CHAPTER 1

Catholic Social Teaching in the American Context

This chapter will describe Catholic social teaching as it relates to the 21st Century United States. It will proceed through an overview of Catholic social teaching with particular emphasis on the reasons for its formal explication almost 1900 years after the founding of Christianity. Next it will consider the most comprehensive statement thus far on the U.S. economy by the bishops of the United States, *Economic Justice for All* (*EJA*) issued in 1986. Finally it will consider Pope Benedict's encyclical on social justice, *Charity in Truth* (*Caritas in veritate*) (*CIT*) issued in 2009. This will set the stage for consideration of recent socio-economic research and the ways in which it can enter into conversation with this social teaching as it relates to the current situation in the United States.

Catholic Social Teaching

The key to understanding Catholic social teaching is that it flows from the Catholic[1] view of human nature. Catholic social teaching is based on a Catholic anthropology which understands that human beings are created by God in the image and likeness of God and are called by God to a life of eternal participation in God's own divine life. Humans have both body and soul. The Incarnation of God as a fully divine and fully human person, Jesus Christ, underscores the essential importance of

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[1] The term "Catholic" is used throughout because this project focuses specifically on Catholic social teaching. Its use is not meant to imply that other Christian denominations do not hold substantially similar positions. As Jim Wallis observes: "I am an evangelical Christian, but I am also a convert to Catholic social teaching with its long and rich history." Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 85.

both body and soul. Humans respond to God's call to eternal life through lives in relationship and community with other humans and the entire created world. God desires that humans live together in freedom, justice, and love. An economy has as its goal the development of human beings. How one understands what it means to be a human being will determine how one evaluates an economy. An economy is not an end in itself but rather a means to the end of a full and complete human existence in all its dimensions: material, intellectual, moral, spiritual and religious.[2]

While the Church's social teaching finds its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, it was not until 1891 that the Church issued a specific statement on its social teaching. *Rerum Novarum*, the encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII on capital and labor, represents the first explicit statement from the Church about the economy and its role on human life. This statement and all subsequent ones are at pains to point out that *Rerum Novarum* does not offer *new* teaching but is rather the application of timeless principles to new circumstances in human existence. As Charles Curran explains, "Official Catholic social teaching usually does not take a radical approach to social teaching in terms of proposing completely new and different structures. This reforming approach coheres within many emphases in the Catholic theological tradition."[3]

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[2] For the text of Vatican II's documents I will use Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1 of *Vatican Council II*, rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). I will follow the convention of citing paragraphs rather than pages. *Gaudium et Spes*, 64.

[3] Charles E. Curran, "A Century of Catholic Social Teaching," *Theology Today* 48, no. 2 (July 1991): 155.

In the case of *Rerum Novarum*,[4] these new circumstances have often been called "the social question." The rise of market economies and capitalism along with increasing urbanization and industrialization had changed the social structure of Western European countries. The old institutions of Church and class were giving way to wealth and ownership. While a small minority benefitted tremendously from these changes, most people found their situations worsening. The transformation of tradesmen and farmers into industrial workers resulted in growing poverty and hopelessness. Questions that arose were: What was the proper role of the state in these circumstances? What, if any, were the limitations of private ownership? Did workers have a right to organize into unions in order to balance the power differential between owners and industrial workers? In Europe the response to this new situation was the rise of socialism and its solution of state ownership of the means of production and thus political intervention in the workings of a free market. In its extreme form, socialism presented itself as communism with its ever present threat of materialism and atheism. Socialism saw religion as part of the oppressive regime that kept ownership in private hands and sanctioned the oppression of the laboring class.

These were indeed "new things" that prompted a response from the Church. Robert Kennedy points out that in the 18th century large scale manufacturing organizations supplanted tradesmen. The failure of these organizations to secure the common good resulted in the rise of socialism and the "emergence of Christian social

[4] The literal English translation is "of new things."

thought as a distinct body of doctrine."[5] That response is noteworthy for its approval of labor unions as well as a defense of private ownership. While the problems were real, the response of state ownership and centralization was not the answer because it violated a Christian understanding of human nature. "In a remarkably even-handed manner the pope laid anathemas on both liberal capitalism, which released the individual from social and moral constraints, and socialism, which subordinated individual liberty to social well-being without respect for human rights or religious welfare. Economic life, like political life, should reflect the dualistic nature of the person…providing for bodily needs and facilitating the quest for salvation."[6]

The fact of this first social encyclical is at least as important as its content. The Church staked its claim to teach in this area and to provide an answer to the social question. While Pope Leo noted the problems inherent in the "social question" and while he forcefully criticized the two alternatives (liberal capitalism and socialism), he saw the solution in terms of a return to the past rather than in new forms for the present and future. "The goal was still the restoration of order and authority."[7] This was particularly relevant to the acceptance, or even the notice, of *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XII's *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) in the United States. While both emphasized charity and justice, they were also filled with "triumphalist

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[5] Robert G. Kennedy, "Wealth Creation Within the Catholic Social Tradition," in *Rediscovering Abundance: Interdisciplinary Essays on Wealth, Income, and Their Distribution in the Catholic Social Tradition*, eds. Helen Alford, O.P., Charles M. A. Clark, S. A. Cortright, and Michael J. Naughton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 72. Kennedy is a professor in the departments of Management and Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas (MN) and should not be confused with Robert F. Kennedy, former senator and presidential candidate.
[6] David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 13.
[7] Ibid.

ecclesiology, antidemocratic political values, and a conservative, even negative understanding of natural law."[8] Vatican II marked a turning point for the Church in its understanding of itself and its place and role in the world. Social documents subsequent to the Council began to rectify this reactionary character even as they expanded on the positions first laid out in *Rerum Novarum*. It is in this reformed context that the documents of concern to this study were produced.

While the 19th century saw a plethora of social and scientific changes that challenged the Church and its understanding of itself and the world, none is perhaps more central and relevant to discussion later in this study than the rise of individualism. Luguino Bruni takes the unconventional but intriguing position that one of the most important contributions of Christianity to human culture is the importance of the individual. While the individual person is always seen as existing in a social context, the belief in the Incarnation implied that each human person has an existence that is separate from his or her membership in a tribe, country, or class.

> With the Judeo-Christian revelation, the individual acquired a dignity and very high values, and "became" a person. Likewise, history and terrestrial realities also took on an enormous value and were no longer regarded as shadows of a true reality that was transcendent. In the modern (Western) world, technology and science cannot be understood without this process of the valorization of the human person. The date normally cited as the beginning of this valorization is that of the time of humanism; but, strictly speaking, the beginning of this process dates back to the stable in Bethlehem.[9]

While human culture in the West continued to be predominantly a group culture for centuries after Christ, the seed had been sown and eventually resulted in

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[8] Ibid., 1.

[9] Luguino Bruni, "Toward an Economic Rationality 'Capable of Communion," in *The Economy of Communion: Toward a Multi-Dimensional Economic Culture*, ed. Luguino Bruni, trans. Lorna Gold (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2002), 42.

recognition of individual rights and responsibilities in the democratic societies of the West. This incipient possibility of separating the self from the other was essential to the development of science in the sense that it became possible to understand pieces of reality as autonomous from the whole, and thus it became possible to isolate and analyze discrete areas of human activity and indeed the human individual itself. This development challenged the traditional order of things and toppled hierarchies and class as organizing principles of social order. Humans came to be seen as creators of their own destiny rather than fitting into neatly organized and stable categories of descending power and authority.[10]

This emphasis on the individual gradually led to individualism, the enshrinement of the individual over against the collective, the piece over against the whole. This extension had particularly disastrous consequences in economics.

> …Economists did not only distinguish and separate out the sphere of "search for wealth" from the others; they also brought about another separation….Economics starts from the premise that individuals are not linked to each other by inseparable bonds before beginning to barter. The intellectual exercise of separating the *ego* from the *alter* is, therefore, possible, giving rise to an individualistic science in which "I," as the individual agent, can be analyzed independently of my relationship with the other.[11]

Here can be seen clearly how anthropology provides the central presuppositions for economics. If one does not conceive of human beings as both individuals and social persons, one develops economic thought and practice that must be inherently

[10] Bruni's point should not be misunderstood. The development of a radical individualism was a distortion of the Christian tradition which always stressed the individual person as a member of a social group. Under the influence of other economic and social forces, this revelation about the value of the individual became distorted into a view of the individual apart from the "other." As a result relationality was weakened in ways never envisioned by the Christian revelation.

[11] Bruni, 44.

immoral, that is, inconsistent with human nature and thus not capable of achieving the goal of a full development of the complete human being, both individually and as a member of a group. One way or another, Catholic social teaching since Vatican II has sought to address this fundamental issue. Sometimes it addresses specific abuses and sometimes it addresses more systemic issues.

Economic Justice for All (1986)

After an extensive process of consultation with lay Catholics and Americans in general, the bishops of the United States issued *Economic Justice for All* (*EJA* henceforth) in 1986. Drawing on scripture and the previous social teaching of the Church, *EJA* sought to "discover what our economic life must serve, what standards it must meet."[12] The document enumerates six standards:

1. "Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person."
2. "Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community."
3. "All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society."
4. "All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable."
5. "Human rights are the minimum conditions for life in community."
6. "Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights."[13]

[12] For the text of *EJA*, I will use David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). I will follow the convention of citing paragraphs rather than pages. *EJA*, 12.
[13] Ibid., 13-18.

Relying on *Mater et magister* and *Gaudium et spes*, the bishops succinctly restate the traditional Catholic norm: "*The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured.*"[14] Their position was not to advocate any particular economic arrangement[15] but rather to apply this norm to the then current economic circumstances in the United States.

EJA is a wide ranging document that touches on the body of Catholic social teaching and several areas of economic activity in the United States as well as the role of the United States in the international economy. While clearly the United States has a significant impact on the world economy and while Catholic social teaching is trenchant in its evaluation of that role, this study will focus on the domestic economy of the United States and its role in the development of United States residents.

Dysfunctions of Current Economy

For the purpose of this project three aspects of *EJA* are especially relevant: dysfunctions of current economy, inequality, and fundamental anthropology. The very title, *Economic Justice for All*, makes it clear that the guiding critique of the American economy has to do with the distribution of resources. The title implies that justice, i.e. equitable distribution, is available to some but not all U. S. citizens. As long as some do not have the resources needed for a decent life, there is, in fact, no justice even though many have enough and some have more than what is needed.

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[14] Ibid., 28.
[15] Ibid., 12.

The focus in the pastoral is clearly on the poor and disenfranchised. This is in keeping with the very beginning of the Church's social teaching in *Rerum Novarum*.

The American economy is tremendously productive, providing the highest standard of living in the world. However, the bishops, using the norms of distributive justice and contributive justice, find much wanting. "Distributive justice requires that the allocation of income, wealth, and power in society be evaluated in light of its effects on persons whose basic material need are unmet….Minimum material resources are an absolute necessity for human life."[16] With regard to contributive justice, the document states that: "Social justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way."[17] The bishops find that poverty and need continue to be all too prevalent in this most productive economy. They write, "Harsh poverty plagues our country despite its great wealth. More than 33 million Americans are poor; by any reasonable standard another 20 to 30 million are needy. Poverty is increasing in the United States, not decreasing."[18] The bishops emphasize that this burden of poverty falls unequally on blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, women, and children. With a 1987 population of 243 million, their estimates indicate that 26 percent of the U. S. population was poor or needy. The pastoral letter focuses on the changes that need to be made to distribute more equitably the fruits of the economy.

[16] Ibid., 70.
[17] Ibid., 71.
[18] Ibid., 16.

Inequality

Closely related to the discussion of the dysfunctions of the economy is the treatment of inequality. In his provocative essay, Dennis McCann provides a helpful summary of the six times that *EJA* mentions "inequality."[19] He observes that the bishops do not demand and do not condone any arithmetic equality of income or wealth but at the same time they "challenge economic arrangements that leave large numbers of people impoverished."[20] In considering not only *EJA* but previous Catholic social teaching, he notes that when the word "inequality" is used it is usually "teamed with a morally loaded modifier such as 'extreme' or 'shocking.'"[21]

McCann notes further that the bishops see the impact of this "extreme" inequality in the fact that many are impoverished as noted above. However, he also underscores their observation that another impact of inequality is a power differential that results in uneven participation in the life of the society. McCann then concludes that it is this uneven participation that is the real issue in income inequality, in some ways deemphasizing the right and need for all people to have a certain level of material goods to sustain the dignity of human life.[22] It is not necessary to elevate inequality over participation or vice versa. The bishops argue that both provide norms by which one can evaluate an economy.

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[19] Dennis McCann, "Inequality in Income and Wealth: When Does It Become Immoral and Why?" in *Rediscovering Abundance: Interdisciplinary Essays on Wealth, Income, and Their Distribution in the Catholic Social Tradition*, eds. Helen Alford, O.P., Charles M. A. Clark, S. A. Cortright, and Michael J. Naughton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 192.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 193-7.

The key point is that inequality in either economic terms (income or wealth) or in political/social terms (participation) is seen as morally unacceptable if it is extreme. It is important to point out that neither *EJA* nor previous documents define "extreme" inequality even though they all find it problematic in many ways. In fact *EJA* states that inequality cannot be regarded as immoral in itself and some inequality may be unavoidable and even useful in an economy.[23] Again the point at which it ceases being useful is not defined. The bishops do not go as far as John Paul II and his critique of equality in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (*SRS*). "Experience shows us that the denial of this right [of economic initiative], or its limitation in the name of an alleged 'equality' of everyone in society, diminishes, or in practice absolutely destroys the spirit of initiative, that is to say *the creative subjectivity of the citizen. As a consequence, there arises, not so much a true equality as a 'leveling down.*[24] It is not perfectly clear if his objection is to economic equality per se or to socialist state limitations as a means to that end. Since virtually any successful economic system imposes limitations on private ownership and by extension "economic initiative," and since Church teaching including John Paul II's own writing supports and fosters such limitation, it appears that this position arises from a desire to devalue extreme socialist solutions, especially communism. The Pope's assumption appears to be that the only way such equality could arise is through overbearing state coercion. Other methods of achieving equality may thus be unobjectionable.

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[23] *EJA*, 185.
[24] For the text of *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, I will use David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). *SRS, 15.*

In any event, the negative consequences of equality are seen in terms of negative impacts on those excluded and impoverished. If everyone has an acceptable level of income/wealth and participates in some acceptable way in the society, there would be no reason to negatively evaluate inequality. In fact, it might be the engine that drives the economy. As long as everyone has some minimum level of income and participation, there should be no limits to income or wealth inequality because inequality in and of itself appears to be morally neutral.

Fundamental Anthropology

If one's anthropology provides the norms for evaluating human activity including economic activity, then it is essential to understand *EJA*'s view of human nature. The bishops rely on traditional church teaching in this regard but it is important to spell that out as they express it here. The most important fact about human beings is that they are created in the image of God. "*As such every human being possesses an inalienable dignity that stamps human existence prior to any division into races or nations and prior to human labor and human achievement.*"[25] There is a fundamental equality among all human beings because of their common source, God. This is extended to the right of all to share fully in the fruits of God's creation. "*From the patristic period to the present, the Church has affirmed that misuse of the world's resources or appropriation of them by a minority of the world's population betrays the gift of creation since 'whatever belongs to God belongs to*

[25] *EJA*, 32.

all.'" [26] This principle of the universal destination of goods means that "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone."[27] It was within this context that John Paul II articulated his teaching of a social mortgage attaching to private property: "…The goods of this world are *originally meant for all*. The right to private property is *valid and necessary*, but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property, in fact, is under a 'social mortgage,' which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods."[28]

Moreover, human beings are not only individuals with an irreducible right to dignity and respect but they are also members of a community. In the first instance, they are members of the "human family" bound to each other by their common source, God. They also are members of other social units: tribes, nations, and families. Individuality is never seen as separated from a fundamental membership. "Biblical faith in general, and prophetic faith especially, insist that fidelity to the covenant joins obedience to God with reverence and concern for the neighbor."[29] This understanding of human nature gives rise to the moral demand for justice, not only in terms of the rights and responsibilities of individuals but also in terms of a call to concern for others, especially those who are in need.

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[26] Ibid., 34.
[27] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington: USCCB Publishing, 2005), 75.
[28] *SRS*, 42.
[29] *EJA*, 37.

The Incarnation both emphasizes and extends this insight into human nature. The demand for justice is understood as part of the new creation created by that entry. "Our action on behalf of justice in our world proceeds from the conviction that, despite the power of injustice and violence, life has been fundamentally changed by the entry of the Word made flesh into human history."[30] Christians are called not just to recognize that the Reign of God with justice and mercy will ultimately triumph over the injustice and inattention of the world but they are called to work for that Reign in the midst of their day to day lives. "It is not simply the promise of the future victory of God over sin and evil, but that this victory has already begun—in the life and teaching of Jesus."[31]

Although not developed extensively, the bishops go even further in understanding the social nature of human beings from a theological perspective. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ was that God is a community of persons. "Indeed Christian theological reflection on the very reality of God as a Trinitarian unity of persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—shows that being a person means being united to other persons in mutual love."[32] This fundamental insight of Christianity goes beyond the common humanity of all with its requirement for justice for all. Christians and indeed all humanity are called by God to enter into this "communion" in which the individual is fully independent and yet fully united with all other

[30] Ibid., 54.
[31] Ibid., 41.
[32] *Gaudium et spes* quoted in *EJA,* 64.

members. This is the reality of the Reign of God destined to be the final state of all existence and already in the process of becoming in everyday life.

It is from this understanding of "communion" that the bishops articulate the notion of solidarity. "Solidarity is another name for this social friendship and civic commitment that make human moral and economic life possible."[33] Solidarity expresses "the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity."[34] More than simply a principle of social organization, solidarity is a true moral virtue. "Solidarity is…an authentic moral virtue, not a 'feeling of vague compassion…[but] a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*…the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible for *all*."[35]

If solidarity flows from the understanding of the communion of all in all, then subsidiarity flows from the commitment to the dignity and value of individual human beings. As Pius XI stated in *Quadragesimo anno* (*QA*), "…it is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry."[36] In today's modern world, however, the social structure is not simply the "community" and the "individual." Between these two

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[33] *EJA*, 66.
[34] Ibid., 84.
[35] *SRS*, 38.
[36] For the text of *Quadragesimo anno*, I will use David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).). I will follow the convention of citing paragraphs rather than pages. *QA*, 79.

there now exists a plethora of "intermediary organizations," both public and private. *QA* extended this principle to these relationships as well. Thus subsidiarity requires that a "greater and higher" organization not take on the responsibilities and activities which "lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought…to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them."[37] The key point is that all organizations "of a superior order" exist to help and support "lower-order" organizations. "In this way intermediate social entities can properly perform the functions that fall to them without being required to hand them over unjustly to other social entities of a higher level." This maintains the dignity and integrity of lower organizations.[38]

The Church's social teaching, exemplified in *EJA* and all previous expressions, is based on an understanding of human nature that is potentially in tension: the individual as sacred and the individual as member of a social group. The norm of solidarity insures that the social nature of humans is respected while the norm of subsidiarity insures the dignity and right of individual action especially at it manifests itself in social organizations. These two principles play against each other in the concrete situations of economic activity. As principles of social organization, each provides a check on an unrestrained reliance on one alone. In a greater sense, however, both are seen as moral virtues which are clearly focused on the common good.

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[37] Ibid., 203.
[38] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 81.

Charity in Truth (2009)

In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI issued his third of three encyclicals, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth CIT*.)[39] This followed *Deus Caritas Est* (*God Is Love* 2006 *GIL*)[40] and *Spe Salvi* (*On Christian Hope* 2007.) *CIT* contains his teaching on social justice in the contemporary world with special emphasis on a world reeling from economic distress. This is a teaching directed to the world and thus contains important teaching on globalization and its impact especially on the poor. For the purposes of this project, as with the consideration of *EJA*, attention will be paid to those aspects that can be applied to the dynamics within a specific economy. Much has changed and much has stayed the same since 1987. This most recent Catholic social teaching will provide insights to update the teaching of *EJA* to these current realities. In addition, however, Benedict seeks to expand the basic insights of traditional Church teaching in light of contemporary economic developments. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which his teaching extends and complements the *EJA* teaching on the fundamental dysfunction of current economy, inequality, and fundamental anthropology.

Previous social teaching has tended to concentrate on justice as a central value because it is in a consideration of justice that the natural law can be brought to bear on "the social question" and thus the message can be more accessible to those who

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[39] For the text of *Charity in Truth* I will use Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth: Caritas in Veritate* (Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009). I will follow the convention of citing paragraphs rather than pages.
[40] For the text of *God Is Love* I will use Benedict XVI, *God Is Love: Deus Caritas Est* (Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). I will follow the convention of citing paragraphs rather than pages.

are not Christian or who choose not to use theological arguments in economics. Benedict strikes a different note right at the beginning of *CIT*. "Charity[41] is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelled out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law. It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbor…."[42] At the same time he points out the importance of human reason, reflected in the very title of the document.

> Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality.[43]

> A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance. In other words, there would no longer be any real place for God in the world. Without truth, charity is confined to a narrow field devoid of relations.[44]

For Benedict truth is both theological and natural, known through both faith and reason. "Entranced by an exclusive reliance on technology, reason without faith is doomed to flounder in an illusion of its own omnipotence. Faith without reason risks being cut off from everyday life."[45] He makes clear that the Church is open to

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[41] For most American audiences, "charity" can be an ambiguous term. Benedict uses it throughout as one of the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. Charity understood as philanthropy or "charitable giving" can arise from charity as the Pope uses it here but is a narrower concept of social behavior. His call to his readers is not to make charitable contributions but to enter into the relationship of love of God and thus to enter a new life.
[42] *CIT*, 2.
[43] Ibid., 3.
[44] Ibid., 4.
[45] Ibid., 74.

all truth and interprets it in the light of current circumstances.[46] Church social teaching, as indeed all Church teaching, always conveys certain unchangeable truths while at the same time understanding and interpreting these truths in light of both changing circumstances and deepening understanding from the natural and social sciences. Benedict is confident in this approach of openness because he is guided by the insight of Aquinas that "truth is one" and any apparent contradiction or inconsistency of natural understanding with theological truth is only that, apparent.[47]

Benedict not only encourages but requires a conversation between theology and the developing insights of the social sciences. "The Church's social doctrine, which has '*an important interdisciplinary dimension*'…allows faith, theology, metaphysics and science to come together in a collaborative effort in the service of humanity."[48] He sees excessive fragmentation of human knowledge as one of the major reasons for a lack of economic development as called for by Paul VI. He criticizes narrow approaches by both theologians and social scientists as contributing to this lack of development. The collaboration between the two is "indispensable" to considering "all the elements involved in the…solution of socioeconomic problems."[49]

Unlike *EJA*, *CIT* is not filled with socioeconomic data to describe the economic situation, either globally or within specific countries. Given the focus of the encyclical, this is understandable. Yet, he makes clear that the current economic

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[46] Ibid., 9.
[47] John Paul II, "Truth cannot contradict truth," (address, Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Vatican, October 22, 1996).
[48] *CIT*., 31.
[49] Ibid.

arrangements have not gotten closer to the goal of universal development and, in fact, have made things worse. While there has been growth since Paul VI's *Popularum Progressio*, this "growth has been and continues to be weighed down by *malfunctions and dramatic problems*, highlighted even further by the current crisis."[50] He catalogs the issues that plague the world and national economies: technology, globalization, speculative financial dealing, large-scale migration with persistent inattention to the plight of migrants, and largely unregulated exploitation of natural resources. This is the fruit of an overly technical approach to development which after the fall of Russian communism has taken profit maximization as its goal. While wealth in absolute terms has increased dramatically, inequalities and poverty have increased as well. In all this, however, he finds the opportunity for "discernment" and the shaping of a "new vision for the future."

Dysfunction in Economic System

Although stated in more general terms, *CIT* finds the same underlying dysfunctions of the economic system as did *EJA*. It appears that all the social teaching of the Church has had little impact on the real world practice of economics. The triumph of capitalism has not improved the lot of ordinary citizens and has worsened the situation for the poor. Reflecting on the changes in economic systems and institutions, Benedict concludes that it is not the system or institutions that lay beneath the dysfunction. Rather it is the values that animate the actors within the

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[50] Ibid., 21.

system, or within any system. He stresses that economic systems with their emphasis on wealth creation are not to be divorced from political systems with their emphasis on equitable distribution. This duality is a typical facet of Catholic social teaching that began with how to address "the social question." Either system pursuing its own agenda to the exclusion of the other will result in dysfunctions of poverty and lack of initiative. Rather one must look to the values of the individuals involved in the systems. "…It is man's (*sic*) darkened reason that produces these consequences, not the instrument *per se*. Therefore it is not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility."[51] The solution lies not in developing new systems but rather a new human being who proceeds to economic action with different values and goals. This will be further explored later in this chapter.

Inequality

Benedict discusses inequality in ways similar to those in *EJA*. He states that it is essential that "economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an *excessive* and *morally unacceptable* manner."[52] Both among and within countries, excessive inequality is seen as evil because it increases poverty which leads to a destruction of social cohesion and social capital. Social capital is generally understood to be the trust among people that allows concerted action whether in the economic or other realms of social endeavor. Hence, inequality is seen in the

[51] Ibid., 36.
[52] Ibid., 32.

traditional terms of Catholic social teaching. It is disordered not in itself but only if it is excessive. Benedict advances the argument, however, by noting unspecified social science on the dangers of "structured insecurity" that arises from excessive inequality:

> Economic science tells us that structured insecurity generates anti-productive attitudes wasteful of human resource, inasmuch as workers tend to adapt passively to automatic mechanisms, rather than to release creativity. On this point too, there is a convergence between economic science and moral evaluation. *Human costs always include economic costs* and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs.[53]

Here "structured"--perhaps systemic and permanent--appear to be the characteristics of an inequality that creates economic and social dysfunction. This appears to be a move beyond the traditional "excessive" argument in that the social costs of inequality are experienced by more than the poor which excessive inequality creates. However he does not develop the notion any further.

In this regard, Benedict's *God Is Love* contains an interesting comment on the early life of the Church in which equality in possessions and status was quite evident. After quoting from *The Acts of the Apostles*, Benedict notes that the early church was characterized by: fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles, communion and prayer/Eucharist. Communion, although not explicitly defined, consisted "in the fact that believers hold all things in common and that among them there is no longer any distinction between rich and poor. As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not in fact be preserved. But its essential core remained: Within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone

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[53] Ibid.

what is needed for a dignified life."[54] While it is clear that this equality (a *radical* communion) was not maintained, whether or not it could have been maintained is an arguable question. The use of the adjective "radical" suggests that Benedict believes it is not realistic to have expected the Church to have maintained this life style. This is interesting in light of the fact that the life style Jesus preached was indeed seen as radical vis a vis the prevailing religious and social mores of his times. Was it necessary to compromise this value in order to insure institutional survival? Was anything essential lost in this cultural accommodation? At the least, Benedict does not repeat the unsupported assertions of earlier documents including *EJA* that a radical equality would have disastrous consequences in terms of economic development and human initiative.[55]

Fundamental Anthropology

It is the area of anthropology where Benedict makes a major contribution to the social teaching expressed in *EJA*. He affirms the basic stance of *EJA* but then deepens the understanding of what it means to be a human being using the contemporary insights of a more relational ontology. While reason can come to the conclusion that all humans are included in a single human family, a species that contains a fundamental unity in the midst of an almost incomprehensible diversity, Benedict notes that this must mean something more than individuals "who happen to live side by side." He quotes Paul VI's observation that "the world is in trouble

[54] *GIL,* 20.
[55] *SRS*, 15.

because of the lack of thinking" and then goes on to specify precisely the kind of thinking that is required. Thinking of this new kind "requires a *deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation*." In fact, it is precisely interpersonal relationships that define human beings. "The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures." This relationship is not simply a series of bilateral relationships. These relationships taken together constitute the human community or family. Here Benedict makes the point that this constitutes a "communion" in which the individual's autonomy is honored and enhanced while the whole is likewise valued and strengthened. "The human community does not absorb the individual, annihilating his autonomy…but rather values him all the more because the relation between individual and community is a relation between one totality and another."[56]

He then brings this all together in a powerful summary statement: "The inclusion-in-relation of all individuals and peoples within the one community of the family [is] built in solidarity on the basis of the fundamental values of justice and peace." He then goes even further than *EJA* in likening this to the Trinity.

> This perspective is illuminated in a striking way by the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity within the one divine Substance. The Trinity is absolute unity insofar as the three divine Persons are pure relationality. The reciprocal transparency among the divine Persons is total and the bond between each of them complete, since they constitute a unique and absolute unity.[57]

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[56] *CIT*, 53.
[57] Ibid., 54.

This mystery of the communion of God in which the three Persons are distinct and yet perfectly united is the reality into which God desires to incorporate all humanity. All humans are called to incorporation into this communion which is also a profound interpenetration in relationship with all other humans and perhaps indeed with all creation. In Benedict's words, "The Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes *a metaphysical interpretation of the 'humanum' in which relationality is an essential element*."[58]

Human development, the proper work of the economy, must have this understanding of humanity as its foundation: the human persons can never be viewed in isolation from the rest of humanity or from God. To do so is to violate the very nature of what it means to be human. Thus he asserts the necessity of both subsidiarity and solidarity, not as separate principles and certainly not as opposing forces but rather in an active relation that guides the actions of humans in the world. One without the other is deficient; one dominant over the other is likewise. "The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need."[59]

From this more developed theological ground, Benedict adds new insights or at least some not prominent in *EJA*. Most intriguing is his explanation of a theology of gratuitousness. Arguing from both charity and truth, he explains that everything

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[58] Ibid., 55.
[59] Ibid., 58.

that exists is gift from God. It is not just that God gifts human beings with their starting points and they achieve everything after that; some more and some less. Everything, even who we are, is gift. "Not only are other persons outside our control, but each one of us is outside his or her own control. *A person's development is compromised, if he claims to be solely responsible for producing what he becomes."*[60] All we have and all we are are gifts from God. The implication of this is not just that we should exhibit a spirit of gratefulness to God. Benedict takes this even further. Although the consumerist and individualistic life of modern humans can easily mask gratuitousness, the reality is "the human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension."[61] We are created by God as gift and God gifts us with all that is; we in turn express our fundamental nature in giving to others what has been given to us. It is this principle of gratuitousness that is in accord with humanity's fundamental nature and which must be present in any economic, social or political action that seeks true human development.

It is in this context that Benedict raises a call for an "economy of communion."[62] This strange juxtaposition of theological and social science terms is innovative in Catholic social teaching. It appears no where else in the official documents and thus represents if not a new teaching then certainly a new

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[60] Ibid., 68.
[61] Ibid., 34.
[62] "Economy of salvation" is a traditional term of Catholic theology. It refers to God's plan for the creation of the world and the salvation of all humans. This plan is revealed by God in the Old and New Testaments and is centered on the saving action of Jesus Christ. "Economy" in this sense comes from the Greek term for "household management." Benedict is using the term "economy" here in a sense familiar to American audiences as the sum total of the creation of goods and services and their exchange in a marketplace. Combining the secular understanding of the term "economy" and the theological term "communion" is innovative in official Church documents.

interpretation in light of developing insights in economics. He notes that the distinction between profit and non-profit organizations no longer fully describes the reality of the economic system. His description is intriguing although not very specific:

> …A broad intermediate area has emerged between the two types of enterprise. It is made up of traditional companies which nonetheless subscribe to social aid agreements in support of underdeveloped countries, charitable foundations associated with individual companies, groups of companies oriented toward social welfare, and the diversified world of the so-called "civil economy" and the "economy of communion." This is not merely a matter of a 'third sector,' but of a broad new composite reality embracing the private and public spheres, one which does not exclude profit, but instead considers it a means for achieving human and social ends. Whether such companies distribute dividends or not, whether their juridical structure corresponds to one or other of the established forms, becomes secondary in relation to their willingness to view profit as a means of achieving the goal of a more humane market and society.[63]

This suggests that whatever an economy of communion is, it is a new way of seeing human economic activity. This is not a question of combining the strengths of existing economic systems and thus eliminating the flaws but rather of thinking about economic activity in a new way and acting accordingly. He says later that in fact what is needed is a new lifestyle, a new set of values more in accord with the anthropological insights described above. Quoting from *Centesimus Annus*, he says that such an economy of communion will be based on "the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth."[64]

These themes of gratuitousness and economy of communion do not come out of a desire to right a balance between capitalism and socialism as much as out of a

[63] *CIT*, 46.
[64] Ibid., 51.

more radical critique which seeks to deepen understanding of human nature and to let human activity including the economy reflect those values. It is precisely these themes which caused George Weigel to react so negatively to aspects of *CIT*. He finds "true" Benedictine sentiments in the material which he finds consistent with *Centesimus Annus.* He characterizes these as "the pope's own insightful thinking on the social order." He finds discussions of gratuitousness, communion, and wealth redistribution as opposed to wealth creation to be evidence of "Peace and Justice [Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace] ideas and approaches that Benedict evidently believed he had to try and accommodate."[65] Whether or not one agrees with his assessment, it is clear that at least this observer finds a change in direction or perhaps emphasis in *CIT*. Commenting in *America* on Weigle's critique, John Kavanaugh seems closer to the truth.

> So that is what Weigel thinks of this pope: He is a gentle soul who signs his name to a document that misrepresents his own theology and it application. This is not the case. If anything, the present pope is an astute and intelligent man, not the pawn of some interest group. Rather, as was the case with Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict has an integrative vision of our faith. His notion of "gratuitousness" or "the gift" in human existence is a frontal rejection of our myths of 'self-made" men and women. The gift of our shared existence as a human family is grounded, for Benedict, in the Gospel that brings all things under Christ.[66]

In fact it seems that it is Benedict's strong theological base that leads him into a deeper consideration of the social question.

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[65] George Weigel, "*Caritas in Veritate* in Gold and Red: The Revenge of Justice and Peace (or so they may think," *National Review On Line* (July 7, 2009), under http://article.nationalreview.com/399362/icaritas-in-veritatei-in-gold-and-red/george-weigel?page=1 (accessed February 11, 2009).

[66] John F. Kavanaugh, "Proofreading the Pope," *America* (October 12, 2009), under http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11909 (accessed February 11, 2009).

Conclusion

These two documents--*Economic Justice for All* and *Charity in Truth*--issued more than twenty years apart, one addressed to the citizens of the United States and the other to the citizens of the world, provide a perspective from which to understand Catholic social teaching as it applies to the contemporary situation in the United States. Both documents are part of the tradition of Catholic social teaching and are faithful to those roots. One does not in any way contradict the other even though emphases might be different. Synthesizing the three perspectives used above, dysfunctions of the economy, equality/inequality, and anthropology, it is possible to understand the stance of Catholic social teaching on the situation in the United States.

With regard to the dysfunctions of the current economy, it remains the case that the economic system, while highly productive in material terms, creates intolerable poverty in the midst of abundance. Ten years after *EJA*, the American bishops issued a brief pastoral statement assessing the situation in 1995. The picture was bleak. They cataloged a set of socio-economic data that showed things had gotten worse. They point out that the number of Americans living in poverty had increased not decreased since 1985. The situation for those in the middle had likewise worsened. During a period of economic expansion, "many families are experiencing declining real wages….The highest earning 20 percent of households saw their income increase by about $10,000. In contrast, the 20 percent of households at the bottom of the income range saw their income decrease [in real terms] by $1,200."[67] Benedict notes that there has been substantial economic growth world wide over the past 20 years. Along with the rapid globalization of societies and economies, this represents a remarkable achievement and the possibility of achieving the goals of economic development. Yet, he also notes that poverty has increased both world-wide and within specific economies. This situation is made all the worse by the financial collapse and resulting recession of the last half of the first decade of the century. The clear abuses by both financial institutions and individual actors have caused pain and distress world-wide.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that the consistent position, though not necessarily stated so baldly, is that economic growth and development seen in material terms may be a necessary but certainly not a sufficient cause of economic justice in light of the universal destination of goods. If the most productive economy the world has ever known is incapable of providing the necessary means for human dignity for all its citizens, then clearly economic productivity and wealth creation do not provide answers to the social question. These persistent dysfunctions have been cataloged by Catholic social teaching since *Rerum Novarum*. Catholic social teaching was articulated in response to the rise of socialism and its threat to the established order. Subsequent documents have tended to be caught in the either or choice between capitalism and socialism (communism) with both being found defective but with the preference clearly toward capitalism and its bias for individual freedom of

[67] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Decade After Economic Justice for All: Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1995), 7.

action. With the fall of communism as a viable economic system, the dysfunctions of capitalism have become even more visible. While both documents make several suggestions for economic reform (most notable *EJA*), only *CIT* hints at a different economic system, an economy of communion and gratuitousness. As imprecise as these terms may appear to some, this may be the path toward a more radical re-formulation of Catholic economic thought in the new century.

Both *Economic Justice for All* and *Charity in Truth* struggle with equality/inequality. They take the position that "extreme" inequality results in unacceptable levels of poverty and destruction of social capital. Neither can pinpoint where inequality becomes "extreme" and thus unacceptable. Neither argues that a radical equality in economic income and wealth is desirable although that argument may have more to do with the means used to achieve such equality than with the concept itself. Some level of inequality may in fact be useful and necessary to economic growth and wealth creation even though these do not necessarily lead to economic justice. This is in accord with Catholic thought as expressed in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. No one begins with everything needed for bodily and spiritual life. We need others since "'talents' are not distributed equally." The differences of

> age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and the distribution of wealth…belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular 'talents' share the benefits with those who need them.

> These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods….[68]

Benedict would have it that this inequality that gives rise to generosity is based on gratuitousness, the recognition that all is gift and that human persons are meant to be gift givers, not hoarders. If this were an active principle of human economic behavior, greater inequality would lead to greater generosity thus reducing by way of gift the underlying inequality. Both documents agree that this is not the way contemporary economic systems operate. As a result, there is the need for political intervention to redistribute income and wealth in a more equitable fashion. However, the problem of where to draw lines remains. How much inequality is unacceptable? How much political action is justified to rebalance what ordinary economic behavior will not distribute equitably?

Finally both documents make clear that the economy is at the service of human persons, not vice versa. Thus how one understands the human person is central to any evaluation of an economy. Both documents are squarely within the Catholic tradition, understanding a human person as both an inviolate individual created by God with an inherent right to dignity and respect, and as a social being, part of the family of humanity as well as other intermediate social groups. No economy can promote the full development of human persons without giving priority to human persons. Economic productivity and wealth production must be seen not as ends in themselves but as means to the end of human development. The persistent

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[68] *Catechism of the Catholic Church With Modifications from the Editio Typica*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 1936-7.

failure of economic systems to do this may be evidence that economics on its own is simply not capable of doing anything other than maximize profits and wealth. Catholic social teaching may be asking an economy—any economy—to be something it is not and cannot be.

The problem lies in a separation between anthropology and economics. One can hold to the Catholic position on the nature of human persons and yet not see the implications for economic action. It is as though these are two separate worlds. It is precisely here that Catholic social teaching raises the central point. These are not separate worlds. There is one world and the insights of Catholic social teaching about human persons in its fullness are to be the norms of human action including economic systems.

Both the American bishops and Benedict XVI explicate a notion of human nature using both human reason and revelation, especially the Triune life of God. Benedict advances the argument through his use of a relational anthropology that sees human persons as intrinsically relational. Relationship with other persons and human groups is not an afterthought but essential to what it means to be human. Any economy that begins with the human person abstracted from those relationships is destined to fail in its primary responsibility for human development. He seems to suggest that a whole new way of thinking about economics is needed rather than constraints on the actions of the current systems.

Catholic social teaching beginning with *Rerum Novarum* is clearly a contextual approach to theology. Based on an analysis of the current social situation, the tradition of the Church is examined anew in order to reformulate it in ways that are relevant to new conditions of human life. The following chapters will look at two developments in the social sciences that provide new insights into the social situation, especially in the United States. These will be the basis for understanding how the social teaching of these two documents can be applied to the contemporary United States economy.

CHAPTER 2

The Economy of Communion

This chapter will investigate the concept of "the economy of communion" by describing its sources, both in secular economics and in theology. In *Charity in Tr*uth (*CIT*) Benedict XVI mentions "the economy of communion" as an approach to economic action which differs in material though unspecified ways from the generally accepted notion of economics as the creation and distribution of wealth. He suggests that this new approach is not "the third way" often mentioned in Church teaching but rather "new thinking" about the ways in which human beings are called to interact in the economic sphere. It is important to understand this notion more fully in order to see how this concept can impact Church social teaching.

In terms of economic science, an economy exists to promote the creation and distribution of wealth. With the rise of industrialism in Western countries, it became apparent that more was involved than individual farmers or tradesmen producing products or services for their families and neighbors. New modes of thought were needed to comprehend new methods of production and trade. Economics was no longer simply local; raw materials were extracted or created and shipped to production points. Finished products were distributed far beyond the localities in which they were produced. Factors of production--capital, labor, and raw materials--were owned and controlled by owners and increasingly large scale organizations. These factors were combined and processed to create goods and services which were then traded in a market, the free operation of which was seen as essential to an economic system that could continue to expand and thus create wealth.

Individual actors and organizations received income for the goods and services they produced and likewise paid out resources to acquire goods and services. To the extent that they ended up with excess income after these transactions, they created wealth. This wealth was used to improve production systems and to invest in new opportunities. It became apparent that such excess resources were essential to the effective and efficient functioning of an economic system. As it became accepted that the end of an economy was to produce wealth, it was also accepted that wealth itself became necessary to increase wealth. Growth in terms of a quantitative increase in over-all economic activity and in the amount of wealth generated became increasingly necessary.

While free markets were necessary for such an economy, it was also necessary that standards of justice and equity were upheld within the economy, especially in the market. Transactional equity was necessary if agreements to exchange were to be counted on. All parties needed to trust that agreements were to be lived up to. Clearly inequitable agreements in which one party had excessive power to manipulate and distort would be destructive of an orderly and stable market system. Furthermore, the distribution of income and wealth needed to meet some minimum standards of equity if the system and the social trust on which it was based could be maintained. If large segments of the population were impoverished while a few generated enormous wealth, social and thus economic instability would be created.

The failure of the earliest modern economic systems to achieve this led to exactly these kinds of instability with the resulting social movements to eliminate or restrict private ownership of the means of production and place them in the hands of social groups, typically a government, so that political decisions would replace strictly economic ones. Socialism and communism are the best examples of this response.

