

1891

Developments of the Industrial Revolution, such as steam power and machine tools have led to greater efficiency but **worsening working conditions** for workers, including long hours, unsafe conditions, and child labor. Tensions between workers and their employers increasingly result in **strikes**. In London, Cardinal Manning publicly supports striking dockworkers. In the United States, Cardinal Gibbons supports the **unionization** of street car workers.

Many Church leaders are concerned about the conditions of workers. Clergy, laity, and the organizations in which they participate are involved in discussions of social issues, particularly the **situation of workers**. There is disagreement within the Church and society about whether **the market** should be left to itself or if some degree of state intervention is needed to ensure its correct functioning.

1931

In 1929, the Stock Market Crash occurs and the Great Depression begins. There are large numbers of **unemployed workers** in the United States and Europe. People are questioning the ability of the free market system to ensure the well-being of all. There is increasing awareness that **wealth is becoming concentrated** in the hands of the wealthy elite, leading to rising tension between classes.

Worker-employer tensions continue.

Marxist thought and communism are predominant in the Soviet Union. The rise of the **Nazi** party occurs in Germany and the **Fascist** party comes into power in Italy. These totalitarian regimes deny fundamental human rights and threaten the lives of the vulnerable. Vatican-Italian relations are strained after Benito Mussolini signs an agreement with the Vatican to uphold Catholicism as the state religion but then denounces the Church and implements a police state.

1961

Developed countries are rapidly expanding production and increasing profits, often by using the raw materials and energy from poorer countries. However, poorer nations are not seeing such progress and the **struggle for freedom** has opened the eyes of many to how poor countries have been exploited by colonialism, or political or economic control by a stronger country.

Family farms in both the United States and abroad are beginning to struggle as larger corporate farms increase in number.

President John F. Kennedy begins the Peace Corps as a way to respond to the **needs of the “third world,”** or poorest countries.

1963

The decades prior have seen the destruction of **two world wars**, the second of which included the horror of the Holocaust, followed by the **United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights** in 1948 and the start of the **Civil Rights** movement in the 1950s. In 1963, the **Korean War** is a recent memory and the U.S. has become involved in **Vietnam**. The **Berlin Wall** dividing East and West Germany is in place and the **Cold War** is at its height, with the Cuban Missile Crisis having occurred in 1962 and the **production of nuclear warheads** near an all-time high. Bomb shelters and bomb raid drills have become part of the regular routine at schools. Pope John XXIII has developed a relationship with Nikita Khrushchev and appeals to his humanity and good sense to help bring about an **end to the arms race**, which is endangering humanity.

1965

*(Note: **Two important social documents were written during this year!**)*

It is a time of tumultuous change with political, economic, and cultural shifts. In the 1950's and 1960's, there have been violent wars and independence movements, new reflection on **human dignity** and equality due to the **civil rights movement**, and growing **prosperity** in the West in contrast to the **underdevelopment** of the developing world. **Churches are reflecting on their relationship with the world** and their role in fighting injustice; and **voices from developing countries** arise within the Church.

After two world wars, **Christians of many denominations** have begun working together for development and reconstruction through the United Nations. Since the 1940's, American Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray has been developing theological thought on the **collaboration of Catholics with non-Catholics** in working for justice. In 1948, the World Council of Churches, a council of other Christian denominations, adopted a "**Declaration on Religious Liberty**" affirming the **right to freedom of worship** for all people.

Cold War communist countries are **oppressing the Church**.

1967

The United Nations has declared the 1960s the "Decade of Development," but the hoped-for gains are not yet being achieved, in part because of the distraction of the Cold War and massive **military expenditures** by the U.S. and USSR.

There are competing notions of **development** including the U.S. emphasis on growth of the Gross National Product, the U.N's approach which includes social development, and a French belief that **development should incorporate all aspects of the person**, including the spiritual. An economic boom has led to economic growth for wealthy market economies and increased economic activity abroad.

