Pope John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra*: 
The Encyclical and the Notion of the Common Good 
J. Marianne Siegmund

In Pope Saint John XXIII’s Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961), the Holy Father sought to apply the Church’s social doctrine to numerous situations of the times, among them the issue of the common good. This paper first anchors the encyclical within the larger frame of world history at the time in which it was written, and then offers a brief overview of *Mater et Magistra*. In light of two specific themes in the encyclical, the individual person and socialization, a final remark highlights the notion of the common good.

Pope Saint John XXIII (1881–1963) reigned as pontiff from 1958–1963.1 “Good Pope John” issued no less than eight encyclicals during his brief, five-year pontificate, with *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961) being his fifth. Known as the Pope of the *aggiornamento*,2 John XXIII saw it as his task to work toward both the “internal spiritual renewal, and [the] external adaptation of the Church’s laws and institutions to the times,” which two facets comprise the nature and distinction of the term itself.3 The Church, the “living interpreter” of Jesus Christ,4 is “to converse with the human society in which it lives.”5 Thus, like Leo XIII and others before him, and John Paul II and others after him, the Pontiff’s intent in *Mater et Magistra* is to apply the Church’s teachings to the “changed conditions” of his present day (#50).

In this paper, I will accomplish three tasks. First, I briefly situate the encyclical within the context of world history at the time in which it was written. Second, I offer a concise overview of *Mater et Magistra*. In light of two specific themes in the encyclical, the individual person and socialization, my third task is to offer a brief remark on the notion of the common good.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO**
**MATER ET MAGISTRA**

Commemorating the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, the pastoral style of *Mater et Magistra* reflects the spirit of optimism, with its practical and enthusiastic outlook toward the future.6 At the same time, *Mater et Magistra* was written during an era of “great social upheaval.”

[T]he world was confronting atomic weapons; a Catholic president occupied the White House for the first time in American history; the devastating impact of the Second World War was still fresh in many minds; a communications revolution was turning the world into a global village [and] Khrushchev was leader of the Kremlin.7

In 1957, four years before the encyclical was issued, the Chinese government had set up the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics, which was condemned a year later by Pius XII.8 1958, the year of Mao Tse-tung’s “Great Leap Forward,” which aimed at the rapid industrialization of the countryside, claimed the lives of approximately 30 million people by famine.9 Castro had just come to power in 1959, and, one month before Mater et Magistra was promulgated, “at least a significant minority of Cubans” were committed to overthrowing him if possible.10 To this world, the Bishop of Rome, whose ministry originates “in the manifold mercy of God,” issues his encyclical message.11

OVERVIEW OF MATER ET MAGISTRA

Both Leo XIII (Rerum Novarum, 1891) and Pius XI (Quadragesimo Anno, 1931) focused upon the “social problem” of the “industrial working class in an age of rapid modernization.”12 With Mater et Magistra, John XXIII introduces two new dimensions in Catholic social teaching. First, he broadens the vision of the social problem “to include the circumstances of non-industrialized nations; second, he emphasizes “the role of the laity in carrying out the practical implications of the Gospel.”13 Later, John Paul II develops these two themes in both Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987) and Centesimus Annus (1991).14

Often regarded as innovative in Catholic social thought is the Pope’s stress on the widespread ownership of private property (e.g., #115). Also unique to Mater et Magistra is the Pontiff’s emphasis on agriculture and the farm (#123–50), which gave “fresh impetus to the agrarian reform movement in Latin America.”15 John XXIII clearly emphasizes that the family owned and operated farm is to be regarded as an ideal, and he claims that farming is, in fact, a vocation (#142, #149).

Aware of his responsibility as the “vicar of Christ and head of the whole Church and faith, and teacher of all Christians,”16 John XXIII begins and ends his work by noting that the encyclical aims to educate and govern, “with maternal providence, the life both of individuals and of peoples” (#1).17

Those who objected to the papal teaching contained therein began using the slogan, “Mater Si, Magistra No,” which was a spin-off of the then-current anti-Castro slogan, “Cuba Si, Castro No.”18 In his article, Another
Outbreak of ‘Mater Si, Magistra No,’ Dale Vree, editor of the *New Oxford Review*, explains the adage as referring to “pick-and-choose Catholics” who claim that the Church is Mother, but not Teacher.¹⁹ John XXIII’s opening paragraph of the encyclical states otherwise, as he highlights the Church’s two-fold nature. “The Catholic Church has been established by Jesus Christ as Mother and Teacher of nations, so that all who in the course of centuries come to her loving embrace, may find salvation as well as the fullness of a more excellent life” (#1).

