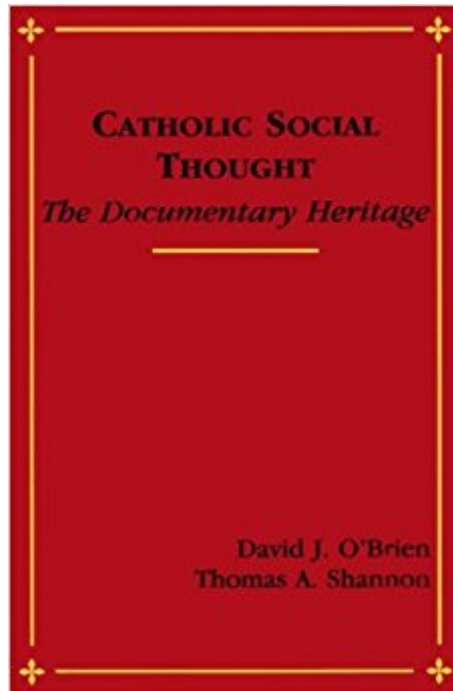




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# Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage



## Synopsis

Marking the centenary of Catholic social teaching, this is the single most comprehensive collection of primary documents from Pope Leo XIII's historic *Rerum novarum* to John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*. Along with the complete texts of every essential papal encyclical, this volume also includes the important documents of the American bishops on peace and the economy. Every document is preceded by an introductory essay and helpful notes, Making it an exceptional reference and teaching tool. Catholic Social Thought is indispensable for scholars and students, religious and lay people, and everyone concerned with the official statements of the Catholic church on social issues and world peace.

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## Customer Reviews

Marking the centenary of Catholic social teaching, this is the single most comprehensive collection of primary documents from Pope Leo XIII's historic *Rerum novarum* to John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*. Along with the complete texts of every essential papal encyclical, this volume also includes the important documents of the American bishops on peace and the economy. Every document is preceded by an introductory essay and helpful notes, Making it an exceptional reference and teaching tool. Catholic Social Thought is indispensable for scholars and students, religious and lay people, and everyone concerned with the official statements of the Catholic church on social issues and world peace.

I am using this book for a class on Catholic Social Teaching, and it is very useful. By containing the encyclicals, constitutions, and other documents of Catholic Social Teaching along with some commentary and background provided by the authors, it gives great insight into what all Catholics should be focusing on. The bad thing however was that when I received my book in the mail it had tiny black bugs all over it, inside and out. I had to throw it away as I couldn't get rid of the bugs and did not want them in my house. Unfortunately this has made it a little bit difficult given that I need the book for class, however all the documents in the book can be obtained on the Vatican's and the USCCB's website for free. All that you are lacking is the small commentary by the authors of the book for each document, you will still get the text of the Church teaching from the websites and not have to pay anything for it.

It is really nice to have all these documents in one book to facilitate reading them in chronological order. I wasn't impressed with the commentary. The commentary had some useful historical details but I felt that the authors' personal opinions marred the usefulness of their comments but the value of this book is not diminished by this in the least.

Product as advertised. Very satisfied.

Intros are biased

This volume offers readers the classic texts of Catholic social teaching, and the way that teaching has evolved in the last two centuries. Following is a review of some of the most influential writings discussed in the book. 1. *Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor* (Leo XIII, 1891) Leo XIII (1810-1903) served as the two hundred fifty seventh pope from 1878 to 1903. He was an extraordinarily influential pope who was interested in the advancement of learning, opened the Vatican archives to all scholars, and founded the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. In 1891, at a time when capitalism and the industrial revolution were underway in transforming much of Europe, Leo wrote the great encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("New Things") to all bishops of the Catholic Church. At the time, two classes had emerged in Europe: the industrialists, who enjoyed wealth and luxury, and the laborers, who were in general oppressed by poverty. In his encyclical, Leo XIII tried to convince Catholics to "concentrate less on politics and more on the `social question'" in order to restore "order and authority" (p. 13). Leo attempts to lay out a system of social action that would later be called "subsidiarity" by Pope Pius XI. Under this system, issues are dealt

with by the most local level of administration, such as the family, household, or local community, and government or the State are only involved when issues cannot be effectively handled on a local level. Leo writes that the idea that civil government should at its own discretion "penetrate and pervade the family and the household, is a great and pernicious mistake" (p. 18, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 11*). But if a family finds itself "in great difficulty, utterly friendless, and without prospect for help, it is right that extreme necessity be met by public aid" (p. 18-19, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 11*). It is therefore natural and necessary that the State play some role in the work of remedy and relief by assuring that laws, institutions, and "the general character and administration of the commonwealth ... produce of themselves public well-being and private prosperity" (p. 27, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 25*). Leo continues by analyzing the ideas animating socialism, such as the notion of "class warfare." He opposes this idea when he writes: "Just as the symmetry of the human body is the result of the disposition of the members of the body, so in a State it is ordained by nature that [employers and employees] should exist in harmony and agreement ... capital cannot do without labor nor labor without capital" (p. 20, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 15*). He further outlines a series of workmen's rights, including the right to strike (p. 29, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 31*), to a day of rest of Sundays and on certain festivals (p. 29, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 32*), to reasonable hours of labor (p. 30, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 33*), and to a just wage (p. 31, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 34*). Regarding the right to a just wage, Leo argues for a perspective that goes beyond a mere contract theory of work, for "there is a dictate of nature more imperious and more ancient than any bargain between man and man" (p. 31, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 34*). An employer does not fulfill his duty by simply paying the worker an agreed-to wage, for it is not within the workman's right to even accept a wage when it is below the level necessary for the support of himself and of his family. Rather, every worker "has a right to procure what is required in order to live" (p. 31, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 34*). When employers fail to honor this basic right, the State is to be appealed to for protection.<sup>2</sup>

