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Published version. *Theological Studies*, (December 1, 2001). DOI. © 2001 Theological Studies, Inc.
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PUBLIC CATHOLICISM: AN AMERICAN PROSPECT

THOMAS HUGHSON, S.J.

[Interaction between Catholicism and public life in the United States is nothing new. Nor is this local church's concern for the poor. Can that concern, evident from the historical record and from public-opinion research, become a public advocacy of racial, social, and environmental justice in the U.S.? Normative and empirical considerations suggest that it is possible, but not inevitable, in view of indirect influence from the Puritan heritage upon American Catholic self-understanding.]

PUBLIC CATHOLICISM in the United States has a storied past and a lively present. What about its future? I will explore that question with recourse to public opinion research.¹ A brief prologue focuses the question.

American Catholics have entered civil and political life in three styles distinguished by David J. O'Brien.² Civic-republicans (John Carroll, John Courtney Murray, U.S. bishops' pastoral letters) correlate discipleship and citizenship. Interest-groups (Legion of Decency, USCC lobbying on parochial schools, Catholic League) press Catholic causes. An evangelical style (Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Pax Christi) appeals directly to the New Testament. Without displacing these or other models, Vatican II nonetheless ushered in a renewed Catholicism that is a "public church"³ as a whole

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¹ I wish to thank the fellows and staff at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate for sharing their social-scientific resources generally and their comments on a draft of this article. Likewise at Georgetown University, the Woodstock Theological Center fellows and staff, also made helpful observations. Si Hendry, S.J., doctoral candidate at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley commented on an earlier version; Donald Gelpi, S.J., emeritus professor at JSTB, provided stimulating insights. My research shaped a presentation given at a conference "Social Justice: Jubilee 2000" held at Newman University, Wichita, Kansas.

² David J. O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996).

³ See Martin Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Michael J.

and on the basis of official ecclesiology, not because of public initiatives by some individuals, groups and movements with Catholic principles.

Renewal has involved a number of theological perspectives: a more positive Church/world relation; a communion ecclesiology attentive to the local church; episcopal collegiality; hope for Christian unity; solidarity with humanity, especially those suffering. Together they encourage lay and clerical engagement with public concerns as a normal aspect of faith. Engagement seeks the common good of society according to the universality in Christ's love for humanity, rather than the particularity of church membership.⁴ It belongs to what Bernard Lonergan considered a "redemptive action of the church in the modern world," part of "Christian service to human society to bring about the kingdom of God."⁵ What will be the future of that service in and to the United States?

Its past was often characterized by traits that Michael and Kenneth Himes underlined, "respect for the legitimate autonomy of other social institutions . . . , acceptance of some responsibility for the well-being of the wider society . . . commitment to work with other social institutions in shaping the common good of the society."⁶ Renewal has resulted too in particular initiatives that link faith with justice on parish, diocesan and national levels but, equally significant, has led in principle to a "public church, a church whose mission encompasses advocacy for just structures in civil society,"⁷ with a focus on the poor, marginalized and oppressed.⁸ In 1970, for example, the bishops of the United States launched the Campaign for Human Development. In 1972 they brought advocacy for justice alongside charity in the mission of Catholic Charities USA, and in 1986 published *Economic Justice For All*.⁹ Might completion of Jubilee 2000 begin a *kairos* in which the future of public Catholicism in this country becomes an object for consideration, deliberation and choice, a new expression of

Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993) chap. 1, "The Public Church and Public Theology"; Mary E. Hines, "Ecclesiology for a Public Church: The United States Context," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 53 (2000) 23–46.

⁴ See John A. Coleman, S.J., ed., *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991); and Marvin Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1998).

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972) 362.

⁶ Himes and Himes, *Fullness of Faith* 2.

⁷ Mary E. Hines, "Ecclesiology for a Public Church" 25.

⁸ José Casanova argues that, in modern societies, public religion with prophetic willingness to question the frameworks and ideas operative within major institutional spheres contributes to protecting human dignity and rights against tendencies toward enforcing various kinds of absolutism (*Public Religions in the Modern World* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994]).

⁹ See Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, chaps. 11–13.

how Catholics in the United States enter into divine purposes invoked by “Thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer at every Eucharist?

A deliberated, chosen future concretizes Christian hope along a definite, contingent path of realization. Theology can explore that specification of hope by reflecting on its normative meaning and empirical potential. So, in a first step, the following formulation refines and specifies the question about the future of public Catholicism in the United States. *Is it too much to hope that public Catholicism will become a civil constituency¹⁰ for racial,¹¹ social,¹² and environmental justice oriented toward common witness¹³ with other Christians?¹⁴* The formula, “racial, social and environmental justice,” will be kept throughout for the sake of continual reference to the singularity of race in matters of social justice,¹⁵ and as a formal reminder

¹⁰ “Civil constituency” refers to free association based on social goals and a cooperative exercise of citizenship on behalf of society’s common good by means of an option for the poor exercised also outside strictly political acts like voting. Michael Novak provides an important discussion of civil society as milieu and object of social justice. A limit is omission of factors and forces tilting the playing field against the poor, women, and racial minorities (“Social Justice Redefined: Pius XI,” in *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [New York: Macmillan, 1993] chap. 3).

¹¹ While racial justice logically belongs within social justice as one of its subsets, logical implication and indirect promotion of racial justice through social justice has failed to reckon with the bias of White supremacy in American Catholic theology, pastoral teaching, and ecclesial practice (Bryan N. Massingale, “James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism,” *Theological Studies* 61 [2000] 700–30). Catholics in the U.S.A. are 78% White, 16% Hispanic, 3% Black, 2% Asian, and 1% Native American (Bryan T. Froehle, Mary Gautier, *Catholicism USA: A Portrait of the Catholic Church in the United States* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000] 16–19).

¹² Respect for the physical, natural environment belongs with racial and social justice but will not be treated separately here. Nevertheless, a culture of justice remains incomplete without consideration of the sources and consequences of modern relations with physical nature in reference to a model of knowledge as domination that has also caused injustice to women.

¹³ Common witness is “the witness that the churches, even while separated, bear together, especially through joint efforts, by manifesting whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share and experience in common” (Tom Stransky, “Common Witness,” *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. [Geneva: WCC, 1991] 197–200, at 197). Common Christian witness does not exclude or pre-empt common religious witness.

¹⁴ In effect, this would learn from, if not adopt outright, the Canadian Catholic model. Donna Geernaert reminded delegates at the convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America that, “the Catholic Church in Canada over the past thirty years has tended to seek ecumenical partners for collaborative research and effective advocacy in issues of social justice” (“A Response to Mary Hines,” *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 53 [2000] 47–54, at 49).

¹⁵ See the articles by Diana L. Hayes, M. Shawn Copeland, Cyprian Davis,

that human justice is inextricably connected with relationships to earth, water, land and the physical cosmos. Gender equity will be understood as an inherent part of social justice. But formal consideration of racial and environmental elements will have to occur on another occasion. Similarly, treatment of common witness in cooperative citizenship will be deferred though questions for ecumenical dialogue preparing for common witness conclude this article.

POTENTIAL FOR ADVOCACY?

Is hope specified in terms of public advocacy for racial, social and environmental justice something American Catholics can consider appropriate and realistic for further discussion, deliberation and choice? I suggest it will be appropriate if it is at all congruent with the actual condition of lived Catholicism in the United States. It will be inappropriate, though perhaps a beguiling utopian image, if there is no potential in lived Catholicism for its realization short of a massive, collective moral miracle suddenly altering millions of minds, something not part of Jesus' own or the apostles' post-resurrection public ministry and not a theologically reasonable basis for pastoral plans proceeding in awareness that the miraculous is one thing, deepening conversion in a large, local church quite another. Answering the question about actual, empirical potential involves learning from the social sciences without abdicating the primacy of faith.¹⁶

O.S.B., Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., and Bryan N. Massingale in *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (2000), an issue devoted to "The Catholic Reception of Black Theology." These articles support and amplify James H. Cone's 30-year-old critique of theological silence by White Catholics regarding White supremacy in its everyday oppression through cultural codes and institutionalized practices. See also Cone's, "Black Liberation Theology and Black Catholics: A Critical Conversation," in the same issue of *TS*.

