



## The Belated Manifesto Of Catholic Social Teaching: Rerum Novarum

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### Abstract

The period initiated by the Industrial Revolution brought about profound social, economic, and political transformations worldwide. The emergence of new ideologies, widespread misery, hunger, high levels of poverty, the deterioration of the family institution, epidemics, and the weakening of religious beliefs generated significant concern among various actors. Changes in state structures, the conflicts between newly emerging social classes, and the ideologies that fueled these conflicts were, in turn, nourished by these societal issues. For an extended period, the Church remained silent in this new context, refraining from taking any particular stance or setting a clear direction. This silence finally came to an end as the Church's existence was perceived to be under threat, and religious beliefs no longer commanded acceptance based solely on religious teachings and paradigms. In 1891, the encyclical Rerum Novarum, or "new things," was issued, addressing the misery and challenges experienced by workers, offering critiques of ideologies such as socialism and capitalism, and proposing various recommendations for building an ideal society to eliminate these issues. However, upon closer examination, it is evident that this encyclical was not solely driven by the virtue of charity, as attributed by the Church itself, but also aimed to preserve the Church's position as a religious authority.

**Keywords:** Catholic social teaching, Industrial Revolution, Labor History

**Jel Codes:** B15, N33, J50

## Katolik Sosyal Öğretisinin Geç Kalınmış Manifestosu: Rerum Novarum

### Özet

Sanayi Devrimi ile başlayan süreçte dünya sosyal, ekonomik ve siyasi olarak çok farklı dönüşümler yaşamıştır. Yeni ideolojilerin ortaya çıkması, sefalet, açlık, yüksek düzeyde yoksulluk, aile kurumunun zarar görmesi, salgın hastalıklar ve inançlara yönelik zayıflık birbirinden farklı birçok aktörü endişelere sürüklemiştir. Devletlerin yapısındaki değişimler, ortaya çıkan yeni sınıfların birbiri ile olan çatışması ve bu çatışmayı teşvik eden yeni ideolojiler aynı zamanda bu toplumsal sorunlardan beslenmiştir. Kilise de ortaya çıkan bu konjonktürde uzun bir süre boyunca sessiz kalmış ve herhangi bir yöne meylenmemiş ve rota çizmemiştir. Bu sessizliğin nihayete ermesi kilisenin hem kendi varlığının tehlikeye girmesi hem de dini inançların artık dini öğütler ve paradigmlar üzerinden kabul görmemesi üzerine olmuştur. 1891 tarihinde Rerum Novarum yani "yeni şeyler" ismiyle ilan edilen bu genelge içeriğinde işçilerin yaşadığı sefaleti ve sorunları işlemiş, sosyalizm ve kapitalizm gibi ideolojilere yönelik eleştirilerde bulunmuş ve ideal bir toplum inşa edilerek sorunların ortadan kaldırılması için çeşitli önerilerde bulunmuştur. Ancak detaylı incelendiğinde bu genelgenin tam anlamıyla kilisenin kendisine atfettiği yardımseverlik erdemi üzerinden gerçekleşmediği aynı zamanda kilisenin dini otorite olarak konumunu koruma amacı da taşıdığı görülmüştür.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Katolik Sosyal Öğretisi, Sanayi Devrimi, Emek Tarihi

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When considering the profound influence and transformation the 19th century brought to the world, the Industrial Revolution emerged as the primary catalyst of this change. The intense commitment of the socially divided classes—bourgeoisie and proletariat—to ideologies positioned on opposing ends of the spectrum, fueled by ambition and expectation, exposed both the economic and political institutions to various threats. While these diverse actors voiced their perspectives on the unfolding events and took their place on the stage of history, the Catholic Church maintained its silence amidst these challenges for many years. With the issuance of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, a document that later marked the beginning of what came to be known as Catholic social teaching, the question of how social issues were addressed and processed from the perspective of religious authority arose as a significant inquiry. Additionally, a debate emerged regarding the Church's intentions in issuing this encyclical: whether its sole aim was to alleviate the suffering and address the problems of workers to prevent class conflict, or if it was also driven by a self-serving desire to protect its position. Furthermore, the encyclical revealed how the Church, as a religious authority, perceived emerging ideologies like capitalism and socialism and positioned itself in response to these new doctrines.

