

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

A SUMMARY

Ancient Background

In 1968 archaeologists discovered the previously unknown city of Ebla in what is now modern Syria. Ebla was the capital of a city-state that dominated the area from 3000 BC to 1600 BC. In 1975 the library of Ebla was unearthed and revealed some 16,000 clay tablets which gave a dramatic picture of this ancient culture. A 1978 article in the *National Geographic* entitled, "Splendor of an Unknown Empire", made this interesting notation:

All roads lead to Ebla throughout much of the Middle East, long before Rome held sway. Once there, those roads went directly to the steps of the royal palace. Ebla erected no walls around its palace, only around the city itself. Eblatians believed their leaders should be accessible and accountable. A king ascended the throne not strictly through lineage, but by election, and was **responsible for the welfare of widows, the orphaned, and the poor. If derelict, a king could be ousted by a group of elders.**

From the beginning of recorded history human beings have expressed their belief that there was a strict communal obligation, guaranteed by the highest authority in the nation, to care for the poor and marginalized in society. They knew from experience that the structures of society often contributed to the creation of a gap between the rich and the poor and thus the community through its leadership and its laws had a moral obligation to attend to needs of the poor. This sense of a community responsibility and obligation to the poor is difficult to revitalize in our modern, individualistic Western culture.

The Vision of Israel

It was within in this culture of the Middle East that the Hebrews became a people and developed their laws and customs. For the Hebrews, salvation was experienced as a communal event. Moses led the people out of Egypt by announcing that God was forming them into a people. They were God's people and He was their source of life.

They settled in the land of Canaan sometime in the 12th century BC. It was said that each received a share of the land - land owned by God and given to them for their use. For more than a century they resisted the notion that they should be ruled by a king. Later they accepted the office of king and became a nation, but they knew in their hearts, like the people of Ebla, that becoming a nation under a king could create the social inequities that would divide them as a people - some with wealth and power and some with none.

They also understood that in their culture land was the source of wealth, security and

individual identity. Once land was purchased or acquired by loan default by some in the community, this was the beginning of the gap between the rich and the poor.

In an attempt to address this problem, they held in faith and expressed in their law their religious intuition that the land was a gift to them from God. It was to be used for their own good, however, God owned the land. The inequities that would inevitably arise when land changed hands were addressed in the law by the concept of the Jubilee Year as expressed in Leviticus:

This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when every one of you shall return to his own property, every one to this own family estate (Lev. 25:10).

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the country you possess, you shall grant a redemption of the land.

If your brother becomes poor, and sells part of his property, then his next of kin shall come and redeem what his brother has sold. If a man has no one to redeem it, and then himself become prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it, let him reckon the years since he sold it and pay back the overpayment to the man to whom he sold it; and he shall return to his property. But if he has not sufficient means to get it back for himself, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the year of jubilee, in the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property (Lev. 25:23-28).

And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you. take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God; that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.

When, then, your countryman becomes so impoverished beside you that he sells you his services, do not make him work as a slave. Rather, let him be like a hired servant or like your tenant, working with you until the jubilee year, when he, together with his children, shall be released from your service and return to his kindred and to the property of his ancestors. (Lev. 25:35-41).

No matter what misfortune or failure had occurred in their lives, in the jubilee year they were to be restored to full members of the community and their ancestral property

restored.

While scholars doubt that this kind of restoration of the jubilee ever took place in actual fact, nevertheless it was contained in the law and it defined the kind of justice that was at the heart of the definition of the People of God. The concept of the jubilee year expressed the care and concern that God had for all of his people. It also expressed the religious insight that all the earth belongs to God and that human beings are the stewards of creation, not its owners. In a community committed to the will of God, those dispossessed of their land and/or without adequate means of support could never be taken for granted. All in the community had a right to life and the means to sustain it, especially the widows, orphans and strangers in their midst. The justice of God demanded it.

