

## **Centesimus Annus . . . in everyday language**

### **The Hundredth Year**

**John Paul II, 1991**

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The following text is a translation of Pope John Paul II's pastoral letter into everyday language. This is not the official text. When citing the document, you are encouraged to use the [official text](#).

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Commemorating and praising Leo XIII's *Of New Things* (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 break-up of atheistic communism was due to its disrespect for the dignity and the consequent rights of the human being. 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.

1. The church remains grateful to Pope Leo XIII for the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("Of New Things"), which he wrote a century ago. The energy it gave is not yet spent.

2. This encyclical is meant to honor that letter and the "church's social teaching" that flowed from it.

3. Besides rereading it we should look at our own "new things," to bring forth—in the tradition of the church — "new and old" from the Lord's treasure. "Old" is the defense of the human person, the building of a more just society, and the curbing of injustice. "New" is an analysis of recent history, in view of continuing the "good news."

#### I. The "New Things" a Hundred Years Ago

4. At the end of the last century, the church was facing a new world. A new type of ownership had appeared and a new form of labor. Human work was bought and sold, according to the law of supply and demand, leaving the workers continually threatened by unemployment, which—without any social security—meant starvation. Society had divided into two classes, separated by a deep gulf. When people began to realize the injustice of this situation and a revolution threatened Pope Leo XIII wrote his letter

on "the condition of the workers."

5. Society was torn by the conflict  
between capital and labor,  
"the worker question."

The two sides faced each other as "wolves"  
with mere physical survival on one side,  
and opulence on the other.

Because the pope wanted peace  
he condemned class struggle;  
but aware that peace is built on justice  
he set out some of its conditions.

Not everyone accepted  
the church's right and duty to do this.

Many believed that the church  
should restrict itself  
to heavenly salvation.

The pope's letter put the church  
in the midst of public life.

The church's social teaching  
is an essential part  
of the Christian message.

There can be no solution  
to the "social question"  
apart from the Gospel.

6. Pope Leo XIII wrote  
of the dignity of work  
and of the rights and the dignity of workers,  
who "exert themselves for the sake  
of procuring what is necessary  
for the various purposes of life,  
and first of all for self-preservation."

The energy they use while working  
is part of their person  
and belongs to them.

Work is humanity's vocation  
through which we realize ourselves.

Pope Leo XIII stressed  
the "right to private property."

Everyone has the right  
to the things necessary  
for oneself and for one's family.

7. Pope Leo XIII stressed the right  
to form associations and trade unions  
—a right no state can take away  
without betraying

"the very principle of its own existence."

He addressed the right  
to a limit on working hours  
and the right to rest,  
albeit different for women, men, and children.

"It is neither just nor human  
so to grind women and men down  
with excessive labor  
as to stupefy their minds,  
and wear out their bodies."

8. He wrote of the right to a just wage:

"A worker's wage should be sufficient to support himself, his wife, and his children."

This right is so essential, he stated, that it cannot be left to the free consent of the partners.

It is the strict duty of the public authority to provide properly for the welfare of the workers.

"Every individual has a natural right to procure what is required to live. And the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they earn."

"If a worker accepts harder conditions he is made the victim of force and injustice."

9. All have the right to fulfill their religious duties, Leo XIII affirms, stressing the right to, and the need of, Sunday rest. We might ask ourselves whether industrialized societies ensure this basic right to Sunday rest.

10. Pope Leo XIII criticizes "socialism" and "liberalism." Against "socialism" he affirms the right to private property. As for liberalism he states that the state may not favor the rich while neglecting the poor. It is the poor who have a claim to special consideration. The richer class can help itself; the poor have no resources of their own to do so. They chiefly depend on the help of the state. This remains valid today, considering the poverty in the world. It does not depend on any ideology or political theory, but on the principle of solidarity, valid in the national and international order. Leo XIII uses the term "friendship" for it, Pius XI calls it "social charity"; Paul VI, extending it even further, speaks of a "civilization of love."

