

**IN THE TEMPLE OF CREATION:
AMERICAN AGRICULTURE, FIFTY YEARS AFTER *MATER ET MAGISTRA***

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Introduction:

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

If we look upon the last 50 years of American agriculture from the perspective of production, an astonishing portrait of accomplishment emerges. In 1961, the year of the promulgation of *Mater et magistra*, U.S. agriculture produced 3.6 billion bushels of corn, 1.2 billion bushels of wheat, and 679 million bushels of soybeans. It was a remarkable period of productivity following the post-war years of development and prosperity. Today, however, such accomplishments seem modest by comparison, for those same figures have multiplied several times over: corn production has increased by 350%, wheat production has nearly doubled, and soybean harvests have multiplied by a factor of 5, nearly a 500% increase when compared to only a generation earlier. These human achievements in the arena of agriculture are almost too difficult to comprehend; they give witness to the remarkable fruits of God's providence *and* human labor, and manifest what some might call a certain "rule of superabundance."

And yet if we consider the same phenomena from the perspective of the human person, a less sanguine portrait emerges. Side by side with the staggering achievements in production values stand the more sobering statistics concerning the social goods of American agricultural life. From this perspective, history seems to have stood still, for in many ways we can reaffirm what was said 50 years ago: namely, that "the increased efficiency of social and economic systems . . . serves also to bring to light certain glaring discrepancies."ⁱ

In 1960, 4 million farms were occupied by families; today, within a span of one generation, half of the family farms in the United States have disappeared.ⁱⁱ For the decades *prior* to *Mater et magistra*, the family farm was promoted by the Catholic Church as one of the most ideal conditions in which a family might be raised and a livelihood pursued.ⁱⁱⁱ In the fifty years *following* its promulgation, the family farm has been decimated, and its status has been reduced to a nostalgic memory of an era largely believed to have evaporated.

Coupled with these costs to the "human ecology," one can include the burdens on the natural order: soil erosion, soil depletion, water contamination, and extensive environmental damage continue to plague industrial agriculture, despite ongoing efforts to address these concerns.

To assess the achievements of American agriculture, then, merely from the prism of its production values, would be naïve, and in many ways irresponsible, from the vantage of appropriate social analysis. For Catholics especially, in light of our commitments to the human person, no analysis of American agriculture is adequate without an explicit reflection on the impact this industry has had upon the human community and the person, considered as an image of God and steward of the earth.

Many aspects of the circumstances I have mentioned here have not gone without notice, as the Church has repeatedly called us to reflect on these dimensions. Time does not permit us to recall all of the efforts on the part of the Holy Father to raise concern about the re-assessment of agriculture both from an environmental and human standpoint. "The time is now for the re-evaluation of agriculture," the Holy Father has said at a recent Angelus address, "not in some nostalgic sense, but as an indispensable resource for the future."^{iv}

Blessed John Paul II, in many of his social encyclicals and especially in his own personal witness before the people of Iowa in 1979, brought the issues of agricultural stewardship before the conscience of the United States in unprecedented ways.

The United States Bishops, too, at both the national and regional levels need to be recognized for their persistent efforts to lead the Church to a deeper understanding of the human, ethical, and social concerns at the heart of our agricultural tradition.^v

Special attention needs to be given to the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, which for over 80 years has worked to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ and the social teachings of His Church into the heart of rural life in the United States. Established by Fr. (later Archbishop) Edwin O'Hara, in 1923, the Conference continues to be one of the principal means by which Catholic social thought is disseminated? among rural farmers, primarily of the central United States.^{vi} Historically, the conference served as a catalyst for discussion, a clearinghouse for best practices, and an advocacy organization to promote its Catholic rural philosophy. Among its many accomplishments were a series of summer courses, in which a "rural philosophy" was offered by theologians, social scientists, and agricultural experts, throughout rural communities. At its peak, some sixty schools enrolled 1,700 priests, 9,000 women religious, and 12,000 laity in various schools of rural philosophy sponsored by the Conference at colleges and universities?.

Today, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference continues in its efforts in the arena of policy advocacy and shares its best practices among a variety of social agencies, all dedicated to the integration of Catholic social thought and agricultural practice. Together with the Bishops and allied social agencies, a persistent and noble effort has been put forth to bring the dignity of the human person into the forefront of American agricultural policy and practice.

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And yet, it is precisely here, my brothers and sisters, here at the intersection of agriculture and the human person, that one encounters what is perhaps the most staggering statistic concerning the essential relationship between agricultural life and Catholic life as it has unfolded in United States in the last 50 years. And it is simply this: Of the 244 Catholic degree granting institutions of higher learning within the United States, *not one* offers a program of study in Agriculture.

How can this be? How can it be that the single, most prominent facet of American economic life is absent from the arena of Catholic higher education? What is it about Catholic education or agriculture today that has contributed to this great divorce?