Faced with an unacceptable either-or choice, both large economic actors and governments began to modify the absolute freedom of the owners of the means of production. Such a modification was clearly in the best long term interests of the owners. If the mass of people were too poor or too distrustful to engage in the market, there would be fewer people to buy products and services. Thus the economy would cease to expand and grow and the creation of wealth would slow if not actually decline. Henry Ford was not noted for his commitment to social justice but he paid his production workers wages that exceeded the prevailing wage for manufacturing jobs precisely because he wanted them to have enough money to buy the cars they were making. The basic motivation for limiting economic actions was to maximize the long term ability of an economy to grow and thus produce increasing amounts of wealth. The rationality of this economic thinking was the economic system itself. The criterion for judgment about the effectiveness of an economy was contained within the goal of an economy: increasing wealth.

In contemporary advanced economies, the factors of production have become much more complicated and sophisticated. In addition to raw materials, equipment, labor and capital, there have been added technology, information, and finance.

Increasingly these factors no longer exist in constrained geographies but can be located anywhere in the world or in the case of information and finance in no physical location at all. This globalization, noted by Benedict XVI and John Paul II, is a new feature of contemporary economics with both advantages and disadvantages. The major advantage is that economic activity can use factors of production wherever in the world the cost is the lowest. The major disadvantage is the dislocation that occurs when functions are relocated away from some areas into others. The resulting unemployment can pose a major problem. In terms of the overall system, such relocation is rational since it reduces costs and thus increases wealth production. The assumption is that any local economic disruptions are short term until labor and resources are directed to other activities. These are viewed as collateral to the major goal of ever more productive economic systems, productive in the sense of wealth generation.

The economy of communion operates in a different manner because it is based on different notions of the purpose of an economy and of the nature of human beings. It has arisen from critiques of the classical approach described above, launched both within and outside economic science. The following sections will discuss the critique from within, followed by the critique from outside.

Critique From Within Economic Science

This analysis will focus on four areas of criticism from within economic science: the relationship between wealth and scarcity; the unrealistic focus on an individual, unrelated economic actor; the differences between a supply-constrained and demand-constrained economy; and the inaccurate appeals to Adam Smith's "invisible hand."

Relationship Between Wealth and Scarcity

As Charles M. A. Clark has pointed out, wealth is an illusive concept. It may be simple enough to understand wealth as deposit of unused income after needs and desires of economic actors are accounted for but the concept becomes much more nuanced when one tries to understand the proper role of wealth in human economic and social activity. The central question is not the nature of wealth but rather about "how it is created, how it is distributed, and how it is used."[69] Clark traces the intellectual history of wealth and shows convincingly how it has moved from being a social construct to one almost exclusively of individuality. This shift is perhaps seen most clearly in the rise of marginal utility as an economic concept. The value of any potential choice to an economic actor is the usefulness and scarcity of that choice to the actor as an individual. Wealth thus comes to be defined in terms of usefulness and scarcity. This resulted in "the reduction and eventual elimination of historical and social context from our understanding of economic activity."[70] Ultimately freedom of choice became the norm for evaluating economic activity. "As long as

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[69] Charles M. A. Clark, "Wealth as Abundance and Scarcity: Perspectives From Catholic Social Thought and Economic Theory," in *Rediscovering Abundance: Interdisciplinary Essays on Wealth, Income, and Their Distribution in the Catholic Social Tradition*, eds. Helen Alford, O.P., Charles M. A. Clark, S. A. Cortright, and Michael J. Naughton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 29.
[70] Ibid., 41.

individuals freely choose how to employ their wealth, it is put to the best possible use, because the best possible use is whatever the individual chooses."[71]

Scarcity has become intrinsic to modern notions of wealth. An economy in which there were a super abundance of goods equally available to all members would be a society without wealth since the value of any good is determined by its scarcity. Diamonds are valuable because there are few of them relative to potential demand. If diamonds were as numerous as apples in an apple orchard, they would have little or no economic value since everyone could have as many as one would want. If apples were as scarce as diamonds, apples would be extremely valuable and would constitute wealth. Thus an economy creates wealth by restricting the supply of goods which thus become more valuable. The dysfunction with this mindset is that wealth becomes available only to a few and those few use their wealth to control and restrict the supply of wealth. There is an inherent bias toward scarcity in any economic system that focuses on wealth as its supreme end and does not see wealth as something to be put to the use of all members of a society. The result is that attempts to increase wealth inevitably do so only for those in power and thus already wealthy, leaving the vast majority of a society in either absolute or relative poverty. This dynamic explains the situation in the United States during the nineties. During this period, real net worth of U. S. households increased by 50 percent while real hourly and weekly wages actually declined by 0.2 percent. "This suggests that much of this 50 percent increase in wealth has not been due to factors that promote the common

[71] Ibid., 43.

good but instead has been due to the redistribution of costs, the creation of scarcity, and the promotion of exclusion."[72]

Unrealistic Focus on the Individual, Unrelated Economic Actor

Second, mainstream economic science has had an unrealistic focus on the "economizing" individual, abstracted from the social community and any relationships prior to exchange relationships in the market. Luigino Bruni describes how this focus arose in economics.

> But economists did not only distinguish and separate out the sphere of 'search for wealth' from others; they also brought about another separation….Economics starts from the premise that individuals are not linked to each other by inseparable bonds before beginning to barter. The intellectual exercise of separating the *ego* from the *alter* is, therefore, possible, giving rise to an individualistic science in which 'I,' as the individual agent, can be analyzed independently of my relationship with the other.[73]

While the value of the individual is clearly important, such an exclusive focus eventually gave rise to a radical "individualism" in which the actions of separate individuals became the only interest of conventional economic science.[74] While individuals clearly do not exist in complete isolation from other individuals, the relationship among individuals came to be seen as solely instrumental in nature. The "other" came to be seen as a means to the economic ends of the individual, either advancing or retarding the individual's effort to maximize his or her economic

[72] Ibid., 50.
[73] Bruni, 44.
[74] Ibid., 45.

advantage. "Individualism and instrumentality are therefore the two sides of the same coin."[75]

Within this system of thinking, rationality becomes purely instrumental. Rationality becomes focused on the best ways of achieving our desires or ends and

> does not question the content of the desires themselves…It is easy to see how such a vision of rationality provided an easy way for *values* and intrinsic motivation of actions to be omitted from economic science. It is the relationship between means and ends and not the content of the ends and means in themselves, which determines the rationality of the actions.[76]

Whether one thinks in terms of individuals as human persons or as corporations, the analysis is the same. Others are seen as means to the ends of the individual actor and that end is not subject to any value assessment other than the desires of the individual and the freedom with which it can be chosen. The recent economic history of the United States is replete with examples of the dysfunctions of such economic thinking: Enron and the financial meltdown of the home mortgage sector.

While it is possible for individuals to come together as a group—either formally or informally—and pursue their common desires, this changes nothing but only substitutes "group egoism" for "individual egoism."[77] However, a we-rationality is different. "The roots of this idea date back to the work of classical economists such as Smith, Rousseau and Genovesi. The main point is that of developing a concept of rationality in which, in order to decide which action to undertake, a person does not think so much about whether 'this action has good consequences for me' as whether

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[75] Ibid., 47.
[76] Ibid., 46-7.
[77] Ibid., 55.

'this action is my part in our action, which has good consequences for us.'"[78] Hollis articulates a notion of group "membership as a constitutive relationship between people who remain distinct."[79]

This critique of traditional economics is simple. While one can abstractly think of an individual acting alone without prior or conditioning relationships to others, this is not reality. Economic actors are first and foremost human beings who do in fact exist in relationship with others prior to any economic behavior. They are motivated by loyalty, love, obligation, respect, and responsibility. This is a logic "which gives meaning to belonging, to the desire to follow social norms, to duty, to love etc. No one can prevent this action from also being read in terms of instrumentality (and perhaps something can also be gained from that behavior), but the fact remains that the action is not grasped in its specificity if only read in this way."[80] An economic logic that fails to take this reality into account sets up the possibility and even necessity of economic behavior that is dysfunctional and opposed to the common good. Any attempts to limit, control, or otherwise adjust such an economic thought system will never be able to eliminate these dysfunctions. What is needed is a new way of thinking about economics, a new starting point that accounts for the reality of human existence.

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[78] Ibid., 51.
[79] Ibid., 55.
[80] Ibid., 55-6.

Differences Between a Supply-constrained and a Demand-constrained Economy

Third, any economy operates with certain constraints. The nature of these constraints can tell us much about the way in which an economy operates. Most economies in the world are supply constrained, that is, there are not enough goods and services to meet the basic human needs of members of the society. In such economies, the basic task is to increase the supply of goods and services and to distribute them in such a way that these human needs are met or are better met. This is the situation of developing countries with large populations and relatively inadequate goods and services.

In developed economies, such as the United States, the situation is very different. There are clearly enough goods and services produced to meet the basic human needs of all members of the population. These goods and services may not be distributed in such an equitable fashion, but supply is not the issue. These economies are demand-constrained. Once basic human needs are satisfied, the economy will cease to expand with population held constant since demand will cease to expand. Since a stagnant economy does not increase wealth, it becomes necessary to increase demand so that supply will expand to meet the increasing demand. Increased demand without a corresponding increase in supply will expand the economy because prices will rise. However, the real expansion of an economy comes when supply constantly increases in response to increased demand. Clark succinctly states the case: "In a 'demand-constrained economy,' scarcity takes on a new meaning, for the scarcity of the neoclassical economist is not real; that is, it is not based on the inability of the economy to provide the necessities of life to support the populations of a society. It is instead an 'artificial' scarcity created by the business system in order to maintain the rate of return on wealth and the social power that attaches itself to 'scarce' wealth."[81]

In a demand-constrained economy, demand must be stimulated beyond basic human needs while scarcity of goods must also be maintained. The resulting consumerism generates a never-ending cycle of consumption to fulfill artificially stimulated needs and desires. Since these are continually stimulated, they can never be satisfied and thus lead to more consumption. This "rat race" of consumption stimulating more consumption is the engine that drives modern developed economies like that in the United States. The wealth generated by this cycle "requires for its existence that the economy operates at a level below its potential, that the fruits of the economy be distributed in a grossly unequal manner, and that consumer wants be artificially encouraged to perpetuate the rat race."[82] The demand-constrained nature of the economy of the United States explains much of the dysfunction of this economy and may be inherent in any developed economy which takes the creation of individual wealth as its primary end. It is incompatible with an economy whose primary purpose is the creation of social wealth in which all members share in some equitable fashion.

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[81] Clark, 44.
[82] Ibid., 51.

Inaccurate Appeals to Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand"

Fourth, there is a critique of appeal to Adam Smith's "invisible hand" in both economic science and especially in popular understanding of the economy. Smith held that the pursuit of wealth by individual actors was the heart of an economy. Any distortion or abuse would be controlled by the "invisible hand" of competition in a free market. Competition would serve to make sure that individuals pursuing individual wealth and advantage would work to the benefit of the whole and would enhance the common good. Anything which would interfere with that competition would distort the operation of the invisible hand and thus limit the overall functioning and benefit to the common good. Many modern day advocates of this approach overlook the fact that Smith saw economic activity as working for the common good. He did not envision individual actors acting as isolated actors exclusively focused in individual return and profit.

Zamagni cites two of Smith's central maxims, the first of which is the much more familiar. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it." Zamagni observes that "we should take careful note of the adjective 'necessary'; Smith seems to suggest here that attention to others is a fundamental and inescapable component of human nature and hence indispensable to the understanding of individual choices, of economic ones among others."[83]

In other words, Smith saw economic actors making choices and decisions to maximize their own wealth in a context of a social network in which each one felt connected to all and in which individual actions contributed to the common good. Once that presumption of the social context was lost, the interpretation of his invisible hand became distorted in ways with which he would have disagreed. "Only within a structure of a relational kind, fed systematically by the practice of 'moral sentiment' such as sympathy and benevolence, is it possible for the pursuit of self-interest to produce positive results….Otherwise, it would be inevitable to fall back into a Hobbesian forest in which the economic game becomes a zero-sum game."[84]

These four critiques of contemporary, mainline economic science express a common theme: viewing economic actors as isolated individuals out of relationship to others leads to dysfunctional outcomes, no matter how "successful" an economy might be in increasing the total output of goods and services. Once an individual is abstracted from the natural relationships with others, it is not possible for an economic system to promote the common good. An economic system based on a radical individualism and instrumentality inevitably focuses on individual rather than social wealth and thus depends on scarcity and exclusion as fundamental strategies. While wealth does increase it is concentrated in a few powerful actors at the top of

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[83] Stefano Zamagni, "Wealth Distribution in Economic Discourse: Catholic Social Thought and the Individualistic Paradigm," in *Rediscovering Abundance*, 219.
[84] Ibid.

the pyramid and creates poverty and stagnation for the rest. At it develops, such an economy becomes demand-constrained and thus focuses on increasing consumption in an endless cycle of artificially stimulated consumption, lack of satisfaction, and then more consumption. This cycle enriches those who control the system but leaves others behind. The "invisible hand" of Adam Smith is misconstrued to convince those left behind that more freedom to take whatever individual economic action seems desirable is the only way to proceed. The presumption is that the maximization of individual goods will naturally result in improving the common good. However, without a beginning point that recognizes the common good, such an approach is disingenuous at best and manipulative at worst.

The above critiques of economic science find a comfortable fit with Catholic social teaching. What is significant, however, is that they arise from an economic analysis and not a religious one. This convergence of thinking increases the credibility of Catholic social teaching by positioning it a way that is accessible to all, not just to Catholics. In addition to critiques raised within economics, there has developed a cultural critique that finds the true nature of human existence best expressed in a culture of giving rather than a culture of having. This position arose more directly from a spirituality that understands human beings as creatures of a benevolent God.

Economic Science Responses to Critiques

Toward the end of the 20th century some economists—including Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen—began to understand economic development in broader terms as human development which focused on "people, on their needs and some basic parameters which regard the quality of life: health, life span, education and degree of participation in social life."[85] This expanded notion of development was and continues to be at odds with a strictly economic view of development. Rather than a focus on increasing individual wealth and the resulting over consumption, this approach envisioned a broader view of human life and its needs. Almost by definition, the economizing individual proved incapable of operating in a way that maximized this human as opposed to economic development. It began to be apparent that such an approach required or perhaps arose from a different conception of human beings and their role in the world. Vera Araùjo is clear about these implications. "This concept emerges from the idea of *new persons* who are capable of surpassing their *modern* identities as producers and consumers, and finding *something extra* which will help them to open up to others and to liberate them from isolation and egoism."[86] She calls this new kind of person *homo donator* (human as one who gives) as opposed to the *homo oeconomus* (human as one who maximizes economic self interest) of mainline economics. The reality is that our cultures today are

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[85] Vera Araùjo, "Personal and Societal Prerequisites of the Economy of Communion," in *The Economy of Communion: Toward a Multi-Dimensional Economic Culture*, ed. Luigino Bruni, trans. Lorna Gold (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2002), 21.
[86] Ibid., 22.

dominated by a culture of having with its individualism, egoism, and excessive consumption.[87]

This insight typically proceeds from two different though related sources: a radical relational view of human existence and a belief in the Trinity as a reality and model for human existence. Simona Beretta explains the first in terms of the need for a "thick" society. "…For a society to be generated and to be generative, its members must prove to each other that their mutual trust is deserved. This happens through the complex 'game' of exchanging gifts. Without this generative game, the thickness of society—the basic trust relationships that make it possible to circulate goods through markets and hierarchies—would disappear."[88] While one may take such trust relationships as naturally occurring, she holds that this is wrong headed. Such relationships must be nurtured by accepting this "strong logic of gift."[89] This logic of gift is not simply benevolence or charity but a radical stance toward others and the world.[90] Gifts can be given for the purpose of getting something in return. As long as gifts are given within a system that focuses on individualism, egoism, and

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[87] Ibid., 25.

[88] Simona Beretta, "Wealth Creation in the Global Economy: Human labor and Development" in *Rediscovering Abundance*, 151.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Louis-Marie Chauvet distinguishes between market exchange and symbolic exchange in his work on sacramental theology. "The important point to understand is that market exchange, like every value exchange, is binary: product X is exchanged for value Y, in kind or money….Symbolic exchange is structured in a *ternary* way, as shown in the example of the gift. Besides the gift and the return-gift, there is here the *reception* of the gift *as* gift and not as anything else. When A offers a gift to B, the heart of the matter resides in the reception of the object by B as a gift, which is verified in the return-gift of an expression of gratitude from B toward A." *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, ed. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 121. This symbolic exchange is the ground of human existence and relationship and provides the context in which value exchanges may take place as a practical requirement of human community. To raise value exchange to the level of dominance and superiority over symbolic exhcange is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of human existence.

excessive consumption, the generative power of gifts is lost. Giving a gift to get something in return in a quid pro quo fashion does not build trust but exactly the opposite. Systems that proceed from a culture of having carry within them the seeds of their own destruction.

There is a clear role for markets and for governments but if a system relies solely on these, it will fail to gain human development. Markets and government policies should nurture and encourage such development but if the culture itself does not support the notion of gift, the result will be no different. "People either acknowledge the gift relationship, which is constitutive of each person and of society, and nurture it; or they behave as if the 'closed logic' of self-interest indeed exhausts the horizon of possibilities."[91] Writing about new management approaches, Hans Burckart gives concrete expression to a culture of giving:

> The term 'to give' is understood, rather, as the antithesis of the dominant culture that is based on 'having,' on 'possessing.' While the idea of 'making a donation' simply entrenches the culture of having (by setting itself out as an exception),…'giving' is at the heart of all the values and most fundamental social dynamics. It is a radical paradigmatic change that involves every aspect of life and creates an enormous potential for the construction of what has been called 'social capital,' which is at the basis of development.[92]

Theology and Culture of Giving

While cultural and to some extent economic analysis was developing this notion of a culture of giving as necessary to an effective economy which focused on

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[91] Ibid., 151-2.

[92] Hans Burckart, " Sustainable Development and Management: Elements of a New Management Paradigm," in *The Economy of Communion*, 76.

human development, more religious analysis was rediscovering and re-emphasizing this same reality.

> …The culture of giving is about the nature of human person as a being who is open to communion, to a relationship with the Absolute-God, with others and with creation. Individuality and sociality come together in the gift of self, in the gift of one's being and in circulation of material and spiritual good that are necessary for development, for growth and maturity of all.[93]

It is not only the "Absolute-God" but the Trinity that provides the basis for this logic of gift. "Trinitarian communion…as both substance and life, is the ontological foundation of every form of communion."[94] While this is consistent with the relational critique of economic science (see above), this goes further in its understanding of relationship as communion in which individuals retain their identity and yet are in radical relationship with others. It is not an either/or choice but rather an understanding of individuality that reaches its fullness in relation with others.

Further, this application of the Trinitarian communion as a model for human communion carries within it the fundamental notion of gratuity. God created all humans and the world freely, gratuitously, without regard to what God might receive in return. In fact, it is impossible for God to receive anything in return other than human beings living out their God-given lives in ways consistent with God's gratuitous creativity. Freedom is inherent in such gratuity but it is a freedom often misunderstood by the modern world. "Freedom does not only have to take into account the freedom of the other—as individualist liberal thought recognizes—but has to regard the other as a constitutive part of that freedom. The relationship with

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[93] Araùjo, 23.
[94] Ibid., 27.

the other, in fact, is an integral part of freedom, not merely being in relationship with the other."[95]

These strains of thought have generated a coherent school of thought: the economy of communion. The approach to economic activity grew out of the Focolare movement founded by Chiara Lubich.[96] This movement is centered on a spirituality of unity. It became apparent that such spirituality was at odds with the economic activity and thought prevalent in the Western developed countries. Over the past 20 years, theologians, economists, and others have elaborated an approach to economics which took seriously the critiques described above. Lubich herself described the economy of communion in a presentation in 1999.

