

Pastoral on Economics Difficult to Prepare

Notre Dame, Ind. (NC) — It may have been easier for the U.S. bishops to write their recent pastoral letter on war and peace than it will be to do their planned pastoral on the American economy, University of Notre Dame President Father Theodore Hesburgh said Dec. 12.

Opening a three-day national symposium at Notre Dame on the upcoming pastoral, the Holy Cross priest said the planned letter must address American economic issues within "a rational and moral framework that is acceptable to most people."

The Dec. 12-14 symposium on "Catholic Social Teaching and the American Economy" brought together theologians, businessmen, economists and politicians to discuss what should go into the pastoral, the first draft of which is expected to be completed by next November.

Business experts, anticipating harsh criticism of American capitalism and of the economic policies of the Reagan administration in the pastoral, have said that the letter

could be more controversial than the bishops' war and peace pastoral, which made national headlines when it was issued last May.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, chairman of the bishops' committee drafting the new letter, and other committee members have argued, however, that the committee will consider liberal and conservative views about the American economy.

Father Hesburgh urged the bishops to draft a letter linking the economic well-being of the nation with a moral obligation to take care of workers and the poor.

"Economics does not exist in a vacuum — it exists for people," he said.

The purpose of the letter, he said, should be "to ask the right questions and lay out the situations in a way which is fairly obvious."

He urged symposium participants to be open to all views. "You may disagree, but at least we have made a

beginning," he said.

"There are lots of problems in our political system — it needs to be altered," said Daniel Finn, economics department chairman and social ethics professor at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn.

One of those problems, Finn said, is an over-emphasis on individualism at the expense of the common good of society. Invoking the democratic principles of community life, he said the United States should "widen the scope of the decision-making process."

He added, however, that that process is a slow one. "People will never be able to vote on a planned economy," he said.

Marina von Neumann Whitman, vice president and chief economist at General Motors, disagreed with Finn's philosophy. "To use the old saying, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,'" she said.

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