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The Economic Agenda of Catholic Social Teaching: The Framework for a Normative Social Theory

Michael D. Russell

ABSTRACT. The Catholic Church has developed a position on socio-economic issues during the past one hundred years as detailed in economically-minded papal encyclicals and related church documents. Included are several criteria that provide a framework for evaluating areas of economic policy. The Church's mission has been to develop a normative social theory capable of integrating both theology and economic theory. The body of literature addressing the Church's approach to socio-economic issues is known as Catholic Social Teaching, or CST. I will use CST to describe the Catholic platform of normative economic justice, its justification of social theory, and the potential economic reality of such goals.

"No one may claim the name of Christian and be comfortable in the face of hunger, homelessness, insecurity, and injustice found in this country and the world"
Economic Justice for All, Paragraph 27

I. The Interrelationship of Religion and Economics

Since the advent of human civilization, society has been characterized by worldviews. A worldview is a framework for understanding the world and humanity's role in it. It could be called the window through which a society understands life. Worldviews differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture. Spanning continents, cultures, and national boundaries, a worldview can define how both individuals and collectives respond to one another and other social or environmental situations. Every so often a dominant worldview will emerge within a society and take on a hegemonic status.

For centuries religion was the source of worldviews. It provided the basis of the social schema that outlined how and why people behave. Religion gave individuals a purpose and a reason for existence. It permeated every aspect of life, from work to family to death and beyond. The religious worldview provided a basis for government and leadership. Most importantly, it had a strong role in determining how people made decisions and behaved towards one another. It had very strong normative content that it sought to instill into society.

As the centuries progressed, societies changed. A new worldview came into existence in the West and sought to challenge religion as the dominant social ideology. The new kid on the block was an alternative method of conducting trade. An explosion of trade and productivity led to nations and individuals gaining large amounts of wealth. Eventually civilization developed new theories and models to explain the source of this growing wealth and the effects it had on individuals and society. The new philosophy was called economics, and its shining star was capitalism. The increased wealth generated consumerism and materialism, which began to seize control of society. Capitalism became the most widely accepted and successful economic system, and it now dominates today's global society. The history of economic regimes has proven the practical reality that capitalism is best capable of producing the goods and services individuals want.

The emergence of capitalism as an overarching worldview and not simply economic system has caused a change in the way individuals perceive the world and one another. At the same time, religion has remained a strong determinant of behavior and perception. I would propose that today's two most powerful worldviews are religion and economic systems, specifically Christianity and capitalism in the case of Western civilization. A system of "give and take" has been established between these two powerhouses. Individuals must choose one over the other where the two disagree.

Economics is a social science that focuses on human behavior and decision-making. At the heart of the economic model is homo economicus—"economic man"—a rational, utility maximizing creature. The actions of the individual, acting alone or in groups, form the basis of economic theory. Religion is also based on personal decisions and deals with both the individual and groups of people. Both the economy and the church are social institutions.

By combining these two, economics and religion, a system of values and a framework of action for decision-making can be developed. The development of this structure into a normative social theory is the purpose behind the combination of religion and economics. It has been debated whether one should be integrated into the other. Many theologians and some economists believe the science of economics should accept theology into its ranks and take ethical considerations into account when formulating theory and models. Regardless of this debate, it remains to be decided whether religion and economics *can* be combined in the

modern world. As it stands, the dual existence of the two involves little integration but a fair amount of interdependence. Economists provide the “knowledge” while theologians supplement it with “value.”

According to James Dean, an economist at the University of Manitoba, the scientific results of economic study have much to offer theologians. He states, “There is much [in economics] that can be useful in addressing the questions that theologians consider important.” His comments do not suggest that economics and religion will always complement one another. He goes on to say that, “the scientific knowledge may not always be what theologians expect, but it has an empirical basis that suggests it deserves a hearing.” Dean holds that “economics has produced a variety of results that might help theologians formulate normative social policy... Economics suggests a variety of factors that are relevant in devising such policies. Not all economics is relevant, but much economics bears directly on issues important to theologians” [Dean, 1999, 121].

