



FAITH, REASON & SOCIETY

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Foreword

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE this new volume of essays from the Röpke-Wojtyła Fellows.¹ The Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship is a program of the Arthur and Carlyse Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship at The Catholic University of America. It is a year-long intellectual exchange devoted to examining important economic, political, and social questions in light of Catholic social thought. The Fellows are senior college students selected from a wide range of American institutions of higher education.

Each year, the essays reflect the particular concerns and intellectual temperament of the cohort. While the topics in this volume vary, they share a deep unity. Many of these essays are animated by a common question: what sustains a free and moral society? More precisely, what happens when the moral and cultural foundations that undergird freedom begin to erode?

Our Fellows confront this question with seriousness and nuance. They resist both naïve optimism and reactionary nostalgia. They examine political authority and bureaucratic order, offer novel interpretations of Catholic social teaching, and seek the meaning of male-female complementarity in a post-industrial age. All strive for a richer

¹ The views expressed in these essays are those of the individual Fellows and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship. While each Fellow worked with a scholar who assisted in the development and completion of the essay, any errors that remain are the responsibility of the author.

understanding of the human person and what that understanding demands in every domain of life.

The Fellowship is not designed to produce ideological conformity. On the contrary, it is meant to cultivate disciplined thinking, charitable disagreement, and intellectual courage. Throughout the year, the Fellows traveled together, read demanding texts, debated vigorously, and forged friendships grounded in a shared search for truth. The essays in this volume are the fruits of that common labor.

I thank the Fellows for their dedication, seriousness, and joy in learning. I am also deeply grateful to Candace Mottice and Kate Schulz for their tireless work in organizing the colloquia and supporting the program, and to the scholars who guided our discussions throughout the year: Fr. Brad Elliott, PhD; Dr. Flavio Felice; Fr. Bob Gahl, PhD; Dr. Michael Pakaluk; Dr. Catherine Pakaluk; Dr. Paul Radich; Prof. Dennis Teti; and Dr. Max Torres.

My thanks extend as well to my colleagues at the Ciocca Center and to the Sarah Scaife Foundation and the Templeton Foundation for their generous financial support. Finally, I express my profound gratitude to Carlyse Ciocca for her unwavering commitment to the Fellowship.

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Immigration, Citizenship, and the Church

*Blake Chen**

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S CRACKDOWN on illegal immigration has brought tensions between government officials and the Catholic Church to the forefront. Though anodyne statements published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) seem to allow room for reasonable Catholics to disagree on the issue,¹ the actions of church officials reveal a more slanted reaction to recent immigration restrictions. Salient examples include the USCCB's recent move to sue the Trump administration over its freezing of funding for migrant programs,² or the petitioning of the government by Catholic Charities—an organization which openly offers aid to migrants with questionable legal status—to reconsider the rescinding of millions of taxpayer dollars.³ Vice President J.D. Vance was roundly criticized in both the secular and Catholic press for expressing his views on the principle of *ordo amoris*,⁴ even garnering a thinly-veiled rebuke from Pope Francis, who, in a letter addressed to the U.S. Bishops, condemned “any

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¹ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/migrationandCST>.

² <https://www.ncregister.com/cna/u-s-bishops-sue-trump-administration-over-refugee-funding-freeze>.

³ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/261873/catholic-charities-urges-trump-administration-to-rethink-freeze-on-ngo-funding>.

⁴ <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/guest-voices/jd-vance-wrong-jesus-doesnt-ask-us-rank-our-love-others>.

measure” that would “tacitly or explicitly identif[y] the illegal status of some migrants with criminality.”⁵ With some exceptions, it seems that few Catholic leaders have attempted either to mount a rigorous defense of citizenship or to advocate a more cautious approach to immigration.

This paper aims not to prescribe specific policy measures, but to provide a philosophical and theological defense of citizenship. I wish to address the following questions: first, is the American political order compatible with mass migration? Second, may the government justly exert control over who can come into the United States? Third, are immigration restrictions and citizenship themselves compatible with Catholic social teaching?

The Political Effects of Mass Migration

In the latter half of the 20th century, an increase in global economic integration and the outsourcing of labor and production made the march towards globalization seem inevitable. Mass migration into the United States from South America and Asia also played no small role in the rapid transformation of American culture and government. In order to analyze the political effects of immigration on the character of the United States, it may be instructive to consider the sea change that an earlier wave of immigration ushered in, that from 1880-1914. By 1910, writes historian Samuel Lubell:

[A] majority of the children in the schools of thirty-seven of the nation’s leading cities had foreign-born

⁵<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2025/documents/20250210-lettera-vescovi-usa.html>.

fathers. In cities like...Duluth, New York, and Chicago more than two out of every three school children were the sons and daughters of immigrants. Viewed in today's perspective, it is clear that those figures forecast a major political upheaval some time between 1930 and 1940.⁶

Indeed, the New Deal realignment saw repeated victories for Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, even as traditionally Republican segments of the electorate continued to vote Republican. New immigration helped spark this electoral success. First- and second-generation Italians, Eastern European Jews, Poles, and Irish largely approved of Roosevelt's centralization of administrative power and the spread of the welfare state; in turn, Democrats were richly rewarded with their votes. Notwithstanding some notable demographic outliers, including the Vietnamese and Cubans, later generations of immigrants also tended to support similarly progressive policies, including affirmative action, government provision of housing and medical care, and increased social planning.

Public support for the burgeoning bureaucratic state throughout the 20th century, especially among immigrants, signaled the fulfillment of the progressivism articulated by President Woodrow Wilson and John Dewey, whose conception of human nature conflicted radically with those of the founding fathers. The Progressives regarded James Madison's famous remark in *Federalist 51* that men are not angels—or indeed any suggestion of man's unchanging nature—as quaint. Wilson

⁶ Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Colophon, 1965), 43-44, quoted in Thomas G. West, *Immigration: The Founders' View and Today's Challenge*, 98.

viewed the separation of powers, placed as a guard against human ambition by the founders, as an obstruction to efficient government. He believed that a benevolent government, run by an enlightened expert class, could best govern the masses, obviating the need for property and self-government.

Now, lest the reader become puzzled by my reference to the Progressive Era in the context of immigration, it should be duly noted that President Wilson's immigration policies do not resemble those of today's open-border Democrats. Yet it is important to realize that the same principles that informed Wilson's technocratic ambitions for government now undergird today's open-border policies. They subvert the principle of self-governance because they refuse to acknowledge that the political community finds its basis in common mores, faith, and customs. Both treat citizens as subjects, not as self-determining individuals—hence their preference for bureaucratic management, which, unmoored from a national identity, ignores the social cohesion vital for human flourishing. It should then come as no surprise that unchecked immigration encourages a political order that struggles to hold together.

Unfortunately, such is the government that many immigrants come to expect in America today. Politicians on both sides of the aisle court voters by passing policies that encourage reliance on government-provided employment, housing, food, and welfare. In turn, that modicum of virtue necessary for a self-sustaining republic—what Madison described as the citizenry's "certain portion of esteem and confidence"⁷—is undermined.⁷ Instead of promoting the virtues of self-restraint, hard work, and entrepreneurship, the welfare state has at

⁷ *Federalist 55*.

once incentivized a culture of dependency and disincentivized assimilation.