After a brief introduction (#1–9), the encyclical is easily divisible into four parts. As one might expect, in the first section of *Mater et Magistra* (#10–50), the Holy Father connects his work with that of his predecessors by highlighting their major contributions. In paragraph #26, he gives *Rerum Novarum* its acclaimed, often-repeated title, “the *Magna Charta* for the reconstruction of the economic and social order.” Highlighting Pius XI’s theme of subsidiarity in *Quadragesimo Anno*, John XXIII also focuses upon the topics of justice and charity governing economic undertakings, and that a “juridical order” is vital in guaranteeing that economic activities are “in conformity with the common good.”²⁰

The Pontiff then mentions Pius XII’s 1941 Pentecost radio broadcast, which commemorates *Rerum Novarum* for its teaching on “material goods, labor, and the family.”²¹ Thereafter, John XXIII enumerates the “economic, scientific, social, and political developments” that have taken place since the 1941 radio message, noting that he wants to “confirm and explain more fully” current applications of previous social teachings.²²

The second part of *Mater et Magistra* (#51–121) focuses upon “private initiative and private property, themes that John Paul II would vastly expand in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*.”²³ In *Mater et Magistra* #51–58, the Pope asserts that “private initiative should enjoy ‘first place’ in economic affairs, and, by invoking the principle of subsidiarity, [he] . . . suggests that the role of the state in economic matters should be limited.”²⁴ In paragraphs #59–67, the Pontiff addresses the concept of socialization, upon which I comment below.

Paragraphs #68–72 reinforce the fact that “remuneration of work . . . [cannot] be left to the laws of the marketplace [or] . . . to the will of the more powerful”; instead, it “must be determined in accordance with justice and equity” (#71). He reiterates the fact that workers must be paid a just wage, which allows them “to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner” (#71).

In the remaining paragraphs of the second section (#73–103), the Holy Father “advocates experiments in cooperative or profit-sharing ventures to promote economic harmony, and encourages businesses to form coopera-
The Pontiff incessantly links rights with duties and his insistence on one’s right to private property is a good example. While “private ownership is clearly sanctioned by the Gospel,” the Pope likewise notes Christ’s Gospel invitation to the rich “to convert their material goods into spiritual ones by conferring them on the poor” (#121). Indeed, the Pontiff stresses that private ownership is a “guarantee of the essential freedom of the individual and . . . an indispensable element in a true social order” (#111).

Part three of the encyclical is entitled “New Aspects of the Social Question” (#122–211). Here, John XXIII explains the need for rural development (#157–84) and cautions wealthier nations to respect the cultural values and independence of the very countries they seek to aid. At the same time, spiritual values cannot be “ignored, forgotten or denied, while the progress of science, technology and economics is pursued for its own sake, as though material well-being were the be-all and end-all of life” (#176). By her presence, the Church “infuses her energy into the life of a people,” and she aims “at a unity which is profound and in conformity with that heavenly love whereby all are moved in their innermost being” (#180–81). John XXIII also emphasizes the sacredness of human life since, from “its inception, it requires the action of God the Creator” (#192, #194).

In the fourth and final unit of the encyclical (#212–64), “Reconstruction of Social Relationships in Truth, Justice, and Love,” John XXIII speaks of the difficulties of building an ordered society, in which the “greatly multiplied relationships between citizens [are] . . . brought into more humane balance.” To this end, he posits two fundamentally opposed notions of the human person, which I present below.

