

SOCIAL TEACHING: From Proclamation To Promotion



Denis E Hurley O.M.I.

Archbishop Denis Hurley O.M.I. Archbishop of Durban, visited Australia in August-September 1991, as part of the Rerum Novarum Centenary celebrations in the dioceses of Melbourne and Perth.

In Melbourne, Archbishop Hurley was the keynote speaker at a public meeting where he spoke on one hundred years of Catholic Social Teaching.

In his speech the Archbishop stressed the crucial role of the laity in promoting the Church's social teaching. He also stated that although sections of the Church among the clergy, laity and religious were dedicated in promoting the social teachings they formed only a small minority. The Church must seriously consider its method of promoting the social teachings. Part of the solution he said, was to be found in the small community.

Archbishop Denis Hurley became a bishop at age 31 in 1947. At the time of his visit to Australia he was the longest serving bishop in the Catholic Church. He is one of the Church's most eminent justice and peace leaders, a man who has witnessed great change within the Church, particularly in his own country South Africa.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is pleased to present the text of the Archbishop's Melbourne presentation: "**Social Teaching: From Proclamation to Promotion**" as part of its series of ACSJC Occasional papers. Also included are the vote of thanks given by Frank Costigan and the text of Archbishop Little's homily given at the Melbourne Rerum Novarum Centenary Mass.

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The following talk was given in Melbourne on 28th August 1991 at Presentation College Windsor.

A New Dimension of Christian Concern

The kind of social teaching inaugurated by *Rerum Novarum* was new. Teaching about the social obligations of Christians had always flourished in the Church: teaching on charity and justice. But the industrial and political revolutions inaugurated in the second half of the 18th century had introduced new social conditions in Western Europe and America and the Church's social teaching had to be adapted to deal with these. It was no longer just a question of charity and justice between individuals and families and small corporate groups, and between monarchical rulers and their subjects. NOW masses of people were involved in the new democratic societies and the new relationships of factory owners and factory workers. These developments required a new dimension of social concern and social teaching. New norms had to be formulated, the norms of social justice. The new social concern had been developing in Christian circles for several decades: even, in the case of John Wesley's Methodists and all associated evangelicals, for over a century. These Christian developments however were outstripped in scope and intensity by the ideology of socialism which promised to be the revolutionary response to the abuses of liberal capitalism.

Growing Christian social concern in the Catholic Church persuaded Pope Leo XIII that the time had come for an authoritative intervention at the highest level: hence *Rerum Novarum* in 1891.

Social Teaching and the Role of the Laity

Looking back over what has happened since then it is clear that there is a very close link between the development of Catholic social doctrine and the participation of the laity. A little reflection indicates that it could not have been otherwise. Social concern could not develop without the laity playing a major role. The overwhelming majority of the Church is lay and this majority in many countries is an important segment of society and in some countries the dominant religious segment. If social concern is to be a reality it will be so through the laity. There can be no promotion of social concern without the participation of the laity.

Already in the time of Pope Leo XIII, wherever there were significant numbers of Catholics, Catholic associations were in full flower: some promoted by the clergy, some founded and promoted by leading lay persons, some concerned with piety and devotion, some with social issues, including the major issues of poverty and work, and some concerned with politics. This blossoming of associations was the Church's response to what was seen as the two major threats to Catholicism in the 19th century: liberalism and socialism.

Inspired by *Rerum Novarum*, the 'social Catholics' went to work with publications, commentaries on the encyclical, 'social weeks' and all the apparatus of promotion they could muster. They were a small but vigorous and vocal segment of the Church trying bravely to disperse

the incomprehension and apathy of an ecclesiastical tradition that could not see what all this had to do with religion. Probably the most important development after *Rerum Novarum* was the launching of the Christian trade union movement in continental Europe for this involved the Catholic worker in his own salvation. Inevitably, there were problems and quarrels. Corporatism which favoured the idea of employers and workers in the same association or corporation contended with trade unionism which foresaw domination by employers in such a set-up. The neutral union contested the field with the Christian union, and the union involved in party politics with the union not so involved. Slowly, hesitantly, contentiously, the Catholic social movement gained momentum.

