

## The principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

No. 1

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The foundation of Catholic Church's rich social doctrine is expressed in the Holy Bible,<sup>1</sup> in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, in the Church's historical and saintly texts, e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas,<sup>2</sup> and St. Augustine,<sup>3</sup> and, for example, in its more "recent" 1537 papal encyclical entitled "Sublimus Dei" on respecting the liberty and property of the American Indians.<sup>4</sup> The body of the Church's modern social doctrine starts with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*<sup>5</sup> which marked "the beginning of a new path."<sup>6</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, "events of an economic nature produced a dramatic social, political, and culture impact."<sup>7</sup>

The Industrial Revolution changed centuries-old social structures which raised profoundly new questions about labor and capital. The Church responded with the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* intervening in the social affairs of the world in a new way. The Church prayed for and sought Wisdom "capable of finding appropriate solutions to unfamiliar and unexplored problems."<sup>8</sup> The purpose was to explore the labor question in response to industrial laborers "who languished in inhumane misery."<sup>9</sup> The Encyclical considers these issues based on principles found on revelation and on natural law and morality.

Diligently, the Pope's Encyclical lists the many errors that give rise to social ills. It excludes socialism as a remedy and details in modern terms, "the Catholic doctrine on work, the right to property, the principle of collaboration instead of class struggle as the fundamental means for social change, the rights of the weak, the dignity of the poor and the obligations of the rich, the perfecting of justice through charity, on the right to form professional associations."<sup>10</sup> The key theme of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* is—as every good Dominican would love—the "just ordering of society."<sup>11</sup> Pope Leo XIII affirmed that modern social problems could only be dealt with by cooperative action between all social forces.<sup>12</sup>

With the grave economic upheaval of the Great Depression, Pope Pius XI published the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* which commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.<sup>13</sup> The Pope expanded on Pope Leo XIII early work, and "reread the past in light of the economic and social situation which the expansion

of the influence of financial groups, both nationally and internationally, was added to the effects of industrialization.”<sup>14</sup> It was written in the post World War I period where totalitarian regimes were imposed on Europe while the propaganda of “class struggle [that found its intellectual (so to speak) beginnings in Karl Marx] was becoming more bitter.”<sup>15</sup>

Importantly, *Quadragesimo Anno* “warns about the failure to respect the free to form associations and stresses the principles of solidarity and cooperation in order to overcome social contradictions. The relationship between capital and labor must be characterized by cooperation.”<sup>16</sup>

The Encyclical also confirmed that wages and/or salaries should be proportionate to the worker and to the worker’s family.<sup>17</sup> Another critical but overarching principle of the Encyclical is the idea that the State or government, in its relationship with the private sector and private action, should apply the principle of subsidiarity, which is the concept that is “fixed and unchangeable” that the government should not take from persons “what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the” government or to the community; “so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.”<sup>18</sup> Pope Pius XI rejected the principle of “unlimited competition between economic forces,” confirmed the value of private property and recalled its social function.<sup>19</sup> The pope promoted a concept of free association, an urgent application of moral principles to govern human relationships, “with the intent of overcoming the conflict between classes and arriving at a new social order based on justice and charity.”<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, two European totalitarian regimes came to power Italy and in Germany. Pope Pius XI protested against the abuse of power and of people by the fascist socialist regimes in his Encyclicals *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*<sup>21</sup> relating to Italy and *Mit Brennender Sorge*<sup>22</sup> relating to Germany. In 1938, with the spreading of anti-Jewish sentiment and repression, Pope Pius XI affirmed, “Spiritually we are all Semites.”<sup>23</sup>

In his 1937 encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, Pius XI tackled the issue of the Church’s social doctrine and atheistic communism, describing communism as “intrinsically perverse.”<sup>24</sup> As he noted, in reflection on Scriptural, saintly, and prior papal writings, he noted the best way for correcting the perversity and evils of communism “could be found in the renewal of Christian life, the practice of evangelical charity, the fulfillment of the duties at both the interpersonal and social levels in relation to the common good, and the institutionalization of professional and interprofessional groups.”<sup>25</sup>

