

THE Round Table

Fall
1991

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." -- Peter Maurin



WHY THIS ISSUE?

In 1932, George Shuster, the editor of Commonweal magazine, sent Peter Maurin to visit Dorothy Day. He instructed Peter to search her out because, in Dorothy's words, "George thought that we were alike in point of view, both interested in changing the social order and in reaching the masses with the social teachings of the Church." Nearly sixty years after that December day, the Catholic Worker is still trying to live by the counsels of the Gospels and reach others in the spirit of the Church's social teachings. This issue of the Round Table is a look at Catholic Social Teaching and what it has to say about our lives and our world.

Mark Neilsen gives a bird's-eye view of Catholic Social Teaching and how it applies to key issues today. He encourages us to see that these writings are less a blueprint for a social system and more a challenge to live a creative and committed life within the Church and society. Amata Miller provides insightful reflections on how these teachings evolved over the years: as the awareness of poverty has grown, official teaching of the Church has increasingly sided with the poor and powerless. Pat McCormick also writes about the evolutionary nature of the social teachings, and points out that dialogue within the Church on important matters needs not only to include women but also must allow the poor to be addressed as conversational partners and subjects of their own lives and history.

In three interviews we briefly look at these writings in light of the experience of women, the environmental crisis, and in the context of working men and women in the U.S.

The centerfold illustrates the chronological development of these writings and some main themes they touch upon.

In the regular columns, Sharon Cummins reflects on being a mother at Karen House; Mary Ann McGivern weaves a story of God's faithfulness to us over the long haul; and Rosemary Davison describes the plight of the poor in Panama — a terrible reality that makes one wonder just what went wrong in the (U.S.- engineered) shift from despotism to "democracy"....

As I worked on this issue, I couldn't help but wonder why Catholic Social Teaching is not, in Peter Maurin's words, "the dominant social dynamic force" in our Church and world? Is it the language or length of the writings, or their lack of a local focus? A friend of mine suggested that most people just don't know what these teachings are; many don't even know that they exist. Perhaps this issue can help us begin to explore these writings and discover their usefulness for our lives and our world.



- Bill Miller

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ON THE SIDE OF THE POOR

by Amata Miller, IHM

"God is on the side of the poor." Both the Old and New Testaments reveal a compassionate God caring for the poor and vulnerable, urging special attention to their needs, even basing the final judgement on how a person responded to the "least" ones. Jesus modeled this preferential love in his choice of companions, his response to cries for help, and in his teaching. The first Christians made the needs of the poor among them the primary norm of their choices about material things. For them, sharing in order to meet one another's needs was on a par with prayer and Eucharist as requirements of discipleship.

In ensuing centuries the church became a majority institution in society. As her stake in the established order grew, the message of preferential love for the poor was muted. In the development of the natural law tradition it took its place as one among many obligations of the Christian.

Gregory Baum points out that the option for the poor has always been part of the church's teaching. He speaks of the compassionate option, urging almsgiving; the ascetical option, challenging to imitation of the poor Jesus; the pastoral option, creating institutions in service of the poor; the missionary option, living with the poor in order to evangelize. In our time the identification of the sinful structures which cause poverty mandates the preferential option for the poor in the face of institutions which oppress them. All of the options are still valid and necessary, but unless Christians stand on the side of the poor within social, economic, political and ecclesial institutions the other options cannot be authentic in our time [1].

In modern church social teaching the vision of the God who takes the side of the poor has gradually re-emerged, gaining strength and clarity as awareness of the reality and causes of poverty in the world heightened in recent decades. Donald Dorr has carefully probed the papal teachings from 1891-1981 to trace this development [2]. He sees this re-alignment of official position as potentially the most significant political shift for the church since the time of Constantine [3]. Thus, a brief review of the evolution of this stance is important and useful.

Writing *Rerum Novarum* in the period when Marx was pointing out the grinding poverty generated by industrial capitalism, Leo XIII called for social change and expressed the church's concern for the working classes and the poor. However, whenever change was not possible without threatening the established order he exhorted the poor to look to their heavenly reward for comfort.

Pius XI wrote *Quadragesimo Anno* in the midst of the Great Depression, when the poverty-creating effects of market collapse were evident everywhere. His advocacy of an alternative corporatist-vocational model of social organization convinced many Catholics that action for social change was part of the Christian call. His later writings broke with Leo's advocacy of loyalty even to an unjust regime.

