FOCUS ON THE MINISTRY AND BUSINESS ETHICS
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Economic Justice and Recent Roman Teaching
Drew Christiansen, S. J.

Political Economy, Leadership, and Policy
Arthur I. Blaustein

Transnational Corporations
Norman J. Faramelli

A Sociologist on Managerial Ethics
Robert Jackall

How to Change Corporate Culture
Janet Dudrow and Douglas Wallace

Homiletical Resources on 1 Corinthians
Janice Riggle Huie
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EDITORIAL:
THE DILEMMA OF THE BUSINESS ETHICIST

HENRY CLARK

It was fun to be a liberal in the sixties, especially if you were a liberal professor of social ethics in a Protestant theological seminary. Surrounded by enthusiastic students and involved in a number of Righteous Causes, I was proud to be a member of what would later be called "the New Class," devoted to the establishment of a Great Society. Life was full of responsibilities, challenges, and perplexities, of course, but some things were clear and sure: racial discrimination and economic inequality were wicked, and whatever John Kenneth Galbraith said about economics was true. Since the federal government had been so successful in attacking segregation, and had announced a highly publicized War on Poverty, we looked forward to further progress down the road to a Welfare State where we could count on a Big Government solution to most of life's vexing problems.

It was during those heady years, and in the optimistic mood of the time, that I made my first attempts to become a practitioner of business ethics. Recognizing the power of managerial elites and the crucial significance of policy issues arising in their sphere of influence, I accepted an opportunity to lead a Lenten study group on "Christian Values and Economic Life" in a prosperous suburban church. Since my annual salary in 1964 was $3600 (plus living quarters), it was gratifying to find a group

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of business executives who were so eager to be enlightened on this subject that they would pay a first-year instructor at Union Theological Seminary $25.00 per week to instruct them. It was not long before I realized that I was just a lamb being led to slaughter: despite my diligent efforts to master the rudiments of economics while earning my Ph.D. in social ethics, I had virtually no knowledge of their universe, and I was excruciatingly aware that whatever I might have to say on the topic lay under suspicion of being little more than idealistic claptrap.

Most readers of this journal will have experienced similar frustrations, and many will doubtless have attempted to deal with them in very much the same way that I did. Since my first foray into the wilderness of business ethics a couple of decades ago, I have continued my study of the dismal science, and I have filled a few gaps in my knowledge of the business world by participating in or leading dozens of workshops and seminars on business ethics. But I am still impaled on the horns of a painful dilemma: How can anyone who understands the enormous importance of the economic arena shy away from at least trying to influence what happens there? . . . Yet how can even the best-intentioned applied ethicist attain credibility as an evaluator of social policy in this arena? Anyone with a drop of prophetic blood in their veins feels compelled to make the effort, yet lacking the full credentials and experience to speak with authority, she will almost always be viewed with skepticism and treated as an innocent by the business students and corporate executives whom she engages in dialogue. Put more sharply, the dilemma presents itself as follows: you have to meet 'em on their turf, and be able to talk their language . . . but sooner or later you have to persuade 'em to venture onto your turf and talk about things in your terms. That is, you have to begin by understanding and to some extent accepting the givens of the organizational life in which they are involved . . . but at some point you have to go beyond these givens and challenge many of them in the light of ethics. You have to get them to see their "Is" in terms of an "Ought" that is bound to seem in many ways strange or subversive to them; otherwise, the conversation will be fruitless.
EDITORIAL

THREE APPROACHES TO THE DILEMMA

There are at least three possible lines of attack in attempting to resolve the dilemma. One is to admit the futility of the enterprise; a second, to restrict oneself to addressing "micro-ethical" issues (i.e., those pertaining almost exclusively to the processes of business activity, not to the products or the psycho-social impact of such activity); a third, to broaden the approach to include "macro-ethical" concerns having to do with the outcomes produced by our economic system and the socio-cultural assumptions on which it is based.

Giving Up. One way to "resolve" the dilemma, of course, is to give up. No less an authority than David Vogel, one of this country's foremost students of corporate social responsibility, is extremely pessimistic about the workability of programs in business ethics as a means of persuading corporate managers to consider "nonpecuniary values" in their decisions, because, he says,

the most important decisions made by any firm are out of the control of those who govern it; they are dictated by the imperatives of a market economy. . . . The extent to which business executives could actually change the basic orientation of their companies is severely limited: corporate accountability is fundamentally limited by the inability of a privately owned firm to pursue objectives that are incompatible with long run profit maximization, however loosely that objective is defined: a politically [and socially] accountable corporation in a capitalist system is a contradiction in terms.  

William C. Frederick, professor of business administration in the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh, concurs, arguing that the social responsiveness of many corporations in recent years—i.e., their willingness to "respond pragmatically and defensively to social pressures"—is a far cry from genuine social responsibility. He criticizes the naivete of those who, he says, "have imagined that business itself is the institutional shell into which alternative values could be infused, as new, young leaders whose own personal values are more compatible with social demands occupy positions of power and influence in the corporate system." In Frederick's view, "this hope is a vain one, for the contest between
established organizational values and contrary personal values is always uneven, and normally reaches a foreordained conclusion: Goliath wins."

We have to be duly mindful of this critique; indeed, the articles by Blaustein and (especially!) Jackall in this issue contain material that could be used to reinforce its message about abandoning hope. But one can accept a sober account of difficulties to be faced without arriving at that conclusion—and there are ample grounds for refusing to give up. No doubt moral suasion alone is insufficient: Goliath often turns a deaf ear, unless he is accosted both by pressure from below (in the form of protest actions carried out by disciplined cadres of activists who disrupt business as usual through demonstrations, boycotts, and other forms of nonviolent passive insistence) and by pressure from outside (for example, from middle-class consumer or environmental groups with legal sophistication and political clout). Yet unless these pressures are complemented by appeals to enlightened self-interest or by "leadership" persuasively articulated by do-gooders with Establishment credentials, they are apt to be less effective—and less quick to bring results—than would otherwise be the case. In the struggle for racial justice in the sixties, for instance, the apparently futile pronouncements of religious groups and minority spokespersons during the fifties had a latent power that helped to accelerate and consolidate progress once it was forced by judicial victories and direct action. Both logic and historical experience confirm the point frequently made by Reinhold Niebuhr when he observed that, just as justice will gradually drift into disorder unless it is constantly "pulled upward" by love, a rather too cynical "realism" will intensify the evils it claims to understand if it is not tempered by idealism. History, says Niebuhr, has refuted the absolutism of the pre-democratic realists because it revealed that political encounters and debates in a free society involved not only contests of interest and power, but the rational engagement and enlargement of a native sympathy, a sense of justice, a residual moral integrity, and a sense of the common good in all classes of society.\textsuperscript{3}

The "Realistic" Approach. One might, of course, take a more sanguine view of the executives and their "turf" (their world
and the assumptions or rules governing its operation). This, I believe, is what most academic practitioners of business ethics do. They feel sure that "good business practice" is defined in terms of reasonable moral sensitivity as well as economic rationality, and on that basis they look for ways to show that economic goals and service to the common good overlap. Affirmative action, for example, can contribute to long-range profits as well as to justice, and corporate philanthropy may enhance the firm's image in ways that will ultimately yield dividends flowing from increased consumer good will. Service to the community in the form of participation on school boards and voluntary agencies may lead to similar pay-offs: better schools will provide more intelligent help, and families who play in parks built through the civic efforts of managers who have been encouraged to contribute their energies to such endeavors will be inclined to look with favor upon the corporation and its products.

But according to this logic, a prophetic style is both unnecessary and counterproductive: It is unnecessary because the purposes of justice can be effectively served through appeals to enlightened self-interest: you can often get the decisions and policies you want without obfuscatory invocations of theological images or philosophical impedimenta. It is counterproductive because denunciatory confrontation (no matter how diplomatically couched) arouses resistance and may endanger access. It follows that micro-ethics is the only viable alternative: micro-ethics in the form of case study analysis, aimed at making the processes of corporate activity somewhat more just and humane without raising fundamental questions about social structures and outcomes. This is the best that can be hoped for, because it represents the art of the possible in dialogue with management officials.

This is a perfectly tenable posture, and it results in oftentimes admirable achievements. In urging decision-makers in industry to develop moral imagination and to use it in searching for the most creative "win-win" solutions to issues, it capitalizes on their impulses toward good, and it avoids the self-righteousness to which self-styled prophets are always prone. In showing the congruity between doing well and doing good, it follows
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Reinhold Niebuhr’s famous prescription for “a pragmatic ethic in which power and self-interest are used, beguiled, harnessed and deflected” for worthy ends. To practice the vocation of applied ethics in this fashion is surely an honorable pursuit; all tribute to those who practice it successfully, and more power to them.

I would argue, however, that this approach must be combined with and complemented by other approaches that focus attention on larger issues and begged questions. Some ethicists must focus attention on products and outcomes as well as processes; they must find a way to capture the attention of business policymakers with thorough, systemic ethical analysis that does not concede too many givens in advance. For if Christian social ethics means anything at all, it means that the normative takes precedence over the merely descriptive, and certainly over the politely acceptable. It means that visions of the Ought must not be curtailed prematurely by perceptions of the Is at a given moment. It understands all individuals and all social institutions in terms of their covenant relationship with their fellow beings and judges them by reference to their faithful fulfillment of the mutual obligations entailed in this relationship. It sees corporations and governments as having a vocation to serve the common good, and it views all customs, forms, structures, and habitual modes of operation (e.g., private property or profit) as nothing more than pragmatic mechanisms for encouraging human effort and initiative, not as sacred rights on a par with the rights of persons in the commonwealth.

Of course, the practitioners of what I have called “micro-ethics” do not ignore systematic questions entirely. But to raise them “in passing”—that is, hurriedly, as an afterthought unsupported by substantial readings and adequate discussion—is to present one’s audience with a powerful “counter-suggestion cue”: for, making a mere gesture in the direction of addressing questions concerning the need for a structural overhaul of our political machinery or our economic system is to communicate the message that, even though one is aware of the possibility that such questions exist, we need not be interested in pursuing them seriously.

Beyond Realism. Fortunately, there is a feasible alternative to giving up and to adopting a merely micro-ethics approach to the
social responsibility of business. As Kirk Hanson of the Stanford Business School argues, courses in applied ethics must move beyond individual dilemmas and institutional problems to more-global questions concerning "the values and norms [that guide] the economic system of the U. S. or other national economic systems." In addition, the study of business ethics ought to stress the importance of "generating creative options that make the situation more of a win-win one for all parties." Moving beyond "realism" to a macro-prophetic approach involves at least three elements: broadening the agenda of policy innovations to be considered and advocated, forming "policy-oriented coalitions" with persons and interest groups whose assumptions may be different from yours but whose goals are congruent, and cultural consciousness-raising. To describe this approach in any detail would require more space than is available here; suffice it to say that the intelligent reader can easily get a good understanding of what is involved in each element by reading only a couple of salient books or articles, and that ministers have an especially vital role to play in implementing this desperately needed approach to business ethics. As Alasdair Maclntyre has observed in After Virtue (2nd ed., 1984), ethics cannot be satisfactorily taught or practiced, even in our contentiously pluralistic society, unless inquiry returns to classical philosophical and religious questions about the nature and destiny of humankind. But the prospect of facing up to the demands of that challenge, and of trying to figure out strategies to be implemented successfully, is enough to make any realist who values his standing with the secular elites flee to the relative safety of micro-issues; it is enough to make university-based ethicists give up and retreat to the safe ground of esoteric academic research and the pernicious careerism furthered thereby. For practitioners in business, government, law, and science-technology are notoriously unwilling to "waste their time" in "chit chat" about First Principles and the telos of the essential self: if it cannot be summarized in a one-page executive memo, they will not read it (and will resent being asked to do so) . . . and if you start asking them to question the rules of the game as it is now being played (where the bottom
line is success competitively achieved), they will go away, not so much sorrowing as muttering about the impracticality of moralists.

This situation represents a special opportunity—and a special challenge—to a particular group of professionals who ought to be especially motivated and (despite certain handicaps) especially qualified to rise to the occasion: clergymen and clergywomen. First of all, it does not violate prevailing expectations for clergypersons to raise ultimate questions about the purposes for which human life is lived; indeed, they violate their own self-concept and job description if they fail to do this. Second, they have every right to assume that their constituents are open to serious study and reflection on such matters. Therefore, they are in a better position to inject an element of prophetic vigor into applied ethics than professors are; moreover, given the malignant pressures of academic professionalism today, they are more likely to have the guts to do it than academics are.

Needless to say, it is not a question of either/or. The large multi-staffed parish church, or a coalition of smaller churches in a city or good-sized town, can mount an offensive that includes all of the actors mentioned in this essay. Professors can be relied on for information, community activists for clout, and ministers for a relentless insistence that fundamental questions about intentionality and spirituality do not get lost in the shuffle. Given a mix of this kind, there is no need to believe that Saul Alinsky was right when he warned that “well-intentioned people who spend a lot of time discussing ends and means wind up on their ends with no means at all.”

As civic republicans argue, the prophetic thrust of the biblical tradition can be linked to the political and moral thought of the founding fathers: greater emphasis on a covenantal view of caring about and caring for our neighbors is the true genius of America and Americanism. The truly patriotic citizen is one who affirms what the founders of the republic believed about civitas, that “spontaneous willingness to obey the law, to respect the rights of others, [and] to forego the temptations of private enrichment at the expense of the public weal” which is such a priceless element of our civic republican heritage. And the faithful Christian is one who remembers what the American
Catholic bishops, in their pastoral letter, have recently called us to reaffirm: that “the Christian vision of economic life” judges economic institutions and operations in terms of “the dignity of human persons,” and that (as Drew Christiansen argues in the lead essay of this issue of Quarterly Review) this dignity “can only be realized and protected in solidarity with others”—in relative equality.

AN OVERVIEW

This special issue of Quarterly Review is intended to provide some food for thought to ministers and other church leaders who are similarly perplexed by the dilemma of the business ethicist, and to give them some handles by means of which they can overcome it. It is intended, above all, to proclaim the conviction of all its authors that we should not give up the struggle. Beyond that, it offers a series of essays on crucial aspects of economic justice, and on the social responsibility of business, which are rich in all three of the indispensable dimensions of the effective practice of business ethics: normative analysis (in this case, certain new theological understandings of relevant norms in economic life), descriptive analysis (of governmental policy regarding inflation, unemployment, and welfare, and of the socio-cultural impact of transnational corporations on Third World countries), and practical advice about promoting constructive organizational change in business institutions. The entire issue is designed to help ministers and other church leaders carry out their educational and mobilization responsibilities with two groups: first, ordinary citizens who need a better understanding of economic forces and institutions in the modern world, and a more profound comprehension of what Christian discipleship requires in the economic arena; second, policy makers in business and government institutions, who—pace Vogel and Frederick—have a chance to influence the ways in which the organizations in which they work conduct “business as usual.”

The argument of these articles moves back and forth between two distinct categories of value analysis: the prevailing ethos of the nation or of specific institutional forms (especially corporations or banking institutions), and Christian ethics as a framework.
of evaluative norms which can be used to measure the health of a particular ethos. In keeping with our conviction that practitioners of applied ethics ought to come to the discussion of policy issues with a clear normative framework already in mind, we begin with a superb analysis of the doctrine of relative equality, written by Drew Christiansen, a Jesuit scholar who has recently joined the faculty of Notre Dame University as a member of the department of theology. "Americanizing Catholic Social Teaching" adds a special dimension to the reader’s understanding of the widely discussed pastoral letter on the United States economy promulgated last year by the American Catholic bishops. Non-Catholics who have become accustomed to deploring the conservatism of the Vatican on social issues such as "artificial" conception and contraception will be intrigued to discover that for once the leadership of the Catholic church in this country is less enlightened than the pope (!) on an issue that assumes the greatest importance in light of what books like Habits of the Heart have to say about the excesses of individualism in contemporary American culture. The leadership of the Protestant churches of America ought also to be instructed by the political sagacity of the American bishops as revealed in Christiansen’s comments on the process by means of which the pastoral letter was drafted, refined, and publicized.

With "The Political Economy, Moral Leadership, and Public Policy," by Arthur I. Blaustein, the focus moves primarily to the descriptive analysis of social science and history—but as any reader will very quickly perceive, an evaluative perspective infuses every page of this passionate critique of neoconservatism! Blaustein’s credentials for commenting on governmental policy as it affects the economy are exceedingly impressive, for he has served many years in Washington, most recently as the chairman of the President’s Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity from 1977 to 1981. The article is anything but a dry, antiseptic compilation of facts, figures, and bureaucratic preoccupations. On the contrary, it is a ferocious assault upon certain policies Blaustein considers disastrous, and even more upon the cultural ethos and the typical pattern of mass media production and consumption which underlie these policies. He denounces the media professionals, the public when it is lazy
and stupid enough to accept what they offer, and, especially, an Administration that manipulates both media and public to the detriment of millions.

Next comes a discerning appraisal of one of the most significant social institutions of the modern age, the transnational corporation (TNC). Its author, Norman J. Faramelli, has academic training and years of experience in engineering as well as theology, and even before leaving his position with the Boston Industrial Mission to accept a post with the Massachusetts Transportation Authority he had become one of the principal brain trusters of the policy-making apparatus of the Episcopal church in America. "Transnational Corporations, Global Development, and the Church" offers no simple answers, and it specifically warns us against the ever-present temptation to view TNCs as a devil causing Third World misery, or as a savior capable of solving every problem. Readers who are familiar with the World Council of Churches' studies of the global impact of TNCs may be distressed by Faramelli's rather more moderate position, but they are bound to be instructed by the facts and the balanced arguments put forth by the author.

The description of corporate culture presented by sociologist Robert Jackall in his essay, "Bureaucracy, Moral Casuistry, and Sociology," will arouse various emotions in different readers, and ambivalence in most. Those who like to get a quick psycho-spiritual lift by indulging themselves in a gratifying rush of moral indignation will get a high that rivals even those produced by ContraGate and the demise of Gary Hart—but when they come down to earth, they may be overwhelmed by pessimism. For the portrait of the institutional imperatives of the life of management executives lends depressing credibility to the familiar quip that "business ethics" is an oxymoron. Anyone with as much as a few years' experience in any bureaucracy (dare I mention the United Methodist Church . . . or the typical American university?!) knows that the easiest way to get along is to go along with whatever one's superiors in the organization decree; that much is a well-digested given of realism about life in this wicked world. But is it really—can it possibly be—as bad as Jackall suggests in the world of business? The resolve of even the most determined exponent of not giving up the cause of applied
ethics will be tested. On the other hand, though, Jackall’s analysis will motivate some readers to a more-astute analysis of obstacles and targets, and to greater ingenuity in devising tactics in the fight for effective institutional change.

The final essay presents the other side of the coin displayed by Jackall. Douglas Wallace and Janet Dudrow draw on their experience as officially designated social change agents in a relatively small Midwestern business to testify that it is possible to humanize and democratize in very specific and very important ways; indeed, that it is possible to institutionalize a method for continuing to do this indefinitely on an ever-broader range of issues. “New Metaphors in a Time of Change” will be of special interest to many readers, for its authors tell us how meaningful change was achieved in their corporation, and by implication encourage us to look for opportunities to enable the same things to happen in similar business institutions in our own setting.

NOTES

6. Kirk O. Hanson, “Ethics and Business,” Stanford GSB 51:3 (spring 1993): 8, 10; the title of the publication has been changed to Stanford Business School Magazine as of 1985.
7. See especially the writings of Martin Carnoy and Derek Shearer, particularly their book, Economic Democracy: The Challenge of the 1980s (1986), and those of “civic republicans” such as Robert Bellah and William Sullivan, particularly Bellah’s Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (1985) and Sullivan’s Reconstructing Public Philosophy (see note 8).
8. This definition of civitas is given by Daniel Bell, as cited in William Sullivan, Reconstructing Public Philosophy (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Pr., 1982), p. 43.
Although not nearly so radical as Roman teaching on economic life, in its own context the recent pastoral letter of the American bishops is a serious challenge to the political economy of the United States.

