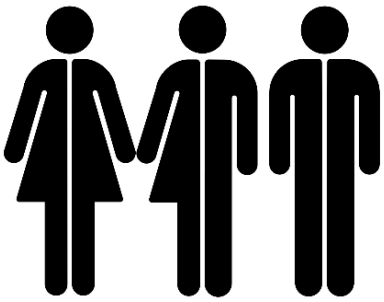
Comparing Critical Social Justice with Catholic Social Teaching

Inc. Common Fallacies and References



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NATURAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL

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Topic	Critical Social Justice	Catholic Social Teaching
Roots / Origins	**Marxist class analysis; Frankfurt School critical theory** (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse); **French postmodernism** (Foucault, Derrida); then identity applications: Critical Race Theory, intersectionality (Crenshaw), queer theory (Butler), postcolonial theory, Freirean pedagogy. **Reified in universities, NGOs, HR and some school systems from the 1990s–2010s**. "Critical Social Justice" is a descriptive label for this applied cluster, not a single magisterium.	**Scripture and the Fathers; natural-law** reasoning (especially Aquinas); medieval and **early-modern Catholic moral theology** (including debates on conquest and the rights of peoples). Modern corpus begins with Leo XIII's **Rerum Novarum** (1891) and continues through the social encyclicals to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004) and later papal teaching.
Key Tenets	**Society is organised by interlocking systems of oppression** (race, sex, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etc.). **Persons are located as privileged or oppressed** by group membership. **Equity of group outcomes is the measure of justice**. Language, norms and "neutrality" are treated as instruments of power. **Lived experience of the marginalised** is privileged as knowledge. The personal is political.	**The human person has inviolable dignity** as imago Dei. Four permanent principles: dignity of the person, common good, subsidiarity, solidarity. Also: universal destination of goods with a **real right to private property**; participation; rights joined to duties; preferential option for the poor. **Justice is a virtue ordered to the good of persons and communities, not a war between identity blocs.**
Unit of Analysis	**Identity groups and their intersections.** The individual is read chiefly as a site where group-based privilege and oppression meet. **"Whiteness," "patriarchy," "cisheteronormativity,"** and similar constructs function as collective agents.	**The person-in-community.** The family is the first natural society and vital cell of social life; then free associations, local community, nation, and the whole human family. Groups matter, but they do not swallow the person. Inherited guilt is not recognised.
View of Society and Inequality	**Disparities of outcome are presumed to reveal domination** unless shown otherwise. Racism is ordinary and structural, not mainly personal animus. Colour-blindness, merit and liberalism are often said to mask power**.** **The aim is to abolish or invert the oppressor/oppressed binary**.	**Equal dignity does not mean identical outcomes.** Gifts, vocations and results differ. Some inequalities are unjust ("structures of sin"); some are not. The poor have a moral claim on conscience. **Persons remain free moral agents**, not only products of systems. The State exists for persons and families, not the reverse.
Anti-Western Bias	Enlightenment reason, liberalism, Christianity and "the West" are frequently framed as the architecture of colonial, racial and patriarchal domination. **Desire to "Decolonise" curricula, canons and institutions.** Paradox: the framework itself is a late-Western academic export.	CST is born of the Western Christian tradition but claims a universal natural-law audience. It criticises unbridled capitalism, collectivist socialism, racism and colonial abuse from within that tradition. **It does not treat "the West" as an original sin to be dismantled; it calls the West to conversion, not erasure.**
View of Gender	Sex is minimised or treated as socially assigned; **gender is identity and performance**. **The male/female binary is an oppressive norm to be destabilised**. Self-identification is authoritative. Queer theory seeks to trouble categories rather than perfect them.	"Male and female He created them." Equal dignity with sexual complementarity. **Sex is a bodily given, not a chosen essence.** Vatican teaching (**Dignitas Infinita**, 2024) rejects gender ideology while insisting on the dignity and pastoral care of every person, including those with same-sex attraction or gender distress.

