

## Presidential Address

### ***THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL*** **REFLECTIONS TWENTY YEARS LATER**

Yesterday at the annual business meeting of the Society we approved the admission of a slate of new members and associate members. Among the new members was one Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., a man who even before his admission into our august Society, had made valuable contributions to the life of the church!

One of those significant contributions was his role as chair of the committee which drafted the pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*.<sup>1</sup> Although the bishops of the United States have issued a number of admirable statements on social issues, it is the pastoral letter written by the Weakland committee and *The Challenge of Peace*,<sup>2</sup> the pastoral letter written under the leadership of then Archbishop Joseph Bernadin of Cincinnati, which are most often cited as illustrative of the bishops functioning as moral teachers on social matters.

It was twenty years ago this past autumn, November of 1980, that the bishops called for the establishment of two committees, one to draft a letter on church teaching regarding war and peace in the nuclear age and another letter which would examine capitalism from the perspective of Catholic teaching.<sup>3</sup>

Here in Milwaukee, the Archdiocese of our distinguished new member, and with the passage of twenty years since the establishment of the two episcopal committees, it seems appropriate to reflect upon those two letters to see what lessons we can learn from them about how the church might advance its social teaching.

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<sup>1</sup>National Conference on Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986). Hereafter *EJA*.

<sup>2</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1983). Hereafter *CP*.

<sup>3</sup>In addition to Bernadin, the members of the committee on war and peace were George Fulcher, bishop of Columbus OH; Thomas Gumbleton, auxiliary bishop of Detroit MI; John O'Connor, military ordinariate; and Daniel Reilly, bishop of Norwich CT. Besides Weakland, the members of the committee for the economics letter were Thomas Donnellan, archbishop of Atlanta GA; Peter Rosazza, auxiliary bishop of Hartford CT; George Speltz, bishop of St. Cloud MN; and William Weigand, bishop of Salt Lake City UT. Originally, Bishop Joseph Daley of Harrisburg PA served on the committee but resigned due to illness and was replaced by Donnellan.

Archbishop Weakland, himself, has anticipated this reflection in an essay published shortly before the formal vote of the bishops approving the economics pastoral. Before addressing questions he raised in that essay I would like to comment upon an important premise of the two pastoral letters, namely, the legitimate role of the local church in acting upon the social mission.<sup>4</sup>

### LOCAL CHURCH

It is no surprise to church historians that developments in the wider society in which the church exists often provide, at least by way of analogy, models for the church in its social organization. The church after Constantine borrowed and adapted elements of the imperial court. During the medieval era the church took on features of feudal society.

Today, we live in the era of globalization. One of the features of this multi-dimensional process suggests that even though there are processes at work which spread a universal culture there is another set of processes at work which give a particular cast to the universal.

We are very far indeed from seeing a one-culture world, much less a Westernized world-culture. The spread of global markets and communications are forces for interaction but one ought not ignore the stubbornness of the particular. There is still the tendency for people to define themselves by what makes them different from others in a particular context. A woman professor in the company of a dozen women who work at other jobs will think of herself as a professor. In a room with twelve other male professors she will think of herself as a woman.

In short, in an increasingly globalized world there will still be strong drives to identify with ethnic, religious and other forms of particularist difference. So today we find in our world tensions between forces which compress the world and intensify our consciousness of one world with other drives to identify the particular and distinctive amidst the global whole.<sup>5</sup>

If this is a central dynamic at work in the wider world it should not strike us as curious that similar competing models are at work in the life of the church. Forces which promote centralization and stress the universal experience of church

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<sup>4</sup>While I am aware that the terminology is in dispute, I use the expression "local church" to designate not only a particular diocese but a gathering of churches of a geographical or cultural region. Thus, I will speak of the church in the United States as a local church. For an overview of the problem of local church/universal church, see Joseph Komonchak, "The Local Church and the Church Catholic: the Contemporary Theological Problematic," *The Jurist* 52 (1992): 416-47.

<sup>5</sup>For one assessment of the geopolitical implications of this tension, see Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

will spur a reaction in arguments for the particular charisms and identity of the local church.

From its origins through its various title and organizational changes the social mission of the church has loomed large on the U.S. episcopal conference's agenda. The bishops believe an important dimension of the work of the conference was and is to identify the social agenda arising from the local or national scene.<sup>6</sup>

What has been called the "magna charta" of the local church is found in the document *Octogesima Adveniens*. In paragraph four of the text one finds three startling sentences.

In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church.<sup>7</sup>

I called these sentences startling because first the pope acknowledges a problem with formulating a teaching which is apt for the universal church. Then Paul VI announced that formulating such a teaching is not the mission of the papacy, and finally, the pope endorsed the role of the local church within a given nation to both read its particular situation and formulate a response.<sup>8</sup>

The pastoral letters were written at a time when the words of Paul VI on the local church still were on the minds of our bishops. The significance of this passage has been diminished somewhat by a number of actions in subsequent

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<sup>6</sup>Helpful treatments of the early years of the episcopal conference are Elizabeth McKeown, "The National Bishops' Conference: an Analysis of Its Origins," *Catholic Historical Review* 66 (1980): 565-83, and Joseph McShane, S.J., "Sufficiently Radical": *Catholicism, Progressivism and the Bishops' Program of 1919* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1986) esp. chap. 2. Evident in these historical studies is the importance of the social mission for the agenda of the episcopal conference. Originally called the National Catholic War Conference the name was changed shortly after the close of World War I to the National Catholic Welfare Conference. Following Vatican II the name became the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, coupled with its public policy arm the United States Catholic Conference. With the recent approval of reforms, the organization as of 1 July 2001 is to be called the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<sup>7</sup>Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 1971), #4 in David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: the Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>I do not mean to imply that prior to Paul's statement there was no sense of a local church already operative in the U.S. situation. What I am suggesting is that there was an evolving sense of the place for a local hierarchy in the life of a nation and the statement in *Octogesima Adveniens* certainly gave impetus to a more proactive role.

years.<sup>9</sup> Given the public nature of the "friendly argument" between Cardinals Ratzinger and Kaspar, most recently in *America* magazine, it is clear that there are contesting visions of how to understand the relationship of the universal and local church.<sup>10</sup> In *Octogesima Aveniens* one finds evidence that Paul's approach to the question gives a greater role to the local church than does John Paul II. The balance between these two dimensions of the social mission of the church may be struck differently from one papacy to another but it is unlikely, or at least unwise, that we stifle the role of the local church in the social ministry.

