

V F Papal document

Catholic Church and
social problems

A CALL TO ACTION APOSTOLIC LETTER

ON THE EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF RERUM NOVARUM

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APOSTOLIC LETTER
OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI

TO CARDINAL MAURICE ROY
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE LAITY
AND OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
JUSTICE AND PEACE

ON THE OCCASION
OF THE EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ENCYCLICAL
RERUM NOVARUM

Venerable Brother,

The eightieth anniversary of the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the message of which continues to inspire action for social justice, prompts us to take up again and to extend the teaching of our predecessors, in response to the new needs of a changing world. The Church, in fact, travels forward with humanity and shares its lot in the setting of history. At the same time that she announces to men the Good News of God's love and of salvation in Christ, she clarifies their activity in the light of the Gospel and in this way helps them to correspond to God's plan of love and to realize the fullness of their aspirations.

Universal appeal for more justice

2 It is with confidence that we see the Spirit of the Lord pursuing his work in the hearts of men and in every place gathering together Christian communities conscious of their responsibilities in society. On all the continents, among all races, nations and cultures, and under all conditions the Lord continues to raise up authentic apostles of the Gospel.

We have had the opportunity to meet these people, to admire them and to give them our encouragement in the course of our recent journeys. We have gone into the crowds and have heard their appeals, cries of distress and at the same time cries of hope. Under these circumstances we have seen in a new perspective the grave problems of our time. These problems of course are particular to each part of the world, but at the same time they are common to all mankind, which is questioning itself about its future and about the tendency and the meaning of the changes taking place. Flagrant inequalities exist in the economic, cultural and political development of the nations: while some regions are heavily industrialized, others are still at the agricultural stage; while some countries enjoy prosperity, others are struggling against starvation; while some peoples have a high standard of culture, others are still engaged in eliminating illiteracy. From all sides there rises a yearning for more justice and a desire for a better guaranteed peace in mutual respect among individuals and peoples.

Diversity of situations

3 There is of course a wide diversity among the situations in which Christians—willingly or unwillingly—find themselves according to regions, socio-political systems and cultures. In some places they are reduced to silence, regarded with suspicion and as it were kept on the fringe of society, enclosed without freedom in a totalitarian system. In other places they are a weak minority whose voice makes itself heard with difficulty. In some other nations, where the Church sees her place recognized, sometimes officially so, she too finds herself subjected to the repercussions of the crisis which is unsettling society; some of her members are tempted by radical and violent solutions from which they believe that they can expect a happier outcome. While some people, unaware of present injustices, strive to prolong the existing situation, others allow themselves to be beguiled by revolutionary ideologies which promise them, not without delusion, a definitively better world.

4 In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with

objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. This social teaching has been worked out in the course of history and notably, in this industrial era, since the historic date of the message of Pope Leo XIII on "the condition of the workers," and it is an honor and joy for us to celebrate today the anniversary of that message. It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of goodwill, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed. In this search for the changes which should be promoted, Christians must first of all renew their confidence in the forcefulness and special character of the demands made by the Gospel. The Gospel is not out-of-date because it was proclaimed, written and lived in a different socio-cultural context. Its inspiration, enriched by the living experience of Christian tradition over the centuries, remains ever new for converting men and for advancing the life of society. It is not however to be utilized for the profit of particular temporal options, to the neglect of its universal and eternal message.¹

Specific message of the Church

5 Amid the disturbances and uncertainties of the present hour, the Church has a specific message to proclaim and a support to give to men in their efforts to take in hand and give direction to their future. Since the period in which the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* denounced in a forceful and imperative manner the scandal of the condition of the workers in the nascent industrial society, historical evolution has led to an awareness of other dimensions and other applications of social justice. The encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno*² and *Mater et Magistra*³ already noted this fact. The recent Council for its part took care to point them out, in particular in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. We ourselves have already continued these lines of thought in our encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. "Today," we said, "the principal fact that we must all recognize is that the social question

has become worldwide.”⁴ “A renewed consciousness of the demands of the Gospel makes it the Church’s duty to put herself at the service of all, to help them grasp their serious problem in all its dimensions, and to convince them that solidarity in action at this turning point in human history is a matter of urgency.”⁵

6 It will moreover be for the forthcoming Synod of Bishops itself to study more closely and to examine in greater detail the Church’s mission in the face of grave issues raised today by the question of justice in the world. But the anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, venerable brother, gives us the opportunity today to confide our preoccupations and thoughts in the face of this problem to you as President of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace and of the Council of Laity. In this way it is also our wish to offer these bodies of the Holy See our encouragement in their ecclesial activity in the service of men.

Extent of present-day changes

7 In so doing, our purpose—without however forgetting the permanent problems already dealt with by our predecessors—is to draw attention to a number of questions. These are questions which because of their urgency, extent and complexity must in the years to come take first place among the preoccupations of Christians, so that with other men the latter may dedicate themselves to solving the new difficulties which put the very future of man in jeopardy. It is necessary to situate the problems created by the modern economy in the wider context of a new civilization. These problems include human conditions of production, fairness in the exchange of goods and in the division of wealth, the significance of the increased needs of consumption and the sharing of responsibility. In the present changes, which are so profound and so rapid, each day man discovers himself anew, and he questions himself about the meaning of his own being and of his collective survival. Reluctant to gather the lessons of a past that he considers over and done with and too different from the present, man nevertheless needs to have light shed upon his future—a future which he perceives to be as uncertain as it is changing—by permanent eternal truths. These are truths which are certainly greater than man but, if he so wills, he can himself find their traces.⁶

NEW SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Urbanization

8 A major phenomenon draws our attention, as much in the industrialized countries as in those which are developing: urbanization.

After long centuries, agrarian civilization is weakening. Is sufficient attention being devoted to the arrangement and improvement of the life of the country people, whose inferior and at times miserable economic situation provokes the flight to the unhappy crowded conditions of the city outskirts, where neither employment nor housing awaits them?

This unceasing flight from the land, industrial growth, continual demographic expansion and the attraction of urban centers bring about concentrations of population, the extent of which is difficult to imagine, for people are already speaking in terms of a "megalopolis" grouping together tens of millions of persons. Of course there exist medium-sized towns, the dimension of which ensures a better balance in the population. While being able to offer employment to those that progress in agriculture makes available, they permit an adjustment of the human environment which better avoids the proletarianism and crowding of the great built-up areas.

9 The inordinate growth of these centers accompanies industrial expansion, without being identified with it. Based on technological research and the transformation of nature, industrialization constantly goes forward, giving proof of incessant creativity. While certain enterprises develop and are concentrated, others die or change their location. Thus new social problems are created: professional or regional unemployment, redeployment and mobility of persons, permanent adaptation of workers and disparity of conditions in the different branches of industry. Unlimited competition utilizing the modern means of publicity incessantly launches new products and tries to attract the consumer, while earlier industrial installations which are still capable of functioning become useless. While very large areas of the population are unable to satisfy their primary needs, superfluous needs are ingeniously created. It can thus rightly be asked if, in spite of all his conquests, man is not turning back against

himself the results of his activity. Having rationally endeavored to control nature,⁷ is he not now becoming the slave of the objects which he makes?

Christians in the city

10 Is not the rise of an urban civilization which accompanies the advance of industrial civilization a true challenge to the wisdom of man, to his capacity for organization and to his farseeing imagination? Within industrial society urbanization upsets both the ways of life and the habitual structures of existence: the family, the neighborhood, and the very framework of the Christian community. Man is experiencing a new loneliness; it is not in the face of a hostile nature which it has taken him centuries to subdue, but in an anonymous crowd which surrounds him and in which he feels himself a stranger. Urbanization, undoubtedly an irreversible stage in the development of human societies, confronts man with difficult problems. How is he to master its growth, regulate its organization, and successfully accomplish its animation for the good of all?