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Pope St Pius X who succeeded Leo XIII in 1903 is well-known for his liturgical reforms in the matter of Church music and early and frequent communion. He also drove hard for the reform of seminary education and the promotion of catechetical instruction. But the issue that Leo XIII had raised with *Rerum Novarum* was not one of his priorities. In the matter of lay participation Pius X's concern focused on what was starting to be called Catholic action. In St Pius X's understanding, Catholic Action aimed at organising and harnessing the apostolic efforts of lay people in close union with and in strict subordination to the clergy. The lay forces of Catholic Action were to be a sort of spiritual and apostolic extension of hierarchical and clerical evangelisation.

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) is well-known for his additions to the corpus of social teaching: *Quadragesimo anno* in 1931 on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* and his condemnations of fascism, nazism, and communism. He pushed the idea of Catholic Action very vigorously. He envisaged dioceses and parishes extending the drive and influence of the bishops and clergy through the four sections of organised Catholic Action: Catholic Action of men and of women, Catholic Action of the youth of both sexes. Other associations of lay apostolate were not excluded but Catholic Action was the apple of the eye of Pope Pius XI. I remember from my days as a seminarian in Rome in the 1930's how he loved to repeat the definition of Catholic Action as "the participation of the laity in the apostolic mission of the hierarchy". If I remember rightly he maintained that this definition of Catholic Action was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thank God Pope Pius XI did not promulgate *ex cathedra* that Catholic Action, as he understood it, is lay participation *par excellence*. We would now be having a difficult time explaining that he didn't quite mean that. As Pope Pius XI was proclaiming it, two things were happening that would soon relativise its value.

One was Joseph Cardijn. In the early 1920s he founded the **Young Christian Workers**, organised them in cells and sections and gave them a method of formation enshrined in the trilogy, **See, Judge, Act**. This new method became the most effective way of training young laity. It soon spread far beyond the world of young workers and was, taken up by a variety of Catholic organisations. These continued to be called Catholic Action but with a qualification—specialised Catholic Action. The new method, emphasizing experience and Bible in due course revolutionized catechetics, inspired liberation theology, the emergence of christian base communities in Latin America and other parts of the world and became responsible for one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council, namely **Gaudium et spes**, the Pastoral constitution on The Church in the Modern World.

The other thing that happened was the growth of the realization that the apostolate of the laity was not just an extension of the apostolic mission of the hierarchy. The laity had their own job to do, in close association with the hierarchy obviously but with a certain autonomy of their own. The role of the laity does not depend on the invitation to help the hierarchy do its job. It flows from baptism. During the time of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) the term lay apostolate grew in popularity. It emphasized the role of the laity 'consecrating' the world in a concept that was to have revolutionary consequences under Pope John XXIII.

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With this vision of lay responsibility developing as part of a renewal that included scripture, theology, catechesis and liturgy there was a growing sense of excitement and creativity in the period that followed the Second World War. Then came Pope John XXIII. He was elected in October 1958 and died in June 1963. In just over four-and-a-half years, as one disgruntled ecclesiastic is supposed to have remarked, he did more damage than can be repaired in four hundred years. Part of the 'damage' he perpetrated was to give the papal blessing to a new, more appreciative, more optimistic view of the world.

This he did just by being the person he was and by publishing two encyclicals, **Mater et Magistra** in 1961 and **Pacem in Terris** in April 1963. The Council he called crowned his work in this respect by its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, **Gaudium et spes**, as well as by giving formulation and focus to the other forms of renewal that had been fermenting in the Church. The role of the laity received special mention in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

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Catholics under 40 years of age may find it difficult to realise the extent of the revolution in the Church's attitude to the world. For 1900 years the Church had been ill at ease in its assessment of the world, appreciating it as the work of God's creation but apprehensive of the evil that lurked in it. The very term 'world' was ambiguous in the gospel, in catechesis and in the theology of the priesthood and the religious life. For religious there was a certain satisfaction in having 'renounced the world', and priests were exhorted to be 'in the world but not of it'. Theology had little idea of how this world was related to the true and lasting values of the next. At best this world looked like a testing ground where Christians proved whether or not they were worthy of eternal happiness. Apart from this, what they actually did in the world was of scant importance. The thing that counted was the 'right intention'.