Pius XII, writing during World War II and its aftermath, focused on the dangers of atheistic Communism. By so doing he gave tacit support to Western capitalist structures, seeing them as the best available option. The evils of powerlessness in the face of totalitarian bureaucratic regimes

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rather than the persistence of poverty in capitalist democracies absorbed his attention. He did, however, reiterate the age-old principles that the right of private property is subordinate to the general rights of all people to the good of the earth.

The Catholic social doctrine of the 1891-1981 years stood primarily on the side of Western capitalism while protesting against the evils of socialism, in the form of "atheistic communism". As such, it kept the church fundamentally uncritical on the side of established economic and political systems of Western nations. This represented both a moral and a political stance for the church. As the failures of the established structures to meet the basic needs of the world's poor became more and more clear in the past three decades, the popes and bishops have challenged the prior stance. Their reflection on the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel has led to the call for a very different stance a preferential option for the poor and powerless.

John XXIII, according to Dorr, shifted the focus of Catholic social teaching. He did not make an option for the poor, but he did break from unilateral approbation of the values of free enterprise capitalism. Since Mater et Magistra the right to private property no longer has a uniquely privileged position among human rights. John's encyclicals, which recognized the urgency of dealing with world poverty, were a major step in disassociating the church from those forces most opposed to changing social structures.

Vatican II occurred in the optimistic 1960's when it appeared that Western capitalism could be humanized, development efforts could rid the world of poverty, and a rising tide would lift all boats. The Council Fathers saw replication of Western patterns of development as the way to eliminate poverty. In the opening words of Gaudium et Spes they made the response to the cries of the poor central to Christian discipleship. They stressed the rights of the poor in justice to share in the fruits of the earth. Almsgiving from superfluous goods was no longer enough for the rich. A new economic order in which poor nations would have a more equal share of the world's goods was envisioned. Through their words and symbolic gestures of relinquishment they committed the Church to the surrender of privilege nec

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No one
may claim the name Christian
and be comfortable
in the face of hunger,
homelessness,
insecurity,

essary to make the preaching of the Gospel credible. Paul VI, building on the teaching of the Council and of John XXIII, called in Progressio Populorum for the full development of each person and all peoples. Writing in 1967, when failures of Western development models to address the basic needs of the poorest were painfully evident, he recognized the enormity of the problem of world poverty and called for "bold transformations" of existing social structures.

Applying these teachings to their own continent the Latin American bishops at Medellin identified the structural injustices which oppress the poor majority in the professedly Catholic nations. They committed themselves to giving "effective preference to the poorest and most needy sectors of society," to a process of "conscientization" of the poor which would enable them to organize to liberate themselves from unjust situations. They accepted the obligation to be in solidarity with the poor and marginalized in their struggle.

In 1971 Paul VI integrated the message of Medellin into his letter, Octogesima Adveniens.



and injustice found in this country and the world.

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He recognized that economic problems required political solutions, and he stressed the importance of participation of the people in the process of social change. He held on to the hope for nonviolent change through consensus, and called the Christian community to reflect on its own social reality, analyze it objectively and draw norms of action from the social teaching of the church. This recognition of the communal discernment leading to a pluralism of approaches was a critical step in the evolution of Catholic social teaching and the manner of living out one's faith commitment.

In their 1971 Synod in Rome, the bishops reflected on the call to act justly in the world. They identified the promotion of justice for all people as a "constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel." From their experience they questioned the universal applicability of Western capitalist approaches to the problem of poverty, and they stated that the church must model justice if she is to preach it. In calling others to stand on the side of the poor, she must stand there herself.

In 1979 John Paul II spoke to the Latin

American bishops at Puebla. He reaffirmed the option for the poor articulated at Medellin and drew attention to the social structures causing the massive poverty among the people. The final statement of Puebla, adopted by consensus, has one section entitled, "A Preferential Option for the Poor." Subsequently speaking in Mexico and Brazil, John Paul spoke about special concern for the poor, while cautioning against seeing Christ as a political revolutionary. In Brazil in 1980 he used the phrase, "a preferential, but not exclusive option for the poor" and invited the poor to be the main agents of their own advancement.

In his writings John Paul has continually stressed that respect for basic human rights, especially for the poorest, is the litmus test of whether or not a society is just. He has, with increasing forcefulness, spoken of the inability of current economic and political structures to address the widening gap between rich and poor both within and among nations. He has identified "sinful structures" which generate and perpetuate poverty and thus call Christians to act to transform them. In both Laborem Exercens and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, he calls for solidarity among the poor and of the church with the poor and oppressed in the struggle for justice.