In this disordered growth, new proletariats are born. They install themselves in the heart of the cities sometimes abandoned by the rich; they dwell on the outskirts—which become a belt of misery besieging in a still silent protest the luxury which blatantly cries out from centers of consumption and waste. Instead of favoring fraternal encounter and mutual aid, the city fosters discrimination and also indifference. It lends itself to new forms of exploitation and of domination whereby some people in speculating on the needs of others derive inadmissible profits. Behind the facades, much misery is hidden, unsuspected even by the closest neighbors; other forms of misery spread where human dignity founders: delinquency, criminality, abuse of drugs and eroticism.

11 It is in fact the weakest who are the victims of dehumanizing living conditions, degrading for conscience and harmful for the family institution. The promiscuity of working people's housing makes a minimum of intimacy impossible; young couples waiting in vain for a decent dwelling at a price they can afford are demoralized and their union can thereby even be endangered; youth escape from a home which is too confined and seek in the

streets compensations and companionships which cannot be supervised. It is the grave duty of those responsible to strive to control this process and to give it direction.

There is an urgent need to remake at the level of the street, of the neighborhood or of the great agglomerative dwellings the social fabric whereby man may be able to develop the needs of his personality. Centers of special interest and of culture must be created or developed at the community and parish levels with different forms of associations, recreational centers, and spiritual and community gatherings where the individual can escape from isolation and form anew fraternal relationships.

12 To build up the city, the place where men and their expanded communities exist, to create new modes of neighborliness and relationships, to perceive an original application of social justice and to undertake responsibility for this collective future, which is foreseen as difficult, is a task in which Christians must share. To those who are heaped up in an urban promiscuity which becomes intolerable it is necessary to bring a message of hope. This can be done by brotherhood which is lived and by concrete justice. Let Christians, conscious of this new responsibility, not lose heart in view of the vast and faceless society; let them recall Jonah who traversed Niniveh, the great city, to proclaim therein the good news of God's mercy and was upheld in his weakness by the sole strength of the word of Almighty God. In the Bible, the city is in fact often the place of sin and pride—the pride of man who feels secure enough to be able to build his life without God and even to affirm that he is powerful against God. But there is also the example of Jerusalem, the Holy City, the place where God is encountered, the promise of the city which comes from on high.⁸

Youth

13 Urban life and industrial change bring strongly to light questions which until now were poorly grasped. What place, for example, in this world being brought to birth, should be given to youth? Everywhere dialogue is proving to be difficult between youth, with its aspirations, renewal and also insecurity for the future, and the adult generations. It is obvious to all that here we have a source of serious conflicts, division and opting out, even

within the family, and a questioning of modes of authority, education for freedom and the handing on of values and beliefs, which strikes at the deep roots of society.

The role of women

Similarly, in many countries a charter for women which would put an end to an actual discrimination and would establish relationships of equality in rights and of respect for their dignity is the object of study and at times of lively demands. We do not have in mind that false equality which would deny the distinctions laid down by the Creator himself and which would be in contradiction with woman's proper role, which is of such capital importance, at the heart of the family as well as within society. Developments in legislation should on the contrary be directed to protecting her proper vocation and at the same time recognizing her independence as a person, and her equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, social and political life.

Workers

14 As the Church solemnly reaffirmed in the recent Council, "the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person."⁹ Every man has the right to work, to a chance to develop his qualities and his personality in the exercise of his profession, to equitable remuneration which will enable him and his family "to lead a worthy life on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level"¹⁰ and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age.

Although for the defense of these rights democratic societies accept today the principle of labor union rights, they are not always open to their exercise. The important role of union organizations must be admitted: their object is the representation of the various categories of workers, their lawful collaboration in the economic advance of society, and the development of the sense of their responsibility for the realization of the common good. Their activity, however, is not without its difficulties. Here and there the temptation can arise of profiting from a position of force to impose, particularly by strikes—the right to which as a final means of defense remains certainly recognized—conditions which are too burdensome for the overall economy and for the

social body, or to desire to obtain in this way demands of a directly political nature. When it is a question of public services, required for the life of an entire nation, it is necessary to be able to assess the limit beyond which the harm caused to society becomes inadmissible.

Victims of changes

15 In short, progress has already been made in introducing, in the area of human relationships, greater justice and greater sharing of responsibilities. But in this immense field much remains to be done. Further reflection, research and experimentation must be actively pursued, unless one is to be late in meeting the legitimate aspirations of the workers—aspirations which are being increasingly asserted according as their education, their consciousness of their dignity and the strength of their organizations increase.

Egoism and domination are permanent temptations for men. Likewise an ever finer discernment is needed, in order to strike at the roots of newly arising situations of injustice and to establish progressively a justice which will be less and less imperfect. In industrial change, which demands speedy and constant adaptation, those who will find themselves injured will be more numerous and at a greater disadvantage from the point of view of making their voices heard. The Church directs her attention to these new “poor”—the handicapped and the maladjusted, the old, different groups of those on the fringe of society, and so on—in order to recognize them, help them, defend their place and dignity in a society hardened by competition and the attraction of success.

Discrimination

16 Among the victims of situations of injustice—unfortunately no new phenomenon—must be placed those who are discriminated against, in law or in fact, on account of their race, origin, color, culture, sex or religion.

Racial discrimination possesses at the moment a character of very great relevance by reason of the tension which it stirs up both within certain countries and on the international level. Men rightly consider unjustifiable and reject as inadmissible the ten-

dency to maintain or introduce legislation or behavior systematically inspired by racialist prejudice. The members of mankind share the same basic rights and duties, as well as the same supernatural destiny. Within a country which belongs to each one, all should be equal before the law, find equal admittance to economic, cultural, civic and social life and benefit from a fair sharing of the nation's riches.

Right to emigrate

17 We are thinking also of the precarious situation of a great number of emigrant workers whose condition as foreigners makes it all the more difficult for them to make any sort of social vindication, in spite of their real participation in the economic effort of the country that receives them. It is urgently necessary for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their regard and to give them a charter which will assure them a right to emigrate, favor their integration, facilitate their professional advancement and give them access to decent housing where, if such is the case, their families can join them.¹¹

Linked to this category are the people who, to find work, or to escape a disaster or a hostile climate, leave their regions and find themselves without roots among other people.

It is everyone's duty, but especially that of Christians,¹² to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood, the indispensable basis for authentic justice and the condition for enduring peace: "We cannot in truthfulness call upon that God who is the Father of all if we refuse to act in a brotherly way toward certain men, created to God's image. A man's relationship with God the Father and his relationship with his brother men are so linked together that Scripture says: 'He who does not love does not know God' (1 Jn 4:8)." ¹³

Creating employment

18 With demographic growth, which is particularly pronounced in the young nations, the number of those failing to find work and driven to misery or parasitism will grow in the coming years unless the conscience of man rouses itself and gives rise to a general movement of solidarity through an effective policy of investment and of organization of production and trade,

as well as of education. We know the attention given to these problems within international organizations, and it is our lively wish that their members will not delay bringing their actions into line with their declarations.

It is disquieting in this regard to note a kind of fatalism which is gaining a hold even on people in positions of responsibility. This feeling sometimes leads to Malthusian solutions inculcated by active propaganda for contraception and abortion. In this critical situation, it must on the contrary be affirmed that the family, without which no society can stand, has a right to the assistance which will assure it of the conditions for a healthy development. "It is certain," we said in our encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, "that public authorities can intervene, within the limit of their competence, by favoring the availability of appropriate information and by adopting suitable measures, provided that these be in conformity with the moral law and that they respect the rightful freedom of married couples. Where the inalienable right to marriage and procreation is lacking, human dignity has ceased to exist."¹⁴

19 In no other age has the appeal to the imagination of society been so explicit. To this should be devoted enterprises of invention and capital as important as those invested for armaments or technological achievements. If man lets himself rush ahead without foreseeing in good time the emergence of new social problems, they will become too grave for a peaceful solution to be hoped for.

