

## *Major themes from Catholic Social Teaching*

**The following principles highlight major themes from Catholic social teaching documents of the last century.**

### **1. Dignity of the Human Person**

Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society. This principle is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God. The person is the clearest reflection of God among us.

### **2. Common Good and Community**

The human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. Human beings grow and achieve fulfillment in community. Human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society.

How we organize our society -- in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to "love our neighbor" has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

### **3. Option for the Poor**

The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor. The "option for the poor," is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community.

The option for the poor is an essential part of society's effort to achieve the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.

### **4. Rights and Responsibilities**

Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if

human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency – starting with food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities -- to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

## **5.Role of Government and Subsidiarity**

The state has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good. All people have a right and a responsibility to participate in political institutions so that government can achieve its proper goals.

The principle of subsidiarity holds that the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately. When the needs in question cannot adequately be met at the lower level, then it is not only necessary, but imperative that higher levels of government intervene.

## **6. Economic Justice**

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions. People have a right to economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life. Catholic teaching opposes collectivist and statist economic approaches. But it also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice. Distributive justice, for example, cannot be achieved by relying entirely on free market forces. Competition and free markets are useful elements of economic systems. However, markets must be kept within limits, because there are many needs and goods that cannot be satisfied by the market system. It is the task of the state and of all society to intervene and ensure that these needs are met.

## **7. Stewardship of God's Creation**

The goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. There is a "social mortgage" that guides our use of the world's goods, and we have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. How we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship, a sign of our respect for the Creator.

## **8. Promotion of Peace and Disarmament**

Catholic teaching promotes peace as a positive, action-oriented concept. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding

agreements.” There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.

## 9. Participation

All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. It is wrong for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.

## 10. Global Solidarity and Development

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. Authentic development must be full human development. It must respect and promote personal, social, economic, and political rights, including the rights of nations and of peoples. It must avoid the extremists of underdevelopment on the one hand, and "superdevelopment" on the other. Accumulating material goods, and technical resources will be unsatisfactory and debasing if there is no respect for the moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the person.

## 11. Care for God's Creation

All of creation is a gift from God and should be respected as such. We show our respect by the way we care for the earth as stewards of all that has been entrusted to us. We need to examine how our excessive consumerism and poor environmental practices are exploiting the earth and take measures to correct our destructive patterns.

*Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation.*

---

# The Busy Christian's Guide to Catholic Social Teaching

**1760s-70s:**

Inventions of the "spinning jenny," "water frame," and "spinning mule" replace handwoven textiles—and workers—

[Rerum novarum](#)

**English title:**

**The Condition of Labor**

in England.

Invention of the steam engine and cotton gin.

**1800-25:** First "Factory Act" in England; trade unions legal in England.

**1815:** Industrial Revolution spreads to other European countries following French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.

**1848:** Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels issue The Communist Manifesto; socialism spreads.

**1880-1915:** Height of imperialism. (European control of Africa, parts of Asia, and India. U.S. involvement in Latin America.)

**1886:** battle between workers, socialists, and anarchists and police ends in the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago.

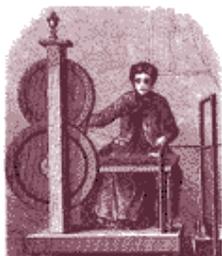
American Federation of Labor founded.

**1889:** Cardinal Henry Edward Manning of Westminster becomes famous for supporting strike of London dockers; Hull House founded in Chicago by Jane Addams.

**1890:** Sherman Anti-Trust Act.

**1891:** *Rerum novarum*

**1893:** Panic of 1893 brings failure of 491 banks and over 15,000 commercial institutions.



**Author: Pope Leo XIII**

*Date: May 15, 1891*

**Main points:** Promotion of human dignity through just distribution of wealth. Present inequality creates a decline of morality as shown in alcohol consumption, prostitution, and divorce. Workers have basic human rights that adhere to Natural Law, which says all humans are equal. Rights include the right to work, to own private property, to receive a just wage, and to organize into workers' associations. Employers and employees each have rights and responsibilities: while the worker should not riot to create a situation of conflict with the employer, the employer should maintain an environment respecting worker's dignity.

