

Schema of Pope's Letter on Social Justice

Following are highlights of an important social document by Pope Paul VI on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the encyclical Rerum Novarum.

The Pope's theme was the need to remake society. He said that current social questions are so urgent and complex that Christians should dedicate themselves "to solving the new difficulties which put the very future of man in jeopardy."

The apostolic letter had four sections: New Social Problems, Fundamental Aspirations, Christians Face to Face with These Problems, and Call to Action. Under New Social Problems the Pope considers urbanization, youth, women, workers, victims of change, discrimination, immigrants, employment, communications media and the environment.

Discussing the continuing urbanization of developing as well as industrialized countries, Pope Paul asserts that "there is an urgent need to remake at the level of the street, of the neighborhood, of the great agglomerative dwellings, the social fabric whereby man may be able to develop the needs of his personality."

He describes these needs as material for "the new proletariats" who are forced in urbanization to "dwell in the hearts of the cities sometimes abandoned by the rich" or "on the outskirts — which become a belt of misery," and spiritual for all men "experiencing a new loneliness" in the city's "anonymous crowd which surrounds him and in which he feels himself a stranger."

The Pope acknowledges that urbanization is "undoubtedly an irreversible stage in the development of human societies." But he questions whether, in a consumer-oriented society, man is "becoming the slave of the objects which he makes."

In discussing youth, Pope Paul asks: "What place . . . in this world being brought to birth, should be given to youth?"

"Everywhere," he says, "dialogue is proving to be difficult between youth, with its aspirations, renewal and also insecurity for the future, and the adult generations." Acknowledging this generation gap, the Pope warns 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."

On the role of women, the Pope notes the drive for equality in many countries, but warns against "the false equality which would deny the distinctions laid down by the Creator himself and which would be in contradiction with woman's proper role . . . at the heart of the family as well as within society." He says that legislation should be aimed not at "false equality" but at "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."

Discussing workers, the Pope reiterates church support for the right of workers to organize and to strike but warns against the "temptation" of "profiting from a position of force to impose, particularly by strikes . . . conditions which are too burdensome for the overall economy." He also says that in public service strikes, workers must "assess the limit beyond which the harm caused to society becomes inadmissible."

Speaking of victims of change, the Pope discusses those "who will find themselves injured" by rapid industrial change. "The church," he says, "directs her attention to these new 'poor' — the handi-

capped 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."

Discussing discrimination, the Pope calls "unjustifiable" and "inadmissible" both legislation and behavior based on racialist prejudice. "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," he states.

Discussing the right to emigrate, the Pope appeals for those who "to find work, or to escape a disaster or a hostile climate, leave their regions and find themselves without roots among other people." Such people, he says, must be allowed to become fully integrated into the new society, to advance professionally and to have access to decent housing.

On employment, the Pope warns that demographic growth particularly in developing countries could lead to growing numbers of unemployed. He laments the "kind of fatalism which is gaining a hold and which he says 'leads to Malthusian solutions inculcated by active propaganda for contraception and abortion.'" He reiterates the church position that governments may encourage population limitation but only by methods "in conformity with the moral law" and which "respect the rightful freedom of married couples" to procreate.

To create sufficient employment, the Pope says, society should devote "enterprises of invention and capital as important as those invested for armaments or technological achievements."

Discussing the growing role of social importance being assumed by the communications media, the Pope expresses gratitude for the new unity among men the quick spread of news makes possible. But he warns that the media are "reaching a point of representing, as it were, a new power" and says:

"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." He also asserts that public authorities "are called upon to perform their own positive function" both by encouraging constructive communications and "by taking suitable steps to prevent the spread of what would harm the common heritage of values on which orderly civil progress is based."

Discussing the environment, the Pope notes that "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." He calls upon Christians to "turn to these new preceptions" concerning the environment and to join with other men in shaping a "destiny which from now on is shared by all."

In the third section of the Apostolic Letter, dealing with the Fundamental Aspirations and Currents of Ideas, the Pope speaks specifically of man's "aspiration to equality and aspiration to participation."

Because of these aspirations, Pope Paul says, man seeks 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 a duty to take part in this search and in the organization and life of political society."

At the same time, Pope Paulitions and the poor.

says that the Christian "cannot without contradicting himself adhere to ideological systems which radically or substantially go against his faith and his concept of man."

In this class, the Pope places Marxism with its "atheistic materialism" and "dialectic of violence" and the "liberal ideology which believes it exalts individual freedom by withdrawing it from every limitation."

Despite the insistence that Marxism and liberalism are antithetical to Christianity, the Pope acknowledges that Christians in history encounter activities which sprang from such ideologies but are "in part distinct from them."

He says Christians today can recognize in certain "socialist currents" a "certain number of aspirations which they carry within themselves in the name of faith" and thus must give careful judgment to "different forms according to different continents and cultures."

The Pope also acknowledges the weaknesses of all ideologies when seen in concrete systems. "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."

The resulting dissatisfaction, he says, has led to a rebirth of utopian quests.

"To appeal to a utopia," the Pope says, "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 be clearly 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 toward a fresh future . . . 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."

While noting the social contributions of technology and science, Pope Paul warns of the danger of man's becoming the object of scientific manipulation and "discusses current doubts as to the ultimate value and results of progress."

The Pope says that since the 19th century most men have put "their hopes in ceaselessly renewed and indefinite progress" and only now is man beginning to rightfully question its object. "Without doubt," he says, "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."

In the fourth section of the Apostolic Letter, the Pope discusses Christians Face to Face With These New Problems.

He says the church does not propose ready-made models for problem solving but neither does it "limit itself to recalling general principles."

Pope Paul then calls for:

- "Greater justice in the sharing of goods, both within national communities and on the international level."

- An end to international "relationships based on force."

- A "revision of the relationships between nations" particularly as regards economic relations between the rich na-

- Social control of "multinational enterprises" which can "lead to a new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level."

- Creation of "modern forms of democracy" to give each man "the opportunity to be informed, to express himself and to become involved in shared responsibility."

The final section of the Apostolic Letter is a Call to Action in which the Pope asserts:

"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 responsibilities and by effective action."

Pope Paul calls on every individual to "examine himself, to see what he has done up to now, and what he ought to do."

In issuing the call, the Pope

reminds that Christians should find hope in the knowledge that "other men are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends" and that in deciding on action should recognize the "legitimate variety of possible options."

"The same Christian faith can lead to different commitments," the Pope says, and the church calls upon all Christians both to take the actions they see as best and to respect the actions of others with "profound charity."

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