

to justify their existence on the basis that they address social issues and do charitable work.” Rather, “business corporations already enhance the common good ‘by providing needed goods and services, and creating wealth’” (134–35).

This volume is a much-needed corrective to the overwhelming consensus of ecumenical bodies making their pronouncements about “justice, peace, and the integrity of creation” as it comes to expression in such statements as the Belhar and Accra Confessions. At the moment, Bradley’s is only one small clear voice in the midst of a cacophony of noisy, self-proclaimed ecumenical “prophets” who are really only “sounding gongs and clashing cymbals.” The faithful, however, live in hope, knowing that ultimately God’s truth will triumph and that their calling is simply to bear witness to the truth.

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The Moral Dynamics of Economic Life: An Extension and Critique of *Caritas in Veritate*

Daniel K. Finn (Editor)

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Within the Catholic academic world and among those who share the distinction of being “professional Catholics” (i.e., those whose paychecks come from bishops conferences, diocesan chancelleries, or Catholic nongovernmental organizations), there is a hermeneutical game called “reading the pope to find that he shares my political opinions.” It starts with taking a papal social encyclical and combing through it for sentences that match one’s own way of thinking about politics or economics. When the reader comes across papal statements that are opposed to or cast doubt on his opinions, he can either ignore them or try to explain them away as unimportant or historically contingent—or simply disagree, because, after all, the Church is not “political.” In any case, his opinions remain blessedly intact and may now even have a seal of papal approval, which makes them even less prone to reexamination or revision.

To be sure, this is not the intention behind papal social encyclicals that as manifestations of Jesus Christ’s salvific mission through his Church should have the conversion of hearts and minds as their objective. No one who pays attention to the “professional Catholic” world can deny the existence of this hermeneutic, and there are probably very few people who have changed their political opinions due to an encyclical. Despite the high-minded tone and style of the encyclicals, the partisan rancor surrounding their interpretation can be unedifying, to say the least. Perhaps, though, there is something to be learned from the partisan way of reading about the interaction between religion and politics in general, and especially between Catholicism (with its teaching and doctrinal authority in the office of the papacy), and modern liberal democracy as it exists in the United States.

The search for such insight is one reason to look to *The Moral Dynamics of Economic Life: An Extension and Critique of Caritas in Veritate*. The book is a collection of contributions to a symposium cosponsored by the Institute of Advanced Catholic Studies of the University of Southern California and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which was held in Rome on October 2010. The symposium aimed to examine the American reception of Pope Benedict XVI's first social encyclical, which was published in July 2009 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, perhaps the most contentious of modern social encyclicals on the question of international social and economic development. (In the spirit of full disclosure, I am a former staffer of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and from the United States, though I was not invited to and did not take part in the symposium.)

Unlike most post-conference collections that simply publish submitted papers, *The Moral Dynamics of Economic Life* attempts to synthesize the contributions from the participants along thematic lines such as "The Theological Grounding of *Caritas in Veritate*," "Markets and Government," "Reciprocity in Economic Life," "Polarization," and "Language and the Orientation to Dialogue." Each chapter has short excerpts from several papers, making the book read as though one were listening to a discussion among the authors. It is a bit of a trick, however: The papers were previously submitted and distributed but not read at the symposium in order to facilitate a discussion that is not recorded in the volume. It is unfortunate that what appears to be the record of an open and frank discussion of the encyclical is more the result of the adept editing of submitted papers. The introduction tells us that Michael Novak and Alan Wolfe did not attend the symposium, so we are left wondering whether their contributions were discussed at all.

The trick is a relatively harmless and minor one because the main point that this reviewer takes away from the collection is just how intransigent partisan readings of religious tenets seem to be. Many of the contributors point out that this or that aspect of the encyclical is the "key" one and as far as anyone can say, they could all be right (with the exception, that is, of Luk Bouckaert, who complains about the "glaring absence of interreligious and interspiritual [*sic*] dialogue" in the encyclical and seems to think the pope need not be Catholic). John L. Allen of the *National Catholic Reporter* writes in his contribution, "The first wave of Catholic commentary on Pope Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* was striking, but not because the verdict was mixed.... One was instead struck by how preexisting ideological filters seemed to drive competing perceptions." As the only reporter at a symposium made up almost entirely of academics, Allen reveals more of the commonsensical or "everyman's" reaction to the encyclical that professors often neglect—to their intellectual disadvantage. For instance, the everyman knows that in every Catholic diocese in the United States, if not in every Catholic parish, there is a political divide between the pro-life and social-justice factions, each of which interpret papal teachings differently. Indeed, the one great innovation of *Caritas in Veritate* is, in Allen's words, "the integration of anthropology and social ethics—the integration of *Humanae vitae* [Paul VI's encyclical that rejected artificial means of contraception] and *Populorum*

progressio [the same pope's encyclical that promoted integral human development and increased foreign aid at the international level].”