It was the role of the prophets to ensure that the Hebrews did not forget their responsibilities toward each other under the Law. For Isaiah and Amos, true religion did not consist in empty religious rituals, but in a life of justice and a concern for all the people of God. As the prophet Isaiah said:

Is this the manner of fasting I wish,
of keeping a day of penance;
That a man bow his head like a reed,
and lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Do you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking every yoke;
Sharing your bread with the hungry,
sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am! (Isaiah 58:5-9)

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your
solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings

and cereal offerings, I will not accept them,
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an everflowing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

In the synagogues - places of prayer and study - that developed perhaps during the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century BC, there was a tradition of welcoming travelers by offering them lodging and food. It was also a tradition to provide food, without question, to locals who found themselves temporarily in desperate straits. In addition, in many synagogues there was a "chest" with funds to provide longer term help to those who found themselves in need.

The Vision of Jesus

While Jesus was an observant Jew, he did not preach about performing correct religious rituals, rather he healed the sick and invited sinners and outcasts into his presence at table. An ideal community living the love of God is what Jesus spoke of in announcing the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus. It envisioned a community totally given over to the will of God and thus transformed by God into a truly human community as intended by its creator.

The Kingdom was like the ideal state of existence as expressed in the Genesis story where mankind and all creation lived in peace -- in right relationship with one another. The God of the Hebrews created mankind to live in peace, but human sin would not allow this peaceful state. Jesus gave hope that by the power of God the Kingdom could come, sin would be overcome and peace would be restored. Those who would be invited into this Kingdom were not those who only performed certain religious rituals, but those who responded to the needs of the poor and the outcast with whom Jesus identified Himself. And those who rejected the needy, rejected Jesus and thus were rejected from the Kingdom.

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep on his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you

clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me’.

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’

And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ (Mt. 25:31-40)

Time and time again, Jesus warned the rich that if they could not share their wealth, they would not enter the Kingdom. He also told his disciples that if they were to be his followers, they must be servants of one another.

The Mission of the Church

If the Church is to be the sacrament of the presence of Jesus to the world, then it must live and act as Jesus did. It must be a people dedicated to healing and nurturing those with great need who live around us. The mission of the Church is not to simply gather people into a community which acts out empty religious rituals. The mission of the Church is to be the sacrament of the presence of Jesus so that people’s lives can be transformed -- transformed to be the body of Christ to a broken world which desperately needs people committed to justice - to a just society in which all live in peace and have their proper share of God’s creation. When justice does not exist, God is not known; he is absent.

Therefore, the promotion of social justice is not an option for Christians, it lies at the heart of the Christian life. The Church must not only live a life of justice within its own community, it must also take on the role of the prophets like Isaiah and Amos constantly reminding society of what it means to be truly religious, truly at one with the will of God. The Church must not only live, but also preach the Kingdom.

If we are to continue the work of Jesus to make the Kingdom of God grow in the world, then we as a Church must be dedicated to social justice. In many remarkable ways the leadership of the Church has responded to the call of Jesus to speak out prophetically and act for social justice. The following is an outline of official statements by popes and bishops that try to apply justice in the various historical circumstances of human life.

1891 - Rerum Novarum - “On the Condition of Labor” - Pope Leo XIII

This encyclical was set against the background of the conditions after the Industrial Revolution which included the harsh treatment of industrial workers - child labor, bad working conditions, low pay, etc. Labor unions were beginning amid great resistance and violence from big business. The Knights of Labor in the U.S. included a great number of Catholic workers and had Catholic leadership, it fought for an 8-hour work day,

occupational safety, abolition of child labor and equal pay for women. Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore defended the Knights and his letter of defense was influential in Leo XIII issuing *Rerum Novarum*. The encyclical expressed moral outrage at the exploitation of workers and placed a concern for social issues at the heart the mission of the Church.

Summary of major points:

The Church could speak out on social issues.

Right of private ownership of property not absolute, subject to the common good.

Obligation to pay a living wage.

Workers' right to organize.

Collaboration rather than class struggle as means for social change.

State must intervene to protect citizens when no other remedy is possible.

The state should protect the rights of association, religious rights and show a special concern for the poor.

Denunciation of "a devouring usury" and the virtual enslavement of the poor by the rich.

Labor is **not** a commodity to be bought at market prices determined by the laws of supply and demand, rather it should be determined by the human needs of the worker.

Workers are to work conscientiously, not injure the property of employers, to refrain from violence and be thrifty and prudent.

1931 - Quadragesimo Anno - "On Reconstructing the Social Order - Pope Pius XI

This was the time of the great world depression. With large masses of unemployed in Europe and the US and concentrations of wealth and power in the hands of a few, many were questioning whether free enterprise held promise for the good of the workers.