This theme of the responsibility of Christians to stand firm on the side of the poor in the face of societal structures which create oppressive conditions is developed also by the U.S. bishops in their pastorals on peace and on the economy. They apply the principles developed by the popes, the Council, the Synod and the Latin American bishops to the U.S. realities.

In the Challenge of Peace one of the key arguments against the arms race is the harm it does to the poor. The U.S. bishops cite the Vatican Council documents and recent popes who call the arms race a crime against the poor. They identify the reality of global inequality and poverty as the fundamental threat to peace, and see the reality of interdependence and the call to create a new world order in which the resources of the earth can be put at the service of human needs as the most far-reaching challenge of peace.

In Economic Justice for All, the U.S. bishops reflect on the "social and moral scandal" of poverty in this nation and the world and give the

needs of the poor the highest moral priority. They call for shaping all economic choices, policies, institutions, and objectives by four moral priorities which put the needs of the poor in first place. They have unequivocally situated the option for the poor as the most urgent moral priority for U.S. Catholics and the nation as a whole at this time in our history.

In this they reflect the gradual evolution of the church's teaching as she has reflected on the signs of our times. As the awareness of poverty has grown, the official teaching of the church has increasingly sided with the poor and powerless. As scripture scholars have revealed more and more of the social context of the Old and New Testaments, we have come to understand the meaning of discipleship in terms of solidarity with the poor.

The uneasiness of some with this evolution in Catholic teaching is predictable. Those schooled in pre-Vatican II social teaching, with its emphasis on support for the structures of Western capitalism, are surprised by papal teachings pointing out the failure of both capitalism and socialism to meet the criteria of basic justice for the poor. The church has always stressed the preservation of the established order of Western society. Thus, church teachings which challenge it are painful for some Catholics who are now in the mainstream of U.S. society. Conversion in the most fundamental sense is required.

If action follows words by the church's official teachers and its people, this will be, as Dorr suggests, the most important political repositioning of the church since the time of Constantine. Surely then, making the preferential option for the poor will increase the cost of discipleship for us all. But nothing less is demanded of us as people called to make real in our world "a life before death for all human beings" [4].

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Endnotes

1. "Theology of the American Pastoral," The Ecumenist 24(Jan-Feb, 1986),21.
2. Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1983.
3. *Ibid.*, p.263.
4. Solle, Dorothee. Beyond Mere Dialogue. 1977 Earl Lectures.

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*the joys
and the hopes
the griefs
and the anxieties
of the people of this
age,
especially
those who are poor or in any way afflicted,
these too are the joys and hopes,
the griefs and anxieties
of the followers of Christ.*



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LABOR



Mr. Daniel Duke McVey, President, Missouri AFL-CIO, was a rank and file member of the Pipefitter's Union for 25 years. He was interviewed by Virginia Druke.

McVey: There are a couple of parallels that I think are interesting between the social teachings of the church and the union movement. The beginning of the unions was based many times on social needs, even the very simple matter of burying fellow workers in the old days. Both the church and the unions are communities that band together to serve the best interest of the people in the group.

But both the church and unions face a similar problem: the smaller the group, the less impact they have on society. The Catholic Church, being universal, runs into many different mores, social traditions, and backgrounds. The American church also reflects the mores, I would call it the fierce independence, of the average American. This is also reflected in its problems with the issues of the day, ranging anywhere from how we teach our children religion, euthanasia, abortion, the needs of divorced Catholics, and how we administer the church as a sacrament itself in the community — all these things are compounded as far as the Church is concerned by the history and behavior of the American people.

In the labor movement you have the same tension with the American culture, and the same tension between the cohesiveness of a small group of people with certain skills, and the need to have impact on the general public. It became necessary

in the labor movement to combine all of those interest groups in one big group, such as the AFL-CIO, to foster shared goals. That worked very, very well from about 1935 until about 1970. Then as the business and monetary concerns of dealing with American corporations changed, some of the same bigness and unwieldy ways of doing business became a detriment.

Things went on like that until monetary necessity started forcing changes. Today, whether anyone can see it or not, an entirely different labor movement has evolved.

I think the church is in the same position. Fixed dogma in many areas is leaving the church without the flock that it once had because it is not responding to real social needs out there. I think its very interesting in the history of the church that most changes that were made in the church were made because of social pressures or circumstances that preempted what was in the past and changed the course of the future. This goes on through the different Vatican Councils and we are in that process again.

