

object to their country's nuclear policies, by refusing to participate in them or to support them in any way."¹⁶⁹ A deductivist approach to moral decisions may encourage the development of heroic virtue, but it may also be compatible with blindness to important values or reflections that point to contrary conclusions. This possibility is one reason why the bishops have held back from prescribing personal responses for concerned Catholics.

Second—and this is confirming evidence for the first point—Okin fails to advert to the problem of how the right of defense is to be preserved in an effective way after the renunciation of nuclear weapons and how the important values of freedom and justice are to be protected against Soviet threats. The crucial step that is taken in paragraph 175 of *The Challenge of Peace*, when the authority of John Paul II is invoked to justify the conditional acceptance of deterrence, is based on a recognition of what may be lost or at least jeopardized if the goal of avoiding nuclear war and its enormous evils is given a uniquely dominant position. The point is that morally weighty considerations are found on both sides of the balance in this decision. The effort to protect two vitally important and logically distinct goods can give rise to a certain incoherence, an incoherence that looks suspiciously like muddle and weakness if the observer is effectively concerned about only one of the goods at stake.

Third, Okin's method and the features which it shares with the method of the pastoral should lead us back to the continuing debate on moral norms and methods discussed by Richard McCormick in the first section of these "Notes" and in many preceding years. In the meantime, the pastoral stands as a decisive, though incomplete and imperfect, contribution to the moral debate over American strategic policy and over the resort to force for political objectives in a divided and sinful world. In 1983 it was acclaimed and criticized; in 1984 it continues to open up wider vistas and closer readings. It will probably continue to do so for quite a while.

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THE BISHOPS AND THE U.S. ECONOMY

In November 1984 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, chaired by Archbishop Rembert Weakland, presented its draft pastoral letter on this topic to the assembled bishops and to the public at large. The Bishops' Conference has designed a process for stimulating discus-

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 539.

sion and soliciting feedback as they move toward refinement of the letter for the vote and promulgation of the final text, which is expected in November 1985. The literature on ethics and economics during the past year has been plentiful and the early comments on the bishops' draft have been, to say the least, provocative. Both the increased interest in economic questions by specialists in Christian ethics and the heightened volume of public discussion suggest that the debate will be lively indeed.

Here are a few samples of the reaction in the press to the bishops' first draft. The *New York Times* called it "an impassioned moral appeal for a change of attitudes toward the poor and policies aimed at helping them."¹⁷⁰ The *Times*' resident economic analyst, Leonard Silk, opined that many economists "will applaud the bishops for hitting so hard and challenging the nation to rethink its policies in the name of the well-being of all people."¹⁷¹ *Au contraire*, said the *Wall Street Journal*, someone should "tell the bishops just how profoundly the first draft of their letter misapprehends the nature of capitalism."¹⁷² The misapprehension, suggested Michael Novak, is the result of a lack of appreciation of American institutions by Catholic social thought: "What would the United States look like today if it had been founded solely on the principles of Catholic social thought circa 1776? El Salvador? Brazil? The American experiment deserves much closer and more sympathetic study by Catholics."¹⁷³ Professor George C. Lodge of the Harvard Business School took a quite different view of what the draft's recommendations would do to the U.S. economy were they to be implemented: "The Catholic bishops' draft pastoral letter on the U.S. economy is more than an inspiring call to social justice. . . . It also points to the means through which the nation can regain its lost competitiveness in the world economy."¹⁷⁴

When reactions are as disparate as these and numerous other comments have been, one may be forgiven for suspecting that more is being revealed about the convictions of the commentators than about the contents of the draft pastoral itself. In the interest of clarifying and, it is hoped, advancing the discussion, some of the central perspectives of the draft will be outlined here. Because the draft is lengthy and complex, no attempt at a comprehensive analysis can be made in this limited space. The discussion will be limited to the foundational theological and ethical aspects of the text, and these will be compared with related discussions in the recent literature. The draft's analysis of empirical data and

¹⁷⁰ Kenneth A. Briggs, "Catholic Bishops Ask Vast Changes in Economy of U.S.," *New York Times*, Nov. 12, 1984, 1.

¹⁷¹ "A Call for Economic Change Based on Moral View," *ibid.* B11.

¹⁷² "Capitalism and the Bishops," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 13, 1984, 32.