Liberal capitalism, socialism, communism and a growing fascist movement all competed for political/economic power.

Summary of major points:

Reiterated *Rerum Novarum* in claiming the Church's right to speak of social issues, upheld

the right to private property coupled with social responsibility and the responsibility of the state to insure that private property contributes to the common good.

Defined just wage as a family wage.

Rejected socialism, accepted free competition all within a society ordered according to social justice and charity.

Defined the principle of "subsidiary" -- larger political entities should not absorb the function of smaller and more local ones. When smaller entities cannot cope with a social problem, the larger entity (the state) must intervene. This was a criticism of socialism and fascism.

Later the U.S. Bishops used the principle of subsidiarity to underscore the importance of families, neighborhood groups, small businesses, professional associations, community

organizations as well as local, state and national government.

Pius XII - 1939-1958

He wrote no major social encyclical, but in various addresses and writings he upheld the right to private property, as had Leo XIII and Pius XI, but he also gave first priority to *the general right of all people to the use of the goods of the earth*. For Pius XII the right of an individual to a particular item of private property is a means for carrying out, and subordinate to, the general right of all people to use property.

1961 - Mater et Magistra, “Christianity and Social Progress - Pope John XXIII

By this time the reality of “the third world” had become evident. Again this was the result of the imbalance of wealth and power. After WW II, the developing West had prospered by an extravagant use of the energy, labor and raw material of the poorer nations.

Western nations had responded to the social needs of the poor by various forms of the “welfare state”. President Kennedy addressed the problems of the third world in the formation of the Peace Corps.

The pope recognized the trend of socialism and called for a balance between rugged individualism and socialism. Individual and group freedoms can exist with some form of state regulation and social programs.

Summary of major points:

Reiteration of the major points of Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII.

Called for new forms of agricultural aid.

Called for emergency and developmental aid to countries in need, while respecting cultural

and political differences.

Warned of threats to peace from economic imbalances.

Stressed human dignity.

Called for state action and private initiative in accomplishing the social responsibility of property.

1963 - Pacem in Terris, “Peace on Earth” - Pope John XXIII

Written within the context of the Cold War - the Berlin Wall, the Cuban missile crisis and the beginnings of Vietnam War. It was also the time of the growing political and economic power of the “military-industrial complex”. The U.S. and other Western countries were engaged in a multi-billion dollar arms trade, which included most third world countries.

Summary of major points:

First encyclical addressed to “all people of good will”.

Encouraged use of reason and natural law to define rights and duties of people, public authorities, states and the world community.

Rights include economic, political and religious rights, immigration rights and the mutual responsibilities of citizens.

Need for a world-wide authority - supported the United Nations.

Approved of the improved status of workers, increased participation of women, a decline in colonialism and the rejection of racial discrimination.

Condemned the arms race.

Called for aid and the protection of rights of refugees.

Spoke of economic rights -- opportunity to work without coercion, just wage, private property and a share of productive goods.

Idea of “right to life” included: adequate food, clothing shelter, rest, medical care, necessary social services and, in the case of sickness, inability to work, widowhood or unemployment, some form of “security” which the state might rightly provide when necessary.

There cannot be peace without justice.

1965 - Gaudium et Spes - “The Church in the Modern World” - Vatican II

At the Second Vatican Council, the bishops of the world addressed the world’s needs.

Bishops from various parts of the world were able to give a picture of the radical economic imbalances and threats to peace and humanity itself.

The document considered a very wide range of issues: the development of church teaching on human dignity; social relations; essential social needs; the role of the church in the modern world; marriage and family life; overpopulation; responsible parenthood; respect for life; cultural diversity and development; fundamental imbalances between rich and poor, duties of public authorities and the common good.

Summary of main points:

Approved of nonviolence and conscientious objection.

Rejected blind obedience to commands, wars of subjugation, and acts of war directed toward population centers.

Condemned the arms race.

Declared that the social gospel is an essential part of the good news of Jesus.

Responsibility of the Church for secular as well as religious history.

Theme of responsibility and service.

Committed the Church to a dialogue with other Christians and non-Christians.

