

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

A Commentary on the Papal  
Encyclical  
RERUM NOVARUM

*by*  
**LEWIS WATT**  
S.J., B.Sc.(Econ.)

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A COMMENTARY ON THE PAPAL ENCYCLICAL  
QUINQUAGESIMO ANNO

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## PREFACE

IN May 1891 Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical letter on the condition of the working-classes, often known by the title *Rerum Novarum*, from the two words with which it begins. It has exercised a profound influence which can be traced even in some of the clauses of the Peace Treaties which closed the Great War. The principles it lays down are not simply the personal views of the Pope, but the fruit of centuries of reflection by Catholic theologians and social philosophers. Later Popes have made it clear that those principles have an eternal value, and can never become out-of-date. In 1903 Pope Pius X explicitly reaffirmed them. In 1919 Pope Benedict XV stated that time had neither diminished the relevance of the encyclical nor weakened its force, and urged that it should be studied with renewed attention. The first encyclical of Pope Pius XI rebuked those who acted as though the teachings of Leo XIII had lost their authority. The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* is then a living document, worthy of the

careful study of all who are interested in social reform.

There are not wanting those who maintain that economic and social questions are outside the legitimate province of the Christian Church, and demand that her representatives should refrain from any expression of opinion about them. Pope Leo XIII lends no countenance to this attempt to confine the influence of the Church within the limits of the sacristy. He points out that Christian teaching has the whole of life for its province, since this life is a preparation for the next and must be put in right relation to it. Many of the details of economic and social organisation must be left to experts, but there are moral principles of conduct which it is the bounden duty of the Church to declare. Nor is her function that of moral teacher only. Her co-operation in practical social reform has been extremely valuable in the past, and will be readily given in the future.

This little book is an attempt to apply the principles of the encyclical to some of our modern problems.