The Catholic theological reappraisal of the world was a tremendous boost for the laity. The great majority of laity spend most of their waking time at work in the world. Having to do this within a situation of ambiguity is not very encouraging. **Gaudium et spes** did a splendid hatchet job on the ambiguity view. It also showed beyond any shadow of doubt that the development of lay responsibility in the Church and the promotion of social concern are totally and absolutely inseparable. Echoing the teaching of **Lumen gentium** (31) **Gaudium et spes** emphasizes this point in the following passage.

"Secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to lay persons. Therefore acting as citizens of the world, whether individually or socially, they will observe the laws proper to each discipline, and labour to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields. They will gladly work with people seeking the same goals. Acknowledging the demands of faith and endowed with its force, they will unhesitatingly devise new enterprises, where they are appropriate, and put them into action.

Lay persons should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city. From priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let lay persons not imagine that their pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give them a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let lay persons take on their own distinctive role."(43)

Since Vatican II Catholic social teaching has been extended by two documents of Pope Paul VI, *The Development of Peoples (Populorum progressio)* and the Eightieth year (*Octogesima adveniens*) and three documents of Pope John Paul II, *Human Work (Laborem exercens)* Social Concern (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*) and *The Hundredth Year (Centisimus annus)*.

The role of the laity has been further affirmed by the Apostolic Exhortation published after the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of 1986, *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World (Christifideles laici)*.

Success and Failure of Social Teaching

This mass of teaching on social concern and on the role of the laity in the Church constitutes an impressive achievement. Can we call it successful? My reply to that question is: to a certain extent, yes; to a large extent, no.

It has been successful in that there are strong and vigorous sectors in the Church among laity, clergy and religious who are loyal and dedicated protagonists of the church's social teaching, but they are a minority, regrettably a fairly small minority. This minority has laboured long and hard to spread the message but the spreading has been slow, so slow that social concern cannot be called characteristic of the large body of the Church nor a regular feature of its preaching and catechising.

In countries like Belgium and France where the Cardijn tradition is strong one gets the impression of the Church structure with two parallel trends: a majority, traditional, socially uninvolved Church and a minority, very socially concerned Church made up of the Catholic Action movements of Cardijn origin — in some cases less concerned with personal spiritual and sacramental life than with social issues. In other countries, and this applies I think to most English speaking countries, the movements of Cardijn inspiration are not very conspicuous and the socially concerned wing of the Church seems less prominent, consisting of groups, commissions and committees working in the justice and peace field.

Despite the dedication of such groups someone has gone as far as coining the devastating indictment that the social teaching of the Church is its best kept secret. This is obviously an exaggeration. Nevertheless it is the kind of statement that makes you sit up and take notice.

If the Church is concerned about people, and it was established for this purpose, the social factors that influence people and largely shape their lives, outlook and experience are of supreme importance.

Social Teaching a Serious Matter

One has got to take notice because the social teaching of the Church is a very serious matter. Pope Leo XIII certainly thought it was when he wrote in *Rerum Novarum*: "*We affirm without hesitation that all the striving of people will be in vain if they leave out the Church. It is the Church that insists, on the authority of the gospel, upon these teachings whereby the conflict can be brought to an end. or rendered at least far less bitter; the Church uses her efforts not only to enlighten the mind but to direct by her precepts the life and conduct of each and all; the Church improves and betters the condition of workers by means of numerous organisations; does her best to enlist the services of all classes in discussing and endeavouring to further, in the most practical way, the interests of the working class; and considers that for this purpose recourse should be had in due measure and degree, to the intervention of the law and state authority*" (13). Pope Leo may be overstating the achievements of the Church but he leaves no doubt but that he considers its intervention in social conflict as very very important.