## 2. METHOD

This study was conducted using the historical method. During the analysis process, the Catholic Church's attitude toward social issues within the context of the social, economic, and political transformations of the 19th century was examined. The primary source of the study is the *Rerum Novarum* encyclical, issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891.

Within the framework of document analysis, *Rerum Novarum* was examined in detail; its discourses, the concepts it employed, and its emphases were evaluated through textual analysis techniques. Furthermore, the study was not limited to the primary source alone; a comparative analysis was also conducted by utilizing secondary sources that reveal the social, economic, and intellectual structure of the period.

In this study, the historical context of *Rerum Novarum*, including the circumstances preceding and following its issuance, was discussed using an ideological analysis method. Within this scope, the Catholic Church's stance against ideologies such as socialism and capitalism was analyzed, and the motivations underlying these positions were evaluated.

In conclusion, by employing both document analysis and comparative ideological analysis techniques, the study aims to understand the historical function of *Rerum Novarum* and its place in the formation process of Catholic social teaching.

## 3. THE PROCESS LEADING TO RERUM NOVARUM

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness." This impactful opening line from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* aptly captures the post-Industrial Revolution structure of the 19th century, a period that could arguably be described as the longest century in world history. Indeed, the Industrial Revolution had a profoundly disruptive effect on the established order within historical progression. The new order that emerged with changes in modes of production not only influenced economic paradigms but also led to significant shifts in social paradigms. Changes in work patterns, substantial increases in working hours, urbanization movements, and the rise of class conflicts between capital owners and the working class (proletariat) introduced a sense of disorder to the social structure. This period of chaos was addressed in various domains, from literary works to political writings, and its details were explored extensively. Each institution, particularly those central to European life and seen as pillars of stability, attempted to either adapt to or guide this transformation through new ideas, ideologies, actions, and institutional structures. The Church, which held a crucial role in European nations and

served as a balancing force in social life, however, failed to position itself within these changes and remained without a clear stance until the end of the 19th century.

#### 4. PROBLEMS REFLECTED IN THE WORKS OF THE ERA

The establishment of new factories by capital owners in urban centers and the relocation of production to these areas led to an intense and disorderly migration, bringing about challenges in urbanization and housing. The chaos reached such a point that the governor of the Rhone region, located in the heart of Europe, reportedly stated that this turmoil could only be addressed through rifle fire, short of killing all the workers. The unrest instilled such a deep fear in the wealthy capitalist class that there were even calls for the demonstrators to be executed without pardon (Tanilli, 2023, p. 66). Similar violent incidents—such as arson and workshop bombings—are also discussed in Engels' writings (Engels, 1845/2019, p. 277). Engels' work, which focuses primarily on the challenges and living conditions faced by urban workers, examines this transformation brought about by the Industrial Revolution as a period of intense social concentration and polarization (Engels, 1845/2019, p. 10). Streets lacked sewage systems, and due to heavy and persistent rain, water leaked into homes through roofs, leaving residents in damp, poorly ventilated rooms that were overcrowded beyond capacity. Moreover, Engels describes how workers, regardless of gender or state of sobriety, slept together without any family privacy, a situation that contradicted conventional morals and family values (Engels, 1845/2019, p. 70-75). The general structure of this period can also be observed in the literature of the time. For instance, *Germinal*, a prominent work of naturalism, addresses the wretched conditions of coal miners and the concepts of strike and class struggle, highlighting the long working hours they endured. Émile Zola wrote this book in 1885. Additionally, Charles Dickens' novels, such as *Hard Times* (1854) and *Oliver Twist* (1838), depict the adverse changes in social life following the Industrial Revolution. Given that Charles Dickens was an English author, these works provide a realistic portrayal of the severe conditions in England during that period. In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the working class is portrayed as living lives lacking in moral rectitude. Moreover, topics such as feeding the poor and constructing model housing for them are discussed among members of the upper class within the context of the book's setting (Wilde, 1890/2018).