¹⁷³ "The Bishops and the Poor," *Washington Post*, Nov. 13, 1984, A21.

¹⁷⁴ "Bishops' Sound Advice for US," *Boston Globe*, Dec. 3, 1984, 19.

interpretation of policy options will be left for discussion in other fora.

In order to be clear about the presuppositions of this very initial and modest commentary, it is only honest to point out that the author of this section of the "Notes" was one of the consultants who advised Archbishop Weakland's committee as it produced the draft. Though what is said here is in no way to be identified with the views of the committee, much less the Bishops' Conference as a whole, it does contain a bias to view the document in a favorable light.

The most basic question to be asked, of course, is why the bishops are undertaking an evaluation of complex economic issues in the first place. The draft acknowledges "the difficulties involved in relating moral and religious values to economic life" and states that "moral and religious conviction cannot, simply by itself, produce solutions to economic dilemmas."¹⁷⁵ It affirms, nevertheless, that technical economic questions are inseparable from moral considerations: "Economic activity has a profound effect on the quality of human life and can determine whether people live or die."¹⁷⁶ In continuity with the tradition of modern Catholic social thought, the draft takes as its starting point a Christian commitment to the protection of the dignity of the human person as created in the image of God, to the enhancement of the solidarity of the human community as an expression of both the social nature of the person and of the Christian obligation of concern for the neighbor, and to the religious quest to discover the deeper meaning of the many activities which shape economic life.

In other words, while acknowledging the differentiation of the economic and religious-moral dimensions of human life which is a characteristic of life in societies that have undergone "modernization," the draft refuses to accept a complete separation of the two spheres. Its goal is to show the import of Christian faith and the Christian tradition in that large domain of public life which is the economy. Both the Introduction and the Conclusion of the document explicitly resist the distinctively modern pressure to define faith, theology, and the Church in narrowly private terms. The process of producing the letter gives evidence that the bishops are seeking to shape the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. into a more active participant in what Martin Marty has called "the public church"—"a family of apostolic churches with Jesus Christ at the center, churches which are especially sensitive to the *res publica*, the public order that surrounds and includes people of faith."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, First Draft*, no. 15; text in *Origins* 14 (1984-85) 337-83.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 3. For a very helpful discussion of some of the possibilities and difficulties

Not everyone is as supportive as Martin Marty of such public presence by the Church and its leadership. For example, St. Louis University historian James Hitchcock views it as the result of the emergence within the diocesan and national offices of the Church in the U.S. of "a new species of bureaucrat designated as expert in matters of 'justice and peace.'"¹⁷⁸ Following a line of analysis common in the writings of neoconservative intellectuals, Hitchcock regards these bureaucrats as members of a "new class" whose identity and power rest on their ability to serve as gatekeepers in the generation and transmission of specialized knowledge. In recent years, he believes, the bishops began to see that their experience and background had not prepared them to exercise their authority in a way appropriate to the complex demands of a radically changed world. Thus "many bishops began automatically to defer to their 'experts.'"¹⁷⁹ According to Hitchcock, the increased public involvement of the U.S. Catholic bishops is therefore the result of "the triumph of the bureaucrats,"¹⁸⁰ the abdication of episcopal authority to "those who have made their way into key offices of the church structure in recent years." Hitchcock sees these operatives as "by and large . . . left of center on most public issues" and as "inclined to see the world through a haze of ideology that seems to them like self-evident truth."¹⁸¹

These are strong claims about the sociological and internal organizational shifts within Roman Catholic officialdom, claims for which historian Hitchcock has not provided self-evident backing. Without seeking to refute them with the careful empirical and analytical sort of study they deserve, let me simply state that it has not been my impression that Catholic bishops have been overly eager to abdicate their religious authority to anyone. One hypothesis about the social causes of bishops' increased public role which holds at least equally plausible explanatory promise, I believe, is that which explores the consequences of the large number of recently appointed bishops who have come from backgrounds in direct pastoral ministry. Some of the great Protestant thinkers of this century who played very active roles in debating political and economic questions from a Christian ethical perspective began as pastors in communities harmed by injustice: Walter Rauschenbusch in the Hell's Kitchen section of New York, Karl Barth in the industrial town of Safenwil, Reinhold Niebuhr in conflict-torn Detroit. Hitchcock would do well at least to consider such an alternative explanation before reaching

present in conceiving the Catholic Church in this way in the U.S. today, see J. Bryan Hehir's 1984 commencement address at the Catholic University of America, "A Public Church: The Implications of Structured Pluralism," *Origins* 14 (1984-85) 40-43.