In November 1986, the Catholic bishops of the United States, after five years of preparatory work, issued a pastoral letter on economic life in the United States. *Economic Justice for All* was a precedent-setting document. Representative David Obey of Wisconsin held a special hearing for a House of Representatives committee to learn why the bishops believe current levels of poverty are "a moral scandal."

**SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE DEMOCRATIC CONSCIENCE**

The economics pastoral letter set precedents within the Catholic Church, too. The bishops' 1983 pastoral letter on nuclear weapons issues, *The Challenge of Peace*, had opened the way to a public drafting process, going through three preliminary drafts to which public response was invited. The consultations for the economics letter, however, were far more representative of the general public, including Protestant and Jewish opinion. Working people, the poor, and elderly, in addition to experts from business, government, and academia, testified before the bishops' drafting committee. Over and over again, people spoke of the way that current economic policies, particularly the self-interested behavior of the economic elites, contributed to growing poverty and growing inequality.
again, as the drafters discussed the preliminary versions of Economic Justice, they insisted that the process of public discussion was more important than the specifics of the letter itself. The Vatican and some European bishops sometimes seemed uneasy with this open process, but the American bishops were confident that they had set a precedent in adapting Catholic social teaching to the open processes of American democracy.

The public drafting process represents the Catholic hierarchy's most successful strategy since the Great Depression for influencing public debate on moral aspects of social policy. There was a time when Catholic social teaching presumed its audience consisted of the leaders of nations. But this has become a hopelessly anachronistic supposition, a nostalgic vestige of medieval Christendom. Today Catholic social teaching aims at shaping public opinion.

Although Pope Pius XII was well known for his radio broadcasts and public addresses on moral and political questions, significant change came first with Pope John XXIII. John addressed his encyclical Pacem in terris "to all men and women of good will." This simple phrase indicated the pope's belief that Catholics shared common moral ground on major social questions with non-Catholics. Vatican II, in its major social document, Gaudium et spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, similarly embraced the cause of humanity. In addition, the council, like Pope John, taught that all people, believers and nonbelievers alike, had an obligation to discern the signs of the times.

The late Paul VI also made moral appeals to men and women of conscience, notably in his 1967 encyclical Populorum progressio. With the passage of time, however, Paul grew increasingly impatient with the ineffectiveness of propounding a generalized moral teaching from the Vatican. In a 1971 apostolic letter, Octogesima adveniens (in English, A Call to Action), Paul broke with the older conception of "Catholic social doctrine." He urged Christian communities to discern for themselves what they ought to do and which political strategies were appropriate to their social goals. "In the face of such widely varying situations," Paul wrote, "it is difficult for us to utter a unified
message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity." He continued: "It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church" (no. 4).

Inculturation: Public Teaching as Social Strategy

Although there were precedents for episcopal action on the economic front in the American episcopacy’s 1919 program of social reconstruction and in Msgr. John A. Ryan’s support of the New Deal, the Catholic bishops of the United States were slow to adapt to Paul’s decentralized approach to social action. The bishops’ 1976 United States bicentennial program, “Liberty and Justice for All,” sought advice from the Catholic laity at local, regional, and national consultations on the direction of Catholic social policy. But the liberal recommendations of the program’s concluding “Call to Action” conference were abandoned by the bishops, and the process, in clerical eyes at least, was discredited.

Subsequently, discernment of a social program for the United States presented the bishops with several other difficulties. For one, the separation of church and state in the United States made advancing a social program a sensitive matter. To the general public, the traditional American Catholic agenda, such as aid to parochial schools, seemed narrow and self-interested. Moreover, since the dominant style of Catholic insertion in American life had been one of assimilation, there was a general reluctance on the part of Catholics to stand out. Furthermore, beneath the tolerance won for them by the goodness of Pope John and the urbanity of President Kennedy, Catholics still feared the deep strain of anti-Catholicism in American culture. Non-Catholics remained suspicious of Catholic authoritarianism. The 1984 presidential campaign seemed to bring the worst fears of both sides to the surface, as New York’s Cardinal John O’Connor and Boston’s Cardinal Bernard Law baited Catholic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro over the abortion issue.
When the Executive Committee of the Bishops' Conference settled the campaign dispute, the direction of its own strategy was clear: there ought to be no wall of separation between morality and politics, it ruled, but the strategy, tactics, and timing of action on moral issues should be left to public officials. The Bishops' Conference pointedly held the line against bullying from the pulpit. It distinguished between direct application of church power in politics and indirect influence in shaping the public debate over social policy. The bishops would neither threaten nor punish; they would teach.

Adapting to the United States Context

Economic Justice for All represents the bishops' most sophisticated effort to date to address social issues through public teaching. Its double purpose is to inform conscience and to influence the debate over public policy. In keeping with the Catholic tradition of natural law, the drafters attempt to contribute to building "a common moral vision" of economic life for believers and unbelievers alike.

To non-Catholics accustomed to regarding natural law as a peculiarly Roman form of apodictic moral prescriptions and to the new breed of Catholic natural lawyer, intent on preserving a conservative sexual ethic through Kantian intuitionism, it may seem strange to speak of the letter's teaching as belonging to the family of natural law. Nevertheless, the document belongs to the broad stream of natural law reasoning for three reasons.

First, Economic Justice conforms to the natural law paradigm by virtue of its intention. By that I mean it tries to find common ground for Catholics and non-Catholics, for believers and unbelievers. It does not base its arguments on exclusively religious sources: not Scripture, not theology, not church authority. Secondly, its substance belongs to the natural law tradition; on major points it is in continuity with the line of modern Catholic social teaching. Thirdly, by its use of the language of human rights, the letter follows the precedent of contemporary social teaching since John XXIII in adapting the secular natural rights tradition as the primary mode of discourse about social and political questions.

In keeping with the teaching of A Call to Action, the bishops
understand that Catholics and other citizens must discern for themselves how best to achieve justice in economic life. Accordingly, the pastoral distinguishes between the kind of seriousness with which the bishops’ readers ought to take their moral principles and the tentativeness which attends their

“What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?”

policy options (see *Economic Justice*, nos. 21, 127–35, esp. 134–35). The letter sets the basic questions: “Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral and Christian must be shaped by three questions,” they write. “What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?” (no. 1). The pastoral’s readers must discern the appropriate means to construct an economy for people.

Adaptations and Qualifications

_Economic Justice_ has gone a long way to adapt Catholic social teaching to the American context. Alert to how neuralgic a moral assessment of the economy would be, from the outset the drafting committee rejected its original mandate to write a letter on capitalism. It chose instead to address certain features of the American economy: employment, poverty, agriculture, and the relation of the United States economy to developing nations. It avoided any systemic social analysis of the American political economy, and sidestepped an examination of United States political culture as a source of the economy’s moral failures. Taking the lead from their conservative critics, in later drafts the bishops effectively used the rhetoric of American civic culture to applaud the strengths and mark the weaknesses of United States economic life.

Finally, the bishops downplayed the potential radicalism of recent Catholic social teaching, with its insistence on egalitarian redistribution, and proposed instead “a new American experiment” in economic rights. A serious advance over United States
practice, which historically has excluded claims to economic rights, the experiment is nonetheless tailored to the United States by prescribing only "minimal access" to the economy. The remainder of this article will examine how the bishops adapted the principles of Catholic social teaching to the American context.

RELATIVE EQUALITY AND MINIMAL ACCESS

Papal economic ethics since the time of John XXIII may be described as advocating a strategy of "relative equality." It has enjoined repeated redistribution of wealth, income, and resources to ensure that a full human life is available to all. Departures from equality are held within strict limits to promote a general sharing in a common quality of life. Well-to-do individuals, groups, and nations are asked to make extensive sacrifices to help include deprived peoples in their prosperity. Equality may be limited for the sake of other basic interests: human freedom, individual initiative, and the avoidance of envy and avarice. Nonetheless, equality is the basic norm.

The most evident difference between *Economic Justice for All* and contemporary papal and conciliar teaching on economics concerns the place of equality in a just economy. The bishops have played down inequality as a factor in producing economic injustice (*Economic Justice*, nos. 74, 183-85). They call into question only "extreme inequalities of income and consumption." They neither see inequality as a reason why "so many lack necessities," nor do they present socio-economic equality as a remedy for impoverishment. In essence, the bishops take a "basic needs" approach to economic justice. "Basic justice," they write, "calls for the establishment of a floor of material well-being on which all can stand" (no. 74).

David Hollenbach, one of the bishops' chief staff writers, has pointed to the letter's assertion that there is "a strong presumption against extreme inequality of income and wealth as long as there are poor, hungry and homeless people in our midst (no. 185)." But Hollenbach's emphasis, like the bishops', is solely on the elimination of need. Satisfying basic needs, however, is only one thread in the egalitarian weave of Roman social teaching. Beginning with John XXIII, repeated distribu-
tion and egalitarian social policies are equally prescribed for other reasons: (1) to avoid the recurrence of degrading poverty, (2) to promote human well-being, and (3) to foster community. None of these goals, as the bishops insist, aims at "a flat, arithmetical equality." But clearly, they aim at far more than minimal access.

*Inequality Subverts Basic Rights*

To aim no higher than minimal access ignores John XXIII's analysis in *Pacem in terris*, which asserts that inequality makes a dead letter of human rights. John wrote:

Experience has taught us that, unless [civil] authorities take suitable action with regard to economic, political and cultural matters, inequalities between the citizens tend to become more and more widespread . . ., and as a result human rights are rendered totally ineffective and the fulfillment of duties is compromised. (no. 63)

In short, approaches that do not directly address inequality fail to realize the basic rights they hope to provide. Only some greater degree of distribution of goods and services and repeated distribution of wealth can guarantee the resources that permit people to enjoy basic human dignity.

John, a church historian, believed the lesson of history to be that inequality undermines the exercise and enjoyment of other rights. Less-demanding moral economies (growth strategies and, more recently, even basic need strategies) have simply failed to halt impoverishment and to realize a better life for the world's poor. In succeeding decades Roman teaching found added evidence to support John's judgment for a link between inequality and injustice, and it continued to advance egalitarian social programs as a remedy for injustice.

For Paul VI, for example, "the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation" are twin signs of the times (*Octogesima adveniens*, no. 22). But although more and more people desire equality, the pope noted that the world is growing more and more inimical to equality. "Left to itself," he wrote, "[modern economics] works rather to widen the differences in the world's levels of life, not to diminish them" (*Populorum
“Flagrant inequalities,” he lamented in Octogesima adveniens, “exist in the economic, cultural and political development of the nations.” Paul named the disparities in quality of life he had in mind: “While some regions are heavily industrialized, others are still at the agricultural stage; while some countries enjoy prosperity, others are struggling against starvation; while some peoples have a high standard of culture, others are still engaged in eliminating illiteracy” (no. 2). In sum, unequal economic growth leads to vast disparities between nations and even different groups within the same nation.

To remedy the injustice done by an overly competitive market, Paul argued for the primacy of politics over economics. Political power, he reasoned, is needed to promote the common good in the face of unconstrained economic power. Furthermore, the principle of solidarity, as Paul articulated it in Populorum progressio (nos. 43-52, esp. 48-49), prescribes that rich nations share their wealth with developing nations in order to close the gap between rich and poor. The aim of this sharing, it should be noted, was not simply the alleviation of poverty, but a sharing in a common level of development.

John Paul II, with his Eastern European background, addresses the shortcomings of socialist economic systems as much as those of capitalist regimes. Nonetheless, he suggests that the reading of the economic signs of the times by his predecessors looks like a “gigantic development of the parable in the Bible of the rich banqueter and the poor man Lazarus.”

Today’s economic institutions, he laments in Redemptor hominis, “are proving incapable of remedying social situations inherited from the past or of dealing with the urgent challenges and ethical demands of the present” (no. 16). Whether through effective use of the market or through “wider and more immediate redistribution of riches and control of resources,” writes the pope, the structures of economic life need to be transformed “not only to satisfy [people’s] essential needs but also to [help them] to advance gradually and effectively.” For John Paul as for his predecessors, the requirements of economic justice are not restricted to minimal economic rights.
According to the Roman magisterium since John XXIII, then, means must be found not only to provide basic needs but also to ensure personal development. The egalitarian strain in contemporary Catholic social teaching, it is important to note, is not limited just to meeting basic needs, whether as a remedy for market failure in capitalist societies or for political failure in socialist countries. It also requires social policies that promote the full development of every person. In Catholic teaching, as Pope Paul VI said, “this self-fulfillment is not something optional.” In fact, full human development is “a summary of our duties” (Populorum progressio, no. 16). The Roman magisterium does not share the axiom of liberal political philosophy: Let needs diminish, that preferences may flourish. Rather, social policy ought to aim, according to the Roman teaching, at human fulfillment. Nowhere is this plainer than in the recent Roman use of the concept of the common good.

In Mater et magistra and Pacem in terris, John XXIII revitalized the ancient concept of the common good, updating it to fit contemporary standards of social development. Pope John’s definition of the common good as “the sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection” is often cited (Mater et magistra, no. 65). It is commonly assumed that he refers only to fundamental rights, but that is a misperception. For these conditions are intended, he says later, to enable men and women “to achieve their own integral perfection more fully and more easily” (Pacem in terris, no. 58).

By almost any standard, policies that permit people to attain integral “perfection fully and easily” aim at a perfectionist, egalitarian ideal. Perfectionism is the moral position that men and women are obligated to develop fully their human capacities. In social ethics, it refers to notions of justice which require that society and especially government make such development the aim of public policy.

For Paul VI, to take another example, “authentic development” consists of movement from “less human conditions to those which are more human” (Populorum progressio, nos. 20-21). A
perfectionist understanding of human rights, therefore, is as much a factor as meeting needs in the favor the Roman teaching has shown for redistributive social policies during the past thirty years.

By comparison with the Roman tradition's concern for human development, the American political tradition has stressed merely the elimination of agreed-upon basic evils. A perfectionist ethics differs from this position in that it aims at instituting conditions for a more humane life. To take one example, basic justice requires that people have a means of livelihood; perfectionist justice demands that their work be fulfilling. A policy of basic needs or minimal access, as found in Economic Justice for All, is compatible with the elimination-of-evil strain in American politics, but only minimally with the distribution-for-human-development theme in Catholic social teaching. Providing employment, job security, and participation in the workplace constitute only a down payment on the rights and social policies espoused in the Roman documents.

Misperceptions

Unhappily, commentators mistakenly persist in viewing the Roman teaching as requiring only the basic conditions of human dignity. Two examples: "Distributive justice, not egalitarian justice," writes Charles Curran, "remains at the heart of recent social teaching."14 "Official social teaching," contends Jean-Yves Calvez, "is not egalitarian," but it has, however, "persistently linked justice with a demand [that] society provide at least minimal standards . . . that all members of society be insured decent standard of living."15 On the contrary, there is manifold evidence not only that the Roman magisterium enjoins repeated redistribution, but that it does so with a perfectionist program of human development in mind.

For example, consider again the conception of the common good found in recent teaching. In his wish to make the economy serve humanity, John XXIII required extensive distribution of national wealth. Social development, he thought, should follow on economic growth. A listing of government responsibilities for the common good in Mater et magistra illustrates the degree to which John expected national wealth to be redistributed on egalitarian lines:

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to provide employment for as many workers as possible; to take care lest privileged groups arise even among the workers themselves; to maintain a balance between wages and prices; to make accessible the goods and services for a better life to as many persons as possible; either to eliminate or to keep within bounds the inequalities that exist between different sectors of the economy . . . ; to balance properly any increases in output with advances in services provided to citizens, especially by public authority; . . . finally, to ensure that the advantages of a more humane existence . . . have regard for future generations. (no. 79)

This listing of the components of the common good shows that although John assumed a welfare floor of economic protections, he did not limit redistribution to meeting basic needs or even to establishing modest levels of social and cultural amenities. Since the aim of economic life is to make possible the self-development of everyone in the community, levels of distribution are to rise with economic growth. One function of government is ensuring a more humane existence for all.

Another reason to regard the recent papal conception of the common good, as found in Mater et magistra, as egalitarian is that it prescribes repeated economic adjustments to prevent social divisions. Divisions resulting from economic "inequalities" are to be avoided "even among workers." These inequalities are to be corrected, as Paul VI would later teach, so that men and women can live together in society as brothers and sisters. Number 79 also explicitly identifies the limitation and elimination of inequality as a function of government.

As can be seen from such other goals as maximizing employment, preventing privilege, and making goods and services generally available, John's conception of the common good is also strongly distributive. One might even say John's conception of the common good is radical because, unlike the American bishops, he believed inequality to be not just a symptom but a cause of impoverishment, and he found in routine redistribution a protection against further injustice to the disadvantaged.

In sum, the notion that Catholic social teaching demands only minimal distribution for the sake of meeting basic needs cannot be squared with four evident developments in recent magisterial statements: (1) claims that inequality undermines basic rights,
(2) prescriptions for reallocation to close the gaps (in levels of development) between groups, (3) stipulated obligations to support human flourishing, and (4) the desire to avoid the growth of inequalities in order to promote community. It is on the same points that Economic Justice may be assessed as to how it has adapted Catholic social teaching to fit the American context.

THE BISHOPS’ NEW AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

On one key point, Economic Justice for All follows recent Roman social teaching: in making inclusion, particularly of the poor and marginalized, an overall guideline for a moral economy. “Basic justice demands,” it reads, “the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the life of the human community for all persons” (no. 77). The moral priorities it sets for the nation address the needs of the poor:

The fulfillment of the basic needs of the poor is of the highest priority. (no. 90)

Increasing active participation in economic life by those who are presently excluded or vulnerable is a high social priority. (no. 91)

The investment of wealth, talent, and human energy should be specially directed to benefit those who are poor or economically insecure. (no. 92)

According to the pastoral, the option for the poor is not prejudicial to other groups; it is rather the leading edge of an inclusive social policy. Nonetheless, it is inclusion at a level of basic conditions of employment and protection from deprivation.

Unlike recent Roman teaching, however, Economic Justice does not regard egalitarian social arrangements as a necessary means of guaranteeing basic economic rights. Instead, in keeping with the American work ethic, employment is made the keystone of the bishops’ program. Through employment, the bishops seek “minimum levels of participation” (no. 77); “minimum conditions for life in community” (no. 79); “a basic level of access” to the economy (no. 78). In identifying economic participation with such minimal rights, the bishops have overlooked the reading of the signs of the times—that inequality undermines basic rights.

Minimal Justice

This minimalist conception of participation stands a considerable distance from the perfectionist notions of the Roman
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magisterium. Although to conceive of justice as a set of minimal conditions was typical of natural law thinking through the time of Pius XII, it has been uncharacteristic of postconciliar social teaching. Preconciliar social doctrine contrasted justice and charity. In an important switch, postconciliar social teaching has informed norms of justice with the spirit of charity. In recent years, even when social teaching has spoken of the requirements of human dignity, it has had in mind human flourishing as contrasted with the basic conditions for such development. By adhering to a theory in which society protects only basic rights, the bishops have opted not to cling closely to the perfectionist ideas of Roman teaching. Instead they have articulated a minimal moral doctrine which can be heard and acted upon in American culture. Their “experiment in securing economic rights” would consist in “the creation of an order that guarantees the minimum conditions of human dignity in the economic sphere for every person” (Economic Justice, no. 95).