**THE HUMAN PERSON AS THE “FOUNDATION, CAUSE, AND END OF EVERY SOCIAL INSTITUTION”**

The notion of the human person is foundational not only to *Mater et Magistra*, but also to the social teaching of the Church, in general. In paragraph #109, the Pope teaches that the individual human person is “prior to civil society.” Catholic social teaching rests upon “one basic principle: individual human beings are the foundation, the cause, and the end of every social institution” (#219–20). Because the person is the end of the social order, society cannot manipulate or oppress him for its own sake. Thus, the priority of the individual human person over society is the first and fundamental principle upon which I reflect.

Perhaps even more crucial than the major global events enumerated above is the fact that, when *Mater et Magistra* was promulgated in May of 1961, two radically opposed concepts of the human person were coming...
Mater et Magistra and the Notion of the Common Good

into clearer view. These two incompatible views of the person find expres-
sion in the encyclical in the following manner.

One position sees man as an autonomous being independent from
God. To this contemporary worldview, hostile to Christianity, John XXIII
posits the Christian concept of the human person.

[I]n an era of scientific and technical triumphs such as ours man can
well afford to rely on his own powers, and construct a very good
civilization without God. But the truth is that these very advances in
science and technology frequently involve the whole human race in
such difficulties as can only be solved in the light of a sincere faith in
God, the Creator and Ruler of man and his world. (#209)

Elaborating upon the theme of autonomy, the Pontiff warns against
various ideologies that divide man from his true and ultimate End, the
Creator for whom he was made. He explains that numerous ideologies do
not take account of “that deep-rooted sense of religion which exists in all
men everywhere, and which nothing, neither violence nor cunning, can
eradicate” (#213). John XXIII elaborates upon this difficulty: “In seeking
to enhance man’s greatness, men fondly imagine that they can do so by
drying up the source from which that greatness springs and from which
it is nourished. They want . . . to restrain and, if possible, to eliminate
the soul’s upward surge toward God” (#217).

The Pontiff thus pinpoints the “most fundamental modern error,”
which fabricates the person’s “natural sense of religion [as simply] . . .
outcome of feeling or fantasy, to be eradicated from his soul as an anachro-
nism and an obstacle to human progress” (#214). In sum, he teaches, “this
very need for religion reveals a man for what he is: a being created by God
and tending always toward God” (#214). Positing man’s fulfillment apart
from God, then, is the first point John XXIII identifies as prevalent—and
contrary to—the Christian concept of the human person.

The Pope singles out a second factor about modern man, which is also
inconsistent with Christianity. He notes that the “materialism in which
modern society is steeped” complicates an accurate vision of justice, mak-
ing it difficult to understand the priority of the individual over production
(#229). Thus, John XXIII writes against the practice of treating employees
“as though they were mere cogs in the machinery, denying them any op-
portunity of expressing their wishes or bringing their experience to bear on
the work in hand, and keeping them entirely passive in regard to decisions
that regulate their activity” (#92).

The Holy Father laments the battle between science and technology
on one hand, and the human person’s spiritual life on the other hand. He
explains the “clear contrast between the immense scientific and technical
progress and the fearful human decline shown by ‘its monstrous masterpiece . . . [of] transforming man into a giant of the physical world at the expense of his spirit, which is reduced to that of a pygmy in the supernatural and eternal world’” (#243). While the Church has long taught that, “scientific and technical progress and the resultant material well-being are goods and mark an important phase in human civilization,” such goods must be “valued according to their true nature: as instruments used by man for the better attainment of his end” (#246). Succinctly put, the person must control advances in the scientific world; he must not allow these same scientific achievements to control him.

John XXIII further comments upon the deep-seated opposition between Communism and Christianity, noted by Pius XI, that dictates, no “Catholic could subscribe even to moderate socialism” (#34). Because socialism aims solely at “the production of goods, human liberty is excessively restricted and the true concept of social authority is overlooked” (#34).

John XXIII further notes that Catholics “should be prepared to join sincerely in doing whatever is naturally good or conducive to good” with others who hold a different “view of life” (#239). While some commentators see the Pope’s remarks in paragraph #239 as “an opening to the Left’ on the part of Catholic social teaching, Mater et Magistra is frequently cited today as legitimizing the central role of government in achieving social goals.”