¹⁶ See the essays in *Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict*, ed. David Martin, John Orme Mills, W.S.F. Pickering (New York: St. Martin's, 1980). However, according to John Milbank, theology betrays itself and Christianity by imbibing social science—but not historiography—as an irreligious knowledge of social relations that forsakes the Church's own original, divinely initiated and sustained renewal of human existence as the only source for social knowledge (*Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1994]). Joseph A. Komonchak's brilliant use of social theory as an ecclesiological resource would be lost under Milbank's veto of social science (*Foundations in Ecclesiology, Supplementary Issue of the Lonergan Workshop*, ed. Fred Lawrence, vol. 11 [Boston: Boston College, 1995]). And yet I agree with Milbank's affirmation of the primacy and ultimacy of Church, discipleship, and faith in interpreting, criticizing and ordering all other kinds of knowledge of social relations. That differs, however, from a primacy as cause or source of all other social knowledge. Noetically generative primacy does not belong to the mortal, pilgrim condition of faith, though who

Theological inquiry on a future for public Catholicism and potential for it instantiates (and transforms) typical acts of conscious intentionality by which any person or group deliberates on a social future. Insofar as grass-roots initiatives, local plans and episcopal governance of the Church involve discussion, deliberation and decision, there is some analogy between processes inside the Church and public policy formation in civil and political society.¹⁷ Both exemplify self-transcendence in action, in being attentive to facts, in seeking to understand them, in reflecting on various understandings to assay their truth, in taking responsibility in decision for truth affirmed. Lonergan was not oblivious to either side of the analogy in *Method in Theology*. Chapter 2 on “The Human Good” addresses public processes in civil and political society as instances of self-transcendence that can give rise to social progress.¹⁸ Chapter 14 on “Communications” adverts to “modern pluralist democracies” with “governments that perform legislative, executive, judicial and administrative functions” that “when well run . . . promote the good of order within society.”¹⁹

Because a “redemptive process” of undoing alienation that refuses self-transcendence and loosening up ideology that justifies alienation “has to be exercised in the church and in society generally” both Church and state have a need for “ends . . . to be selected and priorities determined”²⁰ in view of factual conditions and available resources. “Plans have to be drawn up,”²¹ implemented then evaluated in view of adjustments or revisions. In a democratic polity, for example, communicated acts of conscious intentionality by citizens and their representatives become the public discourse essential to active participation in democratic processes that prepares for

knows if it does not belong to beatific vision among the blessed, or in small doses, to some infused mystical knowledge. For a respectful yet critical analogy between Milbank and Barth, see Gregory Baum, “For and Against John Milbank,” in *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994). See also a “Review Symposium on John Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory*,” *Philosophy and Theology* 9 (1996) 419–59, with essays by Anthony J. Godzieba, John Berkman, Frederick Bauerschmidt, William P. Loewe, and Paul Lakeland.

¹⁷ A crucial difference between analogy and identity keeps me chary of “democratizing” the structures of the Church as a way to give institutional presence to the principle of Christian freedom. If there has been assimilation of monarchic tendencies remedy does not lie in adopting another political model. Vatican II etched the church and state difference more deeply than ever, and that includes the church and democratic state difference that Murray had argued in *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1960). Kenneth D. Wald explains Puritan insights into human sinfulness that inspired America’s founders with wariness about majority rule and led them to institutional checks and balances. (*Religion and Politics in the United States*, 3rd ed. [Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997]).

¹⁸ *Method in Theology* 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 361.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 364.

²¹ *Ibid.*

eventual policy decisions on, for example, campaign finance reform. American civil society steers its political course and debates its future insofar as citizens and representatives engage and express their conscious intentionality.

Loneragan describes four kinds of basic human acts that people communicate when making a valid contribution to public discourse:

Being attentive includes attention to human affairs. Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities. Being reasonable includes the rejection of what probably would not work but also the acknowledgment of what probably would. Being responsible includes basing one's decisions and choices on an unbiased evaluation of short-term and long-term costs and benefits to oneself, to one's group, to other groups.²²

Communication of these sorts of acts by citizens and officials constitutes a public discourse that sets a public, accessible context for the less accessible debates on public policy among elected legislators and executives. The policies shape but do not fully determine the social future. As part of the citizenry Catholic Americans too enter into this process of communication. To the extent that their faith modifies the worldview within which they attend to, inquire into, reflect on and evaluate public issues, they exercise a *de facto* public Catholicism.

These same kinds of acts can and do occur inside the Church too. Catholics can attend to the present condition of public Catholicism, think about its latent possibilities, reckon their feasibility and decide on a future. This is not to propose or presuppose that a single organized voice, uniform view, or political perspective presently obtains among American Catholics. Nor does it postulate an already existing institutional forum or set of procedures enabling American Catholics to exchange, deliberate, decide, and represent views on public matters (though that seems worth considering).²³ It does assume that religious faith modifies its adherents' worldview and to that extent generates a somewhat common self-understanding whose basic perspectives bear on public issues, admitting that on concrete issues application of the perspectives may be widely divergent on practical options.

When it comes to the act of conscious intentionality that is being attentive to human affairs in the United States, I take it for granted that public Catholicism cannot look away from the need for racial, social and environmental justice. With that as a given, the broad question about the future of public Catholicism grasps one of the "unnoticed or unrealized possibilities." Then, in a next step, conscious intentionality moves into reflective

²² *Ibid.* 53.

²³ Mary Hines suggests a plenary council, "to deliberate on issues of importance to the American church" (45). Public Catholicism would be an apt issue for a plenary council in the spirit of the Common Ground Initiative, though not on a premise of democratizing the Church.

consideration of whether the possibility envisaged would “work” or not. Would it be theologically reasonable to hope that American Catholics can develop into a civil constituency advocating racial, social and environmental justice? It would be unreasonable to follow an unworkable plan. Here workable and reasonable mean theologically suitable, in the sense of appropriate to the sources and tradition of faith which seems in this case to be clearly so, and reasonable in the sense that sufficient potential for its achievement exists that further deliberations and planning bear some likelihood of being effective.

The pragmatic question arises, and is theologically appropriate, because public Catholicism in the United States, or in any nation, does not have an angelic Christian existence with innumerable abstract possibilities perennially before it. To the contrary, relations between Catholic faith and any culture, whether North American, Eastern European or African, lodge within the self-understanding of Catholics in that local church. The relation between faith and culture has internal dimensions that are definite. Simultaneous participation in the Church and in the culture weaves the meanings and values in social, economic and political structures into the fabric of a person’s and a local church’s life of faith. Consequently, for example, Catholics participating in American culture, society, economic life, and politics have acquired religio-cultural predispositions that make one or another pastoral strategy more or less likely to engage self-transcending faith and an inculturated life in the Spirit at the level of people’s historically-effected yet spontaneous self-understanding.²⁴ Something similar holds for Eastern European and sub-Saharan African Catholics.

The logic of inquiry so far is simple. First, what does it mean to ask about the specified hope for public Catholicism? Then, second, what is the potential for its realization? Condition 1 is the present reality of American Catholicism. Condition 2 is a future condition of the specific sort already formulated in terms of racial, social and environmental justice. What is the potential in condition 1 for it to become condition 2? The next section will begin to answer that with recourse to findings from social science.

AN EMPIRICAL PRINCIPLE IN THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Lonergan adverts to the “empirical principle” that “there are no true factual judgments without a foundation in relevant data.”²⁵ Relevant data

²⁴ John Coleman has explained why an attempt to promote public Catholicism in America on the model of European Catholic Action does not suit external conditions and internal predispositions of American Catholicism (*An American Strategic Theology* [New York: Paulist, 1982]).

²⁵ Bernard Lonergan, “Moral Theology and the Human Sciences,” *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 15 (1997) 5–20.

are part of answering any question and are an obvious element in acquiring knowledge of any sort. Accordingly, data from social-scientific, public opinion research will be gathered to help ground a judgment on whether condition 1, American Catholicism today, has potential to become condition 2, public Catholicism acting as a civil constituency for racial, social, and environmental justice. Data from public opinion research invites theology to 'read' over the shoulders of social scientists what research discloses about attitudes pertaining to social justice operative in everyday American Catholic action and interaction.²⁶ "Social justice," however, is not a phrase that public opinion research puts into the questions it asks, and seldom occurs in interpretations that more often refer to "economic inequality," "economic equality," "government assistance to the poor," etc.²⁷ What idea of social justice will guide gathering and, to a limited extent, interpreting this data?