Certainly, this was presumed by the body of U.S. bishops as they supported the creation of the Bernadin and Weakland committees. The belief that the leaders of the local church should exercise a pastoral teaching role by speaking to developments within their country was a taken-for-granted aspect of episcopal ministry.<sup>11</sup>

I mentioned earlier that the significance of Paul VI's statement has been somewhat diminished in recent years. For example, there is an unintentional downside to the frequency and visibility of papal trips. On these trips the present pope engages in a modern form of evangelization. He affirms the distinctive gifts of the local church and often brings to the world's attention the injustices found in a local region. Due to the modern media papal actions are now reported and captured for cameras which send images out to the entire world. This is a new and dramatic opportunity for witnessing to the gospel and one that reaches far more people than will ever constitute the readership of an encyclical.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time there is a risk involved, one that turns the pope into a "supraepiscopal figure" which obscures the authority of the local bishop. Despite the pope's good intentions to come as a pilgrim or universal shepherd uniting with the flock, he carries too much historical "weight" to really build up the local church. Instead, what occurs is that the focus is so much on John Paul II that the local authority is weakened.<sup>13</sup> In the popular mind the papal symbolization today combines three images: the guardian and touchstone of unity in faith, the holder

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<sup>9</sup>For accounts of the actions I have in mind, see Mary Elsbernd, "What Ever Happened to *Octogesima Aveniens*?" *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 39-60, and Richard Gaillardetz, "Reflections on the Future of Papal Primacy," *New Theology Review* 13 (November 2000): 52-66.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Kaspar, "On the Church," *America* 184 (23-30 April 2001): 8-14. For a report on the controversy and some of the internal church politics involved, see Robert Leicht, "Cardinals in Conflict," *The Tablet* 255 (28 April 2001): 607-608.

<sup>11</sup>Yet, recall that it was precisely the *mandatum docendi* of an episcopal conference which was questioned by Cardinal Ratzinger at a meeting in Rome on 18-19 January 1983 that was called to discuss the peace pastoral. See the public report of the meeting by Jan Schotte, "A Vatican Synthesis" *Origins* 12 (7 April 1982): 691-95, esp. 692.

<sup>12</sup>See Gaillardetz, "Reflections on Papal Primacy," 57.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

of supreme juridical authority and, finally, a living icon. The first image is patristic in origin, the second medieval, but the third is quite modern. It is this "living icon" dimension which has shifted popular attention from the ministry of the Petrine office to the person of the pope himself.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly this trend did not start with John Paul II but with the rise of ultramontanist in the nineteenth century. Recall the slogan of the time that Catholics venerate three white things: the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Eucharistic host, and the cassock of the pope.<sup>15</sup> In regard to the perennial quest to balance the local and universal experience of the church the net effect of this present highly visible papacy may well be to perpetuate an imbalance between the church local and universal.

Behind the entire exercise of the development of the pastoral letters was a basic premise that, especially in matters of social teaching, the nation's bishops had an important role in identifying and speaking to the issues of moment which the church should address. Out of a somewhat spontaneous episcopal reading of the signs of the times in 1980 a proposal was formulated to review and articulate Catholic teaching on modern warfare. Thus, the Bernadin committee.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar way, the economics pastoral came to be after floor discussion on a statement about Marxism raised the issue of a need to assess capitalism from a Catholic perspective.<sup>17</sup> It was Archbishop Weakland within the committee who argued that what was needed was an assessment of a specific economy, thus the letter became not a document about capitalism but a pastoral letter on the U.S. economy.

By these actions something new was emerging in the life of the U.S. church. Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul, perhaps optimistically, believed, that there

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<sup>14</sup>Dominic Monti, O.F.M., "The Role of the Papal Office in the Life of the Church: Historical Reflections," unpublished ms. (1987 Academic Convocation, Washington Theological Union).

<sup>15</sup>A striking reference regarding the "personality cult" of the papacy is from a sermon of Bishop, later Cardinal, Gaspard Mermillod of Lausanne who referred to three incarnations of the Son of God: "in the womb of a virgin, in the Eucharist, and in the old man in the Vatican." The "old man" was, of course, Pius IX. See J. Derek Holmes, *The Triumph of the Holy See: A Short History of the Papacy in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Burns and Oates, 1978) 153.

<sup>16</sup>James Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb* (New York: Image Books, 1983) 13-25.