As one would expect, John XXIII’s converse outlook of the human person states that he is “a creature of God endowed with a soul in the image and likeness of God” (#249). In response to criticisms, one might emphasize the Holy Father’s point that human life is sacred; its “very inception . . . reveals the creating hand of God” (#194). John XXIII also emphasizes the great good of marriage and family life, which the Catholic Church continues to uphold. Human life is “transmitted by means of the family, and the family is based upon a marriage which is one and indissoluble and, with respect to Christians, raised to the dignity of a sacrament” (#193). Given such examples from Catholic social teaching, one might easily defend John XXIII from those who would claim he is “opening to the Left” in Mater et Magistra.

In light of the social question, the Pope expounds upon the concept of the human person in the following manner.

[M]an is not just a material organism. He consists also of spirit; he is endowed with reason and freedom. He demands, therefore, a moral and religious order; and it is this order—and not considerations of a purely extraneous, material order—which has the greatest validity in
The solution of problems relating to his life as an individual and as a member of society, and problems concerning individual states and their inter-relations. (#208)

The human person is free, and the state cannot deprive him of his freedom. Instead, the state must “augment his freedom while effectively guaranteeing the protection of his essential personal rights” such as his “right and duty to be primarily responsible for his own upkeep and that of his family” (#55). Again, the Holy Father upholds the importance of a just wage. Remuneration based upon justice and equity provides workers with the means “to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner” (#71).

The human person’s rights and duties in the social order imply several realities. For one, human labor is first and foremost human; it is the work of a unique human being. The Pope explains that human labor is “not merely . . . a commodity, but . . . a specifically human activity.” Because labor is a human activity, it can perfect one’s nature. Work, therefore, is not extraneous to man’s nature; embedded in human nature is the “need to express himself in his work and thereby to perfect his own being” (#82).

Emphasizing the cooperation of laity in “humanizing and Christianizing” society, John XXIII teaches that the human person is called to share in God’s own divine life; human labor thus “becomes a continuation of His work, penetrated with redemptive power” (#256, #259). Far from hindering his spiritual life, man’s temporal activity contributes toward one’s growth in holiness and it also extends Christ’s fruits of Redemption to others around the world (#255, #259).

In roughly three and a half years, the Second Vatican Council document, Gaudium et Spes, would teach that, the mystery of the human person, which only becomes clear “in the mystery of the Incarnate Word,” has a direct correlation to one’s understanding of God. Seeming to anticipate Conciliar teaching, John XXIII warns that the human person is “but a monster, in himself and toward others,” if he is separated from God, for “the right ordering of human society presupposes the right ordering of man’s conscience with God, who is Himself the source of all justice, truth and love” (#215). Thus, peace and justice will only come about when people “return to a sense of their dignity as creatures and sons of God, who is the first and final cause of all created being” (#215). In sum, teleology embodies the concept of person in Mater et Magistra; his final end—should he attain it—is eternal life.

Christianity . . . lays claim to the whole man, body and soul, intellect and will, inducing him to raise his mind above the changing conditions of this earthly existence and reach upwards for the eternal life of heaven, where one day he will find his unfailing happiness and peace. (#2)
MATER ET MAGISTRA AND THE THEME OF SOCIALIZATION

My second point—and possibly the most widely discussed theme of Mater et Magistra—is socialization, or “the multiplication of social relationships.” Before I apply both concepts—the primacy of the person and socialization—to the notion of the common good, then, I need to clarify what John XXIII means by socialization.

The term socialization ignited controversies amid the already conflated landscape surrounding Mater et Magistra. For example, commentators argue that the Pontiff’s use of the Latin phrase socialium rationum incrementa is equivalent to “an endorsement of political or economic socialism”; however, such was not the Pope’s intent.

Socialization “refers to a wide variety of social activities that characterize modern society.” In truth, the human person has diverse social relationships: family, friends, and business associates, in addition to one’s relationship as a citizen to the state, and one’s relationship as a member of the Mystical Body to the Church, which the Pope particularly emphasizes at the end of the document (#258–64).

