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June 15, 2005

Dear Democratic Colleague,

As we continue to explore the nexus between faith and politics, I want to share with you this thoughtful, historical and analytic document prepared by Neil Proto regarding Catholic social teaching and American society. Mr. Proto is a lawyer in Washington D.C., and an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown's Public Policy Institute.

I hope that you find this document a useful background as you speak with people of faith in your district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosa" in a cursive script.

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

April 2005

**The Essential Controversy:
The Catholic Church, Its Social Teaching in America
and Those Who Defined It**

Introduction

Framing the Controversy: The Bishops' Letters, 1980 - 1986

In 1980, the American Bishops' Conference - an institutional arrangement not previously recognized by the pope as having authority independent of the Curia in Rome - decided to examine the fundamental issues it believed central to Catholicism and American society: nuclear weapons and war, and economic justice. The Conference drew on a long tradition of such examinations and statements within the Church beginning, for its purpose, with the issuance in 1891 of *Rerum Novarum* ("New Things"), Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on capital and labor.¹

At that time, Pope Leo XIII was deeply concerned about the harsh consequences of the industrial revolution, ranging from "the ... discoveries of science; ... the changed relations between masters and workmen; in the enormous fortunes of some individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses " It was a time of unfettered capitalism, a call for a violent form of socialism and, within the United States, massive European immigration, shameful living conditions, ethnic, racial and religious discrimination, and the denigration of labor.²

This tradition of examination and statement within the Church, with even broader institutional and practical consequences, emerged powerfully - with particular respect to American Catholics - in Pope John XXIII's ascension and his convening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, a rare, broad, almost three-year examination of the Church and its duty in society. At that junction, suffice it to say, Vatican II and the pope's positive view of the role of the lay community and of more communal decision-making within the Church shed a lot of "tradition." Drawing in large part from Pope Leo's *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John XXIII also issued two encyclicals: *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher: On Christianity and Social Progress) in 1961³ and *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), in 1963 (issued shortly after his death).⁴ In America, John Kennedy was President, Catholics were growing in ascendancy and the civil rights movement had stirred hearts, minds, politics, and bigotry. We also were in deadly combat with the Soviet Union (*i.e.*, the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962). Pope John's views and actions resonated widely and deeply.

Those individuals who formed the American Bishops' Conference in 1980 came of age as young priests and were strongly tempered by Pope John, the teachings of Vatican II and the

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American experience. Many among them also were the sons of immigrants. Also, beginning in 1980, the bishops were witnessing the presidential election in progress: Reagan-Bush v. Carter-Mondale. Some of the same issues (*e.g.*, poverty, high unemployment, budget deficits, the increase in nuclear weapons and an intensification of the American-Soviet confrontation) had reemerged. They did so with even more potentially serious consequences during the election of 1984.

Two pastoral letters were issued by the Conference: *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (1986).⁵ The focus of this paper is primarily the second letter, *Economic Justice for All*. Drawing heavily on natural law, reason and scripture (including the Old Testament), the Jewish experience, and the life of Jesus –his nonviolent way and his embrace of the poor – the bishops began a very open, public process – numerous hearings, broad public participation among the lay community and the public issuance, with opportunity for comment, of draft letters – that yielded *Economic Justice for All*.

The leaders in the drafting and public dialogue included Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (Chicago) and Archbishop Rembert Weakland (Milwaukee). They sought, through this process, to articulate “Catholic social teaching”, especially a concern for the poor and labor and the dignity of family, and what they characterized as a hoped for “New American Experiment.”⁶ They called upon all within the lay community – within government, business, and labor – to embrace this teaching and engage in a dialogue on its implementation with respect to very specific social and economic problems. The letter did *not* include proscriptions about sexual conduct (*e.g.*, abortion, homosexuality). By the early 1980s, however, Pope John Paul II was in Rome. Although consistently and strongly supportive of workers, unions and a duty towards the poor, he was, from the outset of his papacy in 1978, very uneasy about sharing his authority with a seemingly independent Bishops' Conference or the laity. With the help of the Curia, he began a process of “restoration” of both the pope's central authority within the Church and a more insistent emphasis on “traditional” teachings (*e.g.*, celibacy, protection of the unborn, Peter as a male). Pope John Paul II also had his own, different perspective on how to deal with the Soviet Union. And, almost simultaneous with his ascension, conservatism and the Republican Party attained a strong intellectual and practical presence in America. Reagan was now President.