Media of social communication

20 Among the major changes of our times, we do not wish to forget to emphasize the growing role being assumed by the media of social communication and their influence on the transformation of mentalities, of knowledge, of organizations and of society itself. Certainly they have many positive aspects. Thanks to them news from the entire world reaches us practically in an instant, establishing contacts which supersede distances and creating elements of unity among all men. A greater spread of education and culture is becoming possible. Nevertheless, by their very action the media of social communication are reaching the point of representing as it were a new power. One cannot but

ask about those who really hold this power, the aims that they pursue and the means they use, and finally, about the effect of their activity on the exercise of individual liberty, both in the political and ideological spheres and in social, economic and cultural life. The men who hold this power have a grave moral responsibility with respect to the truth of the information that they spread, the needs and the reactions that they generate and the values which they put forward. In the case of television, moreover, what is coming into being is an original mode of knowledge and a new civilization: that of the image.

Naturally, the public authorities cannot ignore the growing power and influence of the media of social communication and the advantages and risks which their use involves for the civic community and for its development and real perfecting.

Consequently they are called upon to perform their own positive function for the common good by encouraging every constructive expression, by supporting individual citizens and groups in defending the fundamental values of the person and of human society, and also by taking suitable steps to prevent the spread of what would harm the common heritage of values on which orderly civil progress is based.¹⁵

The environment

21 While the horizon of man is thus modified being according to the images that are chosen for him, another transformation is making itself felt, one which is the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity. Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace—pollution and refuse, new illnesses and absolute destructive capacity—but the human framework is no longer under man's control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family.

The Christian must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all.

FUNDAMENTAL ASPIRATIONS AND CURRENTS OF IDEAS

22 While scientific and technological progress continues to overturn man's surroundings, his patterns of knowledge, work, consumption and relationships, two aspirations persistently make themselves felt in these new contexts, and they grow stronger to the extent that he becomes better informed and better educated: the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation, two forms of man's dignity and freedom.

Advantages and limitations of juridical recognition

23 Through this statement of the rights of man and the seeking for international agreements for the application of these rights, progress has been made towards inscribing these two aspirations in deeds and structures.¹⁶ Nevertheless various forms of discrimination continually reappear—ethnic, cultural, religious, political and so on. In fact, human rights are still too often disregarded, if not scoffed at, or else they receive only formal recognition. In many cases legislation does not keep up with real situations. Legislation is necessary, but it is not sufficient for setting up true relationships of justice and equality. In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others. If, beyond legal rules, there is really no deeper feeling of respect for and service to others, then even equality before the law can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation and actual contempt. Without a renewed education in solidarity, an overemphasis of equality can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good.

In this field, everyone sees the highly important contribution of the Christian spirit, which moreover answers man's yearning to be loved. "Love for man, the prime value of the earthly order," ensures the conditions for peace, both social peace and international peace, by affirming our universal brotherhood.¹⁷

The political society

24 The two aspirations, to equality and to participation, seek to promote a democratic type of society. Various models are

proposed, some are tried out, none of them gives complete satisfaction, and the search goes on between ideological and pragmatic tendencies. The Christian has the duty to take part in this search and in the organization and life of political society. As a social being, man builds his destiny within a series of particular groupings which demand, as their completion and as a necessary condition for their development, a vaster society, one of a universal character, the political society. All particular activity must be placed within that wider society, and thereby it takes on the dimension of the common good.¹⁸

This indicates the importance of education for life in society, in which there are called to mind, not only information on each one's rights, but also their necessary correlative: the recognition of the duties of each one in regard to others. The sense and practice of duty are themselves conditioned by self-mastery and by the acceptance of responsibility and of the limits placed upon the freedom of the individual or of the group.

25 Political activity—need one remark that we are dealing primarily with an activity, not an ideology?—should be the projection of a plan of society which is consistent in its concrete means and in its inspiration, and which springs from a complete conception of man's vocation and of its differing social expressions. It is not for the State or even for political parties, which would be closed unto themselves, to try to impose an ideology by means that would lead to a dictatorship over minds, the worst kind of all. It is for cultural and religious groupings, in the freedom of acceptance which they presume, to develop in the social body, disinterestedly and in their own ways, those ultimate convictions on the nature, origin and end of man and society.

In this field, it is well to keep in mind the principle proclaimed at the Second Vatican Council: "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, and it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power."¹⁹

Ideologies and human liberty

26 Therefore the Christian who wishes to live his faith in a political activity which he thinks of as service cannot without contradicting himself adhere to ideological systems which radically or substantially go against his faith and his concept of man.

He cannot adhere to the Marxist ideology, to its atheistic materialism, to its dialectic of violence and to the way it absorbs individual freedom in the collectivity, at the same time denying all transcendence to man and his personal and collective history; nor can he adhere to the liberal ideology which believes it exalts individual freedom by withdrawing it from every limitation, by stimulating it through exclusive seeking of interest and power, and by considering social solidarities as more or less automatic consequences of individual initiatives, not as an aim and a major criterion of the value of the social organization.

27 Is there need to stress the possible ambiguity of every social ideology? Sometimes it leads political or social activity to be simply the application of an abstract, purely theoretical idea; at other times it is thought which becomes a mere instrument at the service of activity as a simple means of a strategy. In both cases is it not man that risks finding himself alienated? The Christian faith is above and is sometimes opposed to the ideologies, in that it recognizes God, who is transcendent and the Creator, and who, through all the levels of creation, calls on man as endowed with responsibility and freedom.

28 There would also be the danger of giving adherence to an ideology which does not rest on a true and organic doctrine, to take refuge in it as a final and sufficient explanation of everything, and thus to build a new idol, accepting, at times without being aware of doing so, its totalitarian and coercive character. And people imagine they find in it a justification for their activity, even violent activity, and an adequate response to a generous desire to serve. The desire remains but it allows itself to be consumed by an ideology which, even if it suggests certain paths to man's liberation, ends up by making him a slave.

29 It has been possible today to speak of a retreat of ideologies. In this respect the present time may be favorable for an openness to the concrete transcendence of Christianity. It may also be a more accentuated sliding towards a new positivism: universalized technology as the dominant form of activity, as the overwhelming pattern of existence, even as a language, without the question of its meaning being really asked.

Historical movements

30 But outside of this positivism which reduces man to a single dimension even if it be an important one today and by so doing mutilates him, the Christian encounters in his activity concrete historical movements sprung from ideologies and in part distinct from them. Our venerated predecessor Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* already showed that it is possible to make a distinction: "Neither can false philosophical teachings regarding the nature, origin and destiny of the universe and of man be identified with historical movements that have economic, social, cultural or political ends, not even when these movements have originated from those teachings and have drawn and still draw inspiration therefrom. Because the teachings, once they are drawn up and defined, remain always the same, while the movements, being concerned with historical situations in constant evolution, cannot but be influenced by these latter and cannot avoid, therefore, being subject to changes, even of a profound nature. Besides, who can deny that those movements, insofar as they conform to the dictates of right reason and are interpreters of the lawful aspirations of the human person, contain elements that are positive and deserving of approval?"²⁰

Attraction of socialist currents

31 Some Christians are today attracted by socialist currents and their various developments. They try to recognize therein a certain number of aspirations which they carry within themselves in the name of their faith. They feel that they are part of that historical current and wish to play a part within it. Now this historical current takes on, under the same name, different forms according to different continents and cultures, even if it drew its inspiration, and still does in many cases, from ideologies incompatible with faith. Careful judgment is called for. Too often Christians attracted by socialism tend to idealize it in terms which, apart from anything else, are very general: a will for justice, solidarity and equality. They refuse to recognize the limitations of the historical socialist movements, which remain conditioned by the ideologies from which they originated. Distinctions must be made to guide concrete choices between the various levels of expression of socialism: a generous aspiration and a seeking for a more just society, historical movements with a political organi-

zation and aim, and an ideology which claims to give a complete and self-sufficient picture of man. Nevertheless, these distinctions must not lead one to consider such levels as completely separate and independent. The concrete link which, according to circumstances, exists between them must be clearly marked out. This insight will enable Christians to see the degree of commitment possible along these lines, while safeguarding the values, especially those of liberty, responsibility and openness to the spiritual, which guarantee the integral development of man.