<sup>17</sup>In 1977 the bishops had approved a statement, at the request of the Vatican, condemning religious persecution in central Europe. During the discussion of the statement, Cardinal Carberry of St. Louis asked if there ought not to be a statement about the larger problem, namely, Marxism. The result was the decision to formulate a statement on Marxism (largely written by the philosopher Louis Dupre) that was approved in 1980. In the course of the discussion about the Marxism statement, Bishop Peter Rosazza made the point that an appropriate next step would be to examine capitalism from the perspective of church teaching.

was a maturing relationship between the American bishops and the Vatican, one that would realize a deeper sense of collegiality within the episcopacy. This would lead the American bishops not only to "interpret the teaching of the Pope to the American church but also interpret the experience and insights of the American church to the Pope."<sup>18</sup>

#### PUBLIC CHURCH

At the time of completing the economic pastoral Archbishop Weakland suggested that underlying the process of writing the pastoral letters were "many ecclesial questions that will demand a broader vision and should provoke a deeper response on our part as a church." In Weakland's mind "a new functional model of the church is at stake." Two questions which loomed large in this new model were, a) "how the church as a whole will enter into the debate in American society on political, social and economic issues;" and b) how the clergy, especially the bishops, "will relate as teachers" to a "highly intelligent and trained laity."<sup>19</sup>

The pastoral letters had as their topics pressing moral concerns: the morality of national security policy and the moral dimensions of the U.S. economy. Yet, more was involved in the two pastorals than an ethical analysis of pressing social ills. It is clear that there was an implicit ecclesiology operative in the processes of drafting the letters, in the texts themselves, and in their reception. This implicit ecclesiology can be fairly summarized by two principles which roughly correspond with Weakland's two issues. One principle, the establishment of a public church, pertains to the external mission of church and society and the second principle, becoming a community of moral discourse, pertains to the internal issue of relations between bishops and laity.

First, however, the external principle: the Catholic church is to be part of the "public church." The words "public church" signify "those churches which are especially sensitive to the *res publica*, the public order that surrounds and includes people of faith."<sup>20</sup> The Catholic church's social ministry will entail three things: (1) acceptance of responsibility for the well-being of the wider society; (2) respect for the legitimate autonomy of public institutions; and (3) a pledge by the church to work with other institutions in shaping the common good of the

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<sup>18</sup>Thomas Reese, "American Bishops and Their Agenda," *America* (17 December 1983): 393-94, at 393.

<sup>19</sup>Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., "The Church in Worldly Affairs: Tensions between Laity and Clergy," *America* (18 October 1986): 201-205 and 215-16, at 201.

<sup>20</sup>Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 3.

society.<sup>21</sup> All three aspects demand a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Catholicism and the wider society.

Augustine asked: should the church care only for the city of God and be indifferent to the fortune of the city of humankind? Or should the church seek to closely involve itself in the second city in order to transform it into a closer approximation of the City of God? Most Catholic theologians have taken positions which try to acknowledge both the different goals of church and temporal society and the shared interests both have in a just social order. Yet choices have to be made and we have seen the church make different choices over the centuries. During the nineteenth century, and continuing well into the twentieth, U.S. Catholicism pursued a strategy of selective engagement organizationally, with many Catholic institutions playing an important role in providing social services, health care and education to a wider society while also maintaining a strong subculture of sensibility and identity. This U.S. approach was substantially different from the dominant approaches found in European Catholicism during the same period, views which reflected either integralism or Catholic Action. Clearly, then as now, a great deal of leeway exists for determining how the church will act in society. Key to understanding which strategy will be adopted are the three reasons which real estate agents use to explain the value of a property: location, location, and location. So much depends on the social location of the church when strategizing about its mission to society.

The bishops at Vatican II sought to articulate in *Gaudium et Spes* a framework for understanding the church's role in worldly affairs. The religious mission of the church was to witness to the reign of God. This religious mission had indirect political consequences for the church's ministry. Working with institutions like government, schools, organized labor, business groups, and voluntary associations the church can play its role of serving the reign of God by defending human dignity, protecting human rights, promoting human unity and assisting people to find meaning in their everyday lives.<sup>22</sup> To exclude responsibility for society is to restrict the presence of God's reign only to limited areas of human life. This is the privatization of the gospel.

Such a broad theological framework as sketched here still leaves room for debate on specifics. Faithful Catholics remain at odds over whether certain strategies for engagement are too sectarian or too compromised. My reading of Vatican II and the history of American Catholicism suggests that the style most appropriate to our social location is that of a public church. Still we must discuss how to be a public church. By choosing a place along a spectrum ranging from the model of pure witness to that of being an agent for social change we place limits on what the church can and cannot do in public life.

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<sup>21</sup>Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., *Fullness of Faith: the Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 2.

<sup>22</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 1965) in O'Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*, nos. 40-43.

In both pastoral letters the bishops chose a particular strategy for being a public church, one which answered "yes" to three questions: (1) Do we as a church expect to change a diverse and secular society? (2) Ought we to commit ourselves to energizing devoted church members? (3) Should we also speak to those people of good will who stand outside our tradition?

Among the chief ways within American society that a public church will serve the commonweal responsibly is by the cultivation of a morally sensitive citizenry. Democracies require this in order to survive. Citizens must have an overarching sense of the nobility and characteristics of the American experiment, as well as a critical understanding of the moral ills embedded in that experiment. Morally reflective and politically engaged citizens play a transformative as well as supportive role in political life. A morally serious politics fosters a spirit of commitment to something larger than oneself as well as encouraging a redefinition of the self in light of ideals which generate moral claims upon a citizen.

I believe the entire enterprise of creating both *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All* exemplified the U.S. Catholic community acting self-consciously as a public church. There was no serious expectation that the letters of the bishops would simply become the new policies of the U.S. government. Nor was there any effort by coercive threats or intemperate warnings to deny the rightful independence of elected officials and professionals in serving the nation. What was evident was a keen sense of the duty which the church had to bring its moral wisdom to bear on the important topics of the nation's security and economy. The pastoral letters were written in an attempt to communicate our moral tradition, an attempt to resurrect concern for public discussion to guide government and promote greater citizen participation in formulating public policy.