Forty years later in 1931 Pope Pius XI wrote in similar vein in *Ouadagesimo anno* (17). So too did Pope John XXIII in 1961 in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. (56-57)

Pope John Paul II has been equally forceful in emphasizing the importance of Catholic social teaching. He writes in his most recent encyclical *Centisimus annus* (The Hundredth Year): "*in effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour. This doctrine is likewise a source of unity and peace in dealing with the conflicts which inevitably arise in social and economic life. Thus it is possible to meet these new situations without degrading the human person's transcendent dignity, either in oneself or in ones adversaries, and to direct those situations towards just solutions.*" (5).

One could continue with such papal quotations, but these, spanning a hundred years, suffice to indicate that papal teaching leaves no doubt about the vital importance of social teaching. By emphasizing it in one of its most important documents, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the Second Vatican Council conveys the same message. It could not be otherwise, human behaviour is profoundly affected by the social situations in which it occurs. If the Church is concerned about people, and it was established for this purpose, the social factors that influence people and largely shape their lives, outlook and experience are of supreme importance.

Clearly social evils like war, invasion, oppression and exploitation of one nation by another, one economic class by another, one race by another, whole population by authoritarian ideological groups, are among the worst evils that disfigure the world. These evils often result in severe and persistent suffering: humiliation and privation leading to sub-human capacities, the frustration of human expectations and disastrous child mortality. If the Church is supposed to be concerned about evil (to help remove it) and of our suffering (to help alleviate it) its social teaching that deals with these issues is of immense importance.

Reasons for Poor Results of Social Teaching

Given that and given, too, that the promotion of social teaching has not met with much success, there must be a reason or reasons for this. I think that one of the reasons is our failure as Church over the years to realise that with the proclamation of the modern form of social teaching from 1891 on a new dimension had come into Church teaching which could not be promoted by existing methods of evangelization and catechesis. These methods were roughly three-fold: pastoral preaching, catechesis of young people and the promotion of special guilds and associations, supplemented occasionally by retreats and parish missions.

In all these methods the traditional concern was with the personal and family behaviour of Church members. The preaching and catechizing and whatever done in guilds and associations was related to what people were experiencing in their personal and family lives. Now suddenly they were confronted with a call to absorb into their personal and family lives huge social concerns involving war and peace, economic disparities between classes and nations, and cultural and ethnic tensions. What could one do practically about these enormous issues in Sunday sermons, catechism classes and monthly meetings of guilds and associations?

We have seen in dealing with the development of lay apostolate and lay formation that the specialized Catholic action movements inspired by Joseph Cardijn did achieve a certain degree of success. Their methods were good and today the socially most vibrant areas of the Church appear to be those promoting Christian base communities or small christian communities with methods adapted from the Cardijn model.

One is almost tempted to call for a moratorium on papal encyclicals and other important Church documents while the whole Church concentrates on the problem of method.

The time has come for the Church to give serious thought to the question of method. We have a volume of social teaching. But we are not getting it across to enough members of the Church to make it a significant dimension of Church awareness. One is almost tempted to call for a moratorium on papal encyclicals and other important Church documents while the whole Church concentrates on the problem of method. Papal encyclicals and other weighty documents are intended for communication and education. They are achieving this object in an all too limited degree. We need to concentrate our attention on this problem.

Surely Jesus intended his Church to be conspicuous by its community spirit.

Solution: Small Communities

Perhaps the solution, or rather part of the solution, is staring us in the face — the small community. The lesson of the community approach comes through loud and clear from the associations at the time of Pope Leo XIII, Catholic Action groups promoted by Pope Pius X and Pius XI, movements that owe their origin to Joseph Cardijn, the lay apostolate in all its variety, the christian base communities of Latin America and their counterparts in other countries. Since Joseph Cardijn few would dare to promote any socially oriented educational project that does not include the elements of group or community organisation, experience and Bible based reflection, individual or corporate action and training in leadership.

The promotion of communities in which people inspired by the Bible, meet, pray, discuss, reflect and, whenever possible, involve themselves in corporate action must be as important an element of Church life as preaching, catechizing and celebrating the liturgy. Surely Jesus intended his Church to be conspicuous by its community spirit. He made it very clear how he expected people to recognise his disciples: **"by this love you have for one another everyone will know that you are my disciples"**. (John 13:33) Love for one another without real community and community spirit is unimaginable. Love is a human relationship. It has many expressions. Love between members of a community generates community spirit, which is something tangible, recognisable. And should remain human, tangible and recognisable even when, I should say, especially when, consecrated by the Spirit of Love.

