it critiques economic models that prioritize profit over people and relationships. While theology and economics differ fundamentally in their approaches – faith versus empirical rationality – they converge on shared concerns like human flourishing, justice, and sustainability. CST integrates these concerns into a coherent framework that transcends disciplinary boundaries and offers a pathway for addressing systemic economic challenges.

To illustrate this potential integration, I will examine the *Economy of Francesco*, a global initiative inspired by CST. This initiative unites young economists, theologians, and

practitioners to rethink economic paradigms through the lens of human dignity and the common good. By aligning CST's principles with economic practices, the *Economy of Francesco* exemplifies how the framework of CST can inspire transformative approaches that respond to the signs of the times, addressing pressing issues like inequality, ecological degradation, and systemic exclusion.

Ultimately, this work demonstrates that CST is not merely a moral critique of economic systems but a constructive framework capable of enriching both theological reflection and economic analysis. By integrating theological insights on the common good and human dignity with economic methodologies, CST offers a way forward for tackling the most urgent economic and social challenges of our time.

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