The church has the right to speak out on social issues. Its role is to teach social principles and bring social classes together. The state's role is to create a just society through laws that preserve rights.

**Context:** Much poverty. Because of the Industrial Revolution, workers are being exploited by profit-hungry employers. Public authorities are not protecting the rights of the poor.

**Innovation:** First comprehensive document of social justice; brings the subject of workers' rights to light.

**Trivia:** In 1841, while still a cardinal, Leo XIII started a savings bank for the poor. He was named a monsignor for his bravery during a cholera epidemic.

## Quadragesimo anno

### English title:

## Reconstruction of the Social Order

**Author: Pope Pius XI**

*Date: May 1931*

**Main points:** After detailing the positive impact *Rerum novarum* has had on the social order—through the church, civil authorities, and now-flourishing unions—stresses that a new situation warrants a new response. Charges that capitalism's free competition has destroyed itself, with the state having become a "slave" serving its greed. Also, while the lot of workers has improved in the Western World, it has deteriorated elsewhere. Warns against a communist solution, however, because communism condones violence and abolishes private property. Labor and capital need each other. A just wage is necessary so workers can acquire private property, too.

**1894:** Pullman strike smashed by federal troops.

**1900:** Founding of Socialist Revolutionary Party of Russia.

**1902:** Peasant revolt in Russia suppressed.

**1905:** "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Russia. Moscow uprising crushed by government troops.

**1911:** Strikes and industrial unrest in Britain.

Suffragette riots in Whitehall, London.

Famine and revolution in China: Manchu dynasty overthrown.

**1913:** German Army Bill expands German army.

**1914-18:** World War I.

**1917:** Russian Revolution begins: Bolsheviks led by Lenin seize power.

**1920:** First full-time session of League of Nations.

**1925:** Adolf Hitler publishes *Mein Kampf*.

**1926:** General strike in Britain.

**1929:** Great Depression.

Unemployment in Germany exceeds 3 million.

**1930:** German elections: 107 Nazis win seats in Reichstag.



The state has the responsibility to reform the social order, since economic affairs can't be left to free enterprise alone. Public intervention in labor-management disputes approved; international economic cooperation urged.

**Context:** A response to the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and rocked the world. In Europe, democracy has declined and dictators have emerged to take power. Fortieth anniversary of [Rerum novarum](#).

**Innovation:** Introduces the concept of "subsidiarity," saying social problems should be resolved on more local levels first.

**Trivia:** Expands [Rerum novarum](#)'s focus on poor workers to include the structures that oppress them.

## Mater et Magistra

### English title: Christianity and Social Progress

**Author:** Pope John XXIII

*Date:* May 15, 1961

**Main points:** Enumerates the economic, scientific, social, and political developments that have taken place since [Rerum novarum](#) and *Quadragesimo anno*. Says there's not just a disparity between rich and poor classes anymore—there's a disparity between rich and poor nations. Decries arms race and the plight of the world's farmers. Arms spending contributes to poverty; peace would be possible if economic imbalances among nations were righted.

It's the duty of wealthy, industrialized nations to help poor, nonindustrialized nations; but in giving aid, it is every country's duty to respect the latter's culture and to refrain from domination. Since technological advances have made nations interdependent as never before, cooperation and mutual assistance are necessary. Says all Catholics should be reared on Catholic social teaching.

**Context:** Advancements such as nuclear energy, automation, space exploration, and improved communication technologies pose complex, new problems for industrialized nations. Meanwhile, millions live in poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

**Innovation:** "Internationalizes" social teaching by addressing, for the first time, the plight of nonindustrialized nations.

**Trivia:** Stresses the popular Catholic Social Action motto "see, judge, act" as a mode of effective lay involvement.

War breaks out between Paraguay and Bolivia.

Revolution in Brazil.  
Revolution in Argentina.

**1931:** National Government formed in Britain after severe financial crisis.

Japan invades Manchuria.