¹⁷⁸ "The Catholic Bishops, Public Policy and the New Class," *This World* 9 (1984) 57.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 63.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 58.

conclusions which reflect so negatively on the judgment and even the integrity of both the bishops and their so-called bureaucrats.

Hitchcock's broadside charge that the public involvement of the Church is clouded over by a "haze of ideology" raises a second, more fundamental question. It implies, I take it, that there is confusion afoot between the transcendent meaning of Christian belief and partial, less ultimate political and social convictions. The truth or falsity of such a charge is, at least in part, a properly theological question. It depends on the identification of a reasonable account of just what Christian belief is, and a critical comparison of this account with the meaning and values implicit in various social-political convictions. Verification or refutation of the charge of "ideological taint" (Reinhold Niebuhr's phrase) is, at root, a task for what has been called "public theology."¹⁸² During the past year several important studies from Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical thinkers have appeared which can help clarify the dimensions of the question.

In a fine essay David Tracy has restated and clarified within brief compass the understanding of public theology which he developed earlier at book length. Theology, Tracy states, speaks "to and from three distinct publics: academy, church, and the general culture."¹⁸³ Its ecclesial source and its ecclesial audience distinguish theology from disciplines such as philosophy and economics, which claim no distinctive religious community, tradition, or faith as their matrix. Thus, for example, the draft pastoral letter states that it intends to base its reflection on the long Catholic tradition "which extends from the Bible to the teaching of Pope John Paul II" and that it seeks "to provide guidance for members of our own Church as they seek to form their consciences and reach moral decisions about economic matters."¹⁸⁴

Tracy goes on to note that ecclesial sources and the ecclesial audience do not circumscribe the task of theology. Religion, and therefore Christian faith and Christian theology, are concerned both with questions that arise at the limits of academic inquiry and cultural experience and also with the meaning and value of the whole of what is.¹⁸⁵ Extrapolating from Tracy, this means that the theological task, and the task of docu-

¹⁸² See the discussions of public theology in this journal several years ago, to which the author of this section of the "Notes" contributed: David Hollenbach, "Public Theology in America: Some Questions for Catholicism after John Courtney Murray," *TS* 37 (1976) 290-303; John A. Coleman, Robin W. Lovin, J. Bryan Hehir, and David Hollenbach, "Theology and Philosophy in Public: A Symposium on John Courtney Murray's Unfinished Agenda," *TS* 40 (1979) 700-715.

¹⁸³ "The Role of Theology in Public Life: Some Reflections," *Word and World* 4 (1984) 230.

¹⁸⁴ *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, nos. 5 and 17.

¹⁸⁵ Tracy, "The Role of Theology" 230.

ments such as the draft pastoral, necessarily include the effort to identify the relationship between Christian faith and such topics as the meaning and purpose of work, the suffering of unemployment, the value of wealth, the struggles and diminishment of poverty, the scope and limits of economic freedom, and the possibilities for and abuses of communitarian economic relationships.

These topics have a secular dimension, but they also have a profoundly religious aspect, as Vatican II pointed out in language cited by the draft pastoral:

What is the meaning and value of this feverish activity? How should all these things be used? To the achievement of what goal are the strivings of individuals and societies heading? . . . What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death which continues to exist despite so much progress? What is the purpose of these victories, purchased at so high a cost? What can man offer to society, what can he expect from it? What follows this earthly life?¹⁸⁶

These are religious questions and they call for religious answers. The task of addressing them in a critical way is the task of public theology.

In another interesting essay James Sellers has observed that "the challenge of reflecting publicly on burning issues in the light of the gospel" is hardly new to Christianity. It has been pursued in a particularly vigorous way by most versions of American Christianity.¹⁸⁷ Under the influence of H. Richard Niebuhr's work, Sellers' reading of the history of American Christianity has led him to identify three distinguishable ways of "going public" which have characterized churches and theologians in this country.