11. Expressing Jesus' and the church's "preferential option for the poor," Pope Leo XIII calls upon the state to do something about the condition of the poor, though he does not expect the state to solve every social problem. He insists on limits to the state's intervention. The individual, the family, and society should be protected by it and not stifled. The main point made in Leo XIII's encyclical

and in the church's social doctrine  
is a correct view of the human person.  
Human persons are willed by God;  
they are imprinted with God's image.  
Their dignity does not come  
from the work they do,  
but from the persons they are.

## II. Toward the "New Things" of Today

12. The events of 1989 and 1990  
proved Leo XIII to be right about  
the consequences of "real socialism":  
that the worker would be the first to suffer,  
that it would distort the role of the state  
and create utter confusion in the community.

13. "Real socialism" considers the human person  
as a mere element or molecule  
in a social organism  
to which he or she is completely subordinated.  
There is no free choice,  
nothing of one's own  
or done on one's own initiative.  
One depends totally on the social machine  
and on those who control it.  
This is a situation in which it is difficult  
to realize one's personal dignity  
and to build a human community.  
The Christian vision is different.  
The social nature of a person  
is not totally fulfilled by the state,  
but is realized in various other groups,  
beginning with the family.  
The denial of God is at the root  
of this total lack of respect for human dignity.

14. It is the denial of God  
that explains the choice of class struggle  
as a means of action.  
Condemning class struggle  
does not mean condemning  
every possible form of social conflict.  
Such conflicts inevitably arise  
and Christians must often take a position  
in the "struggle for social justice."  
What is condemned is "total war,"  
which has no respect  
for the dignity of others  
(and consequently of oneself).  
It excludes reasonable compromise,  
does not pursue the common good  
but the good of a group,  
and sets out to destroy  
whatever stands in its way.  
In a word, it does in relation to  
conflict between social groups  
what militarism and imperialism do  
internationally,  
replacing the search for a proper balance

with the destruction  
of the other side's capacity to resist.  
Class struggle in the Marxist sense  
and militarism  
have atheism  
and the consequent contempt  
for the human being  
as their common root.

15. Rerum Novarum is against  
any form of state control  
that makes the citizen  
a mere "cog" in the state machine.  
It is also opposed to a state  
that is not interested  
in the economic sector.  
The state has to determine  
the legal framework  
to conduct economic affairs,  
so that the interests of one group  
do not overrule another.  
Society and state need to afford protection  
against the nightmare of unemployment  
through economic policies  
that ensure balanced growth and full employment  
or through unemployment insurance  
and retraining programs.  
Wages must be sufficient  
to maintain a worker's family  
and allow a certain amount for some saving.  
The exploitation of the most vulnerable workers  
—immigrants and those marginalized—  
must be prevented.  
"Humane" working hours and adequate leisure  
need to be guaranteed  
as well as the right to express one's own personality.  
The role of trade unions is decisive  
in these deliberations.  
The state must contribute to all this  
according to the principles of  
subsidiarity and solidarity,  
defending the weakest  
and ensuring the necessary minimum support  
for the unemployed.  
The encyclical  
and the subsequent social teaching of the church  
influenced numerous reforms in the years  
bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

16. Reforms were carried out by states  
and were achieved by workers' movements,  
often including Christians  
who started producers', consumers',  
and credit cooperatives  
and promoted general education, professional training,  
and new forms of participation and sharing.

17. Lack of respect for human dignity  
led to the wars that ravaged Europe  
between 1914 and 1945.

The holocaust, in particular of the Jewish people, has become a symbol of what happens when human beings turn against God.

18. Though weapons have remained silent in Europe since 1945, there has been no peace. Half of Europe fell under a communist dictatorship, and the other half organized itself in self-defense. Cultures have been threatened, and masses of peoples displaced. An insane arms race swallowed up resources needed for development. Power blocs formed and fought, causing enormous bloodshed in various parts of the world. Extremists were armed; those in favor of peaceful solutions remained isolated or fell as victims. Third World countries were armed, terrorism spread, and the whole world was oppressed by the threat of a nuclear war. Such a war would be without winners calling in question the issues of "total war" and "class struggle."