Characteristics of Economy of Communion

- Economic actors seek to live out the same lifestyle that they live in other areas of life
- Selfless giving, solidarity and attention to the least in both external and internal life of organizations
- Part of something bigger in which an experience of communion is already being lived
- Those in difficulty are helped as integral parts of the enterprise
- The emphasis is not on the philanthropy of one or other, but rather on sharing, where each one gives and receives with equal dignity.[97]

Beginning in 1991 in Brazil, people animated by these Focolare values established business enterprises that sought to implement the principles enunciated by Lubich. The principal difference between these new enterprises and other businesses

[95] Stefano Zamagni, "On the Foundation and Meaning of the 'Economy of Communion' Experience" in *The Economy of Communion*, 138.
[96] The Focolare Movement is a world-wide association within the Catholic Church. It exists in 180 countries with several million members. It grew out of Lubich's spiritual experiences at the end of World War II. It emphasizes a spirituality of unity. It is more fully described in Chapter 4.
[97] Chiara Lubich, "The Experience of the 'Economy of Communion': A Proposal of Economic Action from the Spirituality of Unity," in *The Economy of Communion*, 18-9.

is the way in which profits are treated. Profits are divided into three parts: "1) for direct aid to people in need; 2) for educational projects to help foster a culture of giving; and 3) for the continued growth and development of the business."[98] Although often referred to as the "economy of communion," more recent citations add the important "in freedom." As Uelmen points outs, this approach to economics is based on a lifestyle modeled on the communion of the Trinity which has freedom as a constituent element. "The result of this lifestyle was not only a more equal distribution of goods, but also a profound cultural intuition—the essence of human experience is to be 'in communion.' In God who is love—and who for Christians is a communion of persons, the Trinity—they saw the map for all human relationship. Our deepest fulfillment is in loving, in giving."[99]

This approach to economics arises from a spirituality and the efforts of a group of people to live out that spirituality in all spheres of their lives. Although it responds in important ways to the critiques of traditional economic science, it is not strictly speaking a response to that critique. Lorna Gold, drawing on her doctoral dissertation at the University of Glascow, presents an analysis of the pathways through which this spirituality gave rise to this economic approach. Using a framework developed by Max Weber to describe the impact of religious beliefs on economic behavior, she shows how the fundamental spirituality of Chiara Lubich (to be discussed in Chapter 4) created a seed bed for the rise of the economy of

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[98] Amy Uelmen, "What is the Economy of Communion in Freedom?" *Living City* 48, no. 7 (July 2009): 11.
[99] Ibid., 10.

communion. Specifically she identifies six elements based on the attitudes of the Focolare toward (1) work, (2) trade, finance, and industry, (3) wealth and possessions, (4) relations with other economic actors, (5) environment, and (6) relation to those without economic resources.[100] In each of these areas, the spirituality and life style of the Focolare is in stark contrast to the usual positions of rationalistic economic science. "The Focolare spirituality…gives rise to an economic ethic that is beginning to enter into capitalistic structure through the Economy of Communion businesses in particular. With these businesses, the flashpoints between a rationalistic worldview and this powerful spiritual vision are apparent."[101]

Conclusion

While the implementation of this economy of communion has typically focused on local activity in corporations and community, it provides examples of approaches to economic activity which can become more systematic. It proceeds from assumptions different from the economic mainstream but yet consistent with the economic and cultural critiques reviewed above. Benedict XVI's mention of the economy of communion in *CIT* was not a passing reference to some vague utopian economy but rather a pointer to a new direction in economic thinking and practice. It is a concrete manifestation of the critiques raised by Catholic social teaching and provides a proven path forward. To those who would claim that it is not possible to

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[100] Lorna Gold, "The Roots of the Focolare Movement's Economic Ethic" *Journal of Markets & Morality* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 153-4.
[101] Ibid., 155.

step outside current economic and cultural assumptions, the economy of communion by its very existence as a reality is an effective rejoinder.

CHAPTER 3

Contemporary American Economy: Dysfunctions and Inequality

The previous chapter described a new way of thinking about economic activity, the economy of communion. This approach developed out of critiques of standard economic science as well as the reengagement with a spirituality of unity. This chapter takes a more empirical approach to the understanding of the social and economic experience of middle class Americans at the beginning of the 21st century. For much of the world and, indeed, for many Americans, the unparalleled economic development and technological achievements of America seem to suggest that America is the promised land of opportunity, happiness, and quality of life. This chapter will present research findings that show difficulties that the American affluence creates for all Americans: rich, poor, and especially those in the middle.

By its very nature, Catholic social teaching is open to the changing circumstances of contemporary life. Its essence is the application of the fundamental and thus unchanging principles of Christian faith to the life faced by Christians in particular times and particular places. As Church teaching is at pains to point out, it is not that Catholic social teaching develops new teachings or principles but rather that it devises new applications of these principles to address the issues of the contemporary world.

Catholic Social Teaching's Focus on the Poor

This is easily enough seen in both *Economic Justice for All* (*EJA*) and *Charity in Truth* (*CIT*.) The first is filled with economic and social statistics describing the circumstances in the United States of the late 20th century. This focused the application of the principles of Catholic social teaching to the specific issues of that time. In the second, Benedict XVI specifically mentions the financial economic meltdown of 2008-2009 and draws conclusions from that information and proposes applications of Catholic social teaching based on that development.

Most of the social analysis evident in Catholic social teaching as it relates to developed market economies and especially the United States focuses on the persistent problem of poverty midst the abundance of the overall economy. This is clearly an important issue and central to the message of Christ about the call to announce the Good News of the Reign of God to those on the margins of society. In terms of economic status, Jesus seems to have addressed two audiences: those who were poor (marginalized, sick, widowed, imprisoned, etc.) and those who were rich. To the first he proclaimed the Good News (Luke 6:21-23).[102] To the second he proclaimed a disheartening message: salvation is impossible…at least unless there were significant changes in life style particularly with regard to notice of and relationship to the first group (Luke 6:24-26; Luke 16:19-31;18:18-23) . Catholic social teaching has generally followed this same path emphasizing the problems and immorality associated with poverty and the lack of response to it. The poor and

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[102] All biblical references are to *The New American Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1987).

marginalized will enter into the reign of God. The rich experience salvation by noticing and helping the poor since the rich have already experienced their rewards through possession and enjoyment of the goods of this world.

This focus on the poor is central to the preaching of Jesus. It probably had greater relevance in social systems in which very few people were rich and most were poor, a situation that continues in the developing countries today. However, once societies and economies undergo the epidemiological[103] and economic transition to market oriented economies and democratic political systems, the socioeconomic situation appears to shift to a middle class structure. The largest proportion of the population is in a middle class. A smaller though still significant group remains poor and a smaller still upper class controls a disproportionate amount of resources. With this realignment comes a fundamentally different reality. Compared to developing countries, virtually everyone in the United States is rich. Certainly the middle class with a median family income of more than $50,000 is wealthy compared to the vast majority of families in developing countries. Charles Curran and others have pointed out that the Catholic Church is a conservative organization and has been slow to give

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[103] "The 'epidemiological transition' is the shift in the main causes of death---from infectious diseases to degenerative cardiovascular diseases and cancers. It marks a fundamental change in the main determinants of health and seems to indicate the point in economic development at which the vast majority of the population gained reliable access to the basic material necessities of life." Richard G. Wilkinson, ""The Epidemiological Transition: From Material Scarcity to Social Disadvantage?" in *The Society and Population Health Reader: Volume I Income Inequality and Health*, eds. Ichiro Kawachi, Bruce P. Kennedy, and Richard G. Wilkinson (New York: The New Press, 1999), 39. This transition can also be understood as a shift from infectious diseases as causes of premature death to diseases arising from affluent lifestyles.

up support for social constructions based on a stable class structure with a small upper, governing class and a larger under class.[104]

Such a social construction is no longer the case in the United States and other market economies. In fact a large middle class is the hall mark of contemporary economic development. In market democracies like the United States, it is precisely the middle class that makes the fundamental political decisions about who will govern and the broad policies they will pursue. Thus in the United States, the vast majority of those who hear the message of Catholic social teaching is neither the impoverished and marginalized nor the super rich who control their own destiny. Rather they are part of the broad middle class whose relative wealth is enormous, whose relative political power is substantial but whose life experience is increasingly dysfunctional in that increased material well being has not resulted in higher levels of quality of life. Contemporary social science analysis and critiques provide a focus point for understanding this new circumstance.

Three conclusions are especially salient for this study. First, it has become apparent in the final years of the 20th century that high levels of economic development have not necessarily resulted in an increased quality of life. Second, the middle class is trapped on a systemic treadmill that requires constant consumption at higher and higher levels in order to sustain economic growth. Third, contemporary market economies do not eliminate economic inequality but rather tend to increase it

[104] Curran, 165 and Kennedy, 74.

and this inequality has deleterious effects across the population spectrum, especially on the middle class.

High Levels of Economic Development and Quality of Life

In 1992 Juliet B. Schor published her eye-opening study on the use of leisure time in the United States. *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* pointed out that alone among the developed Western European countries, the workers in the United States had not traded off increased productivity for less working time but rather had increased the number of hours worked even as productivity increased dramatically. For the previous 100 years, the number of hours worked had been steadily declining but then just as the productivity gains began to increase so too did the number of hours worked. In European countries, the same productivity gains resulted in a reduction of the number of hours worked and thus increases in leisure time.[105]

This was not the result of any intentional decisions or policy choices. In fact, most economists and social observers in the 1950's were concerned about how people would use their leisure time when the standard work week was 30 rather than 40 hours. For reasons that are still not completely understood, American workers decided to increase consumption and acquisition of goods rather than maintain living standards and thus achieve more leisure time. The increase in productivity per worker has been quite dramatic. Between 1948 and 1992 productivity per worker has

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[105] Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 1-3.

doubled. "We could now (1992) produce our 1948 standard of living…in less than half the time it took in that year. We actually could have chosen the four-hour day. Or a working year of six months. Or *every worker in the United states could now be taking every other year off from work---with pay.*"[106] The result has been a wide spread affluence never before experienced in the world. Schor takes a particularly striking example from housing to make her point.

> In the 1950's, when developer William Levitt created Levittowns for ordinary American families, his standard house was 750 square feet. In 1963, the new houses were about twice as large; and by 1989, the average finished area had grown to almost three times the Levittown standard—2,000 feet. At the same time, fewer people were living in these dwellings. The typical 1950s family of four has shrunk to an average of 2.6 persons, so that each individual now has as much space as an entire family of four occupied in 1950. Fifty years ago, only 20 percent of all houses had more rooms than people living in them; by 1970, over 90 percent of our homes were spacious enough to allow more than one room per person. The size and quality of the American housing stock has not been replicated anywhere else on earth.[107]

All those trends have continued and increased. Until the recent recession, the number of hours worked has steadily increased driven by continued consumption.

The reasons for this powerful translation of increased productivity into increased consumption are not clear and unambiguous. However, two factors are important. Following a long depression and World War II, the pent up demand for goods in the United States was matched with a large and intact production system put in place to wage the war. There appeared to be no end to what one could desire and what one could acquire. Second, the well known balance between individualism and communitarianism described by Robert Bellah and associates began to become

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[106] Ibid., 2.
[107] Ibid., 109-10.

unbalanced in favor of individualism. When John Kenneth Galbraith wrote *The Affluent Society* in 1958, he could easily describe a private sector of unparalleled affluence but a public sector that was being starved of resources. He saw that this rampant dynamic of affluence was over focused on individual and private good and that it was perpetuating and increasing social and economic disparities.[108] The rising tide might be raising all boats but it was also creating greater distances between them. This economic distance would eventually lead to social and cultural disparities and inequalities.

In 1998 Schor added to her portrait of the typical.[109] Not only are American families working more hours (the typical family has more than one wage earner) and spending more, they are even spending more than they are earning. Savings rates have dropped to close to zero and consumer debt has skyrocketed. All of this has fueled an economic system that has resulted in a life style for ordinary citizens that is more affluent than the richest people of a century earlier. The standard economic assumption was and continues to be that individual economic actors pursue their own advantage in the market. They act to fulfill their wants, needs, and desires. It is not possible for economics as a science to place any value on the differences among those. It is up to each actor to decide and it is the freedom of that decision which is the heart of a free, market economy. However, what happened next was not anticipated.

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[108] John DeGraaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: An All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Beerrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2002), 146.
[109] Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerenial), 1998.

Constant Consumption at Higher and Higher Levels Required to Sustain Economic Growth

Once economic activity passes beyond needs, it moves into largely unknown territory. For most of the history of humanity, the economic task for most people has been to acquire enough resources to provide for basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, safety, education. As those needs are met in a specific circumstance, the individual begins to move into wants and desires. In a society where communitarian impulses have been weakened and individualized ones strengthen, the needs of others are not a central and essential concern of all other individuals. Thus regardless of the needs of others, one who has or is able to attract additional resources beyond basic needs begins to acquire goods that satisfy wants and desires.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as one moves beyond health and safety needs, one moves upward toward self actualization. That move assumes that the lower basic needs are met. These basic needs require goods and services for their satisfaction: food, shelter, clothing, etc. As one moves up the hierarchy, however, acquisition of goods and services is less relevant and at a certain point become negating and dysfunctional since they have little impact on the higher order needs of affection, self-esteem, and self-actualization.[110]

This is the fatal flaw in what John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor have called *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*. After documenting in a very readable journalistic style the symptoms of affluenza that afflict America and Americans, they present a chapter entitled "Dissatisfaction Guaranteed."

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[110] DeGraaf, 113-8.

> To live, we buy….The American racecar lifestyle is fast approaching burnout because it requires long, stressful work weeks that eat up chunks of life, natural resources, and health. It programs us to substitute consumption for both citizenship and companionship. And it tries to meet nonmaterial needs with material goods, a losing strategy.[111]

Psychological studies consistently demonstrate that material wealth does not create happiness. "We keep looking outside ourselves for satisfactions that can only come from within." As if this were not disheartening enough, it appears that "unhappiness and insecurity often *initiate* the quest for wealth."[112] The American experience has shown that a narrowly economic view of human nature and an emphasis on consumption result in a hopeless and self-defeating strategy of seeking meaning and emotional security in wealth and possessions. The tragedy is not only that this strategy fails but even more that it results in ever more powerful attempts to acquire wealth and possessions. It appears as though it is an addiction. When one drink no long suffices to achieve a feeling of well being, take a second. When a sixth no longer works, take a seventh. There is no end to this.

This cycle of endless consumption, however, is not simply a function of individual behavior and choices. Individual addictive behavior is not a complete explanation of the extent and pervasiveness of this phenomenon. The economic system itself has developed mechanisms that both feed on this need to consume as well as maintain and stimulate that need. Clark observes that Thorsten Veblen may have been the first to point out this mechanism in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*. It was essential to the maintenance of the economic system with its elite leisure class to

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[111] Ibid., 110.
[112] Ibid.

stimulate continued economic growth beyond what was needed to provide basic needs. It was necessary to create the perceived need for goods and services based on psychological needs for status and acceptance. "Conspicuous consumption" on the part of the elites would serve to stimulate demand for these luxury goods in order to achieve a standard of living acceptable in society.[113]

Advertising particularly in the mass media became ever more focused on status needs as motivation for consumption. The economy found the perfect solution. Advertising products and services based on need to demonstrate status, acceptance, and success would stimulate higher consumption levels than would be required to meet needs. These increased expenditures focused on achieving status would, of course, prove futile since there were always people who spent more or who had more expensive goods and services. Thus there might be a short term satisfaction of status needs but the need for additional expenditures would inevitably emerge and result in additional consumption.[114] This never ending treadmill would result in expenditures beyond the capacity of most people and thus create as much debt as real economic activity. The final result is that consumer consumption expenditures comprise 70 percent of the American economy, substantially more than even other highly developed market economies. The economic system has become dependent on personal consumption expenditures driven by advertising. The most visible sign of this dependency is the well known admonitions to spend as a response to the 9/11 attacks or the economic recession. This is true even though it was excessive personal

[113] Clark, 45-50.
[114] DeGraaf, 149.

spending and the consequent personal debt levels that were major contributing factors to the financial meltdown and the recession of 2008-2010.

The result of these dynamics is well described by DeGraaf and associates. The American consumer at all levels is trapped in a perpetual treadmill of increasing work, consumption, and debt that never gets them any closer to satisfaction. As long as satisfaction is understood in terms of consumption, that is, external goods and services and status, it can never be achieved. In fact, the economic system demands just such a treadmill. If satisfaction could be achieved or if it could be achieved without consumption and its attendant overwork and crushing debt, it would not benefit the economic system and those at the very top who profit enormously from it.

No amount of moralizing about individual greed and envy will do any good because this has become a systemic issue, not purely an individual one. The system has become so powerful that the freedom of individuals to choose a different course is substantially and effectively zero. As long as one stays within the system, it is almost impossible to behave any differently. "During the last half century,…[affluenza] has been spreading faster than ever before, as cultural values that once kept it in check have eroded under modern commercial pressures and technological changes."[115] One might think that such a system would sweep everyone along at close to a similar level of income and expenditures. Since consumption is prized above all else, it would be in the system's best interest to insure that everyone has the resources to consume beyond their needs. However, the next body of research will point out the disturbing

[115] Ibid., 121.

fact that such an economic system seems to inherently produce and accentuate inequality in terms of income and wealth and that this inequality actually harms everyone trapped within this economic system.

Contemporary Market Economies Tend to Increase Income Inequality

While both individual decision-making and a consumer oriented economic system create conditions under which most people are frustrated in their attempts to find and enhance satisfaction with their lives, there is a deeper factor that gives rise to these two, in ways which are only now beginning to be understood. That hidden but powerful factor is income and wealth inequality. It is significant that it only emerges as a visible factor when subjected to careful analysis. The reason for this is well pointed out by Robert Frank in his work on the impact of inequality on the middle class. He observes that even in the most unequal distribution of incomes—with large multiples between the highest and lowest—it does not feel so unequal because the people right above and right below us appear to be more or less equal to us. Consumption expenditures related to social rank are highly impacted by context rather than absolute levels.[116]

While a family whose annual income is $50,000 would not think it realistic to match the expenditures of a family making $1,000,000 annually, it would appear more reasonable to get a car like the next door neighbors whose annual income is $60,000, even if it needed to go further into debt to do so. Because housing tends to

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[116] Robert H. Frank, *Falling Behind: How Rising Inequality Harms the Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 61-77.

be segregated by income, the family wouldn't see the $100,000 auto parked in the circle drive of the mansion of the $1,000,000 family but it would see the entry level Lexus parked in the driveway next door as it pulled in its five year old Toyota Camry after working a ten hour day. Consumption expenditures driven by status competition tend to be local and cascade down the income ladder. As Schor has pointed out, after "thirty years of growing inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, it's not surprising that the upper-middle class…[which] receive[s] almost half of the nation's annual income…use[s] it to create a compelling consumer lifestyle."[117]

Trapped in this consumption-for-status treadmill, the middle class engages in ultimately self defeating strategies in an attempt to maintain standards set by upper income levels. Frank presents a compelling list of these strategies:

- Working longer hours
- Increased indebtedness
- Reduced savings
- Longer commutes
- Growing sleep deprivation
- Public service cutbacks[118]

If income were more evenly distributed, there would be less pressure to differentiate status through consumer consumption and to continually raise the stakes to demonstrate social status. But this is only the tip of the ice berg of inequality. It turns out that inequality explains much more than a debilitating consumer life style running rampant in the United States.

[117] Schor (1998), 164-5.
[118] Frank, 78-86.

Richard Wilkinson is a researcher in social inequalities in health and the social determinants of health. Beginning the 1980's he began to investigate the relationship between socio-economic conditions and health of populations especially in developed countries. What emerged from these studies was the insight that "'social determinants of health'…[provide] new insights into the way we are affected by our social environment and the social structures in which we live."[119] This research has shown

> that some intensely social factors are among the most important determinants of health in rich countries. These include the nature of early childhood experience, the amount of anxiety and worry we suffer, the quality of our social relationships, the amount of control we have over our lives, and our social status. By choosing which dimensions of health we look at and what angle we look at them from, we can choose what aspects of life health tells us about.[120]

Wilkinson discovered important understandings about the relationship between economic development and health, some of which run counter to the American assumption that the richer one is the better one is in every way. The research clearly indicates that at a certain level of economic development, how rich an individual or a society is appears irrelevant—at best—to the health of that individual or society. "Social and psychological factors loom large among the determinants of health in the developed countries because the long history of rising living standards has drastically reduced the direct effects of material privations."[121] At a certain point of economic development, a society goes through what is known as

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[119] Richard Wilkinson, *The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 8.
[120] Ibid., 9.
[121] Ibid.

the epidemiological transition when infectious diseases as the primary cause of premature death are replaced by chronic, life style related diseases. After this transition, increases in wealth appear to be unrelated to increases in health status.

What does emerge, however, is a different way in which socio-economic status impacts health. Within a developed country, one's socio-economic status does impact health and life expectancy. The lower status, that is, the poorer one is, the sicker one is likely to be and the shorter one's life expectancy. There is a socio-economic gradient. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their comprehensive study of the impact on inequality across different societies demonstrate the important relationship between this gradient and inequality. When looking only at rich countries,

> some countries can be almost twice as rich as others without any benefit to life expectancy. Yet *within* any of them death rates are closely and systematically related to income….Higher incomes are related to lower death rates at every level in society. Note that this is not simply a matter of the poor having worse health than everyone else. What is so striking…is how regular the health gradient is right across society—it is a gradient which affects all.[122]

It became apparent that a higher income inequality intensifies the impact of this gradient throughout a society. To the extent that the American economic system functions to increase inequality, it also functions to have a negative impact on the health of everyone with the society. However, the work of Wilkinson and Pickett has gone further and now makes clear that it is not only health which is impacted by inequality but quality of life measured in a variety of ways and that this impact is true for all members of society not just those at the bottom.