The first, which has been most influential, is the style of evangelical Christianity.¹⁸⁸ It "pits the gospel in one way or another over against the profane." Sellers observes that the American version of this opposition between the gospel and the profane has been given a distinctive twist by the strongly experiential orientation of evangelical Christianity in the U.S. The opposition becomes a tug-of-war *within* the domain of human experience, *between* redeemed and unregenerate experience. The goal, then, becomes that of fetching people from one way of living and experiencing to the other. When this kind of theology "goes public," its goal is to "Christianize the nation."¹⁸⁹ Opposition of the gospel to the profane becomes a challenge to transform the profane into a reflection of the converted heart rather than a separatist imperative. Its power is

¹⁸⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 33 and 10, cited in *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, no. 320; tr. *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America, 1966) 231-32, 208.

¹⁸⁷ James Sellers, "Ways of Going Public in American Theology," *Word and World* 4 (1984) 240.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 241.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 242.

evident in the influence evangelical Christians exerted, for example, in the abolitionist movement. Its weakness is the temptation to diminish the importance and rightful independence of the natural and created order.

A new journal which began publication this year, *Transformation: An International Dialogue on Evangelical Social Ethics*, gives evidence of this power and resists this temptation admirably. In a statement of *Transformation's* purpose, coeditor Ronald Sider emphasizes that the debate about a Christian approach to economic justice must begin with "fundamental biblical questions" about the meaning of justice. But he adds: "questions of political philosophy are also central," and he acknowledges that "there are important areas where matters of fact are hotly disputed."¹⁹⁰ The first few issues of *Transformation* give every evidence of the growth of a form of evangelical Christianity which will make an important and nuanced contribution to the "public church's" engagement with economic ethics in the new debate getting underway.

Sellers' second model of how theology might "go public" continues the bipolar conception of the relation between the gospel and the profane, but reformulates it as a conflict between benevolence and selfishness. His prime analogate for this sort of public theology is the Social Gospel movement and its most cogent advocate, Walter Rauschenbusch. This model presumes that *some* aspects of the worldly order have already come under the sway of the supreme Christian law of love or benevolence, while others yet remain to be transformed. The power of the gospel is not confined to an elect or sectarian community set apart from the world but is to be influential in shaping the whole of life, including public life. Using the benevolence/selfishness yardstick, Rauschenbusch sought "to make discriminating judgments about the virtues and vices of the secular, but to do so on Christian terms."¹⁹¹ This approach is confronted with two temptations. First, in pitting benevolence and selfishness as polar opposites, it can easily shortchange the importance of *justice* in a public theology; for justice contains a mixture of both other-regard and self-regard. Second, Rauschenbusch's confidence that some domains of the secular have already come under the law of love and that the task is now to move on to others (i.e., from the victory of political democracy as one embodiment of benevolence to economic democracy as another) is too simple. In Sellers' words, this is to "reify *agape*" and "seriously to disguise our plight."¹⁹²

When these first two of Sellers' models of public theology succumb to

¹⁹⁰ Editorial, "The Great Economic Debate: Toward a Spirit and Agenda for Dialogue," *Transformation* 1, no. 2 (1984) 1.

¹⁹¹ Sellers, "Ways of Going Public" 244.

¹⁹² *Ibid.* 245.

their besetting weaknesses, they can lead to a thin appreciation of the worldly and the human, an underestimation of the reality of sin, and a taming of the power of the gospel as a word of unexpected forgiveness and hope. This thinning of the natural and taming of the gospel stimulated Reinhold Niebuhr's penetrating critiques of what he called "orthodoxy" on the one hand (which makes everything a consequence of one reading of the gospel) and "liberalism" on the other (which makes everything a consequence of one reading of modern society's capacity for love).

Sellers' third mode in which theology can become public theology is perhaps the most interesting, especially from a Roman Catholic point of view. Sellers calls it a revised form of Puritan ethics, and it is clearly such, since he draws heavily on Jonathan Edwards' essay on *The Nature of True Virtue* to exemplify it. Like Edwards' essay, this ethic rests not only on a biblical foundation but also on a metaphysical or ontological account of the "nature" of human life in society. It is therefore congenial to Roman Catholic social thought, which continues to make strong claims about the essentially social nature of human persons, claims knowable by human reason and experience as well as from biblical revelation.

