

On the Condition of Labor (Rerum Novarum)

This groundbreaking social encyclical addresses the **dehumanizing conditions** in which many workers labor and affirms **workers' rights to just wages, rest, and fair treatment, to form unions, and to strike** if necessary. Pope Leo XIII upholds individuals' right to hold private property but also notes the role of the state in facilitating distributive justice so that workers can adequately support their families and someday own property of their own. He notes the poor "have a claim to special consideration" (no. 37).

Leo XIII criticizes both capitalism for its tendency toward greed, concentration of wealth, and mistreatment of workers, as well as socialism, for what he understood as a rejection of private property and an under-emphasis on the dignity of each individual person.

On Christianity and Social Progress (Mater et Magistra)

Pope John XXIII comments on changes in recent decades such as communication advances, increases in workers' rights and social programs, and the **decline of colonialism**, or the political or economic control by stronger countries of weaker ones. He notes the world's global interdependence and expresses profound concern about the arms race and the growing inequalities between rich and poor nations, noting that gains in science and technology should not lead to economic disparity but should instead benefit the common good. John XXIII also expresses concern about the **plight of small farmers and rural areas**, calls for greater participation of workers in industry and new forms of agricultural support, and notes that **respect for culture** must be emphasized in the Church's missionary activities.

Intervention by governments is needed to address global problems, he says, but should also respect the principle of subsidiarity (allowing the people closest to a problem to help resolve it with social support as needed). Finally, he proposes that Christians should engage in a process of observing, judging, and acting to put the Church's social doctrine into practice.

Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)

This was the first encyclical to be written to "all men of good will," instead of just the world's Catholics. In it, Pope John XXIII lifts up a moral order that should prevail between humans; persons and states; and states; and in the world community. He emphasizes basic **human rights** and responsibilities, calls for an **end to the arms race** based on trust and **respect for human rights**, and supports the creation of a **world authority** to protect the universal common good. He also urges the **East and West** to enter into dialogue, asking them to set aside "false philosophy" in the interest of addressing important social and economic questions. John XXIII notes both that the **arms race** impedes the development of societies and that under-development and injustice threaten peace. He ends the encyclical with a prayer to the Prince of Peace.

The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)

The Second Vatican Council (attended by bishops **from all corners of the world**) focuses on responding to "the joys and the hopes, the grief and the anguish of the people of our time," especially the poor (no. 1). The Council develops a theological basis for the **Church's engagement in the world**, noting how the Church must interpret the signs of the times, both positive (growing wealth, unity, and communication) and negative (hunger and disease, war, the **wealth gap**, divisions based on nation, class, and race, etc.) in light of the Gospel. The Council emphasizes the Church's concern for human dignity, the solidarity of the human community, the important role of human work and activity in the world, and the **engagement of the Church in society and the world**. The second part focuses on marriage and family, **cultural diversity**, social and economic life, political life, **peace and war**, international cooperation, and the need for **integral human development**, which is person-centered and includes spiritual development.

On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')

Pope Francis calls the **ecological crisis** a moral and spiritual challenge, demanding profound **interior conversion**. The world is a gift and we must protect it and all people, who are part of creation. Calling attention to our **interconnectedness**, the Holy Father exhorts the one human family to work together to **reduce consumption** of non-renewal resources and for wealthy nations to assist poor ones. Those in poverty, he writes, have least contributed to climate change but are **disproportionately suffering** its effects. Instead of contributing to an economy of exclusion, technical and economic progress must serve human dignity and **authentic human development**. Work to protect the natural world must respect the **life and dignity** of vulnerable human beings, such as unborn children, those with disabilities and victims of trafficking. All people are called to a **change in lifestyle and consumption**. Individuals, families, communities, and civil and political leaders must all take action so that **God's vision of renewed relationship** between God, self, others, and all of creation can be realized.

On the Hundredth Year (Centesimus Annus)

Pope John Paul II writes to recognize the **hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum***, a landmark document about the dignity of work the rights of workers which influenced many future documents. The Pope examines the **fall of communism**, brought about by the struggles of workers and the inefficient economic system that failed to protect human rights, private property, and economic freedom. At the same time, John Paul II points to the advantages and sometimes **limitations of the market**, which sometimes do not adequately respond to human needs and can prioritize profit at the expense of the dignity of the human person. John Paul II also restates themes of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical and calls for a just society based on the rights of workers, economic initiative, and participation.

