

bear fruit in the life of society. The institutions and ministries of the Church can assist the laity in their vocation in the world. That vocation consists above all in a change of heart: a conversion expressed in praise of God and in concrete deeds of justice and service." (Chap. 5 #327)

### Can you be more specific?

"Changes in our heart lead naturally to a desire to change how we act.

■ "With what care, kindness and justice do I conduct myself at work?

■ "How will my economic decision to buy, sell, invest, divest, hire or fire serve human dignity and the common good?

■ "In what career can I best exercise my talents so as to fill the world with the Spirit of Christ?"

■ "How do my economic choices contribute to the strength of my family and community, to the values of my children, to a sensitivity to those in need?

■ "In this consumer society how can I develop a healthy detachment from things and avoid the temptation to assess who I am by what I have?

■ "What government policies should I support to attain the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable?" (Pref. #23)

### But what do the bishops have to say about holiness?

"Holiness is not limited to the sanctuary or to private prayer. It is a call to direct our whole heart and life toward God and according to God's plan for this world. For the laity holiness is achieved in the midst of the world, in family, in community, in friendships, in work, in lessons, in citizenship." (Chap. 5 #332)

### What are some of the bishops' policy observations and ideas?

Chapter 3 deals with four major areas of concern. Here are a few excerpts:

#### Unemployment

Observations: "The unemployment rate among minorities is almost twice as high as the rate among whites. (#140) For female heads of households the unemployment rate is over 10%. (#141) Discrimination in employment is one of the causes for high rates of joblessness. (#147) The creation of new jobs and decent working conditions is the nation's most urgent priority for domestic economic policy." (#136)

Recommendations: "We need: more job-training and apprenticeship programs. (#159) More extensive use of job sharing, flex time and a reduced work week. (#167) And a long-term conversion from military production to more peaceful and socially productive purposes. (#168) We recommend that the nation make a major commitment to achieve full employment." (#151)

#### Poverty

Observations: "Today one in every four American children under six and one in every two black children under six are poor. (#176) The themes of human dignity and a preferential option for the poor are at the heart of our approach." (#186)

Recommendations: "The first line of attack against poverty must be to build and sustain a healthy economy that provides employment opportunities at a just wage for all adults who are able to work. (#196) Self-help efforts among the poor should be fostered by programs and policies in both the private and public sectors. (#200) Welfare programs should be available to two-parent as well as single-parent families." (#214)

#### Agriculture

Observations: "The U.S. farm system included nearly seven million owner-operators in 1935. By 1983 the number of U.S. farms had declined to 2.4 million, and only about 3% of the population was engaged in producing food." (#219)

Recommendations: "Moderate sized farms operated by families on a full-time basis should be preserved and their economic viability protected. (#233) Operators of such farms should have access to emergency credit, reduced rates of interest and programs of debt restructuring." (#242)

#### Global Economy

Observations: "Half of the world's people, nearly 2.5 billion, live in countries where the annual per capita income is \$400 or less. At least 800 million people in those countries live in absolute poverty, 'beneath any rational definition of human decency'." (#254)

Recommendations: "We believe that U.S. policy toward the developing nations should reflect our traditional regard for human rights and our concern for social progress." (#264)

### This is more than we can handle.

"We cannot be frightened by the magnitude and complexity of these problems. We must not be discouraged. . . . As believers in the redemp-

tive love of God and as those who have experienced God's forgiving mercy, we know that God's providence is not and will not be lacking to us today." (Chap. 5 #364)

"A letter such as this is but the beginning of a long process of education, discussion and action. . . . Jesus reveals that God's love is ultimately victorious over all suffering, all horror, all meaninglessness, and even over the mystery of death. Thus we proclaim words of hope and assurance to all who suffer and are in need." (Pref. #28)

*"We have seen. . . the faces of poverty in our midst. Homeless people roam city streets in tattered clothing. . . . Thousands stand in line at soup kitchens. . . . Millions of children are so poorly nourished that their physical and mental development are seriously harmed. . . . These are alarming signs and trends." (Chap. 3 #169)*

### The bishops and the family

"The Church has traditionally held that the family is the basic building block of any society. In fighting against economic arrangements that weaken the family, the Church contributes to the well-being of society. . . . Economic arrangements must support the family and promote its solidarity." (Chap. 5 #364)

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# Economic Justice For All

Key Excerpts from the  
U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral  
on the Economy

**"In any society  
the 'litmus test of its  
justice or injustice' is  
how it treats its poor  
and powerless."**



*"Like family life, economic life is one of the chief areas where we live out our faith, love our neighbor, confront temptation, fulfill God's creative design and achieve our holiness." (Pref. #6.)*

After six years of reflection and consultation, the country's Catholic bishops, meeting in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 13, 1986, by a vote of 225 to 9 approved a 45,000-word document entitled "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy." The bishops' letter is a call for "a new American experiment" in assuring human rights to all people.

The pastoral letter gives a moral analysis of the U.S. economy and offers policy directions on economic issues, particularly unemployment, poverty, welfare, farming and international economic relations.