Consent and Immigration

The same Wilsonian philosophy that underpins the welfare state and mass migration has at the same time diluted the meaning of citizenship itself, for the duties of citizenship have become less evident as the government has taken on many of the responsibilities formerly left to individuals, families, and associations. The decreasing prominence of citizenship in favor of allegiance to an amorphous, liberal global order is widely celebrated by elites and intellectuals, who view having a particular attachment to one's country as backwards and even jingoistic. In similar fashion, restrictions on immigration are decried as inhumane and reactionary. Some, like political scientist Joseph Carens, argue that borders are in themselves immoral:

Citizenship in Western democracies is the modern equivalent of feudal privilege...to be born a citizen of an affluent state in Europe or North America is like being born into the nobility...To be born a citizen of a poor country in Asia or Africa is (for most) like being born into the peasantry in the Middle Ages (even if there are a few rich peasants). In this context, limiting entry to the rich states is a way of protecting a birthright privilege.⁸

⁸ Carens, Joseph H. "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders." *The Review of Politics* 49, no. 2 (1987): 251–73.

Carens is not wrong to point out the difference of conditions and opportunities that human beings across the world are born into by chance. Yet the policy that he proposes—one of unrestricted immigration, in which only criminals would be forbidden from entry—diminishes the value of the political community, a system itself deeply grounded in the principle of ordered liberty. It may be added here that Pope Francis’ letter to the U.S. bishops, though paying acknowledgment to the need for “orderly and legal migration,”⁹ simultaneously criticizes, as Fr. Gerald Murray observes, “the very existence of laws that regulate the consequences of illegal entry into a country.”¹⁰ Such a challenge to a nation’s authority to regulate its borders denies the first obligation of government itself: to secure the rights of its citizens and provide the conditions needed for flourishing.

Let us take up Carens’ contention that our modern-day immigration restrictions reinforce a system resembling the feudalism of the Middle Ages, in which privileges and rights flowed entirely from the class one was born into. There existed no social mobility then, for feudalism preserved a relationship of unequals, of lord and serf. Carens argues that freedom of movement is indispensable for the exercise of one’s liberty; consequently, any barrier to such movement constitutes deprivation of one’s rights and would amount to *de facto* feudalism. Carens is indeed right to assert that freedom of movement is an “important liberty.” In fact, one could reasonably go further to describe the freedom of movement as a *natural* right inherent in human beings, as creatures equally endowed with dignity by their Creator. A society cannot justly force an individual to stay within that society, for

⁹<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2025/documents/20250210-lettera-vescovi-usa.html>.

¹⁰ Murray, Gerald E. “The Pope, the Border, and the Law.” *The Catholic Thing*.

human beings cannot be justly governed unless by consent. We have thus established that an individual possesses the right to leave his country, especially if the country has failed to secure his natural rights.

However, immigration restrictions enacted with a view to the flourishing of the citizenry are very much legitimate. While human beings possess the natural right of movement, one cannot speak of having a “natural right” to enter into any particular society, for natural rights, by definition, preexist society. Lest this be seen simply as a semantic sleight-of-hand to justify an exception to the natural liberty of movement, a clarification may be instructive. A political community, as noted above, can only be justly formed when individuals who, by their free consent, agree to form a body politic where they will live under common laws, mores, and customs. Without consent, no man would have a right to rule over another—a truth Jefferson acknowledged and that Lincoln would repeatedly emphasize.¹¹ Thus, just as a nation cannot force a foreigner to live within its borders (that would be slavery), one cannot simply demand to be part of a political community. Rather, the people living in it, through their government, must also give their assent. If the principle of mutual assent is not followed, the relationship between the citizen and the foreigner becomes governed by force, not justice; one party ends up imposing its will upon the other, violating the principle of natural human equality. Though outside the scope of this essay, it is worth mentioning that birthright citizenship, celebrated by the Left and reluctantly accepted by many on the Right, is in fact a very relic of the same feudal order—based on the principle of *ius soli*—that the founders sought to reject.

¹¹ Lincoln, Abraham. Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854.

While claiming that national borders are inherently unjust, Carens makes one exception: he qualifies his statement by granting that a nation may exclude “terrorists” and “criminals.”¹² Why might some be justly prohibited from entering the United States? The answer is perhaps almost too obvious to merit explanation: it is, of course, that far beyond being merely *justified* in this action, it is the very *purpose* of the nation to protect those who prove a risk to the integrity and safety of society. Pope Francis similarly frames the immigration issue in his aforementioned letter thus: “At the same time, one must recognize the right of a nation to defend itself and keep communities safe from those who have committed violent or serious crimes while in the country or prior to arrival.”¹³ Perhaps this should elucidate the fact that a polity *can* rightly lay claim to the duty of protecting those within it. One may then ask: might not also the nation rightly aim at goals beyond solely preventing violence to its inhabitants?

Immigration Restrictions and CST

A well-functioning polity, as Aristotle argued, is not merely a collection of individuals who live together in the same region, but rather a community striving towards a common good. Just as parents have an obligation to care first and foremost for their own children rather than the children of another, a nation does not act unjustly when it considers how best to secure the liberties and rights of its citizens, which may involve regulating immigration. This does not mean that the dignity and rights of others may be disregarded; however, it reflects the fact that the moral duties one owes are inevitably affected by the

¹² Carens, p. 251.

¹³<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2025/documents/20250210-lettera-vescovi-usa.html>.

place and circumstance of one's birth. On the topic of human dignity, it may also be added that those on the Left (and many on the Right) also fail to respect an immigrant's human worth when not holding him accountable to the laws of the United States. That is, in effect, treating immigrants as less than rational beings.

The allegiance and fidelity an individual owes his nation properly constitute the virtue of piety. Against those who would argue that “piety does not extend definitely to certain human individuals,” St. Thomas Aquinas responds to the contrary that:

Man becomes a debtor to other men in various ways, according to their various excellence and the various benefits received from them. On both counts God holds first place, for He is supremely excellent, and is for us the first principle of being and government. On the second place, the principles of our being and government are our parents and our country, that have given us birth and nourishment. Consequently man is debtor chiefly to his parents and his country, after God. Wherefore just as it belongs to religion to give worship to God, so does it belong to piety, in the second place, to give worship to one's parents and one's country.¹⁴

Though the Church Universal rightly concerns herself with the good of her flock around the world—hence her special concern for migrants—nations can and should justly care for the well-being of their citizens. Moreover, while the Church transcends national boundaries,

¹⁴ Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 101, a. 1, co.

she recognizes that human flourishing needs human freedom, and thus political, communal, and familial order. Indeed, just as Socrates saw that there was good in obeying the laws of his city, Aquinas recognizes that citizens owe a special debt to their own nation. Patriotism, rightly understood, is thus deeply rooted in the Fourth Commandment's exhortation to honor one's father and mother. Bradley Lewis rightly argues that at the same time, true love of country cannot "define itself against the good or existence of other nations," or be opposed to morality itself.¹⁵ An immigration policy rooted in nationalism is only acceptable so long as that nationalism is consistent with the moral law. Thus, a nationalism defined by race—a Nazi Germany, for instance—would not meet this bar.

The Church's call for generosity towards immigrants is one that the faithful would do well to heed. However, charity is not a collective quality, but an individual virtue. Therefore, it is improper to conceive of a polity as being able to exercise "charity," for polities, unlike souls, are organizations incapable of being "saved." A national immigration policy must be guided by prudence, with the common good of the nation as its lodestar; considerations of "generosity" are not properly in its ken. Moreover, what constitutes true generosity? Is it generous to turn a side eye to the rampant trafficking and dubious working conditions of migrant workers in order to provide a steady stream of cheap labor, in turn depressing the wages of low-income American workers? If immigrants cannot properly assimilate and engage in practicing civic virtue, it is "imprudent" to accept "more than can be integrated," in the words of our late Pontiff.¹⁶ One need only observe

¹⁵ Lewis, Bradley. "Is Nationalism Consistent With the Catholic Faith?" *National Catholic Register* (July 2019).