The lag on this is historic. It's not until enough people have suffered, have lost their security or whatever they hold dearest, that they will take charge of what will be best for them. Then we see the changes that are necessary. I think we're seeing some of that today in the new young leadership coming up in the unions, devising new ways to deal with the problems of collective bargaining — which has done more for workers in this country than anything you can imagine. †

A VAST FIELD OF THOUGHT

by Mark Neilsen

"Catholic Social Teaching" is a term that can be applied to a vast field of thought and writing developed over the centuries in many quarters of the Church. This article uses major documents from the U.S. bishops and the Vatican to present a bird's-eye view of Catholic Social Teaching in some key areas of contemporary life. Catholic Social Teaching, as the following examples show, is less a blueprint for a social system than a challenge to live a creative and committed life within the Church and society.

Well-known, but Misunderstood: Abortion, War and Peace

In the United States, the abortion stance of the Roman Catholic Church is perhaps best known of all the Catholic teachings on social issues. Simply put, Church teaching opposes any intentional and direct taking of the life of an unborn child. Furthermore, the Church insists that the state protect the right to life through legislation.

But abortion is not simply a matter of personal morality. The U.S. Catholic bishops see their opposition to abortion as a basic part of a "consistent ethic of life" that defends human life at all stages. Recognizing that abortion is very often a heart-wrenching last resort in extremely difficult circumstances, the Vatican Declaration on Abortion urges: "Help for families and for unmarried mothers, assured grants for children, a statute for illegitimate children and reasonable arrangements for adoption – a whole positive policy must be put into force so that there will always be a

concrete, honorable and positive alternative to abortion." (#23) Too often, the creative aspect of the Church's abortion stance has been ignored.

Similarly, the U.S. bishops' position on war and peace is often misrepresented. The Challenge of Peace, the U.S. bishops' 1983 pastoral letter on war and peace, received more national attention than all the rest of the bishops' social commentaries put together. But the attention was one-sided: the use of nuclear weapons, either in battle or as part of a strategy of "deterrence," was the focal point of the letter, while the bulk of the document was ignored. The bishops wrote far more about building peace than avoiding war.

Work

In his 1981 encyclical On Human Work, Pope John Paul II has called work "a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question" (On Human Work, #3). As the pope uses the term, work covers a broad range of endeavors: it can be manual or intellectual labor, management or financial activity, paid or unpaid services. The raising of children, therefore, constitutes work just as surely as toiling on an assembly line or writing a novel.

On the one hand, say the bishops, "work is central to the freedom and well-being of people" (EJFA, #141). On the other hand, work is commonly considered a "necessary evil," something we're forced to do so that we can have the money to do what we really want. With such a view, one

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PEACE IS WAITING FOR PIONEERS THAT WILL OPEN UP NEW WAYS.

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Text: Cardinal Roger Polberg, February, 1991.
Address in Washington, D.C.

can easily conclude that the main purpose of a job is to make as much money as possible.

Church teaching offers a far richer appraisal of the value of work for humanity. Pope John Paul II insists that human labor can never be thought of as merely another component of the production process, equal in importance to capital, technology, raw materials and the like. The U.S. Catholic bishops draw heavily from Pope John Paul II's perspective on work in their pastoral letter Economic Justice For All. The bishops quite clearly call for public policy that would insure a job to all who are able to work, health care, retirement benefits, housing and education according to their ability. Realizing that such a public policy package is not very popular these days, the bishops hope their pastoral letter can contribute to a discussion that will build agreement on these fundamental human rights.

* Equality

This topic should, in one sense, be the simplest of all. The basic idea is so simple and so familiar: all people, regardless of any distinction—race, creed, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, habit of thought, political party, or whatever—must be treated with equal dignity because they have been created by God, redeemed by Christ and are called to spend eternity with God in heaven. Most of us agree with such statements about equality, yet it is quite common to feel some

measure of prejudice toward one group or another. Nor has the Church itself been immune from prejudice.

Important statements by the U.S. Catholic bishops and from the Vatican have addressed racial prejudice and suggested ways to overcome it. Even now, the bishops are grappling with the problem of sexism and the ways in which it hinders women from assuming full equality in both the Church and society at large.

In a major 1979 statement entitled Brothers and Sisters to Us, the U.S. Catholic bishops addressed in depth the problem of racism, how it affects the poor and what can be done about it. The purpose of Brothers and Sisters to Us is evident in its opening line: "Racism is an evil, which endures in our society and in our Church" (Brothers and Sisters to Us, #1). Noting the very real progress brought about by the enactment of civil rights legislation, the U.S. bishops see continued problems, not only in the larger society, but in the Church itself. They fear that in the absence of riots or large-scale demonstrations, many people have become indifferent.

