

Bishops on economy: Invitation, not confrontation

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — In its second version of a national pastoral letter on the U.S. economy, the drafting committee of Catholic bishops seems to have moved from the confrontational to the invitational.

A muted tone — an evident effort to lead people into agreement rather than bludgeon them into submission with statistics — is one of the most notable shifts in the spirit and style of the second draft when it is compared with the first.

The drafting committee, headed by Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, released the second draft Oct. 7. In the 11 months since the first draft, which was issued just after the 1984 national elections, the committee had studied more than 10,000 pages of suggestions and criticisms from fellow bishops, economists, theologians and ordinary Catholics.

The result was not a shift in principles. A preferential option for the poor and guarantees of economic rights, for example, are still asserted as fundamental ethical demands. But the style of expressing the principles has been changed.

By changing the overall chapter structure and making extensive editorial changes within topics, the committee took what Archbishop Weakland has called a "more inductive" approach.

The first draft tended first to assert a principle or conclusion then to present argumentation to back it up. The second tends more often to present facts first, drawing the reader toward the conclusion.

One of the most common criticisms of the first draft, even from some liberal Democratic quarters, was that its policy recommendations came across too much like a rehash of Great Society programs of the 1960s and early '70s, many of which have been found wanting. The bishops sounded like politicians, not like moral teachers, the critics said.

Specific policy recommendations in the newer version are tempered to distinguish more clearly between general policy goals required by moral or ethical principles and the debatable, changeable program measures that may be taken to achieve those goals. The second draft also spells out more explicitly many levels of approach rather than focusing so strongly on federal policy responses to various issues.

One of the clearest examples of this change is the two drafts' treatment of day care as an

anti-poverty policy.

The first draft put almost all the focus on government programs and policies. It says that while "national tax and welfare policies should support parents' decisions to care for their own children, all levels of government should help to (ensure) the provision of adequate care for children whose parents must work. The current level of federal and state subsidies for day care is inadequate. We suggest increased funding for services and more generous tax benefits for child care." Only at the end does the first draft also encourage employers to provide day-care services "at the workplace when possible."

The second draft, by contrast, begins by calling on society — including government, but not government alone — to support an alternative to day care, and then goes on to include government action as one part of social policy to make day care more available and affordable when needed.

"Society's institutions and policies," the second draft says, "should be structured so that mothers of young children are not forced by economic necessity to leave their children for jobs outside the home. The nation's social welfare and tax policies should support parents' decisions to care for their own children.... For those children whose parents do work outside the home, there is a serious shortage of affordable, quality day care. Employers, governments and private agencies need to improve both the availability and the quality of child-care services."

The fact that the new draft of the economy pastoral does more to expand its emphasis beyond government policy does not mean that it backed off from ascribing a strong role to government.

On full employment as a top national priority, for example, the new draft says — as did the first — that "private initiative and entrepreneurship are essential" to job creation. But it immediately adds: "At the same time, it must be recognized that government has a prominent and indispensable role to play in addressing the problem." The federal government, it says, must help by establishing programs that create jobs and by other appropriate policy measures.

Acknowledging implicitly the fact that the harsh, provocative rhetoric in the first draft often opened it to criticism and misunderstanding, the committee in rewriting apparently followed that ancient Latin axiom of public speaking, "reddere benevolos" —

make your audience receptive to your message.

Where the first draft said the mere mention of economic planning often produces "a violent allergic reaction" in U.S. society, the second draft changes that to read "strong negative reaction."

Such changes went well beyond an occasional word here or there. They involved extensive rewriting and restructuring throughout. In introductory comments on poverty in the first draft, for example, the committee said, "The fact that so many people are poor in a nation as wealthy as ours is a social and moral scandal that must not be ignored.... We believe that as a matter of justice the misery wrought by poverty in this country should be remedied as soon as possible."

The parallel passages in the second draft avoided the sharp "poor-wealthy" contrast and the provocative terms "moral scandal" and "misery" — without, however, chang-

ing the essence of the call to action.

"Dealing with poverty," says the newer version, "is not a luxury to which our nation can attend when it finds the time and resources. Rather, it is an imperative of the highest priority.... They (facts of poverty) pose for our nation an urgent moral and human challenge, to fashion a society where no one goes without the basic material necessities required for human dignity and growth."

The average American Catholic may well get defensive at being told his or her lifestyle contributes to a national moral scandal, but that same Catholic is likely to respond positively and generously if he or she is asked to rise to the challenge of helping ensure that no one in this country lacks necessities. The real difference, however, is not in what is asked, but how it is asked.

One of the complaints many U.S. bishops had last June when they discussed the first

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Cardinal O'Connor calls new draft 'dramatic improvement' in pastoral

By Charles A. Wood

Notre Dame, Ind. (NC) — The second draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on the economy is a "very dramatic improvement over the first draft," Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York said Oct. 1 in a speech at the University of Notre Dame.

Cardinal O'Connor said the improvement resulted from incorporating suggestions and criticisms relating to the first draft.

The cardinal spoke in a joint presentation with Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago on "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Its Impact on the Social Teachings of the U.S. Bishops."

Although the second draft was not released until Oct. 7, Cardinal O'Connor said Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, chairman of the document's drafting committee, "very generously told us that we could use portions of the text at Notre Dame."

While he did not specifically comment on the changes from the first to the second draft, Cardinal O'Connor said the drafting committee's effort to assess and incorporate the "10,000 pages of responses" to the first draft was "one of the most amazing things I

have ever seen."

The bishops and staff persons of the committee have "given heed to the broadest imaginable spectrum of proposals and recommendations," he said, making the second draft an improvement over the first while maintaining its essential concerns.

Cardinal O'Connor quoted extensively from the new draft's first chapter, "The Church and the Future of the U.S. Economy," and said the first chapter is "perhaps the most important chapter in the entire document."

He quoted the beginning of the chapter which states in part that "every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?"

The economy, Cardinal O'Connor said, continuing to read from the second draft, "is men and women working together developing the gifts of God's creation and building a world more fit for human living."

He said the second draft of the pastoral says that the economy "must serve the material and spiritual well-being of people."

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