¹⁶https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/novembre/documents/papa-francesco_20161101_svezia-conferenza-stampa.html.

the formation of ethnic enclaves in Germany, France, or Britain, and the accompanying violence to understand that unrestricted immigration may have devastating effects on the unity, solidarity, and peace of a nation. A Catholic framework for immigration must always take into account how to meaningfully integrate the new immigrant into society—for when a nation is made up of a mere association of individuals, instead of a virtuous citizenry, it will have ceased to exist as a true community.

Ideal Versus Real: A Catholic Dialogue on the Living Wage

*Zach Frederick**

Introduction

FOR SOME TIME, THERE HAS BEEN a debate about whether the living wage is something that is truly feasible: Is it something that will lead to greater distributive justice? If corrected by the government, will it create a reliant workforce? If the living wage were to be implemented, what would be the economic effects of such a policy? Should we be worried about the economic effects if a policy results in a moral ideal?

These are the questions I will examine in this paper. I will attempt to separate the economic efficiency question from the greater distributive justice and moral question in the paragraphs to follow.

In Catholic Social Teaching common thought is that the living wage constitutes one salary being able to support a family of four or more. However, it is highly disputed if this is distributively and economically plausible or if it will worsen the position of the poor, the single mother, and all those most concerned.

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1. The Moral Ethical Question

It is without a doubt in my mind that moral people agree every living person deserves to be rewarded for work that they do, and this compensation should be fair. However, the ethical question of the living wage comes up when we begin to discuss what this “fair” compensation encompasses. Is it enough for life’s necessities, enough to save, enough to thrive, or something else? Should it be enough for a family, or just for the laborer? The Church would say earning a fair wage is to be given a living wage.

The living wage, I believe, is most aptly described by Pope Leo XIII:

“If a workman’s wages be sufficient to enable him comfortably to support himself, his wife, and his children he will find it easy, if he be a sensible man, to practice thrift, and he will not fail, by cutting down expenses, to put by some little savings and thus secure a modest source of income.”¹

The living wage is described above as one in which if the man and his family are willing to thrift and be sensible with their purchases, then his wage should be appropriate to provide not only a source of income, but life’s necessities plus savings for the family unit.

However, what Pope Leo XIII fails to mention is what should be considered little savings, what is considered thrift, and what is considered modest income. Of these, thrift is the only one discussed in other Papal Encyclicals and is considered a virtue. The idea of thrift

¹ Pope Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum*. The Holy See, 1891. Para. 46.

is not being cheap, but of choosing moral good over worldly ones. For an extreme example, it is choosing to have a second child over a second home.

In addition to Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, multiple papal encyclicals mention the role of the living wage or at least mention that wage should be sufficient for man to have the necessities of worldly and eternal life. The Church makes this crucial point in *Quadragesimo Anno* when Pope Pius XI states that:

“For, according to Christian teaching, man, endowed with a social nature, placed on this earth so that by leading a life in society and under an authority ordained of God he may fully cultivate and develop all his faculties unto the praise and glory of his Creator; and that by faithfully fulfilling the duties of his craft or other calling he may obtain for himself temporal and at the same time eternal happiness.”²

This quote from Pope Pius XI describes the importance of “fair” wages: that man shall not be bound by work solely, that it prevents the development of his eternal happiness. Each man is entitled to wages and sufficient work that man commits to doing.³ Pope Pius makes it clear that man must also have sufficient time away from work that he may be able to grow his soul and eternal life, not only his worldly one.

² Pope Pius XI. *Quadragesimo Anno*. The Holy See, 1931. Para. 118.

³ Pope John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens*. The Holy See, 1981.

It is also important to note that the Church is not against work but instead emphasizes its importance. Saint Pope John Paul II reiterates this in *Laborem Exercens* stating:

“Work is one of these aspects, a perennial and fundamental one, one that is always relevant and constantly demands renewed attention and decisive witness. Because fresh questions and problems are always arising...man's life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity, but at the same time work contains the unceasing measure of human toil and suffering, and also of the harm and injustice which penetrate deeply into social life within individual nations and on the international level.”⁴

This shows that the Church truly believes that man should eat by the work of his own hands, not always in a physical labor sense, but by completing work that benefits society. The Church simply asks that man be fairly compensated for the work that he does. However, what constitutes fair compensation? This is an economic question unfortunately left unanswered in Catholic social thought with any specificity.

2. *The Economic Question*

While the Church takes a strong stance on the living wage for people, economists have long discussed the economic implications. Many economists have found issue with the idea of a living wage, because the economic results of a government enforced living wage may make

⁴ Ibid, Para. 3.

the cost-of-living rise faster than we're already experiencing. Additionally, those who need jobs the most may find it harder to obtain one because the higher costs to employers will likely result in job cuts. Gerald Zandstra of the Acton Institute highlights this in his article on the living wage by stating:

“Studies over the past 40 years indicate that even a legally determined minimum wage leads to fewer available jobs. If employers are forced to pay higher wages, then they tend to hire fewer employees.”⁵

Often minimum wage economic measures have a stronger negative effect than positive for those they are intended to help. Increased minimum wages are primarily instituted for lower income households; however, jobs that are most likely to get cut are the ones they hold. This is again highlighted by Zandstra, “*Entry-level jobs, which low-income people badly need in order to get them started moving up the economic ladder, are the very ones that will disappear.*”⁶ Mr. Zandstra and I, make this leap comparing the effects of minimum and living wage because whether the living wage is instituted by private action or through government intervention, it is a forced wage increase. When wage increases are enforced with the idea of covering the cost-of-living, they've historically resulted in a wage spiral. A wage spiral occurs when wages are raised to cover the cost-of-living, but higher wages drive higher prices, and the wages never sufficiently cover the cost-of-living increases. This is discussed in depth by Wilhelm Röpke in *A Humane*

⁵ Zandstra, Gerald, and Robert A. Sirico. “‘Living Wage’ Is Anti-Christian.” *Acton Institute*, 2 Dec. 2001.

⁶ Ibid.

Economy, and highlights how minimum wage increases are insufficient to support the low-income cohort.

The solution to the economic question at hand may be one focused on bringing down the cost-of-living rather than raising wages. When looking at the idea of minimum and “living wage” it is often more appropriate to examine the cost-of-living.

To quantify this dilemma, we will evaluate the rise in cost-of-living versus wage growth since the writing of the papal encyclicals discussed in the sections above. One of the main concerns with the idea of the living wage is that most people in the current economy need two incomes to afford housing and groceries. Nominal wages have increased dramatically since the encyclicals, but for your real wage to be that of a living wage, it would be a great expense to employers. Take for example that in 1981 when *Laborem Exercens* was written the average yearly family income in the US was \$22,390 and the median US house price was \$70,400.⁷ In 2023 just 42 years later, and 132 years after *Rerum Novarum*, the median family income in the US was \$100,800 and the average house was \$419,300.⁸ We can see that while wages have increased 4.5x the average housing price has grown nearly 6x. In addition to this the Consumer Price Index, or CPI, has increased more than 3x: from 39.66 in 1981 to 129.42 in 2023. The CPI is a basket of consumer goods that helps to track the rise in family staples & discretionary products. This means that the cost of families’ everyday

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Median Family Income in the United States [MEFAINUSA646N], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Median Sales Price of Houses Sold for the United States [MSPUS], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

necessities has more than tripled in price since 1981.⁹ The wage increases above compared to the housing and CPI increases demonstrate the disconnect in our current economy. While there are many dual income homes, the total family income has still been outpaced by the housing market and the cost of everyday goods.¹⁰ The spread between these numbers shows why dual income homes have become a necessity and highlights the inability of governments to enforce minimum wages sufficient to cover rising costs.

