

Our Demands' Alignment with Catholic Social Teaching

As Notre Dame's students, faculty, and staff, we underline that the investments and partnerships with weapons manufacturers on behalf of the University of Notre Dame violate all seven Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles. They also violate the guidelines laid out by the [Socially Responsible Investing Guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(USCCB\)](#).¹ Divestments from Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, and any other weapons manufacturers must occur to end these violations. As critically minded, self-reflexive scholars, we engage with CST in the following pages with concrete examples so that, far from impractical, it may speak to the realities plaguing our present world.

1. **Life and Dignity of the Human Person:** The sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of every person must be respected. In their guidelines on "Promoting Human Dignity," the USCCB recommends divesting from "companies or governments who persistently violate human rights until sufficient action has been taken to correct these human rights violations."² The actions of the above-listed companies have encouraged blatant violations of human rights through the proliferation of arms, which in turn has led to violence, loss of life, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza, affecting millions of Palestinians. This contradicts the principle of upholding and promoting life and human dignity. The USCCB explicitly states, "[The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means.](#)"³ To date, 1.5 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced from their homes, and Israeli airstrikes and rockets have killed at least 35,000 Palestinians, the majority being children and

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2021).

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, sec. 11.1.

³ For more information, <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching#:~:text=Catholic%20teaching%20also%20calls%20on,resolve%20them%20by%20peaceful%20means.>

women.⁴ The above-listed lucrative companies have no interest in a resolution to the conflict by peaceful means, as they profit from continued death and destruction. It is unrealistic to think the companies may change; instead, we must turn our backs on these unjust companies.

2. **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** The USCCB guidelines recommend investing in the common good by “having a regard for all citizens and seeking to respond effectively to the needs of the least fortunate.”⁵ Supporting companies that profit from the continued genocide in Gaza violates this principle of the common good. Palestinians in Gaza are currently being starved by the Israeli government and facing imminent famine. There is no maternal health care for pregnant women, and over 1.5 million Palestinians are now experiencing homelessness and living in encampments.⁶ CST prioritizes the needs of the poor and vulnerable in society. The arms trade is being used directly to conduct the Gaza genocide.

A mystagogical relationship with God is impossible sans seeking justice. Catholic institutions should always be aware of the injustices suffered by the people they serve, allowing them to question any theology of salvation that does not challenge lived realities. Doing so reveals a theological praxis rooted in liberation, which can only be attained via salvation active in history. The theology of liberation that Notre Dame's Gustavo Gutiérrez developed encourages us to integrate exceptional attentiveness into our ministry to the poorest and marginalized of society.

Liberation theology's relevance to our demands rests on how it encourages church leaders to engage in solidarity with all who suffer. It emphasizes how solidarity is epitomized in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Believing in a God who is in a deep relationship with the disinherited and exploited of human history requires solidarity with the

⁴ For a live tracker of casualties and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, see <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>

⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, sec. II.

⁶ See the report by Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

poor.⁷ Solidarity is sought not just for the sake of Jesus but for the sake of anyone suffering. The praxis of love espoused by Jesus is marked by genuine solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Gutiérrez states, “The stranger is not an occasion, an instrument for becoming closer to God. We are dealing with a real love of [humanity] for [its] own sake and not ‘for the love of God.’”⁸ In other words, the gospels call us to care for the disenfranchised among us, not because they are an instrument for becoming closer to God, but because God is present in the person who is in need.

Furthermore, liberation theology can help our great university answer the moral question of “What must I do?” Liberation theology would respond, “act to liberate the oppressed because God is committed to them.”⁹ Adhering to a God constantly liberating the poor in history, just as in biblical times, is essential for us as members of a Catholic university. Our primary goal, analogous to liberation theologians, should be “to clarify the intrinsic relation there is in God’s plan between sociopolitical, economic, and cultural liberation and the eschatological salvation by Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ Liberation theology’s hermeneutic center is the generalization that liberation is *the* message of Scripture. The exodus experience of God liberating the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt via Moses is paradigmatic in the hermeneutic of liberation theology. It demonstrates what God is doing and intends to do in the world and how human liberation from violence can be attained through our participation.

