

Octogesima Adveniens, A Call to Action

Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, 1971

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OVERVIEW

Pope Paul VI begins this letter by urging greater efforts for justice and noting the duties of local churches to respond to specific situations. The Pope then discusses a wide variety of new social problems which stem from urbanization. These issues include women, youth, and the “new poor.” Paul VI next treats modern aspirations and ideas, especially liberalism and Marxism. He stresses the need to ensure equality and the right of all to participate in society. He concludes this letter by encouraging all Christians to reflect on their contemporary situations, apply Gospel principles, and take political action when appropriate.

HISTORICAL NOTE

A Call to Action is an open, apostolic letter from Pope Paul VI to Cardinal Maurice Roy, president of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the publication of Pope Leo XIII’s *The Condition of Labor*. It breaks new ground by developing a theory of the role of individual Christians and local churches in responding to situations of injustices.

DOCUMENT OUTLINE

Introduction

- Greater efforts for justice are needed (#2).
- Given the wide diversity of situations in the world, each local church has responsibility to discern and act (#4).
- A great variety of changes are taking place in the world (#7).

New Social Problems

- Urbanization creates a new loneliness and the possibility that humans may become slaves to their own creation (#10).
- Youth find dialogue increasingly difficult (#13).
- Women possess an equal right to participate in social, cultural, economic, and political life (#13).
- Workers have the right to form unions (#14).
- The “New Poor,” created by urbanization, include the handicapped, elderly, and the marginalized (#15).
- Discrimination along lines of race, origin, color, culture, sex, and religion still exists (#17).
- Emigration is a right (#17).
- There is great need to create employment through effective policies of investment, education, and organization of means of production (#18).
- The media have both positive and negative potential (#20).
- People have a responsibility to protect the environment (#21).

Fundamental Aspirations and Ideas

- Equality and participation need to be ensured (#22).
- Legislation for justice is necessary but not enough; love sparking action for the poor is needed (#23).
- Preferential respect for the poor is important (#23)

- Political activity for a democratic society is consistent with the total vocation of humankind; humans can no longer rely only on economic activity (#25)
- Both Marxist and liberal ideologies alienate human beings (#26).
- Historical movements contain positive elements which must be discerned (#30).
- Certain features of socialism are attractive but Christians must critique its appeal (#31).
- A variety of interpretations of Marxism exist but historically it has led to totalitarianism and violence (#'s 32-34).
- Liberalism promotes economic efficiency but distorts human nature (#35).
- Christians need to discern carefully the options between different ideologies (#36).
- Utopias are generally ineffective but they provoke the imagination and activity for a better world (#37).
- Humans have become the object of science; science lacks a total picture of humanity (#39).
- Nature of progress is ambiguous; quality of human relations and degree of participation and responsibility are just as important as amount of goods produced (#41).

Christians Face New Problems

- Catholic social teaching states the importance of reflecting on the changing situation of the world and applying Gospel principles to it (#42).
- Nations need to revise their relationships to work for greater justice (#43).
- Liberation requires changed attitudes and structures (#45).
- The task of Christians is to create conditions for the complete good of humanity (#46).
- Christians need to concentrate more on political rather than economic activity as a solution for contemporary problems (#46).
- Involvement in building human solidarity is an end of freedom (#47).

Call to Action

- Each Christian has a personal responsibility for building up the temporal order (#48).
- The Lord working with us is a great reason for Christian hope (#48).
- A plurality of options for action exists (#49).
- Christians have the task of inspiring and innovating in working for justice (#50).

Discussion Questions

A Call to Action was written to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the publication of Pope Leo XIII's *The Condition of Labor*. What new issues was Pope Paul VI dealing with in 1971 that may not have existed when *The Condition of Labor* was written? How did Paul VI address these new concerns?

What does Pope Paul VI mean when he says that liberalism (e.g. free trade), though economically efficient, distorts human nature? Consider free trade agreements, liberalizing social services and natural resources such as water, lessening restrictions on pollution, etc. How might these examples illustrate what Paul VI is saying?

Pope Paul VI says in this document that each Christian has a personal responsibility for building up the temporal order, or renewing the world to one of justice and peace. As an individual, how are you working to renew the earth? What more could you be doing?