Another important note in our current economy is the entry of working women and joint worker homes. Since *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 and even since *Laborem Exercens* in 1981, the labor market has changed dramatically: a single income household is now an oddity, not the norm. A woman is somewhat expected to have a degree, trade, or skill that allows her to help contribute to the household income, even if this is part time or supplementary to that of the male. In addition to this in many households today the woman is the “breadwinner.” This defeats the idea of women being able to care for children better than men and allowing them to stay home. While the work of the Church suggests that one income is a moral ideal, and one could argue they are referencing a singular income brought in by a male, the head of the household, a modern reevaluation is necessary surrounding the dignity of the woman in the workplace. What if she wants to work? Is the living wage a moral standard that precludes dual income households from morality?

⁹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Consumer Price Indices (CPIs, HICPs), COICOP 1999: Consumer Price Index: Total for United States [USACPIALLMINMEI], retrieved from FRED.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In addition to the dignity of women in the workplace, it is also important to note the security that comes with a dual income. If one person is laid off, underperforms, etc. then the secondary income can help support the family. We can see how important two people having earning potential is when we look at single-mother or single-father households, which are more commonly low income than those of a nuclear family.

The economic question of the living wage comes down to, what is fair? An Acton Institute commentary struggles with this stating, “For a teenager dependent on the income of his or her parents, a student subsisting in part on loans and scholarships, or a retiree simply supplementing his or her savings and Social Security, a living wage might be zero, but this would hardly be just.”¹¹ This question of what is fair and what is just is the crux of the living wage dilemma, and one that minimum wages have tried to fix for years to no avail.

While on the economic front, I do want to state clearly that Catholic, and all Christian business owners, do have a responsibility to evaluate the pay of their workers and should view wages holistically, in as much as they can still compete with secular companies. If the Catholic business does not make enough to pay an inflation adjusted living wage and continue to afford expenses to beat secular businesses, then it is unfair for us to assume that they should pay a higher wage. If we expected this then all Christians would run out of business. However, Catholics who run successful businesses that can afford a holistic wage

¹¹ Acton Commentary. “Giving the Just Wage Its Due.” *Acton Institute*, 28 May 2014.

review, should consider the family situation of their employees. They are called to use workarounds such as providing “baby bonuses” as well as bonuses for their employees' kids' school and sporting events, number of kids, higher matching for retirement plans than most businesses etc. These types of additional compensation, whether in bonus or another form, for those who follow moral ideals associated with a larger family, only one income, or any other situation that may come up when in a holistic evaluation are important to forwarding morality in business.

These are important considerations for the Catholic business owner, for the morality of the wage they are providing their worker, but also running a successful business first to ensure the world is not run by secular ones.

In conclusion, conservative economists tend to side against a living wage when it is done by a government raised minimum wage; however, liberal economists preach that, morally speaking, the importance of equal economic distribution should outweigh that of economic output: the laborer deserves a wage based on being a participant rather than their value output.

3. The Moral-Economic Dilemma?

After evaluation of the moral and economic dispute on the living wage, it appears that while of moral superiority it is implausible for the entire economy to implement it. While all people deserve a proper wage to live, morally speaking, it is difficult when it comes time to crunch the numbers to see a living wage adjustment that does not negatively impact inflation, cost-of-living, or overreliance on government. The living wage, when evaluated beyond that of a moral scope, begins to

look like an ideal, similar to that of socialism, which on paper in comparison to a market economy also looks better. This ideal as a moral high ground led me to think more deeply about late Michael Novak's wrestle with socialism when he stated:

“The notion that an unworkable ideal is a morally acceptable ideal, however, troubled me. If an ideal doesn't work, isn't that evidence that it is out of touch with human reality? Isn't that a sign that it is a false ideal?”¹²

This statement feels like it holds true with the idea of the “living wage.” It is ideal that all families be given one singular wage that their entire family can live on. This would be a “no brainer” for those who hear it. However, with far more complex moral and economic evaluation, you find the many problems that may arise with implementation.

For example, if you raise the minimum wage, then you are almost certain to have a cost-of-living increase. As cost-of-living rises then the wage will need to increase again. Now we are into the Röpke wage spiral mentioned above.

Another tactic would be providing tax benefits for those with dependents, but then you run into the issue of joint income households. Do they deserve the higher tax write-offs? Right now, there is a base dependent deduction regardless of income. If increased for the living wage though, should only those with one income receive the increased deduction since the idea of “fair” is one wage to support

¹² Novak, Michael. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. Madison Books, 1991, 198.

one family? In addition to this, will the tax relief be limited to those in a certain tax bracket? How do you determine who would receive the “living wage” tax policy and who receives the current tax policy? The government or a new tax would be the likely answer and that I do not want to see in practice given that would result in greater government control over our lives and wages.

If you try instead to provide government support programs, like food stamps or social security, then those who receive the “living wage” will likely become dependent on the government and this will result in a poverty cycle like those we already see in the US. Reliance today has put communities in great despair, and I believe suffocates the entrepreneurial spirit. In addition to government reliance, the issue of dual income households becomes an issue again. If a household has multiple incomes but also has dependents, do they still receive the support programs? Does the help only go to certain tax brackets? The idea of “fair” becomes blurred quite quickly when joint-income households are brought into the picture.

The living wage results in an ideal society: no one including myself can argue that. However, if an ideal is not possible to achieve in action, is it truly ideal? This is a question that many have wrestled with. Our world is one of sin. If we could achieve perfection or the ideal, then there would be no need for various political economies, different forms of government, confession, or religion in general. We would all get exactly what we needed without varying ideas of how to get there. We would know exactly what to do.

So, whether people are in the upper echelon of business success or at the bottom of the poverty cycle, it is necessary for us to shoot for the moral ideal with plausible solutions. However, too much government

intervention results in pass-through effects on the economy. This leaves the call of the living wage and holistic pay to the values of the employer and thus the higher call for Catholic business owners to consider a holistic review, unfortunately an idea that is not feasible for institutions in the economy as a whole.

Conclusion

At the end of the day a “living wage” as described by Pope Leo XIII does not appear feasible without greater negative outcomes than positive for the families. It will result in greater standard of living for a short time but then long-term wages and cost-of-living spiral. The living wage is a moral ideal that needs to be re-evaluated, and I hope that with Pope Leo XIV we could potentially see this.

Dignity in Distress: Catholic Social Teaching and Medical Futility Cases

*Colin Joyce**

AS THE YALE PHYSICIAN and devout catholic Dr. George Mychaskiw writes in his book *Follow the Science*, parties on both sides of a given bioethics issue often emphasize the sanctity of the physician-patient relationship.¹ Whatever decisions take place between a patient and their doctor, they say, must naturally be the most ethical and proper solution to the problem at hand, and a government should in no way restrict that decision making process. This style of argumentation is applied to a variety of current issues, such as IVF, abortion, or sex-change surgeries, and bears a considerable amount of weight in the public sphere. It does, however, assume that both physician and patient always act with sound ethical judgment.