The discussion of the housing issue is, in fact, far from a minor detail. Friedrich Engels authored an entire work dedicated to this topic, titled *The Housing Question*. A notable point in this work is the bourgeois selfishness exhibited by the capitalists in addressing the housing problems faced by workers. At the time, various recurring and seemingly unending epidemics, as well as water pollution, often originated from these working-class neighborhoods, leading capitalists to address the issue partly out of concern for their own safety (Engels, 1872/2022, p. 57). This theme was explored not only in French and English literature but also across various geographies in the 19th century, with references to the general living conditions and lifestyles of workers. For instance, in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), one of the significant works of Russian and world literature, author Dostoevsky addresses socialists and the harsh, impoverished conditions of the working class. While each of these works delves into these subjects in the first half of the 19th century, the 1891 publication of *Rerum Novarum*, which is the central subject of this study, stands out as a rather belated response from the Catholic Church.

## **5. THE EARLY SIGNALS OF RERUM NOVARUM: THE CHURCH, KETTLER AND THE FRIBOURG UNION**

The Catholic Church and the Popes observed the ongoing transformations for an extended period without altering their stance. This passive observation gradually led the Church to become increasingly isolated and left behind (Beckett, 2021, p. 63). In essence, the Church claimed to adhere to a principle that places the human being at the center as an actor, taking into account all dimensions and stages of life. However, what truly mattered to the Church was whether the developments, theories, and ideologies contributed to humanity's salvation or whether they contained any element fundamentally related to faith (Özdemir, 2014, p. 843). While the Church attempted to protect itself by silently observing the economic, social, and political transformations, socialism gained popularity amid the prevailing hardships and oppression. On the one hand, socialism became a refuge for the working class and theorists; on the other hand, the capitalist class aligned itself with a self-serving lifestyle driven by profit-oriented liberal principles, leading to social tension. As previously mentioned, although the Church initially dismissed these developments, it eventually had to acknowledge this *de facto* situation as a reality. It then sought to regain its lost authority in order to establish a social and political identity that would align with its core principles. In this regard, Catholic social teaching can be seen as the actualization of this objective and concern. Therefore, the movement, which began with *Rerum Novarum* and continued under the institutional title of Catholic Social Teaching, represents a reaction against class conflicts, the religiously conflicting principles brought by socialism and capitalism, and the ruthless new order established by capital (Saritaş, 2019, pp. 8-9). As noted, *Rerum Novarum*, initially a response to capitalism, socialism, and the prevailing chaos, alongside the subsequent Catholic social teaching movement, set out to improve workers' living conditions and establish social harmony. Over time, however, it evolved into a network through which various social identities—workers, farmers, and students—could communicate with each other (Birinci, 2023, p. 145).

Before *Rerum Novarum* was proclaimed by Pope Leo XIII, it was noted that the economic and social problems faced by the working class due to industrialization, as well as various solutions to these issues, were discussed from multiple perspectives. The problem that German bishop Emmanuel von Ketteler identified as the century's central social issue in 1864 was indeed the plight of workers and the labor question. Ketteler served as a precursor to both Catholic social teaching and Pope Leo XIII, the architect of *Rerum Novarum*. Each aspect that formed the core philosophy and subject matter of *Rerum Novarum* was first examined and articulated by Ketteler. In his book *Die Arbeiterfrage und das Christenthum* (1864; *The Labor Question and Christianity*), Ketteler emphasized the Church's significant role in ensuring the welfare of the working class. By addressing these issues, he became a social reformer and prompted German Roman Catholics to place greater importance on this matter (Britannica, 2024). Indeed, although Pope Leo XIII, as the architect of *Rerum Novarum*, presented a religious perspective on Catholic social teaching and the issues of the time, he did not introduce a new ideological or philosophical system. His contribution was to grant an international status and centralize these movements, which were already independently and autonomously active (Jansen, 2017, p. 60).

