

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

Topic:	The Relevance of <i>Economic Justice for All</i> Twenty-five years later
Convener & Moderator:	Mark J. Allman, Merrimack College
Presenters:	Daniel Finn, St. John's University/Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies David Hollenbach, Boston College
Respondent:	Jaime Vidaurrazaga, Emmanuel College

In the 1980s the U.S. Catholic Bishops issued two prophetic and controversial pastoral letters: *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All* (1986). Despite the fact that the U.S. was engaged in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan at the time, the silver anniversary of *The Challenge of Peace* passed unnoticed by the bishops. Recognizing that the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Economic Justice for All* was fast approaching, this interest group was formed to ensure that its anniversary did not go unnoticed and to provide opportunity to reflection on the document's relevance to the current economic conditions in the U.S. and around the world.

Hollenbach began his presentation, "Economic Justice and the New Challenges of Globalization" by noting that concern for global economic justice was on the minds of the bishops when they wrote *Economic Justice for All*. Hollenbach contends that economic justice for the poorest peoples of the world, especially those in Africa, is increasingly linked with corruption, war, and other issues frequently regarded as primarily political. Thus promoting economic justice for the poor today calls for working to create institutions that promote political justice, accountable government, the rule of law, and peace. For Hollenbach, global economic justice can be more adequately addressed by using a deepened understanding of the common good shared across borders and a more robust understanding of solidarity. Accepting Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's definition of globalization as "the increase in networks of interdependence among people at multicontinental distances" (Keohane and Nye, "Globalization: What's New? What's Not?" *Foreign Policy* [Spring 2000], 105), Hollenbach argues the ethical evaluation of globalization must assess whether or not these networks are marked by equality and reciprocity or inequality and domination. Turning to the practical level, Hollenbach points to "globalization's democratic deficit" (Joseph Nye, "Globalization's Democratic Deficit: How to Make International Institutions More Accountable" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 4 [July/August 2001], 2) and argues that global justice does not require simply more aid or even some kind of global public authority with real teeth, but reform of global, regional and intergovernmental bodies and the contribution of private sector corporations and nongovernmental agencies.

Daniel Finn presented, "Catholic Social Thought as an Empirical Claim" in which he summarized some of the findings of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies' True Wealth of Nations project as they relate to *Economic Justice for All*

and argued that the conversation with social scientists can be improved by beginning with an empirical claim: implementing the recommendations of Catholic social thought would put the nation on a path to sustainable prosperity for all. The True Wealth project focuses on the notion of “prosperity” as a potential bridge between the disciplines of economics and theology. Prosperity encompasses not only wealth (often the main focus of economists), but broader notions of well-being (often the primary focus of theologians). The project, according to Finn, also includes the basic proposition that, “the economic and cultural criteria identified in the tradition of Catholic social thought provide an effective path to sustainable prosperity for all.” This empirical claim allows theologians and economists to engage in the same research. It stretches theologians beyond the realm of moral claims to struggle with the question of whether or not implementing Catholic social thought would actually improve the economy. Likewise, economists are stretched to include less easily measured indicators of prosperity.

Finn highlighted the work of four scholars involved in the project. (1) Albino Barrera argues there are five principles that Catholic social thought recommends for a just economy (the common good, justice/righteousness, subsidiarity, solidarity and the universal destination of goods) and these are potentially testable empirical measurements of whether or not a nation has implemented what Catholic social thought advocates for a just economy. (2) Andrew Yuengert distinguishes the means and ends of what Catholic social thought holds as “sustainable prosperity for all” by utilizing notions of virtue, personal initiative, social relations and material goods. (3) Stefano Zamagni examines “the civil economy,” a system that flourished in fourteenth and fifteenth century Italy due to the influence of Franciscan monasteries. Zamagni proffers the civil economy as an alternative model to contemporary capitalist markets. (4) John Coleman explores the social scientific notion of social capital and the importance of trust in economic activity. The work of these four authors is available in the recently published *The True Wealth of Nations: Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life* edited by Daniel Finn (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Jaime Vidaurazaga praised the creative ways the authors adapted the centuries-old principles of Catholic social thought to the increasingly more complex realities of the current global economy. Vidaurazaga noted that any reflections on global economic justice need to include the direct reflection and input of the world’s poor who often bear the greatest burdens of economic injustice and are routinely alienated from conversations about economic policy. This was the first year for this interest group. Next year marks the actual silver anniversary of the pastoral letter. The papers presented in these sessions will be published in a volume of collected essays. The final year for this interest group will involve a response/critique of the volume.

MARK J. ALLMAN

*Merrimack College
North Andover, Massachusetts*