

England. One need not be a naïve progressivist to notice that some polities in today's world are relatively more just and less corrupt than others.

This book is valuable reading for anyone with an interest in Augustine and More, and it provides an important resource for Christians who are reflecting on the implications of their faith for political theory and practice.

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## United States Welfare Policy: A Catholic Response

**Thomas J. Massaro, S.J.**

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007

*United States Welfare Policy* is a meaty, well-crafted book focusing on the pivotal Welfare Reform Act of 1996. Massaro lays his groundwork for a Catholic perspective in the first chapter. With regard to the 1996 reform, the next chapters address the historical context, the actual reform policies, and Catholic contributions to the policy debate. The fifth chapter presents the implementation and impact of the reform policies. The final chapter explores policy and ethical issues for reauthorization of the 1996 reform.

The centerpiece of the reform was termination of an open-ended federal entitlement for low-income families and replacement with capped federal block grants to the states. Work requirements were strengthened. Years of financial support were limited. The 1996 law set 2002 as the year for permanent reauthorization with consideration of appropriate changes. Reauthorization has been delayed in Congress and, in 2005, the 1996 Act was “temporarily” extended until 2010.

When Congress takes on reauthorization of the 1996 reform, Massaro advocates changes consistent with his understanding of Catholic social teaching (CST). Massaro sees the 1996 reform as seriously flawed. Massaro does not claim that he has written “the” Catholic response. This is obvious from the book's title. As is clear below, this Catholic reviewer is substantially at odds with Massaro's perspectives.

The book's trajectory is firmly established in the first chapter where Massaro presents his view of the essentials of CST as related to welfare policy. The general arguments of the book flow quite logically from the foundation laid in chapter 1. For this reason, much of this review is devoted to chapter 1.

Catholic social teaching is not defined dogma and is subject to differing interpretations. Additionally, for any specific policy initiative, prudential judgment must be considered and will differ among policy analysts. Massaro writes, “Even accomplished scholars sometimes fall into the trap of inordinate reliance upon a single fragment of a papal social encyclical that seems to support a preferred position on a given issue” (12).

To illustrate this potential for misinterpretation, Massaro alleges that some right-wing commentators misinterpreted John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, which discussed the “malfunctions and defects of the social assistance state” (13). Massaro notes

that conservatives such as George Weigel “isolated these few clauses from their context in order to launch an argument that Catholic social teaching supports their agenda for sharp reductions in the size and scope of government anti-poverty programs” (13).

Massaro is correct about the potential for misinterpretation of CST, and this reviewer believes that Massaro has fallen into the error himself.

In his first-chapter survey of CST, Massaro concludes that there are three broad principles relating to poverty: (1) social membership must be universal (solidarity), (2) make a preferential option for the poor, and (3) do not place people in impossible situations. The first two align well with Catholic social teaching. The third, however, is surprising: It does not seem to rise to the level of prominence of solidarity and preferential option for the poor in CST. Moreover, I anticipated that the third would be the principle of subsidiarity.

Subsidiarity is the proposition that smaller social and governmental entities should take on responsibilities where possible and that the initiative and energy of smaller units should not be supplanted by larger social and political organizations. Coined in 1931 by Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*, the term is prominently included in John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus* and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Subsidiarity has been too prominent in CST to be completely ignored by Massaro. The principle is discussed but quickly dismissed as a minor consideration for public policy. Massaro writes:

Unlike other notions central to Catholic social teaching, subsidiary is not linked to specific roots in scripture or natural law. It is perhaps best characterized, in the words of John Coleman, as “neither a theological nor even really a philosophical principle, but a piece of congealed historical wisdom ... affirm[ing] the importance of social pluralism and intermediate groups.” (28)

Based on the Christian biblical affirmation of the significance and value of each individual human person, I dissent from Massaro’s claim. What is clear for the book is that the dismissal of subsidiarity sidesteps an important basis for support of devolution to state governments, expanded roles for the voluntary associations (including Catholic churches), and an emphasis on the traditional family for the formation of children.

With subsidiarity relegated to back-burner status, Massaro completes his top three principles of CST with “Do not place people in impossible situations.” While his first two principles, and also subsidiarity, have extensive social encyclical grounding, Massaro’s third principle does not. In the very brief elaboration of principle, Massaro’s main reference is John A. Ryan’s *Distributive Justice*.

The significance of setting aside subsidiarity and adding “no impossible situations” is profound for the exploration of ethical welfare policy. Three specifics are mentioned here: the nature of the needed reform, the role of traditional family, and the role of the Church.

While subsidiarity leads to a questioning of the role of the federal government, “no impossible situations” is a foundation for maintaining and augmenting the policy *status quo* based on concern for adverse impacts on some recipients.

