

WHAT THE POPES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT SOCIALISM

excerpts from a compilation by Gustavo Solimeo

PIUS IX (1846–1878):

“Overthrow [of] the entire order of human affairs”

“You are aware indeed, that the goal of this most iniquitous plot is to drive people to overthrow the entire order of human affairs and to draw them over to the wicked theories of this *Socialism* and *Communism*, by confusing them with perverted teachings” (*Nostis et Nobiscum*, December 8, 1849).

LEO XIII (1878–1903):

Socialists debase the natural union of man and woman and assail the right of property

“They [socialists, communists, or nihilists] debase the natural union of man and woman, which is held sacred even among barbarous peoples; and its bond, by which the family is chiefly held together, they weaken, or even deliver up to lust. Lured, in fine, by the greed of present goods, which is ‘the root of all evils, which some coveting have erred from the faith’ (1 Tim. 6:10.3), they assail the right of property sanctioned by natural law; and by a scheme of horrible wickedness, while they seem desirous of caring for the needs and satisfying the desires of all men, they strive to seize and hold in common whatever has been acquired either by title of lawful inheritance, or by labor of brain and hands, or by thrift in one’s mode of life” (*Quod Apostolici Muneris*, December 28, 1878, n. 1).

Socialism disregards the just due to labor

“And in addition to injustice, it is only too evident what an upset and disturbance there would be in all classes, and to how intolerable and hateful a slavery citizens would be subjected. The door would be thrown open to envy, to mutual invective, and to discord; the sources of wealth themselves would run dry, for no one would have any interest in exerting his talents or his industry; and that ideal equality about which they entertain pleasant dreams would be in reality the levelling down of all to a like condition of misery and degradation. Hence, it is clear that the main tenet of socialism, community of goods, must be utterly rejected, since it only injures those whom it would seem meant to benefit, is directly contrary to the natural rights of mankind, and would introduce confusion and disorder into the commonweal. The first and most fundamental principle, therefore, if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property. This being established, we proceed to show where the remedy sought for must be found” (*Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891, n. 15).

Enemy of society and of Religion

“[...] there is need for a union of brave minds with all the resources they can command. The harvest of misery is before our eyes, and the dreadful projects of the most disastrous national upheavals are threatening us from the growing power of the socialistic movement. They have insidiously worked their way into the very heart of the community, and in the darkness of their secret gatherings, and in the open light of day, in their writings and their harangues, they are urging the masses onward to sedition; they fling aside religious discipline; they scorn duties; they clamor only for rights; they are working incessantly on the multitudes of the needy which daily grow greater, and which, because of their poverty are easily deluded and led into error. It is equally the concern of the State and of religion, and all good men should deem it a sacred duty to preserve and guard both in the honor which is their due” (*Graves de Communi Re*, January 18, 1901, n. 21).

SAINT PIUS X (1903–1914):

The dream of re-shaping society will bring socialism

“But stranger still, alarming and saddening at the same time, are the audacity and frivolity of men who call themselves Catholics and dream of re-shaping society under such conditions, and of establishing on earth, over and beyond the pale of the Catholic Church, ‘the reign of love and justice’ [...] What are they going to produce? [...] A mere verbal and chimerical construction in which we shall see, glowing in a jumble, and in seductive confusion, the words Liberty, Justice, Fraternity, Love, Equality, and human exultation, all resting upon an ill-understood human dignity. It will be a tumultuous agitation, sterile for the end proposed, but which will benefit the less Utopian exploiters of the people. Yes, we can truly say that the *Sillon*, its eyes fixed on a chimera, brings Socialism in its train” (*Notre Charge Apostolique* [“Our Apostolic Mandate”] to the French Bishops, August 25, 1910, condemning the movement *Le Sillon*).

BENEDICT XV (1914–1922):

The condemnation of socialism should never be forgotten

“It is not our intention here to repeat the arguments which clearly expose the errors of Socialism and of similar doctrines. Our predecessor, Leo XIII, most wisely did so in truly memorable Encyclicals; and you, Venerable Brethren, will take the greatest care that those grave precepts are never forgotten, but that whenever circumstances call for it, they should be clearly expounded and inculcated in Catholic associations and congresses, in sermons and in the Catholic press” (*Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, November 1, 1914, n. 13).

PIUS XI (1922–1939):

Socialism cannot be reconciled with Catholic Doctrine

“But what if Socialism has really been so tempered and modified as to the class struggle and private ownership that there is in it no longer anything to be censured on these points? Has it thereby renounced its contradictory nature to the Christian religion? This is the question that holds many minds in suspense. And numerous are the Catholics who, although they clearly understand that Christian principles can never be abandoned or diminished seem to turn their eyes to the Holy See and earnestly beseech Us to decide whether this form of Socialism has so far recovered from false doctrines that it can be accepted without the sacrifice of any Christian principle and in a certain sense be baptized.

That We, in keeping with Our fatherly solicitude, may answer their petitions, We make this pronouncement: Whether considered as a doctrine, or an historical fact, or a movement, **Socialism, if it remains truly Socialism, even after it has yielded to truth and justice on the points which we have mentioned, cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Catholic Church because its concept of society itself is utterly foreign to Christian truth**” (*Quadragesimo Anno*, May 15, 1931, n. 117).

PIUS XII (1939–1958):

The Church will fight to the end, in defense of supreme values threatened by socialism

“[The Church undertook] the protection of the individual and the family against a current threatening to bring about a total socialization which in the end would make the specter of the ‘Leviathan’ become a shocking reality. The Church will fight this battle to the end, for it is a question of supreme values: the dignity of man and the salvation of souls” (“Radio message to the Katholikentag of Vienna,” September 14, 1952 in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, vol. XIV, p. 314).

The state can not be regarded as being above all

“To consider the State as something ultimate to which everything else should be subordinated and directed, cannot fail to harm the true and lasting prosperity of nations” (*Summi Pontificatus*, October 20, 1939, n. 60).

JOHN XXIII (1958–1963):

“No Catholic could subscribe even to moderate socialism”

“Pope Pius XI further emphasized the fundamental opposition between Communism and Christianity, and made it clear that no Catholic could subscribe even to moderate Socialism. The reason is that Socialism is founded on a doctrine of human society which is bounded by time and takes no account of any objective other than that of material well-being. Since, therefore, it proposes a form of social organization which aims solely at production, it places too severe a restraint on human liberty, at the same time flouting the true notion of social authority” (*Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961, n. 34).

PAUL VI (1963–1978):

Too often Christians tend to idealize socialism

“Too often Christians attracted by socialism tend to idealize it in terms which, apart from anything else, are very general: a will for justice, solidarity and equality. They refuse to recognize the limitations of the historical socialist movements, which remain conditioned by the ideologies from which they originated” (*Octogesima Adveniens*, May 14, 1971, n. 31).

JOHN PAUL II (1978–2005):

Fundamental error of socialism: A mistaken conception of the person

“Continuing our reflections, [...] we have to add that the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. Socialism likewise maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil. Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order. From this mistaken conception of the person there arise both a distortion of law, which defines the sphere of the exercise of freedom, and an opposition to private property” (*Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991, n. 13).

BENEDICT XVI (2005–2013):

“We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything”

“The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person – every person – needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. ... In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live ‘by bread alone’ (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3) – a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human” (*Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, n. 28).