19. Though these new ideas about peace and war started to stir people's consciences, the threat of communism distracted people's attention and provoked different responses. Some countries made a positive effort to build a democratic society inspired by the ideal of social justice. Others set up systems of "national security" against the threat of Marxism, but risked destroying the very freedom they wanted to defend. A third response was the consumer society, which showed that it could defeat Marxism by the production of material goods, while equally overlooking spiritual values.

20. "Decolonization" meant that many countries gained or regained their independence. But they often remained in the hands of foreign companies and controlled by foreign powers. Lacking competent leadership, they did not always integrate all ethnic groups into genuine national communities.

21. In reaction to the horrors of the Second World War a lively sense of human rights led to a number of international documents and to the United Nations Organization.

There was more awareness of the rights of individuals,  
but also of the rights of nations,  
shifting the center of the social question  
from the national  
to the international level.  
Notwithstanding the progress made,  
not all efforts were positive,  
and no effective alternative to war was found  
to solve international conflicts.

### III. The Year 1989

22. In the 1980's oppressive regimes fell  
in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.  
Progress was made  
toward more just political structures.  
The church committed itself  
to defending and promoting human rights.  
Heroic witness to this was given by pastors,  
Christian communities, and individuals,  
showing that problems can be resolved  
through dialogue and solidarity  
rather than by war and destruction.

23. The decisive factor  
in the fall of oppressive regimes  
was the violation  
of the rights of workers.  
It all began in Poland  
in the name of solidarity.  
The oppressed working people  
recovered and discovered  
the church's social teaching.  
The Europe left over after the Second World War,  
and its resulting Marxist bloc, has been overcome  
by the nonviolent commitment of people  
witnessing to the truth.  
May their example teach others.

24. A second factor in this crisis  
was the failure of an economic system  
that was not only technically inefficient,  
but violated the human right  
to private initiative,  
to ownership of property,  
and to freedom in the economic sector.  
To this must be added the violation  
of cultural and national rights.  
Cultures express in different ways  
the meaning of life and person.  
When these differences are overlooked,  
society and life deteriorate.  
The main cause of this collapse  
was the reaction of the younger generations  
to the spiritual void brought by atheism.  
Youth did not find  
any sense of direction  
until they rediscovered  
the roots of their national culture  
and the person of Jesus Christ.

Marxism promised to uproot  
the need for God from the human heart,  
it actually showed that the heart  
cannot be left empty in this way.

25. The events of 1989 were born from prayer.  
They would have been unthinkable  
without trust in God,  
and union with the sufferings  
of Christ on the cross.  
It is in this way  
that we are able to accomplish  
the miracle of peace and freedom.  
This freedom, however,  
bears the wound of original sin,  
which draws us to evil  
and puts us in constant  
need of redemption.  
This belief is not only  
part of Christian revelation;  
it also helps us to understand  
our human reality.  
The social order will be all the more stable  
if it takes this fact into consideration.  
When people think that,  
possessing the secret of a perfect social organization,  
they can make evil impossible,  
they also think  
they can use any means,  
even violence and deceit,  
to realize it.  
No political society  
should be confused with the kingdom of God.  
It is only God who—at the end of time—  
will finally separate  
the weeds from the wheat.  
The struggle between good and evil will continue  
as long as time lasts.  
The kingdom of God,  
being "in" the world,  
without being "of" the world,  
throws a critical light on society,  
calling everyone, especially the laity,  
to infuse human reality  
with the spirit of the Gospel.