II. The Positive/Normative Distinction

A problem with the conceptualization of a partnership between economics and religion is that many theologians believe that economics supplies value with its theory. In other words, economics is essentially a normative social science. However, one of the first lessons a budding economics student is taught is that economics engages in positive research to avoid value judgements. But not all economists agree. “The positive/normative distinction...is a totally false dichotomy,” states Charles Clark, an economist at St. John’s University, New York. “All economics, as with all social science, is normative and cannot help being otherwise. The claim of the ‘positive’ scientific label is more an attempt to dress up one set of value judgements as ‘scientific’ so that they do not get examined and are not subject to criticism” [Clark, para. 6].

Clark uses several examples of value-laden economic theory, such as Adam Smith’s “society of perfect liberty” to demonstrate theories based on value judgments. Positive economics is based on empirical study and observation. But Clark argues, “observation requires a viewpoint from which to observe.” Observations must be given meaning, usually through a theoretical model or system that is capable of assigning meaning to the observations of reality. Normative economists hold that any theory or model must be a human creation, and as such, will be based on value judgments [para. 5].

Capitalism is derived from human institutions—it operates within a classical liberal political philosophy. This has inherent normative content. The capitalist system was meant to address the human problems of scarcity and other socio-economic concerns. It is based on a set of assumptions regarding basic rights to property, life, and the pursuit of happiness—concepts of a very normative nature.

A continuum of the relative positive versus normative nature of the economic science may be established. Towards one end of the continuum lies economic research and theory that strives to portray the reality of economic study through observation and scientific method. It is the most positive field of economics, yet still it must derive its conclusions from theory. On the other end of the continuum are economic policy, political economy, and other socio-economic fields. These components concern strong normative content of guides to action and recommendations on how economics, or society, *should* be.

It should be noted that Clark and his peers are not of a majority opinion in their stance on economics. However, they do represent a school of theologian-economists who believe that economics is, has, and always will be a normative science. For this reason, they see little difficulty in incorporating Catholic Social Teaching (CST) into economic theory.

III. The Role of Religion in Economic Policy

What is a normative social theory? It can be defined as “any set of related doctrines that prescribes what human societies ought to be or how they ought to be governed, and that affords a standard for the critical appraisal of existing arrangements” [Dean, 1999, 4]. In pre-industrial societies, religion provided the doctrine that prescribed the standards for appraisal. Most people are familiar with the doctrines of religion that detail what behavior is acceptable. Dogma, ritual, social law, and other aspects of authority in society were tied to a culture’s particular religion. As nations progressed, the modern society overturned the old dominant social theory and replaced it with another. Nations began to urbanize and economic progress became the new standard. One aspect of the “new society” was its pluralistic nature. The United States provides a good example where multiple cultures and religions co-exist. It was not possible for a single religion’s social standards to apply to the society at large. Society began its move towards secularism.

The establishment of the secular society began when the United States was first formed. It was more that churches wanted to be free from government interference than the government wanted to be free from the churches' influence. But the secular movement was perpetuated as the United States began to earn its "melting pot" association. The State was best able to provide for the needs of all its citizens by not playing favorites to a particular religion.

Today the United States represents citizens from an incredible range of ethnic, cultural, religious, and geographic backgrounds. Many of these groups have stark differences in religious beliefs and practices. And so American public policy no longer reflects the normative content of the churches and has accepted the pluralism that has become of key importance to modern society. It is a political necessity in a country without a majority religion.

As society progressed into the 20th century, the economic value system within society became objectionable to the Catholic Church. Over a hundred years ago, the Catholic leadership in the Vatican began to issue socio-economic statements regarding the nature of economic influence in the world. The Catholic Church's stance on economic issues was developed into Catholic Social Teaching (CST)—the Church's response to the socio-economic injustice afflicting society.

