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COURIER-JOURNAL

SPECIAL SECTION

Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy

● An Outline of the Bishops' Pastoral

OUTLINE FIRST DRAFT OF THE PASTORAL LETTER ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE U.S. ECONOMY

(This outline describes some of the major themes and statements contained in each section of the document; but it is not a substitute for, nor a summary of the text.)

INTRODUCTION

THE CHURCH AND THE ECONOMY: WHY WE SPEAK

The theme of human dignity is central to Catholic social thought and forms the basis for our perspectives and recommendations in this letter. Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by two questions: What does it do for people? What does it do to people? The poor have a special claim on our concern because they are particularly vulnerable and needy.

In writing this letter we accept the challenge of the Second Vatican Council -- to scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel. We present these reflections on Catholic social teaching and the U.S. economy with the conviction that our nation's great wealth and economic power give it a special responsibility in helping to establish a just economic order.

We write with two purposes: 1) to provide guidance for members of our own Church; and 2) to add our voice to the public debate about U.S. economic policies.

Our fundamental norm in judging economic policies has been this: What will this approach or policy do to the poor and deprived members of the human community?

PART ONE:

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

I. THE CHRISTIAN VISION OF ECONOMIC LIFE

The dignity of the human person is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured. This dignity can only be realized in relationship and solidarity with others.

A. Biblical Perspectives on Economic Life

1. *Creation, Covenant, and Community.* The biblical motifs of creation, covenant, and community provide a basis for our reflection on economic and social justice. Creation is a gift; men and women are to be faithful stewards in caring for the earth. No dimension of human life lies beyond God's care and concern. To live in the new creation and to be a partner in the new covenant calls us to community and solidarity.

2. *The Primacy of Justice.* Reverence for God as Creator and fidelity to the covenant are expressed by concern for one's neighbor. The justice of a community is measured by its treatment of the poor and the powerless in society. Like the prophets, Jesus takes the side of those who are powerless or on the margins of society.

3. *Wealth and Poverty.* Wealth is evil when it so dominates a person's life that it becomes an idol claiming allegiance apart from God or when it blinds a person to the suffering and needy neighbor.

Biblical perspectives on wealth and poverty form the basis for what today is called "the preferential option for the poor." This option challenges the contemporary Church to speak for those who are defenseless and poor and to assess social institutions and policies in terms of their impact on the poor.

4. *Discipleship and Social Justice.* The Church is called to be a community of disciples, a

community which commits itself to solidarity with those who suffer and to confrontation with the sinful structures that institutionalize injustice.

B. Living as Disciples Today: From the Bible to Economic Ethics

Our reflections on economic life are informed not only by the biblical vision of the Kingdom and discipleship, but also by the Church's long tradition of social teaching and by reasoned reflection on the realities of economic life today.

II. ETHICAL NORMS FOR ECONOMIC LIFE

Economic institutions are to be evaluated not only by productive efficiency and the amount of goods and services they make available; we must also ask: Do these institutions permit all persons that measure of active social and economic participation which befits their membership in the human community?

A. Human Rights: The Minimum Conditions for Life in Community

If the economy is to function in a way that respects human dignity, then it should enable persons to find self-realization in their labor; it should permit persons to fulfill their material needs through adequate remuneration, and it should enhance unity and solidarity within the family, the nation, and the world community.

In its relatively short history the United States has made impressive strides in providing material necessities and economic prosperity for its people. However, there remain major problems and injustices that infringe upon human dignity. The nation must take up the task of framing a new national consensus that *all persons have rights in the economic sphere and that society has a moral obligation to take the necessary steps to ensure that no one among us is hungry, homeless, unemployed, or otherwise denied what is necessary to live with dignity.*

The experiment in political democracy carried out by America's founders did a great deal to ensure the protection of civil and political rights in our nation. The time has come for a similar experiment in economic democracy: the creation of an order that guarantees the minimum conditions of human dignity in the economic sphere for every person.

B. Justice, Power, and Institutional Priorities

Justice demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation by all persons in the life of the human community. This norm has implications in terms of distributive justice.