According to Mychaskiw, the predominant view of the modern physician is that if a given act is legal, it is also ethical.² Approaching the physician-patient relationship from a purely pluralistic or libertarian worldview gives rise to a physician's personal interpretation of ethics in all situations. These varied personal worldviews, as held by

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¹ George Mychaskiw, Joseph E Strickland, et al., *Follow the Science: A Catholic Physician's Contemplations on Faith, Medicine, and the Catholic Church* (En Route Books & Media, 2023).

² Ibid.

healthcare professionals, directly affect patients and their outcomes. This pluralistic approach to medical ethics allows moral physicians to treat their patients well but also allows for cultural shifts in perception to affect the medical ethic.

This shifting view of the physician's moral role has had concrete consequences. Over the past 20 years, major legislative changes reflect how the medical ethic has changed. In October of 1997 for instance, the state of Oregon passed the landmark *Death with Dignity Act*, which "allows terminally ill individuals to end their lives through the voluntary self-administration of lethal medications, expressly prescribed by a physician for that purpose." Since 1998, over 3,200 Oregon residents have died by assisted suicide. The practice has since spread to be legal in 10 states, with 18 more considering the legislation.³ Another example is the Texas Advance Directives Act in 1999, where hospitals may unilaterally withdraw life-sustaining treatment deemed "futile," even over family objections, after a 10-day transfer window.⁴ While the law requires ethics review and notification, the hospital and physicians receive legal immunity for ending care based upon personal prescriptive opinion.

This major shift in the medical ethic represents a loss of a Catholic conception of Human Dignity in favor of a modern utilitarianism based upon the value of care. This utilitarianism and the utilitarian ethic present themselves in several ways in the patient care process but

³ Public Health Division, Center for Health Statistics Oregon Health Authority, *2024 Oregon Death with Dignity Act Data Summary* (Salem, 2025), www.healthoregon.org/dwd.

⁴ The Advance Directives Act, Pub. L. 166.001, Texas Health and Safety Code (1999).

can be categorized in two general ways: lack of care based upon expected quality of life and lack of care based upon resource allocation.

The Catholic Church teaches that every human being possesses an inherent and inalienable dignity simply by virtue of being made in the image and likeness of God.⁵

This dignity does not depend on utility, capacity, or condition but is intrinsic, permanent, and universal. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms in section 1700: “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God,” and in section 1934 “All men are equal in dignity and rights.”⁶ Human dignity is not something we confer or withhold; it is instead something received from God, that is our moral duty to steward.

In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II condemns utilitarian calculations that weigh the worth of life by suffering, cost, or prognosis. He writes in section 19 that “the dignity of this life is linked not to productivity, but to being.” Life is not a means to an end; it is a gift that must be protected at every stage. He warns in section 63 that “to claim the right to suppress the lives of disabled or elderly persons, simply because they are a burden to society, is to become the enemy of the weakest.”⁷ Life remains permanently a good, even when marked by pain, disability, or dependence. It is therefore the call of the physician to serve life, not judge its worth.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (The Holy See, 1997).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Holy See, 1995).

This vision was reaffirmed most recently by Pope Francis in the 2024 Papal Encyclical *Dignitas Infinita*, which asserts that every person regardless of age, health status, cognitive capacity, or perceived social value possesses “a dignity that can never be lost, damaged, or destroyed.”⁸ The document’s critiques attempt to ground dignity in autonomy, pleasure, or productivity, arguing that these standards lead to the systemic devaluation of human life, especially in medical contexts. Whenever dignity is made to be conditional, it becomes fragile, subject to cultural preferences, market forces, and professional bias. Catholic moral theology sees dignity as inherent, where modern utilitarian frameworks define value extrinsically in some way, through a certain quality of life, mental capacity, economic cost, or social utility.

The utilitarian quality of life ethic presents itself in the case of mercy killing. This is best classified as the deliberate taking of life to alleviate a current or potential physical burden placed on the patient. In Iceland, for instance, nearly all children diagnosed prenatally with Down syndrome are aborted.⁹ Dr. Helga Olafsdottir, a genetic counselor at Landspítali University Hospital, defended this practice by stating that they “ended a possible life that may have had a huge complication,” claiming it was more ethical to prevent suffering than to preserve life. As she puts it, “Life is grey.” This moral relativism, specifically framing selective abortion as compassionate, illustrates how the healthcare system’s embrace of quality-of-life metrics can override the intrinsic dignity of the unborn. As she says, the healthcare provider and the child’s family consider a life with Down syndrome to be too difficult

⁸ Pope Francis, *Dignitas Infinita* (The Holy See, 2024).

⁹ Julia Quinones and Arijeta Lajka, “What Kind of Society Do You Want to Live in?": Inside the Country Where Down Syndrome Is Disappearing,” *CBS News* (New York), August 15, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/down-syndrome-iceland>.

to bear and is simply better off never having happened.¹⁰ In this way, the healthcare industry has moved from believing in the sanctity of life to believing in the quality of life.

This phenomenon has been clearly documented in medical literature. A 2019 study by the National Council on Disability showed that there exists distinct bias among healthcare professionals against those with disabilities.¹¹ Their findings were that there are frequent official complaints against healthcare professionals for letting their personal judgements about quality-of-life influence medical futility decisions, while requiring no education in disability and the life experience of those with disability. Many providers wrongly assume that living with a disability means living a lesser life, even though studies show that most disabled individuals report high levels of happiness and life satisfaction, especially when they receive appropriate medical care and support.

As documented in the study, these misconceptions about the quality of life experienced by the disabled have led to biased medical futility judgements, sometimes leading to premature withdrawal of care. These concerns highlight the limitations of relying solely on hospital-based ethics committees which may face financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest. Further, they operate frequently without standard due process protection and rarely disclose their decision-making processes to patients or the public. Not to mention that their alignment with internal hospital policies further restricts their independence. The combination of all these factors contributes to the systemic

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ National Council on Disability, *Medical Futility and Disability Bias: Part of the Bioethics and Disability Series* (Washington, DC, 2019), www.ncd.gov.

undervaluation of the dignity and lived experience of patients with disabilities.

In addition to quality-of-life assessments, a second presentation of modern utilitarian care is resource management and allocation, where insurance and healthcare companies refuse to provide care based on poor prognosis or based on cost containment.¹²

Understandably, the raw cost of labor and material to keep the person alive is very steep. Equipment and hospitalization costs: for patients in a persistent vegetative state, three types of mechanical support—respirators, nasogastric or gastrostomy tubes, and intravenous lines—are customarily utilized. In 1992, a study was done on Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) patients indicating the average cost for treatment required 197 days in the hospital and approximately \$170,000, which correlates to \$863 per day.¹³

Another study by Ashwahl et al. estimates the cost of hospital care to be \$149,200 for the first three months.¹⁴ The estimated cost of long-term care in a skilled nursing facility ranges from approximately \$350 per day (\$126,000 per year) to approximately \$500 per day (\$180,000 per year). For children in a persistent vegetative state, the estimated annual cost of care at home is \$129,000 (\pm \$51,000) for the first year

¹² C. Meixner and C. R. O'Donoghue, "Access to Care for Persons with Brain Injury: Ethical Frameworks to Promote Health Systems Change," *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation* 36, no. 1 (2021): 72–77.

¹³ D. M. Kaufman and R. B. Lipton, "The Persistent Vegetative State: An Analysis of Clinical Correlates and Costs," *New York State Journal of Medicine* 92, no. 9 (1992): 381–84.

