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MOTHER AND TEACHER



CATHOLIC CHURCH. POPE, 1958-1963.
(JOANNES XXIII). MATER ET MAGISTRA.
COMMENTARY.

INTRODUCTION

by

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This simplified version of Pope John's Encyclical, "Christianity and Social Progress" (*Mater et Magistra*), fills a real need. We have here in capsule form the leading thoughts of this majestic document. To a very great extent, the summary uses the words of the Encyclical itself. This is a guarantee of its faithfulness and accuracy in selection.

At the same time, useful as this digest will be, it is hoped that it will lead readers to a careful and fruitful study of the entire Encyclical. In this way, they will acquire principles and attitudes that will be most helpful in developing a Christian outlook regarding the critical social problems of our day.

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MOTHER AND TEACHER

Pope John's Blueprint for World Peace
synopsized by

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Introduction

A Mother (Mater) who begets sons; a Teacher (Magistra) who guides them: that is what our Lord designed his Church to be.

Teaching his doctrine, she addresses the whole man: body as well as soul. Like her Founder, she guides souls safely to the next life, but also "has compassion" on the hungry crowd, and cares about the needs of bodies in this life. Thus were the first deacons ordained to minister at poor tables. Thus seventy years ago Pope Leo XIII spoke to the world about workers' problems.

His letter to the world, called *Rerum Novarum*, is by far the most notable witness to the Church's social teaching and action. In it, Leo made his own the problems of underprivileged men, and championed their rights.

This letter has influenced laws and institutions in many nations. All later Popes have built on it. And even today it retains much effectiveness. From it we can draw new and vital ideas about the nature

and extent of social problems; and about our duties in these matters.

Part I

Older social problems and the solutions of previous Popes; newer problems and the need for the present encyclical.

1) *The Times of Leo XIII:*

THE PROBLEM: radical changes in politics and economics were causing confusion and civil disturbances.

THE VILLAIN: Many people said that wages, prices and profits depended on certain blind forces unrelated to morality, that governments should not intervene in such affairs, and that trade unions were unlawful.

THE RESULT: Since "might made right," a few grew very rich, while masses of workers suffered acute need. Indignant workers began to adopt extremist theories.

Leo based his solution on human nature itself as revealed by the gospels and right reasoning. His letter was a wise summary of rules and a blueprint for action.

Leo taught that the rights of workers were sacred. A man's work is no mere commodity. Work, the source of his livelihood, is therefore to be paid for according to humane laws of justice and not the cruel laws of the marketplace.

He taught that private property is a

natural right which the government cannot take away. Still, this right has a social aspect and must be justly related to the needs of others.

He taught that governments must not ignore the economic activities of their citizens, but should promote a sufficient supply of material goods, safeguard the rights of all, contribute actively to better working conditions and see that labor agreements are fair.

He taught the natural right of men to enter into associations.

He taught that workers and employers should care for the common good, and he rejected the notion that competition should be unregulated or that class struggle was inevitable.

2) *The Times of Pius XI:*

Forty years after Leo's letter, Pius XI wrote *Quadragesimo Anno*.

In it, he reaffirmed the Church's right to speak on social problems, and confirmed Leo's general solution of them. He cleared up some details and showed how to adapt rules to changing conditions.

Pius XI said the "wage" system was not unjust in itself, but often took inhuman forms.

He urged partnership agreements between labor and management, such as profit-sharing.

He showed how Christians must oppose the Communist viewpoint and even the viewpoint of the socialists, who regard man's earthly welfare alone, and reduce all social relationships to the production of goods.

Noting the changes since Leo's time, he said that unrestricted competition had been replaced by powerful monopolies, sometimes with government backing.

To counteract this dangerous concentration of power, he insisted on the primacy of the common good, and urged the development of smaller professional and economic groups.

3) *The Times of Pius XII:*

Fifty years after Leo's letter, Pius XII broadcast a message affirming the Church's right to decide whether a social system conformed with God's law.

Regarding material goods, he stated that the earth and its riches were made to meet the basic necessities of all men. Private property helps to achieve this purpose.

Regarding labor, Pius XII said it was a right and a duty. Men themselves should regulate the conditions of labor. Only if the parties cannot or will not do so fairly should the state intervene.

Regarding family life, he observed how private ownership helps to guard and nourish it. He reminded governments of the right of families to migrate.

4) *Recent Problems:*

Affairs have greatly changed in the last two decades.

For instance, science has brought us atomic energy, automation, space conquests.

In the social field have appeared more social security systems, improved education, more conveniences, greater interest in world affairs. On the negative side, the imbalance grows a) between the conditions of agriculture and of industry, b) between the prosperity of different regions within countries and c) between the poor and rich countries.

In the political field, citizens take greater part in civic life, public authority increases its role, Asia and Africa achieve new independence, world assemblies concern themselves with the interests of all people.