26. The events of 1989  
are of worldwide importance.  
The church met a workers' movement  
that for almost a century  
had been partly under the influence of Marxism.  
Workers found their consciences,  
in their demand for justice and dignity  
as offered in the church's social teaching.  
The crisis of Marxism  
does not rid the world  
of the injustices  
on which it thrived.  
To those looking for a new way,  
the church offers its teaching,



as well as its concrete commitment  
and material assistance  
in the struggle against  
marginalization and suffering.  
Beyond an impossible compromise  
between Marxism and Christianity,  
the church reaffirms  
integral human liberation—  
with consequences important  
for the countries of the Third World,  
searching for their own path to development.

27. As regards Europe,  
so much ill will  
has accumulated during the communist regimes  
that there is a danger  
of a serious explosion of hatred.  
We need some concrete steps of arbitration  
to intervene in the conflicts  
that will arise between nations.  
A patient material  
and moral reconstruction  
is needed.  
The fall of Marxism  
and the end of the world's division  
highlight our interdependence.  
Peace and prosperity  
belong to the whole of the human race.  
They cannot be achieved in isolation  
at the cost of other peoples and nations.

28. Some countries in Europe  
at the moment need  
the kind of help given to others  
after the Second World War.  
They find themselves in this predicament  
as a result of the tragic situation  
imposed on them.  
The countries  
that were partly responsible for that situation  
owe them a debt  
as a matter of justice.  
This need should not diminish  
the willingness to sustain and assist  
the countries of the Third World,  
which often suffer even more.  
Priorities have to be redefined.  
Enormous resources could become available  
by disarming the huge military machines  
built by East and West for conflict.  
These resources  
could become even more abundant  
if we found a way of resolving conflicts  
without war.  
A change of mentality is needed,  
no longer seeing the poor as a burden,  
or as intruders  
trying to profit from others,  
but as people seeking to share  
the goods of the world

so that we can create  
a just and prosperous world for all.

29. Development must be understood  
as something fully human,  
not as something merely material;  
its real aim is the enhancement  
of everyone's capacity  
to respond to God's call.

The rights of the human conscience  
must be fully recognized.

It is important to reaffirm these rights:

a) because some dictatorships  
have not yet been overcome;

b) because, in the developed countries,  
the promotion of and demand for instant gratification devalue respect for human rights and values; and

c) because, in some countries  
new forms of religious fundamentalism  
deny minority groups their rights.

#### IV. Private Property and the Universal Destination of Material Goods

30. The church has always defended  
the right to private property,  
teaching at the same time  
that this right is not absolute.

Pope Leo XIII wrote:

"How must one's possessions be used?  
The human being should not consider  
material possessions as his or her own,  
but as common to all."

The Second Vatican Council stated:

"Of its nature private property  
also has a social function,  
based on the law of  
the common purpose of goods."

31. God gave the earth to the whole human race  
for the sustenance of its members,  
without excluding or favoring anyone.

The earth does not yield its fruits  
without human work.

Through work, a human being  
makes part of the earth his or her own,  
which is the origin of individual property.

We obviously must not prevent others  
from having their own part of God's gift.  
Access to work and land are to be found  
at the basis of every human society.

Work and land  
change their relationship continuously.

At one time the natural fruitfulness of the earth  
was the primary factor of wealth;  
in our time the role of human work  
is more important.

Work "with" and "for" others

depends more and more on insight  
into the productivity of the earth  
and knowledge of our human needs.

32. In our time, know-how,  
technology, and skill  
are no less important than land.  
The wealth of industrialized nations  
is based more on the ownership of technology  
than on possession of natural resources.  
Another important source of wealth  
is the ability to know the needs of others  
and how to satisfy those needs.  
Because all of this often requires  
the co-operation of many people,  
organizational skills, planning, timing, and management  
are also sources of wealth.  
The role of discipline, creativity,  
initiative, and entrepreneurial ability,  
is evident and decisive.  
It affirms what Christianity  
has constantly affirmed:  
next to the earth,  
humanity's principal resource  
is the human being itself.  
Once the decisive factor of production was land;  
then it was capital;  
now it is the human being.

