

WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE BOOK LIST

Centesimus Annus

By John Paul II

Written for the 100th anniversary of Rerum Novarum (Pope Leo XIII, 1 May 1891), Centesimus Annus is an encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II. Following the fall of Communism in Europe, the Pope analyzes failed social philosophy and practice (Marxism, socialism, communism, materialism) through an examination of the human person.

About John Paul II

Karol Józef Wojtyła, known as John Paul II since his October 1978 election to the papacy, was born in Poland on May 18, 1920. In 1942, aware of his call to the priesthood, he began courses in the clandestine seminary of Krakow. At the same time, Karol Wojtyła was one of the pioneers of the "Rhapsodic Theatre," also clandestine.

After the Second World War, he resumed his studies in the major seminary of Krakow, and in the faculty of theology of the Jagiellonian University, until his priestly ordination in Krakow in 1946. Soon after, he was sent to Rome where he worked under the guidance of the French Dominican, Garrigou-Lagrange. He finished his doctorate in theology in 1948 with a thesis on the topic of faith in the works of St. John of the Cross.

In 1948 he returned to Poland and was vicar of various parishes in Krakow as well as chaplain for the university students until 1951, when he took up again his studies on philosophy and theology. Later he became professor of moral theology and social ethics in the major seminary of Krakow and in the Faculty of Theology of Lublin.

He was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow in 1958, nominated Archbishop of Krakow by Pope Paul VI in 1964 and made a cardinal in 1967. During Vatican Council II Cardinal Wojtyła made an important contribution to the Constitution Gaudium et Spes and participated in all assemblies of the Synod of Bishops.



Guide questions for discussion groups

- In article 29, the pope uses the term “rights of human conscience” to describe a person’s right to develop his/her own conception of reality. To what extent is this right threatened by: (i) utilitarian values in developed countries, and (ii) religious fundamentalism in some countries?
- The pope insists that a person’s relationship with God is an essential part of any social doctrine. He states that the “atheistic” solution, however, deprives man of one of his basic dimensions. (i) Contrast the Church’s social doctrine with the “atheistic” solution. (ii) What is the prevailing position in your own country? (iii) Do you think the Church’s social doctrine could be applied in full in your own country? Discuss how this may be possible.
- “The Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency.” What particular examples of action can you think of that will spread this message? (Apply your ideas to a social problem prevalent in your society.)
- Are the ideas outlined in *Centesimus Annus* relevant to non-Catholics as well as Catholics? If you are not a Catholic, discuss ways in which these ideas are similar or dissimilar to your own religious beliefs or teachings.