Historical evolution of Marxism

32 Other Christians even ask whether an historical development of Marxism might not authorize certain concrete rapprochements. They note in fact that a certain splintering of Marxism, which until now showed itself to be a unitary ideology which explained in atheistic terms the whole of man and the world since it did not go outside their development process. Apart from the ideological confrontation officially separating the various champions of Marxism-Leninism in their individual interpretations of the thought of its founders, and apart from the open opposition between the political systems which make use of its name today, some people lay down distinctions between Marxism's various levels of expression.

33 For some, Marxism remains essentially the active practice of class struggle. Experiencing the ever present and continually renewed force of the relationships of domination and exploitation among men, they reduce Marxism to no more than a struggle—at times with no other purpose—to be pursued and even stirred up in permanent fashion. For others, it is first and foremost the collective exercise of political and economic power under the direction of a single party, which would be the sole expression and guarantee of the welfare of all, and would deprive individuals and other groups of any possibility of initiative and choice. At a third level, Marxism, whether in power or not, is viewed as a socialist ideology based on historical materialism and the denial of everything transcendent. At other times, finally, it presents itself in a more attenuated form, one also more attractive to the modern mind: as a scientific activity, as a rigorous method of examining social and political reality, and as the rational link, tested by history, between theoretical knowledge and the practice

of revolutionary transformation. Although this type of analysis gives a privileged position to certain aspects of reality to the detriment of the rest, and interprets them in the light of its ideology, it nevertheless furnishes some people not only with a working tool but also a certitude preliminary to action: the claim to decipher in a scientific manner the mainsprings of the evolution of society.

34 While, through the concrete existing form of Marxism, one can distinguish these various aspects and the questions they pose for the reflection and activity of Christians, it would be illusory and dangerous to reach a point of forgetting the intimate link which radically binds them together, to accept the elements of Marxist analysis without recognizing their relationships with ideology, and to enter into the practice of class struggle and its Marxist interpretations, while failing to note the kind of totalitarian and violent society to which this process leads.

The liberal ideology

35 On another side, we are witnessing a renewal of the liberal ideology. This current asserts itself both in the name of economic efficiency, and for the defense of the individual against the increasingly overwhelming hold of organizations, and as a reaction against the totalitarian tendencies of political powers. Certainly, personal initiative must be maintained and developed. But do not Christians who take this path tend to idealize liberalism in their turn, making it a proclamation in favor of freedom? They would like a new model, more adapted to present-day conditions, while easily forgetting that at the very root of philosophical liberalism is an erroneous affirmation of the autonomy of the individual in his activity, his motivation and the exercise of his liberty. Hence, the liberal ideology likewise calls for careful discernment on their part.

Christian discernment

36 In this renewed encounter of the various ideologies, the Christian will draw from the sources of his faith and the Church's teaching the necessary principles and suitable criteria to avoid permitting himself to be first attracted by and then imprisoned within a system whose limitations and totalitarianism may well become evident to him too late, if he does not perceive them in

their roots. Going beyond every system, without however failing to commit himself concretely to serving his brothers, he will assert, in the very midst of his options, the specific character of the Christian contribution for a positive transformation of society.²¹

Rebirth of utopias

37 Today, moreover, the weaknesses of the ideologies are better perceived through the concrete systems in which they are trying to affirm themselves. Bureaucratic socialism, technocratic capitalism and authoritarian democracy are showing how difficult it is to solve the great human problem of living together in justice and equality. How in fact could they escape the materialism, egoism or constraint which inevitably go with them? This is the source of a protest which is springing up more or less everywhere, as a sign of a deep-seated sickness, while at the same time we are witnessing the rebirth of what it is agreed to call "utopias." These claim to resolve the political problem of modern societies better than the ideologies. It would be dangerous to disregard this. The appeal to a utopia is often a convenient excuse for those who wish to escape from concrete tasks in order to take refuge in an imaginary world. To live in a hypothetical future is a facile alibi for rejecting immediate responsibilities. But it must clearly be recognized that this kind of criticism of existing society often provokes the forward-looking imagination both to perceive in the present the disregarded possibility hidden within it, and to direct itself towards a fresh future; it thus sustains social dynamism by the confidence that it gives to the inventive powers of the human mind and heart; and, if it refuses no overture, it can also meet the Christian appeal. The Spirit of the Lord, who animates man renewed in Christ, continually breaks down the horizons within which his understanding likes to find security and the limits to which his activity would willingly restrict itself; there dwells within him a power which urges him to go beyond every system and every ideology. At the heart of the world there dwells the mystery of man discovering himself to be God's son in the course of a historical and psychological process in which constraint and freedom as well as the weight of sin and the breath of the Spirit alternate and struggle for the upper hand.

The dynamism of Christian faith here triumphs over the narrow calculations of egoism. Animated by the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, and upheld by hope, the Christian involves himself in the building up of the human city, one that is to be peaceful, just and fraternal and acceptable as an offering to God.²² In fact, "the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age."²³

The questioning of the human sciences

38 In this world dominated by scientific and technological change, which threatens to drag it towards a new positivism, another more fundamental doubt is raised. Having subdued nature by using his reason, man now finds that he himself is as it were imprisoned within his own rationality; he in turn becomes the object of science. The "human sciences" are today enjoying a significant flowering. On the one hand they are subjecting to critical and radical examination the hitherto accepted knowledge about man, on the grounds that this knowledge seems either too empirical or too theoretical. On the other hand, methodological necessity and ideological presuppositions too often lead the human sciences to isolate, in the various situations, certain aspects of man, and yet to give these an explanation which claims to be complete or at least an interpretation which is meant to be all-embracing from a purely quantitative or phenomenological point of view. This scientific reduction betrays a dangerous presumption. To give a privileged position in this way to such an aspect of analysis is to mutilate man and, under the pretext of a scientific procedure, to make it impossible to understand man in his totality.

39 One must be no less attentive to the action which the human sciences can instigate, giving rise to the elaboration of models of society to be subsequently imposed on men as scientifically tested types of behavior. Man can then become the object of manipulations directing his desires and needs and modifying his behavior and even his system of values. There is no doubt that there exists here a grave danger for the societies of tomorrow and for man himself. For even if all agree to build a

new society at the service of men, it is still essential to know what sort of man is in question.