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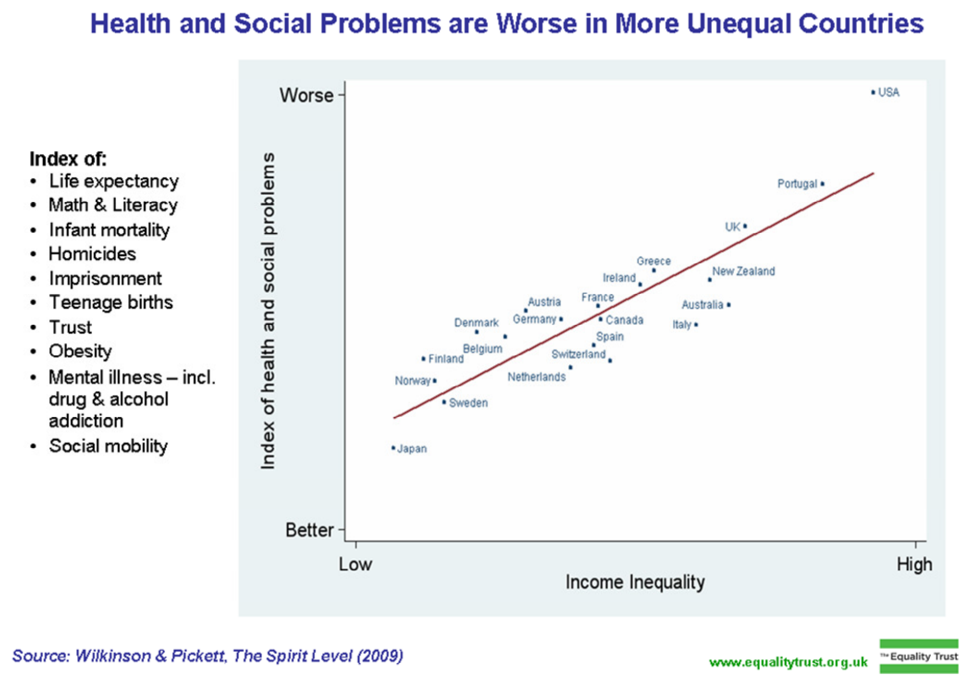
[122] Ricahrd Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 12.

Wilkinson and Pickett's analysis demonstrates the relationship between economic inequality and the social and physical health of a society/culture. This work focuses on the richest countries, those which have achieved the economic development sought after by developing countries. These are the fifty richest countries as identified by the World Bank. Those with less than three million people were excluded as well as Iceland because of the lack of good data on income distribution. Twenty-three countries remained: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States of America. In addition, the analysis also included inequality and socio-economic indicators among the fifty states of the United States. This served as a check against a specific cultural bias within the data.

It appears that there is a qualitative change once a certain level of economic development has been reached. (This is similar to the "epidemiological transition" in which chronic diseases replace infectious diseases as the greatest threats to life expectancy.) Once that barrier is crossed, further economic development tends to lead to greater inequality between the upper and lower levels of some societies. The greater the gap, the sicker and more violent a society or organization. In fact, the greater this gap, the worse a society does on several measures of quality of life. This inequality has an impact, not just on those in the lowest income level, but throughout the society. In the more unequal societies, the middle and upper classes are less healthy, both physically and socially. This is a 20th century phenomenon or at least has only become visible in the 20th century as social and health statistics have become available for all countries. This research also suggests that such a dynamic is even at work among the fifty American states.

Specifically the researchers devised a single measure of quality of life using data widely and comparably available both for the developed countries and for the fifty U.S. states: level of trust, mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction), life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, children's education performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates and social mobility (not available for the U.S. states.)[123] They combined these factors with equal weight into a single measurement they called Index of Health and Social Problems. Their analyses are summarized in the following graphs.

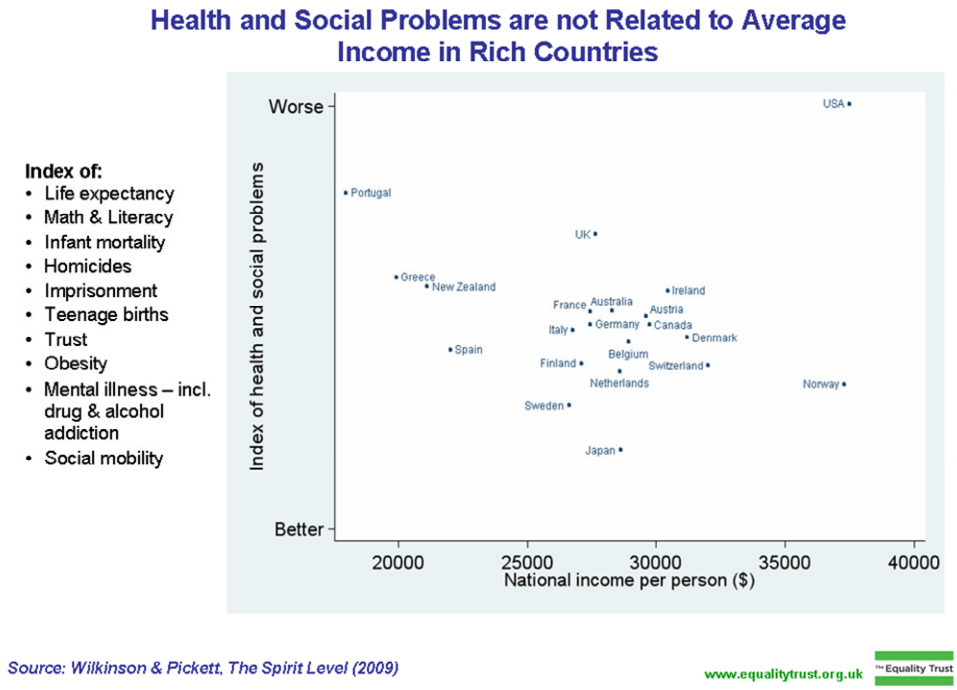
[123] Ibid., 19.



[124]

First there is a clear and statistically significant relationship between income inequality and health and social problems in developed countries. Such a statistical relationship would occur by chance less than one in a hundred times and thus is highly significant. Equally important, however, is to understand that this relationship does not exist with the absolute levels of per capita income as shown in the next graph.

[124] Kate Pickett, PowerPoint Presentation on The Spirit Level.



[125]

"This shows that there is no clear trend towards better outcomes in richer countries….However, as well as knowing that health and social problems are more common among the less well-off within each society…we now know that the overall burden of these problems is much higher in more unequal societies."[126] Although not presented here, the graphs for the fifty U.S. states show almost identical results. The differences between countries is not an artifact of cultural differences since these same relationships occur with a single (U.S. culture). There is an underlying and significant connection between income inequality and the health and social welfare

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[125] Ibid.
[126] Wilkinson and Pickett, 20.

of human societies, at least in developed countries which have gone through the epidemiological transition.

Wilkinson and Pickett carefully work through the analysis of each of the factors included in their index. This analysis not only shows that the relationships hold up under closer scrutiny but also provides an in-depth understanding of the ways in which inequality works its pernicious impact on human society.

> The view that social problems are caused directly by poor material conditions such as bad housing, poor diets, and lack of educational opportunities and so on implies that richer developed societies would do better than the others. But this is a long way from the truth: some of the richest countries do worst….The problems in rich countries are not caused by the society not being rich enough (or even by being too rich) but by the scale of material differences between people within each society being too big. What matters is where we stand in relation to others in our own society.[127]

It is central to their work that they go further than simply providing statistical relationships between various social indicators. They conclude that material inequality is both a measure and a cause of something else.

> Human beings have lived in every kind of society, from the most egalitarian prehistoric hunting and gathering societies, to the most plutocratic dictatorships. Although modern market democracies fall into neither of those extremes, it is reasonable to assume that there are differences in how hierarchical they are. We believe that this is what income inequality is measuring. Where income differences are bigger, social distances are bigger and social stratification more important.[128]

It is increased social distance and stratification that appears to have negative consequences for health and welfare, as measured by the index. What are the mechanisms by which this happens? In an earlier work Wilkinson used the concept

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[127] Ibid., 25.
[128] Ibid., 27.

of pathways to explain how inequality had these impacts in several areas: health, violence, education, etc.[129] This later work provides an overall explanatory concept albeit with applications with each of the index areas. The major pathway or vehicle for these negative effects is through evaluation anxieties which are greater in more unequal and more hierarchical societies.

Researchers have observed an increase in anxiety over the past thirty years. This appears to be a long term and substantial increase that results in high levels of emotional distress and illness, quite apart from an increased incidence of reporting. This increased anxiety results in greater levels of cortisol. Although very useful in short term threat situations since it prepares us for fight or flight, chronically high levels based on persisting anxiety actually retard health in several important ways. This has occurred at the same time that developed countries were moving from a more community based existence to a mass society.

> People used to grow up knowing, and being known by, many of the same people all their lives. Although geographical mobility had been increasing for several generations, the last half century has seen a particularly rapid rise….People's sense of identity used to be embedded in the community to which they belong, in people's real knowledge of each other, but now it is cast adrift in the anonymity of mass society.[130]

Within this context, increased economic inequality can have a particularly powerful effect.

> Greater inequality seems to heighten people's social evaluation anxieties by increasing the importance of social status. Instead of accepting each other as equals on the basis of our common humanity as we might in more equal settings, getting the measure of each other becomes more important as status

[129] Wilkinson, 200-2.
[130] Wilkinson and Pickett, 42.

> differences widen. We come to see social position as a more important feature of a person's identity.[131]

The slogan of the French revolution indicates just how long these concerns about status and equality have been on the agenda of modern humans: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. This slogan represented the desire to be free from the domination of upper class and nobility, to share and glory in the common identity of humans and to reduce the economic and status differentials that kept the oppressive social system in place.[132] Wilkinson and Pickett then present the evidence for each of the ten elements of the index both for the developed societies and the fifty U.S. states. While some pictures are clearer and stronger than others, the overall effect is the same. Whether one looks at the combination of factors in the index or at each of the factors, societies or U.S. states that are more unequal are less satisfactory for human life. There is more sickness, more violence, more addiction, more incarceration, more teenage pregnancies, more obesity, more mental and emotional illness, and less trust among members of the society.[133]

The result of increasing inequality in modern market democracies is an increasingly dysfunctional society. Unfortunately the United States stands as the foundational illustration of this dynamic. This is ironic. Many of the values and insights that well serve a society attempting to pass through the epidemiological transition and achieve modern economic development can become toxic. In an underdeveloped country, there is clearly inequality between a small elite of enormous

[131] Ibid., 43.
[132] Ibid., 45.
[133] Ibid., 49-169.

wealth and the vast majority of the population mired in a profound poverty and material deprivation. Yet this is not a pervasive inequality through the social structure. Most people are in deficient but more or less equal situations. Their material poverty is an evil that ought to be eliminated but their similar status results in high levels of fraternity, trust, and care for each other. This is certainly the testimony of liberation theologians and others who have worked with the poor both domestically and in other countries. As development occurs, the average income per family begins to rise hopefully for all and the attendant benefits of development accrue to them. But now they are subject to the possibility of a growing and systemic inequality throughout the social structure that will begin to erode the benefits of development. If this takes place at the same time as the development of a mass culture and its associated media and with a consumer oriented economy, the result will be a shift toward the individualistic values and the resulting inequality will begin to undo some of the advances of development.

Body weight in the United States is a particularly apt example. Epidemiology has known for some time that there is a social gradient for obesity (Body Mass Index >30) and overweight (Body Mass Index 25-29.9.) What has now become apparent is that the gradient reverses itself after economic development. In absolutely poor countries before industrialization and development, the rich are obese and the poor are normal or underweight. The poor lack the resources to obtain adequate food, let alone more food than they need. The rich, on the other hand, can and do. After development, however, it is those at the bottom of the social ladder who exhibit obesity and the rich who can afford a lifestyle of healthy food, exercise, leisure, and education.[134] Although obesity may be greatest at the lowest levels, in an unequal society there are greater levels of obesity and overweight throughout the social structure. Since the impact of obesity and overweight on health is well known, it is no wonder that the U.S. which is the wealthiest country in the world is far from the healthiest. It is the same with the other factors included in the index. Successful economic development is pursued because it will make a society better for all its members and this is true. However, under certain circumstances, this development can also generate increased and systemic inequality which will erode the very advances sought.

Wilkinson and Pickett turn to evolutionary anthropology to gain an understanding of the ways in which human beings relate in societies, the key dynamic underlying equality or inequality.

> Different forms of social organization provide different selective environments. Characteristics which are successful in one setting may not be so in another. As a result, human beings have had to develop different mental tool-kits which equip them to operate both in dominance hierarchies and in egalitarian societies. Dominance and affiliative strategies are part of our deep psychological make-up.[135]

This echoes Bellah and associates' description of communitarian and individualistic value stances. From the current U.S. perspective and recent history, it is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that dominance strategies are the norm. While such strategies may result in dysfunction from time and time and thus may need to be

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[134] Ibid., 90-1.
[135] Ibid., 203.

constrained to some extent, dominance especially in economic life is the name of the game and, we believe, it works to benefit all members of the society. However,

> in the time-scale of human history and prehistory, it is the current highly unequal societies which are exceptional. For over 90 percent of our existence as human beings we lived, almost exclusively, in highly egalitarian societies….Modern inequality arose and spread with the development of agriculture. The characteristics which would have been selected as successful in more egalitarian societies would have been very different from those selected in dominance hierarchies.[136]

Conclusion

Inequality is not a given for human societies. Perhaps more accurately, extreme inequality as present in contemporary United States is not a given of human existence. Among the developed democratic economies and among the fifty U.S. states, inequality varies from high to low. It reflects policies and economic arrangements that humans put in place to manage and organize their social life. If equality can be higher or lower, then this research makes clear that everyone benefits if it is in fact lower. In fact, the lower it is the better…for everyone. That insight and the research findings that support it provide a lens and focus point to investigate the Catholic social teaching tradition for ways of addressing this issue.

This chapter has presented social science analyses of the contemporary situation in the United States. Status-seeking consumption expenditures, relentless and inherently unsatisfying work and expenditures, and a growing and pernicious inequality characterize the economic and social lives of the vast majority of

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[136] Ibid., 204-5.

Americans. The messages of Catholic social teaching tend to be based on the assumption that most Americans are doing well economically and thus in every other way. The issue is to convince them to share their bounty with those who do not have enough, both within the United States and in other countries. However, these messages are received by people who live in a very different context. They do not feel affluent even though they are. Their quality of life has declined in clearly observable ways. How does Catholic social teaching address this issue? The next chapter will investigate some aspects of the larger Catholic tradition that may provide clues.

CHAPTER 4

Some Relevant Aspects of the Christian Theological and Spiritual Tradition

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis focused on economics, epidemiology, and applied social science. This chapter will begin the move back to theology and the ways in which these insights from analyses of the contemporary situation can confirm aspects of Catholic social teaching, emphasize certain aspects over others, or call for a revision of the ways in which this teaching is applied to contemporary life in the United States.

This chapter reviews some elements of the Christian theological tradition which may be helpful to the integration of the insights of Chapters 2 and 3 with Catholic social teaching. It will touch on the notion of equality as experienced in the New Testament, the implications of *communion* as an understanding of the Church, Paul's use of the body as a metaphor for the community of faith and its possible application to the action of that faith community in the larger world, a contemporary theology of unity, and a suggestion of the type of spirituality suited to the current challenges of Catholic social teaching.

Is There a Theology of Equality?

Ronald Bowlby, Anglican Bishop of Southwark England, attempted to answer the question: "Is there a theology of equality?"[137] While the final answer is a bit murky, his article provides a good summary of Christian thinking about equality and

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[137] Ronald Bowlby, "Is There A Theology of Equality?," *The Modern Churchman* 26 no. 1 (1983).

its role in human society. He begins by trying to be clear about the role of equality in the New Testament evidence. Relying on David Mealand's work[138], Bowlby describes three phases of Christian development: time of Jesus, Church of the Resurrection, and "routinization." The first phase comprises the actual life of Jesus, his acts and words as expressed in gospels with all their unique characteristics. Bowlby finds in the first period that the

> dominant feature is the proclamation of God's reign, as both present in the Lord Himself and imminent for the world. This is characterized by feasting, healing, justice for the poor and an end to Satan's rule. This leads some who hear this call to identify with the coming Kingdom and to accept it in faith and simplicity, and the parables and the teaching stress the need for a firm decision and a real break from the past.[139]

In the second period, the Church of the Resurrection is "a group of people who are tight-knit, somewhat unsure of the future but deeply aware of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. They also expect the End soon, the coming of the Kingdom in power." The third period beginning in the second century begins the long term process of the Church becoming a part of the long term future of human existence. This is accelerated when the church is incorporated into the Roman Empire as the state religion. Early in this period, Mealand observes that Luke and Matthew "begin to soften those ethical demands which might support an extreme egalitarian position."[140]

It would be a mistake to read Enlightenment notions of egalitarianism into early Christianity. Such thinking is not only anachronistic but also out of character

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[138] David Mealand, *Poverty and Expectation in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1980) as referenced in Bowlby.
[139] Ibid., 6.
[140] Ibid., 7.

with the early Church which did not appear to have a political or social agenda apart from the way in which individuals related to those in their personal life space. However it is also undeniable that the gospels include many stories and sayings of Jesus that clearly have an egalitarian slant. Several sayings describe the reversal of fortunes of life in the Reign of God: the first shall be last (Mark 9:36; Mark 10:31;Luke 9:46-48); those who lead are those who serve (Mark 10:42-45; Matt 23:1-12); those who lose their life will save their life (Mark 8:35; Matt 10:39 and 16:25; and the ringing reversals of the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-26.) The radical inclusiveness of the Reign God is seen in the table fellowship of Jesus with those who would normally be excluded by observant Jews (Luke 15:1-7 and Matt 9:10-13) and in stories he told with the inclusiveness theme (Wedding Feast Matt. 22:1-14 and the Great Dinner Luke 14:15-24.) Perhaps the story with which American have the most difficulty is the parable of the workers in the vineyard where those who barely work receive the same pay as those who labored throughout the day. The unfairness of this equality is raised within the story by those who feel unfairly dealt with. As the response unfolds, it is clear that equality is not necessarily the same thing as equity and yet generosity is being held up as the core value. (Matt 20:1-16)

Bowlby concludes that while “there is no well-developed theory or doctrine of equality in the New Testament,” the fundamental Christian message and life work toward a fundamental equality among humans.

> To become a Christian in the first century was to enter into a close fellowship of those who were united in their experience of the spirit of Jesus. At first this experience was inextricably bound up with the expectation of the End of the world…and it is in this context of imminent conclusion that we can best

> understand the…communal sharing of the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44-45). But the experience does not end with the delay of the parousia, and St. Paul in particular uses a series of powerful images to convey what such an experience of receiving the healing and power of the cross means in terms of changed relationships.[141]

Bowlby concludes that equality or egalitarianism is not a central ethical imperative of Christianity, not because it is not consistent with and part of the Christian life style but because to approach Christianity as a set of ethical imperatives is to miss the central point of the life advocated by Jesus and sought as an ideal by the early Church. "Christian ethics is…a Koinonia-ethics, in which the basic aim is maturity rather than morality. Maturity does involve some moral value like love, but…such maturity cannot be achieved in isolation."[142]

> So what emerges from the New Testament? Not a set of proof-texts on equality; and not a clear statement which can be applied to contemporary society without further ado. We have instead the experience of koinonia, and the teaching and action of Jesus constantly emphasizing the dignity and value of those he met. Since these included not only the poor, but also those regarded as alien, the thrust and direction of this is unmistakable: there is an equality of status before God which is shared by all men and women.[143]

The story of the early church is, in part, the story of these several churches trying to live out that ideal in their day to day lives. This is, of course, an ideal characteristic of the Reign of God and thus destined to exist in its fullness only at the end of time. Yet Christians are called to live, somehow, as though the Reign of God already existed and their lives were part of it. Granted this goes against the prevailing norms

[141] Ibid., 9.
[142] Ibid., 10.
[143] Ibid., 9-10.

of society, any society, but this is exactly the task of the Christian: to be in the world but not of the world.

Jesus was clear that those who heard and believed his message were to live under the "law" of love (Luke 6:27-36, John 15:11-17 and Matt 5:43-48) and to announce this good news in the world (Matt 28:18-20 and Mark 16:14-16). Significantly they should also expect that the world would reject them and their message (John 15:19-21 and Luke 21:12-19). It was and is the task of Christians to work in ways appropriate to their stations and roles in life to cooperate with God in bringing the Reign of God into being in the world as it is. Clearly this will be a difficult task fraught with rejection and pain. Neither commitment to a set of ethical rules nor simply a desire to see actual results would be sufficient to maintain such an effort. This would only be possible through an entrance into a new kind of life generating a new kind of person. St. Paul succinctly summarizes this dynamic: "…yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2:20).

Bowlby summarizes his essential argument by noting that "equality, by itself, is an insufficient value" and then quotes Daniel Jenkins: "Equality does not come alive unless it realizes itself in the reciprocity of the communion of love, which is the mature human relationship."[144] Any approach that proceeds by way of the "right" of individuals to equal portions mixes a modern concept with biblical thinking. Equality

[144] Daniel Jenkins, *Equality and Excellence* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 22 as quoted in Bowlby, 11.

would be an outcome of a fully realized Christian eschatology rather than a rule to guide day to day living.[145]

St. Paul's Use of the Body as a Metaphor for the Community of Faith

Paul's first letter to the Christian community at Corinth contains much of his thinking on the community of faith and his use of the human body as a metaphor for that community. John Haughey points out the importance of understanding these texts in a broader rather than a narrow ecclesial way. "As long as Pauline texts are left confined to the moment and place in time that their author first addressed, our literalism will leave his inspired insights under utilized and unexplored, almost criminally so."[146] 1 Corintians 12 presents Paul's teaching on the many gifts of the spirit but the fundamental underlying unity of the community. "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit." (1 Cor 12:4-7)

Haughey urges us to go beyond the understanding of these as reflective of the ecclesial life of the community at Corinth and to understand them in a broader theology of gift that can be applied to the world outside the Church. "In brief, all charisms are to be exercised with a view to the well-being and upbuilding of the

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[145] Bowlby, 11.
[146] John C. Haughey, S. J., "A Pauline Catechesis of Abundance," in *Rediscovering Abundance*, 96.

community."[147] One of these gifts or charisms is the ability to generate wealth but this wealth is to be generated and used to build up the community not to enrich individuals.

