



February 2014

From Subsidiarity to Subsidies: America's Catholic Bishops Re-Orient Their Teaching on Society and Entitlements, 1966-1986

Michael Warner

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp>

Recommended Citation

Michael Warner, *From Subsidiarity to Subsidies: America's Catholic Bishops Re-Orient Their Teaching on Society and Entitlements, 1966-1986*, 11 NOTRE DAME J.L. ETHICS & PUB. POL'Y 581 (1997).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp/vol11/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy at NDLScholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy by an authorized administrator of NDLScholarship. For more information, please contact lawdr@nd.edu.

FROM SUBSIDIARITY TO SUBSIDIES: AMERICA'S CATHOLIC BISHOPS RE-ORIENT THEIR TEACHING ON SOCIETY AND ENTITLEMENTS, 1966-1986

MICHAEL WARNER*

His answer was perfect and, most important, long as a pastoral letter; it let everything be understood yet said nothing clearly.¹

From the 1920s until 1966, America's Catholic bishops gathered under an organization they styled the National Catholic Welfare Conference. In 1966, they renamed this organization the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and created its public policy twin, the United States Catholic Conference (USCC). The name change reflected a desire to give the reformed body a new start in life; the USCC would have somewhat expanded juridical powers and a broadened mandate under the authority of the Second Vatican Council. But another motivation was present as well, and it was frankly confessed at the time by the bishops' spokesmen. A 1967 flier advertising the new USCC noted that the word "welfare" had originally signified "the common good, the general well-being of the Church." By 1967, however, it connoted "social work," in the sense used by charitable agencies. The Catholic bishops of the United States wanted to demonstrate that their concerns were not circumscribed by the bounds of social work.²

The rich irony here is that the bishops need not have bothered. Within a few years it would be obvious that the shifting connotation of the word welfare was tracking rather neatly with the changing emphasis of the national bishops' conference. By 1986, when the bishops issued their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, the USCC had become an outspoken advocate for govern-

* Michael Warner is Deputy Chief of the CIA History Staff. The views in this article are his own, and do not represent analyses or conclusions of the Central Intelligence Agency.

1. MARIE-HENRI BEYLE (DE STENDHAL), *THE RED AND THE BLACK* 145 (Lloyd C. Parks trans., 1970).

2. This article is largely excerpted from my book, *CHANGING WITNESS: CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND PUBLIC POLICY* (1995), copyright Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C. In this text I have used "USCC" to denote statements and activities by both the NCCB and the USCC.

ment subsidies for the poor. The USCC justified these transfers as rectification for society's shocking maldistribution of power and wealth, and advocated them irrespective of the recipients relative virtue or vice. How did this happen? Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, the bishops' social teaching had replaced its Thomistic philosophical template with a newer, phenomenological one. The teaching expressed in *Economic Justice for All* was activist, redistributionist, and statist, and it remains normative for Catholic social action at all levels of the American Church.

The bishops' thought matters for Catholic and non-Catholic Americans because the bishops have worked harder than anyone in the United States to devise a system of principles for governing national life based upon the application of Christ's command to love thy neighbor. For eight decades the bishops have collectively spoken on all phases of public policy. They originally deduced their policy conclusions from premises based in Thomistic natural law teaching, and if those premises have subsequently been supplemented by newer, non-Thomistic ideas, the overall social teaching is no less logically coherent. If prudence and forethought matter to the public life of a democracy, then the bishops' statements merit the attention of anyone interested in the possibilities and problems of applying Christian principles to society as a whole.

I.

America's Catholic bishops first came together to speak regularly on public policy in 1919, forming the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC). There is no need here for a detailed account of the NCWC's founding as a war support agency in Washington, D.C. and its refounding in 1923; it is sufficient to say that the NCWC focused Roman Catholic opinion for officials and lawmakers, and that it projected the bishops' collective social teaching to the faithful and the nation at large in a series of annual and occasional statements on public affairs.³

For almost five decades the NCWC's lens for analyzing social issues was papal and ultimately Thomistic. Thomism looks strange to modern eyes, even though many of the terms it employed (essence, substance, form, etc.) have become so thoroughly integrated into our vocabulary that we use them constantly without realizing their origins. Thomas' teaching was one "school" of the scholasticism that dominated Western intellectual

3. A fuller account of the NCWC's founding and early years can be found in CHANGING WITNESS, *supra* note 2, at 25-34.

life during the High and late Middle Ages. Scholasticism had appropriated the methods and concerns of classical Greek philosophy (particularly Plato and Aristotle and their "neo-Platonic" expositors), but had put these pagan tools to the service of Christian theology and cosmology. Scholasticism was thus a philosophy, a theology, and a dialectical method.⁴ The Schoolmen assumed that "essences" have a reality that is independent of human knowledge. This assumption gave rise to the perennial Scholastic debates over how it was that forms and essences manifested themselves (if at all) in God's creation.⁵

Saint Thomas Aquinas in the Thirteenth Century presented strikingly innovative answers to these questions, and his branch of Scholastic thought is today the only one left as a living discipline. Thomism also clarified our knowledge of objects (including ourselves) by measuring their various degrees of perfection, according to the norms observed for each species.⁶ All such degrees are, according to Thomas, really participations in the orders of nature and/or grace. Man participates through reason in the law of nature that God created.⁷ (Christians, additionally, participate in another order of grace.) The Thomistic observer measures society by its degree of participation in God's divine law, which is also manifested in the natural law.⁸

This teaching propounded the notion of the organic society—the idea that all societies must conform, as if by an anthropomorphized law of social gravity, to an objective reality that constitutes the health of a society. Following papal social teaching as explicated in a line of encyclical letters dating from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*,⁹ the bishops viewed society in anthropomorphic terms, with justice being the right (i.e., natural) relation of the constituent social members to one another and the whole. Just as a human being is called healthy (and righteous) when the faculties of body and soul are balanced in their just order, society is called just when its components are in their right relations. The Thomistic social teaching had argued that maintaining (or restoring) the natural order of relations between the various

4. ARTHUR HYMAN, JAMES J. WALSH, *PHILOSOPHY IN THE MIDDLE AGES: THE CHRISTIAN, ISLAMIC, AND JEWISH TRADITIONS* 5-7 (1973).