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View of the Family	The nuclear, **heterosexual family is often analysed as a site that reproduces patriarchy, racial hierarchy and capitalism**. **"Chosen family"** and **non-normative kinship are valorised.** Some activist texts treat **transforming or decentering the traditional family** as part of liberation.	**The family, founded on the marriage of one man and one woman and open to life**, is prior to the State and has underived rights. Parents are the first educators. **Society and the State exist for the family**; they may assist it under subsidiarity but may not absorb its tasks. **The family is the first school of love, truth and solidarity.**
Epistemology and Truth	**Standpoint epistemology: what counts as knowledge is tied to social location and power.** Claims of objectivity, neutrality and universal reason are treated as the voice of the dominant. "**Lived experience" and critical consciousness outrank disconfirming evidence** when they protect the oppression narrative.	**Truth is objective and knowable** by reason and, for believers, by Revelation. **Natural law is in principle accessible to all.** Faith and reason are complementary (Fides et Ratio). **Conscience is to be formed by truth**, not merely expressed. **Science and philosophy are servants of reality, not of a racial or gendered standpoint.**
Solutions	**Raise critical consciousness (become woke)**; measure institutions by group outcomes; DEI mandates; speech and curriculum reform**; identity-based representation**; **redistribution of status and power**; in stronger forms, "abolish" or **fundamentally reconstruct** policing, prisons, borders, canons and the family as now constituted.	**Conversion of persons and reform of institutions**. Charity and justice together. Subsidiarity: solve problems at the lowest competent level. Just wage, wide property ownership, associations, works of mercy, political participation. **Preferential option for the poor without class or race warfare. The common good, not group capture of the State.**
Tone and Scope	**A totalising diagnostic** applied across education, medicine, sport, art, religion and science. High moral urgency. Dissent is often coded as harm or complicity. **Scope is civilisational: nearly every norm can be read as a power relation to be unmasked**.	**A moral doctrine for social life**, not a party platform or a total ideology. **Scope is wide**—work, economy, war, ecology, migration, family—but always under the person and the common good. **Tone is exhortative and analogical, often both/and rather than friend/enemy.**
Sexuality / Sexual Practice	**Sexual norms are treated as historically constructed tools of power, especially heteronormativity.** Consent among adults is the main public criterion; identity and "lived experience" outweigh act-type morality. **Non-marital, same-sex, and often polyamorous or otherwise non-normative practice are destigmatised as liberation from compulsory heterosexuality** and religious purity codes. Critique of the Church's sexual ethic as oppressive is common.	**Sexual acts are morally ordered only within the marriage of one man and one woman**, and they retain both unitive and procreative meanings (*Humanae Vitae*; Catechism 2331–2400). Chastity binds every state of life. Homosexual acts are judged intrinsically disordered; persons with same-sex attraction are to be treated with respect and called to chastity. Fornication, adultery, pornography and contraception are rejected. Desire is to be integrated, not treated as self-authorising.