Benedict's encyclical therefore tries to reconcile the political divide not by ignoring or even transcending it but by engaging the partisan readings just as they are: partial truths that ultimately fall short of the whole truth about man and God but still remain true. Take the pro-life/social-justice split. One side is right to say that the unborn deserve the protection of the law and the other that there are collective, social obligations to the poor and needy. In fact, Benedict says, being pro-life does not and cannot exclude social justice and its concerns about poverty, and social justice is unworthy of its name if it does not address the evil of abortion. The two sides explicitly disagree not only about the means (i.e., using the power of the law) to bring about the end desired by the opposing “party,” but also about the priority given the end itself. To make matters worse, there is often more unity with political bedfellows of different churches than within the individual churches themselves. Therefore the question is: Why has not a pro-life/social-justice convergence taken place within the Church?

One reason is that partisans do not recognize that their truths are partial and in need of completion. As a result, small ancient republics saw partisans as destructive of the common good. The nature of modern republics, however, is to enlarge their size and counter “faction with faction” in the words of James Madison in Federalist Number 10. As Michael Novak notes in his contribution to the symposium, Americans have tended to rely on competition in politics and business rather than broad appeals to virtue to achieve the common good, but what happens when competition and partisanship are criticized as such, as they often are by academics and religious leaders? Would not the partisan start to see his view as the only “nonpartisan” one and therefore worthy of universal assent? The problem then becomes a lack, rather than an excess, of partisanship followed by timid complacency in thought and action.

Another explanation for partisan readings is the confusion between matters of principle and matters of prudence within Catholic social teaching itself. One cannot be a pro-choice Catholic at the level of principle, but there can be much discussion and even disagreement about the best ways to regulate commercial activity. Even though he once remarked that social democracy is more in line with Catholic social teaching than its liberal variant, the former Cardinal Ratzinger also said that some social teachings of great importance to the Church, such as those opposed to capital punishment and war, do not require the same level of adherence among the faithful as those condemning abortion and euthanasia. Partisans see their own preferences as principles, those of their opponents as expedient.

Finally, of course, there are the peculiarities of the American political scene that have resulted in the extinction of the pro-life Democrat, thereby exacerbating partisan readings of Catholic teaching. (See the article “Democrats, Republicans, and Abortion” in the Fall 2005 issue of *The Human Life Review* for a fascinating look at how this came to be politically.)

Catholic social teaching is often called “the Church’s best-kept secret” by its advocates, and I think this volume is one example of why that is the case. There are many interesting takes on *Caritas in Veritate*, such as Michael Naughton’s emphasis on the logic of gift and what it could mean in terms of the American fascination with “earned success,” but this is nothing new. Theologians and philosophers over the centuries have written about the paradoxes of pride and humility, charity and justice, and, at its best, Catholic social teaching should remind us of these and help us live more faithful lives. If Catholic social teaching remains the purview of academics who disdain or simply do not understand the political world in which they live, no one should be surprised when that world is run by people who are ignorant of Church teaching. At the same time and as we can now see, the political activity of Catholics will be meaningless, even destructive, for the well-being of society if those same Catholics are not well-formed in doctrine and in their interior lives.

As mentioned above, the United States uses competitive checks and balances, and focuses on commercial activity to achieve a certain type of common good at the political level, and it does so without overt public appeals to virtue or religious dogma, despite a great reliance on these in the people. This state of affairs is, in fact, a unique contribution of modern political thought, coming from thinkers such as Machiavelli, Locke, Montesquieu, Smith, and one that the Catholic Church, for obvious reasons, had been very reluctant to accept. This reluctance has not and may never be fully overcome, but it ought to be clear that most Church leaders now support and even try to ennoble liberal society through Catholic social teaching. The success of this endeavor will depend on taking liberalism and partisanship seriously, instead of wishing that the messy political realities of this world never existed.

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A Free People’s Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future

Os Guinness

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That our republic suffers from disorder and decay is no secret. The moral and economic order appears increasingly chaotic and lacks a deeper meaning. The country, bitterly divided politically, cannot agree on the purpose of freedom. Frustration has turned into increased political activism and fragmentation, and perhaps the only national agreed-upon principle is that people feel increasingly separated from their own government.

The current year (2012) has seen some like-minded books published to address the magnitude of the crisis we face. Sound thinkers such as Arthur Brooks and Rev. Robert Sirico have offered up, respectively, *The Road to Freedom* and *Defending the Free Market*. They are, without a doubt, worthwhile examinations of economics and our moral order. While there is no dearth of books to address our problems and its root causes, perhaps