Now it is much easier to cultivate community spirit in small communities rather than in a large congregation. Besides there seems to be no other way of building up real religious awareness related to the circumstances of life and geared to the challenge of secularism. As long as we omit to promote these kinds of communities we shall be neglecting one of the most powerful means that God through our human nature places at our disposal.

We are social beings. We cannot survive outside society, we cannot grow or develop. As the force of gravity holds the universe together, community instinct holds human society together. It is the most powerful instinct in us, more powerful than sex or the instinct for individual survival. An able leader can get people to do anything, suffer anything, dare anything for the sake of social survival. Every war and revolution tells us that.

Community instinct is an extraordinary force. I remember a British priest of Scots extraction who came to South Africa to live out the last years of his life with lungs damaged by gas in the First World War. He once said to me: "I feel somewhat ashamed of saying this but the happiest years of my life were those spent in the Royal Artillery in France." He had not been a priest then, but he never forgot the camaraderie, the esprit de corps that made life bearable and more than bearable at the battle front. Remember too how people speak of times in their lives marked by some intense experience of community. They talk of the wonderful spirit. Remember too what makes a sporting group rise to unsuspected heights of achievement: the team spirit. If we are neglecting this as means of formation and evangelization in the Church we are neglecting one of the greatest forces given to us by God.

How communities should be formed and what size they should be will depend on the cultural circumstances of each country. In most English-speaking urban societies small communities should be able to meet an average size home. Australia, I believe and especially the Archdiocese of Melbourne has quite a lot of experience in the promotion of small communities.

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In South Africa we are trying to promote them in terms of a pastoral plan launched in 1989 with the motto, 'Community Serving Humanity'. There are two methods, of initiating them followed by different dioceses: The **Renew** method, well-known in Australia, and what we refer to as the **Lumko** method, a direct approach to creating small communities much fostered by a pastoral institute called **Lumko — an African word for light**.

We realise that we have an immense task ahead of us, a task demanding organization, formation, training, pastoring and the ongoing supply of programmes. These programmes have to cater for a gradual buildup of formation in social concern, especially its most difficult aspect, the justice dimension. We are not underestimating the effort that this will require particularly among persons of the middle and wealthy classes, who need a very special motivation to get involved in this addition to their religious practice which may prove somewhat threatening to them. When the motivation has been strong enough the recruiting of such persons has been achieved in the case of associations and movements in the Church. What is being asked now is that the promotion of groups or small communities be taken over from such associations and movements and become the characteristic practice of the Church as such, just as preaching, catechizing and worshipping are.

That challenges us to think about methods, methods not just of this or that movement, association or campaign but methods to be adopted and practised by the Church as Church, just as preaching, catechizing and worship are practised as activities indispensable to her very being.

At the beginning of this address I stressed the fact that the promotion of social concern, particularly in its justice dimension, is inseparable from the promotion of lay participation and responsibility. Great emphasis is laid today on the role of the laity in the Church. One could multiply quotations from conciliar and papal documents to illustrate this, but that is hardly necessary. The emphasis on lay responsibility and lay participation is an accepted fact. But the kind of responsibility and participation that we have in mind cannot be promoted by just the ordinary basic pastoral methods. Special formation and training are required. Whatever form this may take, recent experience in movements of lay apostolate indicates that an indispensable element is the group or small community that involves people in reflecting together on the scriptures and on personal and social experience, praying and endeavouring to undertake individual or corporate action related to the situation they are concerned about. If lay participation is to become truly characteristic of the Church it looks as if it cannot do without groups and small communities as an essential requirement of Church life.

Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World has this to say: "in recent days the phenomenon of lay people associating among themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality. In some ways lay associations have always been present throughout the Church's history as various confraternities, third orders and sodalities testify even today. However, in modern times such lay groups have received a special stimulus, resulting in the birth and spread of a multiplicity of group forms: associations, groups communities, movements. We can speak of a new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful. In fact, alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose, so great is the richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community, and so great is the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people". (29)

There should be freedom and flexibility in the structure of groups and small communities but the principle of their indispensability must be clearly emphasized.