While one way of interpreting “the multiplication of social relationships” is to claim that the Pope is endorsing socialism—or at least opening the social teaching of the Church to the Left—an alternate reading suggests that he is asking modern man to order his social relationships through prayer, by “meditating deeply,” and then by putting the Church’s “norms and teachings” into effect (#261). In Gaudium et Spes, the Church will teach more specifically how to order the “intense development of interpersonal relationships,” while remaining ever intent upon the human person’s fundamental and inviolable relation to God.

In Mater et Magistra paragraph #59, John XXIII speaks of the “multiplication of social relationships” occurring in his day on account of “technical and scientific progress, greater productive efficiency, and a higher standard of living among citizens.” The Pope then describes the Christian notion of an authentic community, which is the standard to use in order to judge “the process of socialization and the common good.” Robert A. Sirico explains the Holy Father’s point as follows:

Contemporary life, the Pope argues, requires strong mediating institutions capable of protecting the primacy of the human person while affording him a means of pursuing the common good, a theme always at the heart of Catholic social concern. Socialization, or the ‘multiplication of social relationships,’ is thus a necessary accompaniment to the advancement of civilization and an important component of the integral development of the person.
**Mater et Magistra and the Notion of the Common Good**

In other words, the individual human person is prior to social relationships; these relationships and institutions exist for the good of the human person, and not vice versa. Economic activity, then, is not an end in itself, but an intermediate end, as Catholic social teaching, beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, continually asserts. John XXIII further specifies the role that social relationships are to play in paragraph #66.

Accordingly, as relationships multiply between men, binding them more closely together, commonwealths will more readily and appropriately order their affairs to the extent these two factors are kept in balance: 1) the freedom of individual citizens and groups of citizens to act autonomously, while cooperating one with the other; 2) the activity of the state whereby the undertakings of private individuals and groups are suitably regulated and fostered. (#66)

Once again, in light of paragraph #66 and others like it (e.g., #18, #34, #256, and #259), the plausibility of the encyclical ascribing to a strict form of socialism, such as Marxist socialism, or to democratic socialism, is untenable. The very nature of socialism, in either form, orders “social and civil life toward efficient economic production” and thus subordinates transcendent values to material production, which, as I have stated above, harms the human person. To be sure, the “denial of all transcendent references, including the ultimate transcendent reality, God, is a characteristic mark of socialist ideology”; it leads to the unraveling of human dignity.

As I describe above, John XXIII continually asserts the primacy of the human person and the necessity of safeguarding his transcendent dignity. While John Paul II builds upon the Church’s refutation of socialism in *Laborem Exercens*, John XXIII nevertheless propounds the dignity of the human person repeatedly in *Mater et Magistra* (e.g., #1, #21, #114) and he condemns as “altogether unjust” any economic system that lessens “man’s sense of responsibility or rob[s] him of opportunity for exercising personal initiative.” He emphatically states, “Such a system . . . is altogether unjust—no matter how much wealth it produces, or how justly and equitably such wealth is distributed” (#83).

Why might John XXIII’s encyclical be criticized as socialistic? In *Mater et Magistra*, the Pope focuses not as much on the Church’s enduring teaching of the primacy of labor over capital in such terms; rather, he highlights the very nature of work as “a specifically human activity,” which ought to perfect the human person, as stated above (#18). At the same time, there is “a broad similarity between the objectives of democratic socialism and Catholic social teaching regarding the widespread distribu-
tion of private property, including capital assets." That similarity is one reason why the encyclical is charged with opening the door to socialism.

Note, however, that the Holy Father stresses widespread ownership of property by individuals (#108–18) and he invokes the principle of subsidiarity against unwarranted interference by the state (#117). Nevertheless, it is precisely because socialism looks to the collective to the detriment of the individual that I wish to take up the notion of the common good.

**THE COMMON GOOD**

Since the notion of the common good is a major element in Catholic social thought, one is not surprised to find it present in *Mater et Magistra*. Building upon the concepts of the human person and socialization put forth in the encyclical, then, I would like to offer a brief remark upon the common good. In paragraphs #78–81, John XXIII enumerates the demands of the common good. Rather than explicating these and other similar passages however, I focus upon an exposition of the term itself.

