

change the other person. It is through the hidden work of good example and prayer that the neighbor's life is encouraged to grow and produce its own unique fruits of sanctity.⁶

The life of a contemplative has classically been described as one of "constant prayer and ready penance" (*Perfectione Caritatis*, n. 7). Prayer takes many forms: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, contrition, reparation, petition, intercession, silent surrender. It reaches out to others through intercession and petition. The penances of a contemplative are both exterior and interior. The prescriptions of community life and the vows provide many opportunities for sacrifice often exacting a high price. There are also fruitful interior sacrifices, mostly known only to God and the soul. Solitary and contemplative prayer has always preceded the great moments of our Christian heritage: Mary's *fiat* at Nazareth; Christ's paschal mystery; the coming of the Spirit upon the nascent Church at Pentecost; and so on. "In the solitary conversation of consecrated souls there are prepared those widely visible events of the Church's history that renew the face of the earth."⁷

As mentioned above, a community united in love is a means of evangelization. This is even more true of a community gathered in eucharistic

celebration. The Eucharist is a re-encounter of Christ's total self-giving love by his death on the Cross. The Eucharist is the supreme act and experience of evangelization because it proclaims in a most complete and eloquent manner God's love for humanity. The apostle Paul said as much at the dawn of Christianity: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

Members of the Church's contemplative religious communities are strong in their conviction that they are truly at the heart of the Church's life and evangelization efforts in a mystically hidden, yet fruitful, way. One of the patrons of missionary work is the Carmelite nun St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. The heart and soul of all effective evangelization for God's kingdom is intimate prayer and union with God, spiritual conversion and self-denial, humble and loving service.⁸ The contemplative life is essentially one of love: God is love. When divine love transforms a fragile, sinful human heart and radiates to others, the Church's great work of evangelization continues.

So whether one is a contemplative in the Vatican, Oceania, the Arctic, or in the farthest reaches of the universe, what matters is a life totally sacrificed in love, always in the heart of the Trinity, in the heart of the Church, at the heart of the new evangelization.

Sister Mary Jeremiah

⁶Sister Mary Jeremiah, O.P., "Catherinian Images of Consecration," *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 374.
⁷Bl. Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D.), "The Prayer of the Church," *Writings of Edith Stein*, selected, trans. and intro. by Hilda Graef (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1956).

⁸*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 8. Although this text refers primarily to "spiritual ecumenism," it is valid for any Christian witness.

BEYOND LEFT AND RIGHT: A POLITICS OF LIFE

In England seventy years or so ago, the radical, Christian-led communitarian movement known as "distributism" was proposing the devolution of power to the small nations, regions and localities. It was imbued with a strong sense of the value of place, of environment, and of cultural diversity. It was opposed to centralizing bureaucracy, but at the same time open to Europe (East as well as West). In the face of social decay it called the nation back to the basics of personal loyalty, honesty and family life. It denounced socialism on the one hand (public ownership, the planned economy) and "savage" capitalism on the other (monopolies, plutocracy, wage slavery). It sought a balanced economy through the wide distribution of personal property throughout society.

In America, around the middle of our century, the Catholic Worker movement led by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin (influenced by the distributists as well as by the French personalists) developed from a very similar inspiration. "We are working," wrote Dorothy Day, "for the Communitarian revolution to oppose both the rugged individualism of the capitalist era, and the collectivism of the Communist revolution. We are working for the Personalist revolution because we believe in the dignity of man, the temple of the Holy Ghost, so beloved by God that He sent His Son to take upon Himself our sins and die an ignominious and disgraceful death for us. We are

Personalists because we believe that man, a person, a creature of body and soul, is greater than the State, of which as an individual he is a part. We are Personalists because we oppose the vesting of all authority in the hands of the State instead of in the hands of Christ the King. We are Personalists because we believe in free will, and not in the economic determinism of the Community philosophy."

