



100 Years of Catholic Social Teaching Defending Workers & their Unions: Summaries & Commentaries for Five Landmark Papal Encyclicals

Joe Holland

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"The repeated calls issued within the Church's social doctrine, beginning with Rerum Novarum, for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honored today even more than in the past, as a prompt and far-sighted response to the urgent need for new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level." (Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, Paragraph 25)

This provides summaries and commentaries for five landmark papal encyclicals defending workers and their unions: 1) Leo XIII's 1891 *Rerum Novarum*; 2) Pius XI's 1931 *Quadragesimo Anno*; 3) John XXIII's 1961 *Mater et Magistra*; 4) John Paul II's 1981 *Laborem Exercens*; and John Paul II's 1991 *Centesimus Annus*. The heart of the book is an extended summary and commentary on each of the above five encyclicals, which are often mentioned but seldom studied.

The book opens with the author's analysis of the late modern breakdown of Catholic evangelization among the working classes in the United States and other English-speaking industrialized countries. It concludes with a proposed pastoral strategy of global church-labor solidarity to overcome both the older mid-19th century "loss of the working class" to the Catholic Church in much of Western Europe, and also the newer recently developing "loss of the working class" to the Catholic Church in the United States and other English-speaking industrialized countries.

As the book makes clear, the Social Magisterium of the Catholic Church defends workers' unions as an essential human right rooted in workers' sharing in the image of God, and having the God-given human right to organize for their defense and for participation in decision-making within their workplaces. Bishops and other pastoral leaders who do not build their pastoral strategies for evangelization on this central theme of Catholic Social Teaching undermine their own Catholic ("universal") vocation to preach the full Gospel of Jesus to all social classes.

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