In paragraph #39, John XXIII states that justice and charity are "the principal laws of social life." Moreover, because of the "complex interdependence of citizens," the Pope "speaks increasingly of social justice and social charity at the level of international society" (#39; #146). The common good is the object of the social virtues of justice and charity, as Pius XI states in *Divini Redemptoris.*

In paragraph #65, John XXIII defines the term common good. The common good is that which "embraces the sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection" (#65). Roughly two years later, he uses similar terminology in *Pacem in Terris.* Further, the Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et Spes*, will likewise employ the Pope’s definition in #26.

In his commentary on *Mater et Magistra*, Marvin Mitch makes a distinction between the Pontiff’s depiction of the common good in *Mater et Magistra*, and a slight variation of it in *Pacem in Terris*. He mentions that the Pope’s depiction of the common good in *Mater et Magistra* contains “a lingering tension between two complementary ways” of describing it. Mitch explains this tension as follows:

One approach emphasizes the common good as “a social reality in which all persons should share through their participation in it.” The second approach, seen in *Pacem in Terris*, emphasizes the human rights aspects of the common good: “it is agreed that in our time the common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties
are maintained” (PT #60). These are not contradictory views, but ways of expressing a dynamic concept in different social contexts.54

In short, whatever aims to the common good, also—and primarily—benefits the individual human person. Thus, “each individual is responsible for promoting the conditions that will allow for the authentic development of all.”55 The common good is common precisely because it is “received in persons, each one of whom is as a mirror of the whole.”56

University professor and Jesuit priest, Jean-Yves Calvez, asserts, “John XXIII several times focused attention on the noble responsibility of public authority” regarding the common good.57 Because the state exists for “the realization of the common good in the temporal order,” (#20) she has the responsibility of protecting her own interests as a whole, thus promoting “all three areas of production—agriculture, industry and services—simultaneously and evenly” (#151).

Although the common good requires “public authorities to exercise ever greater responsibilities,” the principle of subsidiarity must be upheld (#117). Thus, the state and public corporations are “to expand their domain of ownership only when manifest and genuine requirements of the common good so require, and then with safeguards” (#117). These and other similar remarks by John XXIII on the degree of state intervention in achieving the common good lead one to offer the following analysis.

While there can be legitimate disagreement over the weight the encyclical and its predecessors give to the role of the state in the achievement of the common good, there should be no disagreement on the principals involved: that people have a basic right to own private property; that the exercise of that right contributes to a well-ordered society; and that all men, regardless of their economic condition, have an obligation to contribute to the common good.58

In sum, “human dignity and solidarity are the foundations on which the common good is constructed.”59 Thus, a “well-ordered and prosperous society” demands that both citizen and state work together in harmony with “their respective efforts . . . proportioned to the needs of the common good” (#56). The state’s realization of the common good “does not refer to a communist or socialist ideology that betrays the Gospel vision of the human person and does violence to individual human dignity.”60 Instead, the common good is “an attitude focused on justice and love of neighbor and the commitment to lose one’s self for the good of the other.”61
CONCLUSION

*Mater et Magistra* was “a watershed in the encyclical tradition of modern Catholic social teaching.” Indeed, it was a contribution to Catholic social thought and a step toward its fuller development that happens, to a large extent, in *Centesimus Annus*. By naming his encyclical for the Church’s two-fold nature of Mother and Teacher, John XXIII anticipates his successor. “To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church’s evangelizing mission . . . [because] this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society”; further, it “situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Savior.”

By situating *Mater et Magistra* within its historical context, and by providing central highlights from the encyclical itself, I provide the foundation by which to delve into two themes, which are prevalent in our own day. These themes are the human person and socialization. Indeed, since Catholic social teaching rests upon the fact that “individual human beings are the foundation, the cause, and the end of every social institution” (§219–20), I tied the two themes together by offering a short analysis of the common good.

Many treasures in the Church’s social doctrine remain to be unearthed in our own day. A future study might deepen the relation between the human person and other themes highlighted by John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* or another encyclical, such as subsidiarity, human labor, or marriage and family. Regardless, *Mater et Magistra* and the other social encyclicals offer sound principles for working to overcome the many difficulties that continually beset the Church and society in our own day.