By becoming a public church we partly answer Weakland's search for a new functional model of church, namely "how the church as a whole will enter into the debate in American society on political, social and economic issues."

Still questions remain for a public church pursuing such a strategy. When is compromise permissible? When is it no longer tolerable? Are there issues on which no compromise is possible? What are they? Are there issues on which the church stands ready to compromise? Can we name these? When the church's position is a dissent from the societal consensus on an issue, what can be demanded of those in public office and influential positions who must lead the society?<sup>23</sup>

We have seen substantial division caused by different answers to these questions. When applied to abortion, capital punishment, civil rights for homosexuals, welfare reform, armed intervention, physician-assisted suicide and an array of other issues we have seen a wide and not particularly consistent set of

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<sup>23</sup>Weakland, "The Church in Worldly Affairs," 215-16.

responses from church members. Nor has civility in debate been particularly evident on many of these topics.

#### A COMMUNITY OF MORAL DISCOURSE

Reflecting on the pastorals Archbishop Weakland suggested that maintaining unity between clergy and laity is important and that writing the pastoral letters enhanced the unity between bishops and laity. This leads to the second principle on the ecclesiology of the pastoral letters: the internal principle that the church will be a "community of moral discourse."

The letters spoke the church's mind to the general citizenry and in a special way provided guidance for American Catholics. This approach to moral education took seriously much of what we have discovered about how adults learn best: dialogical and participative models of education are preferable to monological approaches, especially in moral education where the aim is not solely informational but the personal appropriation of knowledge, making the truth meaningful.<sup>24</sup>

Employment of a dialogical model of adult learning is evident in several ways when one examines the pastoral letters. First, there was the process of writing the letters. A large number of consultations went into the formulation of the letters. Numerous scholarly figures in the fields of biblical studies, theology, ethics, national security, economics, business, social activism as well as people who have played central roles in public policy in various presidential administrations were brought into the discussions.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the direct engagement with the committees through meetings, a wide array of people had opportunities for influencing the letters due to the general circulation of drafts of the text. This procedure permitted editorial writers, journalists, academics and interested citizens to enter the debate. In brief, there was a wide-ranging dialogue prior to the formulation of the documents. It was, in the words of the economics letter, a process "of careful inquiry, wide consultation, and prayerful discernment." The bishops went on to say that "the letter has been greatly enriched by this process of listening and refinement."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See the pastorally wise work of Timothy O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998).

<sup>25</sup>It should be noted that among the theologians consulted were persons who were banned from speaking in several dioceses by bishops.

<sup>26</sup>*EJA*, #3. However, Archbishop Weakland acknowledged "Some opposition came to that procedure [i.e., the consultations] from certain church quarters, namely, the fear was expressed that it could give the impression that the bishops were deficient in their knowledge of social justice and thus their teaching authority would be diminished." Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., "Economic Justice For All Ten Years Later," *America* 176 (22 March 1997): 8-10, 13-19, 22, at 9.

A second means whereby the dialogical model was at work in moral education was in the presentation of the teaching. The authors acknowledged there were different levels of teaching in the documents. So people could read the letters without feeling as if disagreement or doubt was unreasonable or unfaithful. This explicit statement of degrees of certitude to be ascribed to moral teaching was familiar to earlier generations of priests reared on theological notes in seminary manuals. But it was a set of distinctions not always clear to most Catholics. As Ladislav Orsy once observed, "many of the faithful experienced . . . a 'crisis of faith' after Vatican II because they thought 'the teaching of the church has changed'" when what had changed were not doctrinal truths but less certain teachings lumped together as "church teaching" and therefore unchangeable in the minds of many.<sup>27</sup>

In our present time there is a frequent concern voiced that the faithful have a right to know the teaching of the church on a given topic. Without in any way challenging that claim, one ought to add that "[t]he faithful have a right to be informed correctly, as far as possible, concerning what point of doctrine belongs to the core of our Christian beliefs and what does not."<sup>28</sup> Such knowledge of the authority by which the church teaches, if clear to all, would permit the furtherance of probing and constructive conversation among disciples in the formation of conscience.

Today, however, we find not greater but less clarity regarding the authority of church teaching. Subsequent to the pastoral letters we have received the Vatican document on the "Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity."<sup>29</sup> The next year came the instruction entitled "The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian" which referred to a category of teaching which heretofore had not received a great deal of attention—definitive but not infallible doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Although sometimes called the secondary object of infallibility it has never been clear which teachings fit this category. Then in 1998 *Ad Tuendam Fidem* instituted a change in the code of canon law to reflect this middle category of teaching standing between definitive, infallible dogma and authoritative teaching.<sup>31</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger offered a commentary on the text which furthered the confusion precisely because he gave examples of teachings in this category but the examples were not persuasive.<sup>32</sup> Using the Cardinal's criteria one might have

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<sup>27</sup>Ladislav Orsy, "Reflections on a Canon," in Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes, OFM, eds., *Introduction to Christian Ethics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 353-58, at 355.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), "Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity," *Origins* 18 (1989): 661, 663.

<sup>30</sup>CDF, "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian," *Origins* 20 (1990): 117-26.

<sup>31</sup>John Paul II, "Ad Tuendam Fidem," *Origins* 28 (1998): 113-16.

<sup>32</sup>Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone, "Commentary on Profession of Faith's

to include certain past teachings on usury or slavery. Whatever the outcome of theological development in this area, and without wishing to deny the existence of such a middle category of teaching, it can still be said that we are in a situation where the clarity of a teaching's authority has become more muddled.