5. 2 FREDERICK COPLESTON, *A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY: MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY* 52-54 (1962).

6. *Id.* at 62-63, 74-77.

7. *See, e.g.*, ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: *PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS* 355-58 (Thomas Gilby ed., 1982).

8. There is a strong hint of this in *id.* at 381.

9. Pope Leo XIII, *RERUM NOVARUM*, in 2 *THE PAPAL ENCYCLICALS* 241 (Claudia Carlen ed., 1981).

parts of society would provide opportunities for most citizens to prosper. Nevertheless, some would still be in need of alms, and society's different classes and groups would still need to be bound by mutual charity.¹⁰

The bishops militantly rejected all philosophical denials of the notion of the organic society's premises and conclusions. Many such denials had already issued from under the heading of modern thought. Indeed, the American bishops consequently viewed intellectual error (particularly the error of secularism—the denial of God's place in the moral universe) as modernity's gravest flaw. The willful modern ignorance of the truth about man, said the NCWC, was the root of the modern predicament (the persistence of ignorance, vice, and injustice in a world of hitherto unimagined plenty).

This Thomistic paradigm lost its sway, at least in America, during the 1960s. Its premise of an anthropomorphic social order, long forgotten by secular minds and indeed by most non-Catholic Christians, finally came under sustained attack in Catholic philosophical precincts when the controversy over artificial birth control undermined confidence in a teleological view of the biological order and of natural science in general.

By 1965 a new and enduring paradigm was rising in the place of the older, Thomistic teaching. Since its formulation in the early Twentieth Century by German mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl, phenomenology has been used and criticized by every major school of Continental philosophy. Husserl conceived of it as a means of transcending "the crisis of the sciences:" a way of avoiding the sterile alternatives of scientific reductionism or of some form of psychological or historicist subjectivism.¹¹ His motif was "back to the things themselves" (*Zu den Sachen selbst*).¹² In practice, that meant close scrutiny of the dialogic processes by which the mind observes the world. As a method, phenomenology has yielded startling insights about how we "know" our world, the things within it, and ultimately ourselves and each other. Phenomenological concepts are not as familiar to Americans as they are to Europeans, but they have gained a certain recognition here through one of phenomenology's offspring—existentialism. Phenomenological methods, however, do not necessarily have to incorporate the rejection by

10. The notion of the organic social order is explained at greater length in CHANGING WITNESS, *supra* note 2, at 16-24, 37-41, 46-51.

11. JOHN F. KOBLER, VATICAN II AND PHENOMENOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE-WORLD OF THE CHURCH 4 (1985).

12. ALBERT DONDEYNE, CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN THOUGHT AND CHRISTIAN FAITH 23 (Ernan McMullin & John Burnheim trans., 1958).

existentialism (and by Husserl) of ontological certainty. Indeed, Catholic thinkers in Germany, France, and the Low Countries, such as Max Scheler, had by 1960 made phenomenological methods and ideas well known within theological circles.¹³ It would not be too great a stretch to assert that the phenomenology of Vatican II is that of Pope John Paul II; he has persevered in the Council's learned eclecticism, warmly endorsing the Thomistic tradition yet interested as well in the insights on the truth provided by modern philosophical methods.

Some European theologians and intellectuals, trained in the new philosophy and appreciating the way in which existentialism had put phenomenological concepts to work for radical political and social movements, soon turned a critical eye toward the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1961-65). According to theologian John A. Coleman, certain European Catholic intellectuals promoted a new social teaching in reaction to Vatican II:

Some theologians found [the Council's] *Pastoral Council on the Church in the Modern World* overly optimistic in its assessment of modern liberal society and too willing to adopt a cooperative rather than a critical prophetic stance. They feared that cooperation might mean, once again, cooptation. While accepting much of the council's new emphases, *a new political theology reversed some of its trends*.¹⁴

Drawn from German and French phenomenology and existentialism, a new "Political Theology," as it was briefly styled, taught that the root of the modern problem is technology, not intellectual error.¹⁵ The modern problem itself is the perpetuation of inequality in the midst of a plenty built with the sweat of society's powerless. Inequality, in addition to being scandalous and oppressive in and of itself, divides society and sparks violence, both in the personal and social realms.

The new ideas rested on the phenomenological insight that man and God are not knowable apart from one another in the world. European Catholic intellectuals, borrowing from philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, had argued that all religious meaning rests fundamentally in language—a product of history and culture—and thus that no "objective" viewpoint "outside" of

13. HUBERT JEDIN ET AL., 10 HISTORY OF THE CHURCH 262-63, 268-69 (1989).

14. JOHN A. COLEMAN, AN AMERICAN STRATEGIC THEOLOGY 61 (1982) (emphasis added).

15. See, e.g., Bernard Haering, *Man in Search of Liberation in Community*, in HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE LIBERATION OF MAN IN THE AMERICAS 247, 253-54 (Louis Colonnese ed., 1970).

the world was possible.¹⁶ It followed from this assertion that what Catholics called natural law was not a transcendent guide to life (no such thing could exist) but actually an historical artifact renovated by Leo XIII and reimposed by his successors. These notions had gradually revolutionized Continental dogmatic theology, and by the 1960s had influenced Catholic social and moral thinking as well. They were ready and waiting when the birth-control controversy and Vatican II seemed to create for Americans a need for a new conception of modern man.

The new Political Theology made its most significant contribution to Catholic social thought through its proposition that, because men can be known only by their mutual dealings, salvation is fundamentally social.¹⁷ The kingdom of God is not merely eschatological; it is "breaking through" into human history, and calls for all mankind to help build a just society here and now. Theologian Avery Dulles explains that the adherents of this "secular dialogic" ecclesiology saw the Church's primary mission as assisting all peoples to experience the Gospel values of peace, justice, and reconciliation.¹⁸ The new social teaching would serve human needs not by deducing solutions from a supposedly eternal moral code but by scrutinizing the signs of the times; that is, by viewing actual conditions and conflicts with the help of both secular expertise and Scripture (read in a fresh way to discern its meaning for our age).¹⁹ The Thomistic conception of justice as an organic social harmony was set aside. Since people could be known only by how they treated one another, justice could no longer be conceptualized as the correct ordering of social or personal faculties. Instead, justice was to be understood as the act of perpetually redressing inequitable interpersonal relations or "structures," especially where those structures resulted in relative disadvantage or poverty for individuals or social groups.²⁰

In contrast to Papal social teaching and to Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," which stressed the intellectual roots of modernity's ills, the new thinkers regarded rigid patterns of inequality—particularly in the developing nations but also in the West—as the products of the

16. JEDIN ET AL., *supra* note 13, at 10:260-71 (1989).

17. Johannes B. Metz, *The Church's Social Function in the Light of a "Political Theology,"* in FAITH AND THE WORLD OF POLITICS, 36 CONCILIAM 7-9 (1968).