The religious paradigm for this paper is that of the Catholic Church. It should be noted that wherever the term religion is used, Catholicism is the specific religious belief system being discussed. The Catholic Church has been the most outspoken proponent of a religious socio-economic agenda. It has a well-documented history of its program for economic justice. Yet other religions could be used instead. While they might draw different conclusions regarding how to confront the missing moral compass in society, most religions will agree on the need for a normative social theory to provide guidance in economic decision-making. Most of the major world religions share the same dilemma as Catholicism. A changing world culture is causing their normative social doctrine to lose its foothold. They too are faced with the challenge of either continuing to distance themselves from an increasingly mainstream modern, industrial and technological society, or utilizing the economic system to re-assert their belief systems. To use the cliché, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."

It is important to realize and understand both the existing and potential relationship between religion and economics. The partnership

between Catholicism and economics via CST is critical because it combines two powerful worldviews into a combined social theory. It asks the question “can these two superpowers coexist, perhaps even cooperate?” It could produce powerful normative content to which a society should pay close attention.

A large percentage of Americans consider themselves to be religious, and a majority of these individuals identify with a specific religious denomination. For example, there are approximately 60 million American Catholics and approximately 958.4 million Catholics worldwide [Encarta Encyclopedia, Internet Source]. The interplay of religion, the economic system in which they live and work, and the resulting social theory ought to have significance for many Americans, especially for Catholics.

On a larger scale, the product of a combined religious and economic system may be able to provide benefits to all of society. Regardless of the outcome of whether or not economics is a normative field, the need for an economic value system exists. If it were agreed upon that economics does contain normative content, then the need for a value system exists to ensure the proper interpretation and use of its normative content. Alternatively, if it is agreed that economics exists within a value and moral free vacuum, then what will provide the ethical content that is essential to construct good policy? Religion may be the answer. The discussion of *Economic Justice for All* and the search for a framework for normative economic justice will emphasize the value structure of a religiously based economic system.

It should also be noted that while CST proposes an increased role of a religiously based paradigm in public policy, it does isolate that role to normative social decision-making. It is not a proposal for the institutionalization of religion into the formal structure of the government. The proponents of CST do not wish to form a theocracy with their teaching, but rather to simply establish an influential force that serves a guide to the existing process of decision-making. The CST documents are very clear about this point and do not want to be viewed as revolutionaries in the traditional sense. They are advocating the overthrow of unjust economic conditions, not of governments. The Catholic Church is explicit on this point.

IV. The Development of CST

The construction of a normative social theory combining the Catholic religious paradigm and economic thought has been a direct product of CST. Before attempting a dissection of CST, it is necessary to review the history of CST, the literature that makes up the philosophy within it, and its mission and goals.

The Catholic Church has been speaking out for social justice in the economic arena for centuries, beginning with Augustine, proceeding through the middle Ages and Aquinas, and reaching a pinnacle in the 100 years preceding the turn of the 21st century. The body of Church literature addressing economic justice, from whom Catholic Social Teaching is derived, is divided into two segments. The first spans the length of Church history and concerns the individual's economic behavior. The second segment, the more recent of the two, focuses on the economic systems, government institutions, and specific policies that drive economic decision making within society. The Church has moved towards a macro-economic policy from a micro-economic approach [Pryor, 1993, 132].

The modern conception of CST started with the first Roman Catholic Church papal encyclical devoted to the economic system, *Rerum Novarum*, written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, or "The Condition of Labor," has been called the "Magna Carta of Catholic Social Teaching" as it laid the foundation for future Church literature regarding the development of economic policy. *Rerum Novarum* was the first of 10 major papal encyclicals propagating a Catholic economic worldview. Pope John Paul II published the latest, *Centesimus Annus*, or "The Hundredth Year," in 1991 to recognize the landmark work of *Rerum Novarum* as the Church continues to develop its stance on economic justice in the modern world [de Vries, 1998, 197].

