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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF U.S. CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR*

During this past year, I went through one of the most devastating experiences I have ever been subject to when I visited Ethiopia at its absolute worst. There is no way of describing it; I wish that I could. You saw so much of it on television, and you think, as I thought before I went there, that you understood what was happening. But walking among those people is a different thing. Walking down those dusty, lonely roads where there is nothing and where all vegetation has been burned out; where the ground itself is exhausted. You see people streaming out of the mountains, many literally dying on the way, those making it doing so in such fearful states that the possibility of survival for a great number of them is very severely limited. It is painful to look out and see thousands outside the crude camps, not shielded at all from the scorching sun by day or the bitter winds by night, and then to go into the camps themselves and pick up little babies and see them dying before your eyes. When you look into their eyes, you can see that they are blinded because of the diseases attendant to such severe malnutrition. It is very difficult, even in retrospect. It tears you apart to the degree that you ask yourself even if you have a right to leave those people.

More recently, Cardinal Bernardin and I, with three other Bishops, made a trip to Nicaragua. There too, we saw refugees, not in quite such a pitiful plight, but clearly hungry, undernourished, having virtually nothing. We went to a little market where we saw little but fear in the eyes of people not knowing how they were going to survive. I spent this past week in the Dominican Republic, where I went to a little barrio called San Fuegos. The poverty is simply incredible. Once again, it is mind boggling. A simple, warm, good, generous people whom God loves as much as He loves any one of us here, and they have nothing, but they have their faith—a

* Archbishop of New York. This is the revised text of a speech given at the University of Notre Dame on October 1, 1985, sponsored by the Thomas J. White Center on Law and Government.

great deal—and some teachers trying to help under the most primitive circumstances. But except for their faith, they have no future. During this past year, because of this position as Chairman of Social Development and World Peace, I went with Bishop Malone and others to Ireland. And there we saw the empty look in the eyes of those who have sat for years unemployed. I talked to a young lad—eighteen years of age—getting out of trade school with no job waiting for him. He had never seen his father employed; he had never seen his grandfather employed.

All of this leads to one of the most poignant passages in the second draft of the U.S. Bishops' Letter on *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*:

The basic tenets of church teaching take on a new moral urgency as we deepen our understanding of how disadvantaged large numbers of people are in this interdependent world. Half the world's people, nearly 2.5 billion, live in countries where the income per person is \$400 or less. At least 800 million people in those countries live in absolute poverty, "beneath any rational definition of human decency." Nearly half of a billion are chronically hungry, despite abundant harvests worldwide. Fifteen out of every 100 children born in those countries die before the age of 5, and millions of the survivors are stunted physically or mentally. No aggregate of individual examples could portray adequately the appalling inequities within those desperately poor countries and between them and our own.¹

That is very true—no aggregate of individual cases could give us an appropriate picture. But the pictures in Ethiopia and the Dominican Republic come very close. I returned from those places to the streets of New York where I look out from the bedroom of a very fashionable address on Madison Avenue, look across the street at one of the most luxurious hotels in the United States, and in the winter, in between these two buildings, there can literally be people lying in the street, virtually freezing to death. One passes bag men and bag women; one looks at the soup kitchens and at the food lines, and you feel as you do in these other coun-

1. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* para. 248 (Second Draft 1985), reprinted in 15 ORIGINS 257 (1985) [hereinafter cited as Second Draft] (quoting R. McNamara, Address to the Board of Governors of the World Bank, in Washington D.C. (Sept. 30, 1980)).

tries. It is not a matter of criticizing, of indicating or blaming, or wanting to pull down any government or feeling ungrateful about all we have been given here in the United States. It is simply a sense of critical urgency, a passionate urgency, that we must *do* something, that we cannot simply throw up our hands.

We know that a utopia will never occur in this world. However, there are some tremendous achievements possible between what so many people have and a utopia. As I look out to the streets of New York, as I go into the South Bronx that some of you might be familiar with, as I go into Harlem and the lower East Side, I have to ask myself not what have we been doing, but are we doing enough? Are we doing enough for the hungry, for the homeless? Are we doing enough for the uneducated, for the illiterate? Are we doing enough for the cancer ridden? Are we doing enough for those who do not know which way to turn and in their confusion, have an abortion? Are we doing enough for teenage pregnant girls? And I look at a health system with costs soaring beyond the imaginable. We have sixteen Catholic hospitals in the Archdiocese of New York, and their annual operating costs are \$700 million. I look at our childcare centers, and their annual operating costs are \$132 million. I have to ask myself, are we doing enough? What about the people who cannot afford any of these opportunities?

