ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

Topic:	Insights and Oversights of *Economic Justice for All*
Convener/Moderator:	Mark J. Allman, Merrimack College
Presenters:	María Teresa Dávila, Andover Newton Theological School
	Rebecca Todd Peters, Elon University
	Margaret R. Pfeil, University of Notre Dame

The purpose of this interest group is to ensure that the silver anniversary of the U.S. Bishops' landmark pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All* (1986) did not pass unnoticed and to provide the opportunity for scholars to reflect on its legacy and relevance to the current economic climate. In this second year of the interest group (which actually coincides with the twenty-fifth year of the pastoral's publication), three papers were presented.

MT Dávila began her presentation, "Twenty-Five Years Later, Who is Still Missing? The Place of the Migrant in *Economic Justice for All* and Other Teachings on the Economy of the U.S.C.C.B." by noting that while the document rests soundly on the principles of human dignity and the option for the poor, "immigrants are relatively absent" throughout the document. In fact the terms "immigrant" and "migrant" appear only seven times in the pastoral. Thus while the document focuses on economic justice, it is oddly blind to immigrant justice. She attributes this lacuna to the bishops' 1) deep commitment to civil society and the role of the state in securing the common good, 2) privileging the rights and duties of citizenship, and 3) focusing on a limited transformation of existing social structures into more just institutions. The emphases on the role of the state and citizenship leave the document ill-equipped to acknowledge the contributions of non-citizens to the economy or the injustices they face. Drawing on liberationist perspectives, Dávila posits the document ends up merely calling for reform of the economic system, as opposed to offering a more stinging/radical critique of capitalism. Thus while lauding many aspects of the vision of economic justice in the letter, Dávila calls for a broader and deeper focus that addresses, "the violence inherent in the U.S. economic system that demands the sacrifice of a human underclass to fuel its production, its provision of cheap goods, and sustains the presence of an invisible service labor force" to feed economic progress.

Rebecca Todd Peters presented, "Considering a Solidarity Economy as a Framework for Justice." She begins by chronicling the numerous ways "solidarity" is used throughout the document and then explores how a more nuanced understanding of solidarity could foster economic justice. She examines how a theological vision of solidarity grounded in a biblical/relational understanding of justice challenges contemporary American and global economic practices. She argues, "If our starting point is interdependence rather than self-interest, we are able to affirm that there are some common social goods that may sometimes infringe upon individual personal convenience, satisfaction, or desire." She then outlines what a "solidarity economy" might look like, including how it offers

an alternative social narrative to the cultural myths of rugged individualism and many of the basic tenets of neoclassical economics which stress individualism, greed and exploitation. In its stead, she proffers the "prophet principle." Grounded in biblical notions of liberation and care for the poor, the prophet principle challenges human communities to create "social networks and economic systems that establish justice in the world." Peters extends the concerns of economic justice and the prophet principle to include ecological sustainability. While Peters is critical of economic paradigms that stress profit as the supreme good, she is careful to note that profit, *per se* is not bad. In the end, she calls for economic policies and practices that embody a concern for sustainability which would require: 1) changes to how we view private property and individual rights; 2) recognition that unfettered markets are incapable of fostering justice, care and sustainability; and 3) a rethinking of "efficiency" in ways that include care for people and the planet.

Margaret R. Pfeil's presentation, "Becoming *Synergoi*: Food Cooperatives and the Idea of a Local Economy," focused on the relationship among local socio-economic cooperation, farming, food justice, liturgy and the interdependence of creation. Pfeil draws on the Greek word *synergoi* (as found in 1 Cor 3:7-9), meaning the "spirit of working together," as a foundation for an economic ethic that stresses cooperative efforts that foster fuller economic participation, especially among the poorest and most vulnerable. She then explores the concrete challenges of domestic and local food security and how it affects the poor and the environment. She highlights the threat of "food deserts" (typically low-income areas lacking affordable nutritious food) and "food swamps" (low-income locales inundated convenience stores selling unhealthy energy dense snack foods). Food justice is further complicated by the supermarket industry that not only systematically shuns poor neighborhoods, but renders it nearly impossible for consumers to make informed choices about locally and/or fairly produced products. Pfeil also notes that food justice is especially relevant to Catholics because eating is a sacramental act. Pfeil concludes with a case study of the Monroe Park cooperative grocery store in South Bend, IN which was started through a collaborative effort between neighbors in Monroe Park and students in her course , "*Synergoi*: The Theological Ethics of Food Cooperatives."

These three presentations, the presentations from last year's interest group and several other essays will be published by Anselm Academic in the coming year. The volume will also include significant portions of *Economic Justice for All*. Next year is the final year for this interest group and will involve a response/critique of the volume.

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