This is a reality that begs for further analysis. And this afternoon, I would like to reflect more fully on the circumstances of agricultural life in the United States, especially as they bear upon the mission of the Church to nurture and instruct, indeed, to be both mother and teacher, of the next generation of Catholic faithful.

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It may be argued that the history of Catholic higher education in the United States has been largely played out in an urban context, and as such, educational institutions have a kind of natural prejudice for urban affairs and their concerns. Historically, Catholic higher education in the United States has admirably served the needs of immigrant populations and has served to facilitate their entry into contemporary, professional life. The achievements in this regard are remarkable and well documented, and need not be rehearsed here.

But while the urban character of Catholic higher education may account for why agricultural concerns do not register among its institutional endeavors, its wholesale absence in Catholic centers of higher learning demands a more probative account.

Especially as one considers the ever-increasing prominence of agriculture as an economic reality, its absence in Catholic higher education is remarkable. Indeed, considering the broader aspects of agriculture and its importance, namely, in food security, human labor, the use of the earth's resources, the treatment of animals, habits of consumption, and the stewardship of the earth,

to name a few, the exclusion of agriculture as a human and therefore moral endeavor from the arena of the Church's educational mission is simply unacceptable.

Consider the situation from the vantage of the family farm. Parents who wish to hand on a tradition of livelihood are essentially faced with a difficult decision. Either they send their children to learn the best in agricultural practices at secular institutions and thus effectively end their formation in Catholic intellectual culture. Or they send their children to Catholic institutions of higher learning and abandon the hopes for their ongoing development in the family tradition. Both options seem inadequate as both compromise the ability to hand on a living faith across generations of Catholic rural life.

Consider these same circumstances from the vantage of the young person. Already faced with the unprecedented challenges of contemporary secularization, what impress is made upon the youth of this generation who grow up on the farm and perhaps give thought to its continuance as their vocation? Even if the family were to make the difficult sacrifices necessary to earn a degree at a Catholic university, the young person would nonetheless enter an intellectual community in which his or her family's occupation, an occupation that might have spanned several generations, remains nonetheless invisible.

The complete and thoroughgoing absence of any sustained interaction between Catholic educational institutions and agricultural studies can only lead to mutual misunderstanding and recrimination, alienation and isolation. The two communities of discourse inevitably proceed without a common language. Too often, the legitimate values of production are poised against the equally important values of preservation and conservation of the earth's natural resources.^{vii} The overall situation becomes unsustainable and is ultimately a contradiction of the human person, whose vocation from the very beginning has been to "till and keep the earth," that is, to draw from her resources a meaningful livelihood, and to steward her resources for the generations to come.

The Church as the mother and teacher, cannot remain indifferent to these concerns and at the same time remain true to herself. As John the XXIII so aptly stated: "Mother and Teacher of all nations—such is the Catholic Church . . . to hold the world in an embrace of love, that men and women, in every age, should find in her their own completeness in a higher order of living, and their ultimate salvation."^{viii}

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In order to arrive at a proper assessment of the situation, one needs to probe more deeply, if only briefly here, into the causes of the surprising lacunae which has emerged between Catholic social tradition, which speaks repeatedly about the importance of agricultural stewardship and its absence in Catholic educational institutions of higher learning.

I suggest that the problem of the gap between Catholic social tradition and Catholic educational practice is rooted in deeper problems of an intellectual sort: namely, the loss of a theology of creation, a philosophy of nature, which lies at the heart of the Church's social tradition concerning the meaning of man and the task of agriculture.

Others have openly wondered why agricultural issues seem to have failed to register within Catholic higher education despite concerted efforts among committed groups to address this gap. In particular, two historians have written about the history of the NCRLC, its record of accomplishments, and its subsequent waning of influence in educational venues.^{ix} At the conclusion of their essay, they mention only in passing what I take to be one of the keys to a proper analysis of the overall situation, namely, that the social teachings concerning agricultural stewardship are not merely practical suggestions; rather they are rooted in the Church's speculative tradition about the meaning of creation and the human person, a speculative tradition inspired by St. Thomas Aquinas. In other words, the Catholic social superstructure was built upon the much broader, more comprehensive, philosophical tradition of the Common Doctor. It was his philosophy of nature, a

philosophy of creation and the human person, that provided the fundamental context out of which the principles of Catholic agrarian life had been formed. This was the “rural philosophy” that nurtured the social tradition and established the intellectual climate in which its social doctrine, including *Mater et magistra*, was nurtured.

To the extent, then, that a Thomistic approach to the understanding of nature and man continues to be an influence in Catholic education, to that extent its social doctrine on matters of agriculture will be able to gain significant traction, *for classical Thomism insists that the native habitat of the human person as an embodied, intellectual creature is our material cosmos of created beings, intelligently ordered by God and intelligibly grasped by man, a nexus of which constitutes the natural environment of the human person as such.* The human person, whose dignity lies in his spiritual destiny, is nonetheless a creature of the earth, an embodied being among embodied beings, whose immortal soul by nature transcends material creation and yet by grace permeates it with eternal significance.