The bishops’ experiment in economic rights is consistent with the mainline of the American political tradition, which distinguishes between “rights” and “entitlements.” The former are regarded as essential protections entailing mandatory governmental protection; the latter, discretionary matters of public policy, contestable between parties of different ideological persuasions. In trying to bring economic life into the sphere of rights, the bishops knowingly broke down the wall of separation between rights and entitlements. “The first step,” the bishops write, “... is the development of a new cultural consensus that the basic economic conditions of human welfare are essential to human dignity and are due persons by right” (Economic Justice, no. 83). Although the bishops’ minimalist line on rights is a far cry from the perfectionist notions found in Roman teaching, the bishops’ attempt to bring about a political consensus on the importance of economic rights is nonetheless a major breakthrough on the American scene, which has never accepted claims for economic rights. Thus, although not nearly so radical as Roman teaching on economic life, in its own context the recent teaching of the American bishops is a serious challenge to the political economy of the United States.

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The single greatest obstacle to bringing about economic justice for all, the pastoral argues, is a lack of consensus on moral values. One purpose of their letter, the bishops write, is to find "common ground" for people of different backgrounds and concerns. They draw on the tradition of Catholic social teaching, they add, "to make the legacy of Christian social thought a living, growing resource that can inspire hope and help shape the future" (Economic Justice, no. 26). At the same time, they believe in "the common bond of humanity that links all persons" and its promise as a basis for "a renewed public moral vision" (no. 27). The bishops also attempt to prod people in different sectors of economic life to make a commitment to cooperation across the customary boundaries—management-labor, private-public, region with region, etc. (nos. 96-121). "The United States prides itself," they write, "on both its competitive sense of initiative and its spirit of teamwork. Today a greater spirit of partnership and teamwork is needed; competition alone will not do the job" (no. 296).

THE FUTURE

Although one may speculate about the potential weaknesses of the United States bishops' strategy and question its departures from Vatican social teaching, Economic Justice for All follows the overall direction of Catholic social strategy in the development of social teaching and social strategy through discernment at the local level. It is clearly an effort to adapt the gospel message to local conditions, informed by official Catholic (Roman) teaching, but in keeping with the contours of American political culture. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has committed itself to an extensive implementation of Economic Justice. Not the least of its commitments is to extend the kind of worker protections that the pastoral enjoins for society at large to church institutions (Economic Justice, nos. 339-58). The conference of bishops has also appointed a committee to oversee implementation of the letter and allocated funds for follow-up activities. These will include not only clergy education and preparation of materials for Catholic schools, but also support
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for university-level research and public education. The plans of the implementation committee represent a major advance for the conference, which in the past has generally left education on episcopal social teaching to simple publication of their letters (nos. 359-62).

One of the promising ways in which the letter will continue to exert influence on American society is through public education. The letter comes at a time when there is increased interest in many sectors, including business, in ethics. While American society is notably moralistic, Americans lack skills for reasoning about moral problems in the public arena. Economic Justice provides an education in coherent, systematic thinking about public ethics. It also shows how in a pluralistic society Christians

even in a secular, religiously pluralist America, possibilities exist for moral consensus.

Will Minimal Access Work?

Public dialogue is for the United States Catholic bishops what egalitarian redistribution was for John XXIII and Paul VI. It is a strategy to roll back the growing poverty and inequality in our society at the same time that it builds a greater sense of community for a people presently alienated from one another.

If dialogue and cooperation do work, then much will be gained, even though the bishops restrict the demands of justice to basic economic rights. Poverty could be overcome, the acceleration of inequality could be limited, and millions of marginalized people would have a stake in the economy. The bishops’ program of dialogue and cooperation does have a chance to work, but the bishops themselves can only provide models. Others will have to follow their lead in bringing diverse groups together for the program to have any substantial impact.

If the strategy of dialogue and partnership fails, however,
then a few years from now the bishops may have to reconsider their position, just as three years after the pastoral on peace they began to rethink their position on nuclear deterrence. If there are no gains in participation in the economy by the poor and the marginalized, then another approach will have to be tried. National indebtedness and commitments to military expansion incurred in the Reagan years may, however, create severe impediments to success.

At the same time, normative sociological studies of justice point to a presumption against their success. One reason is the divided commitments a basic rights approach produces. On the one hand, it requires that people guarantee the basic interests of everyone in the society; on the other hand, it suggests that when their own basic needs are met they can pursue their own life goals, such as accumulation of wealth and maximizing individual expression. This is not the bishops' position, of course, but it is the way some analysts see a needs- or welfare-based policy losing out to other ideals in an affluent society.

Another possible difficulty is found in evidence, consistent with John XXIII's position on the subversion of basic rights by inequality, that men and women do not defend their basic rights until it is too late to validate their claims. In bourgeois societies, but elsewhere too, people wait until they are nearly utterly deprived to press their claims. At that point, of course, they have the least resources to make their case in a politically effective way. On this hypothesis, a minimal-access theory of justice, such as the bishops', fails to allocate sufficient economic and political resources to assure people the power to preserve guarantees of meeting their basic needs. To overcome such obstacles, the bishops will have to persist in being vocal in urging the American public to commit itself to the common good. In the event the bishops' program founders because of these or other factors, however, "relative equality," because it aims at securing basic rights by directly including the whole population in the economy's progress, may emerge as the American church's ethical strategy for guiding the economy away from the impoverishment of the many toward a genuinely communal society. It was the failure of both economic systems
and less-demanding Catholic theories of justice that moved the Roman magisterium to a more egalitarian understanding of justice over the past twenty-five years.

NOTES


2. To call the drafting process “democratic” may be misleading. It was democratic in the sense that the bishops consulted broadly and openly and that they three times revised their document in light of public reaction. The 1976 “Call to Action,” the culmination of the bishops’ United States bicentennial celebration, was democratic in the usual meaning of the term. Bishops had only one vote apiece along with other representatives of their dioceses. Ultimately, however, the Bishops’ Conference failed to act on the agenda of the “Call,” because grassroots priorities were too troubling for it.

For a review of the “Call to Action,” see Commonweal 113:22 (Dec. 26, 1986), Special Supplement, “Marking the Tenth Anniversary of A Call to Action: An Unfinished Experiment.”


5. Populorum progressio and Octogesima adveniens (A Call to Action) are both in Renewing the Earth and in Social Justice.

6. The greater seriousness with which the United States bishops’ program is now taken is due in part to the shift from church-state issues, like aid for parochial schools, to morality-and-politics issues, like nuclear war, on which they can garner wider public support.


10. I speak of a “common quality of life” to indicate that the recent Roman magisterium sees relatively equal sharing in the “material and social conditions of life” to be essential to social living.

11. The pastoral’s treatment of inequality is strictly descriptive. It avoids any causal
analysis of the links between growing inequality and impoverishment. The normative
prescriptions the letter takes from Catholic social teaching with respect to inequality are:
(1) the priority of basic needs, (2) the expansion of economic participation, and (3) “a
strong presumption against extreme inequality” when some people are in need (no. 
185).
Common Good and U.S. Capitalism, ed. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Hauck (Lanham, 
Teaching: An International Perspective,” in The Catholic Challenge to the American 
Economy: Reflections on the U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the 
16. Economic Justice, nos. 77-78, 85-94. Note especially no. 88: “The ‘option for the 
poor,’ therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. 
Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole 
community.”
18. See Barrington Moore, Jr., Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt (White 
The economic difficulties facing our nation are complex and often seem overwhelming. But these difficulties cannot be used as an excuse for reneging on our social and moral commitments as a nation.

Eight years ago, Bill Moyers, in the course of a nationally televised interview, said to Robert Penn Warren, “Sir, you are one of America’s leading thinkers: a historian, an educator, a novelist, and a philosopher. Can you tell me how we can resolve the terrible crises that surround us?: our cities are decaying; unemployment is on the rise; we have terrible crises in education, housing, healthcare, and energy; there is the persistent and intractable problem of widespread poverty.”

Mr. Warren, whom Newsweek had recently called “the dean of American letters,” paused, leaned forward, and said, “Well, Bill, for a beginning, I think it would be a good idea if we stopped lying to one another.”

And that was before the Reagan era, when the White House became a Hollywood studio, the nation a stage set for media events; and half-truths, distortions, and deliberate deceit were elevated to art forms. When phrases like “safety net,” “the truly needy,” “Peace Keepers,” “Star Wars,” and “getting govern-
ment off our backs" began to abound in our headlines, in corporate advertising, and on network news.

When asked about the trade-offs between the billions of dollars being poured into nuclear weapons at the expense of human service programs, Mr. Warren responded, "That's not very complicated either. In order to comprehend the madness of the arms race, as opposed to investing in social programs, one only has to understand the underlying theme of Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. " He went on to describe the cause and effect of mindless behavior: "It is self-defeating to use the technology, the weapon, the crossbow, just because it's there. Because, if you do, you could very well wind up with an albatross around your neck for the rest of your life."

THE PRESIDENT AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

On February 5 of 1985, President Reagan asserted that God and the Scriptures were on his side in his struggle with Congress to escalate the United States weapons buildup and to increase dependence on more military technology, at the expense of social programs. In citing the divine guidance of the Lord for nuclear superiority, military intervention, and fiscal irresponsibility, the president, at the same time, asked for the abolition of Legal Services and housing for the poor, the termination of the Job Corps (a job-training program for unemployed youths), a substantial reduction in health care for the elderly, and the curtailment of nutrition and feeding programs for infants and mothers. Apparently the president had decided, once again, to make the unemployed, the hungry, the homeless, and the 33 million poor, hostages to his Star Wars fantasy.

Ironically enough, on the very day Reagan invoked providential approval, Pope John Paul II, in two speeches in South America, attacked the arms race and demanded that the "have" nations increase their commitment to social programs. While Mr. Reagan claimed divine inspiration for more technologized weapons systems, the pope, in Venezuela, specifically condemned "a certain technological ideology" which, he said, has "imposed the primacy of matter over spirit, of things over the person, of technique over morals."
After considering these conflicts within the context of man's capacity to exercise intelligent and responsible will in resolving human dilemmas, the pope stated that "technology can be—and actually has come to be—alienating and manipulat­ing." Declaring that "this dehumanizing and depersonalizing tendency explains why the church is never weary of calling for radical revision of the notions of progress and development," he went on to ask: "For how long must man and ... the Third World unjustly tolerate the primacy of economic processes over inviolable human rights, particularly the rights of workers and their families!" One answer immediately springs to mind: as long as Reagan's deceits, fantasies, and moral distortions are unchallenged.

In his speech accepting the 1982 Nobel Prize for literature, Gabriel García Marquez also addressed the same issues. He said:

On a day like today, my master William Faulkner said, "I decline to accept the end of man." I would feel unworthy of standing in this place that was his if I were not fully aware that the colossal tragedy he refused to recognize thirty-two years ago is now, for the first time since the beginning of humanity, nothing more than a simple scientific possibility. Faced with this awesome reality [nuclear war] that must have seemed a mere utopia through all of human time, we, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.

In summing up the moral and human responsibility of the "have" nations, Marquez alluded to a Nobel speech made fifty-three years earlier by Thomas Mann, who said, "In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms." Marquez believes this is just as true today: that social and economic problems can be resolved by reordering political priorities; there is a critical relationship between literature and politics; and the painful reality of poverty, injustice, and inequality—in all countries—is the most important and explosive issue of our time.
One of the anomalies of contemporary American politics is that although most public opinion polls show that the majority of the public is “feeling good” about the economy, most economists are extremely troubled by its weak overall performance. And careful analysis would indicate that there is genuine cause for concern. The sluggish performance of our national economy is best characterized by continued high unemployment, declining worker buying power, burgeoning deficits, stagnating GNP, deepening underutilization of plants, and decreasing investment in new plant and equipment.

The president’s rhetoric and mass media coverage have masked the reality of a dismal economic performance. We will never begin to confront these problems until we realize that politicians and the mass media do not like to deliver bad news about the nature of our economic institutions. Furthermore, if we are to live and work in politically and psychologically healthy communities—and that should by no means be taken as a given—we had better understand that the mass media constitute the most powerful control factor that exists in our country; they dominate and define, culturally, the myths and symbols we live by. And they control the frame of reference that defines all political and economic debate.

The mass media are inadequate to the task of informing the public on the most crucial economic and social issues of our time. The most basic human needs—quality education; well-built, low-cost housing; decent health care; affordable energy; better mass transportation; nutrition; neighborhood development; economic revitalization; care for the elderly; and productive and rewarding jobs—are no match for the mass media’s daily, morbid bombardment of murders, crashes, fires, floods, bombings, scandals, assaults, and banal celebrity gossip. As People’s headline for its story on Chevy Chase put it, “He’s Hot and You’re Not.”

Magazines, newspapers, radio, and television also assault us with antigovernment advertisements financed by big business political action committees (PACs). They have spent millions to say that the undeserving poor, with the help of government,
have brought on our economic ills, so we need only tighten the belts of the poor (i.e., eliminate human and social services) and all would be well again. They—the deserving affluent, big oil companies, defense contractors, banks, and real estate developers—would not even have to think of tightening their belts. The message is slickly packaged in hypnotically stunning layouts and cinematography. The mass media eagerly repeat these lucrative messages editorially. So we have further erosion of public trust in government and its ability to exercise its legitimate social responsibility, and the undermining of an atmosphere vital to healthy, and fair, cooperation among all segments of society.

Moreover, for the past seven years, there has been a conscious cynicism in the way the mass media have reported the previous day’s happenings: REAGAN WINS AGAIN or HOUSE DEMS BEATEN. The political and social life of the country has been reduced to little more than a struggle for political power, the results reported not unlike the score of a football game. There seems to be no higher good, no national purpose, no critical judgment, no serious analysis.

It is naive to assume that the Reagan administration alone is responsible for destroying national programs that are just and humane, or for reversing the role of government as the provider of moral leadership.

Since the Nixon administration in 1969, we have had to contend with a hostile, antisocial political climate. It replaced action with benign neglect, sapped our good intentions, and clouded our judgment and memory of traditional values, to the detriment of real progress.

The Carter administration did attempt to refocus attention on human and social priorities, but it, too, pursued faulty economic policies. Thus, it was overwhelmed by a combination of high inflation and the political negativism of the sophisticated propaganda campaign waged by the New Right and financed by corporate PACs.

The politics of negativism is perpetuated by a vicious cycle fueled by a “get tough” campaign in which reactionary politicians feed the media their own self-serving attacks on social programs. Next, the mass media, eager to pass these
attacks on along with the commercial ads of the private sector (as described above), further confuse and condition us with antigovernment sloganeering. The circle closes when well-heeled lobbyists for privileged corporate interests—the real special-interest groups—return the politicians' messages to them, thereby reinforcing the body of mythology, half-truths, and distortions. And Reagan, the consummate actor/pitchman, knows how to manipulate this process. For seven years the president has gotten away with saying that we are spending too much for social programs—but the hard facts speak otherwise: among Western industrial nations, the United States is ninth in social spending and twelfth in spending for job creation and development!

Even more scary than Reagan getting his legislative package enacted is his success in controlling popular myths. And the unchallenged myths that dominate the headlines and airwaves are a dangling reminder of a lynched national conscience.

The central questions we must ask ourselves in 1988 are: Have we forgotten the meaning of the public good?; have we lost our historic sense of the pain and struggle that gave us our democratic ideals?; and how can we recapture our principles, and our soul, as a people and a nation?

PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL REALITY

The real issues of public policy in 1988 are Ronald Reagan's record over the past seven years, his neo-conservative political philosophy, his view of the role of presidential leadership, and his sense of national priorities.

An endeavor as wide-ranging as a presidential critique needs a unifying metaphor. Mine is drawn from a story told me by a colleague who was helping local consumer groups to organize fuel cooperatives in Maine a few years ago. That winter was unusually cold, and the price of heating oil had tripled since the 1974 OPEC jolt, causing enormous hardship in this very low-income state.

He was invited to talk to about two hundred residents of a small town, after which a television reporter baited a farmer, asking, "What do you think of this outside agitation?" The farmer, who was about seventy, paused; then, with an edge of
flint in his voice, he said, "You know, I'm a fourth-generation Republican Yankee—just like my father, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather—but if I've learned anything, it's that there are two kinds of politics and economics in America. The first kind is what I see on television and what politicians tell me when they want my vote. The other kind is what me and my friends talk about over doughnuts and coffee. And that's what this young fellow was talking about tonight—and he made a lot of sense to me."

I believe that the perceptions of the Maine farmer are absolutely correct: that both the political decisions and the economic policies of the present administration, as well as the coverage of these decisions and policies by the mass media, have reached a level of abstraction that is removed from the reality of most Americans. White House politics, and mass-media coverage of it, have become a form of public entertainment, programmed to take people's minds off the growing list of economic, social, and political failures of this administration, in both domestic and foreign policy.

At the very top of the failure list is the brutal two-year Reagan recession (1982-83). Next is the budget deficit, the worst in our history. The cumulative total of the Reagan budget deficit is greater than the net sum of the deficits of all past presidents, from George Washington to Jimmy Carter. It is driving up the national debt, undermining our competitive edge, and mortgaging away our children's economic well-being. It is a time bomb that is ticking away, and the fuse runs right back to the White House. And the same could be said of the trade deficit.

By escalating the nuclear arms race and increasing the likelihood of a nuclear confrontation, Mr. Reagan has spent more money annually on weapons systems than has any man in the history of the world. His domestic budget and tax cuts were not made in order to balance the budget; they were massive transfers ($36 billion the first year and like amounts for each succeeding year) to pay for military increases. And this was accomplished in a policy vacuum. Mr. Reagan has never provided the American people with a strategic explanation of how this excessive arms buildup fits into our overall defense and foreign policy.
These policies are not based on a coherent reading of history or a comprehensive analysis of realistic options. By locking us into multi-year weapon purchases and "Star Wars" missile systems, Mr. Reagan is hanging an albatross around the fiscal neck of our country. The cost is now $3,500 a year for the average American family. If this spending spree continues, it will cost $24,500 over the five-year period of 1984-88; by 1989, you—the average American taxpayer—will be working one day a week for the Pentagon. The dead weight of this legacy will mean increased nuclear anxiety and a crippling tax burden that will lower our living standard.

One question of paramount importance must be asked by each and every one of us: How long can we afford the folly of economic and nuclear brinksmanship?

Of all the problems caused by Reaganomics, though, unemployment has been the most destructive. It is a disease, and one that can become fatal. As a nation and as a people we are drained of our physical, psychological, emotional, and moral energies. The neo-conservative policy-makers made the calculated decision that unemployment, through the application of monetarism and supply-side economics, should be used as a strategy to fight inflation. This was both unfair and unnecessary, because it affected different segments of our society unevenly and some punitively. The burden fell first on the working poor, then on minorities, women, the young, the old, blue-collar workers, family farmers, small businesses, and professionals, in that order. And the logic behind the theory, as we were told by Mr. Reagan six years ago, was that government spending was the root cause of inflation. Our present huge deficits and staggering debt prove him totally wrong. And David Stockman, the architect of this fiscal policy, now says in his book, The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed, that it was all a deceitful game.

The severity and depth of the problems caused by unemployment were, and still are, the story of the Reagan administration. Yet this tragic story has not sunk into the public consciousness. Why? Because it was not a media event like the Iranian hostage crisis, Lebanon, Grenada, or Libya. The mass media are institutionally incapable of dealing with substantive
and structural economic issues. So this story of unemployment was treated as a minor and unfortunate aberration to be tolerated until it somehow went away of its own accord. If Vietnam could be trivialized as "a living room war," we can now say we have had the first "upbeat recession" in our history.

For each one-percent increase in unemployment, there are 36,000 deaths. Thus the first year of Reaganomics cost 110,000 lives—twice the number lost in Vietnam over a decade. Where is the moral outrage?

In the real world, the practical and human consequences of Reaganomics, the actual cost in dollars to the taxpayers, and the human costs to millions of people, are devastating. For example: as a result of the first year of Reagan's "Economic Recovery Program," more than three million more people became unemployed. The money cost alone is $30 billion for every one-percent increase in unemployment. That's $100 billion the national treasury—we, the taxpayers—lost the first year. And the second year cost another $120 billion. But the human costs are even more staggering.