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Nationhood / Borders	**National borders, especially those of Western states, are frequently framed as colonial and racialised devices that protect historic plunder.** Enforcement is often described as structural violence. Activist forms favour sanctuary, decriminalised movement, and suspicion of patriotism as exclusionary. **"No one is illegal"** is a typical slogan; the nation is a constructed in-group, not a moral subject with duties to its own people first.	**Peoples and political communities have a real common good. Patriotism is a virtue**; nationalism as idolatry is not. **The State may regulate borders** (Catechism 2241) and immigrants owe respect to the host country's laws and heritage. There is also a duty of welcome, especially toward those in grave need, and a universal human family that limits absolute sovereignty. **Neither open borders nor nativist closure follows from the doctrine.**
Private Property Ownership	**Property and accumulated wealth are commonly read as the fruit of racial capitalism, dispossession and inheritance of privilege** (e.g. "whiteness as property"). Large group wealth gaps are taken as evidence that the property regime is unjust. Policy emphasis falls on **redistribution, reparations** and treating ownership as contingent on equity goals. **Stronger strands move toward collectivising or heavily socialising capital.**	**Private property is a natural right** (*Rerum Novarum*, *Centesimus Annus*), **serving personal freedom and family security.** It is not absolute: goods have a universal destination and a "social mortgage." **The Church rejects both socialist abolition of property** and a market unbound by justice. The ideal is widely diffused ownership, a just wage, and voluntary as well as institutional care for the poor—**not class confiscation** as ordinary policy.
Equity / Meritocracy	**Meritocracy is treated as a legitimating myth that hides bias in tests**, credentials and networks. **"Equity" means engineering comparable group outcomes**, often by changing standards, using disparate-impact tests, or allocating by identity. **Racial or gender imbalance is presumed to reveal racist or sexist process** (Kendi: inequity as evidence of racist policy). Colour-blind merit is coded as protection of the already advantaged.	**Persons are equal in dignity, not in gifts, effort or results.** Reward for work, competence and virtue is legitimate. **Unjust discrimination is sin; so is envy dressed as justice.** The preferential option for the poor is a duty to those in need, not a quota system by race or sex. Standards should be truthful. Help the disadvantaged rise to the standard; **do not dissolve the standard to produce a demographic photograph**.
Impact on Mental Health of Children and Youth	Evidence is mixed and contested. Several studies find critical action and identity-politics engagement **associated with higher youth anxiety, depression and lower sense of control**. Haidt & Lukianoff describe "reverse CBT": **teaching fragility,** emotional reasoning and a good-people-vs-evil-people frame. Other researchers attribute distress to real injustice plus social media. **Activism** can give meaning; it **can also train rumination, helplessness and social fracture**. Gender-identity pathways for distressed youth remain medically and ethically disputed.	CST proposes a given body, a **stable family, limits, forgiveness, hope and a vocation larger than grievance.** Large social-science literatures **associate intact family, religious practice and meaning with better youth outcomes.** **It refuses to teach children that they are defined as oppressors or victims by birth.** Pastoral care of the suffering is required; ideological medicalisation of identity is not. **The person is more than a wound and more than a category**.

Conflation of Critical Social Justice with Catholic Social Teaching

While CST and CSJT sometimes seek to address the same social problems, they diagnose them differently, prescribe different remedies, and aim at very different ultimate ends reflective of their origins. They cannot be harmonised without fundamentally altering Catholic anthropology and moral theology, yet a proportion of Catholics are taken in by the falsities and apparent good intentions of CSJT. We can see this conflation in Catholic schools, communities and even within the clergy.

Summary of Conflict in Plain Terms

- **Critical Social Justice Theory (CSJT)** sees society primarily through the lens of **power, oppression, and group identity**, aiming to correct injustice through **structural transformation and redistribution**.
- **Catholic Social Teaching** (CST) sees society through the lens of **human dignity, moral truth, and the common good**, aiming to correct injustice through **conversion, virtue, just institutions, and charity**.

CST affirms the reality of social injustice and **structural sin** but **rejects**:

- Reduction of persons to group identities
- Moral relativism
- Zero-sum views of power
- Inherited Guilt
- Justice detached from truth, mercy, and transcendence
- Gender as a social construct independent of biology
- Reproductive Justice – i.e. Abortion

Common Confusions That Lead to False Equivalence

1. "Both care about the poor, so they're the same"

❌ False

- CST roots care for the poor in **charity, justice, and the common good**
- CSJT roots it in **power analysis and redistribution , i.e. socialism / communism**

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2. "Structural sin = systemic oppression"

❌ Incomplete

- CST: Structures reflect *sinful human choices* and require **conversion**
- CSJT: Structures are inherently oppressive *regardless of individual intent* and must be torn down

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3. "Equity is just modern justice"

❌ Misleading

- CST affirms **proportional justice**
- CST Rejects justice defined purely by **equal outcomes**

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4. "Opposing racism requires race-based policy"

❌ Not in CST

- CST permits **targeted aid**
- CST Rejects policies that **reify race** or **violate equal dignity**

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5. "Fratelli Tutti endorses Critical Theory"

❌ Category error

- CST is rooted in moral theology, not **Postmodern Neo-Marxist epistemology**
- CST rejects relativism and **power-based truth**

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