The entire hierarchy of being, from the lowliest creature up to man (and, beyond, to angels), is permeated by a Provident intelligence that supplies the necessary connections between lower creation and its grace-filled care. Agricultural life, perhaps more than any other occupation, unfolds within this milieu. The successful farmer, who attends to the soil, enters into a relationship with an order of creation that is itself intelligently ordered and whose wisdom becomes his norm. One ignores the order of reality at the risk of one’s own peril, as practical wisdom must submit to a *logos* which lies hidden in the order of things.

The well-ordered farm, more importantly the well-ordered farmer, reflects the natural law of a prudential stewardship, not as some lonely despot over an untamed wilderness, nor as some demagogue over an otherwise meaningless order of nature. Rather, the prudent steward participates in a provident order of reality, an *imago dei* amidst the *vestigiae*, a minister in the “temple of creation.”^x

Agriculture, specifically in this context, is understood to be a “co-operative art,” because its tasks are yoked to the intelligible forces at work in creation itself.^{xi} Like the teacher who guides the natural desire to know on the part of the student, or the doctor who capitalizes on the natural desire to live, the prudent farmer labors *with* nature’s creative forces and coaxes from the earth the fruits she is destined by Providence to yield. His practical craft is to be distinguished from that of the artisan, who works to create what is first only in the human mind. The farmer, by contrast, becomes a master in his craft only through the long and laborious tutorial in the fields. Agriculture, then, is a unique human enterprise, for it is through this labor, perhaps more than any other, that one learns of the wisdom of the Creator and His ways.^{xii}

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All of these reflections would have been familiar to the Catholic student in 1961, for they formed the essential outlines of his or her intellectual formation. In 1961, Pope John XXIII could have counted on a generation of Catholics who would have been at least familiar with the contours of a philosophy of creation and the human person, and these would have supplied, at least in some general level, the outlines of a context for social concern.

In the typical undergraduate curriculum leading up to the 1960’s, the general subject of philosophy would have been divided into two distinct courses of cosmology and psychology, or the study of inanimate and animate nature.^{xiii} *Together* these courses would have provided, at least in theory, an account of both the uniquely deliberative actions of the human person, but also (and this was essential) an account of the native habitat of the human being – namely, the created world as intelligently ordered by God. In the realist landscape of Thomist thought, the human person is always set within the broader framework of an intelligible order of things, an order sustained by God as both First and Final cause.

In my own university, for example, in 1961, every student was required to have completed at least four courses in philosophy (and at least six in theology) as part of his general educational

formation. The first course in the cycle, a general course entitled “Introductory Philosophy,” covered a range of subjects. But most importantly for our purposes, special attention was given to, “the study of the material world within general experience, . . . [and] the place of man in the material world.”^{xiv}

Over time, with the decreasing presence of philosophy in Catholic undergraduate formation in general, and the Thomistic tradition specifically, philosophical psychology and philosophical cosmology disappeared as specific courses of instruction from the intellectual tradition. The net result is something like we often find in our present circumstances. If there is a course at all that treats of the human person in an average Catholic curriculum, it is most likely the “philosophy of the human person,” and such a course deals with debates largely developed along modern lines, that is, post-Cartesian terms; specifically, extensive energy is spent defending certain aspects of the human person over and against reductive, materialist rivals.^{xv}

To be sure, teaching Catholic students about the immaterial aspects of the human person is very much a worthy undertaking. But this can sometimes run the risk of supposing that the Church’s only interest in developing a proper understanding of the human person is to defend the immateriality exclusively. What can be lost in such a one-sided portrait are precisely the embodied dimensions of what it means to be a human being-- and all that goes with embodiment, especially the vocation to steward the goods of the earth. In an attempt to defend a notion of the person against a reductive materialism, one also has to guard against an over emphasis on the spiritual aspects, thereby creating a kind of post-Cartesian angelism in Catholic guise.

The solution lies in promoting the conception of the human person as both spiritual *and* embodied, a substantial union of soul *and* body that was developed by St. Thomas and remains a vital philosophy of existence to this day.

In such a setting, the human person is not taken to be the exception to an otherwise purely materialist order of things; rather, the human person is set amidst a radically intelligible order of creation already permeated with hylemorphic creatures, specifically, the plant and animal kingdoms of lower creation.

Notwithstanding the dignity of the human being as the *imago dei*, the human person nonetheless occupies the lowest order of intellectual creatures, because the human being is utterly dependent upon material substances in order to engage in any intellectual acts. This is one of the central claims of Thomas’ philosophical and theological realism and it provides one of the most vital links to an analysis of the human person within the natural order, for his portrait of the person is premised upon the notion that created being is *prior to* any human knowing or human acting.