> "The criterion [Paul] uses is this: What will build up the good of the community by the exercise of the gift? Priority is to be given to those gifts that edify or upbuild. There is no room for self-promotion or for a self-referential use of one's gifts. The common good trumps any one individual's particular good; and it recalls his earlier instruction in 1 Corinthians 10: a Christian seeks not his own advantage but that of the many.[148]

Haughey uses the parable of the farmer (Luke 12:16-21) to make this point about wealth creation for the Christian. Wealth creation is a charism that is given by God and is to be used for the upbuilding of the community, not for individual gain. The farmer uses his considerable talents to produce a bumper crop, an entirely legitimate use of his talents. "But then, paradoxically he begins to apply the logic of scarcity to his unexpected overabundance. By this logic, wealth means having things and is in itself life-giving, so that the more things one has the more life one will have."[149] The needs of others do not come into play; his only concern is how to store and preserve this abundance for his future. "But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' (Luke 12:20) " Jesus states the moral of the story both before and after. "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions" (Luke 12:15). "Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God" (Luke 12:21). The

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[147] Ibid., 97.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 91.

parable of the talents makes a similar point that wealth creation and productive use of resources is a gift from God. It is the servant who hoards the talents who is found wanting by the master (Luke 19:11-27).

And what is it that matters to God? In Luke 12:31 Jesus provides the answer. Those who seek the kingdom of the Father will have all they need given to them. One seeks the kingdom or Reign of God by living out the good news that God is near and that those who are excluded will be included, those who hunger and thirst will be satisfied, and those who seek justice will prevail. The Reign of God is a world marked by mercy and justice and animated by love.

Of course, creating wealth and using wealth are two different things. Wealth creation may well be inherently unequal. The overwhelming diversity of human existence is evidence that equality cannot possibly be understood as identity or sameness. No two people are identical and thus can never be equal in that sense. Some will be endowed with greater resources, intelligence, or opportunities than others. They can use these advantages to produce a super abundant “crop,” generating more resources than they need or could reasonably use to meet their own needs and those of their families. St. Paul notes that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed as the Spirit sees fit. Not everyone has the same gift but all gifts are to be used for the common good, to build up the community. “But one and the same Spirit produces all of these [gifts], distributing them individually to each person as he wished.” 1 Cor 12:11).

Seen from this perspective equality does not consist in what one has. There is nothing in the New Testament that leads us to think that everyone should necessarily be equal in terms of possessions, wealth, or income. In the Kingdom which Jesus came to announce those things are irrelevant except to the extent to which they are used to build up the community in a way that succors the poor, clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, and generally releases people from those things which enslave them and reduce their God-given freedom. Equality here is equality before the God who cares for each. Those with a superabundance of resources are to use these to meet the needs of those who have not enough for their needs. And as the parable of the workers in the vineyard makes clear, this provision of the needs of others is not dependent on the fact or amount of their efforts. All we have is gift from God whether we perceive it as a more or less direct endowment or whether it comes through the giftedness of others. In the Reign of God, all is gift and life is filled with graciousness and gratuity.

How this equality played out in the early church is neither simple nor easy to understand. The situation is complicated by the fact that there were several churches with different perspectives and points of emphasis of the same message of Jesus. Most scholarship on egalitarianism in the early church focuses on equality of gender, an issue of particular importance to feminist theologians. Most scholars, though not all, see the early church as a period with a fundamental egalitarianism which could not be maintained as the Church entered the mainstream of society and especially once it became the state religion of the Roman Empire. (As noted in Chapter 1, Benedict XVI notes this same dynamic.) The picture of the life of the early Christians depicted in Acts 2:42-47 seems very different from the hierarchically organized church which began to develop in the second century and which accelerated that development in the fourth. Perhaps that was inevitable given the scope and dispersion that the Church had reached by then. Perhaps it was the result of the intensity of commitment characteristic of the early stages of any new human endeavor made even more intense by the expectation that the Lord would return during their lifetimes to claim the world and all in it for the Reign of God. One can imagine the early followers of Jesus taking to heart the parable of the farmer who was foolish to focus on his wealth and surplus when that very night he would die. Yet that parable does not directly lead one to a communal sharing based on a lack of individual ownership and distribution based on need. However things eventually turned out, it is clear that at the beginning there was a movement toward equality in all things.

Egalitarianism in the New Testament Communities

Mary Ann Beavis provides an excellent summary of the scholarship on the egalitarianism of the early Christian community.[150] She focuses on critiques of this nascent egalitarianism especially by John Elliott. While the arguments both for and against early Christian egalitarianism have a special relevance to gender equality in

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[150] Mary Ann Beavis, "Christian Origins, Egalitarianism, and Utopia," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (2007).

the contemporary Church, they provide an important insight in egalitarianism of all sorts. Beavis summarizes the arguments in favor of a reading of egalitarianism:

> This view, whose optimistic portrayal of women is captured by Schüssler Fiorenza's famous phrase 'the discipleship of equals,' envisioned *ekklēsia* as a liberating space of women and men relative to the patriarchal and authoritarian familial, social, political, and religious regimes of antiquity, both Jewish and non-Jewish….Many other scholars…have offered similar reconstructions of Christian origins in terms of an early stage of openness and egalitarianism…followed by a later stage of accommodation to the patriarchal and hierarchical norms of the broader society.[151]

Beavis shows that this understanding of the early Church began in the Reformation with its turn toward scripture and its understanding of a congregational polity for the Church.[152] Beavis concludes that an "egalitarian theory" of early Christianity "has been upheld by prominent scholars for centuries, although the gender implications of the theory were not prominent until the 1970's, coinciding with the rise of second-wave feminism."[153]

Although the egalitarianism at least implicit in Acts 2:42-7 is meant to describe the actual living situation of the earliest community of believers, 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28 can be read as ideal and/or actual expressions of a thoroughgoing egalitarianism. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). The question is whether these admonitions are meant to describe the life that disciples will lead or whether they describe what life will be like in the Reign of God in its fullness. Of course, it really makes little difference. The ideals of

[151] Ibid., 31.
[152] Ibid., 36.
[153] Ibid., 39.

the Reign are not meant to be postponed but rather to guide the life of disciples today.[154]

Bowlby emphasized the importance of "maturity" in *communio*, incorporation into the Body of Christ and the new life that flowed from it.[155] Maturation is an apt concept to explore the incorporation into the Body of Christ and the already-but-not-yet character of the Reign of God that Jesus announced. Maturation is an ongoing process of human growth which never reaches a final stage. One never really becomes fully mature without the possibility of greater or deeper maturity. While the fullness of maturity—becoming the person each potentially is—can never be fully realized, it can come closer and closer to that fullness. Further the end state (an ideal of complete and total maturation) is always present as end or goal in the unfolding process of maturing. So it is with the Reign of God. The ideals of love and quality may never be fully achieved in this life but they animate our lives as we proceed—as individual persons and as humanity—toward the fullness of the Reign of God.

As part of her argument, Beavis references the work of Susan Kent and her typology of egalitarianism that seek to present a "cross-cultural classicization of degrees of gender egalitarianism that may exist with societies."[156] This six part classification runs from "Highly Egalitarian" to "Highly Nonegalitarian". While Beavis and Kent are discussing gender egalitarianism, their analysis logically applies to any egalitarianism including economic. They conclude that egalitarianism and

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Bowlby, 11.
[156] Beavis, 41.

hierarchicalism are not mutually exclusive categories but rather are continua and not absolutes. "Proto-Christianity (or better, proto-Christianities) could well have manifested varying degrees of egalitarian and hierarchical features at different times and locations."[157] These Christianities could be either more or less egalitarian at the same time as well as more or less hierarchical. It was never an either-or choice nor is it today. The central question is which way did early Christianity lean—toward or away from egalitarianism and toward or away from hierarchicalism? Was that egalitarian tendency part of the core message of Jesus and the belief of the earliest communities, or was it a manifestation of the prevailing culture? Does it need to be reclaimed as part of the authentic Christian message or does it need to be surmounted as the necessary cultural manifestation of a particular time and place?

When the question is posed in this fashion, the answer is clearly apparent. Without having to precisely determine the exact nature of the state of egalitarianism or hierarchicalism in the words of Jesus or in the young churches, it is easy to conclude that both leaned toward egalitarianism and away from hierarchicalism. "The utopian character of Schüssler Fiorenza's conceptualization of the discipleship of equals is particularly appropriate to the interpretation of the *basileia* movement, which in itself was utopian (it proclaimed the reign of God) and eutopian (it posited a better way to live)."[158] Showing the presence and impact of Hellenistic utopian

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[157] Ibid., 42.
[158] Ibid., 44.

thinking including a thorough egalitarianism, Beavis catalogs the ways in which the early communities evidenced this new way of being in community.[159]

This leaning toward egalitarianism was not the norm in first century Palestine. It represented a new way of being in community which is entirely consistent with a new way of thinking of community as *communio*. "Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it." (ICor 12:27) This chapter in I Corinthians certainly acknowledges that there are different roles and functions within the community, the Body of Christ. But it spends much more time and emphasis saying that the various parts or members are all and equally important and due equal respect. There may be a difference by way of function but there is no difference existentially. There are clearly differences—Jew/Gentile/ slave/free, male/female, social status, economic status, functions within the community—but these differences do not count for anything. In fact everything is turned on its head, a clear indication that none of this has import or relevance. The rich will become poor; the powerful, weak; those in the first place will assume the last. It is as though these status markers are taken out of the social equation.

If this impulse toward egalitarianism did not survive the movement of the community of faith into the mainstream of society and culture, that is not an argument to say that egalitarianism is somehow not consistent with or was not part of the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus and the earliest communities. While the Roman Church is clearly a conservative organization as are most religious faiths, it must guard

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[159] Ibid., 46-7.

against a position that assumes that how things worked out is exactly how God wanted them to work out and thus cannot be changed. The history of the Church provides examples of firmly held positions that are later changed as circumstances change. Furthermore, to take this position comes perilously close to agreeing with Alexander Pope that "Everything that is, is right" and denying the role of human culture and change in an incarnational faith. Whatever the case, within the Christian tradition there is clearly an inclination toward an egalitarianism, which inclination is available to the contemporary Church.

Sect and Church Typology

Charles Curran uses a church-sect typology developed by Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber to underscore some of the basic tensions within any religious tradition. This typology can provide helpful insights into the ways in which the Church became less egalitarian as it became more established. A "sect is understood as a small, exclusive, religious group emphasizing rigorous ethical standards and seeing itself in opposition to the world and to the culture with a determination not to compromise its ideals. The church, on the other hand, is a universal community, open to embrace all, calling its members to live in the world and to transform it."[160] This typology helps explain the development of the early faith communities from small groups of believers with radical ideas that set them apart from the larger community into a universal community open to all with a mandate to change the world rather than

[160] Curran, 158.

separate from it. If the early churches had remained sects in this sense, they would not have developed into the Church as we know it today.

However, Curran raises the possibility that the demands and challenges of the contemporary world may require the Church to embrace some of the characteristics of a sect without somehow giving up the universal aspects of church. "Now and increasingly so in the future, Catholicism should embrace attitudes and approaches that have often been associated with sects."[161] Some aspects of a sect, such as, voluntary poverty, a radical communitarian philosophy, and a withdrawal from extreme consumerism, can be understood in a way that puts them in service of the Church as working to change society. Confronted with the daunting power of contemporary American culture, it may appear the only path is to "drop out" of the system, but that would not be consistent with the injunction to be in the world but not of the world. A reluctance to emphasize aspects of the faith that seem antagonistic to the prevailing culture may lead to an over easy accommodation to prevailing culture rather than radical reworking of it to bring it into the realm of the Reign of God.

Spiritualities for Cultural Transformation

Given the dynamics of the contemporary culture within which Catholics are called to announce the Reign of God, a reign of freedom from enslavement of all sorts and of peace and love, Christians are called to a radical effort to transform culture that, given the nature of culture, may never succeed or appear to succeed. The normal

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[161] Ibid., 160.

human motivations of achievement and progress will ill serve someone trying to effect thoroughgoing changes at the deep level of cultural behavior. Jesus alluded to that by saying that his followers would experience the same fate that he faced. The world does not deal gently with those who seek to reform it. While we may take steps toward that goal, it will always seem beyond our grasp and we may experience a deep and profound sense of failure and inadequacy that can easily lead to giving up the quest as hopelessly idealistic and impossible. It is essential that Christians engaged in this struggle have a spirituality appropriate to that struggle.

Dorothee Soelle presents the fruits of both her enormous theological talent and her experience as a resister to the violence and discrimination of contemporary culture.[162] She finds mysticism to be at the heart of the matter. Mysticism is not just a way for the resister to stay in the struggle. She finds that resistance must flow from a mysticism if it is to have any reality in today's world. Her root understanding comes from Meister Eckhart, the 14th Century theologian and teacher. Soelle focuses on Eckhart's notion of *sunder warumbe*, "to live without a why or wherefore," as the central core of a spirituality fit for our time.

> This "without a why or a wherefore" that we should live in, that life itself lives in, what does it mean? It is the absence of all purpose, all calculation, every *quid pro quo*, every tit for tat, all domination that makes life itself its servant. Wherever we are torn between being and doing, feeling and acting, we no longer live *sunder warumbe*. Instead, we measure expenditures and success, calculate probability and benefit, or else obey fears we do not understand. I say this with a view to the goal-centered rationality that

[162] Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

> pervades our highly technologized world. Such a rationality prohibits any form of existence for which there is no purpose…."[163]

One has to lay aside one's typical intellectual categories to fully understand this spirituality. It seems to be the most natural thing in the world to have plans, strategies, tactics, milestones, measures of change, if one is trying to change a system. Soelle is pointing out that if one approaches change exclusively in such a fashion, one has already lost because one is operating within the instrumental assumptions of the world and its ego-based systems. As Nancy Hawkins has pointed out, "for Soelle, *sunder warumbe* is a model for living the life of an activist while being detached from its results. To live without a why means to live without intentions, goals, purposes or power."[164] Lest one think that such a stance leads to a kind of mystical quietism, Hawkins underscores that Soelle's life and thought move in exactly the opposite direction. "To live without a why is not to cease acting, resisting, or questioning. It simply renders the one who acts honest. It forces those acting to ask why they act and what they expect in return for their actions."[165]

A spirituality of presence to God is a mystical spirituality that resides deep within humans at the very ground of their being where there is a wordless, formless but powerful presence of the Divine and the human person. This is the only source of energy that can possibly have an impact on this highly developed and technological world in which we find ourselves. It understands that the work is God's and we are called to simply and radically be who we most truly are: creatures of God. The

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[163] Ibid., 60.
[164] Nancy Hawkins, "Conversations with Meister Eckhart and Dorothee Soelle" *in The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. Sarah Pinnock (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 175.
[165] Ibid, 177.

essence is captured by a saying attributed to Mother Teresa of Calcutta although she never said it: "We are not called to success, but to faithfulness."[166] If Christians focus on the success of their efforts to announce and advance the Reign of God, they will be subverted by the very world they are trying to change. This saying is so striking and seems so apt because it is another way of saying what Jesus said to his followers when he described to them that his mission would end in a horribly violent failure:

> He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said. "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." (Mark 8:31-33)

Jesus was called to be faithful to his mission regardless of what he might think the chances of worldly success might be. When he told his followers that each would need to pick up his or her cross and follow him (Mark 8:34-38), he was not predicting success but rather stressing a faithfulness to the deepest reality that he had come to express to all humanity.

Another expression of this spirituality which is often used by those involved in social justice and, ironically, pastoral planning, is a prayer also inaccurately attributed to a great contemporary saint, Archbishop Oscar Romero. It appears, however, that the prayer was actually written by Bishop Kenneth Untener for delivery by Joseph Cardinal Dearden at a Mass for deceased priests.

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[166] "Quotes falsely attributed to Mother Teresa and significantly paraphrased versions or personal interpretations of statements that are not her authentic words" *Mother Teresa of Calcutta Center Official Site* under http://www.motherteresa.org/08_info/Quotesf.html (accessed February 16, 2010.)

> It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The reign of God is not only beyond our efforts. It is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying the reign of God always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. We cannot do everything but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that because this enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.[167]

These are theological and prayerful expressions of a spirituality fitted for the task of being in the world as a force for change and yet not of the world.

Spirituality of Unity and Chiara Lubich

Throughout the course of Christian history, many and varied spiritualities have arisen to serve as guides for living a life of discipleship. While these spiritualities reflect different historical and cultural environments as well as the personalities and experiences of their founders, they "are refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit."[168] Thomas Norris defines spirituality as "a concrete way of living out in the church the gospel revelation of the God of Jesus Christ."[169] Theology and spirituality are different but both are needed for a complete and balanced approach. If theology is "faith seeking understanding" through the tools and techniques of intellectual analysis, spirituality is faith seeking to live in the day to day

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[167] Thomas J. Gumbleton, "The Peace Pulpit: Homilies of Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, March 28, 2004" *National Catholic Reporter* under http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/peace/gumb032804.htm (accessed February 16, 2010.)
[168] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2684.
[169] Thomas J. Norris, *The Trinity Life of God, Hope for Humanity: Towards a Theology of Communion* (Hyde park: New City Press, 2009), 13.

life of those who confess Jesus as the Christ. Both are essential. "Dogma [theology] without spirituality is barren—a skeleton without flesh, but spirituality without dogma is enthusiasm or even Gnosticism—the flesh without the skeleton."[170]

Lawrence Cunningham and Keith Egan draw on suggestions by Gustavo Gutiérrez and Walter Principe to suggest a three stage process for analyzing a spirituality: first, the experience of the founders or first followers of God entering their lives in a specific and often dramatic way; second, these experiences are elaborated and passed on to others and become a way of life; third, theological reflection on a spirituality occurs as it enters into the mainstream of the tradition and becomes accessible to many.[171] This three-step process will be used to describe the spirituality of unity as it unfolded in the life and ministry of Chiara Lubich.

Chiara Lubich was born in 1920 and lived with her family (parents and siblings) in Trent in Northern Italy. Her spiritual awakening began when she was 19 and attended a Catholic Action youth convention at Loreto. During breaks in the conference, she found a sense of peace and of the presence of the Holy Family in the house at Loreto reputed to be the house in which the Holy Family lived in Nazareth. This powerful sense of engagement with Jesus and his family remained with her as she began to sense that God was calling her to "something more" although she had no grasp of what that might be. The war raging in Europe impacted Lubich's life. While she desired to attend university and pursue the study of philosophy, the war made that

[170] Ibid., 130.
[171] Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 7-9.

impossible. She began to help support her family by taking teaching positions in lower schools in Trent. During 1943 she became a member of the Third Order of Franciscans through a local community of Capuchins. As part of that induction she took the name Chiara after St. Clare; her baptismal name had been Silvia.

During 1943 and 1944, the war in Italy was coming to a conclusion with increased and relentless bombing of Trent. Chiara Lubich, her family, and friends suffered the fate of civilians caught between modern military powers. Bombing and artillery shelling were horrendous and accompanied by the shortages of food and shelter that come with war. Lubich continued her spiritual journey nonetheless and took vows as a consecrated virgin in December 1943 at the age of 23. A group of young women, some of whom were her students or former students, formed around her. As a group they decided to stay in Trent during the bombing even though their families left the city for the safety of the surrounding hills. Although they continued their careers, they lived together and shared resources. Eventually their spiritual journey resulted in the Focolare Movement, a Catholic association within the Church that exists in 180 countries with several million members.[172] But at the beginning, she says, "I did not have a plan, I knew nothing. The idea for this Movement was in

[172] The details of the early life of the Focolare Movement and Chiara Lubich's leadership role are recounted in several different publications including the organizations official web site. Although not a scholarly account, Gallagher's work is based on interviews with Chiara and her early associates and is probably the single best source for the story of the movement. Jim Gallagher, *Chiara Lubich: A Woman's Work: The Story of the Focolare Movement and its Founder* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997).

God, the plan was in heaven. It was like this at the beginning. It had been so during the 60 years and more of the Focolare Movement's development."[173]

As this small community of lay women and then men gathered around her in the midst of the violence and destruction of the war, "they held no formal meetings and had no rules or structures. They were just a group of friends who tried to live the Gospel and to help each other to live it….The friends made a pact to meet in the air-raid shelter whenever the siren sounded. The only possession they brought to these meetings was Chiara's little book of the Gospels."[174] They found enlivening meaning in New Testament texts that surely they had often read and heard before; but now, the words seemed to be alive, so alive that they seemed to burn with an intense light.[175] Some of these texts were: "Love your neighbor as yourself "(Matt 19:19), "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt 7:7) "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12-13, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20) and then the words of Jesus that would become the central focus of Chiara Lubich's life and the Focolare Movement.