A third indication of the dialogical educational model at work in the pastorals was the open-minded tone of the letters. *The Challenge of Peace* stated, "This pastoral letter is more an invitation to continue the new appraisal of war and peace than a final synthesis of such an appraisal."<sup>33</sup> Taking their lead from paragraph thirteen of *Gaudium et Spes*, the bishops admit "that, on some complex social questions, the Church expects a certain diversity of views"<sup>34</sup> even if there are shared moral convictions. No pretense existed that the final word had been spoken, only the conviction that the church must speak a helpful word when it can in moral formation and public debate. This same approach can be found in the economics pastoral where it is expressly stated "there are . . . many specific points on which men and women of good will may disagree. We look for a fruitful exchange among differing viewpoints."<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of living with tentative conclusions is the position of the peace pastoral in accepting both the pacifist and the just war traditions in the evaluation of war. Living not only with complexity but ambiguity is a sign the bishops realize that to press for more certainty than reality permits is no virtue.

In terms of educational philosophy the letters followed a collaborative model of teaching where the search for truth is participatory and mutual. All are learners in the community of disciples and the office of pastor does not exempt one from ongoing learning even as one is called to teach. The image of teacher suggested by the letters is not the lecturer at the podium refusing to entertain questions from students but a fellow seeker of truth inviting critical reflection. Such an image of teacher assumes that adults have relevant experience and an understanding of their experience worth sharing with others.

This approach fits well in the U.S. with a high percentage of educated laity and a university system wherein free expression and inquiry are part of the academic ethos. Teaching adults in this context requires effective communication and persuasiveness. It is the intrinsic reasonableness of a moral teaching, not the extrinsic authority of those supporting it, which is the best guarantee that a teaching will be taken seriously. Traces of defensive hostility to questions or the promulgation of conclusions not open to further examination quickly undermines credibility. As Cardinal Avery Dulles puts it: "Generally speaking, the pastoral leaders should not speak in a binding way unless a relatively wide consensus has first been achieved. For authentic consensus to develop, there is need of free dis-

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Concluding Paragraphs," *Origins* 28 (1998): 116-19.

<sup>33</sup>CP, #24.

<sup>34</sup>CP, #12.

<sup>35</sup>EJA, #22.

cussion."<sup>36</sup> The reception of the pastoral letters was advanced by the intellectual humility by which the teaching was put forth. By knowing their audience the bishops gained the good will of the wider public and the interest of their fellow Catholics.

Perhaps the newer educational model is more time-consuming and somewhat messy but in a church and society where appeal to authority is less persuasive than reasoned exposition and argument, the dialogical model of teaching is preferable. The important point to grasp is that the internal principle of the pastorals' ecclesiology reflects a claim that is as much psychological as theological. How do adults learn? Education processes which invite active involvement—questioning, launching thought experiments, discussion, experiential testing—are more effective than education which stresses docility and passive receptivity as the means to learning.

An ecclesiological strategy for moral formation which follows from such an approach to adult education would call upon the church to become a community of moral discourse.<sup>37</sup> The ecclesial community ought to be a place where adult believers can gather to address the troubling issues of the day. In so many ways American society envelops people in a world of unreflective activity that prevents careful moral reflection. Stampeded into partisan debate and bombarded by information from all sides, the adult Catholic needs a time and place where thought, conversation, prayer and moral discernment can occur. In their pastoral letters the bishops, in effect, suggested that the church is an apt location for serious moral conversation. The letters constitute an invitation to envision a church where moral formation occurs through honest dialogue, mutual correction, and communal discernment.

The strategy for building a community of moral discourse ought to be the answer to the second of Archbishop Weakland's questions about the new functional model of church, "how the clergy, especially the bishops, 'will relate as teachers' to a 'highly intelligent and trained laity.'"<sup>38</sup>

At the same time as it strengthens its pastoral strategy to generations of educated adult Catholics the church will also promote its presence in American public life. On the one hand, a vibrant community of moral discourse will feed and nourish the practices and institutions of a public church. On the other hand, a strong public presence in society must be coupled with the church's internal life to avoid moral education becoming an introspective and private moral quest. Both the internal and external principles of the Catholic church advance the life

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<sup>36</sup>Avery Dulles, S.J., "Doctrinal Authority for a Pilgrim Church," in Hamel and Himes, *Introduction*, 336-51, at 348.

<sup>37</sup>"The Church should be defined by a communal thinking effort in which all members of the community participate and share—albeit in different measure—the same responsibility." Klaus Demmer, M.S.C., *Shaping the Moral Life: an Approach to Moral Theology* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000) 30.

<sup>38</sup>Weakland, "The Church in Worldly Affairs," 201.

and mission of the church and failure in implementing either principle will harm the prospect of the other.

### A BROADER VISION

In his reflections on writing the economic pastoral Archbishop Weakland observed that many questions emerged, questions, that in his words, "will demand a broader vision." Ten years later, in 1996, Weakland noted that for economic inequality the statistics cited in the pastoral letter "have become decidedly worse, not better." Yet, "there does not seem to be the will to take any corrective measures." On the topic of poverty the need remains but in Weakland's words, "missing now is the will . . . to take the big steps necessary to alleviate poverty, not just to reduce the number of people on welfare." In the area of unemployment "[t]he search for real jobs that bring sufficient wages and decent benefits is still often in vain."<sup>39</sup> Added to the lack of motivation or political will is another problem, seen more clearly ten years after the pastoral was written, "the growing tendency to blame government for all our problems. It has become commonplace today to hear speeches, one after the other, about the ineptitude of government. The solution then to all problems is to have as little government as possible."<sup>40</sup>

I cite the Archbishop's remarks because they go to the heart of seeing things with a broader vision. The real battleground in politics and the economy is not first to be found on Capitol Hill or Wall Street, or even the corporate boardroom, factory floor, or military base. The most contested space is inside our heads, the realm of the imagination. By winning over people's loyalty at the level of imagination, the images and metaphors we employ about our experience, a public figure achieves a far broader goal than getting agreement on a particular topic of public life.