Edwards' treatise replaces the bipolarities of Christian or secular, benevolence or selfishness, with a tripartite analysis. The highest form of virtue, which Edwards defines as "benevolence to being in general," is heartfelt affection toward God, "the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best."¹⁹³ True or "general" virtue, therefore, is affection for the highest and most universal good, namely, God. It is to be contrasted with love for "particular beings," a form of love which creates what Edwards calls a "private system" which "seems to clash with the public."¹⁹⁴ This distinction between the "general" and the "private" is analogous to the polarity of benevolence/selfishness in Sellers' second type. Edwards' particular contribution, however, lies in the third pole he introduces to the discussion, viz., his concept of "natural" virtue. Though not identical with the fulness of Christian love, this natural virtue moves in the same direction, i.e., it is an appreciation and "consent to order, society, the *polis*—in short, the fullness of the public . . . through conscience and the capacity for justice, if not through *agape*."¹⁹⁵

The importance of this alliance between general and natural virtue and their mutual opposition to the private is that it implies that the public sphere encompasses *both* the religious and the secular. In Sellers' words, "The public is where sacred and secular meet. In our ordinary

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 246.

daily existence we are already in the domain of the public; at its limit our life as public persons approaches the godly.¹⁹⁶

Sellers' three types of public theology are most useful in helping to clarify the different ways that Christianity can be related to current economic issues. He believes that the third approach is the most promising, and in this I think he is right. At the least, it is the most helpful in interpreting the approach to be found in the draft pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops. Indeed, there are obvious analogies between Edwards' general virtue and the Thomistic interpretation of *caritas*, and between Edwards' natural virtue and the cardinal virtues of scholastic tradition. The interesting contribution made by Sellers' discussion is that it helps translate the traditional Catholic categories into a framework both rooted in American tradition and quite relevant to a world marked by strong tensions and even opposition between private and public life. And he does this with the aid of the last great Puritan divine. This holds out considerable hope that opposition between Catholic social thought and the American economic ethic which owes so much to the Puritans may ultimately prove to be the result of asking the wrong questions.¹⁹⁷

In particular, the Sellers/Edwards model of public theology based on public virtue can help in explaining the basis of the central moral norms for economic activity that are proposed by the draft pastoral letter. Relying on biblical sources, on the long tradition of Catholic social thought, on human reason, and on contemporary experience,¹⁹⁸ the draft states that "*justice demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation by all persons in the life of the human community.* The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be actively treated or passively abandoned as a non-member of the moral community which is the human race."¹⁹⁹ Both from the biblical understandings of covenant, of the common creation of all persons, and of the universal redemptive mission of Christ and the Church, and also from natural-law assertion

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 247.

¹⁹⁷ Several other excellent essays on the topic of public theology cannot be discussed here for reasons of space. For an ecumenical perspective rooted in the Reformed tradition, see Max L. Stackhouse, "An Ecumenist's Plea for a Public Theology," with responses by S. Mark Heim, Michael Novak, Donald W. Shriver, Ernest L. Fortin, and Martin E. Marty, *This World* 8 (1984) 47-110. An interesting retrieval of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms as a basis for public theology is developed in Paul G. Sonnack, "Church and State in Light of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Word and World* 4 (1984) 269-77.

¹⁹⁸ See *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, nos. 65-72. These are the same four "criteria" that Max Stackhouse, following the *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church, proposes for the assessment of the adequacy of any public theology. See "An Ecumenist's Plea" 70 ff.

¹⁹⁹ *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, no. 92; emphasis in the original.

of the essential sociality of human beings, participation in community becomes the key to the meaning of justice. Justice is a public virtue. But even more significantly, the degree to which a society permits and supports the active participation of all members in its public life is the test of whether that community is just or not. Though the draft does not, I believe, harbor romantic ideas about the creation of a society in which all persons are equally active participants (as some socialist schemes do), it does state that there is a minimum level of public participation which must be accessible to all.²⁰⁰ The antithesis of such participation it describes as "marginalization," and it explicitly notes that unemployment and extreme poverty are instances of this exclusion from active participation in the public, economic life of society.²⁰¹

The draft's treatment of human rights, both political and economic, is set within the framework of this discussion of participation in public society. Human rights are described as "the minimum conditions for life in community."²⁰² Some critics of the drift of the U.S. bishops' public interventions during recent years have implied, and sometimes explicitly stated, that the use of "rights language" threatens to displace duties and virtue from their proper places of prominence in Christian social ethics.²⁰³ By describing rights as conditions for participation in community, the draft should allay these fears. In fact, when rights are viewed this way, they are well-nigh inconceivable apart from the correlative concept of virtue, provided that virtue is understood in the "public" Edwardsian sense described above.