Since priests and religious are the partners and resource people of the laity in the common task of the Church, the formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious must be relevant to what is expected of the laity. They should be able to fit easily into the groups and communities of lay persons, be enriched by them, indeed be evangelized by them and in return make their indispensable contribution.

In this way laity, clergy and religious can be united in the supreme task so beautifully described by Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelization in the Modern world*.

"For the Church, evangelization means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: Now, I am making the whole of creation new" (*Rev. 21:5*) But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism, and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieus which are theirs.

For the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest; lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.

All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et spes*, always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God." (18-20)

To sum up, the message of this address is that social concern and social justice are vital to the Church. Without that the Church cannot influence societies and their cultures, cannot achieve the kind of evangelization envisaged by recent popes and by the Second Vatican Council, cannot hope to create a christian public opinion. But this kind of evangelization on any significant scale is extremely difficult. That challenges us to think about methods, methods not just of this or that movement, association or campaign but methods to be adopted and practised by the Church as Church, just as preaching, catechizing and worship are practised as activities indispensable to her very being.

My conclusion is that in the matter of promoting social concern in the Church small christian communities are equally indispensable.

VOTE OF THANKS TO ARCHBISHOP HURLEY — Frank Costigan

It is my pleasant task tonight to thank Your Grace on behalf of all here present for your acceptance of Archbishop Little's invitation to come to Melbourne to take part in the Archdiocesan celebrations to mark the centenary of **RERUM NOVARUM**.

It is a particular pleasure to know that, although your birthplace was Cape Town, your parentage was Irish. Melbourne's early history is intimately associated with Ireland and its rebellious spirit, and is proud of it. I was myself in Dublin only six weeks ago to be admitted to the Irish Bar. I suspect that one could trace the source of many of Your Grace's achievements to your wise selection of parents.

It is almost a cliché to say that we live in interesting times; but it is certainly true to say it. One has only to consider some of the highlights of the last two years: the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the momentous happenings in Eastern Europe, the Gulf War, the Russian Revolution, and the changes in South Africa.

One should not allow the excitement associated with these historic events to disguise or hide the immense social injustices which in the last resort have finally produced these events. I think it unlikely that we will quickly forget the ravages of Stalinism, the horrors in Rumania, or the murders and oppression in South Africa. But there is a grave danger that a sudden change, apparently for the better, can bring such a sense of relief that the demand for change and justice can be muted.

I don't think this is likely to happen while our guest of honour tonight is still drawing breath.

It would be equally serious to attribute the presence of social injustice only to those tyrannies whose unacceptable behaviour is moderately obvious, even to the less perceptive. As we know well there are important social injustices to be found in all the western democracies, including this country.

There is poverty, malnutrition and ill health; there is unemployment, violence and depression. It is undoubtedly of a lesser order than a number of other countries but serious enough to prompt great concern among the Catholic Bishops in this country. I have spoken on a number of occasions of the **GREED** and **FRAUD** and **DISHONESTY** which accompanied many of the commercial ventures of the eighties. They reflected a complete lack of concern for those less advantaged members of the community, and almost certainly indicated a lack of exposure to **RERUM NOVARUM**. I regret to say that I don't think even Archbishop Hurley could have changed their ways. The atmosphere in which they acted was one inimical to any decent christian or ethical values. It was based on lies and fraud. It was an affront to a sense of justice, and it has to pass.

I use the word "lies" with care because ultimately justice can occur only if there is truth and honesty between people. As I move gently into middle age, I realise how central to proper behaviour is the ability to trust in the truth and integrity of human relationships.

Archbishop Hurley suggested that those under the age of 40 don't appreciate the extent of the changes which have occurred in recent times. As a layman, I welcome the fresh understanding of the complex world we live in. For this, Leo XIII and RERUM NOVARUM deserve our warmest congratulations. The crusade for social reform must primarily rest in the hands of those who work within that system, but it must be a crusade based on proper Christian and ethical principles.