The independence movements of the 1950's and 60's have led to increased recognition of the harmful effects of **colonialism** such as the exploitation of developing countries and their native populations.

1971

(Note: **Two** important social documents—a **Synod document** and an **Apostolic Letter**—were written this year!)

In 1971, **economic** and **trade systems** that favor the wealthy countries, with 75 percent of resources in the world controlled and consumed by one third of humanity. Cities are facing issues related to **urbanization** (the movement of large numbers of people into cities) and **discrimination** towards **minorities** and **immigrants**.

Some important events have occurred in recent years that impact the documents written this year:

- In 1968, the Conference of Latin American bishops gathered in Medellín, Colombia and noted the need to **correct systemic power imbalances**, to **allow local communities** to shed the light of the gospel on local problems, and to **give the poor a role** in working toward their own development.
- In 1968, **Martin Luther King, Jr.** was assassinated and U.S. President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibited **discrimination** in housing.
- Between 1967 and 1971 there were a series of new laws are passed by the U.S. Congress to prevent **discrimination** in the workplace based on **gender**.
- In 1965, the Second Vatican Council emphasized the role of the Church and its members to **act in service to the world**.

1975

Ethiopia suffers devastating **famine**. Countries like Fiji, Togo, Grenada, and Papa New Guinea, which experienced political and economic domination by stronger countries during colonialism, win independence between 1970 and 1975. Other countries that were previously freed struggle to build systems and infrastructures and many African countries are plagued by war.

In 1970, wealthy countries promise to spend 0.7% of GNP on **development** assistance for poor countries but follow through at a much lower level. In the 1970s, developed countries see high **levels of economic growth** while growth in developing countries is very slow.

The Roe vs. Wade decision by the Supreme Court leads to the destruction of millions of unborn children.

1979

Economic growth during the 1970s increases **consumption** and **materialism** globally. There is increasing awareness of **environmental destruction**, leading to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the founding of national and global environmental organizations, and the celebration of the first Earth Day.

In the 1970s, grave **human rights abuses** and **violence** occur during the Dirty War in Argentina and the civil war in El Salvador. During this decade, **wars rage** in Afghanistan, Cambodia.

1981

In 1980, **strikes** and protests among shipyard workers in Poland lead to the creation of an independent trade **union** called **Solidarity**, which grows into a powerful, non-violent movement advocating for **workers' rights** that is eventually suppressed by the government.

In the 1970s and 80s in the United States, there is a labor unrest, with strikes by federal air traffic controllers, miners, postal workers, workers on grape farms, and others.

1983

Wars are raging in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Lebanon, and between Iran and Iraq.

The world experiences a large **arms buildup**, with much policy debate around the morality of nuclear weapons. **Anti-nuclear sentiment** among the general population leads to protests and advocacy to restrain the development of nuclear weapons.

In 1980, Congress reinstates the requirement that young men register with the Selective Service System upon reaching the age of eighteen.

1986

During the 1980's, the developed world sees increased **economic liberalization** (lessening of the rules and restrictions that govern trade, business, and other aspects of economic life) and **economic growth**. Multinational corporations increasingly move offshore. **Developing countries** suffer from a severe debt crisis and a widening gap between the rich and poor countries.

In the United States, the 1980s see cuts in domestic programs and taxes while defense spending increases. In the early years of the 1980s there is a **major recession, unemployment** reaches ten percent, and many factories close down.

Farmers in the U.S. face increasing difficulty due to the **economic crisis**, high oil prices, and the growth of factory farms.

1987

A Vatican report on Africa this year connecting Angola's poverty with **Cold War enemies' funding and arming** of opposing sides in its **Civil War**. The Pope meets with the Angolan president, who confirms this report.

Global trade is growing exponentially, developed countries see major gains in economic growth, and **consumerism** increases in wealthy countries. **Poverty and inequality** are also on the rise, especially between the wealthy **Northern** hemisphere and the less developed **Southern** hemisphere. The vast majority of developing countries see negative growth. Some begin to argue that the **global trade system** is stacked in wealthy countries' favor.