At the heart of a sound social ethic of agriculture, then, lies a natural philosophy of creation, an order utterly dependent upon a provident First Cause, whose causality extends to the operations of individual creatures.^{xvi} Against the vast and undifferentiated *res extensa* of modernist philosophy, a distinctly Catholic approach to creation would include the formally distinctive and finally ordered aspects of each creature.^{xvii}

If we hope to renew our social teachings surrounding agriculture, it will not be enough, then, to simply “return to the subject,” or even to champion the “dignity of the human person”. Unless there is a corresponding affirmation of material creation – “the stuff” of human intelligence – we run the risk of falling back into the kind of Enlightenment reductionism we sought to evade at the beginning of our efforts.^{xviii} Material creatures, charged with formal meaning and finally ordered toward the common good of the universe are the first and proper objects of human intellection and as such material creation in its intelligible splendor is the fitting “environment” of the human person.^{xix}

In such a realist world, the *ordo* of creation is understood to inhere in things. The formal intelligibility of living organisms as well as the finalities toward which they naturally tend are objectively constituted in reality and express “the design of love and truth of the Creator Himself.” Such an order “is prior to us and has been given to us by God as the setting of our life.”^{xx} It is not humanly derived from a set of clear and distinct ideas of a disembodied cogito (Descartes); it is not the apparatus of a transcendental reason (Kant); nor is it the mere force of human habit or custom

(Hume). It is intrinsic to things and its apprehension by reason is an exercise in objective knowing.^{xxi}

It needs also to be emphasized that such an order, moreover, is not directly implicated in the fall.^{xxii} How the doctrine of original sin shapes our encounter with lower creation is one of the most important questions the church is facing concerning our care of the earth. It would take us too far afield today to explore the issue fully.

But permit me to offer the following remarks. The punishment of original sin, the loss of original justice, does not directly implicate the lower orders of creation, specifically the animals, the plants, or inorganic matter. Rather, it is *our* grasp of the *logos* of creation that is now fleeting and fraught with error due to original sin. For their part, Aquinas says, “all natural things were produced by the Divine art, and so may be called God’s works of art.”^{xxiii}

It follows, then, that if it is *we* who are sinful and the creature is not, a certain deference to its intelligibility would be the only prudent measure to take. The precautionary principle of Catholic social thought would apply most forcefully in our treatment of lower creation because it is *our* ways, not nature’s ways, which are caught up in the drama of sin. Recovering the realist tradition of form and finality, it seems to me, is one the surest way to enrich our understanding of how creation’s art is to be grasped and thus prudently used for the benefit of man and the glory of God. For form and finality point to a rationality that transcends mere matter; form and finality point to a divine benevolence at work in the order and beauty of the world.

Before we propose to modify creatures to suit our expectations, it would be wise to consider how our own ways of acting may be in need of modification. Before we ignore the form and finality of living things – the distinctive principles of organic life-- we might pause to consider how our modern biases lend themselves to reducing the creature to an artifact, and thus the craft of agriculture to simply another industry. The deliberate, genetic modification of a naturally occurring creature is not just an exercise in human ingenuity; it is a recasting of the creature as a mere product of human making. If unchecked by the norms of prudence,^{xxiv} such practices run the risk of deforming creation, whose original wisdom is our norm, of transforming the creature into a “resource” whose value is to be merely to be “used.” It is not a question of using creatures for the benefit of man and the glory of God. It is rather a question of the norms for such use, norms which are not only written in the human heart, but written into creation itself from the beginning.^{xxv}

In addition to providing a more adequate notion of our relationship with lower creation, the affirmation of the doctrine of original sin would also supply the much needed corrective against those who want to elevate nature and its ways beyond proportion. For while the doctrine of original sin reminds us that it is *we* who are aliens in an otherwise integral order, such alienation will only find its remedy in the grace of Christ.^{xxvi} In short, there are no practices at the personal or public level which will overcome the alienation which lies at the heart of the human being as he or she ponders our place in the world. Christ, not creation, is the answer to a fulfilled life, and fidelity to Him will be our only route to a satisfying stewardship.

At the heart of so many programs of environmental stewardship lies a subtle Pelagianism, that is, the notion that one can be saved or all can be made right with the world simply by practicing ever more austere programs of efficiency or simplicity. It was Pelagius in the 4th century who preached the heretical doctrine of salvation through good will and arduous effort, self-discipline and austerity, rigor and steadfastness, and it is this same promissory tone one often encounters in contemporary discussions of the environment. Efficiency is a feature of prudent use, but it is not itself an end. Efficiency cannot address the spiritual wound within the heart of the human being, who nonetheless dwells in the gift of an integral cosmos.