Social Justice

Extensive, valuable emphasis on social justice as a dimension of and path toward a common good leaves room for compensatory accent on social justice as a way of common truth, a practice of truth. Some common meaning and truth underlie practical and theoretical agreement on a common good. Operative agreement on a common good and its procedures that has no presupposed acquiescence in some judgments of truth, including factual judgments, is a chimera—where does it or has it existed? To the contrary and about the United States, for example, John Courtney Murray argued the length and breadth of his career on behalf of attention to a consensus on some truths that underlies social and political life according to the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Democratic institutions and

²⁶ David Miller argues the stronger methodological claim that developing a general theory of social justice does best to work with, though not entirely from, how people actually think about matters of justice, as this can be learned from empirical public opinion research. Without foregoing normative philosophical analysis and justification, Miller notes that learning what people actually think follows Aristotle in listening to and clarifying public opinion rather than proceeds according to Plato's contrast between truth and public opinion (*Principles of Social Justice* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1999] chap. 2).

²⁷ One exception, using a vocabulary of "social teachings," is James D. Davidson et al., *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997); see also *Catholicism USA*, chap. 5, where the concept of "social services" covers institutions and agencies (e.g. hospitals, the St. Vincent De Paul Society, Catholic Charities USA, the Campaign for Human Development) that, taken together, do represent a significant part of the breadth in Catholic response to social problems due to social injustice, even though the stated motives in many instances center on charity.

justice under law depend on a limited, prior consensus not only that the common good comprises public order, prosperity, and the moral norms basic to both, but on national agreement with those few truths given enduring expression by the Declaration of Independence and then embodied in the legal and political order erected on the Constitution and Bill of Rights. In Murray's analysis, public discourse on the common good of the nation cannot but involve and depend on the tacit, formative presence of prior acquiescence in those judgments of truth that he called the "public philosophy" or "public consensus."²⁸

"We hold these truths . . .," it can be said in reliance on Murray, grounds and shapes what Lonergan calls the "institutional basis" for a "good of order"²⁹ that makes possible recurrent attainment of particular, concrete goods by citizens. Likewise, Lonergan's analysis of common meaning as the formal constituent of community points to common experiences, common understanding, common true judgments, and on that basis, decisions in and by a community. Might it not be the case that social-ethical attention to the common good sometimes treats it as if independent of common understanding and common truth when it comes to social justice? Agreeing with Murray and Lonergan on the formative role of true judgments held in common leads to emphasis on social justice as a practice formed by true judgments and as an outcome that proportions structures of cooperation to basic aspects of humanity grasped as true.

Social justice is personal practice and social institutionalization of three true judgments: (1) that all human persons are equal in dignity, (2) that human nature is intrinsically social, and (3) that institutions or structures of cooperation enter deeply into social and personal existence. The first two have long been part of Catholic philosophical and ecclesiastical tradition, are interwoven into social Catholicism yet by themselves are not social justice. The third is the least widely affirmed and may not be a common element in what social scientists have identified as a "Catholic difference." And yet precisely knowing and acting on the third true judgment give new effect to the first two. Bryan Hehir remarks that Catholic social teaching advanced beyond legal or general justice and into social justice³⁰ precisely because of insight into the "structured organization of society" and an

²⁸ John Courtney Murray, "E Pluribus Unum: The American Consensus"; "Two Cases for the Public Consensus: Fact or Need"; and "The Origins and Authority of the Public Consensus: A Study of the Growing End," (*We Hold These Truths* 27–43, 79–96, and 97–123).

²⁹ *Method in Theology* 47–55 passim.

³⁰ Likewise, Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J., emphasizes that social justice developed out of "general justice" covering all aspects of an individual's relation to the good of society, rather than as an equivalent to distributive justice in the economic sphere alone ("Social Justice," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 13 [Washington, 1967] 318–20).

associated stress on “the need to shape the institutional patterns of social life in accord with the demands of justice so that commutative and distributive justice may be more easily fulfilled.”³¹ Insight into the structured organization of society and a judgment that this belongs to social existence can shape the meanings of personal and interpersonal interaction. Yet without insight into how structures of cooperation affect persons and the common good, social justice is missing in action.

Social justice relates these truths to the common good of a society according to an option for the poor. The outcome sought is a social order whose institutions and structures enable all persons to participate in the cultural, social, civil, economic and political life of a society. To the extent that social justice is lacking, Christian hope expressed in “Thy kingdom come!” becomes an orientation to an alternative social order respecting truths about our humanity that the gospel also affirms and deepens. Social justice can be defined as personal and social practice of truth about our humanity, for the sake of a practical proportion between these truths (equality in dignity, intrinsically social, intrinsically structural) and participation in cultural, social, civil, economic, and political institutions. Social justice institutes and maintains societal structures that allow practical expression of being created in the image of God.

Its basic political dimension consists at present in the nation-state being the usual precondition. The dynamics of globalization³² give it an international aspect as well.³³ David Miller identifies a bounded society with a determinate membership as one of three conditions for the possibility of social justice. Another is an “identifiable set of institutions whose impact on the life chances of individuals can be traced,” and a third is some means capable of changing that set of institutional structures toward social justice.³⁴ Contrary to Thomas Gilby who earlier had held that the expanded presence of the state in many spheres of life, an affair of citizens no less than of government officials, “marks the specific difference of social justice,”³⁵ Michael Novak locates that difference not in a relation to the state but first of all in “an inner capacity to form associations for the sake of

³¹ Bryan Hehir, “Social Justice,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, gen. ed. Richard McBrien (New York: HarperCollins, 1995) 1203–4, at 1204.

³² See T. Howland Sanks, S.J., “Globalization and the Church’s Social Mission,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 625–51.

³³ The outstanding work of the International Social Justice Project acquires international data on popular perceptions of social justice (*Social Justice and Political Change: Public Opinion in Capitalist and Post-Communist States*, ed. James R. Kluegel et al. [New York: de Gruyter, 1995]).

³⁴ Miller, *Principles of Social Justice* 4–6.

³⁵ Thomas Gilby, O.P., “Social Justice,” in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, ed. P. K. Meagher, O.P., et al. (Washington: Corpus, 1979) 3331–32, at 3332.

improving the community³⁶ . . . the capacity to cooperate with others . . . in achieving ends that benefit society either in part or as a whole³⁷ by joining with others to change the institutions of society.³⁸ His expected result is that the poor and excluded will be able to join the nation's work-force or preferably to initiate small businesses.

A social aspect is not only implied by the state but has to do with certain kinds of goods. Miller and others point to the distribution of social goods, like access to education, and to social burdens like military conscription, that are outside the economic sphere.³⁹ The economic aspect of social justice concerns the relation of members of a society to the production and distribution of goods and services, is the aspect apparently most investigated by public opinion research, and is sometimes treated as distributive justice. The personal aspect of social justice is its being a quality in persons insofar as they act according to and participate in the three truths. The cultural aspect concerns the presence or absence of basic truths about our humanity as an unofficial common gauge of social justice guiding or failing to guide people's participation in society's institutions. Racism and White supremacy, for example, are instances of culturally embedded refusals of those truths as principles that guide practice according to structures of cooperation.

Catholic tradition envisions a socially just condition as the presence, due to no single law or administrative procedure, of an overall quality throughout the whole of a society in which exercise of liberty respects justice, counteracts economic forces tending toward structural exploitation, and enables people "to participate in the economic, social and political life of the community."⁴⁰ But it includes affirmation of the three truths listed above.

³⁶ Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 187.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 191.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 77–78. He shapes his approach in response to Friederick Hayek's criticism that "social justice" confuses a mortal virtue with a regulative principle inherent in a social order. For a brief critique of Hayek's premises, see David Johnston, "Is the Idea of Social Justice Meaningful?" *Critical Review* 11 (Fall, 1997) 607–14. For a refutation of Hayek's claim that the idea of social justice presumes some single agent regulating the market, see David Miller, *Principles of Social Justice* 107–10.

³⁹ *The Encyclopedia of Ethics* says that "[s]ocial justice refers to fair distribution of social goods and equal respect before the law. . . ." ("Social justice and responsibility," [n.a.] in ed. J. K. Roth [Pasadena, Calif.: Salem, 1994] 3.818).

⁴⁰ Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching* 317. Duncan B. Forrester sums up social justice in Catholic teaching as "a quality of relationships which are just in as far as they affirm human dignity and encourage mutuality and participation." ("Justice" in *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. P. B. Clarke and A. Linzey [New York: Routledge, 1996] 501–4, at 504). He attaches "a priority for the poor, the excluded and the marginalized which is clearly derived from the Biblical tradition." Likewise, Gilby refers to "the maintenance of inalienable rights . . . to life, security, intellectual and religious freedom, family privacy, and . . . work according to one's capacity" as essential to social justice. ("Social Justice" 3332).