Justice in the World (Justicia in Mundo)

The **Synod of bishops** who authored this document included many bishops from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Sensitive to the **concerns of the developing world**, it noted a "tremendous paradox" facing the world contrasting the abundance of resources with the divisions and "crisis of solidarity" facing the world (no. 7). (Solidarity is recognition that we are all one human family.) The Synod calls for **structural change** and "liberation from every oppressive situation" facing members of the human family. It notes the failure of **development**, overspending on armaments, environmental damage, the **domination of the economic system** by wealthy nations, and the **lack of access** by poor countries to those things necessary to fulfill their "right" to development. Calling for solidarity with developing nations, the Synod writes that **action by the Church "on behalf of justice and participation** in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a "constitutive," or essential, dimension of the preaching of the Gospel" (no. 6).

On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)

Written on the ninetieth anniversary of the very first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II presents **work** as a fundamental dimension of human existence through which the person achieves fulfillment as a human being. He emphasizes the dignity of labor and notes that through work, the human person can share in the activity of the Creator. John Paul II reminds readers that **labor** should be prioritized over capital—that the **worker** should be valued more than profit. For this reason, we must protect the **rights of workers** to employment, to just wages and **to organize unions**, among others. The Holy Father also calls for "**new movements of solidarity** of the workers and with the workers" (no. 8).

The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)

Pope John Paul II affirms the **gift of life** and the need to protect it at all stages. He proclaims the good news of the value and dignity of each human life while decrying the culture of death and calling for a renewed culture of life. The encyclical addresses a wide range of old and new threats to life, especially **abortion, euthanasia**, experimentation on human **embryos**, and the **death penalty**. John Paul II argues that we must be people of life who stand “for all life and for the life of everyone” (no. 87). The culture of death, he says, is caused by an overemphasis on individual freedoms and a lack of recognition of relationship with others. This mentality, reflected in materialism’s emphasis on “having” over “being,” must be replaced by one of solidarity (recognition that we are all one family) and seeing life as a responsibility (no. 23). The pope notes that the family is the “sanctuary of life” (no. 59) and connects respect for life with the need for social and economic policies that support families and integral human development which promotes the dignity of the person (no. 18, 81).

On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio) In response to the worsening situation of the poor around the world, the Pope Paul VI criticizes unjust economic structures that have led to inequality and **underdevelopment**, including the inequalities of the market system, the effects of colonialism, economic domination and exploitation of poor countries by rich ones, and the **prioritization of military spending** and the arms race over development. Paul VI challenges the nations of the world to focus on the “**integral human development**” of the poorest nations. This type of development includes much **more than economic growth**, requiring a true commitment to solidarity (the idea that we are one human family) and **genuinely human** values.

On Social Concern (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)

Pope John Paul II criticizes the “**wars of proxy**” fought as part of the **Cold War** by the Eastern and Western blocs in developing countries as they compete for influence, comparing the practice to colonialism (or the political or economic control by stronger countries of weaker ones. This was commonly practiced until the 1960s and 70s). He notes that besides the East-West divisions, there are now also **North-South** divisions, with the **rich-poor gap** continually widening.

Building on the notion of development in *On the Development of Peoples*, which was written twenty years prior, John Paul II emphasizes the need for authentic human development which values **being over having** and which emphasizes the spiritual aspects of the person. He criticizes superdevelopment and **consumerism** (putting excessive value on material things) as false forms of development. The Pope discusses the **environment**, noting the dignity of creation and humanity’s misuse of it.

John Paul II notes the “**structures of sin**” such as the desire for profit and thirst of power that help create the evil of poverty and threats to life. He calls for solidarity (or the recognition that we are one human family) between rich and poor nations in order to attain true development and peace.

Redeemer of Man (Redemptor Hominis)

Pope John Paul II examines human dignity and rights in the light of the mystery of redemption. He questions **consumer attitudes** and **materialism** (valuing material things more than relationship with God and others) that have become more common. He also questions the adequacy of current economic and political structures to address injustices, noting the **degradation of the environment** and economic structures that lead to inequality. John Paul II notes the **connection between violations of human rights and war** and the need for true progress based on respect for these rights.

A Call to Action (Octogesima Adveniens)

In an apostolic letter on the **eightieth anniversary** of *Rerum Novarum* to then-president of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace Maurice Roy, the Pope Paul VI urges **local churches to develop responses** to the social and economic problems facing their communities. He reminds **Christians of their duty to participate** in working for social and political reform to promote social justice. Paul VI identifies new societal problems related to **urbanization**, the situation of **workers, women** and youth, **discrimination**, and attitudes towards **immigrants** from poor countries and notes that “preferential respect” should be given to the poor (no. 23). Paul VI urges changes in policies on issues affecting the poor such as **trade, debt, and economic policy**, and warns against basing progress on economic growth alone. He notes the need for political **participation by the poor** and the correct use of **political power** and affirms the role of individuals and **local Christian communities** in shedding the light of faith on injustice as a way of living out the Gospel.