It is this kind of thing, I think, that has driven the bishops. Cardinal Bernardin has brilliantly given us the theological, sociological, and philosophical background—the context within which we are attempting to produce this document on Catholic social teaching and the economy. But even beyond this, is this sense of urgency that has developed in the hearts and the very beings of our bishops. What can we do? We must do something. It is the same thing that drove us in regard to the pastoral on war and peace. We knew that we were not going to solve all the problems of the world. We knew that a pastoral letter was not going to bring peace in twenty-four hours. It was not going to disestablish all of the nuclear weapons systems and all of the potential torments of war. But we had to do something. We had to try to stir up a sense of the moral urgency felt by many but not by all.

The immediate precipitating factor of this effort to address the United States economy and the economy of the world was really in the sermon of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, in Yankee Stadium in October, 1979. In his famous address on Dives and Lazarus, he said:

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, with deep conviction and affection I repeat to you the words that I addressed to the world when I took up my Apostolic ministry in the service of all men and women. "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows what is in man. He alone knows it"

We cannot stand idly by enjoying our own riches and freedom if, in any place the Lazarus of the Twentieth Century stands at our doors.

In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility. Riches and freedom create a special obligation.

And so, in the name of the solidarity that binds us all together in a common humanity, I again proclaim the dignity of every human person: the rich man and Lazarus are both human beings, both of them equally created in the image and likeness of God. Both of them equally redeemed by Christ, at a great price, "the price of the precious blood of Christ." (1 Pt. 1:19)²

Pope John Paul II added, "As I said to you at the beginning, Christ is our Justice and our Peace, and all our works of Justice and Peace draw from this source the irreplaceable energy and light for the great task before us."³ He then reminded us that it is not in riches themselves that we must fault ourselves. He says the rich man was not condemned because he had riches, because he abounded in earthly possessions, because he dressed in purple linen and feasted splendidly every day. The rich man was condemned because he did not pay attention to the other.

That is so crucial, and it has been so badly misunderstood. That is one of the reasons why some have become unfortunately antipathetical to the whole concept of this proposed document. They believe that the document represents an effort to polarize classes, to indict the wealthy for being wealthy regardless of their goodness, their generosity, their support of the hungry and the homeless as well as the Church. The Holy Father points out that the rich man was condemned because he paid no attention to Lazarus, the person who sat at his door and longed to eat the scraps from his

2. John Paul II, Homily at Yankee Stadium, October 2, 1979.

3. *Id.*

table.

Nowhere does Christ condemn the mere possession of earthly goods. Instead, he pronounces very harsh words against those who use their possessions in a selfish way without paying attention to the needs of others. We must always remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; it must form our conscience. Christ demands openness to our brothers and sisters in need: openness from the rich, the affluent, the economically advanced; openness to the poor, the underdeveloped and the disadvantaged. Christ demands an openness that is more than benign attention, more than token actions or half-hearted efforts that leave the poor as destitute as before.

In speaking with various members of the committee attempting to develop this pastoral, I have repeatedly heard them cite this particular passage. It is obvious that this parable is driving them; it is the precipitating factor for the effort to develop this particular pastoral letter. Obviously, the context is *Rerum Novarum*⁴ and *Quadragesimo Anno*,⁵ and *The Church in the Modern World*,⁶ just enunciated by Cardinal Bernardin. The bishops do not pretend to be economists by any stretch of the imagination; they want to stir a sense of urgency. They have a deeply rooted conviction that things could be better.

The process followed in the development of this proposed pastoral should be briefly discussed. It is a fascinating process, but I do not reference it for that reason. I reference it in response to those who seem to perceive the bishops as acting arbitrarily or venturing into areas beyond their own expertise.

One phase was completed with the publication of the first draft of some 124 pages, plus footnotes. That draft was developed very, very painfully, using the model that was really developed by Cardinal Bernardin for the pursuit of the questions of war and peace, in accordance with which we tried to interview conscientiously as many people as we could—very, very ordinary people. For example, I remember one woman, not ordinary except that she was not an engineer

4. Leo XIII, *The Condition of Labor (Rerum Novarum)* (1891).

5. Pius XI, *On Reconstruction of the Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno)* (1931).

6. Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, reprinted in *THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II* 199 (W. Abbott ed. 1966) [hereinafter cited as *Gaudium et Spes*].

or a weapons specialist. She was the mother of six children, serving a suspended sentence for allegedly damaging governmental property as a protest against the potential of nuclear weapons. We interviewed her as well as past Secretaries of Defense and the present Secretary of Defense. We interviewed sociologists, theologians, psychologists, lawyers, medical doctors, for as extensive a period of time as we possibly could. We disseminated drafts all over the United States. We sent them to our brother bishops in different parts of the world. We received thousands of responses, to say nothing of the articles that appeared in the periodicals, newspapers and journals. We worked and conscientiously tried to develop a better understanding of the issues with which we were dealing. We then sought to discern, with the help of prayer and retreat that we made together, what would best advance the world toward peace.