Dr. Harvey Brenner of Johns Hopkins University has conducted the most thorough and comprehensive research to date into the human consequences of unemployment. It is now possible to measure the specific impact of unemployment on: child and spouse abuse, alcoholism, suicide, drug abuse, and mental and physical illness. For example, for each one-percent increase in unemployment, there are 36,000 deaths. Thus the first year of Reaganomics cost 110,000 lives—twice the number lost in Vietnam over a decade. Where is the moral outrage? Why are the media not connecting cause and effect? The loss of 239 lives in Lebanon brought instant outrage, banner headlines, and blue-ribbon panel investigations. Yet the story of 110,000 unemployment-related deaths is mindlessly buried. Is it too uncomfortable for mass consumption, too uncomfortable for political leadership, or too uncomfortable for the media themselves?

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Underlying the glittering rhetoric of economic claims is a startling reality: two-thirds of the new jobs created since 1981 are at, or below, the poverty level. They are part-time, seasonal, or low-level, dead-end jobs. The official unemployment figures belie the severity of the problem. For example: a steelworker in Youngstown, Ohio, loses his job paying $28,000 per year. In order to support the family, his wife takes a part-time, minimum-wage job at a fast-food outlet for $8,000. The unemployment figures show a no-change washout—one gained a job, one lost a job; but the annual family income is reduced by $20,000 and they slide into poverty. In 1982, more people were forced into poverty than in any year since the Great Depression. In addition to the 35 million poor in our country, there are another 40 million people whose lives are marginal and vulnerable. Through no fault of their own, an accident, layoff, illness, or divorce could push them into poverty overnight.

Another substantial truth of this hidden story came to light during recent Congressional hearings; it was estimated that the total cost to the GNP of the Reagan recession—which includes plant idleness—has reached one trillion dollars.

In order to push through its original "supply-side" economic package in 1981, the administration conjured up the specter of an "economic Dunkirk." Instead, what was actually perpetrated was a "social Pearl Harbor": the worst massacre of social service, educational, housing, nutrition, job-training, and consumer programs in our history. It wiped out the modest gains made in the prior fifteen years by women, the elderly, minorities, and the young—the most vulnerable segments of our society—and it has driven five million more people into poverty, the biggest jump since the Great Depression.

The president has often referred to the fact that the future of America lies with our youth. What, then, went through his mind when, for example, he abolished the CETA Public Service Employment Program? His decision, whether from a social, economic, or cost-accountability viewpoint, is senseless. The real issue is whether our society believes it to be of greater value to keep a youngster in a state prison at an annual cost of $15,000, in a drug rehabilitation center for $19,000, in a mental institution for more than $45,000, or in a job-training and job-creating
program for $9,000. We do not need a crash course in zero-based budgeting or human relations to tell us that all but the last choice are wasteful and destructive to society and its individual members. At a time when 43 percent of minority youths are without jobs, these policies violate both social responsibility and common sense.

And what went through the president’s mind last year when he explained his deep concern for the suffering of the unborn, at the very same time that the White House was trying to kill WIC (a feeding and nutrition program for pregnant women and babies) and EPSDT (a children’s health program)? The cutbacks in these two excellent social service programs the year before had already contributed to a rise in infant mortality. One might conclude that Mr. Reagan’s notion of “right to life” covers only the time from conception to birth. How can he support the anti-abortion amendment, and at the same time pursue policies that increase infant mortality?

It was only twelve years ago that we learned of the evils of Nixon’s “enemies list.” What is far worse today is that although Nixon’s list consisted of people, the Reagan “enemies list” takes on whole categories of people, and institutions as well. Reagan has declared war not only on the poor, but on women, minorities, the elderly, the young, consumers, the public sector (including education, health, housing, employment, and mental health programs), the arts, the humanities, social science research, public radio and television, occupational safety, Legal Services, VISTA, the environment, and on public service itself.

The decision to transfer many social and human service programs to the states—Reagan’s New Federalism—is another example of a new idea that makes no sense. I am well aware that the economic difficulties facing our nation are complex and often seem overwhelming. But these difficulties cannot be used as an excuse for reneging on our social and moral commitments as a nation. I agree with Franklin Delano Roosevelt that “the Presidency is a place of moral leadership.” So I am deeply troubled by the notion that national issues, ones that require national policy and programs and that are a part of our national
purpose, should suddenly devolve to the states because neo-conservatives, almost as an afterthought, rediscovered state sovereignty. The issue is not federal versus state; rather, it is the diminution or avoidance of national standards of responsibility and accountability. To deflect, suspend, or fragment responsibility and accountability suggests that we are either renouncing or failing to assert our moral purpose as a nation. Worse than that, Mr. Reagan (and the New Right) seems to be denying that this moral purpose exists.

This moral leadership has always been affirmed, even by the genuine conservative leadership which has played such an important role in American history. Historically, promises of lower taxes and economic privatism have never been central issues. Traditionally, conservative leaders have focused primarily on the underlying problems of the human community—the issues of leadership, of equality, of opportunity, of continuity and order, of the obligations of the strong to the weak, and of the federal safeguards needed to keep the privileged from abusing their power. They never abandoned the presidency as the seat of moral responsibility.

But Mr. Reagan has done so, without losing the public’s esteem. Poll after poll demonstrates that a majority of the American people rejects his specific policies, yet, paradoxically, they like the man. Thus, a major task is to connect President Reagan to his policies and his appointments. This will not be easy, as many people are fooled by Reagan’s shrewd ability to slough his failures onto others. Yet, it is Ronald Reagan’s economic and social policies that have caused widespread human suffering. He must be held accountable for his failure to exercise moral leadership during a period of crisis and change, and for his inability to deal fairly with all segments of our citizenry.

Through the use of myths and symbols, “the Great Communicator” has created a counterreality that is reinforced by the ads of corporate political action committees (PACs). The rhetoric and images offered us in mass media advertising by the oil companies and banks add up to the America of our fantasies—idyllic pastoral settings, quaint churches, “nice” communities, abundant wildlife, and clear, bubbling streams. We are never shown the industrial polluters, the nuclear and toxic chemical wasters
POLITICAL ECONOMY

...the bankers making a quick buck providing loans to military juntas in Brazil while foreclosing mortgages on steelworkers' homes in Ohio and on family farms in Iowa.

All of the promotional debris, however, cannot hide from us one central problem: that contemporary persons in a technological mass society are, to a great extent, losing the power to believe in or affirm any moral value; and that the individual is being separated from an ethical, reasonable frame of reference. This is the dilemma of Reaganism which we must confront, the subtle undermining of our values. Mr. Reagan is an entertainer who distracts the public and manipulates the media by composing hymns to individualism, localism, Sunday piety, and homespun virtues; meanwhile, behind the pitchman's facade, the "good ol' boy" axis of corporate exploiters is destroying the local centers of power and authority, from the small businesses and family farms to the towns and cities of America. They are erasing the uniqueness of our individuality and the diversity of our culture, the peculiarities of place, and of settled personal and family identity; they are making men, women, and children live by antihuman rules and abstract time unrelated to personal experience or to local custom. The consequences of this process of depersonalization are anxiety, conflict, and loss of genuine freedom.

To put it bluntly, the Reagan administration gives one sad performance after another. Its domestic policies are based on failed theories, rerun ideas, smiling one-liners, and a hostile attitude that says, "Let them eat jellybeans." Its foreign policy is based on paranoia, jingoism, saber-rattling, and phony patriotism. And its political strategy with respect to social policy has been one of pandering to, and exploiting, the most regressive and antisocial tendencies in our national character. If these policies are allowed to continue, we could wake up one morning and find ourselves on the "endangered countries list."

Reaganomics, as well as the administration's overt antisocial policies, are not based on a commitment to such higher principles as freedom, liberty, or individualism, although the pieties are mouthed at the drop of a camera. The reactionary policies of the Reaganites—and their proponents on the
religious Right: Novak, Falwell, Robertson, and company—re­mind me of a passage in The Heart of Darkness. Joseph Conrad put it this way:

Their talk was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight . . . in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware that these things are wanted for the work of the world.

BEYOND REAGANISM

When a sane and civilized family runs into tough financial times, two things happen. The one thing that they do do is to ensure that those members of the family who are least able to fend for themselves are given adequate protection and the bare necessities for survival. The one thing that they do not do is to allow those who have more than enough and who are enjoying luxuries to continue to hoard. There are certain natural principles of behavior, of caring and decency, that have prior claim over untested game plans of economic theorists or politicians on the make. It is the adherence to these principles that defines us as human. It determines our national character.

What we need is a vision of national policy that is consistent with the American promise. I believe that most Americans do share the common goal of achieving a stable, equitable, and democratic society that does not suffer from recessions, unemployment, inflations, gross waste of human and natural resources, and the grinding misery of poverty.

I believe that we can achieve this goal, and that we can balance it with tough-minded and comprehensive foreign and defense policies that seek to maintain our national security and a stable peace. We need not escalate the nuclear arms race; we need not stumble into a Lebanon without an achievable plan; we need not violate international law by exporting covert terrorism; and we need not blunder into an unnecessary war in Central America.

The following are a series of specific policy and program recommendations that are geared to achieving domestic stability and international security:

1. A National Youth Opportunity Act that will put unemployed youngsters to work, in urban and rural areas, in public service and conservation jobs;
2. Standby authority to initiate new counter-cyclical Economic Development and Jobs legislation that will be triggered by a rise in unemployment to more than 8 percent;

3. A National Industrial Productivity Board that will recommend comprehensive policies for:
   - targeted reinvestment in older smoke-stack industries and research and development incentives for new high-technology industries;
   - anti-inflation measures that would include wage and price controls on a sector-by-sector basis when inflation exceeds 8 percent;
   - fair and equitable incentives for worker productivity and capital investment to discourage unnecessary plant closure and nonproductive capital speculation;

4. A redirection of existing neighborhood revitalization resources and programs in low-income communities that would center on locally based economic development corporations and tax-free enterprise zones;

5. The acceptance of a mutually verifiable nuclear freeze for the period of one year;

6. A reduction of 10 percent in the military budget, cessation of Star Wars (SDI) development, and cancellation of production of the MX missiles and B-1 bomber, two costly and unnecessary weapons systems;

7. Ratification of the 1974 treaty to limit nuclear weapons tests, the 1976 treaty on underground nuclear explosions, and the 1979 second Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT II);

8. The initiation of a summit meeting with Soviet leadership to discuss comprehensive arms control and trade agreements;

9. A pledge of nonintervention in the internal affairs of other nations (including covert activities in Nicaragua), and the reinstitution of human rights conditions in military aid programs (including El Salvador) as we did in Argentina.

A RETURN TO COMMON SENSE

At the time of the birth of this Republic, Thomas Paine, citizen and patriot, spoke a fundamental truth when he said: “We hold
the moral obligation of providing for old age, helpless infancy, and poverty far superior to that of supplying the invented wants of courtly extravagance.” Ronald Reagan has betrayed these basic principles of republicanism. His economic game plan is in reality a carnival for wealthy speculators and hell on earth for the poor, with the middle class being squeezed to its limits. Mr. Reagan seems to think that his mandate is to change our government from a representative democracy to a royal monarchy, solely for the benefit of an economic elite. That is wholly inconsistent with the traditional values of this nation.

Furthermore, Mr. Reagan has viciously attacked civic and religious organizations and institutions that have traditionally supported equal justice, economic opportunity, civil rights, quality education, consumer protection, and a nuclear freeze. He calls them “special interest” groups, while casting a blind eye and supporting pat toward the defense contractors, well-heeled lobbyists, and influence peddlers within the White House. Worse than the amoral posturing, Reagan demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the role of voluntary associations in American history; they have fought, year in and year out, for basic human rights— for what Abraham Lincoln called “the public liberty.”

Recently, I took the opportunity to reread the thoughts of Madison, Jay, and Hamilton in The Federalist Papers, and the writings of Jefferson, and recalled that our Founding Fathers were well aware that politics and economics were interrelated faces of power, each necessitating its own checks and balances. What impressed me most, though, was their mature leadership and a clear and qualitative vision of the “public interest.”

In this sense our political history has provided us with a common-sense vision of the American promise that calls for justice, freedom, equality, and opportunity. We may forget, or we may deny; but we cannot change our historical legacy. The uniqueness of our nation is that its founding principles were based on the quest to improve the human condition, to enrich democratic values, to ensure the general welfare, and to endure against adversity.

We must continue that quest. We must restore trust in our government. We must have more democratic decision making
in formulating our economic, social, defense, and foreign policies. We must ensure that our government fulfills its responsibility to balance, secure, and protect the freedoms and liberties of all our people, and to balance public and private interests. I believe that the neo-conservatives are absolutely wrong: I believe that a vital, responsive, and healthy federal government is indispensable to the well-being and sovereignty of a self-governing people. That is, after all, what democracy is.

Finally, I think it must be said that only those people have a future, and only those people can be called humane and historic, who have an intuitive sense of what is important and significant in their national goals and institutions, and who value them. What I mean by "intuitive sense" is the critical difference between authentic moral behavior as opposed to abstract moralizing. The former is a qualitative sensibility: a moral conviction informed by education and reflection on our history and literature. The latter is a form of entertainment: a conscious effort to manipulate our emotions for quantitative gain or self-serving goals. It is with this shared and authentic moral conviction and the continuing belief in the common-sense vision of a truly democratic America that we must redouble our efforts to restore these fundamental values to American public policy.

NOTES

TRANSGLOBAL CORPORATIONS, 
GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT, AND 
THE CHURCH

NORMAN J. FARAMELLI

Transnational corporations excel in making "widgets," and they are neither the saviors nor villains of global development that some would make them out to be.

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are firms with a base in one nation but with operations and facilities that extend beyond that nation. They are financial or industrial organizations whose ownership, management, economic outlook, and political loyalties transcend the boundaries of any one country. TNCs are a primary driving force behind the trend toward global economic interdependence.

TNCs are able to exert enormous influence on global development patterns in both the industrialized and the less-industrialized nations. This article explores the ethical dimensions of the TNC with regard to how it functions in the global economy, particularly in the less-industrialized nations.

Although the TNC is a highly complex organization with many managerial, marketing, and technical capabilities, it is operated by ordinary people who are producing products and providing services. For example, many of the TNC personnel in the United States-based firms are members of our local

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TRANSCATIONAL CORPORATIONS

congregations. They are people with a broad range of energies and talents who work hard at their jobs.

Until around fifteen years ago, the TNC was primarily an American phenomenon. In the 1950s and 1960s, the United States firms ventured abroad and formed American-owned and United States-based TNCs. In the 1970s and 1980s, the foreign firms reciprocated—the Japanese, West Germans, and other Europeans spawned many large-scale transnational ventures in the financial as well as the industrial sectors.

Transnational corporations have been heralded as the “new missionaries,” proclaiming to the world the gospel of modern technology and industrialism. But TNCs themselves are as much the result of the growing reality of economic interdependence as the cause of such interdependence.

The TNC is now in a new stage of evolution. According to management expert Peter Drucker, the old multinational concept is fast becoming obsolete because of a new kind of global interdependence. Although the United States firms and American labor complain about the inroads of Japanese goods into the United States domestic markets, the real problem is that the United States is losing its international markets to Japan and others. Drucker notes that as the world is becoming more economically integrated, the world is simultaneously becoming more politically fragmented. National rivalries are intensifying. This oddity of increased political fragmentation and growing economic interdependence will be dealt with later in this essay.

As we ponder the role of the TNCs in the international economy, it is important that we remember the limited yet important spheres of influence of the TNCs. There are three major elements. TNCs:

(a) possess management skills and have access to technology and capital,
(b) have access to international markets, and
(c) usually manufacture products efficiently and can contribute to productivity gains in the local economy.

TNCs excel in making “widgets,” but they are not very effective as major agents of social reform. Although their activity
often brings about important social changes, the TNCs are usually more comfortable with widgets than with social issues. For example, they tend to be politically conservative, because they desire stability in the host nation. Sometimes that stability is possible only via political repression of dissent by the host government. The presence of the TNCs usually strengthens the ruling forces in a given nation. If, for instance, the nation in which the TNC is operating is setting out on a campaign to eradicate or reduce poverty, or to satisfy the nutrition needs of its people, the TNC might play a positive role. If, on the other hand, the TNC is functioning in a repressive society (which is not an infrequent occurrence), the actions of the individual TNC, no matter how well intentioned, cannot be expected to offset the effects of a series of bad public policies. That is, their presence can reinforce political repression.

Although the transnational corporation is highly complex, it is operated by ordinary people, many of whom are members of our local congregations.

We need to get beyond those extreme claims that the TNCs are either the answer to global poverty or that the TNCs are the cause of global poverty and underdevelopment. Furthermore, it is imperative that we understand those circumstances under which the TNCs can work to alleviate poverty and foster social justice, and those circumstances where they clearly perpetuate global poverty and injustice, despite the claims made by their supporters. A major focus of this article is to address these concerns.

MOVING BEYOND THE “TNC AS SAVIOR” OR “TNC AS VILLIAN” DEBATE

Over the last three decades, conflicting claims have been made about the role of the TNC in alleviating global poverty. On the one hand, TNC supporters argue that “TNCs are the answer to world poverty and underdevelopment. The technology that they bring to the Third World can lift the people out of poverty.”
This argument was frequently made in the late 1950s and 1960s, but the tenacity of global poverty is casting doubt on such claims. In the 1960s, a counter view was developed and widely circulated: "The TNCs are the major cause of global poverty and underdevelopment." This charge is also beginning to wane, because it has become clear that many nations were mired in poverty long before they ever heard of a TNC. Also, there are many poor nations where the presence of TNCs is very small, if existent at all. The roots of global poverty, therefore, are to be found in causes other than the TNC.

Studies have indicated that in some situations the TNCs inadvertently work to perpetuate the maldistribution of wealth and income prevalent in a society. They did not cause the inequities but simply reinforced them. In some studies by the World Bank and other agencies, it was found that industrial development, whether it is brought by the TNC or by indigenous groups, has not improved the plight of the poorest 40 percent. This often resulted from attempts to transform a subsistence agricultural society into an industrial society, including such steps as moving masses of people from rural to urban areas, forming new pockets of poverty and unemployment in and near the sprawling cities. The number of new jobs produced was often less than the number of jobs displaced.

The social conditions, along with the political and economic policies of the host nation in which the TNC is operating, will have a major effect on whether or not the TNC is serving the poor or reinforcing poverty. For example, when the host nation is working to address the nutrition needs of its people, the TNC can and has served as one of its instruments. But the issues are not always clear.

Consider, for example, the case of the malaquiladoras—the assembly plants of United States firms that operate in Mexico. How can one assess their contribution to the global economy and global justice?

This phenomenon has grown from the "runaway shop" to one of Mexico's largest economic sectors. In 1975, there were 450 plants; now there are about 1000. They employ around 250,000 Mexicans, 85,000 in the border city of Juarez alone. General
Motors alone now employs more than 24,000 workers in plants in northern Mexico.

Under this program, raw materials, components, equipment, and machinery enter Mexico duty free. They are delivered to factories in Mexico, and the assembled or manufactured goods are then exported to the United States with duty paid only on the value added. The low Mexican labor costs—less than $1 per hour—make it attractive for the United States firms to operate in Mexico.

This program is highly successful in Mexico. Its proponents say that the malaquiladoras are playing an invaluable social function by helping to provide jobs and to stabilize Mexico's shaky economy. Their presence clearly helps the Mexican debt situation. Proponents also argue that the choice is simple. The United States can either continue to lose some jobs to Mexico (while improving the spin-off businesses and improving United States competitiveness) or it can lose these jobs to foreign competition. For the United States worker, that is a Hobson's choice.

The effects on the United States workers are significant. As one American congressman recently said, "The autoworkers are aware of how much of the industry is moving to Mexico. You cannot tell someone who has just lost a job, 'Sorry, but you are a casualty to the higher purpose of allowing Mexico to pay off debts to American banks.'"