Hence, Pope John considers it his duty to confirm the teaching of his predecessors, to explain it more fully, and to give guidance on new and serious problems.

Part II

Updated comments on some basic economic matters.

1) *Private Initiative and State Intervention:*

In economic affairs, private initiative ordinarily claims priority.

Yet public authority has the right and

duty to encourage, regulate, supplement and co-ordinate this private initiative in the interest of the common good.

Modern developments have required increasing intervention of public authority in economic affairs. Care should be taken that such intervention ultimately serve the basic rights of individuals. According to the "principle of subsidiarity," the intervention should occur only when necessary to achieve these basic rights.

One modern development is the fact of the daily more complex interdependence of citizens. This complexity requires many restrictive laws. Society now concerns itself with an individual's health, education, and choice of career, as well as the care of the handicapped.

This growing social trend can and ought to be worked out in a way best suited to promote its natural advantages and to minimize, as far as possible, its attendant disadvantages.

If the growth of social action involving state regulation follows sane principles, it need not be detrimental to the individual.

2) *Payment for Work:*

It is immensely sad to see great masses of workers and their families condemned to utterly sub-human conditions because of inadequate wages.

Sometimes the privileged few with

enormous wealth live surrounded by the utter poverty of the vast majority.

Sometimes services of doubtful or inferior value receive much better payment than the more beneficial work of honest men.

Still, basic justice demands that workers be paid a wage which allows them and their families to live a truly human life. Also, all classes of citizens should share in the fruits of production.

On the national level, justice demands the employment of the greatest number of workers, equilibrium between wages and prices, and balance between economic expansion and the development of social services.

On the international level, justice demands the avoidance of unfair competition, the fostering of mutual collaboration between countries, and effective co-operation in the development of communities less economically advanced.

3) *Employee Rights:*

In addition to receiving just wages, workers need to be able to perfect their personalities while on the job. Working conditions should allow them to exercise responsibility and initiative.

Small and average-size undertakings, especially those involving artisans, should be safeguarded by co-operative action.

As far as possible, workers should take an active part in the business of the company they work for.

Through collective bargaining, workers' associations rightly exert their influence in their own sphere of employment.

Workers should also exert proper influence on the national level where vital decisions are made about economic matters.

International associations such as the United Nation's International Labor Organization deserve special praise.

4) *Private Property:*

Recent changes have raised some doubts about the right to private property.

Thus systems of insurance and social security are giving many people the sort of security which used to come from owning property. Also, many people, such as those in professions, prefer income which flows from their work to income available from capital. This is as it should be.

Still, the right of permanent ownership of property, including productive goods, has permanent validity. In defending this right the Church does not intend to endorse the present condition of things, but sees the right to property as a guarantee of the essential freedom of the individual.

Moreover, now is the time to insist on the wider distribution of property ownership among all classes. This includes houses,

land, tools, and durable consumer goods.

All this does not deny the lawfulness of state and public ownership of some productive goods, especially those which involve a power too great to be left to private persons without injury to the community.

When the state increases this ownership its motive should not be to reduce private ownership as such. To oversee this increased ownership the state should choose men with the needed experience, know-how, and a sense of responsibility to their country.

Furthermore, the right to private ownership has a social function, since in God's plan all the goods of this world are primarily intended for the worthy support of the entire human race.

Even though the state has increased its concern about welfare problems, the social function of private ownership is not out of date.

With all its machinery, the state cannot remedy many tragic and urgent problems which afflict private persons. Hence vast opportunities for private sympathy and charity will always remain. Besides, such private action promotes spiritual values more effectively.

Part III

We have spoken about just relations between managers and employees.

1) Considerations of social justice must also affect the relation (a) between various branches of the economy, (b) between areas of varying productivity within the same country and (c) between the poorer and the richer countries.

a) In most countries people are moving away from the farm.

What can be done to make farming nearly as efficient as manufacturing and service industries and to provide farmers with living standards similar to those of city-dwellers?

These questions concern everybody, especially public authorities. Various public services such as roads, drinking water, and health benefits, should be developed in rural areas.

Economic growth should be balanced, with agriculture keeping pace with other factors. Systems of social insurance and social security can make a most effective contribution to the overall redistribution of national wealth according to the principles of justice and equity.

Economists must devise a means of price regulation suited to the special nature of agricultural produce.

The ideal farm is owned and managed by the family. The farming community must take an active part in its economic advancement and should be united in co-operatives

and various professional associations.

b) Within the same country, areas often differ sharply in social and economic levels. Public authority should act to eliminate such inequalities, though the citizens involved should be helped to help themselves.

To reduce these inequalities, peoples all over the world must co-operate to facilitate the movement of goods, capital and men from one country to another. In this matter, the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization has been doing praiseworthy work.

c) The correct relationship of the richer countries to the poorer ones: this is one of the key questions of our times. Some nations enjoy luxuries; others endure poverty.