During Pope Pius XII's reign in World War II, the Pope used radio messages and other media, to teach and reflect on a new social order guided by "morality and law, focusing on justice and peace[.]"<sup>26</sup> During that period of devastating war that ravished the world, "for millions of believers and nonbelievers, the social teaching of Pope Pius XII represented the voice of universal conscience."<sup>27</sup>

"One of the characteristics of Pope Pius XII's interventions is the importance he gave to the relationship between morality and law."<sup>28</sup> The Pope asserted that the natural law is at the soul of any system both at the national and international levels.<sup>29</sup> Pope Pius XII's teachings on social doctrine are considered as an immediate precursor of the Second Vatican Council.

Twenty years later, Blessed John Paul XXIII read the "signs of the times,." He noted that the social question was becoming universal and involved all countries; together with the problems of the Industrial Revolution, there were problems with agriculture, in developing countries, and the need for "global economic cooperation."<sup>30</sup> The Pope connected economic growth to not only satisfying humankind's needs but to promote its dignity.<sup>31</sup> In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII addressed it to "all men of good will." He called for all humanity to "tackle and solve problems of an economic, social, political or cultural character which are posed by the universal common good."<sup>32</sup>

The Vatican Council II's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes the Church's solidarity with the human community and carefully examines the subjects of culture, of economic and social life, of marriage and family, of political life, and of peace and the community of people. It notes among all of creation, that the person is "the only creature that God will for its own sake[.]" and that all structures in human life and development must focus on "the progress of the human person."<sup>33</sup>

Another document of the Vatican Council II's of pinnacle import was the declaration entitled "*Dignitatis Humanae*" where the right to religious freedom is proclaimed grounded on the dignity of the human person and that such "must be sanctioned as civil right in the legal order of society.

Pope Paul VI noted that development is a new name for peace and noted in his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* of the integral development of man and the development of solidarity with all humanity. Via development the Pope presents as the "transition from less humane conditions to those which are more humane."<sup>34</sup> This transition implies for each person a form of culture, respect for the dignity of

each person, and that of the “highest good, the recognition of God Himself, the author and end of these blessings.”<sup>35</sup>

In the same year the above encyclical was published, 1967, Pope Paul VI created the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace. The purpose thereof was to promote justice and peace in the world. In 1971, Pope Paul VI advanced the social doctrine of the Church as grounded on Pope Leo XII in his apostolic letter entitled *Octogesima Adveniens*. He touched on the post industrial age and the inadequacy of ideologies in responding to modern social problems.<sup>36</sup>

Another hallmark of Pope Paul VI’s record is the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* where he foresaw the world we live in today. He noted that the consequences of artificial birth control will create a “wide and easy road” toward the lowering of morality, the danger to young people, and the declining morality. He noted that men, “growing used to the employment of anti-conceptive practices, may final lose respect” for women. He posed the question, that without regard to the moral law, “[w]ho will stop rulers from favoring, from even imposing upon their peoples, if they were to consider if necessary, the method of contraception which they judge to be most efficacious?” Without observing the divine law that imposes limits on persons as well as governments, the social situation could “reach the point of placing at the mercy of the intervention of public authorities the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy.” Pope Paul VI noted that man must live in accord with God’s law in governance over “his own body and its functions; limits which no man, whether a private individual or one invested with authority, may licitly pass.”<sup>37</sup> In the world today, from the legal commission of abortion, to the violence against women and children, and to the communist Chinese government’s harshly imposed one-child per couple policy, Pope Paul VI was prophetic.<sup>38</sup>

John Paul II’s encyclical entitled *Laborem Exercens* was devoted to work, “the fundamental good of the human person, the primary element of economic activity and the key to the entire social question.”<sup>39</sup> Pope Paul II noted that human work must be understood must be noted not only for his objective and material sense, but as a expression of the person and its fulfillment.<sup>40</sup> The Pope also noted the “growing awareness of every individual as a human being without any distinction of race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or social class[;]” but the modern irony is that this growing awareness cannot be reconciled “with the widespread attacks on human life and the refusal to accept those who are weak, needy, elderly, or just conceived? These attacks go directly against respect for life[.]”<sup>41</sup>