The precise meaning of participation in public life as a norm for economic behavior and policy, of course, remains to be specified in greater detail. How much participation? In which areas of action and decision? With what degree of accountability? Within which institutional frameworks? On what scale? At the workplace? Locally? Regionally? Nationally? Globally? In approaching these questions, the essay produced by a group of 31 Roman Catholic lay persons, chaired by William Simon and Michael Novak, as an "advisory" to the Weakland committee, is a useful point of departure. The Simon-Novak essay, like the bishops' draft, cannot be summarized here. In the context of the rights/virtue tension, however, one of its central themes is particularly important. It states clearly and forcefully the reciprocal linkage between virtue and beneficial social institutions: "Virtuous people can be undermined by systems of

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 94.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 93.

²⁰² Ibid. at no. 74, section subheading.

²⁰³ See, e.g., J. Brian Benestad, *The Pursuit of a Just Social Order: Policy Statements of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1966-80* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982) 119-41.

poor design. And good systems can be made to fail by a people of inapposite or flawed or unvirtuous behavior."²⁰⁴ Though the essay describes this fact as a "paradox," it hardly seems to be such. It has the feel of the commonsensical, if one thinks that social justice and public virtue are reciprocally related and that lack of one can undermine the other.

The prime goal of the Simon/Novak team is to affirm that U.S. economic institutions, by which they mean relatively free markets and a relatively limited state, are conducive to the development of relatively virtuous citizens. And vice versa. One of the prime arguments they make to support this contention is that which points out that a market economy demands co-operation, teamwork, a sense of partnership. In short, they argue, persuasively I think, that U.S. capitalism today is not individualistic, as many of its critics often assert. The charge of individualism won't play as a trump card in this debate. Repeatedly the Simon/Novak document cites de Tocqueville as a witness for the "associative instinct" present in U.S. culture.²⁰⁵ They add that "Where human beings voluntarily associate themselves in a common task, then success or failure depends to a very large extent upon their capacities for instinctive, regular, and habitual cooperation with one another."²⁰⁶ Who could deny this? Indeed, all should affirm this. Though teamwork and co-operation in worldly affairs, guided by "self-interest rightly understood,"²⁰⁷ may not be the height of agape and "general benevolence" (in Edwards' language), surely they are a key part of "natural" virtue.

But here is where the rub really lies. For Edwards and Aquinas before him, the supposition was that natural virtue and general virtue (*caritas*) would in fact move in the same direction—toward a *respublica*. I would state this the following way: the American genius for co-operation and teamwork needs to be tested according to how public it really is. Though the Simon-Novak group has much to say about the associative and productive qualities of U.S. cultural and economic arrangements, and though they frequently confess to failures, they have virtually nothing to say about how present economic "systems" may make people less virtuous. That is, they say little about how the prevailing incentives, rewards, and penalties can too often encourage devotion to the "private" and disregard for the public weal. When this happens, the result can be the exclusion of weaker members from participation in the economic life

²⁰⁴ *Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy*, published privately by a Lay Commission on Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy, (New York, 1984).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 17.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 21.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

of the community. In other words, the privatization of virtue among the powerful can result in the marginalization of the weak.

This point has been discussed in a very helpful and challenging way by Drew Christiansen in a study of recent Catholic social thought that appeared in this journal.²⁰⁸ Christiansen's thesis is as follows. Since the Second Vatican Council there has been an increased emphasis on equality as a norm for economic life in Church teachings. The equality at issue is not a flat, arithmetical equivalence of income or wealth. It is rather what Christiansen calls relative equality, "a situation in which inequalities are held within a defined range."²⁰⁹ This emphasis on relative equality has emerged in Church teaching for two reasons. First, the scrutiny of the signs of the times urged by Pope John XXIII and Vatican II has led to the conclusion that inequalities have been increasing to such a degree that they threaten to destroy community. Second, this reading of the signs of the times has been accompanied by a strong emphasis on the centrality of social solidarity brought about by the renewal of the biblical and theological foundations of Catholic social thought. Relative equality, therefore, calls for efforts to strengthen the bonds of community and for resistance to the "crisis of solidarity" in our time.

