

***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER—
INTEREST GROUP***

Topic: *Economic Justice for All: Looking Back, Looking Forward*
Convener/Moderator: Mark J. Allman, Merrimack College
Presenters: Meghan J. Clark, St. John's University, New York
Most Rev. Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., Archbishop Emeritus,
Archdiocese of Milwaukee

This was the final year for an interest group convened to mark the silver anniversary of the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* (1986). Papers presented as part of this project will be published in *The Almighty and the Dollar: Reflections on Economic Justice for All* (Anselm Academic) in fall 2012. The contributions include: David Hollenbach, "Economic Justice and the New Challenges of Globalization;" Daniel Finn, "Catholic Social Thought as Empirical Claim;" Rebecca Todd Peters, "Considering a Solidarity Economy as a Framework for Justice;" Mark Allman, "Participation as a Moral Measure of the Economy;" Thomas Massaro, "Fighting Poverty and Providing Safety Nets: An Agenda for U.S. Catholic Advocacy in Social Policy;" Alex Mikulich, "Where Y'at Race, Whiteness, and Economic Justice? A Map of White Complicity in the Economic Oppression of People of Color;" María Teresa Dávila, "Who Is Still Missing? Economic Justice and Immigrant Justice;" Margaret Pfeil, "Becoming *Synergoi*: Food, Justice, and Economic Cooperation;" and Christopher Vogt, "Liturgy, Discipleship, and Economic Justice." This year's presenters were given advance copies of all the essays.

Meghan Clark opened by noting that for younger scholars, *Economic Justice for All* has always been part of the corpus of Catholic Social Teaching. Her paper, "Economic Inequality as a Clear and Present Danger to the Common Good," argued that a more sophisticated understanding of economic inequality strengthens traditional analyses of economic justice, which often focus on poverty alone. Drawing on recent research in social and medical sciences, she illustrated how inequality exacerbates the pernicious effects of poverty and corrodes the common good. Her first example from public health research showed the threat to public health posed by inequality can be empirically measured by looking at life expectancy, infant mortality, cancer rates, sickness, and "excess deaths." Widening economic inequality negatively affects not only the health of individuals but whole communities. Her second example from economic research focused on social anxiety, competition, consumerism, and the erosion of social trust due to widening gaps between rich and poor. The research shows that inequality is counterproductive to community bonding and exacerbates addressing other aspects of social and economic injustice. For Clark, Catholic social thought should integrate the social sciences' work on inequality, which can enrich the traditional principles of the common good, participation, and the option for the poor.

Archbishop Weakland (who served as the chair of the *Economic Justice for All* drafting committee) organized his paper, "*Economic Justice for All Twenty-Five Years Later: A Response to the Papers Delivered*," around three questions. First, "If the bishops were to rewrite a letter on the economy would he recommend the same transparent and collaborative process?" He replied he "would not want to see one aspect of that process changed" while also regretfully acknowledging "it would be impossible in our time." It is worth noting that a few weeks later the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops approved drafting a statement on the economy expected in the coming year. His second question concerned what has been added to the body of Catholic

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Social Teaching since 1986 that is relevant today. He identified *Centesimus annus* (1991), *Ecclesia in America* (1999), *Caritas in veritate* (2010), as well as several other documents from the Roman curia and other conferences of bishops. In answer to his third question, “What has happened on the economic scene in these twenty-five years that might persuade us to rethink our content?” Weakland identified five areas: (1) Globalization, including the relationship between power and wealth, the influence of banking and finance, and economic colonialism. He noted Hollenbach’s contribution as insightful in these areas; (2) solidarity, where he drew on Peters’s work on neoliberalism and global solidarity, the need for renewal in the labor movement and a defense of the role of government; (3) preferential option for the poor, which he said many of the papers use very well, especially the two most challenging papers in the volume: Davila’s on immigration and Mikulich’s on white complicity; (4) agriculture, which the pastoral letter does address but ignores the use of crops for energy; and (5) Liturgy as a tool for combating individualism and stoking a sense of communal responsibility. Of Vogt’s essay he said “it is the kind of piece that would make an excellent pastoral letter.” The session was well attended and ended with an enthusiastic appreciation for Weakland’s advocacy for the poor and lifetime devoted to economic justice.

I wish to express my gratitude to the CTSA for supporting this interest group. Not only did it help mark this important anniversary in a way relevant to the signs of the times,” but the resulting volume will ensure further reflection by a wider audience.

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