

Topic: The Moral Ecology of Markets in the Work of Pope John Paul II:  
A Framework for Analysis

Convener: Kenneth R. Himes, Washington Theological Union

Presenter: Daniel Rush Finn, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota

Respondent: David Hollenbach, SJ, Boston College

Catholic social teaching, especially in the writing of the present pope, has regularly taken up the topic of the morality of free-market economics. Yet, Daniel Finn asserts, John Paul II has "not yet asked one fundamental (and extremely difficult) question: Under what conditions could a Christian give moral approval to the market system?" In his presentation Professor Finn first provided an overview of the present pope's teaching on economic life. He then offered a four-part analytical framework, drawn from the papal teaching but also supplementing it with his own insights in an attempt to answer the question: "under what conditions could a Christian give moral approval to the market system?"

Present throughout the pope's economic teaching is his commitment to a personalist hermeneutic for understanding economics. Finn sees this papal reliance on personalism as problematic since John Paul's accent on personalist categories leaves his analysis "somewhat nearsighted." Although the pope offers a skillful clarification of personal experience he leaves the institutional dimension "out of focus."

The constructive aspect of Finn's presentation outlined four touchstones for a moral ecology of the market: (1) a market bounded by law; (2) communal provision of goods and services; (3) morality of individuals and groups; and (4) mediating institutions of civil society. The major issue involved in the first sphere is the consideration of what are the proper restrictions placed on the actions of individuals in a market economy. Which activities should be considered beyond the pale of market exchange and which not? The second area entails determination of those goods and services deemed so essential that there must be a mechanism for community provision to the needy. Under the third heading one must examine the moral values and norms which an economy encourages through its institutional expectations, reward systems, and social practices. A fourth and final realm for analysis is the vitality and significance of mediating structures in civil society. In sum, Finn proposed that examining the topics which fall under one or the other of these four elements provides the needed ethical analysis for any judgment about the legitimacy of a market economy.

In his response David Hollenbach expressed his essential agreement with the proposed framework and took up Finn's point about the need for an institutional, not just personalist, critique of an economy. Hollenbach illuminated the importance of the institutional analysis by discussing three areas: the ethics of property ownership, urban poverty in the U.S., and development strategies for poor nations.

Subsequent discussion expressed appreciation for Finn's proposal as a heuristic device which offered a better framing of ethical debate than the traditional division of capitalism v. socialism. Questions focused largely on clarification of Finn's framework, asking how a variety of ethical concerns about the economy might fit within the proposed analytical scheme.

KENNETH R. HIMES, OFM  
*Washington Theological Union*  
*Washington, D.C.*

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Theme: Congar's Theological Anthropology and His Doctrine of Salvation

Convener: Mark E. Ginter, Saint Meinrad School of Theology

Moderator: Charles Dautremont, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Presenter: Fred Jelly, O.P., Mt. St. Mary's Seminary

Respondents: James Christie, United Church of Canada

Lucian Turcescu, University of St. Michael's College

According to Congar, theology's most urgent task is to develop an adequate anthropology. This thesis propelled Jelly to elucidate the contours of Congar's attempts at a contemporary Christian anthropology. Jelly began by summarizing Congar's answer to the question, "What is salvation?" Congar's four principal convictions about salvation are these: (1) salvation denotes a destiny beyond life and death; (2) Jesus Christ is the way to this salvation; (3) even this present life derives meaning from the hope in an eschatological destiny; and (4) salvation means freedom from "frustration," i.e., sin. The pivotal conviction is the second. Since Christology informs soteriology, any theological anthropology fundamentally must focus on the person of Jesus Christ—fully human and fully divine. Congar's Christology re-presents the biblical and conciliar formulations of the first seven ecumenical councils. The Catholic ecclesiology and Mariology that logically proceed from this Christology continue to pose ecumenical challenges today.

James Christie reflected on the "ecumenical receivability" of Congar's soteriology, Christology, ecclesiology, and Mariology. Christology presents the greatest challenge in a plurality of worldviews among multifaith perspectives. Where would Congar place himself on the soteriology continuum: exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist? Furthermore, how do we translate patristic categories of the ecumenical councils into a dynamic Christology more consistent with Einsteinian and post-Einsteinian physics? Granted, the ecclesiologies of Catholicism and Protestantism do operate quite differently. Even more so is the vexing question of Mariology.

Lucian Turcescu took up Jelly's invitation to explore the ecumenical implications of the Mariology that ensues from the commonalities of Catholic