CST has been built upon ten socio-economic encyclicals and several other key official Church documents. The ten encyclicals, their English titles, authors, and dates of publication, are as follows:

- Rerum Novarum* ("The Condition of Labor"), Pope Leo XIII, 1891
- Quadragesimo Anno* ("Reconstruction of the Social Order"), Pope Pius XI, 1931
- Mater Et Magistra* ("Christianity and Social Progress"), Pope John XXIII, 1961
- Pacem In Terris* ("Peace on Earth"), Pope John XXIII, 1963
- Populorum Progressio* ("The Development of People"), Pope

Paul VI, 1967
Octogesima Adveniens (“A Call to Action”), Pope Paul VI,
1971
Evangelii Nun tiandi (“Evangelization in the Modern World”),
Pope Paul VI, 1975
Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work”), Pope John Paul II,
1981
Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (“On Social Concern”), Pope John
Paul II, 1987
Centesimus Annus (“The Hundredth Year”), Pope John Paul
II, 1991

The non-encyclical documents that have contributed to the formulation of CST include “Economic Justice for All,” produced in 1986 by the U.S. Bishops; “Justice in the World,” written by the Synod of Bishops in 1971; and “The Church in the Modern World” authored by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. A large volume of additional literature has contributed to modern Catholic Social Teaching but it has not been as influential or as widely distributed in comparison to the documents I have delineated [The Busy Christians’ Guide, Internet Source].

Catholic Social Teaching attempts to incorporate Catholic moral theology into economic theory. Andrew Yuengert of Pepperdine University describes the mission of CST using an architect/home builder analogy:

[CST] treats mainstream economics like an architect who wants to build a house to serve ends that are opposed by the client, and whose design is based on theories that may render the structure unstable. Respectful of the expertise of economists, the popes [and other church leaders] nevertheless insist that economic analysis and advice take into account the objectives and expertise of Roman Catholic moral theology. This situation should be agreeable to economists, whose avowed goal in life is to provide value-free positive analysis in the service of social objectives outlined by others [Waterman, 1994, 35].

The goal of CST is to develop a comprehensive social theory that reflects the values and ethical standards of the Catholic Church.

V. The Economic Criteria of CST

CST draws upon several criteria as the basis for its socio-economic goals. The criteria can be summarized by a series of guiding principles that characterize the mission of Catholic Social Teaching:

1. *Human Dignity.* Economic justice is particularly concerned with human dignity. In “Economic Justice for All,” paragraph 28, the Bishops write, “the dignity of the human person... is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured.” Human dignity is defined as the set of fundamental human rights, inherent to every person, such as civil and political rights like the freedom of speech, worship, and assembly, and human rights such as the right to life, food, clothing, and education. Dignity is correlated with just wages, humane working conditions, equal economic opportunity and participation, and basic material needs [Pryor, 1993, 141].
2. *Subsidiarity.* As taken from *Centesimus Annus*, paragraph 69, the principle of subsidiarity states that “communities of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its function, but rather it should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity... always with the view to the common good.” This principle *limits* the freedom of the federal government in situations when the state or local government is more capable of addressing the issue. The idea behind subsidiarity is that most problems can and should be solved by those closest to it. It does not prohibit the federal government from action, but prefers to give lower levels of government the first opportunity to act. Even more so, it would rather have government do only that which individuals and private groups cannot do independently. Subsidiarity gives direction to the various governments and social institutions in providing for a just economic society [Alexandrin, 1999, 1349].
3. *The common good.* The principle of the common good is the pinnacle of just economic activity. The economic order should not only provide goods and services, but it should also allow for creative participation on behalf of everyone within the community. Economic decisions should be evaluated by how they will affect

each individual and group within a greater context [Yuengert, 1999, 42]. The church recognizes and supports the right to private property but also emphasizes the necessary obligation to use private property to advance the common good, that is to utilize resources in such a way as to institute “those social conditions which favor the full development of human personality” [Mater et Magistra, para. 65]. The concept of the common good prioritizes human welfare as the norm for all economic decisions [Finnegan, 1995, 18].

4. *Solidarity*. The last guiding principle is called solidarity, which is described as “a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good: that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, para. 38]. A closely related ethical standard that complements the idea of solidarity is Kant’s categorical imperative to always treat individuals as an end in themselves and never as a means to an end [Pryor, 1993, 139].