There is still another part of the story. In addition to low wages in Mexico, some of the United States-based firms are also attracted to Mexico by less stringent environmental regulations than those encountered in this country. There is, however, an ironic twist to this story. The New River in Baja California, into which many of the firms discharge their untreated (or improperly treated) wastes, actually flows from Baja California back into Southern California, causing serious environmental problems.

What can we say about the net effects of the malaquiladoras? There are at least two important ideas to note: (1) the TNC has been used by the Mexican government as a means to address unemployment issues, and (b) the results have been ambiguous, with some Mexican workers benefitting and some United States workers being adversely affected. Furthermore, until one
appreciates the social conditions in Mexico, it is difficult to show just how beneficial the program has been to the Mexican workforce.

When the effects of the TNC are assessed, it is important to consider a variety of factors. For example:

(1) The type and the pace of the industrial development fostered by the TNC is critical. One should ask: Is the size and the type of the technology compatible with the cultural ethos of the host nation? (In this case the type of technology refers not only to machines but to the form of human organization and the manner in which materials are transformed into products.) Is the pace of technological development too fast, i.e., are the social dislocations resulting from industrialization offsetting the gains from economic development?

(2) The relationship of industrial development to agricultural development is very important: Is the agricultural sector, along with its vast pool of rural labor, being ignored? Often the development path followed in a less-industrialized nation bypasses the agricultural sector and concentrates only on industrial development. That can be a fatal flaw in development. Furthermore, when agricultural development does occur in the Third World nation, is it producing cash crops for export, or is it addressing the nutritional needs of the people? There are some circumstances where cash cropping makes sense, but meeting the nutritional needs of the society should be a first priority.

(3) Terms of agreement are important in the development process: Is the technology contributing to the industrial capacity of the host nation? Are the terms of technology transfer reasonable for the host nation? All these questions are difficult but necessary to answer.

In assessing the work and the effects of the TNCs, we need to know what they are good at, as well as the cultural values they bring into a Third World nation. As noted, they are skilled at providing technology and access to markets, and at promoting efficiency in manufacturing. They can, for instance, clearly increase productivity levels and plant efficiency in a Third World country.
It is also necessary for us to identify and to appreciate the human values that are brought into a society by the TNC. The technology is always accompanied by a form of social organization; it is never value-free. It reflects the values of industrial society. These are the values of mass production, efficiency, material acquisition, with a priority given to enhancing a material standard of living. It is important to understand how these industrial values blend with the cultural values of the host nation. Are they compatible, or are the indigenous values simply seen as “obstacles” to development, (a view found in many books on international development)?

As we consider what the TNCs are good at, we need to understand their financial flexibility. In fact, the treasurers of the TNCs are fast replacing the gnomes of Zurich. Given their size and extensive lines of credit, TNCs can move large amounts of money from one country to another almost instantly.

TNCs are making a big difference in the way the international economy functions. In today’s global economy, ideas and people flow as readily as capital. This mobility and flexibility is certainly good for the TNC, and perhaps even for the overall global economy. But it is not necessarily beneficial for any one nation.

Are the TNCs effective in what they do? It is necessary to understand the work of the TNC in the context where it is operating. To argue that the TNCs, for instance, are not improving the lot of the poorest 40 percent might be true, but it is the task of the host nation to deal with the distribution of income and wealth in a society. The TNCs also require political stability where they operate. Understandably, they do not want changing policies and regulations. Sometimes that stability can be guaranteed only by a high price—the repression of individual freedom.

Given these concerns, where can the TNCs be helpful? Here are some examples: In the 1970s, Farbwerke Hoescht (a West German chemical firm) was asked by the Indonesian government to help improve rice production on 600,000 acres on the island of Java. Farbwerke Hoescht recommended special seeds, fertilizers, and crop-protecting chemicals to the farmers. The company advanced all the necessary supplies on credit—the
farmers paid nothing until they earned profits from the increased yields. For every dollar of seeds, fertilizer, and chemicals invested, it was estimated that the paddies yielded two dollars of additional rice.

As noted, technical skills, management capabilities, and marketing expertise are among the assets possessed by the TNCs. Another example of the use of these assets is the atta fortification project in India. (Atta is the ground wheat product used to make chapatti—the round, flat, breadlike staple of the northern Indian diet.) The Indian government contracted with private firms for the purchase of the fortifying ingredient as well as for processing and marketing of the finished product. In some nations, those marketing skills were used to design educational programs to create a keener nutritional awareness. The TNCs' technical skills have also been used to promote research and development activity.

The TNC can be most useful under these conditions when:

(a) the host nation knows specifically what it wants and utilizes the skills of the TNC,

(b) the TNC can respond flexibly and adaptively, and

(c) the host government has the funds to pay for the skills of the TNC. (Sometimes this might be made possible via an international research and technology pool either through multilateral efforts or through the United Nations.)

Considering the work of the TNCs from the perspectives noted above, we can now move beyond the savior vs. villain debate.

**TNCs, ETHICAL BEHAVIOR, AND THE CHURCH**

It is difficult to provide a simple ethical framework for evaluating the work of the TNC. Before we can proceed, we need to develop a vision of what responsible corporate behavior would look like. This vision is rooted in our values of efficient production in a safe and humane work environment, care for the natural environment, desire for social and economic justice, and the preservation and enhancement of individual freedom. We will see that in the vision, the TNCs are not only responsible for their actions but also accountable in their actions to the political
community and to the wider society. Here are some guidelines for TNC behavior in the Third World nations as well as other countries:

(1) The TNC should be supportive of policies in host nations that aid the workers and the poor. They need to obey the law and work to promote progressive policies, i.e., those conducive to decent wages and benefits (including a safe work environment), and good working conditions. That is easier said than done, however, because of the relative wage scales in a particular nation and the variations in legal structures among the nations. We should note, however, that the TNC is often in a peculiar bind because it is accused both of underpaying the employees (causing exploitation) and also of overpaying them (thus disrupting the wage structure in a particular nation).

(2) The TNC needs to exercise its social responsibility; consequently the firm should not allow behavior that is outlawed in the United States (or in the home base) to occur in a Third World nation. For example, this pertains to the unloading of chemicals banned in the United States and elsewhere on foreign markets. This call for a stewardship ethic is an appeal to a corporate conscience that goes beyond compliance with national laws. Also, bribes should be forbidden, even if they might be expected as part of some local customs.

In many ways, the presence of the TNC reinforces the social and political structures that the TNCs might find abhorrent elsewhere.

(3) In a similar vein, the TNC should refuse to work in situations where the social and political structures are oppressive to one particular group, such as blacks in South Africa. The TNC needs to understand that its independent actions will not offset the negative impacts of the government policy of apartheid. In many ways, the presence of the TNC reinforces the social and political structures that the TNCs might find abhorrent elsewhere.
Divestment from places such as South Africa is always a mixed bag, however. That is, after divestment, another firm usually picks up the business. Nevertheless, there are times when the right message needs to be sent. Also, when divestment begins to increase, the economic stability of the nation begins to shatter, thus hastening the pace of additional divestment.

Witness the situation in South Africa. In South Africa many United States firms have practiced the Sullivan principles (including hiring and promoting blacks), which were used to justify their staying there, i.e., so as to reform the structure from within. But, as the Reverend Leon Sullivan said recently, it is time for the corporations to divest because we cannot expect the efforts of the individual TNCs to overcome the effects of the apartheid policies.

Is such a vision for TNC behavior naive? We cannot respond to that question other than to argue for both a sense of corporate social responsibility as well as corporate accountability. When we appeal to corporate social responsibility, we are asking the firm to go beyond what the law requires. That sometimes works, but it often places the firm at particular competitive disadvantage. That is, the firm does something that its competitors are not doing. That is why a sense of corporate accountability is necessary; accountability to the laws and needs of the host nation, and also to the wider global political community. Here all firms can be treated equally. Given the absence of any international political instruments that can control the behavior of the TNCs, the United Nations can offer, and has offered, the kinds of codes and guidelines for international corporate behavior.

Having said a few things about the ethically responsible and morally accountable behavior of the TNC, we also need to address specifically what the Christian community can do to promote a more equitable type of global development. The areas in which we need to work are heightening awareness, promoting dialogue and education, and engaging in specific actions with TNCs and others. Here are seven areas in which work needs to be done:
(1) We need to recognize the new international economic context, which has no parallel in the political arena. That is, the world is growing more economically integrated and politically fragmented at the same time. The rationalization of the TNC strategy might serve the needs of the TNC, and perhaps even the global economy, but it does not necessarily serve the needs of any one nation. Professor Raymond Vernon, a renowned expert on TNCs, wrote recently: “In refusing to serve any national interest, the TNC runs the risk of serving no interest at all other than its own.”

The political fragmentation, which makes it difficult to control the TNC, should not preclude our need to envision a new global community, a vision whose articulation can become primarily the task of religious institutions.

(2) The activities of the TNC need to be considered in light of the context of social and economic development. In order to foster the goals of economic justice, we need both corporate social responsibility as well as corporate accountability. That is, we need new partnerships between the public and the private sectors along with other initiatives.

(3) We need to promote dialogue with workers in the TNCs, especially those who are members of our congregations. How the TNCs actually function—their limits and possibilities—needs to be explored. Those who work in those firms can be effective teachers, and their stories need to be complemented by others who bring differing perspectives. The social, religious, and cultural factors of industrial development need to be addressed as well as the political and the economic factors.

(4) In that dialogue we need to develop moral guidelines, especially those that articulate our vision of care for the whole of creation, of social and economic justice, and of the enhancement of individual freedom. These will be based on fundamental biblical and Christian ethics. They will be designed as guides only, not as a detailed code of conduct nor as specific operating policies for a TNC.

(5) The church should investigate its own ownership in TNCs, i.e., its stock portfolio. Is the behavior of the firms in which we are investing consistent with our understanding of basic ethics, such as racial, economic, and gender equality,
TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS

environmental quality, workers' rights, human freedoms, etc.? As owners, we should exert leverage on corporate behavior, but sometimes divestment of the stock of some firms is essential in order to send a message. We should harbor no illusions, however, about the economic effectiveness of divestment.

(6) As we recognize the need for corporate accountability to the political community, we need to work for policies that provide and promote more accountability. That includes a look at United States policies that affect TNC behavior at home and abroad. We also need to work with the international community (particularly the United Nations) on these issues.

(7) Any activity of the church with regard to the TNCs should be engaged in with a fully ecumenical spirit. The problems go far beyond the scope of any one denomination. Furthermore, we are part of a wider global Christian community and we need to

The church needs to remember that it was one of the first transnational corporations.

listen to our brothers and sisters from other nations. They can tell us of their experiences with economic development and the TNCs. The church needs to remember that it was one of the first transnational corporations. That fact should be celebrated.

CONCLUDING NOTE

Much of what has been said was given in summary fashion, so there will be no attempt to summarize here. There are, however, a few ideas that need to be reiterated if we as Christians are to take global development seriously. If we are concerned about global economic justice, we need to understand its relationship to global economic development and to the role of the TNC.

Although we in the religious community need to promote corporate social responsibility and urge the TNCs to behave accordingly, it is important to note the need for corporate accountability—accountability of the TNC to the host nation and to the wider political community. The need for more consistent national laws and international guides or controls is becoming
apparent. We need some type of effective political analogue to the globally integrated economy. Nevertheless, we face a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, there is the reality of an increasingly fragmented political community. On the other hand, there is a growing global economic interdependence and a deepening need to appeal to a broader global community to humanize global economic activity. Despite the fragmentation, we need to develop and work for such a vision of the global community where we can all celebrate our common humanity. New types of partnerships are needed between the TNCs and governments to promote human welfare. But regardless of our global visions, we need to remember that the TNC can be most effective and constructive when that host nation knows precisely what it needs and asks the TNC to perform the task.

The global strategies of the TNCs are making political controls and guidelines increasingly more difficult, but also more necessary. It is also clear that much of the economic activity in a host nation should be based on indigenous enterprise with modest dependency upon the TNC. The TNC should be utilized primarily for meeting specific national goals and objectives. Finally, as members of the Christian community, we need to celebrate our international network as we work to understand and guide the TNCs and strive to promote a global economic justice.

NOTES

2. Address of Robert McNamara to the Board of Governors, the World Bank, Sept. 1, 1975 (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.)
BUREAUCRACY AND MORAL CASUISTRY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

ROBERT JACKALL

An adequate ethics of business requires a knowledge of the day-to-day experience of the decision makers involved.

Business ethics is rapidly becoming big business. Among other developments, the last fifteen years have seen the proliferation of a great number of books and articles on ethical problems in business; the emergence of several centers and institutes at least partly dedicated to the subject or to related problems like the role of values in scientific, technological, or public policy work; the spread of business ethics courses in both college and business school curricula; and even, in some corporations, the development of seminars in ethics for executives. This groundswell of attention to ethical issues continues a historical tradition that in different forms dates at least to the turn of this century, when the big corporation began its ascendancy in our society. The recent upsurge has been prompted undoubtedly by the Watergate crisis and its spillover into business, and, more recently, by a series of corporate scandals headed by revelations about insider trading on Wall Street. At the same time, the accelerating pace of scientific and

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technological change that continually overturns taken-for-
granted notions about our universe has prompted widespread
discussion of ethical issues. All of this has been a boon to many
moral philosophers, normally a precariously positioned occupa-
tional group in a social order where the scepter of intellectual
supremacy has long since slipped from the hands of a discipline
once called the queen of the sciences. With the titles of “ethicist”
and even “ethician,” moral philosophers have applied their
considerable mental acumen to unraveling the conundrums of
the fast-paced, hurly-burly worlds of commerce and industry or
more sedate scientific milieux. In doing so, they have extended
in quite new directions the much longer tradition of moral
casuistry, that is, the process of applying general principles to
specific situations to resolve moral quandaries, an art that often
involves the invention of wholly new rules and legitimations for
action.

Unfortunately, most of this analysis has been of hypothetical
cases, of real life cases abstracted from their intricate organiza-
tional contexts, of public testimony before various commissions
and hearings by officials who, as it happens, are well-practiced
in fencing with such audiences, or of the journalistic accounts of
highly publicized corporate scandals in recent years. Despite the
emergence of a new industry that one might call Ethics, Inc.,
however, the philosophers at least have done little detailed
investigation of the day-to-day structure and meaning of work
in business and of how the conditions of that work shape moral
consciousness.

But only an understanding of how men and women in
business actually experience their work enables one to grasp its
moral salience for them. In this essay, I want to examine, with a
sociologist’s eye, the occupational ethics of men and women in
business, that is, the moral rules-in-use that they construct to
guide their behavior at work. As they are popularly used, of
course, the notions of morality and ethics have a decidedly
prescriptive, indeed moralistic, flavor; they are often based on
the remnants of religious beliefs, like the admonition to follow
the Golden Rule. However, in using such notions sociologically,
I do not refer to any specific or given, much less absolute, system
of norms and underlying beliefs. Moreover, I imply no
judgment about the actions I shall describe from some fixed ethical or moral stance, as the terms are often used in popular discourse, sometimes by business people themselves.

THE ETHICS OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

I begin with a puzzle that confronted me while doing extensive sociological fieldwork in a variety of corporations. For the past several years, I have participated in regular meetings at a large public relations agency, where ethical issues are discussed. A high official of the agency, out of his own intellectual interest, is the principal force behind the committee. He wants the group to grapple with the many dilemmas that public relations practitioners face. In my years in the meetings, a number of issues have risen repeatedly. For instance, should the agency represent corporations whose products are widely thought to be harmful, like companies that manufacture cigarettes? What rules should govern hype, that is, the coordinated, multi-media inflation of the reputation of products, events, and personalities? Or, in what circumstances may the agency use the widespread practice of the fictive realities known colloquially in the field as “fronts”—such as fake committees of concern, or alliances for the responsible use of such and such a product, or disinterested scientific institutes—all of which serve the purpose of helping to mobilize or defuse public support for a position while concealing or at least obscuring the principal interests initiating action? As it happens, most of the junior and senior staff who participate in the meetings find the discussions of these large professional questions only mildly interesting; they see them as academic exercises that have little bearing on actual professional practice. Most of them, particularly junior staff, would rather focus their attention on the internal management practices of the agency, an issue that makes the high official very uncomfortable. When the official misses a meeting, in fact, the discussion invariably turns to the ethics of relationships within the firm. I noticed the same focus on local organizational issues rather than on larger professional concerns among managers in the other corporations that I studied. Why this overriding concern with internal organizational issues? What connection do managers see
between their everyday occupational ethics and larger notions of, say, corporate social responsibility? To address these questions, I must sketch in outline form the social structure of business corporations as I understand it and suggest how this structure shapes moral consciousness.

Managers' occupational ethics—again, their moral rules-in-use in their organizational world—emerge directly out of the social structure of the corporation. Generally speaking, corporations are what may be termed patrimonial bureaucracies. On one hand, they are hierarchical; they are standardized with a high degree of formal or functional rationality; and they are simultaneously interlocking and compartmentalized. On the other hand, authority is exercised in a highly personal manner. This takes the form of a kind of fealty between bosses and subordinates, and patrons and clients. Moreover, corporations are relatively unstable social structures. Since upheavals, purges, reorganizations, or other forms of restructuring are commonplace, alliances with other managers become mandatory for survival, let alone success. These alliances may be built on past or present fealty ties but they also emerge from the personal relationships established through social cliques or coteries, through networks, or through associations developed around convenient coincidences of interests. All of these circles of affiliation establish generally informal criteria for admission, making them into what I call probationary crucibles of a sort, much like the old Protestant sects. Essentially, to be admitted to a circle one must hold one's own among one's peers. A universal criterion for admission seems to be the ability to establish "personal comfort" with others, an ongoing process that embraces not only the demonstration of one's competence and the possession of an agreeable style, but, in particular, the

Morality in the corporate world emerges not from sets of internally held principles but from relationships with some person, some clique, some social network that matters to a person.
convincing display of an understanding of how the world works. The latter includes an appreciation of the importance of reciprocity, of protocol, of primal loyalty to one's own alliances in a topsy-turvy world filled with conflict, and especially a shared moral code.

It goes perhaps without saying that the moral ethos of managerial circles is not notable for its fixedness. Morality in the corporate world emerges not from sets of internally held principles but from relationships with some person, some clique, some social network that matters to a person. Since these relationships are always multiple and always in flux, moralities are always situational.

Managerial circles breed, select, or, more exactly, elicit certain distinctive habits of mind. I can best describe these habits of mind by summarizing research that I have reported elsewhere. In a separate study of occupational dissenters, or whistle-blowers, I gathered a number of cases of men and women who ended up making protests about their organizations' practices on moral grounds. I studied, for instance, a financial executive who objected to high officers in his corporation using employee pension monies as a slush fund to bring profits in invariably on target year after year; and a manager at Three Mile Island who objected to procedural shortcuts by his own company and by the major contractor on site in cleaning up TMI-2. These shortcuts threatened, he felt, not only the success of the cleanup but public safety as well. I presented these and several similar cases to corporate managers and public relations people whom I know well, asking them to appraise the moral choices made by the dissenters. Almost all the responses present a similar pattern, and managers and public relations people alike feel as follows: (1) The issues at stake are wholly practical concerns, devoid of ethical or moral content. In technological matters, in particular, one does not make one's view of a technical issue a matter of principle. It is the prerogative of authority to resolve technical disputes. (2) The dissenters had acted stupidly by violating, in some way, fundamental rules of managerial circles—for instance, never to go around one's boss, never to contradict one's boss in public, never to expose colleagues' mistakes, never to try to fix responsibility for errors or wrongdoing, particularly
on the "up side," and never to put things in writing in an unambiguous way that allows little room for interpretation. (3) The dissenters' greatest mistake is their insistence on a moral code that makes a claim on others, reduces their freedom to respond to exigencies, calls others' morality into question, and therefore makes others uncomfortable. Without exception, the managers that I interviewed about these cases were not surprised that the dissenters were fired; they too would search for whatever excuse they could find to get rid of them. Managers, they say, do not want evangelists working for them.