The bishops, aware that the country was in the midst of an economic downturn, were alarmed to see the disproportionate number of minority people among poor. The bishops feared that in an atmosphere of indifference to the plight of minorities, these poor would especially be regarded as expendable.

The struggle against racism, the bishops understood, was a matter not simply of new laws or public policies. "It is important to realize in the case of racism that we are dealing with a distortion at the very heart of human nature," they declared. "The ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ" (Brothers and Sisters to Us, #30).

The U.S. Catholic bishops are in the midst of writing a pastoral letter in response to the concerns of women who experience in the Church as well as society a "second-class status." Changes in modern society have brought about a reconsideration of the role of women and, by extension, of men. Pope John XXIII in his 1963 encyclical Peace on Earth, noted that the increased public

role of women was a distinctive characteristic of the modern age. "Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity," he wrote, "they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim, both in domestic and public life, the rights and duties that befit a human person" (Peace on Earth, #41).

Environment

The list of environmental catastrophes awaiting us is familiar: the "greenhouse effect" of global warming could drastically change the earth's climate and food production; depletion of the ozone layer is eroding a needed shield against harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun; and toxic wastes build up threatening to contaminate the food chain and drinking water.

Our Christian tradition teaches us that we must cherish the gift of creation as we use it for the purpose our Creator intended. Pope John Paul II, known to be an avid hiker and lover of the outdoors, has repeatedly urged world leaders to enact policies to protect the environment.

Pope John Paul II urges us to reflect soberly on the parable Jesus told his disciples as he traveled to Jerusalem for the last time (Lk 19:11-27). A rich noble was called away temporarily, so he gave an equal amount of money to each of ten servants and told them to invest it for him. Upon the master's return, those who had gained him a profit we praise and rewarded, but the servant who had buried the money for fear of making a bad investment was scorned and punished.

Those who have much – talent, riches, education, technology, whatever – are not free to do nothing with their wealth. Instead, it must be put to use so that it can bear fruit. Stewardship, then, cannot simply mean avoiding waste, but implies that we use the gifts we have for the right purpose.

International Solidarity

One can easily feel overwhelmed by the number and difficulty of problems to which our faith calls us to respond. A good antidote to that feeling is On Social Concern. Pope John Paul II's

1987 encyclical letter on international development. Not that the pope offers us any escape from responsibility. On the contrary, Pope John Paul pushes the discussion even further: he insists that our faith obliges us to address not simply social one issue or the economy of a single country, but to work for the development of every human being in the world! But the Pope offers hope and a vision of a better world that is not only attractive, it is also possible.

On Social Concern is primarily a document of faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ, a faith that leads us not only to face the world around us, but to embrace the cause of human dignity and freedom. True human development is not simply a matter of material goods. Development, says Pope John Paul, must include "the cultural, transcendent and religious dimensions of man and society," or it will end by enslaving them further (On Social Concerns, #46). Respect for human rights, collaboration with others, respect for the cultural integrity of minority groups, and care of the environment are all characteristics of genuine human development.

The Pope is not suggesting there is anything wrong with things themselves or with technological and material progress. Like the gifts of nature and personal talents, it is what we do with these things that is important.

Each of us must determine for himself or herself how best to put the virtue of solidarity into our lives. For some, it may be the rigorous life of a missionary or international development volunteer. For another, prayer for famine-ravaged lands might be the best gift of self. For still others, a combination of material aid, public policy advocacy, prayer and openness expresses concern for sisters and brothers in other lands. The good news about Catholic social teaching is that we can do something and we don't have to do everything. We can neither allow guilt to shut our eyes to human misery around us, nor delude ourselves into thinking we can build an earthly Utopia. We can accept ourselves as imperfect creatures and in the process, learn more about the God whom we worship. ✦

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Bangladesh. Merry Chen, OA

with vigor by national and regional synods around the globe.

As subsequent documents revealed a deepening respect for the authority of human experience and a willingness to enter into dialogue with the worlds of history, culture and science, another change was taking place in the voice of official Catholic Social Teachings. In three distinct, though stammering ways it was becoming a more inclusive voice. The collegiality represented and called for by Vatican II led to a progressive though incomplete broadening of the authorship of Catholic Social Teachings. The ongoing dialogue with the outside world, too, has its effects and influences upon the voice of the documents. Finally, a deepening though ambivalent appreciation of the subjective character of the laity resulted in some tentative breakdown in the dichotomy between hierarchical teachers and lay audience.