18. AVERY DULLES, *MODELS OF THE CHURCH* 83-85 (1974).

19. Philipp Herder-Dorneich, *How Can the Church Provide Guidelines in Social Ethics?*, in THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL, 35 CONCILIAM 84-85, 89-90 (1968).

20. COLEMAN, *supra* note 14, at 61.

Western world's socioeconomic processes. Bernard Haering, for instance, explained that modern modes of production and social intercourse had vanquished the traditional, patriarchal structures of familial and communal life.²¹ This had liberated mankind in many ways but had also created a cold and impersonal social climate in which many people understandably sought love and companionship only within their narrow personal relationships. Even worse, some of these lonely people were tempted to romanticize the vestiges of the patriarchal past. The new social thinking, said Haering, directed the Church to resist these pulls toward apathy and reaction by adopting a "prophetic" role—a critical posture toward society—in order to highlight the conflicts and injustices that impede justice and salvation.²² After Vatican II closed in 1965, America's Catholic bishops gradually adopted these new ideas about justice and the Church's role in society.

II.

By the mid-1960s, the traditional, Thomistic social teaching of America's bishops seemed to some Catholic intellectuals to be outmoded and inordinately fearful of erroneous ideologies. For example, the editors of *Commonweal* criticized the bishops' 1963 statement *Bonds of Union* for blaming racism on secularism and materialism: "there have been too many God-fearing segregationists and too many agnostic integrationists to make this explanation plausible," said *Commonweal*. Such airy theorizing seemed to the editors to give little sustenance to the courageous Catholics and non-Catholics struggling for civil rights.²³ Father Peter Riga of Buffalo, N.Y., argued in *Today* magazine that American Catholics had neglected racism and other social problems while salving their consciences by supporting schools and charities. He blamed this apathy in part on a fear of communism and "seminary training for a world of the 16th century instead of the 20th."²⁴ Historian David J. O'Brien later summarized such complaints about "the apparent inadequacy of republican [viz. natural law] categories in the face of spiraling problems of violence and injustice:"

In John Courtney Murray's [and by implication the NCWC's] advanced version of the republican tradition, natural law ethics provided no leverage for bringing about

21. Haering, *supra* note 15, at 253.

22. *Id.* at 254-55. See also Metz, *supra* note 17 at 17.

23. *A Disappointing Statement*, COMMONWEAL, Nov. 29, 1963, at 267, 268.

24. Peter Riga, *Catholics and Community*, TODAY, June 1964, at 9, 11.

the kingdom of God, only for establishing minimal levels of decency. Neither did it provide an emotionally compelling ground for resistance to evil.²⁵

The catalyst for this development was America's agonizing struggle over civil rights. Called to exercise moral leadership in a time of social crisis, the hierarchy knew that ecclesial missteps risked fracturing the American Catholic communion; that any course of action would be criticized by some as extreme and by others as equivocating. The NCWC's statements on race relations had stressed the need for individual efforts on behalf of tolerance and moral reform, explaining that Catholics were bound in conscience to raise the issue of racism and justice in their daily lives. Nevertheless, even oppressed minorities, said the bishops, had an obligation to work for the common good while seeking the fullness of their own rights.²⁶

By 1966 the bishops could see progress toward full civil rights, but they became increasingly alarmed about the persistence of poverty within America's mostly affluent society. The USCC's pastoral letter *Race Relations and Poverty*²⁷ (drafted by staffer Fr. John Cronin) conflated these two problems in a manner that soon became typical in USCC statements. The pastoral letter referred to "the aggrieved of our nation," defining them as the poor and the members of minority groups such as blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, and suggested that their relative deprivation was caused primarily by prejudice.²⁸

This discussion of an aggrieved class of citizens marked a change from the NCWC's approach to social analysis. Previously, the NCWC's Social Action Department had viewed social groups by their function in providing for the common good, and did not pay much attention to poverty as such. Department officials tacitly assumed that reconstructing society along organic lines would indirectly but decisively diminish the incidence of poverty. By 1967, the doubts of the USCC staff were growing, however, with staffers beginning to view social groups not according to their abilities but according to their needs.

25. David J. O'Brien, *Join It, Work It, Fight It*, COMMONWEAL, Nov. 17, 1989, at 624, 626-27.

26. National Catholic Welfare Comm., *Discrimination and Christian Conscience*, in 2 PASTORAL LETTERS OF THE UNITED STATES CATHOLIC BISHOPS 201 (Hugh J. Nolan ed., 1984); National Catholic Welfare Comm., *Racial Harmony*, in 3 PASTORAL LETTERS, *supra* at 17.

27. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, para. 11, *Race Relations and Poverty in QUEST FOR JUSTICE* 355 (J. Brian Benestad & Francis Butler eds., 1981).

28. *Id.* at 356.

In other respects, however, *Race Relations and Poverty* echoed the moderate tone of earlier statements. Its list of remedies reiterated calls for better schools for poor children, night classes for adults, job opportunities and training, low-cost housing, and transfer payments that promoted, not undermined, family stability.²⁹ The pastoral letter preserved the NCWC's earlier emphasis on subsidiarity and federalism, mentioning governmental intervention as one of several possible measures and adding that such intervention should occur at "appropriate levels."³⁰ The letter also called for dialogue to replace "shouted epithets of hate."³¹

USCC staffer John Cronin explained the logic of *Race Relations and Poverty* a few months later, warning that "our cities might burn" if whites failed to respond to black disillusionment.³² Civil-rights legislation had raised expectations, he argued, but it had not cured the inner-city poverty that caused the "riotous rage" felt by many blacks. In the consequent unrest, black nationalism and white backlash fed on one another, threatening even greater violence to come.³³ Cronin seemed at a loss for solutions; his natural-law training had conditioned him to think in terms of long-term, structural changes, not sudden crises. On the verge of a well-earned retirement, he seemed disillusioned with the way in which secular society had ignored the old NCWC's social commentary. Apparently inspired by the secular media and the War on Poverty's Community Action Program, Cronin said that in some areas progress might even require working outside of and in opposition to local power structures.³⁴

The assassination of Martin Luther King in April 1968 soon caused great concern among the bishops' leadership. Just a month earlier, four of the nation's most senior prelates had held an "emergency meeting" to respond to the report of President Johnson's National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, which had studied the urban riots.³⁵ King's martyrdom shocked and frightened liberal Catholics, many of whom feared that the black community had lost its last great moderate, and that the anger caused by white delay would soon boil over.³⁶ The USCC's already scheduled pastoral letter on race, released three

29. *Id.* at 357.