The point is that the bureaucratic structures of big organizations transform moral issues into practical concerns. This alchemy is effected to a great extent by managers' understanding that their own organizational fates depend on their attention to the internal rules and social context of their world. Moral judgments based on, say, a professional ethos or personal religious conviction have little meaning in a world where the etiquette of authority relations, nonaccountability for actions, and the necessity for the protection of one's boss, one's circle, and oneself supersede all other considerations.

Public opinion constitutes one of the only effective checks on the bureaucratic impulse to translate all moral issues into practical concerns.

Now, some managers carry this transformation of moral issues into practical concerns to quite far reaches. I call this an alertness to expediency, that is, an ability to perceive the intersection between external exigencies, organizational logic, and personal advantage. Alertness to expediency demands the systematic cultivation of the ability to strip away the externals of a situation, to discard competing but irrelevant claims, and to keep one's eye fixed on what has to be done, how best to do it within the protocol of an organization, and how to benefit from it personally. Managers alert to expediency accept the world as it is and make whatever compromises have to be made with conventional verities in order to make the world work. It is
precisely such practical perspicacity, unencumbered by ideological and moral frameworks, that makes managers with this habit of mind invaluable and successful in a bureaucratic milieu.

The logical result of alertness to expediency is the elimination of any lines at all. But practically speaking, corporations are not self-contained. They operate in the public arena and are subject to the vagaries and pressures of public opinion. Public opinion constitutes, in fact, one of the only effective checks on the bureaucratic impulse to translate all moral issues into practical concerns. Those imbued with the habit of mind that I am describing make every effort then to mold public opinion to allow continued uninterrupted operation of business. In this sense, moral issues become issues of public relations.

It is, in fact, from just such a viewpoint that junior and senior managers at the public relations firm see the high official’s desire to discuss the moral quandaries of their profession. In their view, he has reached and maintained his position precisely because of his own great alertness to expediency. As they see it, although they do not voice this opinion to him, the meetings to discuss ethics constitute an elaborate front, a forum for the public discussion of sophisticated principles that bear little resemblance to the actual private moral rules-in-use that both the high official and they themselves live by. If, they say, one examines the institutionalized internal management practices of the firm—shelving older employees, suppressing data critical of management from employee surveys, backing and filling after reneging on promises, or fostering favorites by allotting them prized accounts and therefore the chance for prestige and promotions—one can get an accurate picture of the operative ethics of the firm not only in management practices but in larger professional matters as well. In this view, the grand theories of corporate social responsibility should be appraised against an understanding of the mundane, often banal, day-to-day struggles of an organization. In effect, they feel the high official is practicing public relations on his own staff.

**AFTERWORD**

In my own view, the abstractions and especially the platitudes of much of contemporary moral philosophy thus conceal rather
than reveal the real everyday dilemmas of men and women in business. These are dilemmas that are often extremely anxiety-provoking and that admit of no formulaic solutions. How does one, for instance, make hard judgments about people, money, and the allocation of resources and simultaneously fulfill the demands of caritas? How does one strive for success in a world that demands ceaseless self-objectification and self-control and simultaneously maintain a generosity of spirit and vision? How does one submit oneself to the rules and etiquette of the organization, the price of survival, let alone success, in the corporate world, and simultaneously avoid the piecemeal parceling out of one’s self? How, in short, does one act in the world and maintain a sense of integrity? Sociology, of course, offers no emotional comfort nor moral guidance in such issues nor, least of all, a vision of what men and women could become. But, one might argue, its relentlessness in seeing the world as it is provides firm ground for honorable choices.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING


NOTES

1. From 1980 to 1983, I did fieldwork in three corporations. These were a large textile firm, a large chemical company and its parent conglomerate, and the public relations firm discussed in this essay; my work in the latter continues today. Thirty-six corporations refused permission for the study, sometimes after extended and complicated negotiations reaching all the way to the top of some firms. This was an instructive experience in itself, although I have treated these data as preliminary. In the corporations to which I eventually gained access, I conducted 143 intensive, semi-structured interviews at every level of their respective hierarchies. Each interview usually lasted between two and three hours, but sometimes went much longer. In particular, I re-interviewed more than a quarter of my interviewees, and many of these a third and fourth time. Among those re-interviewed, I also selected a stratified group of twelve managers. I regularly asked these managers to interpret materials that I was collecting. I met with these managers more than a half-dozen times each.

I conducted all interviews personally. Most were arranged by appointment and done in the workplace during regular office hours. A few took place in restaurants, cafeterias, or bars; one was held in a private home. I recorded all interview data by hand and typed them myself, usually the same day.

The interview data are complemented by extensive nonparticipant and participant
observation. These observational data include attendance at some management meetings, informal conversations and discussions over meals, coffee, and drinks, and participation in a range of social events. I also attended two seminars for up-and-coming managers, each lasting for several days. It was often in such informal settings that I gained the best insights during my fieldwork, ideas that I then pursued more formally through interviews. In all the firms that I studied, I also reviewed the company literature directed at managers, as well as internal documentation detailing organizational actions or stances on specific issues.

I do not claim that my work describes all of American business: the limits of any inquiry based on studies of a few firms are self-evident. But only detailed fieldwork, which necessarily limits breadth, can yield in-depth knowledge of a subject like occupational ethics. Moreover, the great size of the two industrial firms that I studied, their intricate bureaucratic hierarchies in both line and staff, and the complex technological, regulatory, legal, administrative, and public relations problems that their managers face not only made both fit all my initial selective criteria, but they also make them, I think, sites where one can come to understand many of the central issues of managerial work. Moreover, the public relations firm that I studied is at the very center of that world. Finally, within the confines of the circles to which I had access, I made every effort to get structured representative samples of people to interview, that is, groups in all three firms that ranged across official rank, salary, organizational function and responsibility, age, and sex.

2. As my study of corporate managers proceeded, I began to see that an investigation of organizational morality should also explore managerial dissenters, so-called whistle-blowers, many of whom take stands against their organizations on grounds that they define as moral. Since whistle-blowers are scarce in the corporate world, I focused on whistle-blowers in bureaucratic contexts, both corporate and governmental. Beginning in 1982 and continuing to the present, I have done thirteen case studies of organizational dissenters, interviewing eighteen dissenters in the process. Each case study has also involved the review of considerable amounts of documentary evidence. Thus far, I have used these data principally to help me understand more fully corporate managers' occupational morality. I did this by presenting several whistle-blower cases to the stratified group of twelve managers mentioned earlier, asking them to assess the dissenters' actions and motives by their own standards.
NEW METAPHORS IN A TIME OF CHANGE: TAPPING HIGHER ASPIRATIONS WITHIN CORPORATIONS

JANET DUDROW AND DOUGLAS WALLACE

How one company turned disruptive change into an opportunity to improve its corporate culture.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1982, a couple of young boys climbed over a fence surrounding a partly demolished department store and allegedly started a fire that burned a whole city block in downtown Minneapolis. On one-half of the burning block was Norwest Bank of Minneapolis, one of the Midwest's leading financial institutions. Within thirty-six hours, the bank was open once again for business—this time in what eventually turned out to be about twenty-five scattered office locations. As one wag put it at the time, "This is the only major company that is no longer a place but a concept."

The question of organizational change is not a theoretical one for Norwest Bank, Minneapolis. First, during the early eighties, banking began a process of monumental change that most of us really could not appreciate. Deregulation of the industry was already into a canter in 1980, and would soon be galloping. In the past, banking had been protected from the vicissitudes of open competition. Of course, there had been the usual bounties offered for new depositors, but retail customers knew that the federal government prohibited banks and S & Ls from paying...
any more than 5½ to 5¾ percent interest on their deposits. Deregulation changed all of that.

Second, bankers were often fearful of reading each morning’s newspaper, expecting another surprising announcement of a new competitor. Beginning in the late seventies it seemed everyone was talking about getting into the banking business, including Sears, brokerage houses, even insurance companies. Bankers suddenly felt like one-armed combatants, trying to compete with new players who were not strapped with the incapacitating regulations only gradually being eased for banks.

Finally, to complicate this picture of change, came the astounding increase in interest rates, and then the response of the Federal Reserve to raise the cost of new money. In some cases banks were caught loaning money at interest rates well below what they now had to pay for money—a dilemma that would force some bankers into despair.

In short, these forces ensured an experience of change unparalleled in an industry that had been brought up to believe that change was something that happened to somebody else. In North American society, this kind of industry change is being repeated at an ever-accelerating rate as we learn what it is like to become part of a truly competitive global economy. Constant change is what all of us will experience forever. In that world, what will corporate responsibility look like? And is it even possible?

INSIGHT INTO OPPORTUNITY

A few weeks before the fire, the top management group at Norwest had been discussing emerging social issues affecting banking, with a mind to select one for intensive analysis by an employee social policy task force (more about the task force process later). The post-fire flurry interrupted these discussions before the group could concur in their top choice.

The authors (who headed up a social policy department within the bank) had been involved in discussing these issues, which, by and large, were items generated in a Delphi survey of selected bankers and community leaders. (A Delphi survey is a several-step interaction that identifies and forecasts emerging trends, including new social issues.) During the recovery period
following the fire, the discussion was put on hold. But during that same time decisions had to be made quickly, bypassing the older habit of centralized decision making. People noticed and liked the change.

Turning that insight into an opportunity, we suggested to the management committee the idea of appointing a task force to tackle the question, what kind of culture should the bank move toward in order better to meet the demands of its new strategic business plan (which was just being concluded) and in view of its stakeholder responsibilities (to customers, employees, communities, vendors, governmental agencies, stockholders, etc.)?

James Armstrong, the newly appointed president, was impressed with the opportunity to examine this question precisely at a time when there was an extraordinary state of flux within the organization. The management committee voted 9 to 1 to select this question for assignment to an employee task force.

THE TASK FORCE PROCESS

Backing up just a bit, it is important to know how this task force process worked at the bank and how it came into being. In 1978, then-CEO John Morrison, in discussion with one of the authors, created a social policy group (1) chartered to anticipate social ethical issues, not merely react to them, (2) aimed toward policy development, and (3) involving employees from all levels of the bank in addressing the issues—a bottom up/top down approach to change. From the beginning there were built-in assumptions that employees are a rich source of information and reflection on social ethical issues and that five percent of any social unit, if it works in a concerted way, can affect the culture of a social system: if at least five percent of Norwest employees were dealing with the social ethical dimension of management issues, they would alter the culture of the bank so that concern for all stakeholders would become an integral part of the way the organization did business.

Here is how it worked: The Social Policy staff regularly conducted Delphi surveys of outside experts to identify emerging social ethical issues that might affect the bank. The top
management committee of the bank would select the issue(s) for employee groups to address. Fifteen to eighteen interested employees (selected by their peers) would form a task force. The group would be given an intensive off-site orientation and then meet at least weekly for six or seven months. The first stage of the process was designed to give the task force a common base information and differing ethical value perspectives on the topic. Task forces were addressed by such persons as Rosabeth Moss Kanter, on individual rights, and Ralph Nader, on consumer expectations. During stage two the groups sifted through the information and perspectives and adopted policy recommendations. In the final stage a report was written and presented to the top management group, who expected to act promptly on the recommendations.

OBSERVING THE CULTURE

The "New Culture Task Force" began its work in February, 1983, and completed it in August of that year. It followed the general pattern of previous social policy task forces, but at the end it differed sharply in one important respect. It refused to follow the customary "old culture" expectation of a detailed report of findings and recommendations and opted instead for a carefully crafted set of half-day presentations and discussion with the top management committee.

The task force gathered an enormous amount of information about values and cultural change. For example, more than twenty resource people appeared before the group, including James O'Toole (University of Southern California professor and author), social ethicist Robert Terry (director of the Reflective Leadership Program at the Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota), and Harold Chucker, columnist and business historian. A large number of articles and books were read by members, including Terrance E. Deal and Allan A. Kennedy, Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life, and Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., In Search of Excellence.

As a way to gain firsthand accounts of other corporations known for having strong organizational cultures, the task force invited representatives of several of those corporations to speak.
Richard Schall, Vice Chairman and Chief Administrative Officer of the Dayton-Hudson Corporation, presented an excellent analysis of how his organization’s culture is played out. Other spokespersons from Honeywell, Control Data, and Hewlett-Packard provided contrasting perspectives.

And finally, information about Norwest’s own culture was solicited in a variety of ways. The task force was particularly interested in the question of what ethical values the existing culture reflected and reinforced. It concluded that no one methodology would be adequate to capture the richness and variety of perspectives on what constituted the culture and values that it reflected. So the group turned to a number of approaches to answer these questions. One-tenth of the bank’s population was selected at random to answer a questionnaire regarding Norwest culture. The task force was gratified with an 80 percent response rate. Among other things, it revealed an unclear vision of the organization.

A completely different approach to drawing a picture of the culture was taken through conducting fifteen different field observation projects, led by members of the task force. They ranged from analysis of past annual reports to interviews with new employees and observations of what was emphasized in new employee training programs.

The constraints of this article make it impossible to describe the findings and recommendations of this effort; however, a summary of the framework used by the task force to summarize its conclusions about the culture and its recommendations for the future can be found in Vanguard Management, by James O’Toole (see note 1).

When the task force finished its work, it made two half-day presentations to the top management committee. The reactions of their discussion were anything but tepid.

The nine months of the task force project allowed us an opportunity to observe the complex process of formulating organizational change and wrestling with competing ethical perspectives. It also—surprisingly—offered a glimpse into the richness of people’s thoughts and dreams about corporate life. And it prompted us to probe the question of the relationship between organizational culture and ethics. What follows is a
"work in progress," a collection of musings, prompted by the task force experience, on the *why* of culture change.

CULTURE AND ETHICS

First, it is clear that *culture and ethics are inseparable*. For what is culture if not the collected beliefs and symbols defining "what we are," "what we do," and "what things mean"—and, by implication, "what is good to be," "what is good to do," and "what is good to concern ourselves about." Many popular writers and thinkers about corporate culture would have it that excellence in corporate life depends on defining a set of "cultural values" that promote the particular interest of the business, and then communicating these values and reinforcing them through rituals and other behavior.

This ignores the crucial point. People do not just want the culture of business to be different. They want it to be better.

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We asked the members of our task force to come up with some descriptors of an optimal culture for meeting a deregulated banking environment. To be sure, we added a clause, "while being responsible to our stakeholders," but that phrase tended to be dropped in the course of the project, while the emphasis on fitting the culture to the business goals was continually stressed.

What happened, though, was that the members generated a list of "optimal culture" attributes, many of which had unproven or only tenuous links to Norwest’s business strategy. When the question was raised with respect to where these higher aspirations of ethical conduct came from, the discussion was fascinating. It seemed that members brought with them, from a *reflective side* of the larger society (culture), deeply held beliefs about the way things should be.

What was interesting is that the task force members had such difficulty justifying these recommendations. In business organizations, people believe they can "sell" things only on the basis of
productivity, or profitability, or market share, or whatever else is the prevailing measure of value in that organization; they do not believe they can sell creativity by saying, "Well, because creativity is a good thing." And they are right—they cannot sell it that way.

They cannot because the notions of goodness that we bring with us from the reflective side of the values of the larger society, notions based on principles of justice, truth, charity, and so forth, are extrinsic to profit-making business. These words are not commonly part of the corporate lexicon. So we are left with words such as "productivity" to talk about measures of worth having much more significance to us in the larger scheme of things.

In essence, then, all of this talk about excellence and strong cultures may be important language trying to express a profound discomfort with the gap between what is and what ought to be.

Of course, in any imperfect world there is always a gap between what is and what ought to be. In our view, the most pressing problem is that most organizations either deny that the gap exists or accept the gap in despair. It is a problem pointed out by many observers of business organizations. The new culture task force at Norwest pointed out a tendency toward "speech making" by top officers, which they described as part of the gap between what is professed and what is really done.

LEADERS OR MANAGERS

It is at this point in the discussion that someone usually asks, "So where is Moses to lead us to the truth?" or "Where is the Messiah who will save us?" or, "Where is our Roosevelt, or Aquino?" or whoever, who will point the way? The quip is a good-humored acknowledgment of the human tendency to want a quick solution, a cosmic parent. It is also, we think, an acknowledgment of another truth: Good management is not enough.

For management is concerned with planning, staffing, organizing, training, directing, and controlling. Management is concerned with making things happen within the existing subsystem of the corporation. But moving the culture of
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business toward compatibility with the reflective side (as against the self-centered side) of the larger society’s values, making the culture better—that is the province of leadership.

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James MacGregor Burns, in his 1978 treatise on the subject, suggests two distinct notions of leadership. Transactional leadership is a quid pro quo arrangement whereby a person exchanges something of economic, political, or psychological value that is wanted by a group. But the relationship does not reflect on enduring purpose. Once the arrangement is completed, the relationship has ended.

Most of the popular heroes of organizational culture are transactional leaders, such as Lee Iacocca. This type of leadership is necessary and a difficult art, without a doubt. But it is a relationship without an enduring purpose. It is style; it does not create substantive change in values.

Contrast this approach to what Burns calls transforming leadership, which exists when leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Examples include Martin Luther King, Jr., in the civil rights movement, and in the corporate arena, Johnson and Johnson’s CEO James E. Burke, whose formulation of the company’s credo, during the Tylenol crises, represents enduring values.

Can this be done? It has been done, although examples like IBM’s Thomas Watson, Sr., and Edwin Land of Polaroid are noteworthy for their scarcity. And most examples cited are of chief executive officers or persons in other positions of authority.

“LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS PERSONS”

One must questions why this is so. Why, in most businesses, do we assume that leadership requires institutionalized authority?
Management requires position. Transactional leadership requires authority, or at least significant resources for bargaining. But we are talking about improving the culture of organizations, about "elevating the level of human conduct and aspiration," about transformational leadership. Such leadership requires neither position nor authority. More and more it appears that one of the biggest blocks to improving organizations is the assumption that you can't do it unless you're at the top.

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To refute this assumption we need only recall Gandhi, a "colored" lawyer who emerged as one of the most compelling leaders in modern history, or remember how the course of our own nation's history was forever altered by a southern Black minister who said, "I have a dream today."

One would hope that transforming leadership can happen in business, not necessarily on the part of a CEO, but of otherwise ordinary individuals who have been blessed with vision, skill, and (most importantly) moral courage. It is those individuals to whom we must look, not necessarily to the top name on the organizational chart, for the words we need to narrow the gap between what is and what ought to be.

NEW METAPHORS

Conventional approaches to organizational change typically borrow from mechanistic, systems, managerial, or behavioral psychology models. These approaches are useful for managers who are seeking ways to get people to do certain things within the existing system. The approaches engage the mind.

We think that "human conduct and ethical aspiration" are elevated not by engaging the mind only, but by engaging the spirit, and the body, and (perhaps last) the mind. Two of the effective ways of doing this are theater and liturgy.

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However, there are two kinds of theater, just as there are two forms of leadership.

The first is theater in the sense of theatrics, coming in the same category as artifice, applied decoration, cheap entertainment, and (at its worst) propaganda. At best, theatrics are a medium through which transactional leaders "trade" with followers without any elevation in aspiration or conduct. This is the theater most often described in the culture change how-to books.

The second is theater as the Greeks and, later, Shakespeare used it: as a corporate event in which actors and observers engage in an illumination and confirmation of both their values and their aspirations.

In the corporate realm, we see the first type of theater exemplified by insurance industry sales seminars, where the bells, whistles, and expensive prizes may motivate greater sales effort, but also reinforce perennial human tendencies toward selfishness and narcissism. We see the second type of theater practiced by the Gelco CEO who rewards his top sales people by personally serving them dinner. His ritual, so reminiscent of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, not only rewards the top people with personal recognition but reinforces the value and dignity of serving others—upon which any notion of customer service depends.

