

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: WHAT DO CATHOLICS KNOW, AND WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?

Most scholars believe anecdotally that Catholics' knowledge of the Church's Social Teachings (CST) is very low, but the question has never been studied scientifically. In this study I use two statistically representative national surveys to measure knowledge and assent to CST among Catholic priests and parishioners. Using instruments based on CST themes articulated by the U.S. Bishops, focusing on poverty, I confirm that CST knowledge and assent is very low among parishioners, but much higher among priests. Assent among parishioners, however, is higher than their level of knowledge, and significantly higher than among non-Catholics, particularly with regard to the Option for the Poor. Assent increases with knowledge for the parishioners, but not for the priests. Younger priests are more knowledgeable about CST, but show lower assent, than older priests. I suggest in conclusion that CST assent, and belief in general, is more a product of social context and community participation than of direct indoctrination.

Catholic Social Teaching:
What do Catholics know, and what do they believe?

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