In the end, however, it may be the stammering attempts to include the contribution of lay Catholics which proves to be the acid test of an evolving Catholic Social Teachings. As many have noted, the hierarchy seems more willing to dialogue with non-Catholics than it is to enter into

serious conversation with its own laity and religious. For here the shift to a more inclusive voice challenges the very self-conception of Catholicism as a hierarchical society. And yet it will only be through such a change that the full authority of the church as a community of moral discernment will be actualized. Under Leo XIII and Pius XI social documents tended to speak at and about the laity, reflecting upon their condition from an elevated vantage point while sending down commandments to be followed obsequiously. In this aristocratic and hierarchical worldview the large masses of Catholic laity were not seen as dialogue partners but as children who needed to be cared for, instructed and commanded.

Beginning with *Mater et Magistra* there are some interesting indications of a shift away from this paternalism. John XXIII offers a method of critical reflection to be employed by the laity, recognizing their role as subjects, not merely objects of Catholic Social Teachings. Citing their professional and scientific competencies, the expertise offered by their experience and immediacy to local situations and problems, as well as the fact that Catholics of good will may disagree with one another on important questions, John XXIII and Paul VI take the authority and agency of the laity with increasing, if sometimes uneven, seriousness.

Within the documents themselves the voice of the laity shifts from those overheard cries of the suffering poor to critical challenges addressed to the hierarchy. The reflections upon the poverty of the Church found in the Medellin documents show the bishops dialoguing seriously with the laity's criticism about the lifestyles of the clergy and hierarchy. The *Challenge of Peace* acknowledges that many good Catholics disagree with their recommendations, while the critical self reflection found in the NCCB's *Economic Justice for All* is at least in part the fruit of listening to the voices of those who work for and in the Catholic Church in America. But perhaps the most striking, though also the most heartbreaking, was the attempt to listen seriously to the voice of women in the formulation of the first two drafts of the unfinished pastoral on women's concerns.

The critical impasse of this document is symptomatic of the tension between what the Church says about justice in the world and how



the Church struggles to be just, between its struggle to enter into dialogue and some of its continuing assumptions about the concept of truth. To move beyond this juncture, to listen to the voices of the laity, of women, and of theologians without simultaneously guarding the rear flank against transformative changes is the critical challenge of the church. It is not possible to move forward without being broken and changed.

This shift to a more inclusive voice in the Church parallels in a variety of ways the improvements that occur in communication patterns and health as a family system matures. So-called parental authority is exercised more collegially, incorporating a greater breadth of knowledge and experience, relieving the monarchical head of unrealistic and unreasonable expectation. Further, this shift to greater collegiality allows rules to be better based in reality. The dialogue with and influence of parties outside the system fundamentally improves the health and stability of the system, as isolation is a primary index of system dysfunction. The increasing influence of the laity reflects a growing ability to deal with ambivalence and disagreement, essential to the development of healthy individuation within the system.

The tone of *Rerum Novarum* reveals Leo XIII's presupposition that the "Chair of Peter" is the perfect mediator of the conflict between employers and workers at least in part because of the objectivity it enjoys as a result of its elevated and neutral vantage point. Indeed, much of the earlier writings in official Catholic Social Teachings cling to this notion of neutrality, implying that the

otherworldly character of the church is what renders it capable of offering truly objective analysis. Such an assumption seems to fly in the face of the contemporary language calling for a "preferential option for the poor" and challenging the church to embrace the perspective of the marginalized. This shift from a pseudo-neutrality to advocacy is intimately related to the changing conversational patterns of official Catholic Social Teachings.

For example, by examining the structure and tone of *Rerum Novarum* it becomes clear that Leo XIII's neutrality represents a commitment to preserve the decidedly unbalanced political and economic status quo. The pope's hierarchial worldview, combined with his fears of any sort of revolutionary changes, led him to support only those tinkering reforms initiated by the wealthy and mighty of his day, rejecting initiatives by the working or underclass as destabilizing. This pseudo-neutrality is preserved by the fact that the aristocratic pope is only in dialogue with the powerful. *Rerum Novarum* is a conversation with the wealthy about the problem of the poor, and for this reason is unlikely to generate structural analysis or sweeping reform. Instead, the pope's neutrality becomes an unwillingness to unmask systemic evil or to give the poor any real political tool for their struggle.

It is at Medellin that the poor are first addressed as conversational partners and challenged as subjects. Not surprisingly, it is also at Medellin that the concept of education begins to take on the meaning of conscientization, while development language is replaced with a discussion of liberation. Here too the analysis of poverty and violence attains a new depth, revealing the structure of institutional violence and the brutality of poverty as an expression of injustice. By taking the poor seriously as conversational partners and subjects of history the documents speak as if from the other side of a chasm, critiquing the world and experience from the perspective of the poor and with a commitment to confronting the systems that oppress them.