Archbishop Hurley has shown convincingly the great contribution made by the Church to the concept of social justice. This contribution did not start with RERUM NOVARUM, but for my generation that encyclical was and is of prime significance. I remember well my time at Melbourne University when groups would discuss RERUM NOVARUM and its implications for hours at a time.

Why are we not getting the message across? What is the appropriate method for doing so? There must be community spirit — and this needs to be cultivated. It may be easier to do this in small communities. But we do live in a large community. What is required:

- a. proper standards of behaviour**
- b. appropriate leadership**
- c. acceptance that some things are wrong**

The importance of small group and small communities is properly stressed by Archbishop Hurley. It is of prime importance, however, that their influences not be directed inwards and become incestuous. They must reflect in the community their standards of behaviour based on a proper Christian ethic.

I feel humble as well in the presence of our guest, Archbishop Hurley. His contribution to the cause of Social Justice throughout the world, but especially in his own country South Africa, and throughout his life is outstanding. His address and answers to questions tonight gives us all a window of insight into the qualities which have made him a World figure. I ask you all to rise and show your appreciation.



**THE CHURCH'S 1891 "BATTLE CRY" FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:
POPE LEO XIII'S RERUM NOVARUM
BY ARCHBISHOP FRANK LITTLE**

This is the slightly edited text of Archbishop Little's address at the Centenary Mass for Rerum Novarum in St. Francis Church, Melbourne, on May 22.

On the centenary anniversary of Rerum Novarum, the famous 1891 social encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, a hundred thousand people, most of them workers from around the world who had come to Rome for the celebration, joined with Pope John Paul II, as he offered Mass in St. Peter's Square.

The Holy Father said that Rerum Novarum constituted "the beginning of a new social doctrine of the Church," by which, "an aspect of the mission received by the apostles from Jesus Christ was fulfilled."

He added: "The social doctrine of the Church is but an organic development of the very truth of the Gospel. It is the 'Social Gospel' of our times, just as the historical period apostles also had the social gospel of the early Church."

This Mass in Melbourne in 1991 then joins in that spirit. Rerum Novarum was a marker event in the Church. We have all been massively influenced by it, perhaps in unseen ways. We have abundant reason indeed to join together our thanks in this Eucharist and recommit ourselves to live out the challenges of the social doctrine of the Church.

"If you do away with the yoke, the clenched fist, the wicked word, if you give your bread to the hungry and relief to the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness." If ever there was a cry for social justice, then there it is. Yet the words cry out of the mouth of Isaiah, a prophet of the Old Testament.

"He sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty of captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free." If ever there was a cry for social justice, then there it is. Yet the words were the mission statement heard from the mouth of our Lord.

"Feed those dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them you are killing them." Tough words indeed, but if ever there was a cry for social justice, then there it is. Such was the saying of the early fathers of the Church.

The quotations sound revolutionary. Any person with feeling heart would recognise them as that. Yet each major historical change invariably needed revolutionary words to change hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. A century ago it was the conditions of industrial workers which called for a revolutionary change. The cry of revolution came from the pen of an 81 year old Pope Leo XIII.

His words were clear; he supported efforts to increase wages and reform capitalism, the right to form trade unions, and the need for the State to intervene in the economy to see justice done to the poorer classes; it rejected extreme versions of socialism and called for the wider distribution of property, especially for working people. It also dramatically established the right of the Church to speak to the moral aspects underlying social and political problems. All old stuff you would say today; yet, as the Australian Historian Fr. Eric O'Brien (later Archbishop), stated: it "fell like a bombshell upon the capitalist-controlled world, .. It had been thought that the Church would never disturb the status quo.

There were limitations to the encyclical, but rarely has any document so captured the popular imagination; it has remained an inspiration and a rallying point for people endowed with a finely tuned Christian conscience.

For Australians, Rerum Novarum came at a very significant time. The failure of the **Maritime and Shearers' strikes in 1890** had convinced many in the trade union movements that they should form their own labour party. In New South Wales the new **Labour Party** was immediately successful. Things were different here in Victoria where a party system in the modern sense of the word had not yet developed and Labour continued to act more as a wing of the Liberal party of the time.