A number of years ago, while still teaching at Harvard, the former Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich, wrote a book entitled *Tales for a New America*.<sup>41</sup> In the volume he maintained that underlying all the campaign speeches and interviews given by politicians are a few basic stories which we tell and retell to ourselves. According to Reich they are our "national parables." He sketched four of these narratives.

1. *The Rot at the Top*. This story has the lesson that Americans ought to oppose any group from becoming too powerful. It is a story of evil elites, be they corrupt business leaders, government officials or cultural aristocrats. It is a tale of corruption in high places, and plots against the public. Investigative reporters feed this belief. So, too, certain detective portrayals like Humphrey Bogart's Sam Spade and Jack Nicholson in "Chinatown" or real life detectives

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<sup>39</sup>Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B. " 'Economic Justice for All' Ten Years Later," 22.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>41</sup>Robert Reich, *Tales for a New America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

like Frank Serpico find the rot at the bottom of the society can be traced back up to the top.

2. *The Triumphant Individual*. In this parable the hard-working little person who is self-disciplined, faithful to the task and willing to take a risk gets the reward of wealth, fame and honor. The lesson is consistent: anyone can make it in the U.S.A. if you work hard and persevere. Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*, Abe Lincoln's tale of a log splitter who becomes president, and the Horatio Alger stories are examples of this parable. We have films like *Rocky*, *Hoosiers*, and *Rudy*.

3. *The Benign Community*. The third parable paints a picture of friendly neighbors who roll up their sleeves and pitch in to help one another. It evokes a sense of patriotism, community pride and self-sacrifice. This story has roots in the religious heritage of America. Perhaps the version most familiar to us today is Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* where Jimmy Stewart learns he can count on his neighbors' goodness as they once counted on him. The parable's moral—we must preserve and nurture community.

4. *The Mob at the Gates*. This last parable is about the darkness that lays just beneath the surface of democracy. It is a story that warns of how tenuous is the hold on civil order and how perilously close we are to chaos. It is a tale of mob rule, crime and indulgence, of society fragmenting due to excess. We find the *Federalist Papers* worrying about the instability of democracy. In the movies the parable is found in the lonely hero facing down social chaos: Gary Cooper in *High Noon* or Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry. The meaning of the story is the need to impose social order lest the rabble take over.<sup>42</sup>

Reich maintains that these stories are familiar to us all. They undergird our ideologies, and shape our public consciousness. The stories can be put together in a variety of ways to emphasize one or the other lesson. For example, in the Progressive Era the Rot at the Top was linked with the Triumphant Individual to make the case that big business, in the form of emerging monopolies, had blocked the progress of the honest small business person. With Franklin Roosevelt the importance of the Triumphant Individual was replaced by the Benign Community parable. The Great Depression had taught a lesson in national solidarity as friends and relatives banded together to survive the effects of hard times and poverty. At the same time Roosevelt used the Rot at the Top to describe those he called "economic royalists" who took advantage of the lowly worker. Ronald Reagan used the Rot at the Top parable to attack government bureaucrats while celebrating the entrepreneur as the Triumphant Individual. Reagan warned about the Mob at the Gates in the person of welfare cheats, drug addicts, illegal immigrants and Central American revolutionaries. The Benign

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 8-13.

Community became a nostalgic appeal to the values of small town America where people voluntarily help one another without government mandates.<sup>43</sup>

We could extend this analysis to cover all types of political rhetoric but the point is clear—every person, every community of persons, uses narrative to interpret the world. We all have a perspective on life by which we sort out its meaning and this perspective is shaped by the images and metaphors which take up residence in our imagination. Narratives transmit these images and metaphors through our imaginative entry into the world portrayed.

It is to the realm of the imagination that Catholic social teaching must more often be directed. Only then will the church be able to rally the political will to act. If Catholic social teaching can appeal to the imagination it will be able to present its case persuasively to a wider public.

How one moves from basic images, metaphors, parables and stories to particular choices is not a simple trail of deduction. It is more a matter of discernment, arising out of our understanding of what is going on around us and a judgment as to what behavior is most fitting, given how I see things. This is why so often we cannot “prove” to people our moral judgments are right. What we can do is explain to others how we see the matter in light of our vision of reality, a vision formed within our imagination.

Explaining to others the way we see life and why we do what we do can be a more difficult task than at first considered. Forcing our moral vision into the procrustean bed of cost/benefit analysis or other dominant forms of public policy debate distorts the Catholic imagination. We cannot easily explain the social teaching of the church to a culture where the imagination has been formed in ways which make the major elements of Catholic social teaching seem foreign.<sup>44</sup>

One possible remedy is to find resonance between Catholic teaching and the neglected strands of American public discourse, the biblical and civic republican languages. As Robert Bellah and his colleagues argued when the economics pastoral was being written, these alternative forms of public discourse are necessary to supplement the dominant individualism of the culture.<sup>45</sup> Only then will themes like the common good, solidarity, and an option for the poor be understandable.

It is within the context of national parables, public languages and American culture that we can appreciate the pastoral letters, especially the letter on economic justice. What that pastoral did was reassert certain biblical and civic republican ideas to demonstrate how they cast our economic life in a new light.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>44</sup>As Andrew Greeley makes clear: “worldviews are not propositional paragraphs that can be explicated and critiqued in discursive fashion. Rather they are, in their origins and in their primal power, tenacious and durable narrative symbols that take possession of the imagination early in the socialization process and provide patterns which shape the rest of life.” *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 133.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

The letter tried to enrich our public discourse by interjecting overlooked themes from the biblical and republican traditions into the national debate on the economy. By doing this one might ascertain points of tension and points of agreement between Catholic teaching and the present reality of the economy.

