

Pertinent Encyclicals

Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Labor) - Pope Leo XIII, 1891

This work on modern Catholic social thought addresses the plight of the industrial workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. It calls for the protection of the weak and the poor through the pursuit of justice while excluding socialism and class struggle as legitimate principles of change. It affirms the dignity of work, the right to private property, and the right to form and join professional associations.

The oppressed workers, above all, ought to be liberated from the savagery of greedy men, who inordinately use human beings as things for gain. Assuredly, neither justice nor humanity can countenance the exaction of so much work that the spirit is dulled from excessive toil and that along with it the body sinks crushed from exhaustion. The working energy of a man, like his entire nature, is circumscribed by definite limits beyond which it cannot go.

Quadragesimo Anno (After Forty Years) – Pope Pius XI, 1931

Writing in response to the alarming concentration of wealth and power in the socio-economic realm, Pius XI calls for the reestablishment of a social order based on the principle of subsidiarity. In commemorating the 40th anniversary of Rerum Novarum, this encyclical reaffirms the need for a social order animated by justice.

...the riches that economic-social developments constantly increase ought to be so distributed among individual persons and classes that ... the common good of all society will be kept inviolate.

Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher) - Pope John XXIII, 1961

Applying the teachings of his predecessors to modern problems, and affirming the role of the Church as a teacher, and as a nurturing guardian of the poor and oppressed, John XXIII calls for a greater awareness of the need for all peoples to live as one community with a common good. Special attention is focused on the plight of the farmers and farm workers in depressed rural, agricultural economies.

It is necessary that public authorities have a correct understanding of the common good. This embraces the sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby people are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection.

Octogesima Adveniens (A Call to Action) - Pope Paul VI - 1971

Realizing the need for a genuine renewal in domestic and international societal structures, Paul VI calls on Christians to live up to the duty of participation in social and political reform as a way of discovering the truth and living out the Gospel.

Let every person examine themselves, to see what they have done up to now, and what they ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others the responsibility for injustice, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first. (#48)

Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year) –Pope John Paul II - 1991

Commemorating and praising Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum (1891), this encyclical repeats its main point: human persons should be respected, for they are created in God's image and charged with God's life. Overlooking this fact led to the brutalization of the workforce in Pope Leo's time, the horrors of the two world wars, the holocaust, the recent dictatorships in the East, and the gap between the rich and the poor. The encyclical calls for a revolution that offers the hope of a new, alternative world in which God's gifts are shared in a just way and where all human rights are respected.

Laudato Si – On Care for our Common Home - Pope Francis – 2015

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (#139)