40 Suspicion of the human sciences affects the Christian more than others, but it does not find him disarmed. For, as we ourselves wrote in *Populorum Progressio*, it is here that there is found the specific contribution of the Church to civilizations: "Sharing the noblest aspirations of men and suffering when she sees them not satisfied, she wishes to help them attain their full flowering, and that is why she offers men what she possesses as her characteristic attribute: a global vision of man and of the human race."²⁴ Should the Church in its turn contest the proceedings of the human sciences, and condemn their pretensions? As in the case of the natural sciences, the Church has confidence in this research also and urges Christians to play an active part in it.²⁵ Prompted by the same scientific demands and the desire to know man better, but at the same time enlightened by their faith, Christians who devote themselves to the human sciences will begin a dialogue between the Church and this new field of discovery, a dialogue which promises to be fruitful. Of course, each individual scientific discipline will be able, in its own particular sphere, to grasp only a partial—yet true—aspect of man; the complete picture and the full meaning will escape it. But within these limits the human sciences give promise of a positive function that the Church willingly recognizes. They can even widen the horizons of human liberty to a greater extent than the conditioning circumstances perceived enable one to foresee. They could thus assist Christian social morality, which no doubt will see its field restricted when it comes to suggesting certain models of society, while its function of making a critical judgment and taking an overall view will be strengthened by its showing the relative character of the behavior and values presented by such and such a society as definitive and inherent in the very nature of man. These sciences are a condition at once indispensable and inadequate for a better discovery of what is human. They are a language which becomes more and more complex, yet one that deepens rather than solves the mystery of the heart of man; nor does it provide the complete and definitive answer to the desire which springs from his innermost being.

Ambiguous nature of progress

41 This better knowledge of man makes it possible to pass a better critical judgment upon and to elucidate a fundamental notion that remains at the basis of modern societies as their motive, their measure and their goal: namely, progress. Since the nineteenth century, western societies and, as a result, many others have put their hopes in ceaselessly renewed and indefinite progress. They saw this progress as man's effort to free himself in face of the demands of nature and of social constraints; progress was the condition for and the yardstick of human freedom. Progress, spread by the modern media of information and by the demand for wider knowledge and greater consumption, has become an omnipresent ideology. Yet a doubt arises today regarding both its value and its result. What is the meaning of this never-ending, breathless pursuit of a progress that always eludes one just when one believes one has conquered it sufficiently in order to enjoy it in peace? If it is not attained, it leaves one dissatisfied. Without doubt, there has been just condemnation of the limits and even the misdeeds of a merely quantitative economic growth; there is a desire to attain objectives of a qualitative order also. The quality and the truth of human relations, the degree of participation and of responsibility, are no less significant and important for the future of society than the quantity and variety of the goods produced and consumed.

Overcoming the temptation to wish to measure everything in terms of efficiency and of trade, and in terms of the interplay of forces and interests, man today wishes to replace these quantitative criteria with the intensity of communication, the spread of knowledge and culture, mutual service and a combining of efforts for a common task. Is not genuine progress to be found in the development of moral consciousness, which will lead man to exercise a wider solidarity and to open himself freely to others and to God? For a Christian, progress necessarily comes up against the eschatological mystery of death. The death of Christ and his resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord help man to place his freedom, in creativity and gratitude, within the context of the truth of all progress and the only hope which does not deceive.²⁶

CHRISTIANS FACE TO FACE WITH THESE NEW PROBLEMS

Dynamism of the Church's social teaching

42 In the face of so many new questions the Church makes an effort to reflect in order to give an answer, in its own sphere, to men's expectations. If today the problems seem original in their breadth and their urgency, is man without the means of solving them? It is with all its dynamism that the social teaching of the Church accompanies men in their search. If it does not intervene to authenticate a given structure or to propose a ready-made model, it does not thereby limit itself to recalling general principles. It develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal when its message is accepted in its totality and with all its demands. It also develops with the sensitivity proper to the Church which is characterized by a disinterested will to serve and by attention to the poorest.

Finally, it draws upon its rich experience of many centuries which enables it, while continuing its permanent preoccupations, to undertake the daring and creative innovations which the present state of the world requires.

For greater justice

43 There is a need to establish a greater justice in the sharing of goods, both within national communities and on the international level. In international exchanges there is a need to go beyond relationships based on force, in order to arrive at agreements reached with the good of all in mind. Relationships based on force have never in fact established justice in a true and lasting manner, even if at certain times the alternation of positions can often make it possible to find easier conditions for dialogue. The use of force moreover leads to the setting in motion of opposing forces, and from this springs a climate of struggle which opens the way to situations of extreme violence and to abuses.²⁷

But, as we have often stated, the most important duty in the realm of justice is to allow each country to promote its own development, within the framework of a cooperation free from any spirit of domination, whether economic or political. The com-

plexity of the problems raised is certainly great, in the present intertwining of mutual dependences. Thus it is necessary to have the courage to undertake a revision of the relationships between nations, whether it is a question of the international division of production, the structure of exchanges, the control of profits, the monetary system,—without forgetting the actions of human solidarity—to question the models of growth of the rich nations and change people's outlooks, so that they may realize the prior call of international duty, and to renew international organizations so that they may increase in effectiveness.

44 Under the driving force of new systems of production, national frontiers are breaking down, and we can see new economic powers emerging, the multinational enterprises, which by the concentration and flexibility of their means can conduct autonomous strategies which are largely independent of the national political powers and therefore not subject to control from the point of view of the common good. By extending their activities, these private organizations can lead to a new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level. The excessive concentration of means and powers that Pope Pius XI already condemned on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* is taking on a new and very real image.

Change of attitudes and structures

45 Today men yearn to free themselves from need and dependence. But this liberation starts with the interior freedom that men must find again with regard to their goods and their powers; they will never reach it except through a transcendent love for man, and, in consequence, through a genuine readiness to serve. Otherwise, as one can see only too clearly, the most revolutionary ideologies lead only to a change of masters; once installed in power in their turn, these new masters surround themselves with privileges, limit freedoms and allow other forms of injustice to become established.

Thus many people are reaching the point of questioning the very model of society. The ambition of many nations, in the competition that sets them in opposition and which carries them along, is to attain technological, economic and military power. This ambition then stands in the way of setting up structures in which the rhythm of progress would be regulated with a view to

greater justice, instead of accentuating inequalities and living in a climate of distrust and struggle which would unceasingly compromise peace.

Christian meaning of political activity

46 Is it not here that there appears a radical limitation to economics? Economic activity is necessary and, if it is at the service of man, it can be "a source of brotherhood and a sign of Providence."²⁸ It is the occasion of concrete exchanges between man, of rights recognized, of services rendered and of dignity affirmed in work. Though it is often a field of confrontation and domination, it can give rise to dialogue and foster cooperation. Yet it runs the risk of taking up too much strength and freedom.²⁹ This is why the need is felt to pass from economics to politics. It is true that in the term "politics" many confusions are possible and must be clarified, but each man feels that in the social and economic field, both national and international, the ultimate decision rests with political power.

Political power, which is the natural and necessary link for ensuring the cohesion of the social body, must have as its aim the achievement of the common good. While respecting the legitimate liberties of individuals, families and subsidiary groups, it acts in such a way as to create, effectively and for the well-being of all, the conditions required for attaining man's true and complete good, including his spiritual end. It acts within the limits of its competence, which can vary from people to people and from country to country. It always intervenes with care for justice and with devotion to the common good, for which it holds final responsibility. It does not, for all that, deprive individuals and intermediary bodies of the field of activity and responsibility which are proper to them and which lead them to collaborate in the attainment of this common good. In fact, "the true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them."³⁰ According to the vocation proper to it, the political power must know how to stand aside from particular interests in order to view its responsibility with regard to the good of all men, even going beyond national limits. To take politics seriously at its different levels—local, regional, national and worldwide—is to affirm the duty of man, of every man, to recognize the concrete reality and the value of

the freedom of choice that is offered to him to seek to bring about both the good of the city and of the nation and of mankind. Politics are a demanding manner—but not the only one—of living the Christian commitment to the service of others. Without of course solving every problem, it endeavors to apply solutions to the relationships men have with one another. The domain of politics is wide and comprehensive, but it is not exclusive. An attitude of encroachment which would tend to set up politics as an absolute value would bring serious danger. While recognizing the autonomy of the reality of politics, Christians who are invited to take up political activity should try to make their choices consistent with the Gospel and, in the framework of a legitimate plurality, to give both personal and collective witness to the seriousness of their faith by effective and disinterested service of men.