30. *Id.* at para. 14.

31. *Id.* at para. 10.

32. John F. Cronin, *Must We Have Race Riots?*, *SIGN*, April 1967, at 17, 19.

33. *Id.* at 17.

34. *Id.* at 18.

35. *U.S. Bishops Tooling Up Riot Study Responses*, *NAT'L CATH. REP.*, March 13, 1968, at 1.

36. DOUGLAS J. ROCHE, *THE CATHOLIC REVOLUTION* 63 (1968).

weeks after King's murder and the riots that followed, naturally reflected this concern. Titled *The National Race Crisis*, it proclaimed: "The crisis is of a magnitude and peril far transcending any which the Church in America or the nation has previously confronted. [America must act] while there is still time for collaborative peaceful solutions [because] civil protests could easily erupt into civil war."³⁷

The National Race Crisis set the tone for many statements to follow. It subjugated the earlier emphasis on federalism and subsidiarity to a sense of crisis, announcing the necessity of urgent governmental intervention to stabilize the dangerous situation. Seeing a social cleavage between white America and the marginalized poor, the bishops sought to make the institutional Church an advocate for the oppressed. They thus argued that all white Americans shared in the guilt of racism, and thus should recognize "that racist attitudes and consequent discrimination exist, not only in the hearts of men but in the fabric of their institutions."³⁸ The Church should work with all men of good will to "encourage, support and identify with the efforts of the poor in their search for self-determination."³⁹

The year 1968 finally passed, but the feeling of national crisis that it had engendered in the bishops' thinking about poverty and justice remained. The USCC's 1969 Labor Day statement viewed social groups not according to their function in society but according to their need for aid.⁴⁰ The USCC proposed that the Church respond to the contemporary crisis by leading a massive development effort to assist "the struggle of the poor to achieve self-determination."⁴¹ In an astounding (and inaccurate) indictment of the old NCWC's social teaching, the Labor Day message also judged previous Catholic efforts well-intentioned but insufficient because they had been "oriented toward treating the effects of poverty rather than confronting its causes."⁴² Three months later the bishops launched just the sort of plan called for by the Labor Day statement, promising fifty million dollars to meet "the evident need for funds designated to be used for organized groups of white and minority poor to

37. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The National Race Crisis*, in QUEST FOR JUSTICE, *supra* note 27, at 359, 361-63.

38. *Id.* at 359.

39. *Id.* at 361.

40. U.S. Catholic Conference, *USCC's 1969 Labor Day Statement*, 67 CATH. MIND, Jan. 1969, at 1-4.

41. *Id.* at 3.

42. *Id.* at 2.

develop economic strength and political power in their own communities."⁴³

The administration of the USCC's new assistant general secretary, Fr. James Rausch, furthered this trend. Rausch in 1970 offered an innovative notion of justice to a gathering of the National Council of Catholic Women. Taking as his starting point Paul VI's 1967 encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*⁴⁴—but filling its outline with Political Theology—he argued that

justice is not a static notion of human relationships that is locked in by a conservative view of civil order where the rights of current possessors of power and wealth are guaranteed against debtors and outcasts. If justice is to exist in the social order it must acknowledge the fallibility, and, indeed, when present, the malicious effects of structures men create which thwart the pursuit of greater humanness for all.⁴⁵

Justice cannot remain a mere concept, said Fr. Rausch, "it must be an act."⁴⁶ Rausch cited Pope Paul's assertion that the goods of the earth are created for all and that no one is justified in keeping property for his sole benefit when others lack the necessities of life.⁴⁷ This logic, Rausch argued, vanquished the comfortable ethic of occasional charity practiced by many Americans and obligated Christians to provide the poor with access to wealth and power.⁴⁸

The new social ethic, as suggested by Fr. Rausch, regarded as oppressive all inequalities of wealth and power that were not immediately tied to some greater service for the common good (and distrusted even these benefits if their recipients tended to be white or male). Following this logic, Rausch regarded the leveling of suspect social distinctions as a pressing matter of justice. This conception banished the traditional notion of a natural social order and, consequently, the older distinction between justice and charity. Indeed, Fr. Rausch seemed to say that it was arrogant to believe that one's donation to the poor was in any

43. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Resolution on Crusade Against Poverty*, in 3 PASTORAL LETTERS OF THE UNITED STATES CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *supra* note 26, at 214.

44. Pope Paul VI, *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO* (1967), in 5 THE PAPAL ENCYCLICALS, *supra* note 9, at 183.

45. James Rausch, *Development and Justice*, CATH. MIND, March 1971, at 4-5.

46. *Id.* at 5.

47. *Id.* at 4.