*Quadragesimo anno*

**1932:** Hunger marches by unemployed in Britain.

**1933:** Hitler becomes German Chancellor, Reichstag burned.

Franklin Roosevelt enunciates "Good Neighbor" policy: aid sent to Central and South America, U.S. troops withdrawn from Nicaragua.

Japanese occupy China north of Great Wall; Japan leaves League of Nations after League condemns its actions in China.

**1935:** Germany reinstates conscription, repudiates military clauses of Versailles Treaty.

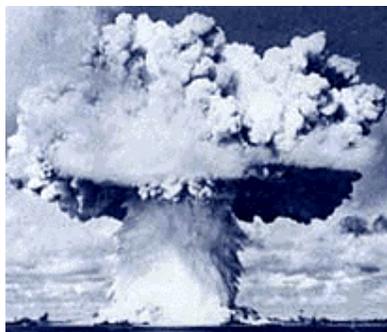
**1936:** German troops occupy Rhineland.

**1937:** Japanese take Nanjing and Shanghai ("Rape of Nanjing").

**1938:** Austria declared part of German Reich after German occupation.

**1939-45:** World War II

**1939:** Fighting between



**Pacem in terris**

**English title:**

## Peace on Earth

**Author: Pope John XXIII**

*Date: April 11, 1963*

**Main points:** The only way to ensure peace is to ensure a foundation that consists of specific social rights and responsibilities. The bulk of the encyclical goes on to list these, detailing rights and responsibilities that ought to exist (1) between people, (2) between people and their public authorities, (3) between states, and (4) among people and nations at the level of the world community. Some specifics: cultural changes demand that women have more rights; justice, right reason, and human dignity demand that the arms race must cease; the United Nations needs to be strengthened.

**Context:** Follows two early Cold War events—the erection of the Berlin Wall (August 1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962).

**Innovation:** "Its optimistic tone and development of a philosophy of rights made a significant impression on Catholics and non-Catholics alike," say Henriot, DeBerri, and Schultheis in their book *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*.

**Trivia:** First encyclical addressed to Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

## Gaudium et spes

**English title:**

**The Church in the Modern World**

**Author: Vatican II**

*Date: December, 1965*

**Main points:** Up to all Catholics, as the "People of God," to scrutinize the great technological and social changes—good and bad—that have transformed the world. (Names some of these changes—industrialization and mass communication, e.g.—and lists many changes they've effected in turn: greater gaps between rich and poor, overpopulation, rapid growth of city life, questioning of traditional values by the

Japan and Russia;  
Japanese repulsed.

**1945:** U.N. established.

U.S. deploys first atomic  
bomb, destroying  
Hiroshima and, later,  
Nagasaki.

**1947:** India and Pakistan  
become independent.

**1948:** U.N. Declaration  
of Human Rights.

**1949:** Feminist Simone  
de Beauvoir, *The Second  
Sex*.

**1950:** Korean War  
begins.

World population at 2.5  
billion. "Population  
explosion" begins.

**1952:** First atomic  
submarine; U.S. explodes  
first hydrogen bomb.

**1954:** Senator Joseph  
McCarthy's  
anticommunist witch-  
hunt condemned by U.S.  
Senate.

Vietnam split at 17th  
parallel: North Vietnam  
under Communist  
control.

Cambodia becomes  
independent from France.

**1955:** Bandung  
Conference: 29 Afro-  
Asian nonaligned states  
gather to condemn  
colonialism.

**1956:** Martin Luther  
King, Jr. leads bus  
boycott in Alabama.

Seven different

younger generation, etc.)

Explores relationship between Catholic Church and  
humanity. (While the church isn't bound to any  
party or social system, its mission "begins in this  
world"; all people called to improve the world;  
Jesus is the lord of history; etc.)

Families, the foundation of society, are especially  
vulnerable to today's new trends; the Catholic  
Church should use culture more to spread the  
gospel; with new developments in weaponry, a new  
evaluation of war is needed.