Australia was sliding into the depression of the 1890s, with falling prices overseas for primary commodities, the crisis in finance and the collapse of some major banks, the collapse of the building industries and real estate market, and one of the severest droughts in Australia's history. Sounds familiar! Unemployment soared, at times to over 30%; there were at that time no unemployment benefits or pensions, no child endowment and no national health schemes. Many people knew privation and suffering. It is no wonder that Rerum Novarum struck such a responsive chord in the hearts of Australians.

The encyclical was presented very formally by **Cardinal Moran** in Sydney when he addressed an audience which included most of the 35 newly elected Labour members of parliament. The Cardinal spoke with the authority of a prolific and respected historian and author. He made practical applications to the local scene, supporting improved living and working conditions and the eight hour day. He went beyond the encyclical in defending the right to strike; he also interpreted Pope Leo's call for a just wage as meaning a family wage. Popular Catholic social movements quickly adopted these interpretations of the encyclical. Cardinal Moran strongly supported social reform but was careful not to be seen as supporting one political party in preference to others. He encouraged all parties to embrace social reform.

In Melbourne, **Archbishop Carr** judged that any formal presentation could too closely link the Church with the political cause of Labour. He spoke rather to the moral issues involved in social reform. He directed that the encyclical be read in all churches of the Archdiocese — just imagine!

Lively articles in the *The Advocate* debated issues of the encyclical and brought home to readers just how mind-blowing the document was.

Rerum Novarum had a significant and lasting effect on Catholic thinking and social movements in Australia, it inspired Catholics to support the efforts of social reformers and encouraged the Catholic laity to play their full part in public and political affairs. Catholic movements of later decades, **the Champion Movement, the Catholic Action movements, the ecumenical Action for World Development, and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace**, have all played their own special roles in picking up the social justice torch and blazing their ways for the progress of peoples.

And so Rerum Novarum is not just an important historical document. The revolutionary change that was produced in the Church has led many to claim that it can be considered the basic social justice document. It certainly was the forerunner of other highly significant documents published by the Popes since Leo. The

present Holy Father has given us abundant evidence of his own commitment; he has published three encyclicals in this area of social concern: **On Human Work (1981)**, **On Social Concerns (1987)**, and then on the actual day of the centenary of Leo's encyclical, **Centesimus Annus**.

So, just as Leo's encyclical has inspired people to commit themselves to social concerns, so this centenary document runs with the baton. It assures us that the Church's social teaching is an essential part of the gospel message; no one is truly Christian without this fundamental aspect of teaching. The new encyclical reaffirms the dignity of work, defends the rights of workers and supports the role of unions. It speaks positively of market economy, and calls for new efforts to provide opportunity for and to meet the basic needs of the poor, especially those in the Third World and also societies emerging from Communist oppression. It asks the world to find concrete alternatives to war and urges all to build a culture of peace. Furthermore, it reaffirms and strengthens the Church's option for the poor and calls for authentic liberation and solidarity. It also outlines the responsibilities and limitations of the state, while emphasising basic human rights, subsidiarity, the

role of intermediary groups, and always returning to the basic consideration, the common good. The new encyclical also tackles such specific concerns as international debt, the family (the Pope calls it a "sanctuary of life"), consumerism and ecology.

All of you present this evening are declaring that you are committed and that you wish to have your fires of commitment to social justice rekindled. The past carries memories which can inspire you. The very words *Rerum Novarum* are like a flag, a battle cry, an emblem which stirs the very depths of our beings, and makes us proud to be associated with those who proudly share a similar commitment. We belong to the same family; we sing the same song. We can take heart in the present that so many have come this evening to demonstrate mutual solidarity. Although there may be amongst you many different causes which fire the enthusiasm for justice, development and peace in your souls, we can take new heart in a firm hope that the future is certain when the principles espoused in *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus* are our inspiration and our conviction.

Then we shall be living in the spirit of the challenging call of Isaiah and we shall be committed to a similar social mission as was so beautifully expressed by our Lord.



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