Now, there is much about distributism and personalism that appears to be outdated. Nonetheless, I would suggest that some revised and updated form of these is emerging as the new political "paradigm in waiting." The old categories of Left and Right dating back to the French Revolution are dissolving in post-communist, post-modern confusion. Philosophic conservatives like John Gray and Anthony Giddens may appeal to sustainability and diversity, reciprocity and responsibility, solidarity and subsidiarity; but these ideals cohere only within a religious understanding of human persons, and arguably within a trinitarian understanding. In the end we are always driven back to the need for an *anthropology* that would enable us to distinguish true from false needs in relation to the ends they serve. Lacking such an anthropology, the Left will remain completely barren, just as the Right must remain at the mercy of the free-market ideologues. Perhaps the basis for such an anthropology can be found within Christianity. Such is the claim implied by the Second Vatican Council (in *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22): "Christ the Lord, Christ the New Adam, in

the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling." Of course, any pretension of this sort to insight into the essence of man will be viewed with suspicion by both sides, as a potential basis for totalitarian oppression. What gives the Church the right to tell us all what we "really" need? Every dictator claims to know what is best for his people. Nevertheless, it is the claim of Christianity that a revelation concerning human nature and destiny has been made, and that it is through this revelation that we discover the ultimate ground and importance of human freedom.

What a Christian political movement needs, in order to become genuinely post-liberal rather than merely reactionary, is to combine its communitarian instincts with a more sustained *theological* analysis of the modern economy, including problematic concepts such as "economic growth," "sustainability" and "consumerism." A Christian social movement needs to expose and examine the assumptions that underlie our present economic order, in the light of alternative principles derived more directly both from revelation and from human experience. For human society is not simply a "natural" phenomenon: it is created by human beings and partakes of their supernatural destiny. The economic realm is often regarded (even by Christians and other religious believers) as in some sense "autonomous" and subject to its own set of unchanging laws. But it is surely autonomous only in the sense that regular miraculous interference with its operations need not be expected; not in the sense that it can be sepa-

rated from the drama of the human soul, the drama of divine and human freedom. It involves human decisions and thus functions neither impersonally nor deterministically.

Since Freud, the realm of human sexuality, too, has been regarded as an autonomous realm of natural forces and reactions. Nevertheless, for centuries the Christian revelation shaped this realm by means of the sacrament of marriage and ideas of chastity, courtesy and purity. The realm of money can also be given a Christian "form." Of course, no economic or political structure will ever make us good, but the Fall will rage like a cancer in any structure that is not designed to *encourage* the good.

Thus in the great social encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991), Pope John Paul II can be found arguing not merely for a system of social insurance, or for particular measures to soften the social and environmental impact of consumerism, but more radically for an economy *structured throughout* by a less secular or individualistic set of assumptions: "It is therefore necessary to create lifestyles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices; savings and investments" (n. 36). Implicit here is the growing realization that the apparent "neutrality" of liberalism, which claims merely to facilitate free competition between equals on a "level playing field," is an illusion. Markets are not some kind of natural phenomenon governed by scientific laws. They are *artificially created* by legislation, which to a large extent defines both what is to count as a commodity and how it is to be priced.

At one time it was assumed that a man could be sold as a slave; now we are faced with the decision whether or not to allow the sale of human embryos, organs or genetic tissue. What is to count as a commodity on the open market? Why alcohol rather than cannabis or crack, fighter planes but not nuclear bombs? Is it legitimate to patent a life form, such as a genetically engineered plant or bacterium? Is the delivery of fresh water, of electricity, of basic medical care, of education, of transportation, supposed to fall into the arena of public service or of commercial industry? In the mass media or in the retail trade, what is to count as an effective monopoly? Should the prices of goods be made to reflect their likely environmental impact as well as the cost of manufacture? The legislation that defines a market is always governed by many assumptions about human beings and society. Those that govern our present world economic system were largely formed during the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, and if we are to get at them we need to think not merely philosophically, but theologically.

At the end of 1994 fourteen Catholic editors from a cluster of North American journals—ranging from *Communio* through *The Chesterton Review* to the more populist *Catholic Worker*—felt it necessary to sign a joint statement calling for a more critical examination of the life-style and economic assumptions of the Western nations.¹ Their

concerns were, in part, theological. What the signers had in mind was the attempt by Catholic neoconservatives to endorse on theological and doctrinal grounds an American economic model for the nations newly emerging from the tyranny of communism in Europe. True, this neoconservative campaign was coupled with a bold attempt to engineer a moral recovery in the culture, and invoked the authority of Pope John Paul II's 1991 encyclical. Nevertheless, the signers of the statement felt that such appeals ended up partially misrepresenting not only the tradition of Catholic social teaching, but even the very encyclical in question, in which we find the pope asserting it "unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called 'Real Socialism' leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization" (CA, n. 35), and calling for "an authentic theology of integral human liberation" (CA, n. 26).