We all share responsibility for the fact that populations are undernourished.

Justice and humanity require that richer countries aid the poorer ones. This help should not stop at emergency aid, but should entail instruction in modern techniques and investment of capital.

More and more people are recognizing their duties in this respect. Broader foreign aid programs for the future are much to be desired.

On the one hand, poorer countries should not only aim to produce more goods, but also to produce them more efficiently, and

with more equitable distribution of the increased national wealth. Thus social conditions should keep pace with economic expansion.

Helping countries, on the other hand, should respect the individuality of the country helped, and not try to impose self-centered policies.

It would be especially tragic if the wealthier nations, which sometimes are overly materialistic, exerted a bad influence on the spiritual traditions of the poorer nations.

Even the Church, with her supernatural goals, strives to promote the unique natural heritage of the nations she evangelizes.

2) Will world population exceed food supply? Far-ranging arguments on this score are quite inconclusive and controversial. No general problem in this area exists now.

Whatever the localized problems of the present and the general problems of the future may be, the productivity of nature and the ingenuity of man can solve them without methods of population control which violate man's nature.

The provident God has bestowed upon humanity sufficient goods to bear with dignity the burdens associated with procreation. Parents should exemplify for their children a firm confidence in God and the sacrificial spirit needed to face life.

3) Science and technology have made it

growingly needful that the peoples of the world depend one on the other. Very serious necessities demand that countries co-operate in mutual assistance.

Yet mutual distrust often blocks the needed co-operation, diverts wealth into armaments and thwarts nobler enterprises.

The villain here is the lack of a common belief in objective laws of justice and right. Such laws bespeak the existence of God and the necessity of religion.

Many modern men thought the human race could do without God. The horrors which science can now cause are inclining many of them to return to a religious outlook.

In richer countries fascination for material goods is losing its hold on many hearts. In poorer countries, a growing vision of human rights and dignity adds emphasis to spiritual viewpoints.

Here are hopeful signs that international collaboration will come to flourish.

Part IV

The modern world has undergone immense scientific and industrial changes.

The overriding problem is to bring the effects of these changes into a more humane balance. This is a problem existing within nations and between nations.

Solutions to this problem fail to the extent that they are rooted in a partial view of human nature, especially regarding man's religious dimensions.

For there can be no peace or justice in the world if men violate their God-given dignity. Divorced from God, a man becomes a monster to himself and to others.

The Church's social doctrine is permanently valid because it is grounded on a complete view of man's abiding nature. The cornerstone of this doctrine is the individual person, naturally social, who is by right the foundation, cause and purpose of all social institutions.

Truth is the guide of this doctrine, justice its aim, love its driving force.

This doctrine, however, must be applied as well as understood. Such is the hard but lofty task recommended to all men of good will.

It must be vividly understood that the Church's social teaching is inseparable from her philosophy of human life. This teaching should be increasingly emphasized: in all Catholic schools, parishes, and lay organizations.

Upon the laity primarily falls the task of demonstrating that Catholic social teaching not only sounds beautiful, but that it works. Making it work will not be easy, though, because men incline to overrate their own

selfish interests, and to idolize materialistic values.

Yet a spirit of moderation and sacrifice has always been expected of Christians. Though many men live only for pleasure, common sense endorses moderation and simplicity of life, while faith further shows the value of self-denial as an atonement for sin and a medicine against it.

Making the Church's social theory work is also hard at times because the exact requirements of justice in a specific case may not be clear.

In every case, a problem should be attacked in three stages: *observe* the situation from every angle; *judge* what can and should be done on the basis of sane principles, and *act* accordingly.

Even sincere, enlightened Catholics may at times differ on the proper action. Still, let them respect one another's good will, and co-operate as far as possible. People shouldn't put off doing good things because they are busy arguing about what is better or best.

Also, in social matters Catholics must often deal with men who have a different view of life. Without sacrificing essentials, Catholics should courteously weigh the opinions of these others and not measure every program in the light of their own specific interests.

It should be obvious how much zealous, competent laymen are needed to correct the "monstrous masterpiece" of our times: a view of human nature that makes men scientific giants but spiritual pygmies.

The Church approves of modern man's giant scientific steps, so long as they lead men ultimately to their supreme spiritual goals.

As a means of promoting these goals, the Church has always insisted on the observances of the Lord's Day. Setting aside daily business on that day, men should take time to worship, to foster family bonds, and to refresh themselves with decent recreation. Current abuses of the Sabbath are deplorable, and Christians should resist them ardently.

With respect to spiritual goals, let no Christian suppose that he must abandon the affairs of this world in order to achieve Christian perfection. God's plan is that men should develop and perfect their personalities through their daily work, which in most cases is a down-to-earth affair.