Data

What can be said about American Catholics and social justice on the basis of data from social-scientific research, not merely according to casual anecdotes?⁴¹ A point of orientation is the important study, *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans*.⁴² The authors' research found that religious conviction in favor of helping the needy was the single most commonly held element in Catholic identity and a major point of union among Catholic Americans.⁴³ 77% of those surveyed agreed strongly that, "[h]elping the needy is an important part of my religious beliefs," and another 20% agreed somewhat. Only 3% either disagreed somewhat or strongly.⁴⁴ 93% of American Catholics scored at least a medium acceptance of Catholic social teachings (51% high, 42% medium).

Similarly, the highly respected Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate reported in *Catholicism USA: A Portrait of the Catholic Church in the United States* that their survey data too showed 97% said "[h]elping those in need" was an important element in their Catholic identity. This exceeded the 91% who said, "[p]assing on the faith to the next generation," and the 80% who said, "attending Mass."⁴⁵ An earlier study had found a direct correlation in Catholics between frequency of church attendance and increasing generosity to the poor.⁴⁶ Moreover, an accumulating body of social-scientific research substantiates the hypothesis of a 'Catholic difference' in, among other things, an unusually high level of readiness to have the government assist the poor.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Andrew Greeley consistently provides data and interpretations that challenge casual stereotypes about, or within, American Catholicism. For instance, his data support an interpretation of some priests' complaints about "lack of generosity, materialism . . . secularism . . . apathy, confusion and lack of principles" as "cliches of clerical culture" that ignore the laity's well-known "spiritual hunger" and desire for "better liturgy, better homilies, better counseling, more compassion and more respect for women" ("A Sea of Paradoxes: Two Surveys of Priests," *America* 171 [July 16, 1994] 106–7).

⁴² James D. Davidson, et al., *The Search for Common Ground*, see above n. 27.

⁴³ There is some racially differentiated survey data on American Catholics. 90% of African-American Catholics of the post-Vatican II generation have a high degree of acceptance of Catholic social teachings. Only the 100% of Asian Americans from the post-Vatican II generation was higher on this. 55% of White, post-Vatican II Catholics had a high degree of acceptance of social teachings (*The Search for Common Ground*, Table 9.4, 167).

⁴⁴ *The Search for Common Ground* 48, 132.

⁴⁵ *Catholicism USA* 27–28.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey A. Will and John K. Cochran, "God Helps Those Who Help Themselves? The Effects of Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, and Deservedness of Generosity Toward the Poor," *Sociology of Religion* 56 (1995) 327–38.

⁴⁷ *Catholicism USA* 34–35.

This finding is not incompatible with official Catholic commitment to political lobbying and popular support for a pro-life position in American social, civil, political and cultural life. Americans at large, research shows, and so presumably Catholics too, form their attitudes on public matters on an issue-by-issue basis that belies rigid adherence to an outlook determined by a single criterion. Indeed, the thread of logic that links a person's or a group's positions on a series of issues is not always obvious or predictable from one of them. This is to say that for most Americans, "liberal" and "conservative" do not "describe whole philosophies of life, systematically applied to a broad range of issues."⁴⁸ Similarly, two hundred in-depth interviews in four middle-class suburbs and survey data led the Middle Class Morality Project to conclude that most Americans actually camp at various places between the front lines of 'culture wars' pitting tradition against modernity.⁴⁹ Thus opposition to abortion is compatible with readiness to have the government assist the poor. In fact, (American) "Catholics are demonstrably more liberal [favor more, not complete, economic equality and accept some, not all conceivable, regulations on market forces] on economic issues" than (American) Protestants.⁵⁰ Apart from being Catholic, "[n]o other religious variable is consistently associated with whether people are liberal or conservative on economic issues."⁵¹ Exploring the

⁴⁸ Stephen Hart, *What Does the Lord Require? How American Christians Think about Economic Justice* (New York: Oxford, 1992) 165.

⁴⁹ Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All: What Americans Really Think About: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, The Right, The Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking, 1998) chaps. 5 and 6.

⁵⁰ Stephen Hart sums up public opinion research to 1992: "*The only religious factor consistently related to economic attitudes is denominational group: Catholics and those with no religious affiliation are consistently but not dramatically more liberal on economic issues*" (*What Does the Lord Require?* 156; italics in original). This is after accounting for class, race, and region as factors. An example of a consistent but not dramatic Catholic variable on economic matters is a General Social Survey finding (1972–1998) of a 3% difference between Catholics (64%) and Protestants (61%) favoring either more or much more government spending on the Head Start program for children (SDA 1.2: Tables, at <http://csa.berkeley.edu:7502/cgi-bin12/hsda3>). Hart also refers to General Social Survey data, 1984–1989, to explode an assumption that mainline Protestants are more liberal on economic matters than religiously traditionalist Protestants. Ralph E. Pyle found that a higher percentage of those believing the Bible is the actual word of God than those believing the Bible is the inspired word of God or is a collection of fables, favored remedying poverty by each of six forms of governmental assistance. His study found "no support for a connection between fundamentalist views of the Bible and conservative attitudes about economic restructuring" ("Faith and Commitment to the Poor: Theological Orientation and Support for Government Assistance Measures," *Sociology of Religion* 54 [1993] 385–401, at 397). After controlling for factors of income, education, race and political affiliation, theological liberalism did not predict "favorable attitudes toward economic restructuring efforts" (398).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

affirmations about human existence that produce the link between Catholic attitudes on abortion (conservative?) and the economy (liberal?) would be worthwhile, but not here where it is enough to note simply that public Catholicism in the contemporary United States is neither single-issue nor single-principle, and that pro-life convictions do not militate against social justice.

Do Americans generally and so Catholics too have attitudes indicating they agree with the substance of social justice, even if not conceived or spoken about as such? Qualitative and quantitative research have found in Americans the following traits pertinent to, but not comprising the whole of, social justice. Americans are (1) religious,⁵² (2) generous,⁵³ (3) want reduced economic inequality,⁵⁴ (4) but not as part of a religious message,⁵⁵

⁵² Susan Mitchell reported that in 1996, 29% said they attended religious services weekly, 16% went one to three times a month, and 37% participated up to several times a month. That means 82% said they go to religious services at least once a month. ("Religious Attendance, 1976–1996," in *American Attitudes: Who Thinks What About the Issues That Shape Our Lives*, second edition [Ithaca, N.Y.: New Strategist Publications, 1998] 227). The source of the data is General Social Surveys, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. Another survey reported that 61% of Americans said religion is "very important" in their lives, another 25% said "fairly important" (George Gallup, Jr., *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1998* [Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999] 242). Again, 82% reported feeling a need to experience spiritual growth in their lives (Princeton Religion Research Center, *Emerging Trends* 20,10 [1998] 1).

⁵³ 63% of Americans donated money to a charitable cause in a 30-day test period, 59% donated goods, and 26% volunteered time in that period (Princeton Religion Research Center, *Emerging Trends* 20, 6 [1998] 4). Frequency of volunteer work, moreover, rises in direct proportion to frequency of church attendance. 29% of those never attending church did volunteer work, while 49% of weekly and 61% of more than weekly church-goers did (Princeton Center for Research in Religion, *Emerging Trends* 21,9 [1999] 4), reporting an *AARP Survey of Civic Involvement*. In a similar vein, Kenneth D. Wald referred to a positive correlation "between church attendance and voter participation," though not political involvement beyond voting (*Religion and Politics in the United States* 317).

⁵⁴ Somewhat less than two-thirds, 63%, opted for better distribution. Since 1984 between 60–65% have consistently expressed an opinion in favor of some redistribution of income and wealth (1998 Gallup Social Audit, *Haves and Have-Nots: Perceptions of Fairness and Opportunity* [www.gallup.com]). Among the three-quarters of the population defining itself as belonging to the "haves," 59% thought some redistribution appropriate. "An Introduction, Haves and Have Nots," summed this up: "Americans generally appear to desire a reduction in the degree of economic inequality in this country" ("5. Opinions About the Distribution of Economic Resources in the U.S.," Question 19, 2).

