



THE BELIZE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: A CATHOLIC BRIEF ON FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES S U M M A R Y



Below is a summary of a Catholic Brief on foundational principles found in the preamble of the Belize Constitution. This brief was prepared by the Roman Catholic Constitution Commission (RCCC), an authorized body within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Belize and Belmopan. The faithful are encouraged to read and study them and used to guide their participation in the constitution sessions. It is important that every Christian's voice be heard at a People's Constitution Commission (PCC) session before the end of October. These sessions will determine future consultations and possibly future amendments. The entire brief can be downloaded at www.rccc.bz in order to be involved in public consultations.

1 The Belize constitutional review process and the role of the Catholic Church

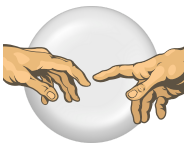
- The Catholic Church supports enterprises that aim to improve good governance provided they align with the founding principles of Belize and are carried out legally and honestly. She emphasizes prudence, patience, and collaboration, as there are risks involved in changing the Constitution.
- Through active participation in solidarity with others, each citizen contributes to the common good.
- The constitutional review process is a moment of the highest importance for Belizean citizens to exercise their own responsibilities to share in the governance of Belizean society.
- It is the Church's task "always and everywhere to announce moral principles, even about the social order, and to render judgement concerning any human affairs insofar as the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls requires it" (*Code of Canon Law 747*).

2 Fundamental principles: the supremacy of God and what follows from it



- The Founding Fathers of Belize intended society to be built upon principles which respect the supremacy of God.
- These principles, such as **truth, justice, goodness, virtue, moral law, freedom, and natural rights**, are universal principles rooted in the order of creation established by God.
- All Christians with a formed conscience will reject any amendment that includes removing the acknowledgment of God's supremacy or the natural law foundation it implies.

Human Nature and the Human Person



- The Gov. of Belize's Citizen Guide affirms that the Constitution is "based on human nature."
- The natural law, inscribed in the heart of every human and discernible by human reason, enables a person to know what is good or evil, in accord with God's design for Creation and humanity's place within it.
- By understanding the needs and the purpose of human nature, humans can comprehend the characteristics of a just society that meets those needs and enables human fulfillment.
- The natural moral law must inform civil law to ensure the good of all.

Human Dignity



- By affirming the supremacy of God and the human dignity with which all humans are endowed, the current Constitution of Belize provides a firm foundation for the protection of human rights.
- Simply by virtue of being human, a person possesses inherent dignity. This inherent dignity can never be stripped from a person since it is not granted by the State or the government or claimed by an individual's autonomous decision.
- The natural law tradition, which protects human dignity, is an essential foundation that gives the Belize Constitution its legitimacy and binding authority on the consciences of the people.

Human Rights



- There is a distinction between natural rights and civil rights. Natural rights are universal, and inalienable: universal for all persons, since they are based on shared human nature; and inalienable, because they can never be taken away from individuals without doing violence to their nature. Civil rights, in contrast, are established by prudence and popular sovereignty.
- The Catholic Church has a great responsibility to distinguish between inherent human rights and the unwarranted claims of scholars and international organisations that are proposed as human rights.
- The Church and the Belize Constitution recognize human rights as inextricably linked to human nature and natural law.

Morality and Freedom



- The current Constitution asserts that "men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and upon the rule of law."
- The Church strongly agrees with this fact about true freedom. True freedom consists not in the license to do anything whatsoever, but in the ability to do good. "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes" (*Catechism* 1733).
- The law of Belize ought to create conditions where true freedom and human flourishing may thrive.

The Principles of Social Justice



- The Founding Fathers of Belize learned Catholic Social Teaching (CST) at St. John's College and incorporated its principles into the Belize Constitution, especially its Preamble.
- The core principles of CST are the **common good, human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity**.
- The vision of social justice following the supremacy of God is that of a *civilization of love*. In a *civilization of love*, each person loves and receives love, transforming both individuals and society in harmony with the dignity of all.
- This vision stands in contrast with impoverished notions of social justice that advocate that justice is achieved by the elimination of all disparity.

3 Particular areas of concern for the Catholic Church

In the debates over specific aspects of the Constitution to amend, the Catholic Church wishes that the following considerations be borne in mind. The items included in this section do not exhaust the Church's interests, and further issues of concern to the Church will undoubtedly be uncovered in the course of public consultation. Nevertheless, the following considerations will provide a basis for the Church's dialogue with other parties.

The common good and material goods



- The common good is not reducible to the sum of the desires of a society's individuals and advocacy groups. Rather, the common good is that which serves the true good of all in the light of natural law.
- Since human fulfillment has individual and communal dimensions, as well as material and transcendent dimensions, the State must be organised to protect each aspect of fulfillment.
- All the goods of the earth, as gifts from the Creator, are meant to provide for the necessities of all people without distinction. The common good requires that all people have access to the means of living which allow for their integral fulfillment.
- Multitudes lack the resources that their dignity demands. Property owners ought to exercise a preferential option for the poor, using their goods so that the poor also benefit from those goods.



