

1961

Encyclical Letter

Mater et Magistra

On Christianity and Social Progress

John XXII

(Excerpts)

15 May 1961

45. In dealing with the family the Supreme Pontiff [Pius XII] affirmed that the private ownership of material goods has a great part to play in promoting the welfare of family life. It “secures for the father of a family the healthy liberty he needs in order to fulfill the duties assigned him by the Creator regarding the physical, spiritual and religious welfare of the family”(AAS XXXIII, 1941). It is in this that the right of families to migrate is rooted. And so Our Predecessor, in speaking of migration, admonished both parties involved, namely the country of departure and the country receiving the newcomers, to seek always “to eliminate as far as possible all obstacles to the birth and growth of real confidence” (AAS XXIII, 1931) between the nations. In this way both will contribute to, and share in, the increased welfare of man and the progress of culture. [20 5]

54. The present advance in scientific knowledge and productive technology clearly puts it within the power of the public authority to a much greater degree than ever before to reduce imbalances which may exist between different branches of the economy or between different regions within the same country or even between the different peoples of the world. It also puts into the hands of public authority a greater means for limiting fluctuations in the economy and for providing effective measures to prevent the recurrence of mass unemployment. Hence the insistent demands on those in authority—since they are responsible for the common good—to increase the degree and scope of their activities in the economic sphere, and to devise ways and means and set the necessary machinery in motion for the attainment of this end. [20 6]

124. We know that as an economy develops, the number of people engaged in agriculture decreases, while the percentage employed in industry and the various services rises. Nevertheless, We believe that very often this movement of population from farming to industry has other causes besides those dependent upon economic expansion. Among these there is the desire to escape from confining surroundings which offer little prospect of a more comfortable way of life. There is the lure of novelty and adventure which has taken such a hold on the present generation, the attractive prospect of easy money, of greater freedom and the enjoyment of all the amenities of town and city life. But a contributory cause of this movement away from the country is doubtless the fact that farming has become a depressed occupation. It is inadequate both in productive efficiency and in the standard of living it provides. [20 7]

127. In the first place, considerable thought must be given, especially by public authorities, to the suitable development of essential facilities in country areas—such as roads; transportation; means of communication; drinking water; housing; health services; [20 8]

elementary, technical and professional education; religious and recreational facilities; and the supply of modern installations and furnishings for the farm residence. Such services as these are necessary nowadays if a becoming standard of living is to be maintained. In those country areas where they are lacking, economic and social progress is either prevented or greatly impeded, with the result that nothing can be done to retard the drift of population away from the land, and it even becomes difficult to make a good appraisal of the numbers involved.

130. One advantage which would result from the adoption of this plan would be that it would be easier to keep track of the movement of the working force set free by the progressive modernization of agriculture. Facilities could then be provided for the training of such people for their new kind of work, and they would not be left without economic aid and the mental and spiritual assistance they need to ensure their proper integration in their new social milieu. [209]

Source: Excerpts from Encyclical “Mater et Magistra” (John XXIII). Available from Vatican’s website:http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jxiii_en_c_15051961_mater_en.html.
