

**MOTHER AND TEACHER**  
**Excerpts from the Encyclical**  
**by Pope John XXIII**  
**May, 1961**

**Introduction**

The Catholic Church has been established by Jesus Christ as Mother and Teacher of all nations. The teachings of Christ joins earth with heaven and embraces man - soul, body, intellect and will, and bids him to lift his mind from the changing human condition to that heavenly country of unending happiness and peace. Holy church has the special task of sanctifying souls and implements His commands when He says, "I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6) and "I am the Light of the World" (John 8:12). The Church is also solicitous for man's daily need as was Christ when he saw the hungry crowd and said, "I have compassion on the crowd" (Mark 8:2). His concern was not just by words but by actions as well. He alleviated their hunger, more than once, by miraculously multiplying bread. This nourishment of the body was also a foreshadow of that heavenly food He gave men on the day before He suffered. This twofold commandment of giving contains the full social teaching and action of the Church.

**PART I**

Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* at a time when a common opinion was put into practice in which everything in economic matters were attributed to inescapable natural forces. Workers, indignant at their lot, proposed extremist theories whose remedies would be worse than the evil to be cured. *Rerum Novarum* proclaimed a social message based on human nature and Gospel precepts.

Forty years later Pope Pius XI published his letter *Reconstructing the Social Order*. He re-affirmed the principles of Leo XIII's letter and took the occasion to clarify some points of doctrine and showed how the principles and directives regarding social affairs should be adapted to changing times. Pius XI reaffirmed the natural law character of private property, that work agreement be tempered with partnership arrangements so that workers and officials become participants in ownership, management or in profits.

Pius XII on June 1, 1941 in a radio broadcast gave special thanks to God for His Vicar's Letter (Leo XII) which was so great a gift to the Church. On this occasion he also went into greater detail on what the Church teaches regarding the three principal issues of social life in economic affairs namely, use of material goods, labor and family. Contemporary circumstances were different for Pius XII from those of earlier times as are the changes in the fields of science, technology, and economics, discovery of atomic energy, first for military then peaceful ends, the almost limitless possibilities of chemistry in synthetics, growth of automation, modernization of agriculture, radio

and television, great speeds of transportation and the initial conquest of space. This Letter is issued to keep alive the torch lighted by Leo XIII and set forth the Church's teaching on the new and serious problems of our day.

## **Part II**

To affirm that in economic affairs private initiative of individuals is to have first place, public authorities are to take an active interest to encourage, stimulate, regulate, supplement and complement the private initiative. This is based on the "principle of subsidiarity," Every social activity, by its very nature, should help the members of the social body and never destroy or absorb them. Public authorities should avoid restricting the freedom of private citizens but should rather increase it. There cannot be a prosperous and well ordered society unless both the private citizens and public authorities work together in economic affairs. Where the State lacks appropriate activity, the weak are exploited by the unscrupulous strong, who flourish like weeds among the wheat. The increased complexity of social life is not from a blind drive of natural forces. It is the creation of free men who are so disposed to act by nature as to be responsible for what they do.

Remuneration for work cannot be left entirely to unregulated competition nor by the arbitrary will of the more powerful. Workers require a wage sufficient to lead a life worthy of man and to fulfill family responsibilities properly. In determining an appropriate wage the following must be taken into account: first, contribution of individuals to the economic effort; the economic state of the enterprise; the requirements of each community; overall employment and, last, the common good of all peoples. Work agreements should be modified by partnership arrangements. Social justice demands that with the growth in the economy, there be a corresponding social development, maintaining a balance between wages and prices, making goods and services accessible to as many persons as possible, eliminating or keeping within bounds the inequalities between agriculture, industry and services.

## **PART III**

Rural dwellers leave the fields because nearly everywhere they see their affairs in a state of depression, both as regards labor productivity and the level of living of the farm populations. What can be done to prevent the imbalance between agriculture, industry and service in productive efficiency? Public authorities need to strive to improve principal services to the rural areas such as: highways; transport service; marketing facilities; pure drinking water; medical services; elementary, trade and professional schools; religion; recreation and the furnishings and equipment in the modern farm home. Public authorities need to take action in taxes, duties, credit, insurance, prices, the fostering of skills and improved agricultural equipment. They must also bear in mind that rural income is both delayed and subject to greater risk. Taxes should be according to the ability to pay.

Agriculture needs capital to carry on and expand operations but they cannot pay high rates of interest. Public authorities need to provide farmers at reasonable rates of interest. Insurance is needed to cover farm output and for farm families. Farmers average less income than workers in industry and the services. It would seem not to be in accord with social justice for farmers' benefits to be inferior to other classes of citizens. Generally the price of rural products is more a recompense for the farmer's labor than for his capital investment.

#### **PART IV**

Whatever the progress in technology and economic life, there can be neither peace nor justice in the world as long as men fail to realize how great is their dignity. A cardinal point of the Church's teaching is that individual men are necessarily the foundation, cause and end of all social institutions. The social teachings of the Catholic Church cannot be separated from her traditional teaching regarding man's life. Toward its fulfillment, we exhort not only our brothers and sons everywhere, but all men of good will.

#### **Dialogue Starter**

How do we affect farm product prices?

PAX ET BONUM  
*SFO*

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