Notes

1. John XXIII died on June 3, 1963. Pope John Paul II beatified Pope John XXIII (Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli), along with Pope Pius IX, on September 3, 2000. Pope Francis canonized John XXIII together with Pope John Paul II in St. Peter’s Square on April 27, 2014. Since Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was also present, it was known as “the day of the four Popes” among attendees, of which I was one.


4. Pius XI *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio* #21.

6. Sirico, “A Teacher Who Learns,” 52. Pope John XXIII looked to five Jesuits, including “German social philosopher and active proponent of solidarism Gustav Gundlach, to draft *Mater et Magistra* (p. 52). Later, Msgr. Pietro Pavan and Agostino Ferrari-Toniolo also worked on the manuscript, and it was completed by Gregorian University professor, Msgr. Pavan (p. 52). Pavan also founded “an institute for Catholic social teachings at the Lateran Universtiy” (p. 52).


9. Warren H. Carroll, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Revolution* (Front Royal: Christendom Press, 1995), 480, 472; 477. On July 31, 1955, Mao “demanded and obtained a policy of immediate full farm collectivization for China.” By the “end of the summer of 1956, one hundred million households, 90% of the total, had been absorbed into 485,000 collective farms,” with the last 10% “eliminated before the spring planting of 1957” (472).

10. Ibid., 496, 503. Just seven months after John XXIII promulgated *Mater et Magistra*, Castro declared to the Cuban people in a televised speech, “I am a Marxist-Leninist and will be a Marxist-Leninist until the last day of my life” (ibid., 468).

11. John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint* 92.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.


17. See also #218 and #226 at the end of the document, for his concluding word on the teaching nature of his work. “[T]he Church’s teaching on social matters . . . has truth as its guide, justice as its end, and love as its driving force” (#226).

18. Garry Wills, *Why I Am a Catholic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 47. During a phone call with William F. Buckley, Jr., Garry Wills coined the term, “Mater Si, Magistra No.” It first appeared in print in a *National Review* remark in the August 12, 1961 issue: “Going the rounds in Catholic circles: ‘Mater Si, Magistra No’” (Wills, *Why I Am a Catholic*, 47). Further research indicates that the entire phrase read, “Going the rounds in Catholic conservative circles: ‘Mater Si, Magistra No’” (The emphasis is my own. http://proecclesia.blogspot.com/2008/02/william-f-buckley-jr-and-mater-si.html). As a result of this remark—not a complete article, nor an editorial from *National Review*, nor even an entire sentence—Buckley, as Founder and Editor of *National Review*, was accused of “slander his fellow Catholics by claiming that any of them would have said
anything so vile as this” (Wills, *Why I Am a Catholic*, 47). To the contrary, and, according to Wills, who was a close friend to Buckley at that time, this remark was expressing Buckley’s “own personal attack on the Church’s teaching authority” (Wills, *Why I Am a Catholic*, 47). Others claim that Buckley was merely pointing to the Pope’s specific economic advice, with which he disagreed. Philip Land, who lectured widely on *Mater et Magistra* in the United States following the encyclical’s release, documents his surprise that rejection of papal authority to teach on social matters came from the “conservative” side (Marvin L. Mitch, “Commentary on *Mater et Magistra* [Christianity and Social Progress]” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005], 211), while Buckley himself wrote in the August 26 *National Review* the following. “Actually, *National Review* has made no substantive criticism of *Mater et Magistra*. Simplistic interpretations in secular terms are notoriously unwise. It merely pointed out that ‘coming at this particular time in history,’ parts of it may be considered as trivial” (William F. Buckley, Jr. *National Review* [26 August 1961], 114, quoted from http://weblog.thereviewfromthecore.com/2002_10/ind_000866.html.) Buckley’s biographer, Jeremy Lott, notes that in his “responses to Catholic critics, Buckley stressed that his non-Catholic magazine had, at most, taken issue with non-infallible papal teachings” (Jeremy Lott, *William Buckley* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2010], 101). Finally, Peter Riga notes that while “no part of an encyclical is to be lightly taken,” one must “be careful not to confuse simple directives or suggestions with solemn principles of social justice which are also developed in the encyclical” (Peter Riga, *John XXIII and the City of Man* [Westminster: The Newman Press, 1966], 1–2). For a fine essay on how to interpret papal documents, see W. J. Smith, S.J., “Interpreting Papal Documents,” in *The Church and Social Progress*, ed. Benjamin L. Masse, 28–33 (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966).