Christiansen's exposition of some of the main strands of papal and conciliar teaching sheds light on the argument of the U.S. bishops' draft pastoral. The sentence from the draft which has been most vigorously attacked by its early critics is the following: "We believe that the level of inequality in income and wealth in our society and even more the inequality on the world scale must be judged morally unacceptable according to these criteria."²¹⁰ In most of the citations of this text that I have seen, the final phrase has been omitted ("according to these criteria"). In making this omission, the critics make it much easier for themselves when they charge that the draft's principal proposal is a radical redistribution of wealth and income in the U.S. In fact, the criteria proposed are the following. Inequalities can be just when they reward greater contributions and when they are incentives to the promotion of the common good. There is, however, "a strong presumption against inequality . . . as long as there are poor, hungry and homeless people in our midst."²¹¹ In Christiansen's terms, there must be limits on inequality as long as some people are excluded from participation in the economic life of the community. In addition, inequality based on "race,

²⁰⁸ "On Relative Equality: Catholic Egalitarianism after Vatican II," *TS* 45 (1984) 651-75.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 653.

²¹⁰ *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, no. 100.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* 99.

sex, or any other arbitrary standard can never be justified.”²¹² This is an evident consequence of the equal dignity of all persons and their common membership in the community. These criteria are not “radical egalitarianism,” much less “socialism,” as some of the critics have charged. They simply state that there are limits to what individuals and groups have a claim to as long as others are in need. One can fully support the Simon-Novak description of the productive genius of the U.S. economy and its virtues of association and partnership, but these must not be used as an argument to deny those limits.

This stress in recent Catholic social teaching on the limits which communal solidarity places on inequality is at the basis of the much-discussed preferential “option for the poor.” The literature on this topic in recent months has been large and cannot be dealt with in even a minimally adequate way here.²¹³ Two brief points, however, are in order. First, in the recent “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation” issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the inequality between rich and poor, both between nations and within them, is referred to as a shocking “scandal.”²¹⁴ It states that its critique of Marxist models of class struggle should in no way be regarded as a disavowal of those who “respond generously and with an authentic evangelical spirit to the ‘preferential option for the poor.’”²¹⁵ Indeed, it is possible to interpret this document as the strongest affirmation of the option for the poor yet to be voiced by the Holy See.

Second, a recent article by Jon Sobrino has identified the option for the poor with the option for life. Speaking in the context of Central America, he states: “The world of poverty is really a world of death and for that reason the option for the poor is an option against death and in favor of life.”²¹⁶ Sobrino develops this idea by describing the plight of the poor, by relating the poverty and violence of Central America to the mystery of the cross, and by linking the Church’s mission directly to the announcement and initiation of the kingdom of God, which “cannot come

²¹² Ibid. 101.

²¹³ See, e.g., Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, “El grito de la pobreza a partir de la fe,” *Christus* (Mexico City) 577 (1984) 34–37; Rodger Charles, “Catholic Social Teaching As Liberation,” *Month* 266 (1984) 85–88; François Francou, “Option für die Armen und Heil für alle: Zur christlichen Problematik Latinamerikas,” *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift* 13 (1984) 33–43; Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Teología y ciencias sociales,” *Diakonia* (Managua) 32 (1984) 292–316; Sergio Silva, “El pensamiento social en el Documento de Puebla,” *Teología y vida* 25 (1984) 175–202.

²¹⁴ *Origins* 14 (1984–85) 195.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ “La opción por la vida: Desafío a la Iglesia en El Salvador,” *Diakonia* (Managua) 31 (1984) 250.

to be if the antikingdom of death is not destroyed and the kingdom of life constructed.”²¹⁷ Sobrino’s essay makes a very helpful contribution to the discussion of the need for a “consistent ethic of life” presently underway in this country.

The discussion of all these issues will doubtless continue vigorously in the year ahead. It is to be hoped, as the bishops’ draft urges, that the debate will be characterized by mutual respect. Thus will it help advance the task of achieving a more just economic order, based on solidarity and participation for all.

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²¹⁷ Ibid. 257.



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