48. *Id.* at 5.

way gratuitous or that even the disadvantaged ought to regard other classes with patriotic affection.⁴⁹

Rausch's sentiments were not his alone; by 1970 the bishops' staff had come to view society as an aggregate of groups differentiated by their relative need—instead of by their contributions to the common good. USCC staffers suggested that America was pushing certain groups (such as blacks, Native Americans, women, farm workers, the elderly, and the disabled) to the margins of national life.⁵⁰

In the face of this widespread inequality, USCC staffers argued that the Church's social role was to play the prophet; to highlight patterns of marginalization and remind the comfortable and the powerful of their role in perpetuating them. Rausch, by 1973 a bishop himself and the successor of Bp. Joseph Bernardin as USCC general secretary, explained this in an address he delivered that year. Citing the 1971 worldwide synod of bishops as his authority in this matter, Rausch concluded:

[T]he function of the Church in the social order is consistently to raise "the forgotten factor" in human affairs, to highlight the human dimension of issues, which gets lost or subordinated to more pragmatic or concrete concerns.⁵¹

The new emphases on social inequality and clerical activism translated rather easily into an expanded lobbying role for the USCC. The bishops' secretariat cast itself in the role of advocate for the disadvantaged, who allegedly had no one to speak on their behalf. To cite but one of many examples, a 1976 USCC statement argued (ignoring evidence to the contrary) that America's senior citizens could not compete "with well-financed interest groups for national resources," and thus required help from Catholics and other people who would speak out as "advocates for the elderly on public policy matters."⁵²

49. Bishop Rausch held to this view of charity during his later tenure as NCCB general secretary. In 1975, he argued that defining policy choices in terms of charity distracted Catholics from key national questions. See *Hunger is a Right-to-Life Issue*, OUR SUNDAY VISITOR, Dec. 7, 1975, at 1, 7.

50. USCC documents in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, repeatedly mention such "marginalization"; see, e.g., *To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life*, at 23, 37; *Race Relations and Poverty*, at 355, 356; *Farm Labor*, at 322, 323; *Society and the Aged*, at 333, 333; and *Pastoral Statement on the Handicapped*, at 346, 349.

51. James Rausch, *Forming America's Conscience*, 3 ORIGINS 129, 131-32, 144 (1973).

52. U.S. Catholic Conference, *Society and the Aged; Toward Reconciliation*, para. 50, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 333, 339.

III.

Civil rights advocates during the 1960s had found in many cases that the federal government was the only guarantor of justice for racial minorities. USCC staffers internalized this lesson and applied it to many other social issues, setting aside the NCWC's traditional emphasis on subsidiarity.⁵³ Though NCWC staffers had worried about the growth of federal power,⁵⁴ the spectacle of state and local authorities in the South resisting federally mandated efforts to end segregation changed a lot of minds in Washington. USCC staffers were soon saying that the federal government was the most reliable, and sometimes the only, engine of social change: a conclusion staffers eventually applied to other social questions as well. Father John McCarthy, for instance, told Congress in 1969 that American poverty was caused by whites who wanted a pool of servile labor.⁵⁵ Because state and local authorities had upheld this systematic oppression, he argued, the federal government had to bypass state and local structures to "get straight into" areas where people desperately needed help.⁵⁶ Don't worry about federalism, suggested McCarthy; we should not give to those "state governments that had a certain role to play in producing that poverty," he explained, "the key to supposedly getting us out of it."⁵⁷

Examples of this federal preference abounded. A USCC statement on the elderly called for "a national policy guaranteeing full employment, a decent income for those unable to work, equitable tax legislation and comprehensive health care for all."⁵⁸ Another statement, on prison reform, advocated "national standards" regulating treatment of inmates and urged Washington to withhold grants to states that refused to adhere to these voluntary guidelines.⁵⁹ In 1976, the USCC advocated federal

53. A fuller account of the NCWC's teaching on the principle of subsidiarity can be found in *CHANGING WITNESS*, *supra* note 2, at 48-50.

54. Examples of the NCWC's stress on subsidiarity can be seen in the writings of two prominent Social Action Department staffers, Frs. George Higgins and John F. Cronin. See the Department's *1966 Labor Day Statement* [drafted by Higgins], *CATH. MIND*, Oct. 1966, at 57; and JOHN F. CRONIN, *THE CATHOLIC AS CITIZEN* 142-48 (1963).

55. *Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1969: Hearings Before the Ad Hoc Hearing Task Force on Poverty of the House Comm. on Educ. and Labor*, 91st Cong. 1586 (1969) (statement of Fr. John McCarthy).

56. *Id.* at 1591.

57. *Id.* at 1592.

58. U.S. Catholic Conference, *Society and the Aged*, para. 51, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 333.

59. U.S. Catholic Conference, *Reform of Correctional Institutions in the 1970s*, para. 10, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 208.

loans to financially-stricken New York City—without mentioning a role for New York State.⁶⁰ Bishop Rausch of the USCC urged the White House to create public works jobs during the mid-1970's recession.⁶¹ Although the bishops' pastoral letter on moral life, *To Live in Christ Jesus*,⁶² urged businesses, professions and workers to show that the common good could be promoted "without intrusion by the state into ever more areas of life," spokesmen for the bishops rarely discussed problems associated with increased federal control.⁶³

This preference for central authority fit with the crisis rhetoric common to USCC policy analyses. The bishops and their Washington lobbyists frequently argued that social problems had reached crisis proportions that demanded national attention and federal action. USCC statements adopted from secular liberal rhetoric a litany of premises, arguments, and conclusions. The bishops' spokesmen took as their starting point the shocking inequalities which remained in America. "Hunger and malnutrition," concluded one statement, were symptomatic of "basic failures" in American social and economic structures.⁶⁴ A "double standard" had arisen in our legal system, which afforded the powerful better care than the poor. Prosecutors used legal powers "against government critics, political opponents and even leaders of churches."⁶⁵ Giant corporations concentrated wealth and power in a tiny portion of the people.⁶⁶ USCC statements referred to a worldwide "food crisis" in 1974.⁶⁷ Another document, *The Right to a Decent Home*, declared "the housing crisis is

60. Administrative Board, U.S. Catholic Conference, *Resolution on New York City*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 269, 270.

61. James Rausch, *Public Works Legislation*, 5 *ORIGINS* 547, 547 (1976).

62. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 23.

63. *Id.* at 46.

64. Department of Social Dev. and World Peace, U.S. Catholic Conference, *Statement on Feeding the Hungry: Toward a US Domestic Food Policy*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 257, 262.

65. Committee on Social Development and World Peace, U.S. Catholic Conference, *Community and Crime*, paras. 13, 66, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 226.

66. Department of Social Dev. and World Peace, U.S. Catholic Conference, *Development-Dependency: The Role of Multinational Corporations*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 105, 109.

67. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Statement on the World Food Crisis: A Pastoral Plan of Action*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 102, 104. See also USCC, *Food Policy*, 5 *ORIGINS* 216, (1975).

overwhelming."⁶⁸ The USCC's Msgr. Francis Lally told Congress in 1977 that current unemployment figures represented "an economic and human crisis of enormous consequences."⁶⁹ This atmosphere of crisis demanded two remedies: establishment of long-term, national economic planning, and a greatly expanded federal role in confronting the nation's ills. American society simply could not afford to continue ignoring its "vast disparities of income and wealth."⁷⁰

Catholic leaders advocated national economic and social planning or, as the USCC's Fr. J. Bryan Hehir chastely put it, "coordination and direction of complex social systems."⁷¹ Bishop Thomas Kelly, who succeeded Bp. Rausch as USCC general secretary in 1977, called for achieving full employment through "sustained economic planning" and job creation.⁷² Monsignor Lally testified before Congress in favor of a "comprehensive planning process," including legislation to guarantee full employment and presidential consideration of "a voluntary program of wage and price guidelines."⁷³ A USCC statement on housing suggested that key decisions regarding the sale and development of land could "no longer be left to the private market alone to resolve."⁷⁴ Catholic spokesmen did not defend every government initiative, but they usually sought to replace ineffective interventions with new federal programs, rather than renewed efforts by private groups or local governments.

USCC statements on welfare, for example, fit this pattern perfectly. The federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program met with criticism from the USCC in 1970; the secretariat alleged that AFDC weakened families and failed to provide a decent standard of living. The USCC preferred the proposed Family Assistance Act of 1970, which offered a mini-

68. U.S. Catholic Conference, *The Right to a Decent Home: A Pastoral Response to the Crisis in Housing*, para. 5, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 298, 299.

69. *The Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1977: Hearings on H.R. 50 Before the Subcomm. on Employment Opportunities of the House Comm. on Educ. and Labor*, 95th Cong. 355 (1977) [hereinafter *Hearings on H.R. 50*] (statement of Msgr. Francis Lally). The official unemployment rate in the month he spoke (January) was 7.3%.

70. U.S. Catholic Conference, *The Economy: Human Dimensions*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 263, 267.

71. J. Bryan Hehir, *Person, Income, Society: Ethical Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1 *SOC. THOUGHT* 3, 7 (1975).

72. Thomas Kelly, *Statistics on Unemployment*, 7 *ORIGINS* 221, 222 (1977).

73. *Hearings on H.R. 50*, *supra* note 69, at 355, 357-59.

74. U.S. Catholic Conference, *The Right to a Decent Home: A Pastoral Response to the Crisis in Housing*, para. 55, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 263.

mum family income underwritten by the federal government.⁷⁵ An overview of welfare policy published in 1977 reiterated the earlier criticism, but nevertheless advocated a national income assistance program "substantially funded by the federal government" to assure uniform benefit levels.⁷⁶ Indeed, that 1977 statement, titled *Welfare Reform in the 1970s*, exhibited all three of the main traits of the bishops' new social teaching. The statement was *activist*, in that its origin was a Department of Health, Education and Welfare request for comments on welfare policies. The fact that the bishops' secretariat felt qualified and obliged to offer such detailed advice on the moral and social aspects of federal programs bespoke the USCC's desire to play an advisory role in governance. The 1977 statement was *re-distributionist* in its purposes, denouncing the disparity of incomes in the United States while implicitly depicting the nation's poor as passively molded (if not victimized) by the society around them. Inequality equaled inequity, in the USCC's presentation, and social dysfunction stemmed only from poverty (and never vice versa). The solution to poverty was jobs for all those who could work and transfer payments for all those who could not. Finally, *Welfare Reform in the 1970s* was *statist*, repeatedly emphasizing the need for federal intervention and national standards.

IV.

By the early 1980s theory and practice had merged to give USCC policy analyses strong tendencies toward activism, redistribution, and centralization. The bishops' domestic concerns in the 1980s revolved around the problems of moving a modern society, founded on the Enlightenment ideal of rationality, toward new, post-modern understanding freed of the ideological notion that "unaided human reason would be able to create a perfect world," as Archbishop Rembert Weakland explained at the University of Notre Dame in 1989.⁷⁷ This effort was given special urgency for many bishops and USCC staffers by what they saw as the Reagan administration's efforts to reverse the more egalitarian policies of its predecessors and to restore an almost Victorian economic and social model.

75. U.S. Catholic Conference, *Welfare Reform Legislation*, paras. 3-4, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 255.

76. Department of Social Dev. and World Peace, U.S. Catholic Conference, *Welfare Reform in the 1970s*, in *QUEST FOR JUSTICE*, *supra* note 27, at 270, 273, 277.

77. Rembert Weakland, *How Medellin and Puebla Influenced North America*, 18 *ORIGINS* 757, 758 (1989).

The bishops' critique of President Reagan's policies and ideals began within weeks of his election in November 1980. The USCC convened its annual gathering in Washington that year intending, among other things, to approve a lengthy theoretical analysis of communism. As the conclave prepared to do so, however, several bishops worried aloud about the "damage" the pastoral letter on Marxism might do to the Church's public image. Bishop William Weigand of Salt Lake City warned that the statement would be badly received, especially in Central America, unless the USCC promised "a future document on the evils and aberrations of capitalism."⁷⁸ Peter Rosazza, an auxiliary bishop in Hartford, likewise urged that the Marxism letter be amended to address capitalism's successes and injustices as well. Although Bp. Rosazza's request was not adopted, his and similar concerns persuaded the bishops to authorize a sequel study in the form of a new pastoral letter on capitalism.⁷⁹

The bishops' unease over domestic policy grew into a sense of deep anxiety after the pastoral letter's drafting committee, headed by Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, began its work in 1981.⁸⁰ The federal budget cuts proposed by the new Reagan administration alarmed the USCC staff and spurred the bishops' advisors to resist such initiatives on Capitol Hill.⁸¹ The secretariat's 1981 Labor Day statement put the struggle in perspective:

Do we want a government that is a protector and promoter of human dignity and human rights Or do we want a government that is a protector of the wealthy and a producer of inequality—a government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich?⁸²

The secretariat's analysis of the Reagan program was harshly critical and showed little originality. USCC spokesmen told Congress that the Administration's plans to cut or trim the growth of various social programs would hurt the poor because local pro-

78. Patty Edmonds, *U.S. Bishops Assail Death Code; Seek Active Laity*, NAT'L CATH. REP., Nov. 21, 1980, at 1, 6.

79. *Id.*

80. The other members of the drafting committee were the aforementioned Bishops Weigand and Rosazza, along with Archbishop Thomas Donnellan of Atlanta and Bp. George Speltz of St. Cloud, Minnesota.