**Context:** The Cold War and arms race still loom. Discussion of *Gaudium et spes* was  
slotted after Belgium's Cardinal Joseph Suenens spoke up after the first session of  
Vatican II asking that the council also address issues more "external" than liturgical  
change.

**Innovation:** First social teaching to represent opinions of the world's bishops.

**Trivia:** This and other Vatican II documents initiate frequent use of the phrases  
"People of God" and "signs of the times."

## Populorum progressio

### English title: The Development of Peoples

**Author:** Pope Paul VI

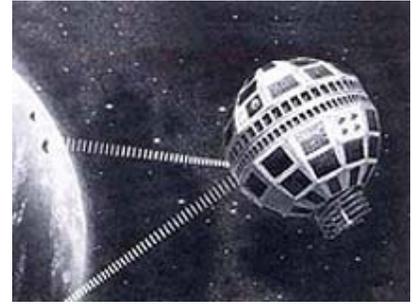
*Date:* March 26, 1967

**Main points:** The church, in response to Jesus' teachings, must foster human  
progress—progress not understood solely in terms of economic and technological  
advances, but in terms of fostering full human potential (i.e., social, cultural, and  
spiritual). Traces world conflicts to the root cause of poverty, advocating proper  
development as a means to peace.



or nations, exasperated by an inequity in trade  
correct: developing nations, exporters of cheap  
re unable to pay for expensive manufactured  
goods of industrialized nations.

There's an urgency to seeing to these problems



governments in Haiti (to September 1957).

**1957:** Sputnik I and II launched by U.S.S.R.

Common Market founded.

**1957-67:** Many African nations gain independence from colonial rule.

**1958:** U.S. launches Vanguard and Explorer satellites.

**1959:** Fidel Castro's guerrillas take Havana; Castro becomes prime minister.

**1960:** Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) instituted.

**1961-73:** U.S. involvement in Vietnam War.

**1961:** Berlin Wall erected to separate East and West Berlin. The first human to travel in space around Earth. *Mater et Magistra*

**1962:** Second Vatican Council, attended by over 2,000. Cuban Missile Crisis. Algeria gains independence from France, Uganda independence from Britain.

**1963:** Nuclear Test Ban Treaty by U.S., U.S.S.R., and Britain. John F. Kennedy assassinated.

Paul VI says: growing disparity tempts the poor to violence and revolution as possible solutions.

Supports international development agencies, such as a World Fund and Food and Agriculture Organization. Since the goods of the earth belong to all, the right to private property is subordinate: "the superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations" ( 49).

**Context:** The Vietnam War rages. African nations fighting wars of independence.

**Innovation:** First encyclical devoted specifically to the issues of international development.

**Trivia:** Coined the phrase, "development is a new word for peace."

## Octogesima adveniens

### English title: A Call to Action

**Author: Pope Paul VI** *Date: May, 1971*

**Main points:** Addresses urbanization and the new social problems it has created—such as a new loneliness and specific problems for youth, women, and the "new poor." ("New poor" includes the elderly, the handicapped, and the cities' marginalized—people disadvantaged because of urbanization.) Notes lingering discrimination because of race, origin, color, culture, sex, and religion. Stresses personal responsibility on the part of Christians in seeing that injustice is challenged. In combating injustice, need to focus on political action—not just economic action. Encourages individual Christians and local churches to apply gospel principles of justice to contemporary situations and take appropriate political action.

**Context:** The world is verging on a recession, so the "new poor" are especially vulnerable. In the U.S., follows a decade of action on behalf of civil rights, led by Martin Luther King, Jr.; coincides with the women's movement of the early 1970s and continuing student protests against the Vietnam War.

**Innovation:** The role of individual Christians in responding to injustice.

**Trivia:** This was an open apostolic letter to Cardinal Maurice Roy, president of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace. Commemorates the 80th anniversary of *Rerum novarum*.