Sharing in responsibility

47 The passing to the political dimension also expresses a demand made by the man of today: a greater sharing in responsibility and in decision-making. This legitimate aspiration becomes more evident as the cultural level rises, as the sense of freedom develops and as man becomes more aware of how, in a world facing an uncertain future, the choices of today already condition the life of tomorrow. In *Mater et Magistra*³¹ Pope John XXIII stressed how much the admittance to responsibility is a basic demand of man's nature, a concrete exercise of his freedom and a path to his development, and he showed how, in economic life and particularly in enterprise, this sharing in responsibilities should be ensured.³² Today the field is wider, and extends to the social and political sphere in which a reasonable sharing in responsibility and in decisions must be established and strengthened. Admittedly, it is true that the choices proposed for a decision are more and more complex; the considerations that must be borne in mind are numerous and the foreseeing of the consequences involves risk, even if new sciences strive to enlighten freedom at these important moments. However, although limits are sometimes called for, these obstacles must not slow down the giving of wider participation in working out decisions, making choices and putting them into practice. In order to counterbalance increasing technocracy, modern forms of democracy must be de-

vised, not only making it possible for each man to become informed and to express himself, but also by involving him in a shared responsibility.

Thus human groups will gradually begin to share and to live as communities. Thus freedom, which too often asserts itself as a claim for autonomy by opposing the freedom of others, will develop in its deepest human reality: to involve itself and to spend itself in building up active and lived solidarity. But, for the Christian, it is by losing himself in God who sets him free that man finds true freedom, renewed in the death and resurrection of the Lord.

CALL TO ACTION

Need to become involved in action

48 In the social sphere, the Church has always wished to assume a double function: first to enlighten minds in order to assist them to discover the truth and to find the right path to follow amid the different teachings that call for their attention; and secondly to take part in action and to spread, with a real care for service and effectiveness, the energies of the Gospel. Is it not in order to be faithful to this desire that the Church has sent on an apostolic mission among the workers priests who, by sharing fully the condition of the worker, are at that level the witnesses to the Church's solicitude and seeking?

It is to all Christians that we address a fresh and insistent call to action. In our encyclical on the Development of Peoples we urged that all should set themselves to the task: "Laymen should take up as their own proper task the renewal of the temporal order. If the role of the hierarchy is to teach and to interpret authentically the norms of morality to be followed in this matter, it belongs to the laity, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live."³³ Let each one examine himself, to see what he has done up to now, and what he ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first. This basic humility will rid action of all inflexibility and sectarianism; it will also avoid discouragement in the face of a task which seems limitless in size. The Christian's hope comes primarily from the fact that he knows that the Lord is working with us in the world, continuing in his Body which is the Church—and, through the Church, in the whole of mankind—the Redemption which was accomplished on the Cross and which burst forth in victory on the morning of the Resurrection.³⁴ This hope springs also from the fact that the Christian knows that other men

are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends. For beneath an outward appearance of indifference, in the heart of every man there is a will to live in brotherhood and a thirst for justice and peace, which is to be expanded.

49 Thus, amid the diversity of situations, functions and organizations, each one must determine, in his conscience, the actions which he is called to share in. Surrounded by various currents into which, beside legitimate aspirations, there insinuate themselves more ambiguous tendencies, the Christian must make a wise and vigilant choice and avoid involving himself in collaboration without conditions and contrary to the principles of a true humanism, even in the name of a genuinely felt solidarity. If in fact he wishes to play a specific part as a Christian in accordance with his faith—a part that unbelievers themselves expect of him—he must take care in the midst of his active commitment to clarify his motives and to rise above the objectives aimed at, by taking a more all-embracing view which will avoid the danger of selfish particularism and oppressive totalitarianism.

Pluralism of options

50 In concrete situations, and taking account of solidarity in each person's life, one must recognize a legitimate variety of possible options. The same Christian faith can lead to different commitments.³⁵ The Church invites all Christians to take up a double task of inspiring and of innovating, in order to make structures evolve, so as to adapt them to the real needs of today. From Christians who at first sight seem to be in opposition, as a result of starting from differing options, she asks an effort at mutual understanding of the other's positions and motives; a loyal examination of one's behavior and its correctness will suggest to each one an attitude of more profound charity which, while recognizing the differences, believes nonetheless in the possibility of convergence and unity. "The bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything which divides them."³⁶

It is true that many people, in the midst of modern structures and conditioning circumstances, are determined by their habits of thought and their functions, even apart from the safeguarding of material interests. Others feel so deeply the solidarity of classes and cultures that they reach the point of sharing without reserve all the judgments and options of their surroundings.³⁷

Each one will take great care to examine himself and to bring about that true freedom according to Christ which makes one receptive to the universal in the very midst of the most particular conditions.

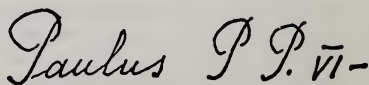
51 It is in this regard too that Christian organizations, under their different forms, have a responsibility for collective action. Without putting themselves in the place of the institutions of civil society, they have to express, in their own way and rising above their particular nature, the concrete demands of the Christian faith for a just, and consequently necessary, transformation of society.³⁸

Today more than ever the Word of God will be unable to be proclaimed and heard unless it is accompanied by the witness of the power of the Holy Spirit, working within the action of Christians in the service of their brothers, at the points in which their existence and their future are at stake.

52 In expressing these reflections to you, venerable brother, we are of course aware that we have not dealt with all the social problems that today face the man of faith and men of goodwill. Our recent declarations—to which has been added your message of a short time ago on the occasion of the launching of the Second Development Decade—particularly concerning the duties of the community of nations in the serious question of the integral and concerted development of man, are still fresh in people's minds. We address these present reflections to you with the aim of offering to the Council of the Laity and the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace some fresh contributions, as well as an encouragement, for the pursuit of their task of "awakening the People of God to a full understanding of its role at the present time" and of "promoting the apostolate on the international level."³⁹

It is with these sentiments, venerable brother, that we impart to you our Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, May 14, 1971.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paulus P. P. VI-". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name of the Pope.

Paulus P. P. VI

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1033.
- ² AAS 23 (1931), p. 209 ff.
- ³ AAS 53 (1961), p. 429.
- ⁴ 3: AAS 59 (1967), p. 258.
- ⁵ *Ibidem*, 1: p. 257.
- ⁶ Cf. 2 Cor 4:17.
- ⁷ *Populorum Progressio*, 25: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 269-270.
- ⁸ Cf. Rev 3:12; 21:2.
- ⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 25: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1045.
- ¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 67: p. 1089.
- ¹¹ *Populorum Progressio*, 69: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 290-291.
- ¹² Cf. Mt 25:35.
- ¹³ *Nostra Aetate*, 5: AAS 58 (1966), p. 743.
- ¹⁴ 37: AAS 59 (1967), p. 276.
- ¹⁵ *Inter Mirifica*, 12: AAS 56 (1964), p. 149.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), p. 261 ff.
- ¹⁷ Cf. *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1971: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 5-9.
- ¹⁸ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 74: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1095-1096.
- ¹⁹ *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1: AAS 58 (1966), p. 930.
- ²⁰ AAS 55 (1963), p. 300.
- ²¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 11: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1033.
- ²² Cf. Rom 15:16.
- ²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 39: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1057.
- ²⁴ 13: *Populorum Progressio*, AAS 59 (1967), p. 264.
- ²⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 36: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1054.
- ²⁶ Cf. Rom 5:5.
- ²⁷ *Populorum Progressio*, 56 ff.: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 285 ff.
- ²⁸ *Ibidem*, 86: p. 299.
- ²⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 63: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1085.
- ³⁰ *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), p. 203; cf. *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), pp. 414, 428; *Gaudium et Spes*, 74-76: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1095-1100.
- ³¹ AAS 53 (1961), pp. 420-422.
- ³² *Gaudium et Spes*, 68, 75: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1089-1090; 1097.
- ³³ 81: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 296-297.
- ³⁴ Cf. Mt 28:30; Phil 2:8-11.
- ³⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 43: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1061.
- ³⁶ *Ibidem*, 93: p. 1113.
- ³⁷ Cf. 1 Thess 5:21.
- ³⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 31: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 37-38; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 5: AAS 58 (1966), p. 842.
- ³⁹ *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, AAS 59 (1967), pp. 27 and 26.