81. Stephanie Russell, *Church Officials Urge Nationwide Opposition to Planned Budget Cuts*, NAT'L CATH. REP., April 10, 1981, at 5.

82. U.S. Catholic Conference, *Reviewing and Renewing the Church's Social Teaching: The 1981 Labor Day Statement*, CATH. MIND, Dec. 1981, at 53.

grams and private charity were already stretched to their limits.⁸³ Bishops and staffers literally carried the same basic text into Congressional committee rooms again and again, varying their illustrative anecdotes to suit whichever social program was under discussion.

Weakland's drafting committee shared these concerns and decided to do something about them. The panel unilaterally reinterpreted its mandate to authorize a pastoral letter on the American economy instead of on capitalism in general. The committee worked slowly, however, holding a lengthy series of hearings with experts and ethicists. After three years there was still no draft, but Archbishop Weakland explained to the USCC at its November 1983 meeting that his committee had changed the focus of its research. The panel had foreseen from the outset that a theoretical examination of capitalism would be difficult, given the various forms of capitalism and its lack of a "coherent philosophical worldview." Weakland and his colleagues on the committee decided instead to study the American economy, especially its performance in the areas of jobs, poverty, trade, and planning.⁸⁴

Archbishop Weakland hinted in 1985, however, that the committee's true focus was much broader. Conceding that the U.S. economy performed well in relative terms, he worried that its fine-looking statistics obscured some less savory aspects of American life. The American economic system was perhaps the worst in the developed world at distributing the wealth it created.⁸⁵ "It is fair enough to judge an economic system by economic standards," he wrote in another context, "but that is not a sufficient criterion for judging a *society*."⁸⁶ Weakland implicitly

83. *Proposed Reauthorization of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977: Hearing Before the Senate Comm. on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry*, 97th Cong. 327-29 (1981) (statement of Eugene A. Marino, S.S.J., Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, D.C., USCC); *Legal Services Corporation Reauthorization: Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Courts, Civil Liberties, and Administration of Justice of the House Comm. on the Judiciary*, 97th Cong. 483-87 (1981) (statement of Msgr. Francis Lally); *Impact of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act: Hearing Before the House Comm. on the Budget*, 97th Cong. 14-27 (1982) (statement of Joseph Sullivan, Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn, USCC, and National Conference of Catholic Charities); *Housing and Urban-Rural Recovery Act of 1982: Hearing Before the House Comm. on Banking*, 97th Cong. 1626-31 (1982) (statement of James Lyke, Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland, USCC).

84. Rembert Weakland, *Church Social Teaching and the American Economy*, 13 ORIGINS 447, 447-48 (1983).

85. NAT HENTOFF, JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR: AT THE STORM CENTER OF A CHANGING AMERICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH 171 (1988).

86. REMBERT WEAKLAND, ALL GOD'S PEOPLE: CATHOLIC IDENTITY AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL 201 (1985).

promised a broad critique of American institutions, drawing together the bishops' earlier analyses of policies and ideas.

The Weakland committee's first draft went to the bishops and the public in November 1984; a second emerged in 1985, and the bishops approved a final version in November 1986. The finished product reflected the changing focus of Weakland's drafting committee, and it expounded at length the criticisms of American economic performance that Weakland had hinted at in 1985.

*Economic Justice for All*⁸⁷ pivoted on the notion that the ostensibly rational functioning of the free market—the basis of the American economy—produced great wealth but also left many people powerless:

The concentration of privilege that exists today results far more from institutional relationships that distribute power and wealth inequitably than from differences in talent or lack of desire to work. These institutional patterns must be examined and revised if we are to meet the demands of basic justice.⁸⁸

The pastoral letter argued that Catholics, government, and society in general were obligated by Scripture to remedy this situation. *Economic Justice for All* called this obligation the "preferential option for the poor."⁸⁹ American Catholic intellectuals had borrowed this phrase from the 1979 conclave of Latin American bishops at Puebla, Mexico, which had spoken of "preferential options" for the poor and for youth in the Church's evangelizing activity.⁹⁰ USCC spokesmen discreetly omitted the option for young people and removed the "option for the poor" from its evangelical context when they used the phrase as a call for social justice.⁹¹

87. NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL* (1986) [hereinafter *ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL*]. This pastoral letter has been reprinted in so many venues that it makes more sense to cite paragraph numbers (which are uniform for all editions) rather than page numbers.

88. *Id.* at para. 76.

89. *Id.* at paras. 52, 90, 92, 123.

90. Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, *Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future*, paras. 1134-65, in *PUEBLA AND BEYOND: DOCUMENTATION AND COMMENTARY* 122, 264-67 (John Eagleson & Philip Scharper eds., John Drury trans., 1979).

91. For example, the NCCB's 1986 pastoral statement, *To the Ends of the Earth*, said that the poor of the world help us to critique our own society. Although the overall letter was on evangelization, its brief discussion of the option for the poor was couched almost entirely in social, not spiritual, terms. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 16 ORIGINS 457, 464 (1986).

Economic Justice for All's thesis rested on shaky Scriptural and historical footings. The pastoral letter did not even try to argue that modern inequality—in a land where even the poor often own “consumer durables” unimagined by King Solomon—was truly inequitable by Biblical standards. In addition, the Old and New Testaments provided scant warrant for the USCC's idea that the poor as such have some pre-eminent claim on government policies and resources. Both Scripture and papal encyclicals consistently had urged statesmen and believers to remember society's weakest members, but this was not quite the same thing that the pastoral letter taught. The preferential option for the poor voiced in *Economic Justice for All* represented a subjective call to activism that declared modern inequality unacceptable, but offered no model of an equitable distribution of wealth and power—let alone of a good society. The pastoral letter defined poverty as “the lack of sufficient material resources required for a decent life,” and implicitly left the definition of a decent life to subjective (and shifting) individual life choices.⁹²

If the American reformulation of the “option for the poor” arose from neither Scripture nor Church documents, whence did it come? As with many other things, it actually came from Harvard; the option for the poor in *Economic Justice for All* was really Harvard philosopher John Rawls' “difference principle” pronounced with a Spanish accent. Rawls had declared that “the social order is not to establish and secure the more attractive prospects of those better off unless doing so is to the advantage of those less fortunate.”⁹³ In other words, inequality can be tolerated only if it works to the advantage of society's bottom rung.