33. Many are faced with the impossibility  
of acquiring the needed knowledge  
to take their place in the working world.  
They are exploited or marginalized,  
development takes place over their heads,  
and they cannot keep up  
with new forms  
of production and organization.  
In their quest for wealth  
they are attracted  
to the cities of the Third World,  
where there is no room for them.  
Sometimes there are even attempts  
to eliminate them  
through population control.  
Many others struggle to earn a bare minimum,  
in conditions that are as bad  
as those at the beginning of industrialization.  
Those cultivating land  
are excluded from land ownership  
and often are practically no more than slaves.  
With no land, no material goods,  
no knowledge, no training,  
they cannot escape their humiliation.  
Some development programs  
have been set up,  
and the countries that managed  
to gain access  
to the international market in this way  
have suffered less from stagnation and recession  
than those who isolated themselves.

Some aspects typical of the Third World also appear in developed countries, where the elderly, the young, and women can easily be marginalized in a so-called Fourth World.

34. The free market appears to be the most efficient tool for utilizing resources and responding to needs. But this is true only if you are able to buy and sell. Justice and truth demand that basic human needs should be met and that none should be left to perish. The possibility of surviving and of making a contribution to the common good is something that simply belongs to the human person as a human person. In the Third World Pope Leo XIII's objectives are still goals to be reached.

35. Trade Unions and other worker's organizations find here a wide range of opportunities for commitment and effort for the sake of justice. It is right to struggle against an unjust economic system that does not uphold the priority of the human being over capital and land. The alternative to it is not a socialist system that leads to state capitalism, but a society with free work, enterprise, and participation— an alternative that is in favor of a market that guarantees the basic needs of the whole of society. Profit, though it plays a legitimate role, is not the only indicator of a firm's condition. The people in it might be humiliated and offended. The aim of a business is not simply profit, but to form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. After the fall of "real socialism" capitalism is not the only economic alternative left. Individuals and nations need the basic things to enable them to share in development. The stronger ones must assist the weaker ones, and the weaker ones must use the opportunities offered. Foreign debts affect these efforts. The principle

that debts should be paid remains,  
but this should not be asked for  
at the cost of the hunger and despair  
of entire peoples.  
There is the need  
to lighten, defer, or even cancel the debts,  
and indeed, this does sometimes happen,  
to let people subsist and progress.

36. In advanced economics  
the demand  
is no longer for quantity,  
but for quality.  
Hence the issue  
of consumerism arises.  
The new material, physical, and instinctive needs  
should remain subordinate  
to humanity's interior and spiritual needs.  
Appealing to instinct only  
may create lifestyles and consumer attitudes  
that are damaging  
to spiritual and physical health.  
The education and cultural formation  
of consumers and producers and of the mass media  
are urgently needed,  
as well as the intervention of public authority.  
A striking example  
of false consumerism  
is the use of drugs.  
Drug abuse is a sign  
of the malfunction of a society,  
destructive reading of human needs,  
and the idle filling of a spiritual void.  
The same could be said of pornography  
and other forms of exploitative consumerism.  
It is not wrong to want to improve our lives.  
It is wrong to seek improvement  
in what one "has," and not in what one "is."  
Even the decision to invest  
in one way rather than another  
is always a moral and cultural choice,  
that should be determined by  
human sympathy  
and trust in divine providence.

37. Consumerism also raises  
the ecological issue.  
Humanity is consuming  
the resources of the earth and life  
in an excessive and disordered way,  
forgetting the earth's own needs  
and God-given purpose,  
provoking a rebellion  
on the part of nature,  
and overlooking  
our duties and obligations  
toward future generations.

38. While there is much concern, and rightly so,  
about the natural environment

and the various animal species  
threatened with extinction,  
little effort is made  
to safeguard our "human ecology."  
Urbanization and work  
can give rise to "structures of sin"  
that need to be destroyed  
and replaced by authentic forms  
of community life.