But what, for example, did the signers of the statement mean by the "disintegrative consumerism" to which they refer in the opening paragraph of their statement? John Paul defines consumerism as a style of life directed towards *having rather than being*, "and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself" (CA, n. 36). In the same encyclical, the pope argues that consumerism contributes to the "alienation" felt within modern society, for "it is through the sincere gift of self that man truly finds himself," and a society that does not somehow foster this gift of self by its "forms of social organization, production and consumption" is an alienated society (CA, n. 41). It is not the act of consumption that alien-

¹See "A Civilization of Love: The Pope's Call to the West," *Communio* 21 (Fall 1994): 497-503.

ates, but consumerism as a way of life in which we *define* ourselves by what we consume.

As the pope said more informally on another occasion (an address to young people in Trent, in April 1995): "In our society of consumerism and image, we easily run the risk of losing ourselves, of ending 'in pieces'. A shattered mirror can no longer reflect the whole image. It has to be remade. The person thus needs a *deep and stable center* around which he can unify his various experiences. The center, as St. Augustine teaches, is to be sought not outside oneself, but deep in one's own heart, *where man meets God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*. In the relationship with God who is unity, man can unify himself."

Ours is a culture in which it is the external criteria that count, the *measurable* that constitutes reality. In his 1982 Aquinas Lecture at the University of Marquette, Kenneth L. Schmitz showed how the "anthropological turn" in modern culture, combined with the progress of empirical science—both immensely precious in themselves—were associated with a "withdrawal of interiority from nature." Reality was "objectified" by the scientific method of Bacon, Galileo and Descartes, and was increasingly accounted for in terms of external relations alone. This applied not only to atoms, but to the entire cosmic order, including human beings. What was lost was the ancient sense of levels of reality, and of that deeper or higher causality which Schmitz calls "creative"—a non-necessary or non-mechanical causality that respects the radical contingency of beings. The world

did not *have to be*. That it *is* can be made intelligible by seeing it as a voluntary act, as (by analogy) a generous and loving "gift."

For G.K. Chesterton, the "coming peril" opposed by distributism was something "vast and vague," something of which capitalism and collectivism are only economic byproducts." It was that spirit which refuses recognition and respect to the Creator and to the natural boundaries of created being, the spirit that has no gratitude, or ability to pray. This is the spirit that does not *receive* the world—and its own existence—as a gift, but wants merely to take. In the modern world, according to Chesterton's biographer, Maisie Ward, "People [are] inundated, blinded, deafened, and mentally paralysed by a flood of vulgar and tasteless externals, leaving them no time for leisure, thought, or creation from within themselves." It is an externalized culture: even skills like remembering and arithmetic are now exercised for us by computer. The external is that which we are tempted to believe we can control, since our actions have a visible effect upon it (Bacon: "knowledge is power"). Increasingly, then, without access to any interior world, in order to establish our own identity we must look for or create it in the exterior—that is, in the fragmented world of images and experiences. And this is the birth of consumerism. I am what I choose: the jeans, the music, the makeup, the style.

The problem with endorsing the free or "market" economy uncritically (although we must endorse it, given the alternative of communism) is that economic growth is currently measured in terms of the quantity of

financial transactions taking place, and thus depends on a steady increase of both production and consumption. Quite apart from the environmental implications of sustained growth, the social and psychological effects of the pressure to consume more and more are dramatic. And the alienation is as great for the producer as for the consumer. For the pope (CA, n. 19), one of the worst results of modern capitalism is the reduction of labor-power itself to a commodity, exchanged for wages. Thus "the unity between production and consumption is broken": increasingly the worker is not producing the things he or his neighbor needs and consumes; he is working simply for the money that he must exchange for those things. What he actually produces is quite without meaning for him—and the things he buys are filled with meaning less and less by his own needs than by the advertising industry which exists to persuade him to buy them.

For modern man, a space, indeed a yawning void, has opened up between *people and goods*, and in this space we are presented with our choice of goods to consume, appropriately encoded with symbolic meaning. Our freedom of choice, which may appear to be greatly magnified in such a marketized economy, is in fact reduced in proportion as the commodities on offer are "illusory," or desired for merely emblematic reasons. In the creation of a society where human identity is established less by vocation (what we are) than by what we choose to buy, use and consume (what we have or can get), the religious believer will see a corrosion of the most important type of human freedom.