God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)

Pope Benedict XVI writes that **the human person’s ability to love** is rooted in the **Father’s love for humankind** and the person’s identity as created in the image of God. God’s love manifests itself in Christ, who gives of himself freely for the salvation of humankind. The **call to love neighbor** flows from God’s love for humanity. Benedict XVI locates love for the poor at the center of Catholic life, noting that the “exercise of charity” is one of the Church’s three “essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word” (no. 22). The Holy Father writes that the Church must **form the consciences** of the laity so that they can work for a **just ordering of society**. Their political activity should be lived as “social charity,” infused with the light of faith and love (no. 29).

On Reconstructing the Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno)

This encyclical, written to celebrate the **fortieth anniversary** of *Rerum Novarum*, reaffirms the Church’s **concern for workers** and defends workers’ rights, including just wages, and condemns the increasing disparities between the elite and **suffering workers**. Pope Pius XI notes the need for state intervention but also introduces the idea of “subsidiarity,” or the idea that we should help those people closest to a problem to resolve it with social support as needed. He proposes reconstruction of society into new systems that would involve all groups within society working together for the good of all. Pius XI upholds the right to private property and also says that **goods also have a social purpose** and must serve the whole human race. He warns against excessive **individualism** as well as **collectivism, communism**, and various types of **socialism** that have developed.

Economic Justice for All

In this pastoral letter, the Catholic bishops of the United States call for a “new American experiment” for the common good (no. 295) in order to **address economic issues** related to poverty, **employment**, food and **agriculture**, and **developing nations**. The bishops argue that economic policies should be evaluated based on how the poor and vulnerable are faring. Workers, owners, stockholders, investors, and consumers should all be seen as economic agents, and must play a role in ensuring that the person is at the center of economic decisions. The bishops highlight the moral implications of the U.S. and global economies, and discuss the need for government guidance to ensure that the free market benefits, instead of hurts, the poor.

On Fraternity and Social Friendship (Fratelli tutti)

Calling for **social friendship during a time of isolation and crisis**, this encyclical is an invitation to universal fraternity inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi. The Holy Father identifies “dark clouds over a closed world” (no. 9) that **prevent true fraternity**: unjust economic systems; racism, war and conflict that perpetuate exclusion and division; the devaluing of the human person, including migrants; polarization and extreme ideologies; natural disasters; and a global health crisis causing immense suffering. In the face of these challenges, the parable of the **Good Samaritan** offers an example of “how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a **society of exclusion** and act instead as neighbors” (no. 67). This involves **welcoming the stranger** and seeking true integral development for all. We must engage in “a better kind of politics” that prioritizes social charity, dialogue, and pursuit of the common good together (no. 154). Finally, the Holy Father articulates an ethic of peace and nonviolence based in truth, reconciliation and forgiveness. This ethic makes war very difficult to justify and the use of the death penalty inadmissible.

Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)

Pope Benedict XVI lifts up love, or charity, as the “extraordinary force” that leads people to faith-inspired engagement in the world (no. 1). He identifies justice as the “primary way of charity” and notes the obligation of “every Christian” to “take a stand for the common good” and work for institutional change (nos. 6-7). In the face of a global **economic crisis**, Pope Benedict XVI writes about the need for “a *new vision for the future*” (no. 21) guided by love, truth, and **solidarity**. These values, he writes, must inform all aspects of **economic life**, such as finance, **trade**, and **globalization**, which must be humanized and re-oriented to the common good. Business owners, investors, and consumers all have a role to play in guaranteeing that businesses operate to benefit the common good. Benedict XVI criticizes modern society’s appeal to rights without acknowledging corresponding duties, and he emphasizes the international community’s duty toward solidarity which should be realized in many ways, such as attention to the needs of workers and **immigrants** and **development assistance** to poor countries, which should be implemented in a way that prioritizes **respect for life** and the authentic human development of the person. The Holy Father links concern for life with the duty to **care for creation**, emphasizing **environmental concern** more than in any past encyclical.

The Challenge of Peace

This pastoral letter from the Catholic bishops of the United States begins with a discussion from scripture and tradition about **war and peace** then offers two Christian responses to war: **just war** and **nonviolence**. The bishops describe numerous conditions that must be present in order for a war to be considered just. They bishops condemn the use of **nuclear weapons** against civilian populations, the deliberate initiation of nuclear warfare, and the **arms race**, and note that nuclear **deterrence** is only to be used as a step toward progressive **disarmament**. Finally, the bishops call for the Church to be involved in **efforts for peace**.

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