By investing green practices with a kind of significance they simply cannot bear, we place a false and ultimately futile confidence in technological achievements. A genuinely Catholic approach to agriculture, then, is to be understood within the more humble context of our filial adoption; we are stewards of the earth because we are adopted sons and daughters of creation’s Owner. The absence of any reference to Christ when considering agricultural practice reduces the

vocation to care for the earth merely within a secular horizon, as if our destiny is merely to co-exist among species, as managers in a managed world.

Finally, because original sin is said to merely wound, but not destroy human nature, we have to remember that the original message of creation and its Creator remains intact and is accessible to human reason and discernment. Indeed, our rational participation in the eternal law made manifest in creation constitutes the basic features of the moral life and comprises the primary precepts of the natural law.

We need to renew our understanding of the human person as an intellectual creature who, though wounded by sin, is nonetheless *situated within a natural order of intelligible substances*, a multi-textured complex of teleologically ordered wholes, whose existence is utterly dependent upon and ordered by God as First and Final cause. Recovering the significance of formal and final causality in creation as articulated in the classic Thomistic natural philosophy would go a long way to restoring an appropriate grasp of the questions at stake.^{xxvii}

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Returning to the immediate subject of *Mater et magistra* – it may not have been the stretch in 1961 that it seems to be now, to move from a consideration of the unique status of human beings among embodied creatures, to the responsibilities within creation that are incumbent with this privileged status.^{xxviii}

This waning of a realist tradition would account, at least in part, both for the difficulty of Catholics to engage agricultural stewardship in a distinctly Catholic manner and the subsequent invisibility of such efforts on the part of the Church to rouse that same concern. It is not so much about the failure of a social tradition as it is the increasing tone deafness on the part of Catholic intellectuals to the realist theology of creation that is its proper medium.^{xxix}

Agriculture, as the co-operative art of man and nature, could disappear from the horizon of Catholic inquiry, because the distinctive features of its praxis – namely, the cooperation of man with an intelligible order of creation, would recede into the shadows of a mechanistic view of nature itself. The distinctly human principles of its craft, the wisdom of its ways and the traditions of stewardship and animal husbandry, would be absorbed into the world of mere technique and efficiency, production and industrialization. The *vestigia dei* having been reduced to a mere *res extensa*, nature no longer bears the divine impress, but is subject to the manipulations of a practical reasoning alone, whose ethos is mere technique and whose mantra is mere efficiency.

Against the backdrop of staggering achievements in production and efficiency, the original vocation to till and keep the earth would soon be rendered nostalgic and quaint, a remnant of an era long past with the ever increasing refinements in method. Coupled with a forgetfulness of our own sinfulness, such achievements can dwarf the original gift of things and silence the voice of the Creator who speaks in creation.

Such a renewal in our philosophy of nature, would not only contribute to a more comprehensive, Catholic stewardship of lower creation, but it would provide the necessary context in which the full personality of man, as a co-operator with God, could develop. Perhaps the single greatest pastoral challenge in overcoming the “depressed occupation”^{xxx} of industrial agriculture, will be confronting the ideology of industrialization itself which has usurped our vision of nature and thus the vocation of the farmer as steward. “Separated from God,” *Mater et Magistra* cautions us, “a man is but a monster, in himself and toward others.”^{xxxi} If we hope to advance the conversation in the arena of agriculture, we will need to engage more deliberately in a reflection on the human person as an embodied creature within an intelligible order of being.

How that engagement ought to unfold remains to be seen, and is likely to take place through a number of concerted efforts: the Catholic university seems the most apt place in which deliberate study on the questions of agriculture need to be thoroughly investigated. Perhaps it is prudent to consider, as well, the creation of Pontifical Institutes in a variety of regional areas, dedicated to the questions of agriculture and the environment, in much the same manner as the issues of marriage and family are studied today. Such institutes could provide the invaluable service of reviewing our

best practices in the light of our deepest theological commitments. Working in collaboration with existing institutions of higher learning, such institutes could be in a position to capitalize on the best research in both Catholic and secular circles.

In closing, allow me to summarize: unless there is a common vision of creation that animates both our social tradition and our daily praxis, the distinct worlds of Catholic social thought and agricultural life will continue to remain separated. Despite the nearly fifty years of consistent efforts on the part of the Church to animate this human industry with principles of justice and peace, a gap nonetheless persists between our intellectual endeavors and our daily labors. Such a fissure has opened up, I argue, because of an attitude toward the material order that is fundamentally at odds with the tradition, one that has been allowed to go largely unchallenged in the generations since *Mater et magistra*.