It is a simple and straightforward fact that over the centuries Roman Catholicism has said or done a variety of things which nearly everyone would now believe constituted some fashion of human rights violations or some other sort of

injustice.

At the same time there has been a certain hesitancy in official Catholic Social Teachings to avert either to the past failures of the church or to errors of earlier pontiffs. There has clearly been a resistance to admitting that an earlier position was erroneous. Pius XI does a wonderful little two-step in *Quadragesimo Anno* arguing that Leo XIII has drawn his teachings from "the unchangeable principles of right and divine revelation" even while deftly modifying the earlier pope's core position on private property. Both *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Mater et Magistra* dismiss out of hand those critics of *Rerum Novarum* who argued that Leo XIII had failed to give the workers an effective tool for their struggle, a point which even so sympathetic a student of the tradition as Donal Dorr has made with authority.

And so there has been some evidence of a rather tentative willingness to look critically at both the actual practice of the church in the matter of justice and the development of official Catholic Social Teachings.

Once again, however, it is at Medellin that a significant shift is noted. Here the documents grapple with an awareness of the cooperation between the church and the colonial and neo-colonial structures which have oppressed and enslaved the people of Latin America. At Medellin the bishops first seem to wrestle with criticisms about the economic injustices within the church. And it is at Medellin that the idea is heard that a church which will preach justice must itself be just.

The four shifts discussed in this paper are each positive if incomplete steps in the evolution of the voice of official Catholic Social Teachings. These conceptually distinct but interdependent changes have brought the developing tradition to a critical stage. At this point the conversation must either qualitatively improve, achieving a new level of congruence and credibility, or retreat into various forms of silence or meaningless shibboleths. The evolving conversation must lead to communication patterns and ecclesial structures capable of witnessing to the content of these statements.

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*Action
on behalf of
justice
and participation
in the transformation of the world
fully appear to us
as a constitutive dimension
of the preaching of the Gospel...*



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Text: Synodal Document on the Justice in the World, 1971

ENVIRONMENT



Suzanne Renard lives in south St. Louis with her husband and their new son Louis. She not only cultivates her own garden, but encourages others to do the same. She was interviewed by Ellen Rehg.

RT: Do you think the Church should have more specific teachings on the issue of our relationship to the environment? Even though there have been general calls there is little specific teaching.

Renard: There's been little call from the Church until Pope John Paul II finally mentioned the concept that we have to be good stewards in order to call ourselves Christians. I think it was in the New Year's speech of 1990. He said, we've been right to focus on poverty and social issues and social justice. But now, at last, we have to recognize that all these things are inextricably bound with the state of the planet. And he called for stewardship of the earth.

It's very risky to get specific. Part of the problem with the Church and taking a stand is if you take any parish and you begin to get specific about it, well, there are no ecological saints or sinners, we're all a part of it. And there's really no way, I've found, to live without some co-opting of the destruction. I am a consumer, as green a consumer I might want to be. We tried to grow all our own food in our back yard this year, but still, we buy dried beans, and it's brought on a truck from a long distance with petroleum products. We drive our car to church. We do have an impact, its just, how do we minimize the negative impact we have on the earth as much as possible?

RT: What do you think we, as Christians,

should do now? Should we attempt to live without technology?

Renard: I'm not sure that we really can go back. We wouldn't want to go back to an agrarian society. That wouldn't undo all the ills either. Even the best farming practices deplete the soil to some extent. I do think the answer is to declare a moratorium for a while, and then to look at the balance sheet and enter into that ledger the effects of technology on the habitats of other creatures (we're not alone here), the habitats of plants, everything that God made.

I think we've developed a sense of entitlement because we seem to be the creature closest to God's image. I don't know that that's true. St. Isaac the Cyprian said all creatures long for God. Even the slimy ones. Even the reptiles. Thanks to God for that creature that longs to be united with the One who made it. The Eastern Orthodox Church has a sense of the Mystical, the desire for oneness with the Creator, which we seem to have divested other creatures of in our search for our place in the Cosmology. Christ came not only for our salvation, I think, but also to make us part of the salvation of what by the hand of the human being has become fallen. That's Irenaeus' schtick with the second Adam. Jesus was the second human because the first one botched it so badly. And so Jesus came to restore health to the human being, not only to me individually. Irenaeus said we should be co-creators. He means that we should restore Eden, restore the Garden. We need to restore health to all creation. †

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



Jim Goeke said Mass at Karen House one Tuesday night in August. I remember when he was a very young scholastic. I get confused about which year what happened, but I think he was one of a group of Jesuits who used to take house for us Wednesday nights during our community meetings. One Wednesday night, a fifteen-year old, Michael — whose mother and younger brothers had stayed with us for several months — appeared with five small step-brothers and step-sisters because his father and step-mother had not come home for two days and there was no food. Mike had heard about Karen House from his brothers, so he came for help.