If we press deeper, we see that theologically many of the characteristic problems of modernity stem from the separation of nature from grace, of culture from God ("ontological dualism"). Industrial capitalism, like Newtonian physics, developed in a world in which the realm of nature and natural laws had been divorced from the realm of supernatural grace, and the so-called objective domain of physical facts had been abstracted from that of subjective values. This dualism, which affected theologians as well as scientists, resulted in a worldview of "liberalism," or the exaltation of freedom into the position of supreme value. The freedom was a *formless* freedom, because it was freedom "for the sake of freedom," freedom to choose and create our own final end. A formless freedom has no content: the content is up to us. In a world dominated by this view, a particular religion such as Christianity becomes merely one kind of option for what we may choose to do with our freedom. The churches remain open, for those who wish to go. Even religion, in other words, becomes a consumer product to be packaged and marketed.

In a liberal society we are not as free as we appear to be. The fundamental choice against Christianity has already been made: it is built into the foundations of the culture. We have placed freedom *rather than love* in the supreme position, and the logic of this choice will, in time, affect everything. However much Christians now evangelize, unless they transform the culture they will reach only an ever-shrinking minority—mainly those who fear the social consequences of an irreligious

choice of some other goal, such as pleasure or power. Christianity then has a tendency to become merely reactionary and moralistic.

The point of speaking in such apparently "romantic" terms about a *civilization of love* or a *culture of life* is simply this: if we wish to preserve our freedom, we must subordinate freedom to love. A freedom that is not subordinated to love is vacuous; furthermore, it fragments and dissolves the self. Liberal freedom being merely the power of choice, by exercising it, by actually choosing one option over another, we inevitably become less free. Any definite commitment restricts our freedom in some respect, even if it opens up for us a new range of options at the same time. Liberal freedom is thus an endless process of becoming less free, because it continually determines and shapes the self. Authentic human freedom continually makes us *more free*. It also involves choice, but choice directed towards the purpose of human existence. The act of choice is directed outward, away from the self; actions are taken for the sake of another. This means, essentially, that the self is always being opened rather than closed by the exercise of its power of choice. Whereas liberal freedom places at the center of society the *choosing self*, those who place love before freedom place at the center of society *the other who is loved*. This is the proposal that Christianity makes to all who would remain free (even free to become Christians or not).

In a (purely) liberal society (if there can be such a thing), the individual is paramount, and everything revolves around that center. In a pre-

or post-liberal society, what is paramount is the relationship between individuals, and everything is done to facilitate and support that relationship. Of course, I am here speaking of the ideals enshrined in the way a society is structured, not about the actual conduct of individuals. No doubt in any earthly human society the majority of citizens will act in a self-centered way. The question is whether that "centering on the self" forms the logic underlying legislation and custom in that society, and is allowed to dominate the rhetoric of political discourse.

Our society, if not purely liberal, is increasingly dominated by liberal assumptions. This is a *fait accompli*. How, then, can Christians respond to it? First, by becoming more aware that the society around them is exerting enormous pressure on them to reinterpret the content of their faith, and by resisting that pressure. This has implications for Christian educationalists and teachers, as well as for homilists. Second, by not merely resisting, but positively holding up before the liberal society an alternative way of life that shines by its own light. This has implications for personal spirituality and morality as well as social action. Third, in the fields of politics and economics, by proposing legislation that encodes the alternative spiritual logic.

With *Evangelium Vitae* and *Centesimus Annus*, the pope offers a lead in all three respects. His own life, as many have recognized, provides an example of self-giving love in action. With all the force of moral authority that flows from such impressive integrity, he addresses his writings not only to Catholics but to "all people of good will." And he

gives concrete guidance in matters of legislation, for example: "The underlying causes of attacks on life have to be eliminated, especially by ensuring proper support for families and motherhood. A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies. For this reason there need to be set into place social and political initiatives capable of guaranteeing conditions of true freedom of choice in matters of parenthood. It is also necessary to rethink labor, urban, residential, and social service policies so as to harmonize working schedules with time available for the family, so that it becomes effectively possible to take care of children and the elderly" (EV, n. 90).