Only by retracing our steps, by recovering and renewing the Church's vision of creation and the human person, will we be able to develop a generation of Catholic stewards. If we are to effectively engage in a new evangelization of agricultural praxis we will need to re-emphasize several distinct but related claims: a defense of a realist philosophy of creatures as formally intelligible and teleologically ordered; an account of the human person as an spiritual creature within a material cosmos--naturally ordered, supernaturally fulfilled; and a vision of stewardship which elucidates these principles and guides our reasonable participation in this divinely ordered cosmos. These are the outlines of a renewed Thomism, a green Thomism, and it is these features which will underwrite our efforts to evangelize those concerned for the care of the earth. Such an exercise would not be a mere nostalgia, nor an antiquated interest in an era long past.^{xxxii} Rather, by renewing the perennial wisdom of the Church, the "rule of superabundance" which has characterized our progress would be set within the more fundamental logic of the gift.

Let us conclude with the remarks of the Holy Father himself, who in 1989, as Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, had this to say:

"We have to make evident once more what is meant by the world's having been created 'in wisdom' and that God's creative act is something quite other than the 'bang' of primeval explosion. Only then can conscience and norm enter again into proper relationship. For then it will become clear that conscience is not some individualistic (or collective) calculation; rather it is a "con-sciens", a "knowing along with" creation and, through creation, with God the Creator. Then, too, it will be rediscovered that man's greatness does not lie in the miserable autonomy of some midget proclaiming himself his one and only master, but in the fact that his being allows the highest wisdom, truth itself, to shine through. Then it will become clear that man is so much the greater the more he is capable of hearing the profound message of creation, the message of the Creator. And then it will be apparent how harmony with creation, whose wisdom becomes our norm, does not mean a limitation upon our freedom but is rather an expression of our reason and our dignity. Then the body also is given its due honor: it is no longer something "used", but is the temple of authentic human dignity because it is God's handiwork in the world. . . ."^{xxxiii}

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ⁱ John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, 48.

ⁱⁱ I am grateful for the research and information provided by Jim Ennis and Robert Gronski of The National Catholic Rural Life Conference. For an overview of some of the relevant issues surrounding food security and agricultural practice in light of Catholic social teaching see also, Martin M. McLaughlin, *World Food Security: A Catholic View of Food Policy in the New Millennium*. (Washington, D. C.: Center of Concern, 2002).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Mater et magistra*, 142.

^{iv} November 14, 2010. <http://www.zenit.org/article-30959?l=english>

^v USCCB (2003) *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farm Workers*; (1988) *Report on the Ad Hoc Task Force on Food, Agriculture and Rural Concerns*; (1986) *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U. S. Economy*; also, (1958) *Explosion or Backfire?*; (1968) *Statement on Farm Labor*; (1972) *Where Shall the People Live*; (1973) *Resolution on Farm Labor*; (1974) *Statement on World Food Crisis: A Pastoral Plan of Action*; (1975) *Food Policy and the Church: Specific Proposals*; (1991) *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*.

^{vi} For a life of Archbishop O'Hara, see, (Archbishop) Timothy Michael Dolan, *Some Seed Fell on Good Ground: The Life of Edwin O'Hara*. (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

^{vii} See Paul B. Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

^{viii} *Mater et magistra*, 1.

^{ix} Christopher Hamlin and John T. McGreevy, "The Greening of America, Catholic Style, 1930 – 1950," *Environmental History* 11 (July, 2006): 464 – 499.

^x *Mater et magistra*, 144.

^{xi} John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 37, "Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him."

^{xii} See Chapter 3, "Agriculture and Personal Values," in *The Importance of Rural Life According to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas: A Study in Economic Philosophy*. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945). Also Emerson Hynes, "Consider the Person," *Catholic Rural Life Bulletin* 2.2 (1939) 16. The integral nature of agricultural labor as well as, more generally, the family farm was a constant theme of Catholic rural social teaching throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s in the United States.

^{xiii} Natural theology was often treated as well.

^{xiv} From the *University of St. Thomas Undergraduate Course Catalog* 1961: "Philosophy 112: Introductory Philosophy. (3 Credits) What philosophy is; its beginnings. Problems about knowledge in Descartes, Hume, and contemporary positivism. The study of the material world from general experience. Analysis of change, potency and act, nature, causes, chance, finality, motion place, time, the unmoved mover, the place of man in the material world."

^{xv} From the *University of St. Thomas 2011 Undergraduate Course Catalog*: "Philosophy 115 Philosophy of the Human Person. An examination of fundamental conceptions of the human person in ancient, medieval and modern philosophy. Possible topics include: the existence and immortality of the human soul, free will and determinism, the immateriality of the intellect, the relationship between mind and body, and the relevance of different conceptions of the human person for ethics and religion. Attention is given to relevant issues of human diversity. The development of logical and critical thinking receives special attention." At <http://www.stthomas.edu/catalog/printed/2010/files/Philosophy10-12.pdf>.

^{xvi} *Summa theologiae*, I.48.5; I.47.1.