The Jesuit scholastics made a bedroom of the parlor. They didn't know we had promised ourselves a month earlier NEVER again to overcrowd the house by letting people sleep in the parlor, and furthermore, that from the first days one rule we had never violated was that we did not take children without their parents. I don't remember what we did. I just remember Michael's and the scholastics' confidence that the house had room for these children.

Michael has three children of his own now and does housing rehab with one of his younger brothers. Jim has been ordained for two or three years.

All this came to my mind because the readings that Tuesday night in August enjoined us to "Be strong, stand firm, have no fear, no terror, for the Lord, your God, is going with you" (Deut. 31:1-8). And, "Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18: 1-5).

Jim started the dialogue homily by saying how hard he found the paradox of trust and responsibility. Penny described how the child within each of us learns to trust and be respon-

sible and to forgive. Bill Miller reminded us of times when our feelings of fear prove groundless in the event. God does save. For myself, it's when, despite my responsible behavior, I hit a brick wall that I remember it is God who saves, not me.

Ellen said she was at a point in her life where she did not understand the readings at all. In a lovely moment, Virginia turned to Ellen and said, "You gave the homily at Midnight Mass one year, and I remember you said then that the way babies are like God is that babies are completely powerless except in their power to provoke love. That is the only power God uses."

That power to provoke love binds an ever-growing community here at the Worker. People move on, but not out of our minds and hearts.

Speaking of moves, Susan and Elijah have moved to a house in Baden and Darryl has moved into the Little House. Lorraine would be grateful for some volunteer childcare this fall and for some baby furniture, especially high chairs. We need forty feet of good fencing for the back yard.

The Economic Conversion Project 1992 appointment calendar is underway. We got our first re-order from Julie B. for the Missouri Association of Social Welfare. To order your own calendar call the office or mail in your order blank, across from the first week in September. ✦



Mary Ann McGivern, SL, is beginning to plan for her fiftieth birthday party in January.

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FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Sharon Cummins



On December 6, 1990 I became a mother. I had to go into the hospital two weeks before Terri was due because of high blood pressure. A week later my labor was induced. It didn't work the first time. The next day they tried again. At 5:30 p.m. they did an emergency C-section because Terri was holding her cord. All I remember was one doctor trying to put me to sleep. Friends told me later that there were complications. My breathing stopped, so they had to cut a hole in my throat to keep me alive. When I awoke my doctor told me, "We thought we almost lost you." Terri came out a healthy six pounds and fourteen ounces.

Being a mother in the community really hasn't been that difficult. I've had a lot of help from friends and guests from the very beginning. Some were so special that I asked them to be godparents.

Teka is a good friend of mine in the community who babysits Terri sometimes and often visits with her in our room.

Jeannie was my doctor and is now my good friend. She delivered Terri in forty seconds! She helped me a lot during the emotional times after Terri's birth. She let me call whenever I needed — I know, as I called her an awful lot. Jeannie and her husband, Paul, invited Terri, me, and some friends

to their home where we celebrated my birthday. Now that I know Paul I feel he can also be Terri's godparent. We are in the process of making Jeannie and Paul legal guardians of Terri in case something should ever happen to me.

I asked Jim to be Terri's godfather because he is a very nice member of the community. I believe he would be very kind to her.

Being a mother was difficult at first because Terri was getting up every two hours to feed. She also has been sick an awful lot, though she's getting better now. As time goes on, it seems easier. It helps when guests and friends babysit so I can get some time away. I don't do as much as I did before Terri was born, but usually I carry Terri with me or ask a guest at the house to hold her. To me, it hasn't been hard to take house or do my other work for the house. Sometimes friends visit me to help watch Terri while I'm on house. I find guests ask my opinion as a mother when their children are sick.

It is possible to be a parent at a Catholic Worker house. I don't see why people are afraid to bring up a child in a Catholic Worker house, unless others in the community have a difficulty with it. But in December after Terri's first birthday I will leave the community, and go elsewhere to live. ✦



Jeannie, Jim, Teka, Sharon
Terri Cummins and Ben Plato

Sharon Cummins is a member of the Karen House community and a wonderful mother.