The four guiding principles establish a strong basis for the evaluation of economic decisions. With these principles in mind, CST can construct the basic framework on which its economic agenda will rely.

VI. Building the Catholic Economy

The majority of Catholic Social Teaching is contained in the socio-economic papal encyclicals. An important document with unique applications to the United States economy, however, is the pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, written by the Conference of United States Bishops. *Economic Justice for All* was intended to provide a comprehensive guide for the application of Catholic Social Teaching to the American economy. The end result was a document that contained instructions for the individual worker, the family, the business owner and manager, and the government. It dissected each economic issue of importance to the Church in turn and dictated both a rationale and specific actions for improving the status of the economic topic.

It is necessary to understand the general role of this important document and its efficacy as a whole. The main question regarding *Economic Justice for All* is: does it provide a viable normative social theory, one that effectively combines the science of economics with the dogma of religion, capable of supplying a modern society with a system

of values and a standard for evaluation? An examination of the letter's economic goals and criteria for instituting economic justice will provide an answer to this question.

A drafting committee of US bishops composed *Economic Justice for All*. Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, who was also the principal author of the document, chaired the committee. The process of producing the letter took six years—three years for drafting and another three for hearings and rewriting. The letter was written in such a manner as to garner the expertise of an exhaustive list of interested parties, ranging from church clergy and Jewish representatives to labor groups and economists. The end result became the standard for social justice arguments involving the economy [de Vries, 1998, 204].

The theology behind the letter ties in closely with Gospel teachings. God gave the world to man, and thus the earth is a gift from the Creator which should not be squandered or hoarded. The same teachings apply to the dignity of the human person, as every person has been created in the image of God. The mistreatment or the denial of basic rights to any individual is equivalent to an affront to God. The letter emphasizes the importance of community and the family in a religious society. The resounding message of Jesus to his followers calling for the rejection of greed and material desires is also reflected in the letter.

The letter focuses on the dignity of the person and the need for an economy to serve the people, not vice versa. The policy actions dictated within the letter continue the priorities of other CST documents by placing the needs of the poor at the forefront of any economic policy. In the general sense, “Economic Justice for All” asks that every economic decision be based on the concept of improving the condition of human dignity for all people.

In November 1996 the conference revisited *Economic Justice for All* and supplemented the original letter with a summary document that listed ten essential guides for economic justice. The statement was titled “A Catholic Framework For Economic Life.” The distinct principles, rights, and obligations of economic shareholders produced by the letter are contained herein:

1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must

- be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good.
3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.
 4. All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security).
 5. All people have a right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join union or other associations.
 6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families, and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.
 7. In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles, but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.
 8. Society has a moral obligation, including government action where necessary, to assure opportunity, meet basic human needs, and pursue justice in economic life.
 9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders, and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity, and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life, and social justice.
 10. The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid, and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need wherever they might live on this globe.

[Catholic Social Teaching Principles, Internet Source]

The ten principles provide an excellent guide for understanding the economic agenda of the Catholic Church. They are the Ten Commandments of economic justice.

Economic Justice for All is important because out of the entire body of literature composing CST, it contains the most explicit instructions for a prototype Catholic economy. It translates the moral theology set forth in the previous CST documents into specific actions for an economy. The letter explains the reasoning for instituting a moral guide into economic life and exactly how individual, families, society, and government can go about doing so. If the “Catholic Framework for Economic life” is the skeleton, then *Economic Justice for All* is the flesh of the CST economic body.

VII. Translating Church Doctrine Into Economic Applications

How does this framework translate into economic theory? Where does the theory become practical applications to the social reality? For example, what are the specific policy initiatives of CST for America? It is to be expected that an inquiring mind will demand what actions must be taken in order to institute the CST’s economic doctrine. The Church has responded to this demand and a sizable amount of literature is directed at specific policy for governments and economists in addition to guidelines for the individual and family.

In order to understand CST as a normative social theory capable of providing a standard for value judgments in an economic system, it is necessary to review the significant policies of the Church’s economic agenda. *Economic Justice for All* focuses on several major policy areas that CST considers to be of utmost importance. They are 1) halting the loss of family farms and resisting concentration in the ownership of agricultural resources, 2) assistance for Third World development, 3) concerted efforts to eradicate poverty, and 4) full employment.