Before the bishops' completed their letter on *Economic Justice*— the letter's content is discussed below – conservative Catholics attacked what they expected to be a criticism of capitalism and a call for the moral and “Catholic” duty of individuals, corporate interests and government to ensure the dignity, fair treatment and minimal living conditions for the poor and labor. Former Secretary of the Treasury, William Simon – a widely recognized and active conservative Catholic – and others contributed \$100,000 to form a group (with Simon as chair) composed of, among others, prominent former Republican officials (all Catholics, such as Alexander Haig, Clare Booth Luce, Frank Shakespeare, Walter Hickel and W. Peter Grace) and Michael Novak (as vice chair), a recognized, highly skilled, knowledgeable and forceful advocate for the virtue (from his own Catholic perspective) of the American free market system.⁷

Their critique – including in *Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy—A Lay Letter* (1984) and, later, *Liberty and Justice for All (1986)*⁸ – provided its own characterization of the bishops' efforts and language, diminished their authority and

knowledge (not enough economic training), and then, with a highly skilled polemic and selective use of biblical scripture and 19th century American history, extolled the singular and Christian virtue of the free market to accomplish the highest good for the poor and labor. In broad historical terms, at stake for the Simon/Novak conservatives was the ideological imperative to correlate, or make interchangeable, the motives and effects of capitalism with the purpose and practice of democracy in America and to posit something that the Church had thoughtfully and methodically never recognized: capitalism, and the historical operation of the free market, is the correlative of Christian beliefs. In more immediate terms, the critique's sometimes subtle but overarching objective emerged with clarity: to diminish the underlying purpose and practical fullness of Catholic social teaching since *Rerum Novarum*. Eventually, at least five Republican members of Congress signed on to the Simon-Novak critique.⁹

Largely mute in this controversy, with minor exceptions, were recognized progressives, liberals, labor leaders and Democrats. No comparable, methodical effort emerged to affirm the bishops' purpose and their own strong affirmation of the moral and "Catholic" duty of individuals, corporate leaders and government to ensure the dignity, worth and fair treatment of the poor and labor. The consequence of such muteness, however, was plain: politically and intellectually (in and out of government and within the Church), conservatives in the Simon/Novak orientation dominated and defined the controversy. They still do.

I.

Looking Back: Labor Unions and the Church, and the emerging "Preferential Option for the Poor"

Prior to Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, the Church hierarchy in Europe (and, to a lesser extent in American) began to recognize, generally, two propositions: (i) the Church's teachings were not directed meaningfully to daily life, and (ii) this failure, among others, was allowing Catholic workers and Catholic immigrants to move toward socialism, class consciousness and forms of organization (some violent) to protect their families and ensure dignity and fairness from the abuses of capitalism and the governments that supported it. Many among those workers and immigrants also were moving away from Catholicism. Under prodding, but conscious of its importance, Pope Leo issued *Rerum Novarum*. Although resisted by many conservative clergy and wealthy Catholics, *Rerum Novarum* had a profound consequence: the Church had moved irreversibly into "Catholic social teaching" and life on earth.