^{xvii} *Caritas in veritate*, 48. "Reducing nature merely to a collection of contingent data ends up doing violence to the environment and even encouraging activity that fails to respect human nature itself." There is nothing wrong with investigating nature with the tools of mathematics, physics and the like; rather, the problem lies in failing to recognize that such an approach, instead of uncovering the "truth" of reality, further abstracts from the personal encounter with living being given in primary experience.

^{xviii} This is a much deeper problem than can be elucidated here. While so much effort has been given to overcoming the legacy of Cartesian dualism, such battles have often taken place on the plane of anthropology. The eclipse of cosmology by anthropology (as well as psychology and spiritual theology) is a derailment of the more important project of establishing a philosophical realism which begins not with the intellect, the soul, the ego, the subject, or the person, but with the objects of intelligible creation. For a similar criticism yet for different motives and with different outcomes see, Bruno Latour, "Chapter 1: Do you believe in reality?" in *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. (Harvard University Press, 1999) 1 – 23.

^{xix} The efforts surrounding the development of a theology of the body, while so very fruitful in matters of marriage and sexuality, will need to be further extended to include a "theology of embodiment," that is, a theology of the body from the "skin outward," if you will; lest we develop a notion of the body that, while correcting the dualistic legacies of Descartes and Kant, nonetheless leaves intact the mechanistic universe of their legacies. It is not enough to assert the dignity of the spiritual nature of man, nor even of the spiritual significance of the human body. What needs to be renewed is a philosophy and theology of creation itself, the person as embodied within an intelligible universe of meaning and purpose.

^{xx} *Caritas in veritate*, 48.

^{xxi} "The first act of the intellect is to know, not its own action, not the ego, not phenomena, but objective and intelligible being." Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*. Translated by Rev. Patrick Cummins, OSB. (Saint Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Company, 1950) 388. Cf. *Summa theologiae* I 84.7. "The proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter; and through such natures of visible things it rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible." For a recent discussion of the practical implications of this priority of being for moral theology, especially medical ethics, see, Edward J. Furton, "Ethics Without Metaphysics: A Review of the Lysaught Analysis," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Spring, 2011) 53 – 62.

^{xxii} The thesis that lower creation is not fallen seems to be increasingly beclouded in the Catholic theological tradition, perhaps due to the increasing sensitivity to widespread ecological damage and apparent disorder. But I would also suggest that it may be the

unintended outcome of the disputes concerning a natural/supernatural end for man, in which any talk of a “natural end of man” is often considered theologically inadequate or misleading. See my “Perennial Wisdom: Notes Toward a Green Thomism,” in a forthcoming volume of *Nova et Vetera*. Still, the natural death of creatures, though considered a physical evil, is part of the provident arrangement of things, and is not in itself a manifest sign of sin. Such events would have occurred in the state of original justice and continue in this life in accordance with Divine wisdom. (*Summa theologiae*, I. 96.1 ad 2; I.48.2; I. 65.1 and 2; I-II.98.4 ad 3). We therefore cannot look upon the natural deaths of creatures and the deaths of human persons in the same light. Presuming the absence of any disproportionate human acts causing such, the creature’s natural death manifests the provident ordering of things; our natural death manifests the punishment of sin and points to the need for a Redeemer.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, concerning the famous passages in *Romans* about “the creature/creation” (κτ□σις) which is made subject to futility (Rm. 8.19ff), St. Thomas does not interpret “κτ□σις” as referring especially or exclusively to lower creation, but suggests that it may also indicate either “the just man,” or “human nature itself.” (Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans* Lecture 4, n. 652-670.) Elsewhere, he argues that no species of lower creation is present in the eschaton. From the perspective of the broader theological tradition, however, it seems to be an open question as to what extent lower creation will be “set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rm. 8.21)” within the order of the new heaven and the new earth. Notwithstanding the pluralism concerning the status of creatures in the eschaton, it seems wise to guard against the temptation to read into the church’s eschatological language about lower creation any implicit notion of its present order as intrinsically disordered. In other words, one may speak of the “perfecting” or “fulfillment” of lower creation without at the same time asserting that its present order is therefore defective. It seems more apt to speak of the lower creation as integrally reflecting a Divine Wisdom, yet perfected through the ordinate care/use of the adopted children of God.

Along similar lines, the theological tradition concerning the “preternatural gifts” is germane here. In the state of original justice, Thomas argues that the death of creatures would have occurred and would not have manifest any sin or disorder in the world. Adam, however, was the exception to this rule of organic death. For Adam—in distinction from other creatures, is preserved from bodily death through the preternatural gift of bodily immortality by means of the efficient cause of God’s grace. [(*Summa theologiae* I.97.1; I-II 106 ad 3; also, *Compendium theologiae ad fratrem Reginaldum socium suum carissimum*, 152; 193). Cf. *Denzinger*, 101, 174, 788.] And thus, whereas immortality is proper to the nature of the human soul *qua* soul, the body, strictly from the perspective of its materiality, is not *per se* apt for immortality and would otherwise have been subject to death were it not preserved from such by a special grace. At the same time, in this life, while the human person is subject to bodily decay and physical suffering as a consequence of original sin, there nonetheless remains in the organic functions of the human being (as in the functions of lower creation itself) signs of the teleological and thus normative ordering. To argue for such is not to defend a naïve physicalism, but expresses confidence in the Wisdom of the Creator and the original, theonomic integrity of organic existence. The body has an intrinsic meaning in spite of its bondage to decay.