> One day I took shelter in a dark cellar with my new companions. We had the Gospel with us. By candlelight I opened it. There was the prayer of Jesus before his death, "Father…may they all be one" (Jn 17:21). It was not an easy text for young women like us, but those words seemed to light up one by one and they imprinted in our hearts the conviction that we were born for that page of the Gospel, that is, to contribute to bringing about the unity of men and

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[173] "The Beginnings as Told by Chiara Lubich" *Focolare Movement* under http://www.focolare.org/page.php?codcat1=246&lingua=EN&titolo=spirituality&tipo=spirituality (accessed February 16, 2010.)
[174] Gallagher, 31.
[175] Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings: Spirituality Dialogue Culture* ed. Michel Vandeleene English-lanmguiage eds. Tom Masters and Callan Skipper (Hyde park: New City Press, 2007), 5.

> women with God and with one another, and in this way fulfill God's plan for mankind.[176]

It was not just unity that animated Lubich and her companions, it was unity achieved in a certain way. During a conversation with a priest visiting one of their ill members, Lubich learned something that stayed with the young movement. The priest

> asked them if they knew when Jesus suffered the most. Chiara replied that it must have been during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. No, the priest said, it was when he cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' He, the very Son of God, had been, or felt, completely abandoned, forsaken even by His Father. From then on the girls decided to follow the forsaken Jesus.[177]

In her later reflections on this experience, Lubich would be very clear. In a letter to a young Franciscan student in 1948, she writes,

> I am convinced that unity in its most spiritual, most intimate, most profound aspect cannot be understood except by the souls who have chosen as their portion in life…Jesus Forsaken who cries out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'…The book of light which the Lord is writing in my soul has two aspects: a page shining with mysterious love: Unity. A page glowing with mysterious suffering: Jesus Forsaken. They are two sides of the same coin.[178]

From these early experiences and her reflection on them, Chiara Lubich developed what came to be known as a spirituality of unity, the basis of the Focolare movement. This movement is

> all about *unity*, among individuals, groups, cities and nations, which seeks to eliminate all discrimination and dreams of a future which will be expressed as: a united world….It is…a work of God. That is the secret of its success. That is due to its evangelical spirit, ever up-to-date and modern, a gospel-based,

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[176] "The Beginnings as Told by Chiara Lubich".
[177] Gallagher, 37.
[178] Ibid., 57.

> collective spirituality, known as the *spirituality of unity*, capable of generating an entirely new way of living.[179]

This is not a unity based solely on a common humanity but rather on saving action of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He prays that *all* will be one as he and his Abba God are one, a oneness that has within it as an essential element the abandonment by the Father. Jesus undergoes this abandonment as his way to the salvation of the world, the task given him by the Father. As his followers we are united with him and by undergoing this same experience of abandonment become united with all others. It is not surprising that this charism of the Spirit, so recognized by the Church, came to Chiara Lubich and her companions as they were stripped of their possessions, ambitions, homes, and families by the horror of war. It is perhaps only in such radically reduced circumstances that one can hear and respond fully to the Spirit of God.[180]

The spirituality of unity that emerged from these experiences and reflections was radically communal. Previous spiritualities had tended to be individually focused[181] but this was surely a spirituality for modern times in which what would become known as globalization would bring all humans into potential union with one another. Perceptively Chiara Lubich points out that such a spirituality of unity would not have been possible at the time of St. Francis when most of the world remained

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[179] Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 3.
[180] Ibid., 4.
[181] Ibid., 27-9. In her discussion of this individual focus, she references Karl Rahner and Jesus Catellano, O.C.D., the latter in a private communication.

unknown to Western Europe.[182] How could there be a full understanding of the unity of the human race when the full extent of the human race was not known by any particular culture, including Western European? For her the path to God was not simply a path that we travel with others but more radically it was a path through others. At a time when a more vertical approach to God would be discredited by the horrors of the inhumanity of the Second World War, her more horizontal approach would prove apt to the growing interdependence of all humanity. Her charism convinced her that we did not have an option. Our only path to God was through others.[183]

Another feature of this spirituality was its insistence on the centrality of what they called "Jesus in our midst."

> We discover…[that] unity offers Jesus in our midst. Here again, the 'something more' is evident. There must be at least two of us in order to have him among us, and two of us united in his name, that is, in his love. Jesus among us. He is the grace that we obtain in unity. It is a super-grace because it is Jesus himself. The presence of Jesus among us is a directive of his to be alive…and it is Jesus himself who gives it.[184]

This presence of Jesus was a reality they experienced in the bomb shelter and which they continued to seek and value throughout the Focolare. She explains the practical reality in the following fashion.

> Jesus says in the Gospel, 'Where two or more are united in my name, I am there in their midst' (Matthew 18:20). Studying the Fathers of the Church, you realize that this 'in my name means two or three who are united in 'my love', in reciprocal love. Two people, or three or four, *who love one another*

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[182] Chiara Lubich, *A New Way: The Spirituality of Unity* trans. New City editorial staff (Hyde park: New City Press, 2006), 56.

[183] Ibid., 26.
[184] Ibid., 56.

> *in Jesus*, have Jesus in their midst. This is what we do: we try to love the other person, making ourselves one with him, with his situation, his way of thinking. He, in turn, tries to love you, practically, trying to understand you, to understand your way of thinking. This brings the presence of Jesus in our midst.[185]

In reflecting on these thoughts in her *A New Way*, she identifies relationality at the core of human existence.

> Jesus in our midst is linked to this aspect because the perfect health of our soul lies in his presence among us. Our characteristic spirituality demands that we do not seek to attain spiritual health on our own. *As human beings and as Christian, we are ourselves only in relationship with other.* It is in relating to others, in loving our neighbors, that each of us becomes fully the person we are, that is, Jesus, another Jesus. For this reason, in order to claim to be spiritually healthy, that is, complete, perfect, fulfilled, in the fullness of joy, we must love others to the point of generating the presence of Jesus in our midst.[186] (Emphasis mine)

Although what became the Focolare movement developed outside ecclesiastical structures, Chiara Lubich always saw her experience within the context of the Church. From the very beginning she placed her experiences in the hands of a spiritual director and then before the Archbishop of Trent as the movement became more organized. In 1962 the Focolare (formally known as The Work of Mary) was recognized by the Church as part of the ministry of the laity. Also not surprisingly Chiara Lubich and her followers saw the Eucharist at the center of their spirituality. The Eucharist was the sacrament of unity in which disciples were joined with Jesus and with each other into the Body of Christ. There could be no deeper expression of this spirituality of unity.

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[185] Gallaher, 53.
[186] Lubich, *A New Way*, 125.

Any spirituality recognized by the Church is not new in substance but is a response to a certain set of conditions. In his introduction to Chiara Lubich's *Essential Writings*, Piero Coda uses a lovely expression to describe the newness and timelessness of this spirituality of unity.

> This substantial and well thought-out selection of Chiara Lubich's writings gives us an opportunity to encounter this experience, highly relevant today. While what is presented here is strikingly original, all the elements of a genuine and powerful mysticism can be recognized, a mysticism with an effective and understandable way of becoming incarnate in our times. Indeed, these pages echo with the Word of Christ who is the same "yesterday, today and forever." Still, this same Word is spoken, welcomed and offered with an accent that makes it surprisingly up-to-date.[187]

He uses an equally compelling image a few pages later. Her teaching is "both utterly traditional and prophetically creative. Like a branch grafted onto the ancient trunk of the Church's experience and doctrine, helping it flower anew, it is traditional, and because of its original perspective on the one-and-for-all revelation of Christ, it is creative."[188]

In fact as this spirituality of unity was developing in the late 1940's and throughout the 1950's, the Church itself was moving toward a re-engagement with a spirituality of *communion* and a greater understanding of the Trinity as part of the every-day life of Christian faithful. Although perhaps not clearly understood at the time of Vatican II, by the 1980's it was becoming clear that a theology of *communion* was the hermeneutic through which the council's writings should be understood.[189]

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[187] Piero Coda, "The Spirituality of Unity in the Christian Vocation," *Essential Writings*, xvi.
[188] Brendan Purcell and Thomas Norris, "The Spirituality of Unity in Contemporary Thought and Culture," *Essential Writings*, xix.
[189] Norris, 54.

The communion of the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) would come to be seen again as central to both Christian ontology and anthropology.[190]

Norris notes that Boethius articulated a notion of person that "has become theologically and socially dominant. The person is an individual, a '*naturae rationalis individua substantia'* and not also a capacity crying out for communion and relationship….Perhaps it is the dominance of person as individual over person as relation that is the real reason for the slowness with which the Council's emphasis on communion is being received in the church."[191] Over time this emphasis on person as substance moved the Trinity—relationship par excellence—to the periphery of the Christian life where it existed as a mystery and a "test of faith" but not necessarily an active principle in the lives of Christians. What the 1985 Synod of Bishops pointed out about the central importance of communion in Vatican II, John Paul II made even clearer as he wrote about the Church's role in the new millennium: "To make the church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the word's deepest yearnings."[192] Knowing perhaps all too well the modern temperament, the Pope cautioned against moving immediately to actions to promote communion without going through the process of developing and embracing

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[190] It is important to note that there are several "communion ecclesiologies," of which the Trinitarian is one. Dennis Doyle identifies five visions or approaches to communion and six different contemporary Catholic versions. *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 16-20.
[191] Norris., 51.
[192] John Paul II *Novo Millennium Ineunte* 433 as cited in Norris, 9.

a *spirituality of communion*. This is not simply a sense that all humans are related but rather

> the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us…..Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, 'masks' of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.[193]

Chiara Lubich's charism and her reflections on it were part of the process of this reclaimed appreciation of the Trinity unfolding in the life of the Church. Her insights were not strictly speaking theological but rather came from her own spirituality and the efforts of her movement to live out that spirituality. In fact, her experience confirms the importance of both spirituality and theology working together in the church. Her spirituality of unity is consistent with the anthropology and ontology being worked out once again from the revelation in Jesus Christ of the Trinitarian nature of God. Without this spiritual and theological grounding, the Focolare Movement would be just another attempt to make the world a better place, as laudable as that would be.

The Focolare Movement unfolded from these experiences and especially the engagement with that text from John's gospel. While it recognized the evident diversity of human existence, the movement focused on the irreducible and underlying unity of human existence. Its programs and processes emphasized that unity and the need to live one's life in a way that recognized, respected, and increased the unity among human beings. The Economy of Communion with its emphasis on

[193] Ibid.

the common good and equality developed out of this spirituality of unity. It saw the economic system under the sway of self interest as a force that worked against unity and instead stimulated a disunity and inequality. This spirituality of unity is reflected in the communal life lived by hundreds of Focolare communities through the world. These provide a contemporary example of a spirituality of unity in actual practice.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered some aspects of the Christian theological tradition in search of insights that can be useful in a restatement of Catholic social teaching for contemporary Americans. This is especially important in light of the new insights for the applied social sciences reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. The importance of egalitarianism in the teachings of Jesus and in the life of the early Church seems clear. It is important to resist the temptation of converting that reality into an ideology with the attendant social and political agendas. At the same time, it is also clear that Catholic social teaching has the opportunity of reclaiming that “lean toward” equality so characteristic of the life of Jesus and his earliest followers. St. Paul’s use of the body metaphor for the community of faith provides insights into the way in which such equality can be active within the community. Since Catholic social teaching is not simply social teaching but rather the social implications of Christian faith, it is essential that there be spiritualities which can support disciples as they seek to live out these implications. Both the theological insights of Dorothee Soelle and the life and apostolic work of Chiara Lubich provide avenues to approach such spiritualities. The next and final chapter will seek to create a conversation between Catholic social teaching, insights from contemporary applied social science, and these aspects of the Christian theological tradition and thus move toward some possible restatements of Catholic social teaching.

CHAPTER 5

Implications for Catholic Social Teaching, Church Life, and Individual Catholics

This chapter will describe the implications of the material in the previous chapters for Catholic social teaching as applied to the contemporary situation in the United States. To review, the first chapter looked at Catholic social teaching as articulated in *Economic Justice for All* (*EJA*) in 1986 and *Charity in Truth* (*CIT*) by Benedict XVI issued in 2009. Chapters 2 and 3 summarized the results of recent social science analysis of economic and social situations among developed countries and especially in the United States as well as newly emerging concepts of alternative economies. Chapter 4 surveyed some elements of the Christian theological tradition that might prove helpful in this attempt to restate Catholic social teaching in light of the contemporary American situation. There are five areas which should be emphasized by Catholic social teaching given these understandings of the ways in which humans interact in highly developed societies. None of these areas are new to Catholic social teaching but represent areas which should receive stronger emphasis if this teaching is to have an impact on the circumstances in the United States.

The first section will present these five areas: a more direct engagement with economic equality; a central concern with over-consumption and extreme consumerism; a critique of the systemic way in which the current economic system oppresses all, especially the middle class; an emphasis on a spirituality of unity and equality; and finally a recognition of and support for an economy of communion. The next section will describe some specific suggestions for the way in which the

Catholic Church in the United States could change its operation in light of the results of this research. The final section will present implications for individual Catholics in the United States.

Implications for Catholic Social Teaching

Economic Inequality

It is clear that economic inequality has dire consequences for the quality of life of members of a society within a highly developed economy. Catholic social teaching should take cognizance of this reality. Inequality is bad for societies not only because increasing inequality means that there are increasing numbers of poor—a reality well noted by Catholic social teaching—but also because it results in decreased quality of life throughout the socio-economic spectrum of any society—a fact not fully acknowledged by Catholic social teaching. This may well explain in part why *EJA* had little impact on the social and economic situation in the United States. *EJA* makes clear that the plight of the poor in the world's richest society is an abomination that calls out for redress. Yet the plight of the poor has worsened rather than improved since 1986, a fact the U.S. bishops make clear in their twentieth anniversary publication. While those twenty years saw a continuation and in some cases an expansion of programs to assist the poor, the overall situation did not improve. The failure to pay attention to economic inequality and the focus on the plight of poor left a door open for a rapid expansion of inequality through tax cuts for upper income families and the relaxation of economic and financial regulations.

These were undertaken in order to increase economic productivity and stimulate growth. To this end, these policies were successful. But with this growth came increasing and extreme inequality. The result has been a worsening situation not only for the poor but for people at virtually all levels of income.

The supporting rationale for these tax cuts and reduction of regulation was that such policies would free people from government regulation and permit them to pursue their own economic interests unimpeded—or at least less impeded—by government and social constraints. The result was that the vast majority was no better off and suffered from the social and health consequences of increasing inequality. The rationale was clear and straightforward: If everyone could make more money, then everyone would be better off with the poor benefiting more from their own efforts. If that did not happen for any reason, then those who did better would be more able to provide support to the poor. In fact, on almost all measures of socio-economic health Americans ended up less well off.

This situation must be of critical importance to Catholic social teaching because of its insistence that the purpose of an economy is the development of human beings in all aspects of their life. The assumptions at work during economic development seem pernicious once high levels of development are reached. Beyond some level of development, increasing wealth tends to produce inequality and consequently a worsening of the quality of life. Americans are less healthy, less safe, less trustful, more anxious, and more indebted. These are not the conditions under which the full development of human beings will flourish.

The Church should address economic inequality because the empirical evidence shows inequality under certain conditions compromises what Catholic social teaching points to as the very purpose of an economy. In addition, however, the Church can speak to this issue from its unique role as the presence of the Body of Christ in the world. It can draw on the earliest traditions of the Church that clearly have an egalitarian bias. As the previously cited works of Bowlby, Haughey, and Beavis demonstrate, the early Christian experience was highly egalitarian. While a radical egalitarianism did not survive as the faith communities developed into a world-wide Church, those impulses did not evaporate but are still present. In many ways the formal articulation of Catholic social teaching in 1891 was an example of the reclaiming of that tradition in the face of modern social and economic developments. Since then one can read the teaching of the Church as moving constantly toward a more egalitarian position culminating in Vatican II with its re-emphasis on the Church as the People of God and emphasis on the role and dignity of the laity in its life. It is not a discontinuous step to recognize that the insights of Christian life of the earliest communities are consistent with modern understandings of the damage done to the human community by a thorough-going economic inequality.

The fact that there is a convergence of secular social science and Christian faith in this regard is an important development. Although the title of their seminal work is ambiguous—*The Spirit Level*—Wilkinson and Pickett do not see religion providing any useful insights into their area of study. They and the sources they use are secular, pure and simple. Yet they come to the conclusion that equality and egalitarianism are conditions under which humans have typically flourished and that the denial of this in government and economic practice leads to the dire consequences they so well describe. The fact that the world they describe as healthy for humans is consistent with the world Jesus describes as the Reign of God should not be taken lightly. There is a partnership to be made on a basic level of anthropology, supported both by rigorous, value free research and religious faith.

The suggested re-engagement with equality as a characteristic if not a goal of human society requires a re-engagement with the position on equality taken by Catholic social teaching. As noted in Chapter 1, the equality/inequality dimension is present in *EJA* and *CIT* as well as previous documents. At best, the position on equality has been ambiguous. As noted above, "extreme" inequality is found unacceptable because it results in increasing the number of poor. However, inequality itself is found to be "God given" and thus not unacceptable in and of itself. If inequality is understood as diversity and lack of sameness, this can certainly be maintained. St. Paul was at pains to point out that each member is gifted by God with gifts and abilities to be used for the common good. (ICor 12:4-7) All were to develop these gifts and to deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Even though members were different, their differences were not justification for any sense of inequality. Human beings were not meant to become the same, i.e., identical, but all were to develop as fully as possible their unique identities. From a modern perspective, social and economic equality would not be incompatible with this uniqueness.

Further equality/inequality should not be viewed as binary concepts; a society is not either equal or unequal but rather exists on a continuum running from absolute equality to absolute inequality. Economists use a statistical construct to measure the income equality/inequality of a society called the Gini coefficient. This coefficient measures the distribution of income in a society. If one person holds all financial resources, the Gini coefficient is 1.0. If everyone has an absolutely equal share of financial resources, the coefficient is 0.0. Now both extreme conditions do not exist in the real world. The closer the coefficient for a given society is to 1.0, the more unequal it is and conversely the closer it is to 0.0, the more equal it is.[194] Catholic social teaching has rejected calls for absolute income equality for two reasons. First as mentioned above, such an absolute equality would not be compatible with the "God given" diversity of human beings. Second, usually the proposed means to achieve such a radical equality involve a totalitarian governmental approach, i.e., communism, with its typical companion, atheism. Both reasons are sound but they are not arguments for not reducing inequality and coming as close to equality as possible given human diversity and freedom. In other words, Catholic social teaching could give much more emphasis to the value of reducing income inequality and coming closer to equality without giving up its traditional teaching on "radical" equality. Given the dynamics of human economic systems described in Chapter 2,

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[194] Wilkinson, 102.

the Church should emphasize the importance of societies becoming more equal even if the present level of inequality is not viewed as "extreme." Without such an emphasis, a lean toward equality if you will, the dynamics of human economic systems will tend toward increasing inequality rather than decreasing it. The Church should stand forthrightly for the value of equality on the grounds of Christian anthropology and empirical social science and it can do so without violating its position on the God given nature of inequality understood as diversity.

Over-Consumption and Consumerism

The analysis presented in Chapter 3 makes clear that the central economic problem in the United States is chronic over-consumption and a thoroughgoing consumerism which drives consumption to higher and higher levels. This has two negative impacts. Since over-consumption beyond reasonable needs is based on status competition, it is a never ending cycle that never satisfies the status needs that drive it. Second, it gives rise to an overwhelming consumerism supported and stimulated by advertising and marketing systems. This appears to be particularly virulent in highly developed economic systems such as that in the United States.

Curran has pointed out the special challenge faced by the Roman Catholic Church in its social teaching. As a world-wide institution it speaks both to the Church and to the world, and both in all their dimensions.[195] This makes it difficult to frame its message in ways that pertain precisely to the diversity of human existence in

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[195] Curran, 160-2.

all its peculiarities. Messages on economic development tend to focus on the circumstances and needs of the vast majority of humans who live in poverty and distress. Understandably messages that focus on the special issues raised by extreme development can seem irrelevant to the Church's world-wide mission and the economic plight of most people. This teaching can be interpreted to say that those who have experienced advanced economic development have achieved a state where their only obligation is to assist those still in the process of development. Yet the research reviewed above makes clear that there are important and significant problems associated with extreme development apart from a willingness to help those less fortunate. However, in order to address the situation in the United States, Catholic social teaching must deal more directly and centrally with the problem of over consumption not only because it has implications for the lack of development in the rest of the world but because it inhibits the development of the full human person in the United States.

Systemic Oppression

Opposition to a wild consumerism would not be a new theme for Catholic social teaching; it appears in both *EJA* and *CIT*. The issue is to understand this consumerism as a central feature of an economic system that has come to rely on ever increasing consumption to produce increasing amounts of wealth. Its reliance on status consumption provides the mechanism by which all people--especially the middle class--are oppressed. This is oppression of a special kind. It is not oppression by a small group of identifiable elite that controls and beats down the majority. It is oppression by an economic system that seems to have become a creature unto itself with no one in control. This is particularly ironic in a democratic economy where the people have political power to elect leaders and determine or at least influence policies. This is not so apparent when the economy seems to be performing without problems but becomes uncomfortably visible when the economy begins to falter as it did in the United States beginning in 2008. The financial crisis, housing collapse, rapid unemployment, and deep recession triggered calls for responsibility and efforts to fix blame. All the likely suspects—bankers, politicians, regulators, hedge fund managers—were brought before investigating committees or pilloried in the press. Yet everyone seemed to blame someone else who in turn pointed the finger at someone else. In the end the answer seemed to be that no human person was responsible; somehow it was the system that failed.