¹⁴ S. Ashwahl, "Medical Aspects of the Persistent Vegetative State," *New England Journal of Medicine* 330, no. 22 (1994): 1572–79.

and \$97,000 for subsequent years. Adjusting for inflation between these two estimates would be \$748,383 per year for hospitalized care and \$291,779 for nursing home care per year. A rough approximation of the total annual costs in the United States for the care of adults and children in a persistent vegetative state is \$1 billion to \$7 billion, which would be between \$2.5 billion and \$15 billion today.¹⁵

As an Oregon physician Kevin Stevens wrote in his article *When and How to Die*, “the combination of the legalization of assisted suicide and prioritized medical care based on prognosis has created a danger for my patients on the government-run Oregon Health Plan.”¹⁶ According to Stevens, the plan restricts treatment plans for patients with a 5% or less likelihood of 5-year survival. Patients in that category, as Stevens points out, who may have a significant chance of survival for three years are denied surgery, chemotherapy and other interventions to obtain the goal. It will not cover any treatments, “with the primary intent to prolong life or alter disease progression.” However, it will cover the cost of the patient’s suicide.¹⁷ While legally required not to deny care based upon cost, the insurance companies are allowed to include and have included material advertising physician-assisted suicide in denial packages. In the case of an Oregon resident Barbara Wagner with progressive lung cancer, the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) covered the multiple rounds of chemotherapy that Ms. Wagner received. She then requested Tarceva, an experimental and highly costly cancer drug. In order to cover nearly all chemotherapy prescribed for cancer, OHP, whose funds are legitimately limited, does

¹⁵ S. Ashwahi, “Medical Aspects of the Persistent Vegetative State,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 330, no. 22 (1994): 1572–79.

¹⁶ K. R. Stevens, “When and How to Die,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 184, no. 16 (2012): 1814.2–1814.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

not cover experimental treatments with high cost. However, the denial letter Ms. Wagner received stated that OHP would pay for other end-of-life care options, including palliative care and physician-assisted suicide.¹⁸

Also, the unfortunate truth is that medical futility and denial of care is affected in part by the organ donation and transplantation industry. In the 1968 ad hoc committee of the Harvard Medical School, they attempted to redefine the criterion for brain death for two specific reasons.¹⁹ The first, is as we discussed previously, that “Improvements in resuscitative and supportive measures have led to increased efforts to save those who are desperately injured. Sometimes these efforts have only partial success so that the result is an individual whose heart continues to beat but whose brain is damaged. The burden is great on patients who suffer permanent loss of intellect, on their families, on the hospitals, and on those in need of hospital beds already occupied by these comatose patients.” The second, is that “Obsolete criteria for the definition of death can lead to controversy in obtaining organs for transplantation.”²⁰

There is a great need for donor organs in the United States and across the developed medical world. As Saidi et al. wrote in 2014, the persistent shortage of transplantable organs remains the greatest obstacle in the transplantation service.²¹ Many strategies have been

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School, “A Definition of Irreversible Coma,” *JAMA* 205, no. 6 (1968): 337.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ R. F. Saidi and S. K. Hejazii Kenari, “Challenges of Organ Shortage for Transplantation: Solutions and Opportunities,” *International Journal of Organ Transplantation Medicine* 5, no. 3 (2014): 87–96.

developed more recently to increase the availability of donor organs, one such strategy being recovering organs not only from willing living donors or patients declared brain dead, but from patients with irreversible brain injury who do not meet brain death criteria. When both clinicians and families determine that meaningful recovery is not possible, life-sustaining treatment may be withdrawn, allowing for circulatory death and subsequent organ donation. This practice, along with the increasing acceptance of marginal organs, is being promoted as a means of addressing the ongoing shortage.²²

The urgent systemic need for transplantable organs has caused some of the medical community to overlook much needed signs of life, which is clear in the case of a 21-year-old Oklahoma resident, Zack Dunlap, who suffered a traumatic brain injury. As summarized in the case review by Nguyen et al. it was determined that Zack suffered a severe traumatic brain injury and was declared brain dead by the American Academy of Neurology's guidelines.²³ A scan with technetium-99 DTPA indicated no cerebral blood flow. With this diagnosis, his family consented to organ donation. During preparation, Zack responded purposefully to an accidental painful stimulus from his cousin. He later regained consciousness and made a full recovery. In a later interview, he reported hearing the physician declare him brain dead and feeling angry that he could not respond. His case is consistent with what is now termed cognitive-motor dissociation. A later review of his medical records revealed significant issues with how the brain

²² Ibid.

²³ Doyen Nguyen and Christine M. Zainer, "Incoherence in the Brain Death Guideline Regarding Brain Blood Flow Testing: Lessons from the Much-Publicized Case of Zack Dunlap," *Linacre Quarterly* 92, no. 3 (August 2025): 282–298.

death criteria were applied—particularly in relation to the interpretation of cerebral blood flow imaging.

It was only 36 hours after the accident when the physicians pronounced brain death and prepared to donate his organs. They simply did not devote the time or attention necessary to discern the fact that Zack was conscious of the entire process, including the reality that he would have his organs donated while conscious. This rush placed upon the process is due to the desperate need for organs around the country, which devalues the patient from a person to a collection of organs to be utilized where needed.

There is too, as a byproduct of the above utilitarian forms of care, a genuine belief in poorer prognoses for patients with more serious pathologies. However, as the 2013 study by Izzy et al. from the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine reported, this belief may be a self-fulfilling prophecy.²⁴ As they determined from their systematic review of 232 cases of traumatic brain injury at a level 1 trauma center in the eastern United States, the greatest predictor for mortality in cases of traumatic brain injury was withdrawal of care in any way. This indicates that there is a level of clinical nihilism where physicians prematurely withhold care because they believe in a poor prognosis of the patient but end up simply fulfilling the prophecy themselves by withholding treatment. Essentially, if a physician believes that you are going to die and that it is futile to continue care, there is a statistically significant chance that recovery is possible if treatment was continued.

²⁴ S. Izzy et al., “Self-Fulfilling Prophecies through Withdrawal of Care: Do They Exist in Traumatic Brain Injury, Too?” *Neurocritical Care* 19, no. 3 (2013): 347–63.

The purpose of this essay more than anything else is to highlight the degradation of the medical conception of Catholic Human Dignity. The majority if not all of the hospitals in the United States were founded on the basis of basic Christian love and decency. Killing these patients is not a cure. Caring for them is. There are many facilities and doctors that provide good care and are genuinely caring for their patients. There is however an abiding shift in modern healthcare ethics which harms the true conception of human value and harms patients.

The physician-patient relationship is not ethically neutral, nor can it rest upon individual opinion or a calculus of resources. True care involves recognizing the patient not as a problem to be solved or a resource to be managed, but as a human person whose dignity is inviolable in the eyes of the church. When medical ethics forgets this principle, physicians adopt practices like assisted suicide, medical futility policies, and organ harvesting according to utilitarian ends. Church teaching insists that medicine must maintain an inexhaustible reverence for life. If human dignity is to remain central to medical care, then the recovery of a moral tradition that recognizes life as sacred and non-negotiable is essential.

“Woman” in Tocqueville and Stein

*Elizabeth Knapp**

Introduction

IN COMPARING ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE’S *Democracy in America* and Edith Stein’s chapter “The Significance of Woman’s Intrinsic Value in National Life,” it becomes evident that their respective works provide distinct yet complementary perspectives on the role of women in society. Tocqueville offers a narrative description of American culture in the early 19th century, attributing the nation’s prosperity and accomplishments in part to the “superiority” and steadfast character of American women. By contrast, Stein’s work is rooted in personal observation and her philosophical and theological insights while focusing on the intrinsic vocation of women and their unique value in societal and national life.

