

Renewed solidarity spirit endorsed

By JIM RYAN
Fifteenth Sunday in O.T.
Mark 6:7-13
July 14, 1991
On May 1, 1991, the feast of Joseph the Worker, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops published an open letter entitled, "One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching."

The letter is:
1. a commemoration of the 1891 publication of Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Workers) by Pope Leo XIII;
2. a history of the developments in Catholic social teaching in the past one hundred years;
3. and an invitation to all, including labour, business and governments, to work together for a genuinely human society.

(Note: the tone of this letter is open, not dogmatic. It is addressed to a pluralistic society, and encourages debate and dialogue).

Rerum Novarum was published by Leo XIII to address the "new things" or conditions that affected labour in the latter years of the 19th century.

The cause of these new conditions was the Industrial Revolution, which had led to the treatment of labour as a commodity or raw material to be used in the industrial process.

The effect was conflict between capital and labour: wealth for the few, and poverty for the many.

The Pope sought to restore peace to this conflict, but on a foundation of justice.

He drew a distinction between the "going wage" and a "just



Religion and Reality
by Jim Ryan

wage". The "going wage" was what the market required; the "just wage" was what was required by a worker and a worker's family to live in humane conditions, with enough to set aside for the future.

He also supported the right of workers to unionize, and insisted on the obligation of governments to pass legislation protecting working people.

This first stage in Catholic social teaching, which extended from 1891 to the late 1920's, was characterized by "...church reactions to individual injustices suffered by working people."

The second stage, from the 1930's to the 1960's, focused not on individual injustices, but on the need for profound changes in the structure of the market economy.

Two aspects of the reform that was called for are: 1. a new image of Property (the goods of this earth belong first and foremost to all people as their common heritage from God), 2. a new image of Social Life (we are not in competition, pursuing individual ends and private goods, but in solitary with each other, in pursuit of common ends.)

The third stage of Catholic social teaching, since the 1960's, has been the most productive. The thinking in this period has pushed for an understanding of work as a means for people to fulfill their humanity and to contribute personally to the common good.

"...For an economy to be a just one, it must not only produce an abundance of goods and services, and distribute them fairly, but it must also make the producers themselves more human in the process."

The Ontario Bishops close by referring to a specific problem, the maquiladora, or free trade zone on the Mexican side of the Mexican-U.S. border.

(The April issue of the Canadian Forum noted that Mexican wages have fallen nearly 70 per cent since 1983. "The minimum daily wage in Mexico today is about 10,800 pesos (\$4.50 Canadian). To achieve a decent standard of living, it has been calculated that workers need a minimum of 76,000 pesos per day (\$32 Canadian).")

The Ontario Bishops note that the wages and conditions the maquiladora plants "...provide for the Mexican workers are so poor that many factories experience a 200-300 per cent turnover of workers each year."

"At the same time, those jobs for which many Canadians received decent wages are being lost to this country."

The Bishops conclude with a call to recognize the "interdependencies" in our world, and a hope that our response will be a renewed spirit of solidarity with all men and women.

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Bible Digest

"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" Luke 12:20

Don't forget that God has the last say-so about you and your soul. Be wise and not foolish. Trust Jesus as your Savior today before it is too late.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Galatians 6:14.

As Christians our glory is found in the old rugged cross where Jesus died for us. Take time now to thank the Lord for your salvation.

"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." I Corinthians 2:5.

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