The pastoral letter reiterated the bishops' traditional concern with a better distribution of the fruits of the American economy, but *Economic Justice for All* (along with earlier USCC statements) looked to one of society's least participatory structures—the state—to equalize access to the benefits of modern life. Although the bishops faintly echoed the old NCWC in their hope for cooperative planning by all economic sectors, they wanted government to move from its alleged role as social referee to a commitment to reducing social inequality.⁹⁴ *Economic Justice For All* endorsed consolidation of decision-making power at

92. ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, *supra* note 87, at para. 173.

93. JOHN RAWLS, A THEORY OF JUSTICE 75 (1971); ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, *supra* note 87, at para. 69. Paragraph 69 of the pastoral letter also noted the need for “fairness” (a classic Rawlsian formulation) in commutative justice. See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 57 PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW 175, 178-79, 182 (1958).

94. ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, *supra* note 87, at paras. 314, 318, 319.

every level of the economy. It advocated, among other things, national standards for welfare benefits, a higher minimum wage, increased public sector employment, gender-based pay equity, affirmative action, government subsidies for private job formation and training, broader crop-production control programs, and steeper progressive taxes on incomes and farm acreage to foster equality.⁹⁵

Economic Justice for All also reflected the bishops' reluctance to link social progress to "personal" morality. The bishops recognized that some poor people engaged in destructive behavior, but they blamed this on society as a whole (or the prevailing economic system) and rejected "actions, words, or attitudes that stigmatize the poor."⁹⁶ They had no patience with notions such as "the poor are poor by choice or through laziness, that anyone can escape poverty by hard work, [or] that welfare programs make it easier for people to avoid work."⁹⁷ *Economic Justice for All* suggested that problems which disproportionately affect the poor, such as divorce and illegitimacy, were exacerbated by "false values" that had trickled down from society's upper classes:

The constant seeking for self-gratification and the exaggerated individualism of our age, spurred on by false values often seen in advertising and on television, contribute to the lack of firm commitment in marriage and to destructive notions of responsibility and personal growth.⁹⁸

This was not an admission that lethargy or immorality can cause poverty, but rather a depiction of the poor as passively molded by social mores (but not by failed policies). The bishops did not discuss the possibility that some poor people could have become self-destructive on their own, or that a poorly ordered soul could lead even a wealthy individual to vice. Of course, *Economic Justice for All* skated around the delicate question of whether poorly designed governmental programs might be contributing to family breakdown. The bishops defended AFDC against conservative "misconceptions," and quietly (but separately) expressed the wish that the program's coverage could be extended to two-parent families "so that fathers who are unemployed or poorly paid do not have to leave home in order for their children to receive help."⁹⁹ In 1970 the USCC had condemned AFDC for wrecking families; in 1986 such an attack would sound too much like the

95. *Id.* at paras. 159, 162, 163, 167, 197, 202, 213, 243, 244, 245, 247.

96. *Id.* at para. 194.

97. *Id.*

98. *Id.* at para. 345.

99. *Id.* at paras. 193, 214.

Reaganism the bishops rejected. The USCC thus no longer voiced its earlier convictions about federal poverty programs nor drew a clear connection between failed policies and the persistence of poverty. AFDC had not changed—the bishops had.

CONCLUSION

Economic Justice for All capped the movement underway for two decades before its publication in 1986. During the late 1970s, the United States Catholic Conference set aside the Thomistic, natural-law emphasis of its predecessor body, the National Catholic Welfare Conference. In doing so, the bishops and their Washington staff replaced a set of positive (though vague) social goals and guidelines with an activist posture that, while itself offering few if any ideas of what a just society would actually look like, nonetheless consistently supported re-distribution of wealth and power, preferably by the state. *Economic Justice for All* is now normative for American Catholic social action, and bids fair to remain so for many years to come. On its own terms the pastoral letter is not positively bad; it is just not very good.

Barring the unforeseeable, American Catholics are therefore committed to the pastoral letter's clumsy if well-intentioned reasoning. No dramatic return to the Thomistic, organic notion is likely or even possible in present circumstances. The traditional social teaching is a lost idiom. Nevertheless, Pope John Paul II, like Leo XIII a century before him, has worked hard to demonstrate that Thomism is not essentially incompatible with modern modes of thought. It remains to be seen whether John Paul II's restorative project will prove as influential as Leo XIII's—or longer lasting.

American Catholic thought on entitlements thus must refer to *Economic Justice for All*, whether that thought means to develop or oppose the premises and conclusions of the pastoral letter. This being the case, it is well to remember how the pastoral letter was written, and what its drafters intended it to say. Harvey Mansfield, Jr. has recently offered some thoughts on entitlements that might also be borne in mind by students of Catholic social teaching.¹⁰⁰ "Big Government," he explains, "reduces the range of arguable political questions through the establishment of entitlements."¹⁰¹ Mansfield proposes a "re-politicization" of American democracy, in which present-day entitlements must be defended on the grounds of their contribution not only to indi-

100. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *Re-Politicizing American Politics*, WEEKLY STANDARD, July 29, 1996, at 24-26.

101. *Id.* at 25.

vidual goods but also to the Common Good—what used to be meant by the word “welfare.” The overriding emphasis on inequality present in *Economic Justice for All* and other USCC statements has so far limited the possibilities for Catholic discussions about the growth of state power and its effect on the old kind of welfare.

Mansfield’s complaint about the expansion of “rights” and the consequent reduction of space for legitimate political argument illuminates the root problem with *Economic Justice for All*. By 1986, the USCC had come to emphasize individual goods, diffusing what used to be a full-voiced defense of the good of the whole. The old NCWC’s Thomistic and “organic” notion of society—despite its manifest limitations—did not lose sight of the Common Good. Its metaphor of social health provided a context for both the particular and the collective: if one part declined, all suffered; if the whole succumbed, each part failed in turn. In accepting partisan claims for an expansion of fundamental human rights—and entitlements—the USCC helped to perpetuate not only a failed welfare system but a simultaneous impoverishment of the national political discourse.