^{xxiii} *Summa theologiae* I.91.1.

^{xxiv} Because I appeal to the exercise of prudence, it precludes the notion that the deliberate, genetic modification of lower creatures is, strictly speaking, intrinsically disordered. At the same time, prudence would demand the greatest circumspection in such an instance. Because “we are not yet in a position to assess the biological disturbance that could result from indiscriminate genetic manipulation and from the unscrupulous development of new forms of plant and animal life, to say nothing of unacceptable experimentation regarding the origins of human life itself,” (*Compendium*, 458) it is only wise to counsel against such practices.

^{xxv} *Compendium of Catholic Social Thought*, 458, 459. Also, “Science and technology must be put in the service of the divine design for the whole of creation and for all creatures. This design gives meaning to the universe and to human enterprise as well. Human stewardship of the created world is precisely a stewardship exercised by way of participation in the divine rule and is always subject to it. Human beings exercise this stewardship by gaining scientific understanding of the universe, by caring responsibly for the natural world (including animals and the environment) and by guarding their own biological integrity.” International Theological Commission: *Communion and Stewardship: The Human Person in the Image of God*, (2002) 61.

^{xxvi} “Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God “face to face,” will we know the ways by which – even through the dramas of evil and sin – God has guided his creation to that definitive sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 314.

^{xxvii} Others who have sought, with varying degrees of success, to raise these issues include: Willis Jenkins, “Biodiversity and Salvation: Thomistic Roots for Environmental Ethics,” *Journal of Religion*, 83.3 (2003): 401-20; *Ecologies of Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Fr. Robert Grant, *A Case Study in Thomistic Environmental Ethics: The Ecological Crisis in the Loess Hills of Iowa* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); Jill LeBlanc, “Eco-Thomism,” *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 293-306. For an opposing view see Francisco Benzoni, “Thomas Aquinas and Environmental Ethics: A Reconsideration of Providence and Salvation,” *Journal of Religion* 85 no. 3 (2005): 446-76; also, *Ecological Ethics and the Human Soul: Aquinas, Whitehead and the Metaphysics of Value*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). For an excellent discussion of the contemporary relevance of formal and final causality see Giuseppe A. Tanzella-Nitti, “The Relevance of Aristotelian-Thomistic Concept of Nature to the Contemporary Debate Between Science and Theology,” *Annales Theologici* 9 (1995) 107-125. Also, *Faith, Reason and the Natural Sciences: The Challenge of the Natural Sciences in the Work of Theologians*. (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, Publishers: 2009). Not only would the recovery of form and finality aid in the speculative grasp of lower creation, it would facilitate the task of evangelization in leading others to a consideration of the first and final cause of creation. The Church’s consistent affirmation that the existence of God can be discerned by reason through a consideration of the created order is not merely a statement about the capacity of unaided reason, or grace, or epistemology. By implication, the claim affirms the objective intelligibility of things, the order of which provides the rational basis for deducing a supreme first cause. See also my, “Beholding the Logos: The Church, the Environment, and the Meaning of Man,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2009) 33-52.

^{xxviii} Many others have spoken eloquently of some of the themes developed here, specifically the intersections of modern philosophies of nature and the emerging visions of the environment.

^{xxix} I have focused here on trends in philosophical formation. For a brief discussion of these issues in the milieu of theological formation, see my, “Perennial Wisdom: Notes Toward a Green Thomism,” Plenary Address at “Renewing the Face of the Earth: The Church and the Environment Conference,” October 2009, The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity.

^{xxx} *Mater et magistra*, 124.

^{xxxi} *Mater et magistra*, 214.

^{xxxii} Nor would such an effort bear fruit only in the arena of agriculture. Additional areas of concern that could profit from a renewed Thomistic theology of nature would include environmental stewardship, human sexuality, and moral theology, the latter especially as it bears upon the prior dependence of practical reasoning upon the speculative grasp of the teleological order of things. See my, "Perennial Wisdom: Notes Toward a Green Thomism," forthcoming in a special edition of *Nova et Vetera*. For a brilliant analysis of the problem of the eclipse of *natura* within speculative theology generally, see Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). For a more general effort to engage contemporary issues in the light of Thomistic principles, see www.greenthomism.org.

^{xxxiii} Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Fundamental Characteristics of the Present Crisis of Faith," *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 24th, 1989.