According to the pope, the defense of life is the bedrock principle that should underlie all social policies; all legislation for human rights. Life is entrusted to us; our prime responsibility is to make it flourish. Freedom is the possession of life; love is the giving of life. To kill, to put an end to human life (even when motivated by compassion for suffering), by being primarily directed against life is also an act directed against freedom and against love—on a deep level and with far-reaching consequences. Perhaps never before has the Church understood this so clearly—and been prepared to distance herself so decisively from the barbarity both of the modern and of the medieval age. To take only the example of abortion, modern science has rendered the hypothesis of "ensoulment" at some arbitrary age after conception virtually untenable. Meanwhile the experiment of abortion on demand in the former Soviet Union and parts of the West is be-

ginning to reveal its disastrous results. Here the Church sees clearly what will be obvious to all in a few more decades.

If it worse to destroy an oak tree than an acorn, why is it so bad to destroy a cluster of undifferentiated cells in the womb, and can we not still consistently defend human life in its adult form? But a tree's value is little more than that of its species, whereas the value of a person is unique: it is the value of an entire cosmos. Besides, by attacking a human life we are attacking the Other we need to complete ourselves, the "neighbor" on whom our lives should be centered if we are genuinely to become ourselves.

From principles such as these a whole politics can be developed, as the pope does not hesitate to suggest in *Evangelium Vitae* (n. 90): "If charity is to be realistic and effective, it demands that the *Gospel of Life* be implemented also by means of certain forms of social activity and commitment in the political field, as a way of defending and promoting the value of life in our ever more complex and pluralistic societies.... This task is the particular responsibility of civil leaders. Called to serve the people and the common good, they have a duty to make courageous choices in support of life, especially through legislative measures." He affirms that laws which disregard the dignity of human life undermine the fabric of society in the most fundamental way possible. He goes so far as to claim that "a law which violates an unborn person's natural right to life is unjust and, as such, is not valid as a law." The implications of such statements are enormous, but of course

the body of papal teaching is only one set of resources for a broader process of reflection by Christians and others on the social economy. In England, for example, the cross-party Movement for Christian Democracy founded by David Alton brings together Catholics and Evangelicals committed to the six principles of social justice, respect for life, reconciliation, empowerment (or subsidiarity), active compassion, and wise stewardship. If the new politics for life is to emerge anywhere it is

likely to be here. And a politics for life is also necessarily a politics for faith, hope and love. As the personalist William Miller wrote in 1974, "the primacy of Christian love should be brought from its position of limbo where human affairs are concerned and infused into the process of history." It sounds a bit grand, but it might do for a *manifesto*.

Stratford Caldecott

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 5554 E. Westover, #103
 Fresno, CA 93727

Jim Holman
 640 "A" Avenue.
 San Diego, CA 92118

Fr. Joachim Blonski
 201 E. Wilson Ave.
 Gallup, NM 87301

Glenn Olsen
 211 Carlson Hall
 University of Utah
 Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Bill Beckman
 4400 Sumac Lane
 Littleton, CO 80123

Fr. Bill Young
 10330 Hillcroft St.
 Houston, TX 77096

Fr. Larry Gatlin
 4308 S. Blackwelder
 Oklahoma City, OK 73119

Fr. Stanley Klores
 Notre Dame Seminary
 2901 South Carolina Ave.
 New Orleans, LA 70118

F. Craig Wood
 3015 Cass Street
 Omaha, NE 68131

Dennis D. Martin
 Loyola U.—Theology Dept.
 6525 N. Sheridan Road
 Chicago, IL 60626-5385

John Chesser
 3612 Adams Ave.
 Des Moines, IA 50310

St. Mary Ann Sullivan

8400 Abbey Hill
 Dubuque, IA 52003-9501

Milwaukee Area:
 Richard Collins
 RR 1, Box 167
 Cooks, MI 49817

Mark Latkovic
 Sacred Heart Major Seminary
 2701 Chicago Blvd.
 Detroit, MI 48206

Fr. Sean J. Donnelly
 P.O. Box 30598
 Cleveland, OH 44130

Mrs. P.R. Fletcher
 1515 Montgomery Ave.
 Rosemont, PA 19010

Larry S. Chapp
 Allentown College
 2755 Station Avenue
 Center Valley, PA 18034-9568

Mrs. Maria Shrady
 190 Maple Road
 Easton, CT 06612

Michael Gorman
 148-C Herrick Road
 Newton Center, MA 02159

Phil & Carol Zaleski
 27 Hillside Road
 Northampton, MA 01060

Thomas Langan
 137 Strathallan Blvd.
 Toronto, M5N 1S9 Canada

Fr. Michael T. McLaughlin
 Via Pio Emmanuelli 53/54
 00143 Rome, Italy

George Jiri
 Lidicka 36