The theology and the breadth of the encyclical are complex and, on a deeper level, require a level of knowledge and analysis beyond what is reflected here. But the encyclical's essential substantive thrust is fairly direct: Jesus favored the poor and acted on it. Here on earth, the Church should do the same (it now would have "citizen status"),¹⁰ especially in support of those workers who needed the freedom to form "associations" in order to ensure fairness, dignity and a decent wage. Here are some extracts from *Rerum Novarum*:

Among the several purposes of a society, one should try to arrange for a continuous supply of work at all times and seasons; as well as to create a fund out of which the members may be effectually helped in their needs,

not only in the cases of accident, but also in sickness, old age, and distress.
[par. 58]

* * * *

If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepted harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice ... [and that there be] some other mode of safeguarding the interests of wage-earners; the State being appealed to, should circumstances require, for its sanction and protection.
[par. 45]

* * * *

When there is a question of defending the rights of individuals, the defenseless and the poor have a claim to special consideration. The richer class has many ways of shielding itself, and stands less in need of help from the State; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back on, and must chiefly depend on the assistance of the State. It is for this reason that wage earners, since they mostly belong to the latter class, should be specially cared for and protected by the government. [par. 37]

Although the precise terminology doesn't crystallize until the late 1970's (initially articulated by Latin American Bishops) - concerning the State's, society's, and the individual's duty to provide a "preferential option for the poor" - Pope Leo XIII was credited by Pope John Paul II with effectively declaring that precise duty in *Rerum Novarum*.¹¹

II.

America: The Tension in Catholic Social Teaching

From the outset of Pope Leo's encyclical in 1891, and for that matter since the appointment of the first American Bishop in 1789 (John Carroll), American Catholics - clergy and lay - have been in tension: those who view Catholicism as an integral and leadership force in defining the morality of evolving notions of liberty, democracy and the communal duty of individuals (with Jesus' life and life on earth as central) to the poor, the worker and those less fortunate; and those who view Catholicism as more integral to the morality of individual salvation, conduct, and charity, and the pope's singular authority to proscribe conduct (Jesus as appointing Peter, in his singular person and as a male). These two views, and the opinions that flowed from them, should not be considered as exclusive to one or the other. There is overlap and sharing. The difference, often critical in public dialogue and in the personal imperative and experience that moved individual members of the hierarchy, the clergy and the laity, was - and continues to be - in priority, emphasis and the exercise of power.

Rerum Novarum found personification in America from, among others, Maria Francesca Cabrini. She was born in 1850, at Sant' Angelo Lodigiano, a farming village south of Milan. She was the tenth child of Agostina and Stella Cabrini, both devout Catholics. It was a tumultuous

time in Italy: Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi provided a ferment of liberal ideas, political actions and a successful drive, by 1870, for national unity. Many in this movement also were "anti-clerical." The Church had often exploited land and the poor and had sided with the Monarchy and, at times, foreign colonists. Although her town was continuously divided between the Church and the forces of change, Cabrini's relatives moved in "radical circles."¹² Her biographer, Sister Mary Louise Sullivan, described the effect of Italy's *Risorgimento* (the "Resurgence") on Cabrini in this manner:¹³

Francesca Cabrini was made acutely aware of the historical realities of her time. This awareness, influenced by the intense Christian piety of her immediate household, contributed to the development of a personality open to examining the broad social and religious currents of the day, while staunchly maintaining the traditional practices of faith inculcated in her childhood.

Early on Cabrini wanted to be a missionary at a time when the Church considered it a man's calling.¹⁴ Once becoming a nun, she persistently sought, and received, an audience with two Church leaders: Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini and Pope Leo XIII. Both men recognized the need – shared by some Catholic clergy in America – to deal with the immigrant problem; that is, their deplorable living conditions, industrial exploitation of their skills and person, and their unwillingness to embrace the fullness of Catholicism. In 1889 – two years before *Rerum Novarum* – Pope Leo XIII, with Bishop Scalabrini's support, personally agreed to Cabrini's request to go to America.¹⁵