The sanctity of life



- Human life comes from God and is a gift to each person. Since it is not given to be disposed of by an individual's own will, it must not be violated before or after birth.
- The practices of direct abortion, by either surgical and chemical means, and euthanasia have no place in a just society, and any claims of rights to such practices must be held as illusory.
- The death penalty remains legal in Belize, and the Catholic Church calls for its formal removal from Belizean law. As Pope Francis has taught, in our times, "the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person" (*Catechism* 2267).

Family



- The basic unit of social life and society is the family. The exclusive, life-long union of a husband and wife establishes a family which, if God permits, bears fruit in children who perpetuate a society. It is in the family that a person learns how to love, support, and treat other human beings.
- In a society of free human beings and free institutions, the status of the family, as a natural society, takes priority over that of the State. The government's role is to foster strong and fruitful families, protecting their inviolable rights and bolstering the conditions which make them possible.
- Because of various shortcomings, breakdowns, or tragedies, families may not be capable of providing the support which their members need. The government has the duty to ensure the existence of social bodies which contribute what is lacking, especially by supporting churches and other private charities as the first places of recourse for families in need.

Labour



- While work is an essential human activity, it is not humanity's highest good. Reaching the kingdom of God is the highest good. Therefore, work must be seen in its proper place among human activities.
- Workers must be protected from exploitation that would reduce their value to their output alone. The use of child labour, unsafe working conditions, underpaid labour, and disproportionate demands from employers are all ways in which human work gets distorted into exploitation.
- A goal of any society should be the full employment of its members, meaning that work is accessible for all capable persons. Only through full employment can the human right to work be met.
- The government has a special obligation towards its members for whom employment represents a special challenge, such as parents with children, the disabled, ex-convicts, and immigrants who are seeking a better life in Belize for themselves and their families.

Our common home: the environment



- The entire universe shows forth the wisdom and goodness of God. Humanity is not meant to treat creation as an object to be dominated at will, but is called to live harmoniously in it.
- Care for the environment is vital to the promotion of an integral ecology, that is, a situation in which the political, social, economic, and environmental domains flourish in harmony.
- Since the negative consequences of environmental degradation fall disproportionately on the shoulders of the world's most vulnerable and poor, it is necessary for the government to exercise particular concern for the social aspects of the environmental crisis.

Religious freedom



- Religious freedom is an essential human right arising from human dignity. This right has been cherished both by law and by custom in Belize, and the constitutional review process should continue to maintain, and even expand where appropriate, strong protections of it.
- The integrity of religious instruction in religious schools is a key aspect of religious freedom. Religious education does not consist simply in a communication and mastery of facts, but it is an encounter with living models of the faith for inspiration and imitation.
- Government is without power to impose ideologies that would hinder the free exercise of religion, which includes the liberty of conscience to live according to one's religious beliefs.

Gender equality



- The Church supports efforts of gender equality, understood as the equality of males and females, but she denies any reinterpretation of “gender” as a social construct separate from biological sex.
- While the Church recognizes the suffering and the inviolable human dignity of those who question their lived experience of sex and gender, “it is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality” (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 56).

Corruption and the right to vote



- The Church strongly condemns any form of corruption in Belizean society, for it is a betrayal of the good faith of Belizean citizens and a dereliction of the duty of elected officials entrusted to work for the common good. No one should interfere in free elections through special benefits to voters.

Civic participation



- Participation in civic duties is pivotal to a vibrant, sustainable, and resilient democracy.
- Teaching the youth about the Constitution and forming them in moral virtues are the best defences against poor, incompetent, and corrupt government. Mastery of the Belize Constitution should be a central component of education in Belize.
- For students in Catholic institutions, Catholic Social Teaching should be the primary resource for young Belizeans to better understand the guiding principles of social justice in the Belize Constitution.

4 Conclusion

The Church-State partnership is a benefit to a free and virtuous society. The current Constitution's guiding principles are well-founded on human nature and consistent with democratic values. The citizens of Belize are called to learn and live according to these principles with creativity and love. The Church desires by prayer, teaching, and practical charity to assist all Belizeans in building a civilization of love. The Catholic Church encourages the faithful to continue to listen, dialogue, and discern what the Holy Spirit is asking in this democratic endeavour. The Church prays that this process may be free from undue manipulation or discord and that solidarity among each and every person will flourish in the Land of the Free by the Carib Sea. May the representatives of the People's Constitutional Commission and all government ministers be blessed with the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and fortitude as they seek to know the will of God for future generations of Belizeans.



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