1967 - The Development of Peoples, “Populorum Progressio” - Pope Paul VI

Noted the shift for focus from rich and poor individuals to rich and poor nations. In the U.S. President Johnson declared a War on Poverty and the Great Society. Medicare began in 1966. U.S. deeply involved in Vietnam. The civil rights movement was in full swing.

Summary of major points:

Three causes listed for imbalances between rich and poor nations: 1) legacy of colonialism,
2) neocolonial situation of international economic domination, 3) imbalance of power among nations.

Challenged the injustice of so-called free trade.

Called for a just economic system built not on the principle of liberalistic capitalism, but upon solidarity between rich and poor, dialogue, universal charity, retention of the competitive market.

True development is not only economic, but must include the whole person and every person in the task of self-fulfillment and personal responsibility.

Concept of “solidarity” that links the individual and nations with concerns of the poor.

Called for end to nationalism and racism; the arms race.

Called Christians to work for justice so that all people can become “artisans of their destiny”.

1971 - A Call to Action - “Octogesima Adveniens” - Pope Paul VI

A growing disenchantment with purely economic development - the rich nation/poor nation gap was becoming larger. Need for political and social action. Latin American Bishops met in Medellin in Columbia in 1968 and called for the Church to identify itself with the poor. The Latin American Church now linked evangelization and justice.

Summary of major points:

Discussion of social justice must move from just economics to politics.

Affirmation of political activity to change trade, debt and monetary policy and to control multinational corporations and the media.

Warned against the ideologies of socialism, Marxism, liberalism and “progress” in terms of

“merely quantitative economic growth”.

Advocates political activity - but warns against ideologies (socialism, Marxism and liberalism) on the one hand and Utopias (imaginary worlds) on the other..

There is a 3rd way between capitalism and collectivism - the Church at the local level must

analyze and judge its particular situation which may lead to a variety of action responses and use an inductive approach focused on concrete sociopolitical realities, not simply deduced from an ideology. The individual Christian and the local Church

must “see, judge, and act”.

The Church must be political (faith committed to daily life), but not partisan (committed to any one political party or office). This will keep the Church free not only to cooperate within a political environment, but also free to criticize any political/economic system. A recognition that there is no perfect political/economic order possible on earth -- the Kingdom has not come in its fullness.

1971 - Justice in the World -- Synod of Bishops, Rome

Latin American bishops in the process of implementing social justice, liberation and a commitment to the poor from the Medellin conference. U.S. bishops wrote pastoral letters on: the Vietnam War, abortion and welfare reform. In 1969 they launched the Campaign for Human Development to address poverty and powerlessness by investing in projects where people can help themselves - a hand up instead of a hand out.

Summary of major points:

Declared that action for justice is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel. Voiceless victims of injustice include: migrants, refugees, the persecuted, political prisoners, the old, orphans, and the sick.

Christian love of neighbor and justice are one -- they cannot be separated and they are essential to gospel credibility.

The Church as an institution must not just preach justice, it must do justice. It must respect the rights of its members - employee rights, juridical rights, participation in decision-making at all levels, and everyone's right to freedom of expression and thought.

Introduced the practice of “twinning” a rich parish with a poor parish.

1975 - Evangelization in the Modern World, “Evangelii Nuntianda” - Pope Paul VI

This letter was initiated by a request from world bishops, especially African bishops, for the Pope to speak on several issues: the nature of contemporary evangelization; the role of liberation; small church communities; role of local churches, and the variety of cultures.

The U.S. bishops were dealing with the problems of the end of the Vietnam War, the My Lai massacre and the problem of large numbers of refugees. There were also the public disclosures of CIA spying of Americans, Watergate hearings and impeachment votes, the resignation and pardon to Nixon and the widespread conviction of public officials. The U.S. was also reviewing its political origins in preparation for its bicentennial.

Summary of major points:

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God is “absolute”. Jesus preached that salvation is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from

sin.

Evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation are profoundly linked.

Condemnation of all that condemns peoples to remain at the margins of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in

commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism. The Church is to proclaim liberation from these dehumanizing realities.

Political liberation alone without “justice in charity” could also be destructive. Must have a

conversion of both political structures and the human heart.

Must have an awareness of the social and structural concept of sin.

A warning that even the best structures and the most idealized systems soon become inhuman without a true conversion of the heart.