**Quadragesimo Anno: After Forty Years (Pius XI, 1931)** Pius XI served from 1922 to 1939 as the two hundred sixtieth pope. In 1931, amidst worldwide unemployment and economic depression, Pius published the *Quadragesimo Anno* ("After Forty Years") to commemorate the *Rerum Novarum* on its fortieth anniversary and to offer insights into the encyclical's legacy and influence. As a result of the *Rerum Novarum*, writes Pius, civil rulers, more conscious of their obligations to "realize public well-being and private prosperity" (p. 47, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 25*), at last "set their hearts and minds to the promotion of a broader social policy" (p. 47, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 26*). The encyclical brought about a host of other reforms and encouraged and taught "Christian workingmen to form unions according to their several trades" (p. 48, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 31*), thus preventing them from falling into the attractions of socialist organizations. Regarding the principle of just distribution, writes Pius, a balanced middle

ground must be sought after in order to prevent erroneous doctrines. Both the wealthy class that deems that the wealthy "should receive everything and the laborer nothing" as well as the propertyless class that "demand for themselves all the fruits of production" (p. 55, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 57*) have stepped outside of the periphery of this balanced middle ground. It must always be recognized that the earth ministers "to the needs of all" (p. 55, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 56*) and each class must accordingly "receive its due share" (p. 56, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 58*). However, Pius denies the validity of the claim that the wage contract is essentially unjust and should be replaced with the contract of partnership; as Leo XIII so boldly made clear, both labor and capital are necessary in the harmony of business enterprise. Drawing off of the ideas outlined in Leo's encyclical, Pius coins the term "subsidiarity" to refer to the principle outlined in the *Rerum Novarum* under which the State allows subordinate groups to handle matters and concerns of lesser importance that would otherwise dissipate the efforts of the State. This in turn allows the State to more effectively do all those things that belong to it alone, such as "directing, supervising, encouraging, [and] restraining" (p. 60, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 80*). Pius highlights that "the more faithfully this principle of `subsidiarity' is followed and a hierarchical order prevails among the various organizations, the more excellent will be the authority and efficiency of society, and the happier and more prosperous the condition of the commonwealth" (p. 60, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 80*). This principle is not new within Catholic social thought. Although the term is coined by Pius and the idea perhaps best expounded by Leo, it can be traced to Aquinas's discussions of private associations and beyond. Pius writes that the principle cannot be set aside or changed in social philosophy and remains "fixed and unchangeable" (p. 60, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 79*).

### 3. Centesimus Annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (1991)

John Paul II served from 1978 to 2005 as the two hundred sixty fifth pope. In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* ("After One Hundred Years"), a universal letter addressed to all Christians and "Men and Women of Good Will," John Paul II commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of the *Rerum Novarum* and echoed the calls of his predecessor Pope Leo XIII. The encyclical, coming at the heels of the 1989 fall of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, celebrates the principles set forth in the *Rerum Novarum* and its warnings against unchecked socialism as well as impersonal capitalism, pointing instead to a third way that has come to be called "economic personalism," which is a form of compassionate or social market capitalism with human dignity at its center. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul calls for trade unions, example, to play a role in negotiating contracts and helping workers "share in a fully human way in the life of their place of employment." Moreover, he calls to the state to "contribute to the achievement" of this goal by, for example, "creating favorable conditions for the free exercise of economic activity" (p. 450-51, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 15*). Pope John Paul based his arguments largely on who

man is anthropologically as created in God's image with transcendent dignity. For Pope John Paul II, Christian anthropology is "really a chapter of theology, and for this reason, the church's social doctrine, by its concern for man and by its interest in him and in the way he conducts himself in the world, 'belongs to the field ... of theology and particularly to moral theology'" (p. 480, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 55*). John Paul writes that "Not only is it wrong from the ethical point of view to disregard human nature, which is made for freedom, but in practice it is impossible to do so. Where society is so organized as to reduce arbitrarily or even suppress the sphere in which freedom is legitimately exercised, the result is that the life of society becomes progressively disorganized and goes into decline" (p. 457 *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 25*). Accordingly, he rejects the totalitarian state on the grounds that it denies man's inherent dignity; the events of 1989 in his mind represent a struggle of moral principles against an "adversary determined not to be bound by moral principles" (p. 456, *Ãfâ Ã Â§ 25*).

This publication gives anyone interested in the Catholic Church's social teaching a one stop tour of all the essential encyclicals and other writings that break open and build on the foundation of "Rerum Novarum". The translation of the encyclicals is well done and makes reading and understanding the message a lot easier than some previous translations. Over all a much needed and well done volume.

Excellent book for college class.

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