

“Justice” in *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and After

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The present author has found it rather difficult to obtain an overview of the content of “justice” as found in Catholic Social Teaching. Study of the relevant documents seems to point to the fact that the scope of the content of justice has changed – indeed expanded - over the years.

The obvious starting point is the classical framework of justice as commutative and distributive. That was the basic framework in which *Rerum Novarum* (1891) emerged. It placed the issue of distributive justice in the context of virtue, in the light of the common good. But even more important was the situation in which the encyclical came. Not very much earlier, Pius IX had refused compromise with the emerging world scenario through his syllabus (1864). But in many parts of Europe, there were emerging movements that sided with workers. Leo XIII did not attempt a theoretical defence against his predecessor’s refusal to adapt to the emerging world. He simply went ahead and offered a proposal of adaptation to the emerging world.

With Pius XI, Leo’s basic approach found a further vocabulary in regard to distributive justice as social justice (Taparelli) and social justice was presented as the justice between human and human – a relationship that presupposes and fosters equality. And so, the elaboration of content over the centuries has linked other terms and concepts with social justice – subsidiarity, community, socialization, human rights, solidarity, the subjective dimension of labour, development worthy of human being, and most recently ecology. Obviously, this paper cannot treat each of these expansions in depth, but it outlines a possible framework for understanding

“justice” as an expanding concept in Catholic Social Teaching.

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