During another time of economic distress in the United States during the 1930's this picture was described poignantly by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*. When a representative of a local bank comes to foreclose on a farmer and his family, the farmer gets his shotgun to take matters in his own hands. The problem is that he ends up not knowing whom to shoot!

> "It's not me. There's nothing I can do. I'll lose my job if I don't do it. And look-suppose you kill me? They'll just hang you, but long before you're hung there'll be another guy on a tractor, and he'll bump your house down. You're not killing the right guy."
>
> "That's so," the tenant said. "Who gave you orders? I'll go after him, he's the one to kill."

> "You're wrong. He got his orders from the bank. The bank told him. 'Clear those people out or it's your job."
>
> "Well, there's a president of the bank. There's a board of directors. I'll fill up the magazine of the rifle and go to the bank."
>
> The driver said, "Fellow was telling me the bank gets its orders from the east. The order was, 'make the land show profit or we'll close you up.'"
>
> "But where does it stop? Who can I shoot? I don't aim to starve to death before I can shoot the man that's starving me."
>
> "I don't know. Maybe there's no one to shoot. Maybe this thing isn't men at all. Maybe, like you said, the land's doing it."[196]

This lack of apparent human agency combined with an oppressive system serves to make a bad situation worse. In addition to the stress and anxiety that comes with a consumption based economy and especially one that is in dysfunction, the lack of accountability for the system creates its own sense of powerlessness which accentuates already existing anxiety.

No matter what it feels like, the "system" is a creation of humans with individual actors making decisions and choices that reverberate through a complex and often arcane financial system. The fact that many of these have unforeseen consequences does not mean that the system itself has become an entity separate from these human decisions. In this new context, Catholic social teaching needs to intensify its call for individual accountability. Wealth creation is a vocation, a call from God to provide what is needed for full and complete human life. Those who are in leadership positions need to understand their role in this light and not as opportunities for their personal financial advantage alone. Catholic social teaching

[196] John Steinbeck, The *Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 38.

needs to emphasize this dimension and to call attention to those who exemplify this. While there are people at all levels of the economic system who do in fact behave in this fashion, there are some whose visibility recommends them as exemplars: Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Ted Turner, Oprah Winfrey, Andrew Carnegie, George Eastman, and Paul Newman among them.

One important consequence of this exacerbated anxiety in the American economic system is the difficulty of communicating the “preferential option for the poor” that is an essential element of Catholic social teaching. The failure to accept this fundamental message by most middle class Americans including Catholics needs to be understood within the context of the systemic anxiety about their own economic existence. As seen in a previous analysis, simply having more wealth and resources in the American economy does not reduce anxiety about economic status but rather intensifies it. With this intensification, people are naturally more and more concerned with their own economic situation. Calls for assistance to the poor in this circumstance are more likely to be seen as a zero sum game in which the only way to help others is to lose something and thus make your own situation worse. Until the power of the consumption based consumerist system can be eliminated or significantly abated, calls for assistance to the poor will not be taken seriously.

Spiritual Renewal

Catholic social teaching has never just been a school of social or economic thought. It is an application of religious belief within the social setting of human existence. A fundamental spirituality has never been absent from the various documents of Catholic social teaching. The relationship between human beings and God is at the center of Catholic thought and thus is inextricably part of Catholic social teaching. Over the 2000 years of its existence, the tradition of the Church has included many variations of its central truth. In any application of this faith to current circumstances, the exact formulation of its spirituality may be more or less relevant. In the current circumstances, the spirituality undergirding Catholic social teaching should emphasize unity and equality. The spirituality of unity as articulated by Chiara Lubich (as described in Chapter 4) or something very similar recommends itself. This not a new spirituality; clearly it has been present from the beginning of Christianity. The current conditions require a spirituality that helps Christians focus on the fundamental unity among human beings and the desire stated by Christ that "all may be one as I and the Father are one." (John 17:21)

This spirituality of unity is part of the spirituality of communion emphasized by Benedict XVI in *CIT*. There are some important advantages of focusing on this "application" of that notion. First the language is more accessible to most Americans. A spirituality that focuses on unity and equality uses words that are part of everyday language and do not require theological elaboration to convey their meaning. This is not say that theological elaboration is not important nor that the spirituality of unity would not benefit and has not benefitted from theological analysis and elaboration, but only that a spirituality of unity begins with a general comprehensibility on the part of the hearer. Initial comprehension does not necessarily yield agreement with and action on the principles of this spirituality but it begins in a better place. Second, the spirituality of unity developed out of the relatively recent experience of lay Christians and has active adherents throughout the world. Third, this spirituality well positions Catholic social teaching to reach out to other faith traditions—especially Islam—and to those of no religious faith tradition. As Karen Armstrong has pointed out in her voluminous study of faith, all the great faith traditions eventually moved toward an understanding of the unity of all humanity and of recognizing in "the other" someone with whom we shared an irreducible relationship.[197] Equally the great humanist traditions include a fundamental belief in the dignity and value of humans and their essential unity. The rapid and extensive globalization noted by Benedict XVI underscores this point. Catholic social teaching can move beyond theological and political disputes to call humans to recognition of underlying unity that should be given life in our social and economic relations.

At the same time, Catholic social teaching, especially when addressed to Americans, needs to express the spiritual insights of Dorothee Soelle and others about the essential connection between mysticism and resistance to prevailing culture, "the world." While it may be necessary to have a program of economic change and adjustment, Benedict XVI has made clear that we do not need a new economic system as much as we need new people. More precisely, "we" need to become new people. This is not an easy or superficial process but rather changes us in fundamental ways. It is the call of Christ to conversion, a turning toward God so that

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[197] Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 367-399.

we become Christ and thus enter into the life of the Trinity. From the perspective of that new life, we become new people and we see the world as God sees it rather than as the world sees itself. It is from this perspective that economic system change must proceed if it is to deal with the issues addressed by Catholic social teaching. However, there is no guarantee that such changes will be successful; it is more likely that they will fall short of what we think they should achieve. An over reliance on success as confirmation of this new life will inevitably lead to disillusionment and ultimately to an abandonment of such change efforts. Patience and faithfulness that arise from a deep awareness of the presence of the Divine in us, in others, and in the world can provide a perspective that makes faithfulness possible. Soelle articulated this by elaborating on the *sunder warumbe* of Meister Eckhart. This perspective must be an important component of the call to Catholics to engage in efforts to change an economic system that is as deeply entrenched as that of the United States.

Economy of Communion

Taking a cue from Benedict XVI's approach in *CIT*, Catholic social teaching in the United States should begin to focus on alternative understandings of economic systems. Given the material reviewed in Chapter 3, it is difficult to understand how to effectively change the current system while working within that system. Approaches that emphasize controls, regulation, and other adjustments to deal with the excesses and dysfunctions of the current system have not produced any material change in the effect the system has on people within it. While a wholesale change is not possible—such an approach would be naïve and radically ahistorical—it is possible to begin to highlight and encourage approaches that seem to start from different premises and proceed in different ways.

The Economy of Communion—described in Chapter 2—is one alternative approach that has a record of accomplishment. It is one thing to advocate some ideal as yet unrealized in the real world and another to point to actual situations in which things are done differently and with success. Of course, such approaches will be seen as overly idealistic and impractical by those who for various reasons want to continue with the current system albeit corrected for abuses. Yet the great faith tradition of Christianity is based on a notion of the Reign of God announced by the God Incarnate that is itself idealistic and impractical in the eyes of the world. As the Catholic Church entered the mainstream of American culture beginning in the 1950's, its ability to take "counter cultural positions" in some areas has been weakened. An approach that identifies alternative economies and hold them up for a wider view would be a modest but important step toward creating a base for more radical changes in the values that undergird the current economic system. In this regard, the Church will find it useful to move toward a more sect-like position on the sect/church continuum described by Curran. It is difficult to strongly critique an economic and cultural system without, to some extent, standing outside of it. This is the classic position of a sect as opposed to a church. Such a move would require astute ecclesial leadership able to understand the Church as both a group of believers and as a social institution.

It has often been said that Catholic social teaching is the Church's best kept secret. While that may be true, it is not from lack of pages and pages of material. There is no shortage of papal statements and church documents both Roman and American. This excellent material, however, is simply not very accessible to ordinary Catholics or even to those who minister to them. Too often these documents are seen as "church" documents, which of course they are. On the surface their style and language does not seem relevant to contemporary Catholics whose lives revolve around extensive media. If newspaper readership is in steep decline, the readership for such documents is barely extant. The problem is not the content but the media through which the material is communicated. No contemporary organization that seeks to influence the minds and hearts of citizens would simply issue a voluminous document filled with footnotes and constant references to previous documents, themselves equally inaccessible. In papal and Vatican documents this is compounded by the use of Latin original text translated into various vernaculars. A contemporary communications approach would focus on key messages to be communicated to specific audiences through a variety of print and electronic media. It is not within the scope of this study to discuss the details of such a communication strategy but it is important to note that such strategies do exist and there are many lay Catholics with extensive experience in using them. This resource should be enlisted to communicate Catholic social teaching in ways appropriate to contemporary Americans.

The convergence between Catholic social teaching and recent research in both epidemiology and economics provides an important opportunity for the Church in the

United States. This is not an opportunity to establish the Church as a leading institution in the area of social and economic policy. In fact, just the opposite might be true if the Church would emphasize the areas referenced in this chapter. Such emphases would be indictments of the some of the bedrock operating assumptions of the American economy. Certainly a call for reduction of income inequality would engender political opposition from both the right and left. Yet the research makes clear that this a direction open to the Church and perhaps uniquely so.

Implications for the Church in America

If Catholic social teaching is to focus more closely on economic inequality, the Church itself should operate in ways that re-enforce social equality by reducing social distance in the operations of the Church. This is especially important for the Catholic Church in the United States. Any message promoting a more equal economic system ought not to be undercut by an organization that appears to foster social inequality in its own operations. In this regard, the Church in the United States could take action in four areas: resource allocation for ministry, hierarchical "feel" of the Church, political action, and greater gender equality.

The local parish is the setting for the bulk of ministry provided by the Church. The financial reality is that every parish lives within the constraints of its own financial resources. After appropriate support for the diocesan church and through it to the national and world-wide church, each parish provides ministry from its available resources. This is a system in which ministry resources are allocated based on wealth rather than need. A parish with limited resources—typically one serving the poor—may well not have sufficient internal resources to fund the ministries needed by its members. At the same time a parish in the same diocese serving a more affluent parish may have a super abundance of ministries because it has the internal resources to do so.

In effect, the church in the United States uses a market mechanism to fund basic ministries. Those parishes with more money have more ministries while those with limited resources may not have all the ministries needed by its members. While it is not uncommon for dioceses to have transfer mechanisms in place to move some resources from wealthy to poor parishes, these are typically inadequate to provide a full range of ministries to poor parishes. The rationale that Catholic social teaching applies to wealth should also be applied in this setting. If some parishes have more resources and thus ministries than they reasonably need, then some of those resources should be used to provide ministries to those in need. In other words, the Church should model its social teaching in its own internal resource allocation. A complete centralization of resources would of course make possible such an allocation but that would violate the principle of subsidiary. Instead the Church should actively encourage all parishes to provide resources beyond some reasonable level to be available for redistribution to parishes without sufficient resources. The fact that something like this occurs in some cases provides confidence for insuring that this happens in all cases. Building on a sense of solidarity among parishes will strengthen the Church, be consonant with the fundamental Christian values, and provide a strong example for the way in which resources are to be allocated within society.

Given that the Church is a hierarchy by its nature, the degree to which it functions hierarchically can be greater or lesser. Vatican II clearly evidenced a concern to reduce the "hierarchical feel" of the Church by emphasizing the role of the laity and the Church as the People of God. By its nature, a hierarchy is built on a certain distance between those at the top of the hierarchy and those toward the bottom. To the extent that hierarchy is emphasized, the social distance within the organization is increased. Social distance can be decreased and thus the social organization can become more equal by de-emphasizing the hierarchical nature and feel of the organization. The American bishops made just such a move in the process used to develop *EJA* as well as the earlier peace pastoral. The process involved extensive consultation with lay Catholics and an iterative process of review of various drafts. While the final document was issued by the American bishops and was theirs in every respect, many Catholics felt involved in the process. This more participative process reduced the social distance between the bishops and lay Catholics and thus positioned the Church more as a partnership than a strict hierarchy. It is ironic that *EJA* was the last time that the American bishops used such a broadly participative process in developing Church teaching. The intervening years have unfortunately resulted in a reassertion of the hierarchical feel of the Church in America. However a return to the more participative process used earlier can change this situation.

In addition the Church at all levels can reduce its social distance by insuring that the various consultative groups are broadly representative of the social diversity of church members. This can pose a particular problem for an organization which at its base is geographically oriented. Since housing patterns in the United States reflect a strong socio-economic bias, Catholic parishes would tend to exhibit a homogenous socio-economic profile. Thus under the best of intentions, consultative groups would not represent the broad scope of social classes in a community. While such groups would be representative of the parish, they might inadvertently reduce the visibility of needs and problems experienced by social classes not represented but needing the attention of the faith community. If the poor are not represented, it is all too easy to overlook their needs

The Church in America is politically active in many areas as well it should be. One of the areas in which it could carve out a position is the process by which the civil government redistributes income in order to achieve greater economic equality. The question is not whether the government should do this since it has been a consistent part of United States economic policy at all governmental levels. However in order to address the growing economic inequality in the United States, there needs to be a recommitment to the progressive nature of the federal taxing system. It is not necessary that total consumption expenditures decline. That could trigger severe economic decline. What is important is that consumption should be more evenly spread among all citizens. One way to achieve this is a progressive consumption tax so that the more one consumed the higher tax one would pay.[198] This would tend to reduce extreme consumption by increasing its cost to consumers and would provide more resource for transfer to those whose consumption is less than that needed for an adequate human life in the United States. The Church could undertake this initiative not in a partisan way but by holding up the values of Catholic social teaching as standards to evaluate taxing policy and by stressing the need to achieve greater economic equality and thus step back from the negative consequences of increasing inequality.

Finally the Church could improve its status as a force for greater economic equality by working toward greater equality within the Church itself. As long as the Church is seen as treating some people unequally, it will tend not to be taken seriously in any calls for greater economic equality. This is particularly true of its stance toward women and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. These raise issues with important moral and ethical implications which the Church has resolutely maintained. Whether or not women can be ordained may not be an issue but the resolute refusal to even discuss the issue creates a dismissive attitude that can undercut Church calls for greater equality and unity. The status of GLBT persons may also trigger moral concerns about sexual behavior but a fierce resistance to civil marriage of gay and lesbians also creates such a dismissive atmosphere. From the research presented here, growing economic inequality presents a far greater danger to the life and well being of Americans and American society than does gay marriage.

[198] Frank, 105-11.

Yet campaigns against gay marriage initiatives receive enormous financial and rhetorical support from the official Church. One could argue that by muting its opposition to such initiatives and calling instead for more equal treatment of all citizens the Church would strengthen its moral position to influence American culture toward more equality and thus a healthier and safer society.

Implications for Individual American Catholics

As both *EJA* and *CIT* emphasize, Catholic social teaching does not consist in identifying an economic system that will achieve its ideals. What it calls for are Christians who as individuals change themselves and their lives to better achieve these ideals. The basic vocation for all is to conversion, a radical turning away from the values of "world" toward the spirit and the new life that comes from incorporation into the Body of Christ. Catholic social teaching along with the insights reviewed in this project provides some clear paths for contemporary American Christians in this most fundamental task.

Each Christian is called to evaluate his or her lifestyle in light of this social teaching, to understand the ways in which individual decisions advance or retard the building of the Reign of God. For contemporary Americans this means evaluating life style by the extent to which it continues and intensifies economic inequality and status consumption or not. For the vast majority of Christians, this is not a simple either/or consideration. It is simply not practical for most people to drop out of the system, to live off the grid, and not participate in the American economy and culture.

While this can be a satisfying fantasy, it is not only unrealistic but it is inconsistent with the traditional injunction to be "in the world but not of the world."

It will be helpful to consider "lifestyle" from five different perspectives, each of which focuses on a role played by every Christian: economic, political, donative, spiritual, and social. There is an important role for small, supporting groups in such a process. Finally there is a special responsibility for those who hold leadership positions in organizations.

Every Christian is an economic actor and plays an individual role in the economy. While this is a multidimensional role, Catholic social teaching in this new context calls for a careful examination of decisions about consumption. Beyond a certain basic level of consumption to meet human needs, including recreation and relaxation, every Christian should examine potential expenditures from two perspectives. Is this expenditure related to status or to need? Does the desire to acquire something have more to do with how I feel about myself or how others will feel about me than it does with meeting a basic need necessary in our culture? A luxury automobile, to take a uniquely American example, is not problematic in itself. However, if the desire to own a luxury automobile proceeds from a need to demonstrate success and self worth, it needs to be recognized as an essentially fruitless gesture. Second, such expenditures feed a status consumption cycle that contributes to increasing inequality. The bigger and more expensive such status consumption is, the higher the status bar is raised for others; this is the inevitable dynamic of status expenditures. Individual Catholics need to give conscious attention to such expenditures.

As political actors Catholics need to evaluate potential government policies and politicians in light of their impact on economic equality. In general policies should be "progressive" in terms of economic impact, that is, those who have more should be expected to contribute more to the common good. Policies that move in the other direction need to be seen as contributors to increasing inequality and thus its consequences. While Catholics are called to have a special concern for the poor and vulnerable in society, they should also be concerned with the impact of inequality across the economic and social spectrum.

Members of society can also be donative actors, contributors of financial and other resources to those in need. Philanthropy is a peculiarly American phenomenon and can be an important way to recognize responsibility to those in need. In addition it can be an important way to reduce personal or household consumption and shift that consumption to those who do not have what is necessary to meet basic needs. In 2008, 75% of all Americans made a financial contribution to a non-religious organization. Although Catholics are less likely to have contributed to their church, they contribute at the same rate as Protestant to other charities. While there could be an increase in the number of Catholics who contribute, it is more likely that those who currently contribute should carefully examine the portion of their income which is donated. Increasing the percentage would achieve a shifting of resources from those who have much to those who do not have enough and thus spread consumption expenditures in a more equal manner.

Every Catholic is called to be a spiritual actor, to have a rich and enduring relationship with God expressed in and through a spirituality. The diversity of spiritualities available to Catholics and the personal nature of spirituality mean that there is no one Catholic spirituality. Contemporary American Catholics can, however, seek to include a spirituality of unity so that their prayer life includes a call to express the unity God desires in our lives together.

As social beings, Catholic are naturally part of groups of all sorts. The implications of Catholic social teaching described here, however, make it imperative that such groupings include people from different social and economic strata. Just as a parish tends to reflect the socio-economic dimension of housing patterns so too do voluntary human groupings. Humans tend to naturally associate with people like themselves. However, it is important that Catholics take special initiatives to make sure that in at least some of their social groupings there is a diversity reflected in the larger society rather than their natural and often narrow groupings. If one is not poor and one wants to encounter the poor, it almost always means that one must place oneself in places one is not accustomed to and in situations in which one is not comfortable. To restrict social interactions to our habitual patterns will constrict the social and economic diversity of our interactions.

The self reflection and evaluation in the above five areas is not easy, especially for individuals. Small support groups focused on this evaluation will make it more likely that individuals will be able to maintain this counter cultural process. Parishes provide a natural settings for such groups which could be part of an over all social justice process.

Finally, Catholics who hold leadership positions in organization have a special obligation and opportunity to conduct these evaluations, not only in their personal lives but in their organizational roles as well. Beyond the example that the visibility of leadership provides, decisions about organizational life ought to reflect these values as well. About every decision made in an organization, one can ask, “Does this advance or retard equality?”

Conclusion

In many ways, the material reviewed in this project confirms the basic insights and principles of Catholic social teaching. The teaching since *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 has shown remarkable consistency. While there have been changes in emphasis, the fundamental principles have remained and have been strengthened. The specific research reviewed here does not change that reality but rather calls for a continuation and expansion of that social teaching. This is particularly relevant to the situation in the United States. It has been almost 25 years since there has been a major statement by Catholic bishops in the United States on the economy and associated issues.

The events of the recent past in the United States economy have raised economic issues higher on the national political agenda and have increased the divisiveness of these issues and their implications. This will be a difficult terrain for the American church to traverse but the very nature of these issues requires the Church to restate and expand social teaching as it relates to the issues the United States now faces. The events since the fall of Russian Communism have made the fundamental issue clearer. The choice is not between two competing economic systems; that choice has been made. The choice is between two views of the nature of human beings and nature. One is the perspective of the Reign of God, already inaugurated but not yet fulfilled; the other is the perspective of the world. A compromise between these two is not possible. A rigorous proclamation of Catholic social teaching based on the perspective of the Reign of God will bring the Church into conflict with powerful forces both within and outside its family. Such a proclamation may result in a diminution of the regard for and power of the formal Church as an institution in American culture. A re-engagement with the evangelical Testaments, the writings of the early fathers predating the fourth century, and the central documents of Vatican II may help the Church reemphasize its mission and to deemphasize its institutional formulations.

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