Essentially, the economics pastoral was an effort by the bishops to move us toward a more communitarian self-understanding. That, in turn, might permit us to reframe the national parables used in our public speech. Thus, the most significant aspect of the pastoral letter is chapter two where the bishops recall the meaning of justice in the Bible and then explain the meaning of justice today with biblical rather than liberal individualist premises.

It is by challenging the way in which we understand ourselves as a people that the power of the pastorals should be measured. Can we recapture a more communitarian vision of American life? Is it possible to recover the Benign Community parable in a manner that is less nostalgic; one with a more inclusive definition of community? Or, must we continue to equate the American promise with successful individuals on the make?

If the categories in which we think of ourselves can be modified then the possibilities for new policies become greater. The ideological framework must be altered if we are to change the operational structures of the economy. Therefore, it is correct, I believe, to see the letter as being in many ways an exercise in cultural critique more than economic analysis.<sup>46</sup> By that I mean the letter should be read as a call to retrieve other interpretive strands of American experience besides the individualist one. Both critics and supporters of the church's social mission should admit such an agenda is closer to a religious community's strengths than the task of drawing up a blueprint for economic policy.

That is why the specifics of policy in chapter three of the letter only came after a lengthy discourse on the Catholic vision of economic life in chapter two. Apart from that context the policies look less persuasive. The key, I believe, was the communitarian theme being espoused. If that were to take root, some of the specifics look more plausible. Without that change of key, few people will sing along with the bishops as they read the lyrics found in the policy sections of the document.

Both pastoral letters employed a similar strategy of seeking to speak to two audiences using two modes of discourse. Although the economics pastoral more successfully integrated the two modes of discourse, there were sections of both pastoral letters which relied upon biblical and explicitly theological language and sections which were cleansed of such language. The rationale presented for this was that policy language had to be accessible to more than Catholics and other

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<sup>46</sup>At the end of their letter the bishops state: "In addition to being an economic actor, the Church is a significant cultural actor concerned about the deeper cultural roots of our economic problems." *EJA*, #358.

Christians, whereas at other times the letters sought to inform the conscience of believers.

One difficulty with this approach, however, became obvious in the secular press's coverage of the economics letter. Going back and reading newspaper articles from the late fall of 1986 one is struck by how little attention was given to the first eighty-four paragraphs or so of *Economic Justice for All*. That is, the entire treatment of biblical themes and most of the explanation of Catholic social teaching was largely ignored. For that reason the policy recommendations in chapter three received some harsh criticism and some praise but also a measure of indifference since in the minds of the secular press the bishops were offering little more than standard New Deal policies. The inability to convey the bishops' message was due to the neglect of the first part of the pastoral letter. I believe something similar happened in the case of the peace pastoral. In both cases the policy sections were treated by commentators as if they could stand alone and often were reported with little reference to the preceding materials.

The press coverage was a warning we have not fully heeded in our social teaching. It is important for us to demonstrate that our social activism is an expression of our faith. We need to root our social teaching and activity in our theology. In this regard, I am reminded of a passage in *The Good Society*,<sup>47</sup> the sequel to *Habits of the Heart*. At one point the authors tell of a distinguished Protestant theologian who visited Washington, D.C. "to advise a group of church board members, agency staffers, and activists." The theologian is quoted:

After I'd spent a while laying out lines of theological justification on some of their major issues, one of the lobbyists raised his hand and asked, "What's the point of this? We agree on the issues. The point now is to organize and get something done about them." I turned to the director who had asked me down there, and said, "I'm sorry if I'm wasting your time. Just say so and I'll stop right now." That's part of their problem, of course, particularly the poli-sci types. They're so theologically inarticulate that they can't persuade anybody in the churches who doesn't already agree with them, and even then they come across as political partisans, not as reflective Christians.<sup>48</sup>

Bellah and his colleagues are recounting the experience of a scholar in a mainline Protestant church, which is seen as declining in its power to shape the ethos of a society. I cite the example to show the risk we run if we fail to be consciously and explicitly theological in explaining our social mission. The risk is that in trying to speak to a diverse nation a public church can ignore its first audience, the people in the pews who remain unpersuaded or uninterested in the social mission.

For this reason, among others, it is imperative that we fashion a truly public theology—a recent term for the traditional concern to relate faith to the social

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<sup>47</sup>Robert Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991).

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 192.

ideas and movements shaping the world in which the church exists. Both pastoral letters distinguished between the audience of church and society. Without denying a legitimate distinction I think it is an overdrawn divide when it is used to suggest that how one teaches should be dramatically different, speaking in theological language in one case and in a style of public discourse cleansed of religious language and symbols to the second audience.

Public theology, understood as an "effort to discover and communicate the socially significant meanings of Christian symbols and tradition"<sup>49</sup> can serve the two audiences identified by the pastoral letters. First, it can introduce into public conversation the wisdom that is resident within the Catholic tradition. The criticism of modernity's privileging of one type of discourse opens the door onto the public square for alternative forms of public discourse. The critique of modernity has made clear that "public reason" itself is a term of dispute since all models of "reason" have communal and historical origins. It is not immediately evident, therefore, why the reasoning of a particular religious community ought to be barred from the public square, for if it is intelligible and persuasive it can make a contribution. And we ought not simply to presume that religious language and symbolism are unintelligible to those outside the religious tradition.