The Fribourg Union convened seven years after Ketteler's death in 1887, which had a significant influence on both Catholic social teaching and *Rerum Novarum*, can be regarded as a transitional step or an institutional effort to bring together various ideas and opinions regarding social teaching. The intellectual contributions of the Fribourg Union and the eventual proclamation of *Rerum Novarum* as a sort of manifesto were unexpected developments among conservative Catholic circles. After years of silence, the Church had broken its quietude and began addressing and seeking solutions to social issues in a pioneering manner. The Fribourg Union initially emphasized that the existing issues required more institutional and comprehensive solutions, asserting that the Church's charitable

approach alone would not be sufficient to resolve these problems. Additionally, it rejected the classical liberal perspective that viewed work as a contract arising from an agreement between employer and employee, where wages were merely a result of that contract. Instead, it argued that due to the sanctity of labor, wages should be regarded as transcending typical negotiations and contracts related to labor (Birinci, 2023, pp. 135-136). As mentioned above, there were also other independent, conscientious movements before the Fribourg Union. One such example is the magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, published by the Roman Jesuits, which in the 1850s expressed concern over the exploitation and abuse of workers by capitalists. Among Catholic individuals and intellectuals, there was indeed an expectation and belief that solutions would be found for social problems, particularly those concerning workers. However, no initiatives or statements addressing this issue were forthcoming from the center of the Catholic denomination (Aubert, 2003, p. 186).

## 6. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S CALL TO ACTION

The Church felt compelled to act due to a range of issues, including deteriorating health conditions, rising alcohol consumption, the erosion of moral and family values, increasing poverty, and the weakening of religious belief among individuals. This situation became so severe that the number of abandoned infants increased due to financial hardship. Although the Pope advocated for children to be raised by their mothers within a stable family structure, low wages made it necessary for even women to work in order to make ends meet, making this ideal impossible (Merriman, trans. Alpagut, 2020, p. 610). However, underlying all these social problems, the greatest concern for the Church was the increasing popularity of socialism, which led individuals away from their religious beliefs and toward atheism. Engels highlighted this alarming trend by stating, "The bourgeoisie takes the proletariat's money and, in practice, makes it atheist" (Engels, 1845/2019, p. 166). Moreover, during this period of chaos and turmoil, innovative sects, cults, and religious movements emerged. Desperate and impoverished masses began to cling to these new faith groups, which portrayed God as accessible and depicted Jesus Christ as a proletarian figure. This level of degeneration in religious paradigms and divine commandments deeply affected the Pope, the central authority of Catholic Christianity, and was a major factor in the emergence of *Rerum Novarum* (Tanilli, 2023, p. 68). Indeed, the Pope, concerned about the working class's increasing inclination toward socialist movements politically and toward atheism, which was religiously unacceptable, feared the weakening of the Church's influence in society and the diminishing bond between workers and the Church (Birinci, 2023, p. 136). Therefore, the Church did not follow a process in which it sincerely considered and addressed the rights of workers. It has been observed that the primary objective here was to preserve the authority and validity of the Catholic world, both institutionally and at the level of the Pope.

With the election of Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci as Pope Leo XIII in 1878, the Catholic Church began to address the social, economic, and religious problems brought about by the Industrial Revolution with substantial new steps and a profound shift in approach (Birinci, 2023, p. 135). Pope Leo XIII's perspectives were highly innovative. Unlike his predecessors, he closely observed and responded to developments that profoundly affected societies and led to shifts in the established order. According to him, the Church's detached and silent stance toward these changes was misguided. The Church should develop a set of principles encompassing all aspects and stages of life, with humanity at its center. Therefore, Pope Leo XIII believed that the new developments and ideas emerging during the turbulent times of the 19th century—marked by both social and intellectual transformations—should be grounded in faith and offer humanity a blueprint for salvation. Serving, valuing, and alleviating the suffering of humanity, he asserted, is ultimately a service to God (Özdemir, 2014, pp. 843-844). Therefore, with the election of Leo XIII as pope, a new era began in which the Church articulated its views on modern values, problems, ideas, and institutions, defining the extent of its adaptability. In this respect, the publication of *Rerum Novarum* represents the Catholic Church's first step into modernity and marks an institutional milestone for Catholic Social Teaching (Birinci, 2023,