1981 - On Human Work, “Laborem Exercens” - Pope John Paul II

John Paul’s travels throughout the world made him aware of the world wide recession of the seventies, the oil crisis, protectionist policies and high inflation. The times also saw: the new China openness, Cambodian killing fields, Soviet Afghanistan invasion, an active Polish Solidarity union, and civil wars in Northern Ireland, Lebanon and Pakistan. Repressive conservative regimes tightened their grips on Latin America, But Somoza was overthrown in Nicaragua and civil war ravaged El Salvador.

In the U.S. Regan had slashed domestic programs to allow him to cut taxes and dramatically increase the military budget.

Summary of major points:

Reiteration of major themes: concern for the poor, evil of unemployment, sinful social structures, private property’s subordination to common use and the right to a just family wage.

Work as the essential key to the whole social question.

Labor neither a tool in the productive process nor a mere commodity. Work is personal.

Stressed the rights of workers and unions, urging “worker solidarity” for the sake of social

justice. Right to strike “within just limits”.

The right of suitable work for all, when unavailable unemployment benefits by employers or when necessary, the state.

Right of a just family wage and allowances for child-raising mothers.

Elimination of age or gender discrimination.

Provision for health care, work accidents, old age pensions and insurance, and appropriate vacations and holidays for workers.

Stressed the “spirituality of work” which furthers the creative design of God.

1983 - The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response - Pastoral Letter on War and Peace - United States Bishops

The social context of this Letter included the wars raging in El Salvador, Afghanistan, Lebanon and between Iran and Iraq. Sadat had been killed and Regan and Pope John Paul wounded in assassination attempts. Solidarity led massive unrest in Poland. In the U.S. Regan engineered the largest peacetime arms buildup in history; attention focused in draft registration, the B1, Trident, Cruise, Pershing II, the neutron bomb, and Star Wars.

The damage to domestic programs such as affordable housing was enormous. There was the Nuclear Freeze Movement and policy debate over first-strike strategy and weapons systems.

Summary of major points:

Peace is a human work, an enterprise of justice.

Two responses to aggression: 1) application of the "just war theory" 2) non-violence. Nations must defend themselves against unjust aggression, armed defense a last resort. Nuclear war - immoral against civilians; any first-strike morally unjustifiable; even "limited" use morally "highly skeptical".

Policy of nuclear deterrence policy only justifiable as a step toward progressive disarmament. Policy does not bring genuine peace.

Arms race is an act of aggression against the poor.

Called for a reduction of armaments, a ban on chemical and biological weapons and a cut back on conventional forces.

Must support immediate, bilateral, verifiable agreement to halt testing, production and deployment of new weapons systems. Need a comprehensive test ban treaty.

The Christian "pacifist option" could include: 1) gospel-based non-violent resistance, 2) gospel-based affirmative reconciliation with enemies and 3) "active non-violence" to resist aggression and undermine armed oppression.

Forms of non-violence include: diplomacy, negotiation, compromise, resistance and peaceable non-compliance and non-cooperation.

Non-violence is **not** passive about injustice and the defense of the rights of others, it rather

exemplifies what it means to resist injustice through non-violent methods.

Non-violence is not the way of the weak, the coward or the impatient. Must be ready for great sacrifice, even of one's life.

Non-violence needs intense study, and may not succeed.

1986 - Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy - pastoral Letter of the United States Bishops

Generated as a letter on capitalism to complement a letter on communism issued in 1980. World economic problems had worsened in a context which included: Japanese

economic ascendancy and U.S. decline, world pollution, widening gap between nations of the northern and southern hemispheres, hundreds of millions starving and severe third-world debt and inflation.

In the U.S., growing deficits, “Reganomics” cut back on domestic programs, cut taxes and increased defense spending.

Summary of major points:

Call for the development of a common moral vision if the economy is to serve all people fairly.

Stressed the biblical concept of justice and the tradition of Catholic social teaching.

A priority concern for the poor and the development of economic rights.

Delineation of responsibilities for workers and unions, owners and managers, citizens and governments and all Christian.

Scripture clearly provides the basis for a “preferential option for the poor”, however all people need to be considered, not just the poor.

Fundamental moral criterion for economic decisions: Must be at the service of **all people,**

especially the poor.