We were not naive about this. At the very least, we wanted to reduce the horrors of war, should war come. We produced an imperfect document, a committee document, a human document. Our work served as a model for the current committee on the pastoral on the economy. Their use of the model has been much more comprehensive than ours. They are spending more time and interviewing more people; they have interviewed a very great number of economists, businessmen, industrialists, ordinary people and the kinds of people that I referenced in regard to the previous pastoral letter.

The first draft was then produced.⁷ I suspect that most bishops in the United States did what I did with that first draft: I had ten thousand copies reproduced. I distributed them in Harlem, in the South Bronx, in the lower East Side. I distributed them in our urban areas, our farm areas. I distributed them on Wall Street. I distributed them in our Catholic colleges and universities. In every instance, we pleaded for honest, objective study, prayer, meditation, discussion and response.

Because of that kind of process all over the country, the committee received ten thousand pages of responses which they very meticulously devoured. The kinds of responses that I received made me very proud of the people in my own Archdiocese. They were generally most supportive, whether or not they agreed with us. These responses recognized that

7. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (First Draft 1984), reprinted in 14 *ORIGINS* 337 (1984).

something must be done, and they were aware of our efforts. Not every response was quite so complimentary as one might have hoped. Some that were less than complimentary, however, were phrased in subtle and charitable language such as this one:

The bishops' economic theories are pious trash guaranteed to solve not one global problem or national disgrace. The bishops are making damned fools of themselves and Catholics in general. Nobody takes them as seriously as they take themselves. They could all give poverty, of a sort, a chance. You gentlemen have just taken one more step in the alienation of the American public. The Church should deal with souls and not get involved in social issues. Please tell your bishops to mind their own business. In this country, we have separation of church and state.

A certain number thought we were thoroughly communistic. "You're living in an unrealistic world and are undermining our country." "You're aiding communism and socialism." "You're not qualified to pass judgment on United States economic policies." These are among the more charitable and subtle of the comments.

These comments are not representative of what we received. I think some people may have a very misguided notion about those who work on Wall Street: the big financial movers and shakers of the world. We spoke to a group of about 300 Catholics on Wall Street, including the president of the stock exchange. We went over, in advance, the essence of that first draft, and I was awed by their responses. Many disagreed with us from a pragmatic perspective. When I say pragmatic, I do not mean a prospective self-interest, enlightened or otherwise. They simply told us that they did not think that the things that we were proposing would work; that in the final analysis, the poor would be poorer and the rich would be richer if we pursued some of the economic hypotheses articulated in the first draft. Again, whether or not we agreed with them was not germane. The good will was extraordinary.

The second draft represents an effort to incorporate the responses and recommendations that came from all over the United States and from different parts of the world. The bishops have objectively, charitably, and sensitively paid heed to the broadest imaginable spectrum of proposals and recommendations. Where the committee disagreed, it nevertheless presented the viewpoint of the proponent of a particular po-

sition. This second draft is a very dramatic improvement over the first, but it maintains the same essential concerns as the first, as it should.

Through Cardinal Bernardin's leadership in the preparation of the document on war and peace, we finally recognized that we will not break various impasses unless we recognize that we can appropriately teach in accordance with three levels of authority. We can talk to the world about those principles which we believe to be innate in every human heart, call them natural moral law principles if you will, but they are universally binding, regardless of the religious persuasion of the actor anywhere in the world. We certainly have the right and the obligation to enunciate those principles. There is a second area of principles that are binding on Catholics: formal, official Catholic church teaching, especially as presented in the Second Vatican Council. A third area falls into the category of what we call prudential moral judgment. The only thing we are saying about this third category is that we have tried to listen carefully. We have prayed, talked, thought, and read together. And it is our best moral judgment, in accordance with Catholic moral and theological teaching, that these particular positions deserve deference, sincere study, contributions on the part of the readers, and indeed, rejection if the readers bring to the particular area of concern more expertise than we have demonstrated.