In his next encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II noted that true development is more than the multiplication of, or the possession of, goods and

services, “but must contribute to the fullness of the ‘being’ of man. In this way the moral nature of real development is meant to be shown clearly.”<sup>42</sup>

In the next article, the remaining Encyclicals on the Church's social doctrine will be discussed and summarized including John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*, and Benedict's XVI's *Caritas et Veritas*. The next article will also review the key principles of this social doctrine and how it is applicable to the modern world.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Zechariah 7:9-10; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Micah 6:8; Proverbs 31:9; Psalm 82:3; Ezekiel 16:49-50; Proverbs 31:8-9; Proverbs 22:16; Isaiah 58:6-12, 61:1; Matthew 5:3; Matthew 7:12; Romans 10:12, 12:15-18; and James 1:27 (This list is not exhaustive).

<sup>2</sup> “Of the Parts of Justice,” Second Part of the Second Part, Question No. 61, Article I, St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224 - 1274 A.D.). <http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/SS/SS061.html>

<sup>3</sup> “In the absence of justice, what is sovereignty but organized robbery.” St. Augustine (354 – 386 A.D.). See, also, p. 112; “The City of God” by St. Augustine, Book IV, No 4; “Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies.” Here St. Augustine discusses that the justice and empire given to Rome was given not by “the gods,” but by the One True God. He also stated that without justice a prince or emperor rules like the rogue leader of a band of thieves; dividing the booty “by the law agreed upon.” Translated by Marcus Dods, D.D., The Modern Library, New York (1950). See also, the concept of justice and legal plunder is thoroughly reviewed in the book, “The Law,” by Frederic Bastiat, (1848) The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, 10533. See, also: [www.bastiat.org](http://www.bastiat.org).

<sup>4</sup> “Sublimus Dei” published by Pope Paul III on May 29, 1537. The brief text of “Sublimus Dei” may be read here: <http://nuncprotunc.wordpress.com/2008/10/21/paul-iiis-sublimus-dei-reaches-across-500-years/>

<sup>5</sup> Published Mar 15, 1891. See, here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/L13rerum.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> P. 39, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, Washington, D.C., (2007).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, (original italics).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40 (quoting *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*; Congregation for Catholic Education, 20, p. 24, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome (1988)).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, (quoting *Centesimus Annus*, para. 60, John Paul II Encyclical Letter (1991).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41. Published May 15, 1931. See, here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11QUADR.HTM>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Quadragesimo Anno*, para. 79, Pius XI Encyclical Letter (1931).

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11QUADR.HTM>.

<sup>19</sup> P. 41, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, Washington, D.C., (2007).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, (quoting *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*; Congregation for Catholic Education, 21, p. 24, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome (1988)).

<sup>21</sup> Published in 1931. See, here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11FAC.HTM>.

<sup>22</sup> Published in 1937. See, here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11BRENN.HTM>

<sup>23</sup> P. 41, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, Washington, D.C., (2007).

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- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* See, here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11DIVIN.HTM>
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* (original italics).
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* *Pacem in Terris*, para. 55, John XXIII Encyclical Letter (1963).
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44. *Guadium et Spes*, 24,40; Second Vatican Council (1966).
- <sup>34</sup> P. 45, "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, Washington, D.C., (2007).
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* *Populorum Progressio*, 21, Pope Paul VI Encyclical Letter (1967).
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* This is an understatement in view of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's victims including the millions killed in the two world wars and the oppression and murder systemic to the Marxist-Leninist ideology when in power.
- <sup>37</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 17, Pope Paul VI Encyclical Letter (1968). See here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6humana.htm>
- <sup>38</sup> See: <http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2012/01/prophetic-pope-paul-vi-and-consequences.html>.
- <sup>39</sup> P. 46, "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, USCCB, Washington, D.C., (2007). See encyclical here: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html)
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* Note that God recognized the dignity and need for work on the earth, even before the Fall. See: Genesis 2: 15-20.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*