*Pacem in terris*

**1964:** Nelson Mandela and seven other black leaders sentenced to life imprisonment in South Africa.

**1965:** Worldwide demonstrations against Vietnam War; civil-rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama; Ku Klux Klan shootings in Selma. Ian Smith unilaterally declares Rhodesia independent. *Gaudium et spes*

**1966:** Race riots in Chicago, Cleveland, and Brooklyn.

**1967-68:** China and France join U.S., U.S.S.R., and Britain as thermonuclear powers.

**1967:** Six-day War between Israel and neighboring Arab states.

**1968:** Warsaw Pact troops occupy Czechoslovakia and halt "Prague Spring." Student protest movements in France, U.S., Germany, Japan. Riots in Londonderry by civil-rights demonstrators. "Flower power" in San Francisco. *Populorum progressio*

**1969:** Martial law proclaimed in Spain following riots. Neil Armstrong first person to walk on Moon. Woodstock music festival.

**1971:** *Octogesima adveniens* "Justice in the World"

## Evangelii nuntiandi

### English title: Evangelization in the Modern World

**Author:** Pope Paul VI

*Date:* October 26, 1975

**Main points:** With a fundamental aim "to make the Church of the 20th century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to people of the 20th century," poses three "burning questions": (1) What has happened to the hidden energy of the Good News, noted for its ability to have a powerful effect on human conscience? (2) To what extent is that evangelizing force really able to transform the people of the 20th century? (3) What methods should be employed so that the power of the Gospel may realize its full effect? On evangelizers and evangelization: Jesus proclaimed a salvation that includes liberation from all oppression, and it's the role of the church to continue that proclamation; redemption includes combating injustice; evangelization should affect human judgment, values, interests, thought, and lifestyle; evangelization important in an increasingly de-Christianized world, as important to nonpracticing Christians as to non-Christians; avenues of evangelization—homilies, personal witness, mass media, etc.—explored.

**Context:** Document itself notes cultural problems of atheistic secularism, indifference, consumerism, focus on pleasure, discrimination, and desire to dominate.

**Innovation:** Challenging injustice and preaching liberation are essential components of evangelization.

**Trivia:** Commemorates the tenth anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II.



## "Justice In The World"

**Authors:** Synod of Bishops

*Date:* November 30, 1971

**Main points:** Dynamics of "oppression" and "liberation" discussed, as the synod remembers that God is a "liberator of the oppressed" and recognizes that structural injustices oppress humanity. Justice is an essential ingredient to the liberation of human beings—not to mention a key expression of Christian love. Injustices catalogued: those against migrants and refugees, also human-rights violations, torture political prisoners, etc. Since many who suffer injustice are voiceless, the church

**1973-74:** Arab oil embargo.

**1974:** India sixth nuclear power. World economic recession.

**1975:** Vietnam War ends with South falling to communists. *Evangelii nuntiandi*

**1978:** World's first "test-tube baby" born in England.

**1979:** Salt II Treaty signed by Carter and Brezhnev. Shah of Iran goes into exile. Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran from exile in Paris. Egypt and Israel sign peace treaty ending state of war existing since 1948. U.S. withdraws its support of Nicaragua's President Somoza; Somoza goes into exile; Sandinista government sworn in. Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Mother Teresa awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

**1980:** Solidarity union founded in Poland under Lech Walesa after two months of strikes. World Health Organization announces elimination of smallpox.

**1981:** Iran releases U.S. Embassy hostages after 444 days. *Laborem exercens*

**1982:** Solidarity outlawed by Polish government.

**1984:** AIDS virus discovered.

**1985:** Mikhail Gorbachev becomes general secretary of Communist

should speak on their behalf. Church must be a witness for justice—via education, international relations, and especially the way it treats its own members (particularly women and laypeople).

**Context:** Echoing not only the worldly political upheavals of the late '60s and early '70s, this document is strongly influenced by the insights of church leaders from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. "Liberation" was a strong theme of the 1968 Medellin conference of Latin American bishops, e.g.