Liturgy, of course, is the church's adaptation of theater for its organizational purposes. The weekly service—the bowing, standing, chanting, kneeling, singing—are the means by which the membership affirms its beliefs. But the ritual also does much more. It is a rehearsal of the best of the reflective side of our story, of the ideal. It taps our individual aspirations and regularly informs our conduct.

THREE VALUES

The task for us who live so much of our lives in "corporate cultures," then, is to acknowledge the schism between the values of the corporation and the values of the reflective side of the larger society. The task is to find language and meaningful "liturgy" that will bring the two value systems closer together.
And the hope is that people of moral courage will emerge at whatever level within the organization to lead the way.

As two followers, we would share our vision for a better organizational culture. Our “better company” is centered on three key values:

(1) **Stewardship**: People in this “better company” believe that we are stewards of the resources entrusted to us by God, our fellow citizens, and our future generations.

(2) **Authenticity**: Our “better company” believes in truth in action, in being true to oneself and true to the world, not distorting either. The members’ relationships with all of the company’s stakeholders are direct, honest, and trustworthy. The gamesperson does not succeed in this company.

(3) **Service**: Our “better company” believes in leaving the campsite better than it was when the campers came. Its most famous hero is the woman or man who went the extra mile for a customer, an employee, a neighbor.

In sum, our vision is that instead of leaving the office with knots in the neck, a two percent improvement in market share, and a queasy sense of having somehow missed the point, we might instead ease the car onto the freeway, take a deep breath, and say, “You’ve done good”—and believe it.

**NOTES**

1. For more information on the Norwest task force program, refer to: James O’Toole, *Vanguard Management: Redesigning the Corporate Future* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), and David Freudberg, *The Corporate Conscience: Money, Power, and Responsible Business* (New York: American Management Association, 1986).
At a preaching workshop last year, I read aloud several of these Epiphany lectionary passages from I Corinthians and asked persons in the group how they would handle them in their own preaching. "I wouldn't preach them" was the overwhelming response. Why not? "Too moralistic." "Irrelevant to the contemporary church." "They don't fit with an overall Epiphany theme of Christ's light being scattered throughout the world." And from the women: "Paul can't be trusted on issues of sexuality and marriage."

On a quick reading of the Corinthian texts, all these objections seem to have merit. The preacher will have to recognize and overcome his or her tendency to be moralistic about these texts, lest the sermon become a string of "you oughts" and "you shoulds" devoid of good news. The preacher will have to struggle both with the Corinthian context and also with the preacher's own context. The preacher must ask, what questions are the members of my congregation asking (or do not yet have the language to ask) about the relationship between Christian faith and life in the world? Many pastors may feel uncomfortable talking about their own life as a lens through which the light of Christ is scattered into the world; such a pastor will be confronted by Paul, who

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Lectures in these homiletical resources originate in Common Lectionary: The Lections Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1983).

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states boldly, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (9:22b). Finally, many women consider Paul to be, in Victor Furnish's words, the "architect of the church's repression of women." Even though a revision of that interpretation is underway within the scholarly community, the pastor will still need to contend with the picture of a "repressive Paul" in the minds of many women and men in the congregation. However, for the preacher who is willing to struggle with these texts, they offer an ethic of holy living for women and men of faith. For the Christian listener who does not want to lead a schizophrenic life divided between Sunday morning and the remainder of the week, the theological principles on which Paul grounds his more specific admonitions present a framework for the integration of life in Christ and life in the world. A Christian is free from everything except the obligation to love as Christ has loved the person of faith. From the most private decisions to his most public decisions, Christians make choices as persons who have been freed from external obligations to live in a relationship of love with God and with neighbor. Although "holiness of life and heart" is scriptural and Wesleyan, it has many negative connotations in our culture. Therefore, I have chosen the paradigm of integrity as a way of reclaiming the meaning of holy living.

As every pastor knows, controversy accompanies virtually any pastoral statement that deals with the Christian's relationship with the world. In addressing this issue, the pastor communicates to the church in the role of shepherd, teacher, and prophet. For a pastoral statement to have more than formal authority, the listeners must believe that the pastor speaks from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that the pastor is attempting to provide leadership to the church on the basis of that relationship. They must also have some reason to believe that the pastor speaks not from self-interest but from a concern with their best interests. A pastoral statement that deals with the Christian's relationship with the world needs a basis in thoughtful reflection and sound reasoning. Finally, the pastor should speak with the freedom of one who is obedient to Christ alone and who is not fearful of the response of the listener.

Paul's authority in addressing the church at Corinth is rooted in his role as shepherd of the church he himself founded, and he is quick to remind the Corinthian Christians of this relationship (9:2). Even
though he speaks harshly at times (4:6 ff., 5:2), the overall tone of this letter is loving and compassionate (chap. 13). Paul’s authority is also grounded in his own special relationship with Jesus Christ, who has claimed Paul as his own and called him to be a preacher and leader (9:1). Insofar as he is able to recognize it, Paul is careful to distinguish his own personal opinion from what he believes is a clear mandate from Christ (7:25). Because he is not able to be physically present, Paul uses the vehicle of a pastoral letter to make his presence felt.

Pastoral letters are becoming increasingly popular today as a means of addressing issues within the contemporary church, and it will be helpful for the preacher to reflect on some of the characteristics of such a letter before moving on to Paul. First, a pastoral letter is usually situation-specific and assumes that the reader is familiar with issues in the congregation. The pastor may write because the members of the church have asked for guidance or because the pastor believes they need guidance. A letter offers a more intimate means of communication than articles or commentaries, yet it provides distance for careful reflection and clarity. It offers a pastor the opportunity to encourage, educate, and promote dialogue. It can offer correction without being personal. When a pastoral letter is written to a congregation in which there are wide differences in points of view, it forces the pastor to clarify and support his or her own position.

Paul spends little time in giving the Corinthian Christians information about issues such as food offered to idols, immorality, and the role of women in the church. We may assume that his readers were familiar with these problems. Some of these differences of opinion may well have arisen from differences in interpretation of Paul’s own preaching. For example, if we are free from the law, why not eat food sacrificed to idols? Away from the necessity to respond extemporaneously to these problems, Paul has the luxury of time to develop a carefully articulated and precise reply. Only correspondingly careful effort on the part of modern interpreters will enable us to understand the historical context of these responses.

More than one contemporary pastoral letter has been accused of being “not spiritual” or “not theological” because it deals with worldly issues. Pastors are told to preach the gospel and let members of the laity follow their own consciences in determining their actions and beliefs. Such an objection rests on two assumptions: first, that ethical
behavior automatically results when a person receives the good news of Jesus Christ and knows that he or she is saved by God's grace; second, that the individual person is the final authority concerning an appropriate Christian lifestyle.

Even the most cursory reading of the writings of Paul will uncover his radical disagreement with both of these assumptions. Paul expends considerable effort to articulate the special lifestyle of a Christian. How will the world know that Christians are different unless they act out of a different set of standards? The key to discipleship is not more laws (we are free from laws), but a relationship of love with Christ and with neighbor. There is no area of life exempt from the rule of Christ; therefore, Paul is free to offer specific guidance about such private concerns as marriage and such public concerns as food offered to idols. Paul believes that the Second Coming is imminent, and the need to live a holy life is urgent. Therefore, Christians must give highest priority to preparing themselves and other believers for the end of time by living in such a way that their lives will be in complete correspondence with their faith.

In a day when church growth is being given high priority, pastoral letters are viewed by some as an irritation at best and a deliberate attempt to undermine growth at worst. Many pastors must contend with the fear that controversy over ethical issues will divide the church. Clearly, there have been instances in which pulpit-pounding from a young and fearless prophet about the ethical implications of the gospel took on the tone of a new works-righteousness that rightly offended many Christians. On the other hand, the temptation to pastoral silence on lifestyle issues has led to instances in which life in the church is virtually indistinguishable from life in the world.

Although Paul dislikes quarrelling and anger, he is not afraid of controversy. Indeed, he uses it as a tool to clarify the implications of the gospel. The Christian is not left to confront confusing and complex issues alone; the body of Christ is built up by reflecting together on the implications of the gospel for Christian living. To be sure, Paul does not tackle social issues; given his belief in the rapidly approaching eschaton, such concerns were meaningless. In approaching these Scriptures from I Corinthians, the pastor will need to think about his or her own viewpoint regarding differences of opinion concerning Christian lifestyles. Under what circumstances does the pastor think
controversy about such matters is healthy and helpful? When does it become harmful? How does the church draw a line between actions that express mere differences of opinion to be respected by others (8:8) and actions that are completely unacceptable by the community of faith (5:12-13)?

Unlike sermons or personal discussions with members of the church, which offer the opportunity for immediate feedback and dialogue, a pastoral letter takes a great risk of being misinterpreted. Once it leaves the pastor’s desk, it is no longer the pastor’s own but belongs to the church and will be interpreted in many different ways. Two thousand years of distance offer ample opportunities for misinterpretation of a pastoral letter that is as specific as this letter to the church at Corinth. To be sure, Paul offers his own life as an example of faithfulness to the gospel, but some of Paul’s own personal preferences weaken his credibility for some people (9:5, 6). Particularly in the lections dealing with sexuality, there is great temptation for the modern interpreter to look for confirmation of his or her own point of view. There is also the temptation for the interpreter to dismiss some of these situation-specific texts as anachronistic or just wrong. Although the issues are different today, the Christian still stands at the intersection of faith and world and is compelled to make ethical decisions about life the world. The believer may “live in Christ,” but she or he also lives in the world. One of the most difficult aspects of faith is holy living, that is, living with integrity as a Christian. Paul addresses this relationship with both insight and passion.

In bridging the gap between text and sermon, I wish to propose four steps. They are an abridgment of Fred Craddock’s method outlined in Preaching (Abingdon, 1985). Step one is a first reading—a spontaneous, naive reading of the text. This is a time to think, feel, imagine, and ask questions without any regard for what anyone will think. The first reading is a time to be alone with the text, to allow it to penetrate one’s own heart and to speak to one’s own spirit. Most of the listeners in the congregation will hear the text in this “first reading” fashion, and it is important for the preacher not to discount his or her own sensitivities.

Step two is setting the text in its several contexts: historical literary, and theological. In studying the historical context, the preacher will need to discover the time, place, and circumstances of the composition of the text. The witness of faith takes different forms according to the
time, culture, and specific persons involved. Determining the historical context will help one to know what issues were at stake at the time of writing and can help one make honest decisions about how those issues might be accurately interpreted for today. In reflecting on the literary context, the interpreter looks at the whole document and asks what the author is intending to communicate by the particular placement of these passages and the style of writing. An awareness of why the author chose a particular form of communication may help the preacher determine the form of the sermon. Viewing a particular text in its theological context enables the interpreter to understand its intention in relation to the overall theological viewpoint of the writer. For example, with respect to these lections we might ask, how does this text fit with other writings by Paul?

Having been intensely involved in studying the text, step three asks the interpreter to withdraw and become self-conscious about the relationship to the text: At what point was I involved in the text? Where did I identify with the text? What have I tried to avoid in the text? Why? Reflection on these questions will help the preacher begin to think about how to communicate the text to the congregation.

The final step is to put the text into one's own words, stating what one has heard and experienced in the text in a single sentence. It is helpful to ask here: what is the text saying?, what is the text doing? Now the pastor is ready to organize the sermon.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Christian integrity requires responsibility toward our own bodies and the bodies of other people.

First Reading. A major theme here seems to be personal freedom versus responsibility for others. In what areas do I deceive myself in thinking that I act as a free agent when, realistically, I am a prisoner of my personal habits, my culture, my prior experience? The American context contains numerous examples of the attitude that the body is simply an object, a machine or piece of data. Pornography, gluttony, sexual violence, abuse of alcohol and other substances are based in a Gnostic approach to human existence. Indeed, one of the tragedies of prostitution is that people separate their bodies from themselves in an effort to make contact with another person. Instead of representing
sexuality as an inseparable part of our personhood, movies, television, and advertising frequently present the view that our sexuality is only a vehicle for relating to another person. Paul believes that Christ died for our whole selves—including our bodies. Indeed, we receive the Holy Spirit through our physical nature as well as our souls and minds. Paul is arguing for an incarnational spirituality.

**Historical Context.** Within the newly formed Corinthian church, one particular group took a major theme of Paul's own preaching, freedom in Christ, and tried to extend it beyond anything Paul ever intended. Paul quotes two of their slogans: “All things are lawful for me” and “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.” Both statements are characteristic of a Gnostic view that sees the world as sharply divided between the “spiritual” realm, which is esteemed, and the “material” world, which is disparaged. Understood one way, the body must be subdued so that the soul can mature; an expression of this view is ascetism. Understood another way, care of the soul is separate from that of the body, and one can do whatever one pleases with the body; this view finds its expression in libertinism. Both views seem to have been held by different factions within the Corinthian congregation (6:13 ff. and 7:3 ff.). The careless eating of food sacrificed to idols and sexual promiscuity by members of the Corinthian church were extensions of the latter worldview.

Paul counters this attitude with three different arguments. First, he points out that an action that may appear to be an expression of freedom can quickly become an instrument of bondage. “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. . . . I will not be enslaved by anything” (6:12). Second, although it is true that life in Christ is life in freedom, Paul indicates that liberty is limited by two relationships: a healthy relationship with one's own self and loving regard for others. Christians are not superior spiritual persons who can do as they please; they are free from the world's laws for a higher purpose: to live a life of holiness (3:16). Third, Paul argues that the body is more than just a physical organ, like the stomach or the brain; rather, it is an extension of the whole self. Christ gave his whole self for our whole selves, and now we are united with Christ (6:17). Therefore, misuse of the body is a repudiation of our relationship with Christ. Sexual immorality is the presenting issue to which Paul is replying, but it need not be the only one. Following Paul's argument, any misuse of the body is a repudiation of Christ.

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Paul exhorts his readers to "shun" or "flee" from immorality. The next sentence poses problems since Paul seems to make a distinction between sexual immorality and other sins of the body. Are we to infer that Paul believes that a sexual sin is a worse sin than other "sins of the body" like drunkenness, gluttony, or greed? Further, Paul shows no concern for the prostitute or the abuse of her body. At least two conclusions are possible. Either Paul does think that sexual sins against the body are a special category or he is simply not considering whether there may be other sins against the body. A good case can be made for the latter interpretation since "immorality" is more general and certainly cannot be restricted to one sort of sin. Moreover, the admonition to "glorify God in your body" invites the Christian to consider a whole range of ways in which to praise God through the body.

Literary Context. Several of Paul's statements in this lection are repeated in other places in I Corinthians albeit with different meanings or emphasis. Paul repeats his opponents' first slogan, "All things are lawful," later in the letter (10:23) in relation to a different topic: food offered to idols. In the second occurrence, Paul emphasizes even more clearly the distinction between individual freedom and corporate responsibility. A Christian may be free to do all things, but responsibility for one's neighbor is a higher value than personal preference.

The statement, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," is similar to Paul's earlier statement, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? . . . For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (3:16-17). Although the language may be similar, the thought is different. In the earlier text Paul is describing the Christian community as the dwelling place of the Spirit. In the later text, the individual becomes the dwelling place. Could it be that when the integrity and unity of the church are at stake, Paul views it as the temple of the Holy Spirit? And when the integrity and unity of the individual are at stake, then the individual becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Paul's threefold repetition of the phrase, "Do you not know . . . ?" serves to underline the communal aspects of this lection on individual ethics. The Corinthian Christians are not hearing something new; the whole congregation is being reminded of something they already know. No one of them can act as an isolated person. The action of one person affects the whole community.
Paul draws on the Hebrew Scriptures to refute the “liberals” who are arguing that since the soul is separate from the body, sexual promiscuity is acceptable and nothing that one does with the body will harm the soul. In a remark presumably aimed at Jewish Christians influenced by this Gnostic position, he quotes Gen. 2:24 directly, “The two shall become one flesh.”

Theological Context. The basis for Paul’s view of the body as the whole person is rooted both in his Jewish heritage and in his understanding of the resurrection. The Torah teaches that “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). Christ’s death and resurrection is the ultimate expression of God’s love for us. In Gal. 2:19 ff., Paul describes his own faith, saying that he has been “crucified with Christ . . . and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Christ’s act of giving himself up to death frees the faithful person from the law of sin and death (see Rom. 8:2). Therefore, the believer exists totally under God’s rule. Even material things such as food and the stomach fall under God’s rule. Rather than standing above the world, the Christian lives within it. The center for the believer’s life is the relationship with Christ Jesus as Lord; every other relationship must be congruent with that primary one.

Furthermore, as God raised up Christ, so God will also raise us. The body, therefore, is not something to be either exalted or misused; rather, it is a part of a holistic approach to responsible life in the world. Sexuality, then, is more than a matter of feelings or hormones; it is an expression of the whole self—body, mind, soul, and strength. Although Christ has freed us from external obligations, the believer is under obligation to lead a holy and righteous life in Christ. Therefore, sexuality is subject to self-discipline as a means of responsibly exercising Christian freedom.

Given the movement toward wholeness in our society, Paul sounds remarkably contemporary in this text. Although many of us continue to act as though our bodies were machines to be used and fixed, there is an increasing appreciation of the body as an expression of ourselves. Indeed one might want to argue that, given modern knowledge of food and health, one can apply Paul’s holistic approach to eating as well as to sexuality. The inner discipline nourishing a responsible approach to sexuality is the same discipline needed for a responsible approach to eating, drinking, exercise, and medicine.
Contact with the Text. There are at least three places for the preacher to stand in communicating this text. The preacher can stand with Paul and exhort the congregation to live a pure, integrated life. If the preacher chooses this position, he or she will need to be sure that his or her own life is above reproach and that love, not self-righteousness, is the motivating factor in the sermon. One can also stand in the position of the members of the Corinthian congregation who were somewhat bewildered and confused about so many conflicting lifestyles, each group claiming Christ as its center: How could they know whom to believe? On what basis could they make decisions for their own lifestyles? How would they know they had made the "right" choices? The preacher can voice these questions and offer guidance. Finally, the preacher can stand with the persons or group whom Paul is judging and feel the weight of his condemnation on their lifestyle. My hunch is that one of the main reasons for avoiding this text is that many preachers unconsciously stand in this third position and experience the pain of guilt. After all, who among us has not misused his or her body? Who is not enslaved to something? Who has not enjoyed the pleasures of their own personal freedom at the expense of the larger community? It is easier to ignore this text than to deal with those uncomfortable feelings. However, many listeners may also be dealing with those feelings, and such self-awareness may well provide the starting point for a compassionate sermon outlining an ethic of personal integrity with regard to the relationship of our bodies, ourselves, others, and God.

In One's Own Words. Christian integrity requires responsibility toward our own bodies and the bodies of other people.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 7:29-31 (32-35)

Increasing devotion to Christ frees believers from anxieties about self and empowers them to live in responsible relationship with the world.

First Reading. New life in Christ means that all relationships are changed: familial, emotional, and commercial. Paul desires a freedom from anxiety in his Christian brothers and sisters which is reminiscent of Jesus' statement in Matthew's Gospel, "Be not anxious . . . " However, is it true that a single person is more free from cares than a
married person or is it merely that the anxieties are different ones? This Pauline statement has formed the basis of the traditional argument for a celibate clergy. Although marriage and child rearing bring many new perspectives to a Christian, any pastor who has been up half the night with a sick child and preached to the faithful the next morning has seen new wisdom in Paul’s advice. Placed in the context of the imminence of the Second Coming, Paul reasons that community order and a single-minded concentration on Christ are more important than family.

The Text in Context. The first task of the preacher with regard to this lection will be to determine the parameters of the text. Paul’s comments on the eschaton are set in the middle of his discussion of marriage. In the RSV, this lection begins in the middle of a paragraph on marriage. Verses 32-35 form the conclusion of the whole section; without them the ordinary listener will not know the context for Paul’s teaching about the imminence of Christ’s coming.