⁵⁵ James D. Davidson and Ralph E. Pyle found that Christian congregations responded to increased disparity between rich and poor in America, 1965–1995, by deploying their resources in ways that tended to perpetuate rather than challenge economic inequality. Staff devoted to social outreach typically were few, and about

(5) show wariness about government or public policy regulation of economic activity,⁵⁶ (6) want the government to assist the poor,⁵⁷ (7) want assistance mainly by increased availability of education and job training,⁵⁸ (8) harbor suspicion that the poor are the cause of poverty,⁵⁹ (9) want to

5% of other staff time went to it. While some wealthy Protestant and Catholic congregations set aside up to 13% of the total budget for social concerns, a 4–5% allotment was more typical. Apart from donations of money, time, and food, about 5% of lay ministries in congregations focused on social concerns. Most hymns and homilies in worship services celebrated God's material blessings more than they issued prophetic summons for more equality in those blessings. While White and Black parishes and congregations range across a spectrum from a "good fortune theology" welcoming members' prosperity as God's blessing on the righteous to a "social justice theology" calling for more equitable distribution of resources, and most are somewhere in between, more lie toward the "good fortune" end ("Public Religion and Economic Inequality," in *The Power of Religious Publics: Staking Claims in American Society*, ed. William H. Swatos, Jr. and James K. Wellman, Jr. [Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999] 101–14, at 108–9).

⁵⁶ How should government remedy economic inequality? A bare majority, 51%, felt that a progressive income tax was how the government should redistribute wealth, down 3% from those answering the same question in 1939 ("7. Attitudes About What Should Be Done To Help the Have-Nots," *Haves and Have-Nots* 1–4). Desire for more economic equality does not mean desire for structural changes. Two hundred in-depth interviews by the Middle Class Morality Project uncovered "[s]upport in America for a capitalism that includes a prominent role for economic justice . . . [that] is remarkably broad and is as likely to be shared by conservative Christians as by East Coast liberals." And yet, with only around 10% of the workforce in unions, interviewees had no corollary readiness to accept public policy as the means to insure that corporations balance three things people want balanced: (1) self-interest with what benefits the community; (2) employees' obligations to work with those to family; (3) CEO salaries with common sense (Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All* 237).

⁵⁷ Where lies the greatest responsibility for assisting the poor? 32% said the government, 28% pointed to the poor themselves, 14% thought churches, 12% the families of the poor, and 8% other private charities. Should the government make every possible effort to help the poor, or should the poor help themselves? Nearly two-thirds, 65%, said the government should help while less than a third, 29%, wanted the poor to get themselves out of poverty. So 65% wanted the government to assist the poor yet only 32% (above) think government has the primary responsibility for the poor ("Attitudes About What Should Be Done To Help the Have-Nots," *Haves and Have-Nots* 1–2).

⁵⁸ How could government help the poor? A ranked preference among four ways was: (1) more than 2/3rds, 67%, opted for education and training, much more than for any other government assistance, such as 34% for (2) other services like housing, health care, child care, social services or 22% for (3) more job opportunities. Least approved, 19%, was (4) income transfer by financial aid, tax breaks, or a better minimum wage. A total of more than 100% was due to the possibility of choosing more than one (Question 37, *Haves and Have-Nots* 2–3).

⁵⁹ Alan Wolfe discovered that despite an appeal by many to religious belief for

separate the worthy from the unworthy poor.⁶⁰ Taken together these traits indicate a strong, vibrant disposition of general justice among Americans, but (5), (7), (8) and (9) keep this somewhere short of personal practice and social institutions that proportion truth about our humanity with structures enabling participation in social, civil, political, economic and cultural life.⁶¹

What may be most significant about this ensemble of traits is that they can be explained as a single whole by reference to something other than justice of any kind, namely a disposition akin to generosity in almsgiving. This borrows and expands on Alan Wolfe's comment on a middle-class sense of obligation that combines willingness to be taxed to provide welfare with unwillingness to agree that the poor have the least claim upon society for any assistance.⁶² This common combination has, he remarks, a structure of almsgiving not of social justice. This goes a long way toward explaining a mixture of remarkable American benevolence, philanthropy, charity, and generosity toward the poor with denial that anyone deserves assistance. At least one reason for this denial is widespread suspicion that the poor are to blame for poverty.⁶³

“a strong sense of altruism and obligation that no amount of anti-welfare rhetoric could extinguish,” most held just as strongly that those in poverty have no basis in human rights for a claim on any kind or amount of assistance (*One Nation After All* 199). John Tropman argues that data show a widespread suspicion that the poor cause poverty (*The Catholic Ethic in American Society: An Exploration of Values* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995] and *Does America Hate the Poor? The Other American Dilemma: Lessons for the 21st Century from the 1960's and the 1970's* [Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998]).

⁶⁰ Wolfe's interviewees wanted to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving recipients of welfare (*One Nation After All* 199). Max Weber's 'Protestant ethic' implies allocating low social and religious status to the poor since their condition could be seen as the result of personal vice indicative perhaps of divine pre-destination to eternal loss. Hence assistance to the poor risked breaking the causal link between hard work and earthly success. Distinguishing the worthy poor (hard-working, not vice-ridden, probably elect for salvation) from the unworthy became a preoccupation especially in England and the United States (Tropman, *The Catholic Ethic* 41).

⁶¹ There may well be a down-sizing of morality that portends difficulty moving beyond commutative justice to social justice. “For middle-class Americans, the ideal set of obligations are those in which people can monitor the reciprocal impacts of giving and getting, and only small-scale morality can achieve that objective” (Wolfe, *One Nation After All* 297).

⁶² Middle-class suburbanites sharply reject the idea that the poor have a right to welfare. Wolfe interpreted this rejection as indicative of an almsgiving model of relating to the poor, one outside obligations of justice (*ibid.* 199 ff.).

⁶³ There is “clear evidence [survey data] that the public expects the government to be involved in helping to improve the situation of the have-nots in society, mainly through education and job training, rather than through income transfer programs” (Introduction to *Haves and Have-Nots* 7).

Suspicion of the poor arguably has a religious background⁶⁴ in the now secularized implications of Puritan covenant theology according to which, at least in its popular if declining form, work that brought success, wealth, and status could indicate the presence of grace and divine election to salvation. By implication, lack of work, poverty, failure, and low status could indicate absence of grace due to predestination for eternal perdition. Almsgiving might be called for by the Bible, but society could not be too careful about the earmarks of virtue and vice in recipients, lest it run against divine exclusions.

And so the ensemble of nine traits contains a generic preference for an outcome in which the poor are enabled to seize abundant opportunities, by this means earn their way out of poverty, and so reduce the gap between rich and poor.⁶⁵ This does not rise to the level of social justice because it ignores systemic, structural pressures. This permits drawing a contrast between American attitudes and social justice. But that would be only half the picture. The other half is that the very traits explicable as almsgiving also show that Americans by and large are willing to negate the absolute-ness of contractual, commutative justice in relations between rich and poor. An almsgiving structure, by contrast to indentured servitude,⁶⁶ is a one-way economic transaction that operates outside concepts of fair exchange and just return. Governmental and other assistance to the poor is not an act of exchange because recipients are not bound to repayment. It lies outside commutative justice and probably is better understood as an incomplete option for the poor than as the opposite to social justice.

Catholic Americans exhibit variations in several of the nine traits. It can be assumed that Catholics are: (1) as religious and (2) as generous as most

⁶⁴ Tropman quotes Ernst Troeltsch's statement that "Calvinism . . . has merged with and to some extent produced that political and social way of life which may be described as 'Americanism' . . . that today has an independent existence, which is almost entirely divorced from a religious basis" (*The Catholic Ethic* 22, citing Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* 2 [New York: Harper-Collins, 1960; Troeltsch ed. dates from 1911] 511).

⁶⁵ "The system is viewed by two-thirds of those interviewed as basically fair with providing equal opportunities of all Americans to succeed" (Introduction, *Haves and Have-Nots* 2).

⁶⁶ Indentured servitude was a social, economic and legal practice relating rich and poor within the confines of a just exchange. From the first settlements in the early 17th century through the War of Independence and up until the War of 1812, "hundreds of thousands of European men and women voluntarily sold themselves into bondage for a number of years in order to become part of the earliest stream of immigrants from the Old World to the New" (Daniel Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981] 14). For accounts of individual indentured servants, see John Van Der Zee, *Bound Over: Indentured Servitude and American Conscience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

Americans. However, generosity to the poor in particular may well characterize American Catholics.⁶⁷ (3) They want greater economic equality. This can be inferred from a finding on Catholic self-understandings as moderate or liberal on economic issues, and on Catholic readiness to have the government assist the needy.⁶⁸ Combining those findings allow a conclusion that Catholics accept some government regulation of economic life (liberal, moderate attitude) in the interest of helping the poor (assist the needy). (4) On aversion to economic equality as part of a religious message, one study supports Catholic conformity with this,⁶⁹ and another indicates a need for attention to it.⁷⁰ Less than a majority of Catholics sampled were (5) wary about government regulations on economic life as a way of reducing economic inequality.⁷¹ Catholics (6) want the government to assist the poor.⁷² It is unknown whether or not Catholics

⁶⁷ Research by Jeffrey A. Will and John K. Cochran found a “Catholic difference” in awarding money to hypothetical families with varying attributes described in vignettes. They report that “Catholics showed generosity levels that were over \$25 per week higher than moderate Protestants and over \$20 per week more than conservative denominations” (“God Helps Those Who Help Themselves? The Effects of Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, and Deservedness on Generosity Toward the Poor” 328). Generally non-Whites “were dramatically more generous than whites” 333. Increasing income correlated with decreasing generosity. But, “the effect of church attendance on generosity . . . was significant only for Catholics, among whom increased attendance increased generosity,” and “highly religious Catholics were more generous toward the poor, while highly religious Protestants, especially among the liberal and conservative faith groups were less generous” (ibid. 335–36).