Chapter 4 presents Catholic institutional voices in the welfare reform debate—voices that were almost completely ignored in the legislative outcome. Documents considered include *Putting Children First: A Challenge for Our Church, Nation and the World* from the U.S. Bishops' Conference. In 1994, Catholic Charities USA produced a position paper titled "Transforming the Welfare System." Massaro also refers to the 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* from the U.S. Bishops' Conference.

These Catholic documents argued against 1996 reform provisions such as curtailments of benefits, tightening eligibility conditions, and time limits on support. Massaro praises these documents, which advocated continuing the support level as a federal entitlement and more expansive client interactions to help with the transition from welfare to independence. The Catholic Charities document urges:

A significant shift in philosophy underlying AFDC is critical. We must move from maintaining families at a substance level to tailored investing in families. This means moving from scrutinizing eligibility and qualification requirements to become partners with beneficiaries.... Assistance providers must be retrained to become partners who respond to recipients in culturally appropriate ways (137).

This reform path may simply lie beyond any realistic expectations for the rigid government bureaucracies that John Paul II called into question in *Centesimus Annus*.

Massaro treats the role of the traditional family under the title of "Anti-Illegitimacy Measures" in chapter 3. The role of family would be a prime consideration in a reform based on serious consideration of subsidiarity. Title I of the 1996 reform act begins with the proposition, "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society." Massaro is agnostic on the validity of this point. Relevant 1996 reform provisions were family caps, teenage mother exclusions, and education grants to promote sexual abstinence. Massaro considers the possibility that these initiatives may be "a dangerous foray into social engineering" (94). He dispassionately weighs the evidence on causes and impacts of alternative family structures. At no point in this section does he consider Catholic social and moral teaching relating to marriage, family, and sexual morality.

The book concludes with a section titled Public Church Contributions to Social Policy: Present and the Future. Here again, Massaro's statist perspective, unencumbered by subsidiarity, has profound implications. Massaro notes that "members of religious communities ... have historically exercised great solicitude for the poorest members of American society" (215). This concern in past decades and centuries manifested itself in direct actions and outreach to assist the poor. For Massaro, directly helping the poor is not the way of the future for Catholics and the Catholic Church. He accepts a politicized battle against poverty for the America of the twenty-first century. Massaro completes the book with reflections and advice on how the Catholic Church, its associations, and members can have greater impact in the political arena.

Massaro's vision on the role of the Church is uninspiring. Should not the role of the Church shift, at least in part, from government policy advocacy to direct assistance to the poor? Could there be at least a partial revival of robust outreach to the poor, such as

Mother Cabrini's founding of hospitals, schools, and support organizations around the turn of the twentieth century? Or must Catholics be relegated to distributing flyers urging the eligible to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit on their tax returns?

I do recommend *United States Welfare Policy*. We should try hard to understand the perspective of those with whom we disagree. Massaro's presentation is well-organized and clear. He presents a policy perspective that is embraced by many inside and outside the Catholic Church. Those who agree and those who disagree with Massaro's vision of assistance to the poor will benefit from engaging his perspective.

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## Can a Health-Care Market Be Moral? A Catholic Vision

**Mary J. McDonough**

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007 (256 pages)

Mary J. McDonough promises the right things: a review of health-care economics for nonspecialists, consideration of arguments for and against markets in health care, and a system reformed according to principles of Catholic social teaching, with a *nuanced* (theologians' favorite word) place for the market. She rightly points past the sterile market versus government dichotomy in health-care financing and delivery. The right question, she correctly argues, is which mixture of markets and regulations would optimize realization of fundamental Catholic social principles in the health-care realm.

That these promises are only partially fulfilled is the combined result of their loftiness and the limitations of a book derived from a dissertation. McDonough is correct that Catholic theologians (this book comes from that camp) have been unsophisticated about markets and that this failing is particularly true of the theological ethics of medicine and health-care policy. Thus, she is to be applauded both for the undertaking and for keeping an open mind about markets. Yet, her book never quite marries theology and economics. It stays at a relatively theoretical level in economics rather than citing or examining technical studies of markets in medical care. This strategy keeps the book accessible to a wide range of readers, but renders its conclusions ultimately unsatisfying.

At the same time, neither does McDonough venture into technical theology or a critical analysis of texts or concepts in Catholic social theory. Thus, the book is quite accessible to nontheologians, though theologians and Catholic ethicists will find its treatment of Catholic social theory (CST) sketchy.

Chapter 1 is a standard, but competently done, review of the history and principal concepts of Catholic social doctrine. The core of the chapter describes the unfolding of this teaching in the encyclicals, beginning with *Rerum Novarum* and concluding with *Centesimus Annus*, with an excursion into the United States for the U.S. bishops' economic pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*. Although McDonough makes human dignity the