A hole in the **ozone layer** is reported in 1985.

1991

The oppression of people in Communist countries begins to give rise to protests.

The **Berlin Wall falls** in 1989, generating global celebration.

The break-up of USSR occurs and **communism collapses**.

At the same time, debate about the **market system** used by the rest of the world poses questions about **economic inequality**, which has reached unseen levels.

1995

Abortion has been legal in the U.S. for 22 years and has led to the deaths of millions of unborn children, but Catholic politicians argue that their private consciences can be separated from their public conduct in the political realm.

Two years earlier, in 1993, Pope John Paul II visits the U.S. and prays for an end to the use of the **death penalty**, which is legal in most states.

In 1994, a Human Embryo Research Panel at the National Institutes of Health recommends that **embryo research** be funded by the U.S. government. President Clinton announces that no studies would be funded that involve the creation of embryos for research purposes. However, there is no restriction on using embryos left over from in vitro fertilization in research.

In the early 1990s, "**making a lot of money**" outranks "helping others" as the most common reason given for attending college.

2004

Cultural critics describe a society characterized by self-centered individualism and pop culture's cheapening of **love** and commoditization of sex.

Cultural critics also worry that constantly expanding technology, while often beneficial; can also be dangerous when used as a replacement for quality **relationship** and personal connection.

In the past several years, the world has faced challenges and divisions such as the 9/11 attacks and the start of the Iraq war; there is great need for **reconciliation** and the healing of **injustices**.

2009

The world is in the midst of a severe **economic crisis** as well as a food crisis that is affecting poor countries most of all.

Global **migration** had surpassed 200 million people each year, with many people migrating to escape poverty.

Reports from the United Nations predict increasing evidence of the impact of **climate change**, such as rising temperature, shrinking glaciers and sea ice, rising sea levels, and extreme weather.

Around the time of the encyclical's release, the group of wealthy nations called the G8, or Group of 8, are preparing for a meeting to discuss a global response to the worldwide **economic crisis, trade, globalization, and development**, among other issues.

Although there is still room for improvement, U.S. international assistance levels and funding to fight HIV/AIDS have increased significantly during the 2000s.

Pope Benedict XVI is preparing to meet with the United States president, with whom he will discuss **human life and dignity, abortion, bioethics, aid, development, immigration, and peace**.

2015

A **climate crisis** threatens humans and the environment.

Globally, there is growing awareness of **biodiversity loss, overconsumption of resources, pollution of land, air and water** and of the **disproportionate burden** of climate change on poor countries least able to deal with its consequences.

The scientific community has embraced a more integrated understanding of climate change as a single crisis affecting **humans and all life on earth**.

At the same time, **progress is slow** at addressing the climate crisis. Easy access to cheap goods, growing access to goods online, and constantly evolving technology that make products quickly outdated contribute to excessive **materialism** and **consumerism**.

Yet, while alarm about climate change receives attention on the global stage, **national and international leaders'** efforts to address the climate crisis often remain **short-sighted**, prioritizing short-term gains and politically popular solutions over long-term progress.

2020

Present

The **COVID-19 pandemic** begins, exacerbating **disparities** and causing major **loss of life**, especially with vulnerable populations. Communities of color, the elderly, front-line and service workers, and the informal workforce are particularly impacted.

Disruptions in education cause gaps in learning, while **social isolation** intensifies mental health challenges, especially for young people. At the same time, polarization and **extreme ideologies** lead to a worsening of social fragmentation.

A growing **global migration crisis** involves massive movements of people as refugees and migrants flee **war, violence, and extreme poverty** but face **unwelcome and hostility** by host countries.

This resource is excerpted from the *Caritas in Veritate* youth resource by USCCB and Catholic Relief Services.

Copyright © 2010 (rev. 2022) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. All rights reserved.

This text may be reproduced in whole or in part without alteration for nonprofit educational use, provided such reprints are not sold and include this notice.