The Church believes the nation’s food system and the agricultural economy are a pressing concern for America. Farm foreclosures and consolidation within the industry are combining with increased damage to natural resources. *Economic Justice for All* calls for re-evaluation and reform in this area. It establishes three guidelines for policy action: 1)

moderate-sized farms operated by families on a full-time basis should be preserved and their economic viability protected, 2) the opportunity to engage in farming should be protected as a valuable form of work, and 3) the effective stewardship of our natural resources should be a central consideration in any measures regarding U.S. agriculture [EJA, 1986, para. 216].

The second focus area concerns U.S. assistance to the developing nations. *Economic Justice for All* states that “unless conscious steps are taken toward protecting human dignity and fostering human solidarity in [U.S. relations with the Third World], we can look forward to increased conflict and inequity, threatening the fragile economies of these relatively poor nations far more than our own relatively strong one” [para 252]. CST uses several facts to support its stance on the importance of this issue. For instance, half the world’s population (2.5 billion) lives in countries where the annual per capita income is \$400 or less. Close to 800 million people in the Third World live in absolute poverty and nearly half a billion are chronically hungry.

Without getting into great detail, the overarching philosophy of CST in regards to US foreign policy institutes the preferential option for the poor as a central priority. *Economic Justice for All* states, “if we are to give appropriate weight to [the Third World's] concerns, their needs, and their interests, we have to go beyond economic gain or national security as a starting point for the policy dialogue. We want to stand with the poor everywhere, and we believe that relations between the U.S. and developing nations should be determined in the first place by a concern for basic human needs and respect for cultural traditions” [para 260]. The concern should be reflected through development assistance, trade, and international finance.

The third economic policy discusses the eradication of poverty. According to EJA, “More than 33 million American, approximately one in every seven people in the nation, are poor by the government’s official definition” [para. 170]. Statistics such as this lead CST leaders to claim a sense of urgency in confronting poverty within America. Their national strategy for action in this arena include the following: 1) building and sustaining a healthy economy that provides employment opportunities at just wages for all adults able to work, 2) vigorous action to remove barriers to full and equal employment for women and minorities, 3) self-help efforts among the poor fostered by programs and policies in both the private and public sectors, 4) a tax system that is continually evaluated in

terms of its impact on the poor, 5) a stronger societal commitment to education for the poor, 6) policies and programs that support the strength and stability of families, especially of families, especially those adversely affected by the economy, and 7) a thorough reform of the nations' welfare and income-support programs [para 200].

The final policy focus is on employment. *Economic Justice for All* calls for "a new national commitment" to full employment. This tenet of CST is especially important as it correlates strongly with the other policy issues and with each of the basic principles CST seeks to pursue. For example, employment forms the first line of defense against poverty and other unjust social conditions. The right to work is at the forefront of economic justice. According to *Economic Justice for All*, "full employment is the foundation of a just economy. The most urgent priority for domestic economic policy is the creation of new jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions" [para 136].

The goal of CST is to make it possible, as a nation, for every one who is seeking a job to find employment within a reasonable amount of time. It has been the failure of social and economic institutions to adapt sufficiently to employment shortages. CST asks for a re-organization of the nation's economic priorities in order to address this pressing responsibility. In light of this request, the Church has several guidelines for action. The first concerns general economic policies, where *Economic Justice for All* states "we recommend that the fiscal and monetary policies of the nation—such as federal spending, tax, and interest rate policies—should be coordinated so as to achieve the goal of full employment" [para 156]. The federal government has passed legislation to this end (Full Employment Act of 1946) but CST argues that they have failed to truly prioritize employment in economic policy.

The more detailed guidelines concern targeted employment programs and alternative employment strategies. First, CST recommends the "expansion of job-training and apprenticeship programs in the private sector administered and supported jointly by business, labor unions, and government" in addition to "increased support for direct job creation programs targeted on the long-term unemployed and those with special needs [para. 162]. Among the alternative strategies CST recommends are increased investigation into the potential of job-share, flextime, and a reduced work week. It also seeks to outlaw compulsory overtime work and discourages the overuse of part-time workers.