Historical Context. Paul shared with apocalyptic Judaism and primitive Christianity the belief that the world was coming to an end; for example: “The form of this world is passing away” (I Cor. 7:31). In fact, Christ’s coming again was believed to be so near that many in Paul’s generation expected to live to experience it (see 1 Thess. 4:13 ff.; 1 Cor. 15:51 ff.). Other passages in 1 Thessalonians express characteristic beliefs about Christ’s coming again: Although no one knows when “the day of the Lord will come,” it will come “like a thief in the night” (5:1). It will be accompanied by signs of distress (7:26). Christians should not sit back and wait passively for the new age; they should live in a constant state of readiness because they have been called to a new existence (7:17), and their primary concern is loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although apocalyptic thought covers a wide variety of beliefs, one may say that, in general, it views the present age as enslaved by evil powers working contrary to the will of God. It looks forward to a new age under the complete sovereignty of God. Apocalyptic thought provides a ready explanation of the evil in this world and the persecution of believers. It also promises a vindication of the righteous in the world to come. Apocalyptic thinking often emerges in a time of major world transitions or oppression of believers.

Literary Context. Beginning with chapter 7, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote” (7:1), Paul appears to be responding
to the questions and concerns raised in a previous letter to Paul from the church at Corinth. He uses this same formula ("now concerning") repeatedly with regard to the issue of food offered to idols (8:1), spiritual gifts (12:1), and the offering for "the saints" (16:1). These issues seem to be part of a continuing dialogue with a divided and sometimes angry Corinthian congregation.

As noted previously, this lection occurs in the middle of a discussion of marriage. The reader will search in vain for reflections on the intrinsic value of family or love; Paul discusses neither. Instead, his advice on marriage and family focuses on expediency. Since "time is short," Paul recommends that believers not change their marital status unless they need to marry to avoid sexual immorality. Similar arguments apply to circumcision and slavery. Using five variations of "Have . . . as though they had not" (7:29–31), Paul makes the case for freedom from the world while continuing to live in the world. The normal patterns of life—marriage, the emotions of grief and happiness, economics, and relationships with the world—become small and insignificant in view of the coming end. One must continue to function in the world, but the focus of the Christian's attention is Christ, not the world. The preacher will note that Paul does not advocate one of the Gnostic possibilities here, i.e., withdrawal from the world to focus on the inner life. Instead, he advocates a radical freedom from the would-be lords of the world in order to live under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This lection is reminiscent of at least two teachings of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. Paul's desire that the Corinthian Christians be "free from anxieties" (7:32) will remind the reader of Jesus' statements in the sermon on the mountain, where he uses the images of birds and lilies as metaphors for a life of trust in God and freedom from anxiety. Matthew ends with these words, "Do not be anxious . . . Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:31–33). In addition, Paul's hope that the Corinthians will give their "undivided attention to the Lord" (7:35) will remind the reader of the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Theological Context. Paul calls for a Christian lifestyle rooted in grace. Because of God's action in Jesus Christ, the Christian's life is completely oriented to a new center: Christ. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, the Christian's total
devotion and attention must be directed toward Christ (7:35). Paul knows how easily persons are distracted from this single-mindedness by ordinary aspects of everyday life: family, our emotions, commerce, interaction with non-Christians. None of these values are bad or good in a moral sense; rather, the issue is one of ultimate loyalty. Everything must take its place in relationship to Christ.

The preacher will need to be fair with the listeners and let them know that at one level Paul was in error about the timing of the end of the world. Nearly two thousand years have come and gone, and God has seen fit for humanity to continue working out its salvation. At another level, the listener will be well aware that Paul is pointing to a fundamental reality of life: all things are passing away. Elderly members of the congregation celebrate holidays with bittersweet joy because so many of their friends are no longer living. For parents the length of time from the birth of a child until that child leaves home seems only an eyelash. Indeed, the pastor who has stood at the open grave of a victim of an automobile accident, a victim of AIDS, or a stillborn child knows how short life can be and how unexpectedly death can steal away a loved one. One can live free from anxieties in such a world only by trust in the grace of God in Christ.

Contact with the Text. The first sentence of this text will challenge the preacher to make a decision about his or her own view about the end of time. Like Paul we live in a day of conflicting opinions about the end time.

One set of views holds that the world will exist indefinitely regardless of human abuse and violence: Humanity has faced many crises throughout history and has always discovered some way out of the quagmire, often through new technology. Given such human resilience and capacity, humanity should not be overly concerned with leaving a legacy for future generations. Given the advances of modern science, increasing numbers of individuals live in the first half of their lives planning for the second half, allocating energy and resources toward pension, retirement, and leisure. For example, many church members, including the clergy, make ethical decisions based on financial implications for their pension funds. Responsible decisions concerning stewardship of God’s creation are accorded less importance than living a long and comfortable life. Persons who live as though
they believe that marriage, material goods, children, job status, etc., are permanent possessions are so wrapped up in the world's values that they cannot help but live anxious, fearful lives. In contrast, Paul would have Christians live in freedom from concern about "what you shall eat or what you shall drink, your body, what you shall put on" (Matt. 6:25). Reconciled by Christ, Christians can face the transitoriness of life at peace with God, with themselves, and with others.

On the other hand, there is another way of viewing our world, especially apparent in this century. Given the impotence of any of the major powers to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons, child psychologists inform us that Americans are rearing a generation of children who believe that they themselves are likely to become victims of nuclear annihilation. These children, too, believe that "time has grown short." For some the result has been nightmares, depression, and a sense of futility. For others it has given birth to a tendency toward narcissism and hedonism: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may be dead." Reflection on the possibility that the end of time as we know it may well come at our own hand is so frightening that we tend to respond in extremes. Most of the members of our congregations would prefer to deny the existence of the problem; it just makes them feel bad and exacerbates their feelings of powerlessness. A small minority of activists focus their whole lives around the creation of a nuclear-free world. They view the nuclear threat as such a critical issue that everything else pales in comparison. Before the preacher moves too quickly to privatize this text and talk about this short span of human life in the midst of God's time, the preacher can profitably examine his or her own assumptions about the end of time and their implications for his or her own lifestyle.

Reflecting on the transitoriness of individual lives, the preacher will readily identify with Paul's description of the present time as a time of crisis in which life and death are at the point of convergence. The believer has only a short time in which to make a decision as to where ultimate loyalty lies. The preacher will recognize those crisis times from experiences of ministry: The pastor waits with the family following surgery; the doctor walks in with a wrinkled brow: "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but . . ." A couple sits in the minister's office; one partner listens without hearing as the other partner says gently, but firmly, "I love you, but this marriage is over." The pastor drops by to visit a fifty-five-year-old manager who has just received
notice of mandatory early retirement because of personnel cutbacks in his company. In these crisis times, the world as formerly experienced is drawing to a close; decisions about primary loyalty and devotion become more clearly focused. Any pastor who has uttered Jesus’ words, “Be not anxious,” in a critical situation knows both how hollow they can sound and yet how important they can be in the life of a believer.

In One’s Own Words. Increasing devotion to Christ frees believers from anxieties about self and empowers them to live in responsible relationship with the world.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 8:1-13

Christian integrity is characterized by freedom from every obligation except the obligation to love.

First Reading. This passage challenges two major values in our culture. First, our culture places a high value on information, reason, and the ability to think logically; Paul argues that love is more important than knowledge. Second, our culture places a high value on individual freedom, usually interpreted as an individual’s right to do as he or she pleases as long as the action involves only consenting adults or does not break the law; Paul argues that the common good for the Christian community is more important than individual freedom. The thoughtful Christian will want to ask: Must these values—love and knowledge, or individual freedom and the common good—always be in conflict? Under what circumstances can they support each other? Within the local church itself, when have I seen or been a part of a group of more-knowledgeable or better-trained Christians who put down less-knowledgeable or poorly trained Christians? Paul raises major leadership issues here: should leaders refrain from making moral decisions if it will divide the community?

Historical Context. Once again Paul must deal with the Gnostic influence in the church. The presenting issue this time is food offered to idols. Is it right or wrong to eat food sacrificed to pagan gods? Jewish law prohibited eating of food sacrificed to idols for three reasons. First, such food was contaminated by association with idolatry; therefore, eating it could imply acceptance of pagan rites. Second, one could not know whether it met Hebrew standards for slaughter. Moreover, such
participation in cultural rites over a period of years could erase the distinctiveness of the Jewish people and encourage assimilation into the culture. In the same way that some Jewish Christians argued for a continuation of circumcision in the early church, they contended that Jewish rules regarding food sacrificed to idols should apply as well.

Another group of Christians in the Corinthian congregation held that none of this reasoning made any difference because idols are not really gods; they are only stone or clay. The one God—the real God—cannot be captured by any humanly made representation. Since Christ has freed his people from the constraints of the law and Christians are factually accurate about the meaninglessness of pagan gods, there is nothing immoral about eating any of this food as long as one does not go against the demands of one’s own conscience.

Literary Context. Once again, as in chapter 6, Paul begins his response to an issue by quoting a slogan used by the Gnostic group, “All of us possess knowledge.” Whether intentionally or not, a formula like this one is destined to polarize any group into “we” versus “they” factions. Paul counters this slogan with one of his own, “‘Knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up” (6:1). This remark is not the first time he has referred to some of the Corinthian Christians as “puffed up.” In chapter 4, where Paul is trying to help the Corinthian Christians not to overestimate the importance of teachers such as Paul and Apollos, he warns them not to be “puffed up in favor of one against another” (4:6). Still later he warns against arrogance (6:18, 19).

In chapter 13 Paul contrasts this conceited way of relating to others with the relationship of love: “If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (13:2).

The audience that Paul is addressing in chapter 8 is the “strong” or more-mature Christian group. It is the group with which Paul himself identifies. Although he agrees with the intellectual accuracy of their position—“we know that an idol has no real existence,” and “there is no God but one” (8:4)—Paul is critical of their unloving attitude. Rather than smugly enjoying their superior knowledge, these more-knowledgeable Christians must take the lead in helping the less-knowledgeable Christians to mature in faith. They must bear the primary burden in establishing the right relationship, lest their freedom impede the faith journey of the less-mature Christians. Paul does not raise the option of a churchwide study on the issue of food
offered to idols as a way to give the less-knowledgeable Christians more information. He focuses solely on the importance of a loving attitude on the part of the more-mature Christians. The basis for this attitude toward the neighbor is God's relationship with us. Christian life is grounded in God's love for us. God, who is infinitely superior, invites us into fellowship. Then we are given the grace to love God (8:3).

For a more-general Pauline discussion of many of the issues in this lection, the preacher will want to consult Romans 14. In this letter, the "weak" Christians are those who are vegetarian (14:2), who observe special days (14:5-6), abstain from wine (14:21), and "pass judgment" on persons with differing opinions (14:3). Paul again argues for the priority of the common good over individual preferences and the importance of building up the church: "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (14:19). Being correct about whether a food is clean or unclean is not the issue with Paul; what is important in Christian life is love: "If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love" (14:15). As in his letter to Corinth, Paul emphasizes that one's relationship with one's brother or sister grows out of one's relationship with God in Christ. If one's actions grow out of obedience to God, then one must remember that "God has welcomed" that brother or sister (14:3); therefore, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?" (14:4).

Theological Context. This text offers the preacher a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the relationship between love and freedom. Because persons have been saved from the bondage of sin and death through Jesus Christ, they are freed from the tyranny of self to love God and neighbor. The Christian abandons special privileges and status, and lives completely out of a relationship of love. When Paul discusses love (chap. 13), it is neither a sentiment nor a virtue; rather, it is a relationship of giving one's self to others. Similarly, freedom is not an abstract principle giving people a right to do as they please. Instead, freedom is exercised in relationship with others, and the heart of that relationship is love. This understanding of the relationship between love and freedom enabled Augustine to say, "Love God and do as you will."

Paul's response to the Corinthians' question about food offered to idols also reveals Paul's emphasis on community-oriented decision-making and the importance of loving attitudes in Christian life.
making. Unlike many contemporary Christians who have taken Jiminy Cricket's motto, "Let your conscience be your guide," as their rule of decision making, Paul has little use for individual conscience in ethics. Conscience is a Greek concept to which Gentile Corinthians are appealing, and this text is the only place where Paul even mentions it. Paul notes that "some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled" (8:7). One's conscience is easily influenced by the action of others: "For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?" (8:10). Instead of individual conscience, moral decisions are to be made on the basis of building up the community (8:1) and choosing what is good for the neighbor (8:12-13).

Contact with the Text. The preacher will need to examine carefully his or her own position within the text. It would be easy to visualize oneself as Paul, lecturing the church on how it should order its life. Such a sermon can quickly become smug and self-righteous. It would also be easy to preach "from above," as though one were an impartial observer handing down wisdom concerning the relative merits of freedom and love. Such a sermon might adequately explicate ethical theories, but it would ignore Paul's emphasis on relationship. The preacher might choose to stand with the "weak," the church members who are being made to feel ignorant and stupid by the "strong." Such a position might lead the preacher to empathize with new Christians who feel uncertain about the content of their faith and anxious about whether they will be accepted as members of the congregation. Given the preacher's own mature faith, the preacher might identify with the "strong" Christians who are far more knowledgeable about matters of doctrine than most of their flock, but who still are struggling with the tension between knowledge and love.

In One's Own Words. Christian integrity is characterized by freedom from every obligation except the obligation to love.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 9:16-23

A Christian's clearest witness to the salvation of Jesus Christ is that Christian's own life.

First Reading. Paul's passion for the gospel, his integrity, and his self-discipline are all apparent in this text. However, can anyone—
even Paul—be all things to all people and not lose one’s center of being? In addition to the personal spiritual risk Paul takes, he also risks being misunderstood by the very people he is trying to persuade; they may interpret his freedom in Christ as vacillation or the sending of double messages. After all, how can someone be a Jew one minute and a Gentile in the next? Paul understands himself to be free from everything except the obligation to love. In his zeal to communicate the gospel, Paul offers his own person as a proclamation of the gospel. On the one hand, Paul’s offering of himself is a demonstration of the Word made flesh; on the other hand, it offers a daunting prospect, for who is worthy to incarnate the gospel?

**Historical Context.** During the course of his ministry Paul had to counter considerable opposition to his apostolic authority. Some of this opposition occurred within the congregation at Corinth, and Paul alludes to these challenges to his authority numerous times in the Corinthian correspondence (I Cor. 3:3-4; 9:3; II Cor. 3:1 ff.; 10-13). Paul validates his apostleship in two ways in this section of the letter. First, he has “seen Jesus our Lord” (9:1). Second, he has founded this church at Corinth: “You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (9:2). Although apostleship brings with it many “rights,” such as the right to marry wives, as the other apostles and Jesus’ brothers had done (9:5), and the right to receive financial remuneration from congregations he has pastored (9:6-12), Paul has refused all of these rights so that everyone will be clear about his sole reason for preaching the gospel, that is, obedience to Jesus Christ, who has laid his claim on Paul (9:16).

Within this context Paul makes reference to four distinct groups who have been the object of his missionary effort: Jews, “those under the law,” “those outside the law,” and the “weak.” Although Peter, not Paul, is thought of as the apostle to the Jews, there were many Jewish Christians in Paul’s churches. “Those under the law” likely refers to those Jewish Christians who still complied with Jewish food laws and the law of circumcision as a way of being obedient to Christ; they are the “conservative” Christians within the congregation. Those “outside the law” might be either Jewish Christians who had accepted their freedom from the law or Gentile Christians who were never under the law. The “weak” group seems to include those persons with “weak
consciences” mentioned in the previous lection: Christians still bound by the legalism of the Jewish law.

That Paul would say, “I became as a Jew,” is a surprise. Paul is a Jew; obviously he must “become as” a Gentile, but why “become as” a Jew? The answer lies in Paul’s understanding of freedom. If observing the practices of Jewish law will help bring Christ to Jews, then Paul can live “as a Jew” in the confidence that the law is not the way of salvation. If conformity to Gentile practices will help show Christ to Gentiles, then he, Paul, can live “outside the law” in the confidence that Christ alone is the way of salvation. Although these statements have an opportunistic, utilitarian sound to our ears, they must be seen in relationship to Paul’s commission to preach (9:17), his emphasis on Christ as the center of his life (6:17), and his belief that sacrificial love is the ground and goal of Christian life (chap. 13).

Literary Context. Scholars disagree over the role of chapter 9 in this letter: Some see it as an interruption of Paul’s train of thought in his discussion of food offered to idols, which is completed in chapter 10. On the other side, chapter 9 can be seen as a personal example of the freedom and self-control for which Paul has argued in the previous four chapters. Two other passages from this letter illuminate this latter understanding: First, the final three verses of this chapter (9:24-27) use the image of an athlete training for a contest as a way of focusing on the self-discipline necessary to exercise the freedom to love. (Indeed, because there are only five Sundays in Epiphany this year and this text ordinarily falls on the sixth Sunday after Epiphany, the preacher will want to consider extending the pericope to include these verses.) Second, Paul recapitulates his entire discussion of apostolicity and freedom at the close of chapter 10 with this admonition, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (10:32-11:1).

Theological Context. Using his own person as an example, Paul summarizes his view of holy living. Christ alone is the center of a Christian’s life; to live with integrity is to integrate the whole self with Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the human person of Paul have converged to create a new being: Paul the apostle. The Word of Jesus Christ has become alive in Paul’s own flesh and blood, freeing him
from every external obligation. To persons who do not know the freedom of Christ, Paul may appear as two-faced or even imperialistic in order to win converts. Those persons who live under the sovereignty of Christ understand that Paul has a different identity from most people, and his actions are consistent with that identity. Paul has no need for approval from anyone except Christ. He has the strength to endure opposition from Christians and non-Christians alike because he does everything "for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (9:23).

Paul uses two athletic metaphors to describe Christian life. Just as in athletics, where entering the race is no guarantee of winning or even finishing, there is no guarantee that a new Christian will grow into a mature one. Christian maturity requires self-discipline and intentionality, just as an athlete needs training and self-control. To these new self-assured converts at Corinth, Paul's words came as caution and guidance. Yet, they knew that Paul was asking no more of them than the commitment he himself had already made. Completely confident of his salvation in Christ, he lived in humility about his own personal life, "lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (9:27). Each of these athletic metaphors for Christian life break down at some point. Only one runner receives the prize in a race, but Paul does not mean that only one Christian can gain salvation. Given Paul's previous statements about the body as a part of the whole self, Paul does not advocate punishing the body as a way to salvation. However, both metaphors reinforce the difficulty and inner discipline necessary to live a Christian life.

Contact with the Text. A pastor will want to approach a text like this one with a great deal of humility. Who can stand the light of Paul's scrutiny? Who can measure up to his apostolicity? Yet Paul does not advocate perfectionism but a process of Christian living. Although it is risky, Paul has chosen to use his own life as a model of Christian life. In so doing he is following the example of Jesus, who was the incarnation of God's love.

If the preacher chooses to stand with Paul, then he or she will be offering the preacher's own life as an example for the congregation. Before making this choice, the preacher will want to examine his or her own life for self-deception and blindness, lest the preacher offer self rather than Christ. Or the preacher might choose to stand with
members of the Corinthian congregation who know the joy of life in Christ because of Paul's personal sacrifice. Such a sermon could lift up both historical and contemporary saints who have modeled holy living, thereby enabling the listener to know the gospel. Alternatively, the preacher might choose to stand with members of the Corinthian congregation who oppose Paul's apparent vacillation on issues and allow the sermon to be a dialogue about the center of Christian identity.

In One's Own Words. A Christian's clearest witness to the salvation of Jesus Christ is that Christian's own life.

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<td>Wesley, John</td>
<td>1:3-8, 41-62; 2:11-23; 3:14-29</td>
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<td>G. Total (Sum of E, F)</td>
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