To help readers understand this document we present here an overview in question-and-answer format. All the answers are direct quotes from the pastoral.

### Why are the bishops getting involved in economic issues?

"We feel the hurts and hopes of our people. We feel the pain of our sisters and brothers who are poor, unemployed, homeless, living on the edge." (Pref. #10)

"Our faith calls us to measure this economy not only by what it produces but also by how it touches human life and whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person." (Pref. #1)

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## What can one person do?

"Jesus taught us to love God and one another. . . without limit." (Chap. 5 #365)

"We ask each of you to read the pastoral letter, to study, pray about it. . . let us reach out personally to the hungry, the homeless, the poor, and the powerless. . ." (Pref. #26)

■ **Pray.** "Challenging the U.S. economy with the Christian vision calls for a deeper awareness of the integral connection between worship and the world of work." (Chap. 5 #329)

■ **Reflect.** "Each one has a role to play, because every day each one makes economic decisions. Some, by reason of their work or their position in society, have a vocation to be involved in a more decisive way in those decisions that affect the economic well-being of others. They must be encouraged and sustained by all in their search for greater justice." (Chap. 5 #333)

■ **Serve.** "As individuals, all citizens have

a duty to assist the poor through acts of charity and personal commitment. But private charity and voluntary actions are not sufficient. We must also carry out our moral responsibility to assist and empower the poor by working collectively through government to establish just and effective policies." (Chap. 3 #189)

■ **Act.** "Become more informed and active citizens, using your voices and votes to speak for the voiceless, to defend the poor and vulnerable and to advance the common good. We are called to shape a constituency of conscience, measuring every policy by how it touches the least, the lost, and the left-out among us." (Pref. #27)

"We believe that with your prayers, reflection, service and action, our economy can be shaped so that human dignity prospers and the human person is served. This is the unfinished work of our nation. This is the challenge of our faith." (Pref. #29)

## What does faith have to do with it?

"We write as heirs of the biblical prophets who summon us 'to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.' (Mi 6:8). . . In the parable of the Last Judgment Jesus said, 'I was hungry and you gave Me to eat, thirsty and you gave Me to drink. . . As often as you did it for one of these the least of My brothers you did it for Me'." (Mt. 25:35-40) (Pref. #4)

## But what has this to do with economics?

"Because Jesus' command to love our neighbor is universal, we hold that the life of each person on this globe is sacred. This commits us to bringing about a just economic order where all without exception will be treated with dignity, and to working in collaboration with those who share this vision." (Chap. 5 #326)

## How are we to bring about this ideal order?

"Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral and Christian must be shaped by these three questions:

■ "What does the economy do for people?"

■ "What does it do to people?"

■ "How do people participate in it?" (Chap. 1 #1)

## Can you summarize the moral vision the bishops are trying to share?

Yes. Here are the basic moral principles.

■ **Human dignity must be protected.**

"We believe the person is sacred—the clearest reflection of God among us. Human dignity comes from God. . . the economy should serve people, and not the other way around." (Pref. #13)

■ **The solidarity of the human family is basic.**

"Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community. The obligation to 'love our neighbor' has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment to the common good. Does economic life enhance or threaten our life together as a community?" (Pref. #14)

■ **The right to participate in the economy is vital.**

"All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society. . . It is wrong for a person or group to be unfairly excluded. . . For example, people who are both able and willing to work but cannot get a job, are deprived of the participation so vital to human development." (Pref. #15)

■ **The poor deserve special care and concern.**

"All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable." (Pref. #16)

■ **Human rights include economic rights.**

"Human rights are the minimum conditions for life in community. . . As Pope John XXIII declared, 'All people have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education, and employment'." (Pref. #17)

## What gives any church group the right to speak on the economy?

"As Americans. . . we believe that we honor our history best by working for the day when all our sisters and brothers share adequately in the American dream." (Pref. #9)

"In a democracy, government is the means by which we can act together to protect what is important to us and to promote our common values." (Pref. #18)

## Are the bishops appealing to Catholics alone?

"We write first of all to provide guidance for members of our own Church as they seek to form their conscience about economic matters. No one may claim the name Christian and be comfortable in the face of hunger, homelessness, insecurity and injustice. . .

"At the same time, we want to add our voice to the public debate about the directions in which the U.S. economy should be moving. We seek the cooperation and support of those who do not share our faith or tradition." (Chap. 1 #27)

## What is the next step?

"This vision of economic life cannot exist in a vacuum, it must be translated into concrete measures." (Pref. #19)

"We must ask ourselves. . . does our economic system place more emphasis on maximizing profits than on meeting human needs and fostering human dignity? Does our economy distribute its benefits equitably or does it concentrate power and resources in the hands of a few? Does it promote excessive materialism and individualism? Does it adequately protect the environment and the nation's natural resources? Does it direct too many scarce resources to military purposes?

"These and other basic questions about the economy need to be scrutinized in the light of the ethical norms we have outlined." (Chap. 3 #132)

## What has all this to do with me?

"The Gospel confers on each Christian the vocation to love God and neighbor in ways that