**Innovation:** First major example of post-Vatican II episcopal collegiality.

**Trivia:** Responsible for the oft-quoted "justice . . . is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel."

## Laborem exercens

### English title: On Human Work

**Author:** Pope John Paul II

*Date:* 1981

**Main points:** Work is at the center of the social question—the key to making life more human and the measure of human dignity. Nature of work is: (1) to fulfill the command in Genesis to "subdue the earth" and (2) to make family life possible. Criticizes both capitalism and Marxism: denounces tendency to treat humans as mere instruments of production; against collectivism; affirms right to private property yet subordinates it to the right of common use.

**Also:** work is a duty; employers need to provide for workers via good planning, unemployment benefits, and international collaboration righting imbalances in standards of living; resources must be used to create employment; wages must be sufficient to support a family, and working mothers should be afforded special consideration; workers deserve health care, right to leisure, pension, accident insurance, decent working environment; right to unionize strongly supported; disable people should be given opportunities to work; people have a right to leave native countries in search of a better livelihood.

**Context:** On the 90th anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, huge numbers of people are unemployed or underemployed. Migrant workers typically exploited.

**Innovation:** Concluding remarks contain a detailed "spirituality of work."

**Trivia:** 90 percent of its content is [\*Rerum novarum\*](#).

Party of the Soviet Union.

**1986:** Haitians overthrow President "Baby Doc" Duvalier. "People Power" revolution in Philippines; Corazon Aquino becomes president. U.S. planes bomb five sites in Libya in retaliation for Berlin disco bombing. Gorbachev initiates policies of glasnost and perestroika. Andrei Sakharov, Russian physicist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, released from exile. "Economic Justice For All"

**1987:** "Black Monday" on London Stock Market: worst day for shares this century. Iran-Contra hearings. U.S and U.S.S.R. sign historic Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty to reduce nuclear arsenals. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*

**1988:** Soviets begin withdrawal from Afghanistan.

**1989:** Tiananmen Square Massacre in Beijing, China following demonstrations for democracy. First noncommunist prime minister of Poland since World War II. Opening of Hungarian border brings mass exodus of East Germans into West Germany. Vietnamese troops complete withdrawal from Cambodia after 10 years of occupation. East German Communist Party leader forced to resign. Berlin Wall comes down after 28 years. Czechoslovakia's Communist Party leaders

## "Economic Justice For All"

**Authors:** U.S. Bishops

*Date:* 1986

**Main points:** Reading the "signs of the times," many challenges to U.S. economy: central role of U.S. in a global economy; mobility of capital and technology affects jobs worldwide; depletion of natural resources; American Dream unrealized for millions because of high unemployment and harsh poverty; economic life doesn't support family life; investment of nation's resources into arms production contributes to hardship; values are a concern. A Christian vision of economic life says: inequalities of income, consumption, privilege, and power should be examined; poor should have the single most urgent claim on the conscience of the nation; the poor and excluded rate an investment of wealth, talent, and energy—should be allowed active participation in the economy. Right to employment; need to create new jobs, provide training, remove barriers to equal employment. Need to re-evaluate tax and welfare systems to provide services and human dignity. Family farms and farmworkers supported. U.S. should be fairer in trade with developing nations. Church must model good management, fair wages, and ethical investment.

**Context:** In 1986, 33 million are poor, 20 to 30 million are needy. Unemployment reaches 8 million.

**Innovation:** The church, as investor and employer, must practice what it preaches.

**Trivia:** As they have done with other pastoral letters, the bishops consulted widely with business leaders, experts, officials, etc.

## Sollicitudo rei socialis

### English title: On Social Concern

**Author:** Pope John Paul II

*Date:* December 30, 1987



**Main points:** While praising the optimism and innovation of *Populorum progressio*—the document being commemorated—notes serious backsliding on issues of development. Twenty years' worth of unfulfilled hopes include: obvious gap between northern and southern hemispheres, global debt (forcing

resign. Romania's Communist dictator executed. U.S. invasion of Panama.

**1990:** South Africa's Nelson Mandela freed from prison after 26 years. Lithuania declares independence from U.S.S.R. Free elections in Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. Iraq invades Kuwait; U.S. and allies send troops to Persian Gulf region. Unification of East and West Germany.