39. The first and fundamental structure  
for a "human ecology"  
is the family, founded on marriage,  
in which the mutual gift of self  
as husband and wife  
creates an environment  
in which children can be born  
and grow up.  
Too often life is considered  
to be a series of sensations  
rather than as something to be accomplished.  
The result is a lack of freedom  
to commit oneself to another person  
and to bring children into this world.  
The family is sacred;  
it is the sanctuary of life.  
It is life's heart and culture.  
It is the opposite of the culture of death,  
the destruction of life by abortion,  
and the systematic anti-child-bearing campaigns.

40. There are needs and common goods  
that cannot be satisfied  
by the market system.  
it is the task of the state  
and of all society  
to defend them.  
An idolatry of the market alone  
cannot do all that should be done.

41. Marxism blamed capitalist society  
because it alienated the human being.  
Its idea of alienation was mistaken,  
and its remedy of a collectivized society  
also proved to be a mistake.  
Yet alienation is still a reality  
in Western societies,  
because of consumerism,  
that does not help one appreciate  
one's authentic personhood  
and because of work,  
which shows interest only in profit,  
and none in the workers,  
considering them to be mere means.  
The way out of this impasse  
is to reconsider  
the Christian vision of the human person  
and its "capacity for transcendence."  
41A human society is both alienated and alienating  
if its organization, production, and consumption

make transcendence more difficult.

Exploitation, in the Marxist sense,  
has been overcome in the West,  
alienation has not.

It exists when people use one another,  
ignoring their own and each other's authentic needs  
and when the mass media  
hinder authentic human growth  
by imposing fashions and opinions  
through carefully orchestrated  
promotion campaigns.

42. After the failure of communism,  
should capitalism be the goal  
for Eastern Europe and the Third World?

The answer is complex.

If capitalism means

a "market" or "free" economy  
that recognizes the role of business,  
the market, and private property,  
as well as free human creativity,  
then the answer is "yes."

If it means a system

in which economic, religious,  
and ethical freedom are denied,  
then the answer is "no."

Marxism failed,

but marginalization and exploitation remain,  
especially in the Third World,  
just as alienation does  
in the more advanced countries.

The collapse of communism

is not enough to change these conditions.

A radically capitalist system  
might not even try to solve them.

43. The church has no models to offer.

Models develop out of concrete situations.

Instead, the church offers its social teaching  
as an indispensable and ideal orientation.

It insists on the right of workers  
to be respected and to be involved  
in the life of industrial enterprises  
so that, in a certain sense,  
they "work for themselves."

This might weaken power structures,  
but it will promote  
a greater productivity and efficiency.

A business is not only

a "society of capital goods,"  
it is also a "society of persons."

A broad associated workers' movement  
is still needed to achieve these goals.

The relationship between

private property  
and the universal destination  
of material wealth

has to be reestablished.

By their work workers commit themselves  
"with" others and "for" others.

They work in order to provide  
for their families, communities, nations,  
and, ultimately for all humanity.

They collaborate in this  
with others, suppliers and customers,  
in an ever expanding chain  
of solidarity.

Ownership is just  
if it serves a useful work.

It is unjust when it is not used  
or when it is used to hinder others,  
or to break the solidarity among workers  
to gain profit.

The obligation to earn one's bread  
presumes the right to do so.

A society that denies this right  
cannot be justified,  
nor can it attain social peace.

## V. State and Culture

44. Pope Leo XIII speaks of a society  
where the three powers—  
legislative, executive, and judicial—  
keep each other in balance.

In this way law is sovereign,  
and not the will of some individuals.

Marxist-Leninism contradicted this.

It holds that some people  
have more knowledge than others  
and that they should rule  
others in an absolute way.

It denies the inborn dignity  
of each and every human being,  
created in the image of God.

45. This totalitarianism  
rejected the authority of the church.

By defending its own freedom,  
the church also stood up  
for the freedom of the human person.

46. The church values democracy  
and cannot encourage narrow ruling groups  
to use the power of the state  
for their own interests.