Noted that the increasing concentration of economic power threatens our political rights as well.

Loss of small farms undermines rural life.

Noted with concern these “signs of the times”: decline in U.S. voting; rise of multinational corporations, PACs, corporate buy-outs; flight to physical-emotional- - psychological lifestyle enclaves of nonparticipation.

1987 - The Social Concerns of the Church, “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis - Pope John II

Written in light of the increasing gap between northern and southern nations with hundreds of millions living in destitution; multiple “proxy wars” animated by the U.S. and the Soviets in Central America, the Middle East, southern Africa, Asia and Afghanistan; massive arms spending. Debt, unemployment, recession and inflation common to many nations.

Summary of major points:

Underdevelopment caused by the militant ideological opposition of East and West, the perversion of investment and aid into neo-colonialism, turning developing countries into “cogs on a gigantic wheel”.

Structural sin rooted in a thirst for profit and power call for a critical stance toward capitalism and collectivism and a preferential love for the poor.

Must accept the fact of an interdependent world, but must attend to the ethical requirements of interdependence for the good of all, especially the poor.

Must attend to the problems of housing, unemployment, underemployment,

international debt and the culture of consumerism.
Solidarity, i.e., a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, is the proper response to the reality of our interdependence.
Call for the abandonment of the politics of blocs, the elimination of all forms of economic, military or political imperialism, and the transformation of mutual distrust into collaboration.
Peace is the fruit of solidarity.

1991 - The Hundredth Year, “Centessimus Annus” - Pope John Paul II

Written to commemorate the 100th year since the publication of *Rerum Novarum*. The Cold War had ended when the Soviet Union collapsed, Germany was reunified, democratic reforms in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. Many dictators fell in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The Gulf War had devastated Iraq. The U.S. had become a debtor nation, one in five children were poor, 35 million people lacked health care coverage and drugs and violence had escalated. Gap between rich and poor widened.

Summary of major points:

Reiterated Leo’s key themes: social teaching part of evangelization; rights and dignity of workers; private property and the common good; role of the state, limited by subsidiarity; and a preferential option for the poor.

Criticism of socialism - atheistic anthropology, class struggle and state control of means of

production - no possible compromise between Marxism and Christianity

Criticized the “ruthlessness” of capitalism for the majority of the third world peoples.

Called for reduction or cancellation of third world debt.

Acknowledged free market efficiency while noting its limits and failures.

Rejected consumerism.

Need to protect human and natural ecology.

The State needs to provide for non-market human needs.

Authentic democracy based on: law and human rights.

Affirmed value of unions, charity and solidarity, grievance resolution.

Need to promote international justice.

Put pacifism and non-violent resistance above theories of justifiable war.

Criticized the Gulf War for slaughter of innocent and use of violence to settle disputes.

Called for the United Nations to promote non-violent resolution of conflicts.

Called for arms reductions and restraining the arms trade.

Concept of “new property” rights: shift from land to capital to technical know-how.

People now have a right to access to this new technical knowledge.

Final Word

The purpose of this outline is to indicate those areas of social thought which the official Church has studied and attempted to provide a Christian response. This side of the final

coming of the Kingdom, there can be no perfect social system. Certain political/economic systems are better than others, but none is perfect.

The Church rightly plays a prophet's role of examining the signs of the times and responding to social problems within their current context in an attempt to change unjust parts of the systems into those which provide the most justice for all, especially the poor.

The genius of the Catholic approach to social issues is that it is not deductive, that is, it does not start with a certain political/economic ideology or utopian vision and attempt to impose this on society. Rather it takes an inductive approach and starts with the problems of the moment and tries to address them with a commitment to justice while accepting a plurality of "solutions" or "remedies" given the existing social/economic system currently in place. It is developmental, rather than revolutionary.

To maintain its prophetic role, the Church must help maintain the separation of Church and state, without giving up its claim to speak out in the public forum. The Church not only has a right, but also a duty to speak out in the public forum as a participant in trying to shape the social order so that justice can come to characterize its structures.

While charity will always play a vital role in our response to the poor, the social ethics enunciated in the Catholic social tradition call for a primary focus on justice rather than simply charity - from a hand out to a hand up - facilitated by just and equitable social policies and structures.