3. **Peace and Reconciliation:** CST advocates for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and resolving conflicts nonviolently. Supporting weapons manufacturers can perpetuate cycles of violence and hinder efforts to achieve lasting peace and justice. The USCCB states, [“The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.”](#) Our role as Catholic individuals and a

⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Freedom as a Gift and Task at Puebla,” in *The Power of the Poor in History* (Puebla: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1979), 145–48.

⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, 202.

⁹ William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?*, Revised and expanded (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 56.

¹⁰ Richard A. McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology, 1965–1980*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981), 620.

Catholic institution is to resist war in the name of *justpeace*.¹¹ *Justpeace* indeed does not include supporting the murder and destruction of our siblings in Gaza.

Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to touch on the preeminent ethical paradigm that Roman Catholics around the globe have applied in their deliberations regarding the situation in Gaza since October 7th: just war theory. It is essential to be transparent that St. Thomas Aquinas does not primarily depict war as a tool for justice or a method for achieving peace. Instead, he places war within the context of charity, viewing it as a potential transgression that raises moral and religious doubts, thereby putting the onus on those seeking to rationalize it. While there might be valid moral justifications for engaging in war, the reason hinges on practical considerations for Thomas Aquinas. Let us recall that for Aquinas, engaging in a just war is acceptable as it aims to achieve the objective of establishing peace.

On the contrary, a war that is not oriented toward peace is considered a sin. Consequently, a war that lacks justifications will undoubtedly deviate from pursuing theological virtues and be deemed a sin. Yet in *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis urged,

We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a “just war.” Never again war!¹²

Francis contends that in our contemporary world, it is either impossible or, at the very least, challenging to engage in war for peace. Along these temporal lines, we, as the students, faculty, and staff of Notre Dame, recall that war is not a relic of the past but an ongoing and persistent threat. Violence in the form of warfare is a direct denial of fundamental rights and a severe attack on humanity. Regarding Aquinas's moral foundation for justifying war, temporal peace, the common good, and justice shape our social and political obligations.

¹¹ “Justpeace,” is marked by a long-term, sustainable approach acknowledging that peace cannot exist without justice. Proposed to bridge a linguistic void, this term denotes conflict resolution strategies targeting violence mitigation and enhancing justice within human interactions. (see John Paul Lederach, “Justpeace: The Challenge of the 21st Century,” in *People Building Peace*, ed. Paul Van Tongeren (Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 1999), 27–38.

¹² Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, sec. 258.

Aquinas's moral foundation for justifying war in our contemporary era is overseen by those primarily guiding the Church, including our university.¹³ The Church has consistently presented the concept of a "just war" and put forward criteria for assessing the justness of a war, considering both its declaration and conduct.

However, this theory originated in a different era, characterized by armies engaging in traditional battles in open fields, predating the age of weapons of mass destruction, urban warfare, and the devastating genocide we are witnessing in Gaza. We join protesters across university and college campuses in the U.S. rejecting the idea that the ungodly atrocities being committed in Gaza could ever be justified, chanting,

"What do we want?!"

"Justice!"

"When do we want it?!"

"Now!"¹⁴

Echoing this sentiment, Pope Francis remarked, "Wars are always unjust," underscoring the toll on the people of God. He implores shepherds to aid war-stricken peoples, emphasizing that war is never the solution and that coexistence remains the essential route to peace.¹⁵ Pope Francis has challenged us to resist the urge to construct a culture of barriers, erecting walls that hinder encounters with diverse cultures and peoples. Instead, we should strive to cultivate a peaceful and brotherly coexistence.

In a footnote of *Fratelli tutti*, Francis acknowledges that Augustine "forged a concept of 'just war' that we no longer uphold in our own day."¹⁶ But he noted that he "also said that 'it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war.'"¹⁷

¹³ Gregory M. Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ For a study about the peacefulness of the protests on college campuses, see <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/10/peaceful-pro-palestinian-campus-protests>

¹⁵ Andrew J. Bacevich, "The Israel-Gaza War Will Fail," *Commonweal*, December 2023, 12.

¹⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, n. 242.

¹⁷ Francis, n. 242.

