



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING PROMOTED
BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ENCYCLICAL "MATER ET MAGISTRA"**

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 16 May 2011*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am glad to welcome you and to greet you on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of [Bl. John XXIII](#)'s Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, a document that is still very timely even in this globalized world.

I greet the Cardinal President, whom I thank for his courteous words, as well as the Secretary, the collaborators of the Dicastery and all of you who have gathered here from all the continents for this important congress.

In *Mater et Magistra* Pope Roncalli, with his vision of a Church placed at the service of the human family especially through her specific mission of evangelization, conceived of social doctrine — anticipating [Bl. John Paul II](#) — as an *essential element* of this mission, because it is “an integral part of the Christian conception of life” (n. 222). [John XXIII](#) is at the origin of the affirmations of his Successors even when he pointed out in the Church the *communitarian* and *plural* subject of social doctrine.

The *Christifideles* laity, in particular, cannot be solely passive beneficiaries but are the protagonists of the Church's social doctrine at the vital moment of its implementation. They are

also valuable collaborators of the pastors in its formulation, thanks to the experience they have acquired in the field and to their own specific skills. For [Bl. John XXIII](#) this was particularly true of the Church's social doctrine, of which *Truth* is its light, *Justice* its objective, and *Love* its driving force (n. 226).

I took up his vision of social doctrine in the Encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#), as a testimony of that continuity which keeps together the whole *corpus* of the social Encyclicals. Truth, love and justice, indicated in *Mater et Magistra*, along with the principle of the universal destination of resources as the fundamental criteria for overcoming social and cultural *imbalances*, continue to be the pillars on which to base the interpretation and also the search for a solution to the internal *imbalances* of today's globalization.

In the face of these imbalances it is necessary to re-establish an *integral reason* that regenerates thinking and ethics. Without moral thought capable of overcoming the structure of secular ethics, such as the neo-utilitarian and neo-contractual, that are based mainly on skepticism and on a prevalently immanentistic view of history, access to knowledge of the *true human good* becomes difficult for contemporary man.

It is necessary to develop *humanistic cultural syntheses* open to the Transcendent through a *new evangelization* — rooted in the new law of the Gospel, the law of the Spirit — towards which Bl. John Paul ii frequently urged us.

Only in personal communion with the New Adam, Jesus Christ, is human reason healed and empowered and it becomes possible to gain a broader vision of development, of the economy and of politics, in accordance with their anthropological dimension and the new historical conditions.

It is thanks to reason, whose *speculative* and *practical* capacity has been restored, that it is possible to avail oneself of the basic criteria in order to overcome global imbalances in the light of the common good. In fact, without knowledge of the *true human good*, charity lapses into sentimentalism (cf. n. 3); justice loses its fundamental "measure", the principle of the universal destination of resources is delegitimized.

Disparity, the gap between the rich and the poor and *inequalities* are nourished by the various global imbalances that characterize our epoch. They create problems of justice and hamper the fair distribution of resources and opportunities, especially with regard to the poorest.

However, no less worrying are the phenomenon linked to a financial system which, after the most acute phase of the crisis, has returned to the frenzied practice of drawing up credit contracts that often allow unlimited speculation. The phenomena of harmful speculation occur also in regard to staple foodstuffs, water and land, ultimately further impoverishing those already living in borderline situations.

Likewise, the increase in the prices of basic energy resources, with the consequent search for alternative forms of energy prompted, on occasion, by exclusively short-term financial interests, which can result in a negative impact on the environment, as well as on man himself.

The social question today is without a doubt one of *world social justice* as, moreover, *Mater et Magistra* already mentioned 50 years ago, although with reference to a different context. Furthermore, it is a question of the just *distribution* of material and non-material resources, of the *globalization* of *substantive social* and *participatory democracy*. For this reason, in a context in which a gradual unification of humanity is taking place, it is indispensable that the *new evangelization of society* highlight the implications of a justice that should be achieved at a universal level.

With reference to the *foundation* of this justice it should be emphasized that it is impossible to achieve it through social consensus alone, without recognizing that, to be permanent, it must be rooted in the *universal good of humanity*. With regard to the plan of *realization*, social justice should be practised in civil society, in the market economy (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 35), but also by a proportionately honest and transparent political authority, also at the international level (cf. *ibid.*, n. 67).

With regard to the great challenges of our day, while the Church trusts primarily in the Lord Jesus and in his Spirit, who lead her through the events of the world, for the spread of the social doctrine she also relies on the activity of her cultural institutions, her programmes for religious instruction and social catechesis in the parishes, on the mass media and on the proclamation and witness of the *Christifideles laici* (cf. *Mater et Magistra*, nn. 207-208).

The latter must be *spiritually*, *professionally* and *ethically* prepared. *Mater et Magistra* insisted not only on formation but also on the *education* that forms a Christian conscience and introduces the person to concrete action in accordance with wisely guided *discernment*.

Bl. John XXIII said that “Christian education... must... aim at... fostering among the faithful... their duty to carry on the economic and social activities in a Christian manner (n. 228). Consequently, to be successful, formal instruction must be supplemental by... active cooperation in their own training” (n. 231) put into practice.

Still valid, too, in addition, are the instructions that Pope Roncalli offered on a legitimate pluralism among Catholics in the implementation of the social doctrine. He wrote, in fact, that in this context “differences of opinion in the application of principles can sometimes arise even among sincere Catholics. When this happens, they should be careful not to lose their respect and esteem for each other. Instead, they should strive to find points of agreement for effective and quick action, and not wear themselves out in interminable arguments, and, under pretext of the better or the best, omit to do the good that is possible and therefore obligatory” (n. 238).

Important *institutions* at the service of the new evangelization of the social fabric, besides volunteer organizations and Christian non-governmental organizations or those inspired by Christian ideals, are the *Commissions "Justice and Peace"*, the *Offices for Social and Labour Problems*, the *Centres and Institutes of social doctrine*, many of which do not confine themselves to its study and spread, but also accompany various initiatives that experiment with the content of the social Magisterium, as is the case with social cooperatives for development, experiences of micro-credit and an economy inspired by the logic of communion and fraternity.

In *Mater et Magistra* Bl. John XXIII recalled that one can better understand the basic demands of justice when one "walks a 'child of the light'" (cf. 257). Therefore, my wish for you is that the Risen Lord may warm your hearts and help you to spread the fruit of redemption through a new evangelization of the social sphere and the witness of a *righteous life* according to the Gospel. May this evangelization be supported by a proper social apostolate, systematically put into effect in the various particular Churches. In a world that is frequently self-centred, without hope, the Church expects you to be leaven, tireless sowers of *genuine and responsible thought* and *generous social planning*, sustained by a total love of the truth that abides in Jesus Christ, the Word of God made man. In thanking you for your work, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.