

# *Quadragesimo Anno, The Reconstruction of the Social Order*

Pope Pius XI, May 15, 1931

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## OVERVIEW

Pope Pius XI covers three major areas in his encyclical. First, he describes the impact of Leo XIII's *The Condition of Labor* on the Church, civil authorities, and other concerned parties. Secondly, Pius clarifies and develops the social and economic doctrine contained in *The Condition of Labor*. He articulates a positive role for the Church in economic and social affairs and affirms the social responsibility of ownership. He advocates a unity between capital and labor and urges the uplifting of the poor and a reform of the social order based on a reestablishment of vocational groups. Finally, Pius treats the abuses of capitalism and socialism and calls for the moral renovation of society coupled with action for justice based on love.

## HISTORICAL NOTE

*The Reconstruction of the Social Order* commemorates the fortieth anniversary of *The Condition of Labor*. Pius wrote and issued this encyclical during a time when major depression was shaking the economic and social foundations in society worldwide. He strongly criticized the abuses of both capitalism and communism and attempted to update Catholic social teaching to reflect changed conditions. He broadened the Church's concern for poor workers to encompass the structures which oppress them.

## DOCUMENT OUTLINE

### Part I: Impact of *The Condition of Labor*

#### On the Church

- Doctrine
  - Encouraged adaptability to changing conditions (#18).
  - Committed many priests and lay people to the Church's social teaching (#19).
  - Inspired a truly Christian social science (#20).
  - Taught in seminars and universities (#20).
  - Has influence outside the Church (#21).
- Practical Application
  - Effort to help lower classes (#23).
  - Influenced education and culture (#23).
  - Works of charity multiplied (#24).
  - Inspired institutions for mutual support (#24).

#### On Civil Authority

- Defined positive role: to protect law and order and to promote public well-being (#25).
- Government must have a special regard for the infirm and needy (#25).
- Leaders became more conscious of their obligations to promote social policy (#26).
- Laws and programs for the poor were begun (#28).



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- Unions
  - Confirmed their mission (#31).
  - Clergy and laity helped create them (#33).
  - Unions have flourished (#33).
  - Leo XIII's counsels should be adapted to different situations (#34).
- Other
  - Associations of employers did not meet with much success (#38).
  - Leo drew his inspiration from the Gospel (#39).

**Part Two: Social and Economic Doctrine****Role of the Church (#41)**

- Church has a right and duty to deal with these issues.
- It is a "God given task."
- Church must pass judgment on social and economic questions as they affect moral issues.

**Property Rights**

- Two-fold aspect of ownership: individual and social (concerns for the common good) (#45).
- Double danger: individualism and collectivism (#46).
- Right of property must be distinguished from its use (#47).
- To destroy the individual character of ownership is a grievous error (#48).
- Right of ownership is not absolute (#49).
- Function of government: to define in detail the duties of ownership (#49).
- Two uses of superfluous income:
  - charity (#50);
  - to create employment (#51).

**Capital and Labor**

- Only by the labor of working people does the state grow rich (#53).
- Labor and capital need each other (#53).
- In history, capital claimed all the products and profits and left the barest minimum to labor (#54).
- Unjust claim of labor: all products and profit belong to working people (#55).
- Advocates a just distribution of wealth to serve the common good (#56).

**Uplifting the Proletariat**

- Uplifting the proletariat is the main objective (#59).
- The situation of workers has improved in Western nations (#59).
- But the situation has deteriorated in other parts of the world (#60).
- Condition of rural laborers is extremely depressed (#60).
- Working people should be sufficiently supplied with fruits of productions (#61).
- A just wage should be paid so people can acquire moderate ownership (#63).
- The idea of a wage contract is not necessarily unjust (#64).
- Wage contract should be modified by a contract of partnerships (#65).



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### DOCUMENT OUTLINE (continued)

- Demand of social justice: wages should support families (#71).
- Women and children should not be abused in the work world (#71).
- Public authorities can help businesses pay a just wage (#73).
- Opportunities must be provided to those willing to work (#74).

#### **Reform of Social Order**

- This is primarily the State's responsibility (#78).
- Principles of subsidiarity: activity that can be performed by a more decentralized entity should be (#s79-80).
- Primary duty of the State: to abolish conflict and promote harmony between classes (#81).
- Importance of vocational groups: common effort for the common good (#84).
- Proper ordering of economic affairs cannot be left to free enterprise alone (#88).
- Economic supremacy has replaced free competition (#88).
- Economic institutions must be imbued with a spirit of justice (#89).
- Calls for international economic cooperation (#89).
- Supports public intervention in labor-management disputes (#93).

### **Part Three: Socialism**

#### **Changes in Capitalism**

- Economic concentration has led to a struggle for domination (#105).
- Free competition has ended (#109).
- State has become a "slave" serving greed (#109).
- Economic imperialism thrives (#109).

#### **Changes in Socialism**

- Divided into two camps (#111).
- Communism supports violence and the abolition of private ownership (#112).
- Socialism condemns the resort to physical force and moderates the prohibition on private property (#113).

#### **Remedies**

- No possibility of a compromise between Christianity and Socialism (#116).
- Socialism perceives humans in a way alien to Christian truth (#118).
- Social reconstruction needs a return to Christian spirit and Gospel principles (#36).
- Love and charity must reinforce justice (#137).

### **Discussion Questions**

Why does the Church have a right and a duty to speak on social issues?

Discuss the weaknesses of capitalism and socialism in light of Catholic social teaching.