The principle of Integral Human Development—prefigured by Pope John Paul II and introduced in Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*—promotes the comprehensive advancement of the individual. By encompassing every facet of life: social, economic, political, cultural, personal, and spiritual dimensions—we are tasked, as a Catholic university, to produce flourishing in society.¹⁸ Underlying the ecological crisis, epistemic injustice, poverty, and conflict in the broadest sense is a spiritual crisis. We have forgotten how to be in touch and connected with the earth and with others; we have forgotten how to care for the planet and others.

4. **Solidarity:** CST emphasizes solidarity and humanity's interconnectedness. Supporting industries that profit from warfare can undermine efforts to foster global solidarity and cooperation, as it prioritizes profit over the common good and the well-being of all people.

When addressing Israel's assaults on Gaza, it is pertinent to acknowledge, in a way that does not cause further division but generates solidarity, *who* is disproportionately impacted by this violence. In light of the statistics above, we demand a response from the University of Notre Dame Administration that speaks to the reality that whatever affects one of us affects all of us. In the case of Gaza, this entails, for example, stretching the boundaries of what it means to be complicit to injustice via investment. It also pushes liberation theology further by emphasizing how solidarity is synonymous with peaceful relationships between parties in which intolerance and inaction have ceased being the norm.

5. **Care for God's Creation:** CST includes stewardship of the environment as a moral responsibility. The USCCB guidelines encourage investment in companies whose emissions align with the Paris Climate Accord and avoid investing in companies that contribute to the depletion and degradation of natural resources and water sources. Through resource extraction, pollution, and the destruction caused by armed conflicts, the production and use of weapons contribute to environmental degradation. It is estimated that in just the first two months of Israel's assault on Gaza, it produced more than [281,000 tons of carbon dioxide](#),

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009.

greater than the yearly carbon footprint of 20 individual countries.¹⁹ Additionally, the destruction caused by the same weapons manufactured by the companies that Notre Dame is in league with has reduced water production capacity to only [5% of normal levels](#).²⁰ This only exacerbates the water crisis that was already underway in Gaza. Many of the limited water resources in Gaza have been [contaminated by sewage overflow](#) due to the loss of power at wastewater treatment plants.

Regarding climate change, in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, caring for our common home requires "a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm."²¹ This conversion, which Francis calls us to, must be grounded in a foundational assumption that humans are instituted in three types of relationships or dimensions: with God, others, and the land. Healing has to happen in all dimensions of these relationships.

- 6. Ethical Business Practices:** CST promotes ethical business practices, including responsible production and distribution of goods. The arms trade is often associated with corruption, exploitation, and the violation of human rights, which go against the principles of justice and integrity in economic activities.

Liberation theology originated in Latin America as a response to societal injustices, poverty, and oppression and has since then been adopted by Black and Palestinian Christians, among others.²² Yet liberation theology, in this regard, reflects continuity from St. Thomas

¹⁹ For more information, see <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/15032024/todays-climate-gaza-israel-sewage-environment-debris-pollution/#:~:text=Scientists%20estimate%20that%20more%20than,nations%2C%20reports%20the%20Guardian>.

²⁰ For more information, see <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/first-deliveries-life-saving-supplies-children-enter-gaza>

²¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato si'* (Encyclical Letter, 2015), sec. 111.

²² It is worth noting that liberation theology was by no means unique to Latin America. Around the same time that the initial writings of Latin American liberation theology were published, Black liberation theology emerged with the writings and preaching of James Cone and feminist liberation theology. For more information, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*. Soon after, Palestinian liberation theology has developed its own discourse that provide biblical and theological liberationist responses to the occupation of Palestine. For more, see Naim Ateek's *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*.

Aquinas and other medieval scholars in contrast to present economists. Thomas Aquinas did not view wealth accumulation primarily as a mechanism for investment capital to facilitate business expansion among merchants and producers, resulting in increased production of goods. Aquinas and liberation theology suggest advocating for the fulfillment of every individual's physical and spiritual needs with dignity.