Our counterparts on this particular committee are clearly following that same division of levels of authority. When the bishops address explicit economic theories or hypotheses or proposals, they make it clear that these theories are presented on the basis of the evidence that they have been able to acquire, that they are not economists, that perhaps others will come along with better, more workable ideas, but they plead for a hearing. They plead for a reading. They plead for studying, for praying and for an appropriate recognition of the efforts involved. I want to emphasize that it is a pastoral letter, a proposed pastoral letter on *Catholic social teaching* and the United States economy. Many people speak of this as "the pastoral on the economy." It is a pastoral letter on *United States Catholic social teaching*, which is why Cardinal Bernardin and I decided to come to Notre Dame together, in this fashion. It flows from the Catholic social teaching that he has presented to us. The chapter headings, and a few of the sub-chapter headings will give you

some sense of the substance.⁸

This document demands thoughtful, prayerful reading and study. What you find, when you go through this carefully, is that we do not talk merely about what has come to be called by Popes themselves, a preferential option for the poor. We begin with it. We think it absolutely crucial, but we put it in perspective. We address every sector of society in this proposed pastoral letter. Part of the letter itself will give you its spirit, its life, and its dynamics. This is the beginning of the second draft and could perhaps be the most important chapter in the entire document:

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 is a human reality, formed by human decisions and actions. It is men and women working together, developing the gifts of God's creation and building a world more fit for human living. All this work must serve the material and spiritual well-

8. The Second Draft includes the following chapter and sub-chapter headings:

- I. The Church and the Future of the U.S. Economy
 - A. The U.S. Economy Today: Memory and Hope
 - B. Urgent Problems of Today
 - C. The Need for Moral Vision
- II. The Christian Vision of Economic Life
 - A. Biblical Perspectives
 - B. The Christian Vocation in The World Today
 - C. Ethical Norms for Economic Life
 - D. Working for Greater Justice: Persons and Institutions
 - E. Christian Hope and Step-by-Step Efforts
- III. Selected Economic Policy Issues
 - A. Employment
 - B. Poverty
 - C. Food and Agriculture
 - D. The United States and the World Economy: Complexity, Challenge and Choices
 - E. Conclusion
- IV. A New American Experiment: Partnership For the Public Good
 - A. Cooperation with Firms and Industries
 - B. Local and Regional Cooperation
 - C. Partnership in the Development of National Policies
 - D. Cooperation at the International Level
- V. A Commitment to the Future
 - A. The Church as Economic Actor
 - B. Commitment to Implementation
 - C. Commitment to a Kingdom of Love and Justice

being of people. It influences what people hope and believe about their destiny. It affects the way they live together. It touches their very faith in God. Concern for all these dimensions of economic life lead us to write this pastoral letter.⁹

In a certain sense, this passage summarizes the entire letter. The bishops say that we approach this task as pastors and teachers of the gospel. They use the very text used by Cardinal Bernardin. The Second Vatican Council declared: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."¹⁰

The ministry of the Church has given firsthand knowledge of the hopes and struggles of many groups and classes of people, both in this country and throughout the world. Again, it is our hope, our dream, our effort, and our commitment to try to do whatever we possibly can to help those most impoverished, and to bring about, for all, the fulfillment of what we so often speak of as the American dream which, properly interpreted, is by no means a merely materialistic dream.

I began by speaking of Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, there was an extraordinary phenomenon, obvious to anyone who visited. I mentioned those thousands who were outside the very crude tents and camps. And there was a fence around, keeping them out in the scorching heat and in the icy winds of the night. Inside the fence were thousands of very, very simple tents. Each tent cost only fifty dollars. The number of deaths that occurred outside the tents, to those exposed to the elements, was enormous in comparison with the number of deaths that occurred inside the fence, to those living in these simple little tents. Outside the fence, they were devoid of all privacy. There were exposed not only to the elements but to all of the curious. Their nakedness, their poverty was clear. Many of them were separated from their families, unable to locate them and unable to stay with them exclusively, even if they could locate them. Those inside, in the tents, lived with their families, grandparents, parents, children, who had survived. Beginning to flourish once again, a light was dawning in their eyes. They had privacy; they had dignity. Fifty dol-

9. Second Draft, *supra* note 1, para. 1.

10. *Guadium et Spes*, *supra* note 6, no. 1.

lars. Fifty dollars for a tent. But infinitely more, they felt that by that little tent, they were somehow embraced by love. Whatever else this pastoral tries to convey, it is that: a plea for love.