COMMENTARY

By Msgr. George G. Higgins

Director, Division for Urban Life, USCC

Pope Paul VI's 12,000-word Apostolic Letter of May 14 commemorating the eightieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's pioneer social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, is divided into five sections: (1) a brief introduction explaining the purpose and the origins of the document; (2) a discussion of certain new social problems; (3) a discussion of fundamental aspirations and currents of ideas in the contemporary world; (4) a section dealing with the role of Christians as they confront these new social problems and new currents of ideas; (5) a call to action.

Before commenting, in a necessarily selective fashion, on some of the substantive matters which are dealt with under these five headings, it seems appropriate to say an introductory word about the style or the tone and the basic thrust of the document as a whole.

Professor E. E. Y. Hales, a British historian who has written extensively on the role of the papacy in the modern world, was one of the first to point out several years ago that Pope John XXIII radically changed the style of official papal documents on socio-economic and political matters. "John," he wrote in his excellent biographical study of the late beloved Pontiff, "was as anxious as any previous pope to reaffirm some continuity in papal (social) teaching; but in fact, in his brief reign, he changed both its spirit and its content. Still more surprising, he introduced a quite new note of hesitancy. . . . It was something new, indeed, when a pope, in an encyclical letter, was prepared to say that this or that was only his personal opinion, using such phrases as 'We consider' or 'We maintain' or 'certain factors which seem to have contributed'. . . . Yet doubt where doubt is due, as it is in all questions of politics and economics, is both intellectually proper and persuasively effective, and part of the charm of Pope John was his refusal to pontificate on public affairs. . . ."

Professor Hales' discerning analysis of Pope John's distinctive and highly effective style of teaching in the area of socio-economic and political problems can be applied with equal validity to Pope Paul's Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Maurice Roy, President of the Council of the Laity and of the Pontifical Commission on Justice

and Peace. That is to say, the style of the Apostolic Letter closely parallels the “persuasively effective” style of Pope John’s major social encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*. The Apostolic Letter is written in the form of a familiar dialogue not only with Catholics or with Christians in general but with all men of good will and carefully avoids the more pontifical style of teaching which so often characterized similar documents in the not too distant past.

On some matters, of course, the Holy Father states his own convictions very firmly, but never in such a way as to force his opinion on the reader or to short circuit or foreclose the dialogue. On all matters which are purely contingent and are open to varying points of view and lend themselves to a variety of solutions he carefully refrains from trying to say—or even leaving the impression that he is trying to say—the last and final word. In deed he goes out of his way to emphasize that it is neither his ambition nor his mission “to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity.” His purpose is the more modest one of “confiding” his own thoughts and preoccupations about some, but by no means all, of today’s more pressing social problems and of encouraging individual Catholics and groups of Catholics, in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of good will, “to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country . . .” and, in addition, “to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be needed.”

Again one is reminded of Pope John’s distinctively pastoral style of teaching by Pope Paul’s repeated emphasis, in several different contexts, on the legitimate variety or plurality of possible options which are open to men of good will, his related emphasis on the obligation of individual Catholics to form their own conscience on these matters in the light of the Gospel message but without waiting for directives from their ecclesiastical leaders, and, last but not least, his urgent plea for the kind of basic humility which “will rid action of all inflexibility and sectarianism” and for “an effort at mutual understanding of the other’s position and motives.”

Two additional observations may be in order with reference to the style or the tone of the Apostolic Letter. First, in addition

to being more dialogical, so to speak, than pontifical, the document is also collegial in tone. Far from trying to foreclose further discussion of the specific problems treated in the Apostolic Letter, the Holy Father explicitly invites the forthcoming Synod of Bishops "to study more closely and to examine in greater detail the Church's message in the face of grave issues raised today by the question of justice in the world." His own Apostolic Letter, then, is meant to be only a kind of interim report commemorating the anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* or, putting it negatively, is not meant to be the last word on any of the complicated matters under discussion. Perhaps it was for this reason that it was issued in the form of an Apostolic Letter and not in the more solemn and more authoritative form of an encyclical.

Secondly, the Apostolic Letter, like Pope John's two major encyclicals on social and political problems, is, on the whole, extremely optimistic in tone. "The note of alarm and admonition," Professor Hales has observed with reference to John's encyclicals, "is scarcely audible. Instead, Roncalli turns to those movements which are deserving of praise and commends them; he picks out those bodies which need encouragement . . . and encourages them. . . . He is, by his own admission, an optimist; he is glad to point to what is good; he thinks in many ways the world is a better place than it was; he thinks there have been enough admonitions, and that they have not been very effective. He is shocked only by the prophets of doom."

In general, the same thing can be said, and again with equal validity, with reference to Pope Paul's Apostolic Letter. Although he would appear, on the surface at least, to be of a less sanguine and less optimistic temperament than John, it must be said that his Apostolic Letter is, on balance, a profoundly optimistic document. In brief, it will give no comfort to the prophets of doom, but, hopefully, will be a source of great encouragement to those of his contemporaries who may be tempted to throw up their hands in despair in the face of the many new social and political problems confronting the modern world.

Let us now turn from the question of style to the actual contents of the Apostolic Letter. Not all of the problems discussed in the document are "new." Some (for example, the role of the government in economic and social life, the liberal or laissez

faire ideology, the right of labor to organize and the right to strike, the evolving nature of socialism) have been dealt with, to one degree or another, in previous papal documents going back as far as Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* published in 1891. In general, however, what distinguishes Pope Paul's Apostolic Letter from earlier social encyclicals is the relative newness of many of the problems it takes up for discussion. In the Introduction to the Apostolic Letter, the Holy Father points out that without forgetting the "permanent problems" dealt with by his predecessors in their respective social encyclicals, he proposes in this Apostolic Letter to concentrate on a number of new questions "which because of their urgency, extent and complexity must in the years to come take first place among the preoccupations of Christians, so that with other men the latter may dedicate themselves to solving the new difficulties which put the very future of man in jeopardy."

To some extent at least, Pope Paul, who is known to be of an academic bent, probably came to his very acute awareness of these problems by means of the printed word. It is worth noting, however, that by his own admission it was his recent journeys to the four corners of the world that helped him to see "in a new perspective the grave problems of our times" and, more specifically, helped him to understand, as no amount of study might have done, that while these problems are, of course, particular to each part of the world, at the same time "they are common to all mankind which is questioning itself about its future and about the tendency and the meaning of the changes taking place."

The "new" social problems which Pope Paul has singled out for special attention fall under ten separate headings: urbanization, Christians in the city, youth and role of women, workers, victims of changes, discrimination, right to emigrate, creating employment, media of social communication, the environment.

The Holy Father does not pretend that his treatment of any of these problem areas is exhaustive. His only purpose was to bring them to the attention of his readers and, hopefully, to start them thinking about alternate ways and means of solving them in the light of the Gospel message and of human values. Unless the reader keeps this point carefully in mind, he is likely to be unduly disappointed in the document because of its apparent

failure to do what it never set out to do in the first place, namely, to come up with pat "solutions" of its own.