p. 132). In fact, the Church's delay in responding to these developments was inconsistent with Pope Gelasius I's Doctrine of the Two Swords. According to this doctrine, God entrusted two different swords to Jesus—one representing religious order and the other representing worldly order. However, after Jesus' physical departure from this world, it became impossible for these two authorities to unite under one individual as Jesus' successor, a scenario that would contradict this religious narrative. Nonetheless, in order to maintain this order on behalf of God, the Pope is expected to fulfill these duties. Therefore, while the Pope maintained the religious order on behalf of God, he delegated worldly affairs to kings, granting them his authorization authority. Although this political arrangement resulted in a partnership that lasted many years, the popes continued to exert influence over the worldly powers held by kings (Zarplı & Coşgun, 2023, p. 185). However, as previously noted, the Pope, as the holder of the "spiritual sword," remaining silent in the face of these developments was contrary to the doctrine. With kings, the holders of the "temporal sword," being influenced by capital, those in poverty were left destitute, which led to a perception that they were abandoned by God's aid, thereby damaging religious allegiance. Specifically concerning Pope Leo XIII, it could be said that he sought to escape this passive stance, endeavoring to use the power bestowed upon him by God and becoming active in addressing events. This new stance was so clearly manifested that the Pope claimed the Church could resolve all societal problems (Birinci, 2023, p. 139). Indeed, the end of the Catholic Church's resistance to change and its attempt to align with the paradigms of the modern world occurred during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903). As previously mentioned, this period was marked by widespread poverty, social issues, and chaos, alongside a growing following for socialist movements. Therefore, amid this turmoil and ambiguity, the Church sought to establish its own set of principles and a manifesto.

This new active stance manifested not only within social teaching but also from a broader perspective. For instance, Pope Leo XIII made a call to the French, "Acceptez la République," urging them to accept the Republic, which was aimed at solidifying the Church's position and legitimacy within the democratic order (Saritaş, 2019, p. 16). This appeal was directed at encouraging the French to adapt to and accept the new order and republic established after the Revolution of 1879. Both *Rerum Novarum* and *Acceptez la République* indicate Pope Leo XIII's clear intention to assert the Church's influence across diverse domains. Through *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII sought to make profound and novel statements, primarily to curb the Church's dwindling support and to demonstrate its stance in response to developments like the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and political liberalism.

**Figure 1: Main Thematic Headings of Rerum Novarum**



**Source:** Prepared by the author

## 7. THE CONTENT OF A MANIFESTO: RERUM NOVARUM

In its content, Rerum Novarum addresses several fundamental areas, creating a comprehensive framework. These areas are addressed individually, allowing the Catholic Church to present its perspectives on both the world's recent developments and societal paradigms in the form of a manifesto. The document, which touches on political, economic, and social matters, was also prepared as a response to refute certain accusations directed at the Church.

The introduction of the document mentions that the spirit of revolutionary change has caused global unrest, followed by references to the transformation in master-worker relations, inequality in income distribution, intensifying class conflicts, and the prevalence of absolute poverty. From the very first paragraph, it aims to highlight the topics it will address and the problems that led to its creation. It notes that these issues are being discussed by wise individuals, frequently debated in public gatherings, and widely addressed by legislative bodies and national leaders (Rerum Novarum, 1891). This statement serves as proof that the Church felt compelled to issue such an encyclical. One of the most significant emphases in the text is made at the end of the second paragraph. The Pope declares that the subject under discussion is not only dangerous but also complex and challenging to define, noting that the danger lies in cunning agitators who incite the public to rebellion by exploiting differing viewpoints (Rerum Novarum, 1891).

### 7.1. Critique of Socialism and Capitalism

The Pope highlighted the importance of the functions of the old guilds and noted that, by that time, these protective institutions no longer existed. As a result of the disappearance of such institutions and the disregard of religious paradigms by institutions and laws, the working class had become subject to the merciless rigidity of capital and the race of competition. Certain ideological groups, who sought to exploit this context and oppression for their own ends, are implied throughout the text as disapproved by the Church. The encyclical specifies that these groups are socialists, accusing them of working to abolish private property by inciting and exploiting the poor's envy toward the rich. The Pope's critique of socialism within the document is not limited to this; he further argues that socialism's views on private property embody a structure that opposes individual freedom. This issue will be examined under the section on private property.