The papal encyclicals touch briefly on policy recommendations.

The majority of the details on policy are included in the bishops' documents, which contain exhaustive instructions for establishing economic policy. Most notably is *Economic Justice for All*, which states that, "This vision of economic life cannot exist in a vacuum; it must be translated into concrete measures. Our pastoral letter spells out some specific applications of Catholic moral principles [EJA, 1986, para. 19]. The most important facet of these policies to recall while reading the literature is that CST does not seek to establish a new economic ideology—to overthrow neo-classical economic analysis—but to implant Catholic moral theology into its existing structure.

VIII. Conclusions

Despite evidence of the many inequities and other inadequacies within the American economic system, most economists will reject the notion of a CST-derived socio-economic theory. They may do so on the grounds of maintaining the positive/normative dichotomy or because they do not believe it is possible or desirable to integrate moral theology with economic analysis. The majority of the mainstream economic community will choose to continue the status quo, where economics stands independent and interested groups, such as religious institutions, may do what they choose with the economic product that is developed.

Free market capitalism has proven to be the most viable economic system for improving the living standards of those who live and work within it. It has shown that if implemented correctly, it can lift people out of poverty. In this sense, it is the best economic regime in existence. But it is not perfect. It can be improved. Certain societal characteristics become inherent to those under the free market capitalist system. Consumerism and materialism are two such problems. These characteristics and other trends take away qualitative meaning from society and individuals—this is what CST is attempting to address. An old adage may be suitable for the mission of CST: "Good, better, best; never let it rest; until the good is better, and the better is best."

Certainly the need for a normative social theory that combines a value system with economic theory exists. In particular, the need is strongest at the level of the individual. Society will reflect the behavior of the aggregate and as individuals and families institute moral decision-making into their economic life, the world could, in a not so metaphorical sense, become a better place for everyone.

Catholic Social Teaching will evolve as the developing economy adjusts to globalization and increasing technological influence. As it currently exists, CST is only partially capable of providing the comprehensive social theory it seeks to develop. It is strong on morals, but it is less useful in practical economic applications. The Catholic theory applies well to the need of society for a moral yardstick. The Catholic Church has served as an ethical standard for centuries in almost every social arena save economics. The process of interpreting theology into economic policy is still in its infancy and will have some “growing up” to do before it wins the ear of mainstream economic thought.

Economic Justice for All contains a unique offer that adequately summarizes the CST worldview. The letter elicits a strong foundation for how Catholics may live out their faith through economic life. The letter does not stop with the Catholic constituency; it goes on to provide reasoning as to why all Americans (and all global citizens) should adhere to its prescription for economic justice: “Economic life raises important social and moral questions for each of us and for the society as a whole... we see too much hunger and injustice, too much suffering and despair, both in our country and around the world” [EJA, 1986, para.10].

Using the basis that it is an obligation of all individuals within society to seek economic justice where it does not exist, the letter suggests a “new American experiment—to implement economic rights, to broaden the sharing of economic power, and to make economic decisions more accountable to common good [para. 21].”

The United States is a nation founded on the principle that certain rights are inherent to all people. The founders of this nation confronted civil and political injustice as they created a new form of government – a democratic experiment that has developed and led to prosperity for generations of Americans. Proponents of CST suggest another “revolution” may be needed:

The time has come for a similar experiment in securing economic rights: the creation of an order that guarantees the minimum conditions of human dignity in the economic sphere for every person. By drawing on the resources of the Catholic moral-religious tradition, we hope to make a ... new ‘American Experiment:’ a new venture to secure economic justice for all [para. 95].

The concept of a new American experiment provides a fitting conclusion to the discussion of Catholic Social Teaching as a normative social theory—a worldview combining religious belief and economic theory. Catholic Social Teaching has provided the hypothesis. Is society ready for a test trial?

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