⁶⁸ 61% of Catholics surveyed identified themselves as moderate or liberal on economic issues, 71% as liberal or moderate on social welfare issues, and 57% on social or moral issues. In response to a question asking for identification of an issue as “very important,” while 40% said “[r]educing governmental regulations to allow businesses to operate more freely,” and 63% said, “[c]hanging the moral direction of American culture,” the largest percentage, 65%, said, “[g]overnment programs to help the needy” (Catholic Poll 2000, *Catholicism USA* 32–33).

⁶⁹ James D. Davidson and Ralph E. Pyle did not find Catholic parishes typically using their resources to challenge the growing gap between rich and poor (“Public Religion and Economic Inequality”).

⁷⁰ Support for the Davidson/Pyle findings comes from survey data collected by the Parish Evaluation Project. The Parish Evaluation Project has studied survey questionnaires completed by over 30,000 randomly-selected Catholic parishioners since 1973. One conclusion is that “[a]t the present moment most parishioners are not being challenged to reshape their attitudes in a way that reflects the social teachings of the Church and Gospels” (Patricia M. Forster, O.S.F., and Thomas Sweetser, S.J., *Transforming the Parish: Models for the Future* [Franklin, Wisc.: Sheed & Ward, 1999; orig. ed. 1993] 23).

⁷¹ 61% identify themselves as liberal or moderate on economic issues, which involves some willingness to accept government regulations in economic life.

⁷² Survey data showed that: “Catholics are significantly more likely to see gov-

vary from a national tendency (7) preferring that government assistance to the poor take the forms primarily of education and job training. Notable differences occur on (8) the cause of poverty. There are two predominant kinds of explanation for poverty. One locates the cause of poverty in the defects of the poor themselves and looks to changes in the poor as the remedy. Another perception of poverty sees factors external to the poor, such as the kind of education available in a given place, presence or absence of local job opportunities, presence or absence of prejudices in hiring, level of wages, etc. The remedy lies in changed external conditions. Only 23% of American Catholics expressed agreement with the first explanation assigning poverty to defects in the poor. An overwhelming 77% agreed with an explanation of poverty in terms of social, structural conditions.⁷³ A marked difference appears likewise in Catholics' (9) wanting to separate the deserving from the undeserving poor. Since they perceive poverty as due largely to external conditions, Catholics do not tend to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy poor, a distinction expressing suspicion that character flaws cause poverty in at least some of the poor.⁷⁴

American Catholics translate concern for the needy into political attitudes and behavior. Data shows also that, "Catholics are significantly more likely to see government as a positive force that can help the poor, sick, and others. . . ."⁷⁵ Also, "Catholics are somewhat more likely to vote than other citizens . . . have provided nearly 30 percent of the votes in recent national elections . . . [and] continue to be the most Democratic of white Christians."⁷⁶ It is no secret that "[o]n most political issues Catholics tend to be more liberal than Protestants from both the mainline and evangelical traditions and more conservative than Jews and those with no religious affiliation,"⁷⁷ except for abortion.

ernment as a positive force that can help the poor, sick and others," and are, "somewhat more likely to vote than other citizens" (*Catholicism USA* 35). In 1996 the Gallup Poll asked, who should be more responsible for providing assistance to the poor—government or religious organizations? The national context at the time featured certain pressures in Congress to end many welfare benefits and to shift more of the burden to the private sector, particularly to the nation's churches. 59% of Catholics and 53% of Protestants said the primary responsibility rested with government ("Faith, Hope and Charity," in *Religion in America, Princeton Religion Research Center 1996 Report* 63).

⁷³ *The Search for Common Ground* 80.

⁷⁴ The worthy/unworthy poor distinction belongs to the "Protestant ethic." Tropman discusses some main features of a "Catholic ethic" in the Introduction to *The Catholic Ethic* 7 ff.

⁷⁵ *Catholicism USA* 35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 28–29.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 31–32.

Interpretation

Why this variation in attitude toward the poor? Is it due to theological or non-theological sources? Will and Cochran found “important differences in compassion for the poor across mainstream American faith groups,” with highly religious, liberal and conservative Protestants showing less generosity than less religious, liberal and conservative Protestants, whereas “highly religious Catholics were significantly more generous,” than less religious Catholics.⁷⁸ They conclude that, “[t]here are a number of differences in generosity patterns across the denominations,” and ask, “[a]re these differences due to theology, class, or other social experiences?”⁷⁹ That such differences stem from religio-cultural factors not from class, race, age, education or other factors is the answer social-scientific research by Andrew Greeley, John Tropman and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate has argued. They concur that a significant Catholic variation in what pertains to the poor stems from an underlying theological source, named the “Catholic imagination,” (Greeley)⁸⁰ or the “Catholic ethic” (Tropman).⁸¹

According to this interpretation empirically accessible Catholic traits express the presence of religion forming a cultural system (not denying it is more than that), a set of interrelated everyday beliefs, values, and attitudes shaped by Catholic doctrine and supportive of Catholic thought and practice. Both the Catholic imagination and the Catholic ethic are ideal-types parallel to Max Weber’s Protestant ethic. The Catholic imagination is attuned on religious principle to the goodness of creation, to divine immanence, to a sacred quality in everyday life, to a positive view of human beings, has a strong sense of communal ties, and thrives on narrative.⁸² Similarly, the Catholic ethic arises from Catholic doctrines and centers

⁷⁸ Will and Cochran, “God Helps Those” 336.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 337.

⁸⁰ See most recently, Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000). Among discoveries: a high correlation between being Catholic and participation in appreciation of the fine arts, and among Catholics a direct proportion between frequency of worship and frequency of attendance at arts events.

⁸¹ Tropman, *The Catholic Ethic*.

⁸² A General Social Survey question which asked if there is “much goodness in the world which hints at God’s goodness,” or if “the world is basically filled with evil.” 70% of Catholics said there is much goodness in the world, while only 47% of Protestants did. Another question asked whether “human nature is basically good” or “fundamentally perverse and corrupt.” Again, 70% of Catholics and 47% of Protestants answered “basically good.” Likewise 67% of Catholics but 64% of Protestants expressed support for government action of a sort that fosters an active government (*Catholicism USA* 33–35).

social existence in sharing resources and communal ties, rather than in individual amassing of resources for private use. It does not interpret poverty as a sign of moral defects in the poor or seek to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor.⁸³

In both concepts Catholicism, as opposed to Protestantism (American Calvinism), imbues its American members with a sense of community that includes the poor, inclines them to see poverty as largely an external condition due to factors outside the control of the poor, opens them to viewing government as a positive reality able to assist the poor, and ends up in the fact that Catholics tend to favor policies and candidates seeking an advantage for the poor. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate designed empirical public opinion research to test these ideal-typical explanations. Data acquired from this research, “supports the findings of Greeley and others [Tropman] that the ‘Catholic imagination’ and ‘Catholic ethic’ influence the political attitudes and behaviors of Catholics.”⁸⁴ Studies have shown that political “differences between Catholics and Protestants remain, even after controlling for the various social and demographic factors commonly used to explain Catholic attitudes and behaviors.”⁸⁵ The thesis of a ‘Catholic difference’, the socio-cultural attitudes it involves, the reality of its political outcome, and that it expresses a still deeper Catholic imagination/Catholic ethic are accepted here as valid.

But reference to an explicit framework of justice, whether distributive or social, is missing from data and interpretations showing a Catholic difference in regard to the poor. For example, *The Search for Common Ground* reports that 42% of survey respondents did not agree that reducing the gap between rich and poor belonged to their faith. Similarly Davidson/Pyle concluded that “good fortune theology” more than “social justice theology” guided public religion, so that “good fortune theology” marked the disposition of parish resources, 1965–1995, including the thematic content of worship.⁸⁶ Will and Cochran findings pertain to generosity and compassion but not necessarily to justice. Absence of an explicit concept of justice in relating to the poor does not deny unusually high generosity toward the poor, a sense of community with them, no blaming them for poverty, and support for policies, programs and candidates that bring about government assistance to the poor. But these positive traits can be explained as phi-

⁸³ It would be helpful to learn variations and similarities in a Catholic imagination and a Catholic ethic among White, African-American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian Catholics in the United States.