Rerum Novarum also addresses the erosion of moral values caused by socialism, accusing it of harming social peace and destroying solidarity by promoting class conflict (Rerum Novarum, 1891). At this point, the Church's view of the socialist-communist side can be tested by examining Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Communist Manifesto. The famous opening line of the Communist Manifesto directly targets the Pope and religious authority: "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies" (Marx & Engels, 1848/2021, p. 47). As seen, the Pope is among the first to be mentioned as affected by the fear of communism spreading over Europe like a specter. Thus, the conflict between the Church and socialist-communist ideology is not one-sided; rather, it is based on mutual negative judgments. The fact that the Communist Manifesto became the most translated book into foreign languages after the Bible also played a significant role in this mutual animosity and conflict (Huberman, 1953/2019, p. 49). Its status as a rival to a sacred text has disturbed religious authorities and the Church.

## **7.2. Family and Social Order**

The Communist Manifesto, authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, was published in 1848. Given that Rerum Novarum was written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, it is noteworthy that criticisms and accusations against socialist-communist ideology continued along the same lines nearly half a century later. What is peculiar here is that the criticisms come half a century after the manifesto, while the responses predate these criticisms by the same span.

According to the Pope, socialism disrupts and threatens social order, peace, and solidarity. In his view, social order is founded on a basis where individuals and groups live together peacefully and fraternally, without class conflict. This atmosphere of peace and fraternity is, for the Pope, rooted in Christianity (Rerum Novarum, 1891). However, for Marx and Engels, the situation is quite different. In the "Bourgeois and Proletarians" section of the Manifesto, the authors use a striking statement that has become a historical slogan, declaring, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," thereby dismissing the traditional religious foundation of the Church's teachings (Marx & Engels, 1848/2021, p. 49). The encyclical, however, posits that basing society on such narratives of class conflict is a grave error. According to the Church, this state of conflict is not the natural state; rather, unity is the natural condition. The Church asserts itself as the mediator to resolve this atmosphere of conflict, with no other institution as powerful in fulfilling this role (Rerum Novarum, 1891). On this topic, Huberman provides intriguing insights in his section titled "Don't Socialists Advocate Class Struggle?" He notes that if a society contains classes with opposing interests, conflict among these classes is inevitable. However, socialism does not specifically advocate or encourage conflict. Instead, according to Huberman, socialism promotes the brotherhood of humanity, a concept closely aligned with Christian morals (Huberman, 1953/2019, p. 72). Additionally, the institution of the family, a common topic of debate between the two sides, has been constructed with inherent oppositions. The encyclical mentions that socialists seek to sideline the family and parents, establishing a state control that is contrary to the natural order and the structure of the home. In Rerum Novarum, the family is indeed described as the "true society" (Rerum Novarum, 1891). However, whether the accusation that socialist-communist thought aims to abolish the family is a concrete criticism is a point that requires further examination. Marx and Engels argued that the family structure, as idealized by the bourgeois, is founded on the capitalistic gain of wealth and does not represent an idealized home or true society. According to them, such a family structure does not even exist among the proletariat. Therefore, they rejected the accusation that they sought to dismantle the family unit in its entirety (Marx & Engels, 1848/2021, p.71).

### 7.3. Private Property

Another significant topic addressed in *Rerum Novarum* in considerable detail is private property. Near the beginning of the text, it is stated that socialists seek to abolish private property, but this is contrary to human nature. *Rerum Novarum* counters the socialist argument that abolishing private property would resolve existing issues and ensure fair distribution by asserting that, in such a scenario, the working class would be the first to suffer. According to the encyclical, if current problems are to be solved, the inviolability of private property must be upheld. As mentioned above, the Church views private property as inherent to human nature and considers it a right. The right to private property is seen as a fundamental distinction between humans and animals in creation. The basic motivating force for an individual to work and exert labor is rooted in the desire to acquire property and then retain it, driven by a sense of ownership. The encyclical argues that if private property were abolished, wage labor would suffer significantly in terms of sustainability. If the fundamental purpose of working—the desire for ownership—is taken from a person, their primary motivation for labor would also be removed. In response to the criticism of socialism's views on private property, Huberman argued that the situation regarding private property is not as it appears and that socialism, in fact, holds a perspective on private property that is quite the opposite. Huberman, in his explanations on this subject, firmly rejected the critique that socialism seeks to abolish private property and claimed that there are two types of private property. The first type is the private ownership of consumer goods for personal satisfaction, and the second type is the ownership of production goods that do not possess a personal quality. He argued that socialism has no issue with the first type of personal private property; rather, it advocates for the elimination of ownership over the means of production held by a small minority, which, in turn, would lead to an increase in the first type of property (Huberman, 1953/2019, p. 71). Indeed, Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* supports this view. According to the authors, the theory of the communists clearly aimed to abolish private property, but not the private property of workers, small artisans, or wage earners. In fact, since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, this class has had no private property to speak of, as workers—who toil for low wages and face poor conditions—cannot even find housing, let alone possess private property (Marx & Engels, 1848/2021, p.66-67). In contrast, the Pope in *Rerum Novarum* asserted that a frugal and moral worker could acquire private property by saving his earnings instead of spending wastefully (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891).