The choice to compare Tocqueville and Stein on the role of women arises from the unique yet compatible insights they offer, despite their differences in context, methodology, and worldview. Tocqueville, as a political theorist and observer of American democracy, depicts the societal and cultural influence of women through their education, independence, and moral strength. Edith Stein, as a Catholic

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philosopher and theologian, emphasizes women’s intrinsic dignity and spiritual mission, thereby offering a metaphysical dimension to their societal contributions. Bringing these two thinkers into dialogue allows the comparison to transcend their historical and cultural disparities to illuminate a shared recognition of women’s indispensable role in society and in influencing morals. This exploration also bridges political theory and philosophical theology to provide a better understanding of gender, virtue, and societal flourishing.

Tocqueville’s analysis centers on women’s education, independence, and moral influence in shaping the broader society. Stein is informed by her Roman Catholic faith, her philosophical training especially in phenomenology, and her experiences as a Carmelite nun; she accordingly emphasizes the intrinsic dignity and spiritual mission of women, particularly in fostering the moral and cultural renewal of nations. Despite their differences in historical and cultural context, both thinkers highlight the indispensable role of women in shaping the moral fabric of their societies.

Research Question and Thesis

By examining Tocqueville’s depiction of women as the moral backbone of America and Stein’s articulation of women’s intrinsic value in national life, this paper argues that both perspectives converge on the idea that women’s strength, education, and moral fortitude are essential for the flourishing of society, even as they differ in their cultural and religious emphases. This comparative study not only deepens our understanding of their respective works but also offers valuable insights for contemporary discussions on the role of women in society. In sum, I aim to analyze how both Alexis de Tocqueville and Edith Stein conceptualize the role of women in society, and what

insights can be drawn from their perspectives for understanding women's intrinsic value and societal contributions.

Analysis

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville examines the role of women in American society and emphasizes their critical contribution to the nation's success. He writes, "I am approaching the end of this book, in which I have shown so many considerable things done by the Americans, if you asked me to what I think the singular prosperity and growing strength of this people must be principally attributed, I would answer that it is to the superiority of their women."¹ Tocqueville contends that women are foundational to America's flourishing, and that "it is the woman who molds the morals" in a free society.² He attributes their strength to the moral and social framework that supports them, suggesting that while a thriving society relies on virtuous women, the cultivation of such virtue in women depends on the moral integrity of the society around them. Tocqueville also observes that American women, despite being confined to the domestic sphere, nevertheless possess exceptional independence, education, and moral strength. He identifies these attributes as key to the nation's success.

Tocqueville begins his analysis by emphasizing that Americans have achieved a remarkable balance between equality and differentiation. He writes that Americans "have not imagined for the woman a greatness similar to that of the man, but they have imagined her as great as the

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la démocratie en Amérique*, vol. 4, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 1067.

² *Ibid.*, 1041.

man, and they have made her their equal even when they have kept the necessary right to command her.”³ Tocqueville identifies a balance at the core of American democracy: equality of worth does not require identical roles. He states that Americans “have elevated [women], in the intellectual and moral world, to the level of the man” so that she might be “great as the man” in her own distinct way.⁴ For Tocqueville, the strength of American democracy lies in this ability to affirm the equal dignity of women while also recognizing that their roles, particularly in relation to marriage and the family, are generally distinct from the man’s role.

Edith Stein’s reflections on the unique vocation and dignity of women resonate strongly with Tocqueville’s portrayal of women as foundational to the moral strength of society. She writes that “the complementary relationship of man and woman appears clearly in the original order of nature: man’s primary vocation appears to be that of ruler...woman’s primary vocation is maternal: her role as ruler is secondary and included in a certain way in her maternal vocation.”⁵ Stein insists that each sex has distinct but equally important roles and gifts—and she warns against the misuse of these roles such as when “women’s natural gifts and their best possible development are no longer considered [by man]; rather, man uses her as a means to achieve his own ends.”⁶ In this context, a woman’s particular role is disregarded, and she is considered only as an instrument to achieve

³ Ibid., 1067.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Edith Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” in *Essays on Woman*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 13.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

another's ultimate aims. This complements Tocqueville's caution against confusing the attributes and unique roles of the sexes, which leads to "weak men and dishonest women."⁷

While maintaining that men and women are fundamentally different in nature and vocation, Tocqueville argues that American society views them as equal in dignity and capability. Tocqueville reflects that "Americans do not believe that man and woman have the duty or the right to do the same things, but they show the same respect for the role of each one of them, and they consider them as beings whose value is equal, although their destinies differ."⁸ This distinction, rather than undermining respect for women, becomes the foundation for their unique form of greatness and indispensable role in society. Instead of advocating for complete sameness, Tocqueville presents a vision of ordered liberty in which women are educated for virtue, entrusted with freedom, and revered for their distinctive moral contributions to society and the family.

Tocqueville's reflections are consistent with aspects of Catholic Social Teaching and Edith Stein's vision of women as morally strong, capable, and ordered toward self-gift. This idea of distinct-yet-equal roles aligns closely with the principles of human dignity and subsidiarity in Catholic Social Teaching, which emphasize that individuals should be empowered to fulfill their proper roles within society.⁹ Stein discusses a similar concept and affirms that women have unique spiritual and psychological characteristics which make her fit to

⁷ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1063.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1066.

⁹ USCCB, "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching."

stand by man’s “side in lordship over the earth.”¹⁰ The vocation of the woman is often realized through exercise of her reason, creative self-gift, and moral leadership: “if she is to stand by his side in lordship over the earth, she must be endowed with the same gifts—to understand, to enjoy, and to create.”¹¹ Tocqueville’s analysis of the American woman reveals precisely this vision in that her political and social influence is not diminished by her domestic role but enhanced by it. He shows that it is precisely in embracing her distinct vocation—which is grounded in reason and morality—that the American woman gains power and respect within a democratic society. Both Tocqueville and Stein hold that a woman’s early exposure to the realities of the world cultivates in her a kind of moral resilience that equips her not only to protect her own virtue but also to shape the broader moral character of society. At the same time, there is nuance to Stein’s understanding of the woman in her unique tendency towards partiality, including disregarding “abstract thought and creative action” in favor of “possession and enjoyment of the good life,” which often later leads to greed and vice.¹² Stein’s idea here is reinforced by Tocqueville’s underlying claim that the moral and intellectual elevation of women is not automatic or superficial, but the result of intentional cultural formation and personal discipline. Without this grounding, the strength of women’s influence—so essential to both Tocqueville and Stein’s vision—can be misdirected.

Tocqueville insists that this moral influence is cultivated through intentional formation. American girls are not shielded from the world’s dangers; rather, they are prepared to face them with reason and

¹⁰ Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

strength. He describes how “before the young American girl has reached nubile age, she begins to be freed little by little from maternal protection... she is taught to consider [the world] with a firm and calm eye.”¹³ American women are not kept in ignorance nor deprived of responsibility; the nation believes that “there was little chance of being able to repress in the woman the most tyrannical passions of the human heart, and that it was surer to teach her the art of combating them herself.”¹⁴ This approach reveals a significant respect for and acknowledgment of the women’s moral agency. The apparent goal of the Americans was not to enforce virtue through external constraints, but to foster it internally through formation in reason and freedom.

