

Bishops' pastoral letter on economy attacks IMF, embraces zero growth

by Kathleen Klenetsky

America's Roman Catholic bishops have given their approval to a pastoral letter on the economy whose principal themes differ in only the smallest degree from the zero-growth prescriptions of the Club of Rome. Entitled *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, the pastoral, representing nearly six years of work, was endorsed by the bishops Nov. 14, by a near-unanimous 225-9 vote, at the conclusion of the annual National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington.

The bishops also approved a follow-up plan, aimed at popularizing the document among America's 52 million Catholics. The plan includes recommendations for creating an *ad hoc* committee, to be staffed by the U.S. Catholic Conference, to monitor and coordinate implementation of the pastoral letter; and a national conference in January 1987 to discuss implementation.

The document was drafted by a five-man committee headed by Rembert Weakland, the former abbot primate of the Benedictines, the order which is committed to returning the world to feudalism. Currently serving as Archbishop of Milwaukee, Weakland is the highest-ranking U.S. hierarch to have attacked the Vatican for its disciplining of Fr. Charles Curran and Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, who have openly broken with Church teachings on homosexuality, abortion, and other moral issues.

Weakland has also castigated Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for being a "Platonist" and "idealist." As the economic pastoral demonstrates, that does indeed define the dividing point between Weakland and his fellow "American heretics," and those, such as Pope John Paul II and Ratzinger, who uphold Augustinian Christianity. After reading the pastoral, one is left thinking that if Ratzinger is an idealist, Weakland must be the exact opposite.

Befitting its author, who has spoken at anti-nuclear demonstrations sponsored by the Nazi-communist Green Party of West Germany, the pastoral calls at the outset for development of a "new ecological ethic that will help shape a future that is both just and sustainable." This idiocy could have been taken verbatim from any Club of Rome document.

It reiterates the Club of Rome version of *Genesis*, which interprets God's injunction to man to have "dominion" over nature, as meaning that they should be "stewards"—the implication being that man should not unnecessarily "exploit" nature through unbridled industrial progress.

In its section on agriculture, it blames the decline in farm prices on farmers' investment in high-technology equipment and methods (which have permitted U.S. agriculture to become so productive that it could feed the world), and calls for eliminating government policies, such as the investment tax credit, which "allowed farmers to cultivate many more acres."

And it calls for converting large portions of the U.S. defense machine into civilian production, claiming, falsely, that military spending is an absolute loss to the economy.

One saving grace

Although permeated by this anti-growth bias, the document departs significantly from the two earlier drafts in one important respect: its treatment of the international debt crisis and its effect on Third World nations. Not only had previous versions refused to criticize the International Monetary Fund, whose "conditionalities" policies have brought killing austerity to millions of Third World inhabitants; but author Weakland had actually defended the IMF's activities on numerous occasions.

That pro-genocidalism represented a view of economic policy totally at odds with that of Pope John Paul II, who has spoken out passionately on the need to alleviate the debt burden now crushing the developing nations. The campaign by the Pope and Ratzinger to find a just solution to the debt crisis reached a new peak last November, during the Extraordinary Synod and attendant events, when Ratzinger denounced the immorality of both Soviet and Adam Smith's doctrines of political economy, and insisted that there must be morality in economics.

In an interview on the pastoral two years ago, Weakland stated that Pope John Paul II's views "shouldn't color discussion" of the document. But, as it developed, the Pontiff personally intervened to ensure that the letter's pro-IMF stance

was dropped.

Archbishop Malone, outgoing NCCB president, revealed during the bishops' conference, that the Pope had instructed the Weakland committee to meet with Ibero-American bishops on the debt issue. Forced to heed the Pope's instructions, Weakland convened a meeting last April, which ultimately led to the inclusion in the pastoral's final version of its only decent section, "The U.S. Economy and the Developing Nations: Complexity, Challenge, and Choices," which deals with the debt crisis.

Starting off with the assertion that the Bretton Woods system initiated in 1944 now "seems incapable, without basic changes, of helping the debtor countries—which had no part in its creation—manage their increasingly untenable debt situation effectively and equitably," the pastoral calls for a series of dramatic steps to resolve the emergency.