A certain inequality in the distribution of economic resources can sometimes be justified, but subject to several stringent constraints:

1. There is a strong presumption against inequality of income or wealth as long as there are poor, hungry, and homeless people in our midst.

2. Unequal distribution of income, education, wealth, job opportunities, or other economic goods on the basis of race, sex, or other arbitrary standards, can never be justified.

Three priority principles should shape our economic policies and institutions both domestically and internationally:

1. The fulfillment of the basic needs of the poor is of the highest priority.

2. Increased participation for the marginalized takes priority over the preservation of privileged concentrations of power, wealth, and income.

3. Meeting human needs and increasing participation should be priority targets in the investment of wealth, talent, and human energy.

C. Responsibilities and Rights of Diverse Economic Agents and Institutions

1. *Working People and Labor Unions.* All people have a right to employment, to just wages, and to collective bargaining. People also have a duty to work, and workers and unions have responsibilities to their employers and to society as a whole.

2. *Managers, Investors, Businesses, Banks.* Persons who own, invest, and manage financial resources make important contributions to society. In using economic resources, a fundamental principle should be that, whatever one's legal entitlement, no one can ever own these resources absolutely or use them without regard for others. Catholic social teaching defends the right to private ownership of property, but it is not an absolute or unconditioned right. No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need when others lack necessities.

3. *Citizens and Government.* All people have

obligations to overcome the wounds of injustice by acts of charity, the sharing of possessions, and other forms of voluntary action. At the same time, all have a larger responsibility to remove the causes of injustice -- through their actions as citizens and through government and the political process.

Government has a positive moral function: that of protecting basic rights, ensuring economic justice for all, and enabling citizens to coordinate their actions toward these ends. While Catholic social teaching provides a positive affirmation of the role of government, it does not advocate a statist approach to economic activity. The principle of "subsidiarity" is the primary norm for determining the scope and limits of governmental action.

4. *Transnational and International Economic Actors.* The conviction that human race is one moral community must be the basis for the effort to improve the quality of global interdependence. All the economic agents of our society must attend to the good of the whole of the human family in a self-conscious way and contribute to the strengthening of institutions which support the international common good.

5. *Consumers.* Our Christian faith and the norms of human justice impose distinct limits on what we consume and how we view material goods. Such limits on consumption and the accumulation of wealth are essential if we are to avoid what Pope Paul VI called "the most evident form of moral underdevelopment," namely avarice or greed.

6. *The Church.* All the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the Church and its agencies and institutions. All Church institutions must fully recognize the rights of employees to just wages and to organize and bargain collectively through whatever association or organization they freely choose. Both individual Christians and the church as a community can make very important contributions to achieving greater economic justice.

PART TWO: POLICY APPLICATIONS

We attempt in this part of the document to focus the light of moral principles on five economic issues that are central to American life. The issues treated here are illustrative topics intended to exemplify the interaction of moral values and economic issues in our day, not to encompass all such values and issues.

III. EMPLOYMENT

The most urgent priority for U.S. domestic economic policy is the creation of new jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions. The prime goal must be to make it possible for everyone who is seeking a job to find employment which befits human dignity.

A. The Scope and Effects of Unemployment

By almost any measure -- individual, social, economic, or political -- the costs of unemployment are enormous. Current levels of unemployment are morally unjustified.

B. Causes and Cures: Competing Interpretations

Several criteria are presented which can help shape an effective response to unemployment. Efforts to generate employment should be aimed specifically at bringing marginalized persons into the labor force; should give priority to long-term jobs; should produce goods and services needed by society; should be as economically efficient as possible; and should include both the private and public sectors.

C. Policy Objectives

1. The nation should make a major new policy commitment to achieve full employment -- to reduce unemployment to the range of three or four percent.

2. The government should increase support for direct job creation programs targeted on the structurally unemployed.

3. Job training and apprenticeship programs in the private sector, supported jointly by business, labor and government should be expanded.

4. Local, state and national coalitions to press for job creation should be formed.

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