⁸⁴ *Catholicism USA* 34.

⁸⁵ Ibid. The most recent data comes from Mary E. Bendyna, R.S.M., “The Catholic Ethic in American Politics: Evidence from Survey Research” (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 1999).

⁸⁶ See above n. 31.

lanthropy by ordinary American Catholics exercised indirectly through a socio-political structure of almsgiving.

That would be why 58% fewer than the 97% who kept helping the needy at the core of their religion backed away from reducing economic inequality. For, “helping the needy” can be accomplished within a framework of philanthropic almsgiving, while “reducing economic inequality” connotes a systemic problem and solution along the lines of distributive and social justice. Likewise, “good fortune theology” does not oppose helping the needy within a framework of almsgiving that embraces economic inequality brought by prosperity. An inescapable conclusion is that the Catholic difference is real. Equally the conclusion has to be that the difference, after more than a century of Catholic social teaching, carrying a legacy of ties with the labor union movement, and a heritage of support for the New Deal, does not now contain a strong, clear principle of social justice in relating to the poor anymore than does the population at large. Why is it that notable American generosity and affinity for the underdog do not lead into social justice in the economic realm? Why is a transition from charity to advocacy so challenging for Catholic Americans?

History

In Lonergan’s *Method in Theology*, recourse to history completes interpretation of data. Similarly, Max Weber developed ideal-types to identify causes of human agency and to approximate an explanation of historical data. In his view social science served historiography by providing careful explanatory categories, like the Protestant ethic, that necessarily remained short of accounting for the full historical concreteness of a phenomenon, like the rise of modern capitalism.⁸⁷ But an ideal-type clarified at least one factor, inviting more precise attention to others in a movement toward accurate knowledge of historical causality. Weber’s dream of convergence between social-scientific and historical explanations seems to be realized in explaining the absence of social justice as a formative principle among contemporary Americans.

Both public opinion research using ideal-types and a review of historical factors shaping American political culture point to the influence of Puritan

⁸⁷ See Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1958; orig. ed. 1904). Also, Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976); H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University, 1946); Wolfgang Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992); George Ritzer, *Classical Sociological Theory* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1996).

theology on American attitudes toward the poor. From an international, comparative perspective, Bernd Wegener and Stefan Liebig interpret data on attitudes toward economic inequality from Germany (East and West) and the United States according to two ideal-types, “egalitarian statism,” and “meritocratic individualism.”⁸⁸ Both are present in both populations but one prevails. The prevalence of the former among Germans and the latter in Americans is explained by reference to the self-interest of influential classes and by the religio-cultural history of each nation. Egalitarian statism looks to the state as the agency responsible for reducing economic inequality and owes its primacy in Germany to the influence of Lutheran Pietism and its strong sense of social concern. Meritocratic individualism assigns the primary role in reducing economic inequality to individual participation in the market and this comes, argue Wegener and Liebig, from the heritage of Puritan Calvinism, whose focus on individual efforts spread through all spheres of public life in the United States.

In the same direction, Kenneth D. Wald reviews the history of American political culture—those basic “assumptions and outlooks that channel public thinking about government and politics”⁸⁹—in light of Puritan influence. “Religious creeds, institutions and communities,” preeminently in the Puritan tradition, “exerted a major impact on colonial life and work,” observes Wald, adding that “the Puritan vision suffused the whole of the colonies.”⁹⁰ Puritan covenant theology supplied an interpretative framework within which to see a right to revolt against a British monarchy that had broken its covenant with colonial subjects and marked the process by which thirteen colonies solemnly entered into a compact. Puritan doctrine on the innate depravity of humanity and skepticism about trustworthy officials and populace steered the founders to a variety of structural checks and balances to prevent accumulation and abuse of power. The Puritan legacy also did much to initiate a habit of mind, an American civil religion by which Americans tried to understand the nation’s “historical experience and national purpose in religious terms.”⁹¹ For many Northerners victory in the Civil War confirmed identification of America with the kingdom of

⁸⁸ Bernd Wegener and Stefan Liebig, “Dominant Ideologies and the Variation of Distributive Justice Norms: A Comparison of East and West Germany, and the United States,” in *Social Justice and Political Change*, ed. James R. Kluegel et al. 239–60, at 247 ff.

⁸⁹ Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, in sections on ‘Religion and American Political Culture’, and ‘Covenant Theology and the Right to Revolt’, at 40–41. Also, “The Impact of Puritanism on American Culture,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*, ed. Charles H. Lippey and Peter W. Williams (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988) 2.1057–74.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 42, 44.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 59.

God.⁹² Wald does not deal with attitudes toward economic inequality or the poor. Still, his identifying of the important role played by Puritan theology, without denying a more familiar contribution from Enlightenment thought, corroborates the idea that Puritan Calvinism decisively shaped American attitudes on public matters and imparted a lasting imprint to civil religion.

It is but a small step to add an inference linking the influence of Puritan Calvinism to attitudes toward the poor and economic inequality. To the extent that a sense of duty toward the poor qualified by suspicion prevails in America, both the duty and the suspicion are likely to derive in some significant measure from the Puritan shape of American civil religion. Tropicman's argument that Weber's Protestant ethic contained a perspective on poverty as probable token of failure in fulfilling a moral duty to work and earn and as presumptive evidence for a sad destiny outside the covenant supports the inference.

While an ideal-typical and historical explanation of present attitudes toward the poor in terms of Puritan influence might seem to hold for a diffuse common culture as Wegener and Liebig argue, it also could appear remote from anyone's self-understanding. Few Americans and even fewer Catholic Americans identify themselves with the religious beliefs of the nation's Puritan forbears, or think of their beliefs, values, practices, motives or attitudes with any explicit reference to how covenant theology may have interpreted poverty. And yet self-understanding is never completely known and can be expanded.

Besides categorial attributes of outlook, behavior and particular attitudes, whether prior to or resulting from conscious intentionality, knowable by common-sense and theoretical observation, people participate in larger meanings by their action, interaction and common language. Those meanings belong to constitutive self-understanding. For example, anyone who votes in a democratic election acts according to ideas, meanings, truths, values, and articulated laws immanent in and constituting democratic institutions. The voter rightly concentrates on selecting the best candidate for an office. And so constitutive principles like the rule of law, self-governance by a people, differentiation of political office from hereditary position, affirmation of equality in human dignity and a consequent Bill of Rights are operational meanings that ordinarily do not preoccupy a voter. The constitutive meanings, while familiar and not locked in an unconscious, probably are not foremost in a voter's self-understanding. Nonetheless she participates in those meanings, is influenced by them, reaffirms

⁹² George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University, 1980) 11.

them by acting according to them and perpetuates their social reality in this particular interaction.

Similarly, attitudes toward the poor and poverty, toward an appropriate kind of government assistance, suspicion about the poor, preference for trusting the market to distribute wealth in the right way, can owe a great deal to Puritan influence without that link being evident in a customary self-understanding. Consequently, public theology cannot neglect analysis of an impact from Puritan covenant theology on American attitudes toward the poor and poverty on the grounds that few acknowledge the impact. Catholic public theology thereby acquires a task of exploring empirical signs of Puritan attitudes in American Catholicism as a possible explanation for why Catholics have not moved from charity to advocacy more readily.

Dialectic

Lonergan's functional specialty of "dialectic," outlines a way to explore an hypothesis such as Catholic assimilation of Puritan motifs. Of course, Tropman considers Methodists, Quakers, African American Protestants generally, the Salvation Army and Mormons too to have a "Catholic ethic" insofar as their cultural mores and religious sources give primacy to a sense of community and sharing of resources. Individual Americans pick their way through some combination of two, competing, ideal-typical orientations, the community-centered (Catholic) and individual-centered (Protestant) ethics since these are the leading alternatives available in this society. Most importantly, neither ideal type contains social justice, which no survey data convincingly demonstrates to be a trait in Americans, Protestant, Catholic or otherwise. Nevertheless a tension follows from the difference between the Catholic imagination or Catholic ethic and the set of attitudes to the poor and poverty found in the population at large. That tension can be explored.