The debt crisis "goes beyond the system," the letter states. "It affects people. It afflicts and oppresses large numbers of people who are already severely disadvantaged. That is the scandal: It is the poorest people who suffer most from the austerity measures required when a country seeks the IMF 'seal of approval'. . . . Ways must be found to meet the immediate emergency—moratorium on payments, conversion of some dollar-denominated debt into local-currency debt, creditors' accepting a share of the burden by partially writing down selected loans, capitalizing interest or perhaps outright cancellation," particularly for very poor nations, like those in sub-Saharan Africa.

The pastoral also demands that institutions like the IMF "be reformed or replaced," since they are "neither representative nor capable of dealing adequately with current problems. . . ."

Zero growth

These creditable aspects of the section are undermined to a certain extent by other references, which doubtlessly reflect Weakland's (as opposed to the Pope's) input. Perhaps the most egregious example is paragraph 282, which, though modified to a certain extent on the floor by Archbishop Levada of Portland, who worked until recently at the Vatican with Cardinal Ratzinger, nevertheless remains outrageously no-growth.

The paragraph states that, "Hunger is often linked with the problem of population growth, as effect to cause." This was amended by Archbishop Levada to read: "Hunger is often seen as being linked to population growth."

It continues: "While this relationship is sometimes presented in oversimplified fashion, we cannot fail to recognize that the earth's resources are finite and that population tends to grow exponentially. Our concern, however, must be as much for the quality of human life as for the number of human lives." This sentence was also modified, but only very slightly. "Whether the world can provide a truly human life for twice as many people or more as now live in it (many of

whose lives are sadly deficient today) is a matter of urgent concern that cannot be ignored."

Such recommendations run antithetical to the concerns of Pope John Paul II, who has repeatedly upheld the dignity and sacredness of all human life. The notion of "quality of human life" can be traced back directly to the hard-core ideologues of the euthanasia lobby, who have argued—with greater and greater success—that those who allegedly can't live a "human life"—the retarded, the comatose, the severely handicapped—would be better off dead. The U.S. Catholic bishops have apparently decided to extend that death sentence to millions in the Third World whose lack of "quality" in their lives, is directly caused by the IMF's policies.

The document's fatal flaw is its failure to address the question of increasing production; at its best, it talks only of redistributing existing wealth, and allowing more "workers co-participation." There is no discussion whatsoever of the potential which science and technology hold for raising the output of real wealth.

The pastoral is an excellent example of how you must necessarily embrace austerity and population control, if you approach the world's economic problems from any basis other than increasing industrial and agricultural output.

This is most apparent in the document's section on the U.S. agricultural crisis, which actually recommends that U.S. farmers stop using capital-intensive methods, because this has encouraged large-scale agriculture. The document actually blames the financial disaster which has overtaken the U.S. farm sector on farmers' investment in high technology!

At one point in this section, the pastoral stipulates, "The United States is unlikely to recapture its former share of the world food and fiber trade. It may also be unwise policy to rely too heavily upon exports as a solution to U.S. farm problems. Producing for these overseas markets may strain our natural resource base. . . ."

What does that translate into? In terms of U.S. farmers, the bishops are effectively recommending that those who manage to stay in business not worry about trying to feed the Third World. And to the Third World, the bishops are effectively saying, you must starve, because we don't like technology.

The pervasive anti-science theme of the document is directly linked to its embrace of corporatist doctrines, specifically, the notion of "subsidiarity," which is referenced numerous times throughout the document. This concept, a revival of feudalist notions developed by German Jesuits in the 19th century, and popularized recently by "small-is-beautiful" ideologue E.F. Schumacher, maintains that all human activity is most efficiently and effectively practiced at the least complex level (i.e., tribes are more "human" than nations). As Weakland himself openly acknowledged at a Nov. 10 press conference, "subsidiarity" experienced a tremendous revival during the 1920s and 1930s in Italy—i.e., the period in which the fascist Mussolini reigned.