David Tracy's proposal that we evaluate not the origins of public discourse but its effects seems wise.<sup>50</sup> His position on the disclosive nature of a religious classic can be a way to go forward in making an argument for public theology. If the Catholic theological tradition can offer a wisdom that enriches public life there seems no reason, in principle, why it should not be accepted as legitimate discourse in a pluralistic society. The argument that a public theology must be ruled inappropriate is not a case which should be settled in an a priori manner. Thus, in retrospect, the pastoral letters may have been a bit too timid in their presentation; the bishops were too quick to censor themselves in pursuit of a means whereby they could speak to an audience beyond the Catholic community. A public theology is an integral part of the functioning of a public church.

The second aim of public theology serves the task of creating a community of moral discourse. Recall that a major argument of *Habits of the Heart* was that unless we as a people use our alternative biblical and republican languages we will cease being able to think in them. In effect, we will lose them if we do not use them. The pastorals sought to inform the consciences of Catholics in their understanding of the moral dimensions of national security policy and economic life, to help church members find alternatives to the dominant formulas of only

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<sup>49</sup>David Hollenbach, "Editor's Conclusion," in David Hollenbach, Robin Lovin, John Coleman, and J. Bryan Hehir, "Theology and Philosophy in Public: A Symposium on John Courtney Murray's Unfinished Agenda," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) 700-15, at 714.

<sup>50</sup>David Tracy, "Particular Classics, Public Religion, and the American Tradition," in Robin Lovin, ed., *Religion and Public Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986) 115-31.

national interest and narrow self-interest when discussing weapons and markets. The effort to explore what national security and economic life look like when viewed within the framework of Catholic teaching was an important exercise of teaching within a local church.

If educated American Catholics, so successfully assimilated into the cultural mainstream, cannot retain or discover the wisdom of our theological tradition for thinking about the meaning of the good life, the good society, and the global common good then the social mission of the church is in peril. For that tradition to be resurrected we need a vibrant public theology and new methods of transmission so that it may be appropriated by adults.

### CONCLUSION

The pastoral letters were important milestones in the development of American Catholicism. In the desire for a genuine inculturation of the Catholic faith within American culture the Catholic community matured in two ways. First, it found its voice within the universal church and second, it discovered its place within a diverse society. Still, twenty years after the Bernadin and Weakland committees were first formed we are left with challenges aplenty.

Although not a matter of the social teaching, we have seen the push and pull of being a local church within a universal one in discussions over *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the implementation of the *mandatum*. Some bemoan the unwillingness of the bishops to argue for their original pastoral approach to the promotion of Catholic identity. Yet others maintain the sensitivity about episcopal influence on Catholic higher education borders on overreaction from the academy. Critics of the bishops now ask, whether the sense of local church which motivated the bishops twenty years ago has withered to the extent that enforced docility trumps creativity and self-initiative in naming and responding to the pastoral agenda before us. For others the issue is, will some U.S. Catholics develop a sense of church which, in practice if not in theory, ignores its ties with the universal church?

A second set of questions pertains to the quest to become a public church. Will an assimilated Catholic population merely echo the dominant viewpoints and conventional wisdom of the wider culture? Will American Catholicism be simply co-opted by an affluent middle-class culture of comfort? Voices from Latin America faulted the economics pastoral for being too accepting of free-market economics, while others within our own nation maintained the bishops sacrificed their prophetic voice in the peace pastoral by the determination not to condemn reliance upon a nuclear deterrent. In reply, others wonder if the desire to speak a prophetic word and offer a clear alternative to business as usual will make Catholics so eccentric to public life that the social mission of the church becomes marginal to practical efforts of transforming society?

A third set of questions surrounds the effort to become a community of moral discourse. Can a church which has a hierarchical teaching office develop

strategies for teaching that effectively influence the moral formation of future adult Catholics? How can those charged with fulfilling the role of teacher in the community find processes which respect the diverse gifts and insights of a large, intelligent and articulate Catholic population? Will the voices of the broad community of disciples be heard in the formulation of teaching? And will that teaching be received critically and appropriated personally by adult believers? Can the church become a place where individuals want to participate so that they can wrestle with serious moral questions and clarify their viewpoints?

To a great extent by focusing on activities like the pastoral letters the educational mission of the church becomes paramount. Much of the subsequent activity which followed the publication of the letters was educational in nature. Yet, Archbishop Weakland could observe that much of Catholic social teaching "has not been assimilated by our Catholic population."<sup>51</sup> It has not been formative of many Catholics in this nation. Yet, this may not be due to its rejection but due to our inability to formulate a social teaching that resonates with the imagination of our people, tapping into the images and metaphors by which our people live. Have we as a church focused on tutoring the imagination or passing on propositional formulas, be they liberal or conservative ones? Here is the issue of shaping a broader vision.

The bishops of the United States have taken their lumps at the hands of many critics, not excluding many of us who are members of the CTSA. But the leadership of this local church produced documents such as the pastoral letters *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All*. In the cooperation with theologians and other scholars, evident in those letters, we can note the promise of mutually rewarding collaboration between bishops and scholars. In the serious efforts to advance moral insight on public matters we can see in our bishops the hope that we will be a church which enriches our society and that invites the faithful to deeper discipleship.

I have suggested several ways in which the pastoral letters leave room for improvement or represent unrealized hopes. But at a time when the Catholic community needs to find common ground and heal rifts which hinder its witness to the gospel we can do worse than recall the experience of what the local church of the U.S. can be when it tries to be a public church and attempts to create a community of moral discourse with a broad vision.

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<sup>51</sup>Weakland, "The Church in Worldly Affairs," 202.