

# *Mater et Magistra, Christianity and Social Progress*

Pope John XXIII, May 15, 1961

*This document is available on the Vatican Web Site: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).*

## OVERVIEW

Pope John XXIII begins this encyclical by reviewing the major points of *The Condition of Labor* and *The Reconstruction of the Social Order*. He notes that new political, social, and economic developments have necessitated *Christianity and Social Progress*. He confirms previous papal teaching on the value of private initiative, just remuneration for work, and the social function of private property. John XXIII then treats the questions of agriculture and aid to developing countries. He urges a reconstruction of social relationships according to the principles of Catholic social teaching and states the responsibility of individual Christians to work for a more just world.

## HISTORICAL NOTE

Pope John XXIII issued *Christianity and Social Progress* in response to the severe imbalances between the rich and the poor which exist in the world. The encyclical commemorates the seventieth anniversary of Leo XIII's *The Condition of Labor*. John XXIII "internationalizes" the Catholic social teaching by treating, for the first time, the situation of countries which are not fully industrialized. He articulates an important role for the laity in applying the Church's social teachings in the world.

## DOCUMENT OUTLINE

### New Developments

- Economic and Scientific (#47)
  - Discovery of atomic energy.
  - Synthetic products and automation.
  - Conquest of outer space.
  - New speed of transportation.
  - Improvements in communications.
- Social (#48)
  - Insurance and social security.
  - Improvements in education.
  - Increased social mobility.
  - Pronounced imbalances between more developed and less developed areas.
- Political (#49)
  - Increased participation.
  - Less colonization.
  - More public intervention.

### Development of Social Teaching

- Private Initiative
  - First priority to private initiative (#51).
  - Supports principle of "subsidiarity" (#53).
  - Public authorities can intervene to reduce economic imbalances (#54).



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## DOCUMENT OUTLINE (continued)

- Balance between public and private initiative (#55).
- “Socialization”: interdependent social relationships with positive and negative consequences created by new developments (#s 59-67).
- Just Remuneration for Work
  - Families need appropriate wage to live in dignity (#68).
  - World imbalance: too much money spent on national prestige and armaments (#69).
  - Economic development must correspond to social development (#73).
  - Economic prosperity: the just and proper distribution of goods (#74).
  - Workers should share in running of companies (management, profits, ownership) (#75).
  - Requirements for common good for nations (#79):
    - create employment;
    - care for less privileged;
    - provide for the future.
- Justice and Productive Institutions
  - Foster small and intermediary holdings (#84).
  - Encourage family-type ownership (#85).
  - Alleviate imbalances (#84).
  - All should work for the common good (#96).
- Private Property
  - Confirms rights to private property (#109).
  - Encourages widespread ownership (#115).
  - State can own means of production (but affirms subsidiarity) (#117).
  - Social responsibility: a function of private property (#119).

## **New Aspects of the Social Question**

- Agriculture
  - Agriculture is a depressed sector; imbalances between it and industry exist (#123).
  - Church calls for services for rural areas and orderly economic development (#127).
  - Appropriate economic policy includes capital at suitable prices, price protection, social security, and strengthening farm income (#s 131-143).
  - Principal agent for improvement should be rural workers, who have dignity from God (#144).
- Aid to Less Developed Areas
  - Need for competent administration and economic policies (#150).
  - Citizens in less developed areas are chiefly responsible for their own development and need to respect dignity and subsidiarity (#151)
- Justice between Nations Differing in Development
  - Peace is more difficult as imbalances persist (#157).
  - Duty of countries to help the poor and unfortunate (#157).
  - Need to establish an effective program of emergency assistance (#161).
  - Private enterprises and societies need to be more generous in cooperation (#165).
  - Industrial countries need to respect the culture of developing countries; aid should be offered without the intent to dominate (#s 170, 172).



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## DOCUMENT OUTLINE (continued)

- Role of the Church
  - Individual Christians must advance civil institutions and human dignity and foster a unity between peoples (#179).
  - Many Catholics are already involved in these efforts (#182).
- Population Increase and Development
  - Humankind has an inexhaustible productive capacity (#189).
  - Humans should not resort to means of population control beneath human dignity (#199).
- International Cooperation
  - Relationships are interdependent; cooperation and mutual assistance are needed (#200).
  - Cause of distrust is failure to agree on laws of justice; armaments are a symptom of this distrust (#203).

## **Reconstruction of Social Relationships**

- Incomplete Philosophies of Life
  - Many philosophies do not encompass the entire human person or respect human dignity (#s 213-214).
  - It is folly to establish a temporal order without God as a foundation (#217).
- Catholic Social Teaching (CST)
  - Individuals are the foundation, cause, and end of all social institutions (#219).
  - CST cannot be separated from Church teachings on life and should be taught at all levels and in the media (#s 222-223).
  - Catholics should be reared on CST and conform their social and economic behavior to CST principles (#228).
  - Applying CST in the world is difficult (#229).
  - How to apply CST (task for laity) (#s 236-241):
    - examine situation (observe);
    - evaluate it with respect to CST (judge);
    - decide how to act (act).
- Conclusion
  - Industrial life can deform values and depart from human dignity (#242).
  - Church needs to renew its dedication in seeking to establish the Kingdom in temporal affairs (#254).

## **Discussion Questions**

This document notes the new developments between 1931 and 1961. What, in your view, are the significant developments that have occurred in the world since then? Name ways in which these new developments affect your life and the life of your community.

How do you define your role as a Christian in the world?

