



Call to Solidarity.

During his second visit to the USA in September 1987, Pope John Paul II reasserted that 'the aim of Christian solidarity and service is to defend,....in the name of Jesus Christ, the dignity and fundamental human rights of every person'. (Address to Catholic Charities, 15/9/87).

As in previous statements, particularly in his encyclical on work (Laborem Exercens 1981), he grounded his view of social problems and human rights on a particular view of what it means to be a human being. Because each human being is a unique person with an immortal soul, the human person's dignity and value, on one level, is beyond measure; accordingly, he or she can never be treated as a means, only as an end. The full development of the human person is a lifetime process, and work is necessary to achieve this development; 'central to the Church's teaching is the conviction that people are more important than things; that work is "for man" and not man "for work"'. (Silverdome, Detroit, 19/9/87). The Pope goes on to emphasise: 'the Church considers it her task to focus attention on the dignity and rights of workers, to condemn violations of that dignity and those rights'.

Detroit is at the heart of what is often termed "The Rust Belt" - a region of abandoned mines and shuttered steel factories. Speaking to the people of Detroit, the pope challenged the criteria by which decisions are made to introduce new technology, and implied that the mass elimination of jobs and related human costs would in the long run far outweigh the gain to society from rapid introduction of labour-saving technology.

Describing what it means to be a Christian in his speech to Catholic Charities, he remarked: 'The discipleship that the Church discovers in prayer she expresses in deep interest for Christ's brethren,....Her concern embraces the area of housing, education, health care, unemployment, the administration of justice, the special needs of the aged and the handicapped'. (15/9/87).

The Pope did not offer specific strategies for much-needed social change. Instead, he concentrated his remarks on the link between faith and justice, by providing (a) a restatement of the deep roots which the commitment to justice has in the Christian tradition of discipleship and fellowship, and (b) a reminder of the core-values of human dignity and solidarity which underlie the Christian's commitment to eliminate injustice.

Church Calendar, November 22: The Feast of Christ the King.