20. Sirico, “A Teacher Who Learns,” 53, who cites *Mater et Magistra* #30, 40. Sirico explains that “juridical order” probably recalls Leo’s acceptance of “the tripartite division of power into legislative, executive, and juridical branches *Rerum Novarum* #121), [which was] somewhat of an innovation in Catholic thought at the time” (Sirico, “A Teacher Who Learns,” 53.)


23. Ibid., 53–54.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 54.

26. Another example of the Pontiff echoing the connection between rights and duties is his mention that Pius XII repeats Leo’s mandate that “man’s work
Mater et Magistra and the Notion of the Common Good

is at once his duty and his right” (John XXIII, Mater et Magistra #44; See also #211).

27. See, for example, John XXIII, Mater et Magistra #169–74.


31. John XXIII, Mater et Magistra #18. The emphasis is my own.

32. Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes #22, #36.

33. Sirico, “A Teacher Who Learns,” 64. See also John XXIII, Mater et Magistra #59; #62–63.

34. Sirico, “A Teacher Who Learns,” 64. Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J., notes that many Catholics confused socialization with socialism (p. 3). For a complete reading of his analysis of this term, see Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J., The Social Thought of John XXIII: Mater et Magistra, trans. George J. M. McKenzie (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 1–14. Alternatively, Peter Riga likewise offers a penetrating analysis in John XXIII And the City of Man, 12–23. Marvin L. Mitch notes that the section on socialization was originally written in German. Although he does not specify the paragraphs of which he speaks, he is likely referring to paragraphs 59–67, even though “socialization” is a prevalent theme throughout the work (Mitch, “Commentary,” 213). In footnote 63, Mitch traces the history of “socialization” in numerous language translations, thus offering an excellent record of its use—or absence (Mitch, footnote 63, p. 213–15). As Garry Wills points out in footnote two of chapter four in his book, Why I am a Catholic, the Latin text does not use the term, socialization; at the same time, “the English translation put out by the Vatican used it for socialium rationum incrementa (a thickening of social ties)” (Wills, 345).


36. For every baptized believer, one’s relationship to the Church exists over and above the realm of the state.

37. Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes #23. See also Gaudium et Spes #26: “The social order and its development must constantly yield to the good of the person, since the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way around, as the Lord suggested when He said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27).”


39. Ibid.


42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. John XXIII, Mater et Magistra #83. See also #92.

45. In Mater et Magistra #256, the Pope says that, “man should develop and perfect himself through his daily work.” Elaborating upon the same theme in #259, John XXIII notes that, “man’s work [is] exalted and ennobled—so highly exalted that it leads to his own personal perfection of soul, and helps to extend to others the fruits of Redemption, all over the world. It becomes a means whereby the Christian way of life can leaven this civilization in which we live and work—leaven it with the ferment of the Gospel.”


47. Commenting upon society’s “rapid economic development,” John XXIII notes in paragraph #115 that, “It will not be difficult for the body politic . . . to pursue an economic and social policy which facilitates the widest possible distribution of private property” (#115).


50. Ibid., 676–77.

51. John XXIII, Pacem in Terris #58. See also the Holy Father’s insistence that, since the common good is “intimately bound up with human nature, [it] can never exist fully and completely unless the human person is taken into account at all times” (John XXIII, Pacem in Terris #55; See also #53–60). Although the terminology in both Mater et Magistra and Pacem in Terris is similar, note the astute distinction of Marvin Mitch that I cite below from his “Commentary on Mater et Magistra,” pages 191–216 in Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005).


Mater et Magistra and the Notion of the Common Good


60. Ibid., 214.

61. Ibid.


63. John Paul II, Centesimus Annus #5.