**1991:** Persian Gulf War; Kuwait liberated, civil war in Iraq.

*Centesimus annus*

nations to export capital), unemployment and underemployment. Should be a unity of the world—not a "First World," "Second World," "Third World," or "Fourth World." Outright underdevelopment abounds, a result of the ideological opposition existing between East-West blocs and their strong penchants to militarism ("wars by proxy"), imperialism, neo-colonialism, and exaggerated concerns for security. Their competition blocks cooperation and solidarity. Chastises the West for abandoning itself to a growing, selfish isolation. Chastises the East for ignoring its duty to alleviate human misery. In fueling the arms trade, both blocs contribute to refugee populations and increased terrorism. Emergence of "superdevelopment," an excessive availability of goods leading to consumerism and waste; existence of "structures of sin"; international trade discriminates against developing countries.

**Context:** World economy is in flux—debt, unemployment, and recession hitting affluent and poor nations alike.

**Innovation:** The "structures of sin" insight.

**Trivia:** 1987 is the International Year of The Homeless in the U.S.

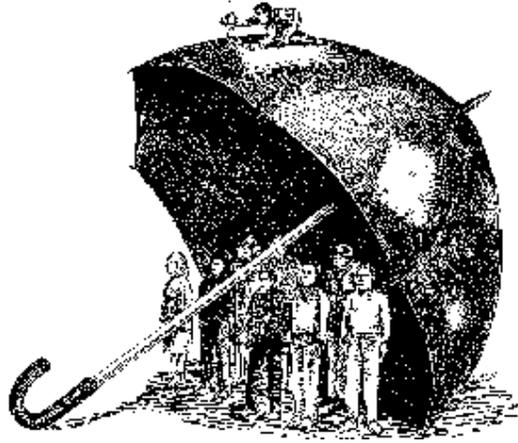
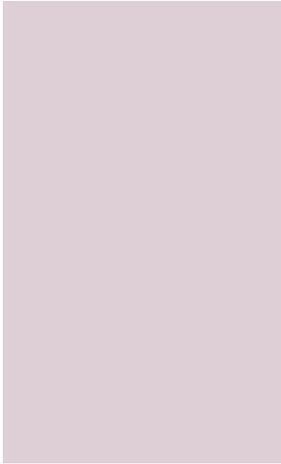
## Centesimus annus

### English title: The Hundredth Year

**Author:** Pope John Paul II

*Date:* May 1, 1991

**Main points:** Marking the 100th anniversary of Catholic social teaching—thus using Leo XIII's [\*Rerum novarum\*](#) as its frame of reference—looks to the 'new things' (*rerum novarum*) shaping the world today. While democracy and social conflict are each discussed, the fall of "real socialism" in the Eastern Bloc nations invites a lengthy discussion of communism and capitalism. The "fundamental error of socialism" is that it's based on an atheistic view of humanity instead of a transcendent one; leads to a "social order without reference to the person's dignity and responsibility." Distinguishing, on the one hand, between "unbridled," "radical," or "primitive" capitalism and, on the other hand, a "business economy" that serves and protects the human person, "it would appear that, on the level of individual nations and international relations, the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs" (#34). Capitalism also recognizes the freedom of the human person. Warns, however, against: (1) The consumeristic tendency of modern capitalistic societies, saying it cheapens the person, harms society, and ultimately poisons the planet. (2) Elevating capitalism, as an economic tool, to the level of an all-encompassing ideology.



**Context:** The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

**Innovation:** While careful not to give a blanket endorsement, notes the benefits of capitalism as an economic system.

**Trivia:** Says modern times bring a new form of ownership—"the possession of know-how, technology, and skill" (#32).

- [Tertio Millennio Adveniente](#) (As the Third Millennium Draws Near) — John Paul II in 1994
- [Ecclesia in America](#) — John Paul II in 1999
- [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#): The section on the Seventh Commandment contains the primary guidance on Catholic Social Teaching including the universal destination and private ownership of goods, respect for the integrity of creation, economic activity and social justice, justice and solidarity among nations, love for the poor...

[← Return to index](#)