### 7.4. The Role of The State

The encyclical emphasizes the importance of the state's role in addressing existing problems. The Church assigns the responsibility of maintaining public peace, which could be disrupted by various strikes, to the state. Additionally, the welfare and comfort of workers should be provided by the public administration. According to Pope Leo, the most fundamental duty of the state is to ensure social justice. However, an important point highlighted in the encyclical is that the state should not be purely sanctified or regarded as the main actor. In this respect, the document also criticizes socialism's aim of establishing state control and hegemony. It states that those who envision a central role for the state in the mechanism of aid are mistaken, as no act of charity can fully achieve its purpose without the Church. This statement demonstrates that the Church emphasized its own existence as one of the indispensable *-sine qua non-* elements within the paradigms of the new conjuncture. Nevertheless, the Church does not refrain from listing the state's duties. According to the Church, the state is responsible for moral governance, a well-ordered family life, respect for religion and justice, moderation and fairness in public taxes, the advancement of arts and commerce, and the abundant productivity of the land. However, it should not interfere with private affairs or organizations. Here, the Church encounters an internal inconsistency, as one of the benefits of organization is collective voice and resistance. Yet it is the Church that calls for the termination of strikes on the grounds of public peace when workers exercise this power by striking (*Rerum*

Novarum, 1891). When the section on the role of the state is carefully examined, it is observed that the Pope never regarded any side as entirely praiseworthy or fully sufficient. While he directed criticisms and accusations toward socialist ideology, he also did not wish for centralized government and state authority to surpass the symbolic existence and necessity of the Catholic Church.

### **7.5. Fair Wages and Workers' Rights**

Pope Leo XIII stated in the encyclical that the primary and most significant duty of employers is to provide what is just to their workers. Acts such as unfair wage deductions or usury are unworthy of a true Christian, and employers should devoutly avoid such behaviors, treating workers justly due to their vulnerability and lack of protection. To do otherwise, in the Pope's words, is "a great crime that cries to the avenging anger of Heaven" (Rerum Novarum, 1891). The issue of rest and a day off, which are essential rights of workers and must be regulated, is also addressed in the encyclical with a religious reference. Based on the narrative from the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament (20:8-11), where it says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days, you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Old Testament, 2024). The encyclical advises that workers' long working hours and days should be regulated, and they should be granted a day of rest. From a religious perspective, as well as for economic reasons, this day of rest allows workers time to spend and consume. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the Church's objective for granting a rest day to workers also includes encouraging worship. Pope Leo XIII, in *Rerum Novarum*, emphasized that working "men" should be encouraged to worship God, fulfill the practices required by their faith, and spend Sundays, considered a holy day in Christianity, in worship (Rerum Novarum, 1891).

The Pope used some basic expressions regarding wage determination. For example, one of the primary criteria is that wages should be sufficient for a virtuous and frugal worker to sustain his life and support his wife and children. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the freedom to determine wages, stating that the worker is free to choose whether or not to accept the offered wage (Rerum Novarum, 1891). Under the heading of Fair Wage and Workers' Rights, it is observed that the Pope stands out with a patrimonial character and emphasis. He advised capital owners in a paternal tone and as an authority figure, warning them to act sensitively regarding wages and rights. As seen in all other sections, the Church considers itself entitled to speak on every aspect of life and emphasizes that this is a necessity.