Lonergan presents six steps in identifying the root of a Christian conflict. This can be adapted to become inquiry into a conflict within Christians, in this case American Catholics insofar as they have absorbed attitudes toward the poor that stem at least partly from Puritan sources and the 'Protestant ethic'. The internal opposition is between an approach to poverty and the poor that participates in a Puritan heritage of dutiful almsgiving qualified by suspicion and doubt about divine love for the poor that presupposes a double divine predestination on the one hand, and on the other a Catholic position linking faith with social justice on a premise of universal divine love and election (itself presuming universal human sinfulness).

Dialectic seeks to arrive at knowledge of whether or not that opposition is an irresolvable conflict between contradictory positions at the level of

horizons. If so, then which kind of conversion—psychic, moral, intellectual, or religious—overcomes the conflict by advancing into a more comprehensive view? If less than a contradiction in theological principle, what? Could it be that deepening Catholic conversion entails a redemptive discernment that sorts out positive from negative influences from Puritan covenant theology, so that what has been absorbed by participation in American culture can be transformed not simply renounced? This would respect the possibility of positive influence from the Puritan heritage, such as linking public life and institutions with a transcendent order of truth and justice. A fuller dialectical analysis could conclude that the ambivalent condition of American Catholicism—an option for the poor yet without structural analysis challenging willingness to let the market produce a socially just society—is an instance of the co-presence of two horizons related genetically as two phases along one line of development. One horizon, an option for the poor in generosity, would be predominant in the present condition and the second, consciousness of structures, that of hope for further development of potential in the first horizon.

Two things seem to be missing, however, for that potential to be on the verge of a major change toward a civil constituency on behalf of social justice. One is common affirmation of the third true judgment in social justice, that structures of cooperation enter deeply into and shape social existence. People can see people but not structures, though structures are intelligible patterns. The classic error of confusing the intelligible with the visible may be at fault, in which case intellectual conversion is called for. Insight into and judgment on the reality of structures of cooperation do not necessarily come from common sense observation. Some degree of education in some philosophy and social science therefore seems to be indispensable especially if white Catholics do not experience themselves suffering from disordered structures, as African American, native American and Hispanic Catholics do. The second thing missing is an ecclesial institution in which grass-roots participants from a populous common ground between the emplaced artillery of the culture wars, and familiar with Sunday Eucharists, can exchange views, deliberate and perhaps find some degree of consensus with pastors and bishops on the future of public Catholicism as an advocate for justice.

CONCLUSION

An empirically ascertainable Catholic imagination and Catholic ethic are ambivalent in regard to hope for public Catholicism as a civil constituency for racial, social and environmental justice. Neither ideal-type contains social justice in the economic realm though each has distinctively positive attitudes toward and links with the poor while especially ready for government assistance to the poor. So if realization of the hope depends on

widespread assimilation of social justice in full form, then this is a utopian path for elite vanguards. At the same time, while not social justice, those positive attitudes may well be preconditions for social justice. If so, as I am inclined to think, then there is some reason to think that a grass-roots public Catholicism has the potential to devote itself to racial, social and environmental justice.

Sorting out the internal sources of resistance to social justice belongs to further analysis of American Catholic attitudes. Likewise, identifying the influence of Puritan theology counsels the advisability of multilateral ecumenical dialogue, particularly because Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Quaker, and other non-Calvinist traditions from the Reformation may have similar issues. African American denominations in the free-church tradition, and black liberation theologies, would be an important source of wisdom on how a Calvinist heritage can be appropriated in the direction of liberation on the basis of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. A redemptive, ecumenical perspective on the whole matter is preferable to pre-ecumenical clarification of differences in the form of deepened opposition inattentive to overlapping areas.

One theme for ecumenical dialogue would be “covenant” as a model of religious and civil community. Can past exclusions in covenant theology be set aside as easily as Daniel J. Elazar supposes? He argues that, “the covenantal tradition in both theory and practice presents a compelling framework of articulating the common good.”⁹³ He admits the exclusionary aspect but feels that a pluralist American people can work this out because past exclusions are factual but not definitive. That would have to be shown in detail in regard to both the history of covenant theology in America and in terms of American civil religion.⁹⁴ African Americans and native Americans might be the best sources of insight on that point, as would others, Catholics included, outside the Puritan covenant tradition.

⁹³ Daniel J. Elazar, “Recovenanting the American Polity,” in *One Nation Under God? Essays on the Future of Religion in American Public Life*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and Joshua Mitchell (Lanham, Md: Rowan & Littlefield, 2000) 65–90, at 65. See an earlier proposal by Robin Lovin, “Social Contract or a Public Covenant,” in *Religion and American Public Life: Interpretations and Explorations* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 115–31.

⁹⁴ See Robert E. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury, 1975); “Religion and the Shape of National Culture,” *America* 131 (July 31, 1999) 9–14; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “American Religious Values and the Future of America,” in *American Religious Values and the Future of America*, ed. Rodger Van Allen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 5–23; John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986); David A. Weir, *The Origins of Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Carl Starkloff, S.J. “The Church as Covenant, Culture, and Communion,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 409–31.

The biblical model of covenant is worth considering in ecumenical dialogue as a model for common witness. Covenanting might be fruitful as a model for civil society as Lovin and Elazar suggest. But that would depend on disengaging it from a modern history of exclusions, and on its being shown to be compatible with an option for the poor, with the universal salvific will of God, and with religious pluralism.

Another theme would be the horizon of hope embodied in each tradition's orientation toward a common witness on behalf of racial, social and environmental justice. The cross and resurrection became the definitive, concrete manifestation of divine power, truth and fidelity that the Holy Spirit empowered believers to communicate freely. I agree with Dermot A. Lane that the cross became the new path for Christian hope because of the resurrection, not apart from it.⁹⁵ The resurrection reveals the divine meaning of the cross. "The eschatological action of God in raising Jesus from the dead reverses what up to now has been the apparent success of injustice and death."⁹⁶ But there is variation among lived theologies of hope according to the various ways Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions have inculturated Christian hope⁹⁷ in an American context. The variations affect attitudes toward social justice and social change.

For example, Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans and others who pray, "Thy kingdom come," do not associate this prayer of hope with the millenarian specification of Christian hope that Jonathan Edwards unleashed during the first Great Awakening, and that the Second Great Awakening stoked. This was the "expectation of the kingdom of God on earth," that H. Richard Niebuhr considered the unifying theme in American religion and the main impact of Christianity on American culture.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1996) chaps. 7–8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 113.

⁹⁷ Brian E. Daley observes that "[o]ne thing is clear from the beginning of Christian literature: hope for the future is an inseparable, integral dimension of Christian faith, and the condition for the possibility for responsible Christian action in the world." He points to a common basis for and consensus on hope among early Christians along with areas of disagreement ("Epilogue: A Common Hope," in *The Hope of the Early Church* [New York: Cambridge University, 1991] 223). See also, Michael J. Scanlon, O.S.A., "Hope," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak et al. (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1987) 492–98.

⁹⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, Harper, 1959) ix, as cited in Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 26–27. On millennialism see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* 50 ff.; Jürgen Moltmann, "Theology in the Project of the Modern World," *A Passion for God's Reign: Theology, Christian Learning and the Christian Self*, ed. Miroslav Wolf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 1–21.

But not all American Christians remember hope in this way. In Catholicism, for example, liturgical proximity between the Lord's Prayer and the Eucharist has tied "Thy kingdom come," to sacramental⁹⁹ and incarnational meanings that have produced an "incarnational humanism."¹⁰⁰ This is an horizon of Christian hope that Vatican II broadened into solidarity with the suffering and that postconciliar faith-and-justice movements have appropriated into an *imitatio Christi* that seeks to bring the kingdom of God in social measure under the auspices of an option for the poor. So ecumenical public theology can ask, is incarnational humanism compatible in theological principle with the covenantal model so influential upon American political culture? Have the two orientations something to teach each other? Can the covenantal model support an option for the poor in the full sense of social justice for the poor as especially loved by God?

⁹⁹ See Mark Searle, "The Liturgy and Catholic Social Doctrine," *The Future of the Catholic Church in America: Major Papers of the Virgil Michel Symposium* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991) 43–73.

¹⁰⁰ John Courtney Murray, "Is It Basket Weaving: The Question of Christianity and Human Values," in *We Hold These Truths* 175–96. Its ideal-typical opposite is "eschatological humanism" directed entirely past terrestrial life to the full coming of God's kingdom and embodied in the early desert monks' practice of weaving a basket one day only to undo it the next for the sake of contemplative self-discipline rather than the reality or worth of baskets, which stand for civilization and in particular, for the polity and economy of the United States.