Earthly work done for eternal motives needn't be less efficient, but should be more so. The basic requirements of justice are made clearer by such motives and the influence of charity makes a man the more energetic, generous, and considerate.

Catholics have this supreme inspiration in

their daily work: united with Christ, their daily labor becomes a continuation of his work, penetrated with redeeming power. Thus civilization becomes leavened with the ferment of the Gospel.

Though our times are gripped with deadly errors and torn with disorders, this era offers the Church immense possibilities for good. The courageous co-operation of every Christian is called for.

Under the guide of the Church, Mother and Teacher, modern man can still bring right ordering to human society. Only in this way can all nations at last enjoy true prosperity, happiness and peace.

Discussion Questions

1. What is an encyclical?
2. Did Jesus show any interest in the needs of poor, hungry, and sick people?
3. According to Jesus, do Christians have any duties towards the needy people of the world? (Check St. Matthew's Gospel 25:31-46.)
4. Is the Church interested only in the souls of men?
5. Pope Leo XIII guided the Church from 1878-1903. What great document did he write concerning the problems of working people? In what year did it appear?
6. Pope Pius XI guided the Church from

1922-1939. What is the name of the world letter (encyclical) which he wrote on the 40th anniversary of Leo XIII's document?

7. Some people say that the "law of supply and demand" should be allowed to take its course without any interference. This attitude has a French name—"laissez-faire," which means "leave things alone." Does the Church agree with this attitude?

8. Do workers have a right to form unions?

9. Does the government give people the right to possess their own property? Could any government justly take away that right altogether? Do any present-day governments try to take away this right?

10. Does the Church have the right to speak out on economic problems (i.e., concerning wages, prices, working conditions, etc.)?

11. Should the government stay out of economic affairs altogether, or should it run these affairs itself?

12. Explain the principle of subsidiarity.

13. If it were possible for one clever man to work so hard that he could buy all the property in a nation, would it be moral for him to do so?

14. Does every person in the world have the right to live a decent human life, and to provide himself with sufficient food and clothing, and a respectable home?

15. Nowadays life has grown more complicated and the government has more to say about social problems. Is this necessarily bad?

16. Would Pope John like to see the nations of the world pulling together to solve world problems? Do you think he approves of the basic idea of the United Nations?

17. Pope John praises the International Labor Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization. To what bigger organization do these two groups belong?

18. Is it desirable that workers take an active part in the business of the company they work for?

19. Just because the Church upholds the right to private property, does that mean she is pleased with the social conditions in those countries which allow private property?

20. Many governments have welfare programs for needy people. Does that mean that private charity is out of date?

21. The common good means the welfare of all the citizens in a country. According to God's plan, what agency is supposed to look after the common good? Should business and labor unions care about the common good?

22. Do modern farmers have any special problems?

23. Do wealthier nations have any duties toward poorer countries? Are foreign aid programs merely a matter of charity?

24. Man is by nature "a social animal." What does that mean?

25. Who will have to show that the Church's social teachings really work out in practice?

26. By what three steps should a person try to solve any social problem?

27. Is it possible for sincere, intelligent Catholics to disagree about how to solve a social problem? What should they do if this happens?

28. What good effect does the observance of the Lord's Day have on society?

29. Does a modern Christian have to run away from the world in order to be a top-notch Christian?

30. What special motive does a Catholic have for doing his daily work well?

*Reaction to Pope John's
World Letter*

“sublime with the wisdom of Christ, eminently practical”

National Catholic Social Action Conference

“a Christian Magna Carta of human rights”
Archbishop Iakovos, Greek Orthodox Primate of North and South America

“courageous and far-visioned”
American Jewish Council

“deserves to be widely studied and pondered”
S. Garry Oniki, Associate Executive Director, National Council of Churches

“one of the greatest and most influential documents of our time”
James B. Carey, Vice-President, AFL-CIO

“a profound document bearing on . . . issues acute in the world today”
Louis G. Seaton, Vice-President in charge of personnel, General Motors Corp.

“its wisdom and vision will help to change the course of history”
Arthur Goldberg, Secretary of Labor

"We must outdream the Communist visionaries, and outwork the Communist fanatics." With these words the eminent economist, Barbara Ward, recently reminded the anti-Communist world of the need for a positive program of social reformation.

Religious men of all faiths have been finding in Pope John's world letter, *Mater et Magistra*, just that sort of wise, humane and practical program.

Catholics must lead the way in understanding and activating this program. Hence this same world letter urges that increasing attention be given to the Church's social doctrine at all levels of Catholic schooling.

This pamphlet provides a quick, simplified introduction to the ideas of Pope John and will help to answer his ardent request that every modern means be used to carry his teaching to all men. This synopsis should prove especially serviceable in elementary and secondary schools, where many of tomorrow's leaders are forming their ideals.

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