- 7. Promotion of Justice:** CST calls for promoting social justice and protecting human rights. Supporting weapons manufacturers can contribute to the perpetuation of injustice, oppression, and violations of human rights, especially in conflict-affected regions. The USCCB states that “revenue should not be gained if it is gained by unjust means, comes at the expense of human life, reduces the human dignity of others, or leads to the destruction of our common home.”²³ Investment in arms companies violates these principles through means that perpetuate violence and injustice. Profiting from these investments violates socially responsible investment norms and goes against CST principles. While liberation theologians may not delve into the intricate technicalities encompassed by modern economic theory, their concern is addressing broader questions about how economic structures intersect with humanity's collective historical experiences. Furthermore, they explore the profound significance of the impoverished, emphasizing their “infinite value” to God.

Theological ethics, grounded in the word of God, should resonate with the needs of the people. Drawing from the biblical concept of the reign of God, Notre Dame should aim to advance liberation from every wrongdoing and tyranny through the realization of justice that revitalizes through the sharing of abundant life. Our theological ethics should follow in the footsteps of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who pioneered the idea that Jesus' crucifixion does not just attain salvation at the hands of the Roman empire but is active in history,

But the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. [Their] existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labor and despoiled of their humanity. Hence the poverty of the

²³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, sec. II.

poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order.²⁴

When Jesus proclaimed, “Blessed are the poor,” Gutiérrez emphasizes that he did not declare, “Blessed is poverty.”²⁵ For Gutiérrez, “Standing in solidarity *with* the poor began to mean taking a stand *against* inhumane poverty.”²⁶

Being Catholic involves emulating Jesus in promoting justice and love, transcending a religious practice confined to kneeling and praying in isolation. Such practices, for instance, leave little room for fostering a more just world, as they create a considerable distance between God and our everyday realities. The type of engagement elucidated by Gutiérrez and exemplified by figures like Saint Óscar Romero rejects many Christians’ individualistic “me and Jesus” approach, a clear pitfall of individualistic piety. Instead, it is rooted in “concrete actions toward others, especially the poor.”²⁷ Hence, liberation theology recognizes that the acts of solidarity are not done to gain spiritual favor with God, nor are they to be done to avoid hell, because both resemble individualistic aspirations contrary to solidarity.

Additionally, solidarity integration promotes a shared sense of humanity and interconnectedness, urging individuals and communities to stand with those facing adversity and collaborate for social justice. A commitment to systemic advocacy is a vital prerequisite for this communal approach to pastoral care. Importantly, this commitment does not entail relinquishing advocacy power to individuals unfamiliar with the experience of poverty when advocating for people experiencing it. Instead, liberation necessitates a contextual theology that acknowledges the significance of interpreting and applying religious teachings within specific social, economic, and political contexts, directly addressing individuals’ tangible struggles.

²⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988).

²⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Preferential Option for the Poor,” in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 160.

²⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, 163.

²⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Charity and Human Love,” in *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1966), 116.

Underscoring the broader concept of liberation, liberation theology advocates for active political engagement and social transformation to combat systemic injustice and oppression. This entails freedom from sin and socio-economic, political, and cultural oppression, perceived as an integral part of God's plan for humanity. Moreover, liberation theology emphasizes environmental justice, broadening its focus to ecological and environmental concerns and acknowledging the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues. Emphasizing nonviolent means of resistance and social change draws inspiration from figures like Óscar Romero, whose biography reveals a theological praxis rooted in liberation, which can only be attained via salvation active in history.²⁸

The USCCB's primary principle of "Avoid doing harm" urges Catholic institutions to refuse to invest in companies that counter Catholic doctrine and to divest from such companies.²⁹ As highlighted, it is clear that investment in Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, and any other weapons manufacturers perpetuate harm and thus must be removed from Notre Dame's investments to have socially responsible investments. Utilizing Catholic Social Teaching to tackle justice for Palestinians entails implementing its core tenets of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good within the unique framework of the Gaza conflict. By incorporating the strategies outlined in this text into its academic, research, and community involvement endeavors, the University of Notre Dame can adeptly leverage CST to address justice for Palestinians positively. This comprehensive, peaceful strategy prioritizes education, dialogue, advocacy, and solidarity to foster peace, reconciliation, and human dignity in the region where Jesus Christ lived and grew up.

²⁸ James R Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005).

²⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, sec. 3.

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