Real democracy requires a state,  
ruled by law, true education and formation,  
participation and shared responsibility.

Democracy does not mean  
that there is no ultimate truth.

If that were true,  
ideas and convictions  
could easily be manipulated  
for reasons of power.

The church is aware of the danger  
of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

Christian truth is not an ideology;  
it knows that human life



is realized in history,  
and it always respects human freedom.  
Freedom attains its full development  
when accepting the truth.  
Christians will listen to every fragment of truth  
they meet in their contact with others.

47. The democratic ideal prevails these days;  
so does attention to human rights.  
That is why mention should be made  
of the most important of these rights:  
the right  
to life,  
to develop from the moment of conception,  
to live in a united family,  
to education,  
to work,  
to support oneself and one's dependents,  
to establish a family freely,  
to have and rear children,  
to live in the truth of one's faith.  
Even in democracies  
these rights are not always respected.  
Sometimes certain demands are not met  
for narrow opportunistic, electoral,  
or financial reasons.  
This leads to distrust and apathy  
and in the end to the inability to see any issue  
within the framework of a coherent vision  
of the common good.

48. The economy cannot be run  
in an institutional,  
juridical, or political vacuum:  
the state has its role to play,  
guaranteeing personal freedom,  
a stable currency,  
and efficient public services.  
Lack of stability, corruption,  
improper ways of growing rich, and speculation  
hinder development and social order.  
The state has to intervene  
when monopolies hinder development;  
in certain cases it can substitute its own services  
when certain sectors of business  
are too weak to render the services  
needed for the common good.  
Those interventions should be  
as brief as possible  
in order to avoid  
removing from society and business  
tasks that belong to them.  
The range of these interventions  
has expanded to the point  
of creating the so-called welfare state  
as a response to poverty and deprivation.  
Recent excesses and abuses—  
to the point that the welfare state has been dubbed  
the "social assistance state"—  
are the result

of an inadequate understanding  
of the role of the state.

The "principle of subsidiarity"  
must be respected:

"A community of a higher order  
should not interfere with the life  
of a community of a lower order,  
taking over its functions."

In case of need it should, rather, support  
the smaller community and help  
to coordinate its activity with activities  
in the rest of society  
for the sake of the common good.

Not doing this  
leads to a loss of human energy,  
an increase of bureaucratic agencies,  
and an increase in costs.

Needs are best understood  
by the real neighbor  
of those who are in need,  
and such needs often demand  
more than just material support,  
a deeper, personal support.  
Help is most effective when given  
in genuine fraternal support.

49. Active charity has never ceased  
to be practiced in the church—  
witness the amount of voluntary work being done.

To overcome  
today's individualistic mentality,  
a concrete commitment  
to solidarity and charity is needed,  
beginning in the family.

The state should develop family policies  
that help families to bring up their children  
and to look after the elderly,  
strengthening the relations between the generations.

Other intermediate communities play a role  
in personalizing society  
and deepening our understanding  
of who we are.

50. It is in this way  
that the culture of a nation is born,  
generation after generation,  
always challenged by the young,  
not in order to destroy or reject it,  
but to make it more real, relevant, and personal.  
When a culture becomes inward-looking  
rejecting any dialogue,  
it is heading for its end.

51. The first and most important things  
happen within a person's heart.  
It is at this level that the church  
contributes to true culture,  
promoting peace,  
preaching how creation  
is placed in human hands

to make it fruitful and more perfect,  
preaching how the Son of God  
saved and united us,  
making us responsible for each other.  
These duties are not restricted to  
one's family or one's nation,  
but extend to all humankind.  
They are made all the more urgent  
by both the new means of communication  
that have brought us closer together  
and by the terrifying power for destruction  
now available that makes it practically impossible  
to limit the consequences of a violent conflict.