This would be true, for example, in the case of the brief sections of the document dealing with the role of women, the rights of workers, and racial discrimination. The Holy Father's treatment of these three enormously complicated problems is tantalizingly brief and obviously incomplete. Nevertheless what the document says about each of them, in admittedly very general terms, should be enough to persuade the reader that the Holy Father appreciates their urgency and is hoping with all his heart that Christians, in open and honest dialogue with their contemporaries, will find a way to solve them in the light of their own informed social conscience. Parenthetically it might be well to point out, in this connection, that the one page of the Apostolic Letter devoted to racial and other forms of discrimination ought to be read in conjunction with the Holy Father's warning, in another context, that while legislation is necessary, it is not sufficient for setting up true relationships of justice and equality and for eliminating the terrible evil of discrimination. What he means by that is that "equality before the law," unless it is accompanied by a profound change of heart on the part of the more affluent and more favored segment of the population and by a more equitable distribution of the wealth of society, "can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation and actual contempt."

While the Holy Father himself does not apply this section of the document to any particular country, it would seem to apply quite specifically to our own situation in the United States. Equality before the law, to the extent that it is guaranteed by the civil rights legislation of recent years, has by no means eliminated the problem of discrimination but, to the contrary, may be serving as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation and actual contempt—and this for the obvious reason that we have yet to flesh out the concept of legal equality with anything like a truly equitable distribution of our national wealth.

Surely it is this sort of problem that the Holy Father is referring to when, in the final section of his Apostolic Letter, he reminds Christians that: "It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic

denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action."

Of the other new problem areas brought up for discussion in the Apostolic Letter, suffice it, for the limited purposes of this brief commentary, to mention only one, namely urbanization. Pope Paul's treatment of this subject strikes one as being highly sophisticated in its understanding of what urbanization, "undoubtedly an irreversible stage in the development of human societies," holds out for mankind, both for better and for worse. The several pages devoted to this complex problem in the Apostolic Letter are too compact to be summarized adequately in this brief paper. On balance, however, what comes through to the reader is the fact that the Holy Father, while facing up very realistically to the enormous problems which urbanization has brought in its wake (a new sense of alienation for millions of hapless refugees from the land, a new and terrifying form of proletarianism, a massive shortage of decent housing, etc.) nevertheless ends up with a message of serene confidence and Christian hope. "In the Bible," he reminds his readers for their encouragement, "the city is in fact often the place of sin and pride—the pride of man who feels secure enough to be able to build his life without God and even to affirm that he is powerful against God. But there is also the example of Jerusalem, the Holy City, the place where God is encountered, the promise of the city which comes from on high."

The Holy Father is persuaded—and would desperately like to be able to convince his readers—that, with God's help, they can, if they have the generosity and the will to do so, direct the irreversible process of urbanization towards the latter destination—the new Jerusalem in which men and women, committed to social justice, can live in brotherhood and peace.

The third section of the Apostolic Letter touches upon a number of new currents of thought in the modern world, some of which are of greater relevance than others to the present socio-economic and political situation in the United States. The Holy Father's carefully nuanced analysis of the historical evolution of Marxism and of socialism in general will presumably be of greater interest to Catholics in Latin America, for example,

than to their co-religionists in the United States, if only because of the fact that, for practical purposes, neither Marxism nor other types of socialism, in the strict sense of the word, hold out any serious attraction for more than a tiny minority of our citizens. At the same time, however, U.S. readers of the Apostolic Letter will not want to belittle the importance of this particular section of the document. Indeed, by comparison with what has been said about Marxism and socialism in general in earlier papal documents, Pope Paul's Apostolic Letter definitely breaks new ground and will undoubtedly be discussed very widely and may even lead to a serious controversy within the Christian community in those countries in which the Marxist-Christian issue is currently a lively topic of debate.

Several other topics discussed in the third and fourth sections of the Apostolic Letter are more directly pertinent to our own situation in the United States at the present time: The liberal ideology, the need to subordinate economics to politics, and the need for new approaches and new structures aimed at securing a greater measure of social justice in the field of international economic life.

The section of the document dealing with "the liberal ideology" and with the subordination of economics to politics will presumably give small comfort to some of the more conservative segments of American society. "Liberalism," in this context, has more of a European than American ring to it. Nevertheless the same ideology (unbridled economic individualism) is not without its adherents in the United States. They will be disappointed to learn that the Holy Father takes a dim view of this form of economic individualism and goes out of his way to warn Christians that, like the ideology of Marxism, "the liberal ideology likewise calls for careful discernment on their part."

Following up on this point in the section of the Apostolic Letter dealing with the Christian meaning of political activity, Pope Paul points out that economic activity, while necessary and, when properly regulated, also beneficial to society, must be subjected to legitimate political power in the interest of the common good, and this at the international as well as the national level. Earlier papal documents had made this point to one degree or another, but never quite so pointedly or emphatically. It is safe

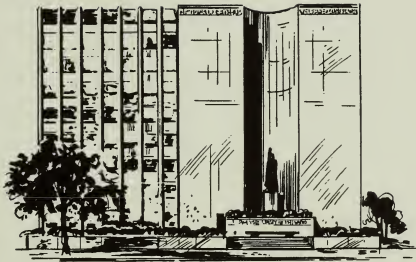
to predict, incidentally, that the section of the Apostolic Letter dealing with this matter will be more widely controverted in the United States than any other section of the document, so deeply are we as a people committed in theory, if not in practice, to the philosophy or the ideology of free enterprise in the old fashioned sense of the word.

Given the enormous wealth of the United States and its crucial influence in world affairs, the section of the Apostolic Letter dealing with international economic justice and the structural changes needed to achieve it are again directly pertinent to our situation here at home. To the extent that the document is directed at the United States, we are called upon to review our trade relationships, our investment policies, etc., so as to bring them into line with that most basic of all the principles of international social justice, namely, "to allow each country to promote its own development, within the framework of a cooperation free from any spirit of domination, whether economic or political." More specifically, the Apostolic Letter points out—with obvious reference to countries like our own—that multinational enterprises—private organizations that "can lead to a new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level"—must be subjected to adequate controls from the point of view of the common good.

Space does not permit us to summarize the Holy Father's constructive and again highly nuanced and remarkably optimistic treatment of the behavioral sciences, the new interest in Utopia, the contemporary youth culture, and a number of other problems. Nor is space available to do more than simply raise the question as to why certain other crucial problems—the so-called population problem comes to mind immediately—are left unmentioned in the document. The only section of the Apostolic Letter which even indirectly touches on the population problem is a single paragraph in which the Holy Father, taking note of "a kind of fatalism which is gaining a hold even on people in positions of responsibility" warns against "Malthusian solutions inculcated by active propaganda for contraception and abortion," and, in general, simply restates the right of the family to the kind of assistance which will assure it of the conditions necessary for its healthy development.

Some readers of the Apostolic Letter will undoubtedly be surprised that the Holy Father has so little to say in the document about the population problem. Others will probably point to alleged omissions in other areas of special interest to themselves. More specifically, the Fourth Estate, in this country at least, will almost certainly object to, or at least raise a number of serious questions about, the Holy Father's none too carefully qualified statement to the effect that public authorities are called upon to take "suitable steps to prevent the spread of what would harm the common heritage of values on which orderly progress is based." Not only the members of the Fourth Estate, but civil libertarians of all faiths and from many walks of life will predictably read into this statement a call for a kind of arbitrary censorship which, philosophically as well as experientially, they hold in abhorrence.

Whatever of that, American readers of all faiths—and Catholics in particular, of course—will be grateful, I think, for the Holy Father's Apostolic Letter and will agree that, on balance, it is a pastoral letter of the highest caliber and a "persuasively effective" call to action in support of "a just, and consequently necessary, transformation of society."



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