## **8. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION**

It must be stated that multiple factors contributed to the emergence of *Rerum Novarum*. As seen in the assessments above, it is a document that came rather late relative to the context and developments of the time. At this point, it is debatable whether the publication of this encyclical was an initiative led by the Church or a means to justify itself in response to criticism. The Pope mentions in the text that the Church is an institution admired for its philanthropy and social peace efforts, even by its strongest adversaries, and that it is not only capable of pointing to solutions but also of implementing them. According to the Pope, philanthropy is undoubtedly a virtue belonging to the Church. Therefore, at this point, the document has been seen as having a "confession" function for the Pope and the Papacy. Beyond this, the encyclical does not offer any proposals that could be seen as innovations. When suggesting that workers establish solidarity organizations, the Pope references existing unions, suggesting they should be similar to the guilds of earlier times and religious in the foundation, thereby also criticizing the existing unions. Furthermore, the Church's view of strikes, the most significant tool workers have for pursuing their rights, is negative; it argues that strikes

disrupt the production process and harm social fraternity. In the encyclical, the Pope acknowledges that the Church is aware that it might appear to be neglecting its duty by remaining silent. However, he states that this controlled silence allows other social classes, specifically state leaders and the wealthy, to understand the difficulties and the current situation. He made his criticisms and expressed his own position. However, although the title of the document is "Rerum Novarum," meaning "new things," the Pope, in fact, introduced nothing new. It must be stated that this document essentially used workers' rights and the prevailing hardships as a kind of veil, behind which it served as a declaration of the Papacy's self-justification.

It is evident that the Church undertook such an initiative to preserve its authority, prevent the spread of negative attitudes toward religious beliefs, and avoid appearing as though it had nothing to say. In the case of Pope Leo XIII, although he engaged in efforts to address social problems even before assuming the papacy, *Rerum Novarum*, as an institutional encyclical, was crafted with a character that opposed changing the status quo, either through gradual process or sudden revolution. Although the document possesses an institutional character, the question of whether it is the product of a corporate will or an initiative specific to Pope Leo XIII gains importance in the background. Given that Leo's attitude toward social developments and his various initiatives were already known before he became Pope, it should be stated that *Rerum Novarum* is, in fact, the result of Leo XIII's individual efforts and will rather than that of an institutional structure. The repeated references within the encyclical to the Church as the most virtuous, authoritative, and universally praised institution, as the most powerful seat of religion, can be seen here as propaganda. In the midst of such great chaos, while economic, social, and political balances were shifting, the encyclical includes statements reminding why the Church should remain steadfast. Therefore, *Rerum Novarum* cannot be said to have been written solely as an act of benevolence or with the aim of finding solutions to social issues. Just as the state, capitalists, and socialists asserted their necessities to protect and sustain themselves, as seen in various works, the Church also aimed to accomplish this through *Rerum Novarum*. When examining whether the encyclical initiated significant transformations after its publication to possess a revolutionary character, it cannot be said to have been a highly influential actor in the course of history. Essentially, everything that could be said on the subject had already been said, and certain practices continued, albeit independently. The Church's aim was simply to bring together the individual and independent works of previous religious actors under one roof, to declare its criticisms of new ideologies, and to emphasize to believers that they should not succumb to these ideologies, asserting itself as the authority in matters of faith. Therefore, *Rerum Novarum* never intended to change the existing order. The Church's objective was to preserve its social, religious, and political status quo—again to use a Latin expression. The socialist side, which is criticized at every opportunity in the document, had, however, already indicated in the preface to Marx's *Capital*—using a language from the Papacy's own geography—that it would turn a deaf ear to such criticisms and continue on its path: "Sequi il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti" (Pursue your course, and allow the people to speak)

With this work, future studies on Catholic social teaching will further clarify the role and purpose of *Rerum Novarum* and the Church's position in the 19th century. It is also clear that there is a need for new studies in this area within the literature, and further evaluations should be conducted.

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## DECLARATIONS

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### **FUNDING / SUPPORT INFORMATION**

No financial support was received.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORS**

All stages of the study were carried out by a single author.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### **DATA AVAILABILITY**

The data are publicly available.

### **ETHICAL STATEMENT**

The study does not require ethics committee approval.

### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USAGE STATEMENT**

No AI-based tools were used in this study.

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