52. "War, never again!"  
just as personal revenge has given way  
to the rule of law within states,  
so the time has come for  
a similar step to be taken at an international level,  
not forgetting that at the root of war and conflict  
there are usually real grievances.  
As Pope Paul VI once said,  
"Another name for peace is development."  
Together we are responsible  
for avoiding war;  
together we are responsible  
for promoting development.  
It should be possible to organize  
at an international level  
the kind of solid economy  
that is possible in an individual society.  
The poor—whether individuals or nations—  
need realistic opportunities.  
This calls for a concerted worldwide effort  
to promote development.  
This may mean important changes  
in established lifestyles,  
limiting waste of environmental  
and human resources.  
it also means utilizing  
the new and spiritual responses  
of peoples who today are at the margin  
of the international community,  
thus enriching the family of nations.

#### VI. The Human Being Is the Way of the Church

53. The church is not interested in  
recovering former privileges  
or imposing its vision.  
Its interest is the human being,  
the "concrete" human being,  
the individual person to whom Christ  
united himself.  
The human being is the primary route  
that the church must travel  
to fulfill its mission.

54. The human and social sciences are helpful  
in explaining

how this concrete person  
is involved in a complex network  
of relationships.

Faith reveals our real identity.

That is why the church concerns itself  
with the rights of the individual,  
the working class, the family,  
the state, national and international society,  
with economic life, culture, war and peace,  
and respect for human life from conception.

55. The social teaching of the church  
belongs to moral theology,  
"a sign and safeguard  
of the transcendence  
of the human person."

56. I thank all those devoted  
to the church's social teaching.  
I wish it to be known and applied  
in the countries  
where "real socialism" has collapsed;  
in the Western countries  
that need to correct their system:  
in the Third World countries  
with their underdevelopment.  
As Pope Leo XIII stated:  
"All should put their hands to the work  
which falls to their share,  
and that at once and straightway,  
lest the evil which is already so great  
become through delay absolutely beyond remedy."

57. The social message of the Gospel  
is and always has been a basis for action:  
the first Christian communities  
redistributed their goods to the poor;  
in the early Middle Ages  
monks engaged in rural development;  
later, religious women and men founded hospitals.  
We, too, need the witness of actions.

58. Love for others, and especially for the poor,  
is made concrete by promoting justice.  
It is not a matter of giving some surplus,  
but of helping entire peoples.  
It requires a change of lifestyles,  
a reorientation of ourselves  
and our organizations  
toward the whole of the human family.  
It asks for effective international agencies  
to coordinate the powerful nations  
and take into account the weaker ones—  
which even the most powerful state on earth  
would not be able to do on its own.

59. The gift of grace is needed,  
a newness in the following of Jesus.  
The church's social teaching  
should begin a practical and scientific dialogue

at the crossroads  
where it meets the world as it is.

60. Pope Leo XIII wrote:

"This most serious question  
demands the attention  
and the efforts of others."

John XXIII addressed his letter on peace  
to "all people of good will."

Now, even more than in those days,  
we are aware that all—  
even those who profess no religion—  
can contribute to a solution.

I already invited all Christian churches  
and all the great world religions  
to offer their witness  
to the dignity of the human being  
created by God.

I am convinced that they will play  
a role in preserving peace  
and building a society worthy of  
the human being.

61. A hundred years ago  
industrialized society was:

"a yoke little better than that of slavery itself."

That is why the church spoke  
in defense of humanity

The church did so  
after the First and Second World Wars  
for exactly the same reason.

And now it does so  
with regard to the developing countries  
living in conditions that are still  
"a yoke little better than that of slavery itself."

62. This encyclical, looking at the past,  
is directed to the future.

As in the years of Rerum Novarum  
we live on the threshold of a new century.

The intention is—with God's help—  
to prepare for that moment.

God's promise is:

"Behold I make all things new."

This newness has been present since creation,  
and especially since Jesus became one of us.

I thank God  
for enlightening humanity  
on its earthly journey,  
and I pray that Mary,  
the mother of Jesus,  
may accompany the church  
on its journey,  
as she accompanied Jesus, her son.