Mother Cabrini (as she was called in America) reflected and in important ways defined what would become essential elements in Catholic social teaching. She was powerfully independent and used her relationship with Pope Leo to defy local priests, bishops and conservative lay leaders, some of whom suggested she return to Italy.¹⁶ She sought out the poorest within the Italian colony, lived with her religious order among them, raised money and opened dozens of hospitals, orphanages, and resting homes for the elderly and infirmed in Chicago, Seattle, New York, Denver, Scranton, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New Orleans and numerous small communities in rural America. She counseled immigrants on social customs, language, religion, discrimination (religious and ethnic) and the disquieting mores of America. Under her guidance, immigrants were provided health care, social outreach skills, English comprehension and a capacity for understanding civic responsibilities.

Cabrini became an American citizen in 1909 (in Seattle) and died in 1917 (in Chicago). In 1946 she was canonized a Saint (the first American). In 1952 she was posthumously named "The Italian Immigrant of the Century," for her "unselfish devotion to humanity." President Truman sent a telegram of praise. Governor Lehman of New York served as Honorary Chair of the event. One speaker declared at the ceremony: "Her accomplishments stand as monuments for all to behold and put to shame those men whose bigotry helps raise the cry of intolerance towards the immigrant." The criticism was political and directed to government. In a manner consistent with established Catholic social teaching and the Church as a "citizen" in America, this and other speakers directly criticized the immigration restrictions on southern Europeans in the newly-enacted McCarran- Walter Act.¹⁷

At the time of Mother Cabrini's death in 1917, the conservatism in the American Catholic Church – always present – began a more prominent resurgence. It emerged in the perceived need for parish schools; a response to both Protestant domination of public schools (where biblical teaching occurred in a Protestant perspective) and a way of exercising more religious control within the Catholic community. The conservatism also emerged in the expansion as well as establishment of new universities and colleges. Conservatives dominated the local parish schools and tension existed with respect to control of the universities and colleges (Catholic University, when first established, was dominated by the progressives).¹⁸ The conservatives had an additional critique: progressives were not sufficiently doctrinaire or dogmatic on critical scriptural teachings and they had anti-papal attitudes (not sufficiently deferential to the singular authority of the pope and too willing to cooperate with non-Catholics in attaining social goals). Such a critique reflected what the progressives might refer to as adherence to the "passive" and "supernatural" virtues at the cost of the "natural and active virtues."¹⁹

The tension took another, now predictable form: the progressives (again, lay and clergy) continued their commitment to social reform and communal moral duty, including joining with non-Catholics. Here are some examples:

- Priests sided with and helped organize miners, common laborers and garment worker during the Haymarket (Chicago in 1883), Homestead (Pennsylvania in 1892) and Pullman (Chicago in 1894) strikes, where industrialists, with government support or acquiescence, severely repressed workers.²⁰
- Two priests, Peter Dietz (Cincinnati) and John Ryan (Milwaukee) worked with the American Federation of Labor and established a social services school, which educated hundreds in social reform and Catholic social teaching. The school was ended, as described by one historian, "at the hands of Archbishop Moeller and some conservative Republicans "²¹
- Ryan's book, *A Living Wage* (1906), generated controversy in and out of the Church. Ryan headed (in the 1920s and 1930s), a group within the National Catholic Welfare League that crafted what became the Bishops' Program (1919), a detailed advocacy of collective bargaining for workers, a minimum wage, social security and health and employment insurance. Many Catholics - especially immigrant workers - welcomed this approach. In large measure, it became the New Deal.
- Almost simultaneous with the efforts of Ryan and others, the American hierarchy of the Church - like the conservative lay in and out of the Church, especially the wealthy (e.g., John Rockefeller (Mussolini's cooperation also was sought and received in the construction of Rockefeller Center's Palazzo d'Italia);²² Morgan Banking interests; and Henry Luce, who then owned *Time*) - embraced and advocated fascism (Mussolini and the Mussolini model), with its hierarchical foundation, entwined church and state relationship, conservative social orientation,