This vision—where virtue is the fruit of moral strength, not imposed restriction—parallels Edith Stein’s account of the vocation of the woman. Stein argues, “Whether man or woman, whether consecrated or not, each [person] is called to the imitation of Christ . . . That is why we see in holy men a womanly tenderness . . . while in holy women there is manly boldness, proficiency, and determination.”¹⁵ She argues that women must be educated in truth, not protected from it, and that their inner strength—referred to as “manly energy” by Tocqueville on occasion—makes them capable of confronting evil without being overcome by it.¹⁶ Similarly, Tocqueville writes that Americans “counted more on the free effort of [the woman’s] will than on weakened or destroyed barriers.”¹⁷ The young American woman is not

¹³ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1042.

¹⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1043.

¹⁵ Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” 20.

¹⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1064.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1043.

naive; instead, she “has pure morals, rather than a chaste mind.”¹⁸ Her strength and constancy lie not in being untouched by the world, but in actively and knowingly choosing virtue.

There are notable points of both alignment and tension between Stein and Tocqueville regarding the roles and capacities of women. While Stein acknowledges that many women possess the ability to perform well in roles traditionally held by men—arguing that “every so-called ‘masculine’ occupation may be exercised by many women as well as many ‘feminine’ occupations by certain men”—Tocqueville observes that American women rarely pursue such roles by choice or necessity.¹⁹ He notes, “you do not see American women lead matters outside of the family, conduct business, or finally enter into the political sphere; but you also do not find any who are forced to give themselves to the hard work of plowing or to any one of the difficult exercises that require the development of physical strength.”²⁰ This apparent restriction is reinforced by an “inexorable public opinion” that “carefully encloses the woman in the small circle of domestic interests and duties.”²¹ However, Tocqueville emphasizes that American women “courageously bear their new condition . . . because [they have] chosen it.”²² Tocqueville demonstrates the element of free will in their acceptance of traditional roles. This aligns with Stein’s concern that professional work should not undermine maternal duties, as she argues that the vocation of mother and wife requires profound virtue and dedication. Both thinkers recognize that while women have

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” 19.

²⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1064.

²¹ Ibid., 1049.

²² Ibid.

considerable talents and independence, societal expectations and domestic needs strongly shape and often limit their public roles.

The areas in which Tocqueville and Stein differ in regard to a woman's role in society reflect the two thinkers' distinct cultural and philosophical contexts. Tocqueville's observations are rooted in his analysis of Protestant American society and its political dynamics, whereas Stein's insights stem from Catholic theology and her experiences in early 20th-century Europe. Stein acknowledges that in times of economic hardship, "it would not be feasible or possible to make distinctions between masculine and feminine professions; everyone must take any employment as soon as it is offered, whether or not it suits his or her specific individual talents."²³ However, she nevertheless insists that ideally, "a natural choice of vocation may be made thanks to an upbringing, education, and guidance in harmony with the individual's nature," allowing each person to flourish according to their unique gifts.²⁴ Stein also suggests that virtue can emerge through struggles when work is misaligned with one's nature, because it "demands a high degree of personal maturity and an unconditional good will in doing one's best."²⁵ Ultimately, Stein's views on the role of women in society are likely more flexible and nuanced than Tocqueville's due to the crises of the 20th century and her personal consideration of a woman's spiritual and intellectual needs. Nevertheless, Tocqueville's socio-political focus on women's roles in democracy does not contradict Stein's deeper exploration of the intrinsic spiritual vocation and moral mission of women. The two

²³ Stein, "The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace," 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

perspectives they offer can enrich our modern conception of feminine dignity and societal contribution.

The idea that women are morally and socially influential is reinforced by the customs and institutions of American society, which Tocqueville describes as deeply protective of women’s dignity and independence. He observes, “since the Americans imagine nothing more precious than the honor of the woman, or nothing so respectable as her independence, they consider that there is no punishment too severe for those who take them away from her against her will.”²⁶ Women’s virtue is not merely a private concern; it is a public good, safeguarded by both law and culture. Tocqueville further notes with admiration that “American men constantly exhibit a full confidence in the reason of their companion, and a profound respect for her liberty.”²⁷ This societal respect enables women to act confidently in the world; Tocqueville also describes “a young girl [undertaking] a long journey, alone and without fear.”²⁸ This is significant in the context of Stein’s discussion of the vocation of women, which involves not only maternal self-gift, but also autonomy and strength. Stein adds to Tocqueville’s idea that a woman’s virtue provides an essential component of society. She describes “true feminine qualities” as “required wherever feeling, intuition, empathy, and adaptability come into play. Above all, this activity involves the total person in caring for, cultivating, helping, understanding, and in encouraging the gifts of the other.”²⁹ For Stein, the fulfillment of a woman’s vocation requires an environment that trusts her moral and intellectual capacities—similar

²⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1066.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1065.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1066.

²⁹ Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” 19.

to the kind of cultural acceptance Tocqueville describes. Such trust allows women to exercise their distinct gifts in shaping both private and public life.

These observations affirm not only the dignity of women but also the essential role of society in supporting that dignity. As noted earlier, Catholic Social Teaching likewise maintains that the family and civil society must collaborate in forming individuals capable of virtue and freedom.³⁰ Tocqueville suggests that America presently models this because it provides a moral and cultural foundation that enables women to flourish as autonomous and virtuous individuals.

Tocqueville contrasts this American model with the failures he sees in Europe, where many reformers “confusing the different attributes of the sexes, claim to make the man and the woman beings, not only equal, but similar.”³¹ He warns that such efforts to erase sexual differences ultimately degrade both sexes, asserting that “from this crude mixture of the works of nature only weak men and dishonest women can ever emerge.”³² He argues that the attempt to impose sameness—rather than affirming equality in difference—produces confusion and moral weakening. In opposing this, Tocqueville defends a vision of human flourishing rooted in natural capacities, similar to Stein’s writings: “transcendence over natural limitations is the highest effect of grace; however, this can never be attained by an arbitrary battle against nature and by denial of natural limitations but only through humble submission to the God-given order.”³³ For both

³⁰ “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,” USCCB, 2005.

³¹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1063.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” 22.

thinkers, genuine progress does not come through the rejection of nature but through a respectful development of it—recognizing the dignity of both man and woman in their distinct callings. Attempts to erase sexual differences, therefore, are not liberating but destructive, because they reject the very structure within which human persons grow in virtue and grace.

This natural order does not diminish women’s freedom; on the contrary, it provides the structure within which true freedom and self-gift are possible. Tocqueville points out that American women freely choose to enter into their domestic vocations: “I did not notice that American women considered conjugal authority as a happy usurpation of their rights,” he writes, “or that they believed that it was degrading to submit to it.”³⁴ Rather, “they took a kind of glory in the voluntary surrender of their will, and... located their grandeur in bending to the yoke themselves and not in escaping it.”³⁵ This is not servility but strength—a strength freely offered in love. For Tocqueville, such submission within marriage is not a denial of equality but its fulfillment within a divinely ordained order.

Conclusion

Tocqueville’s portrayal of American women in *Democracy in America* affirms both their moral strength and their dignified role within a framework of ordered liberty. Similarly, in Stein’s second chapter of *Essays on Women*, she identifies the distinct and important role women play in both the home and democratic life. While these two thinkers interpret the roles of women and men through different historical

³⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 4, 1064-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1065.

lenses, they both identify the social positioning and unique capabilities of women in themselves, and they do not make them into mere passive subjects of their male counterparts. Both Stein and Tocqueville particularly reject the modern impulse to erase sexual difference in the name of equality. Edith Stein in particular defends the idea that a woman's vocation lies in loving, understanding, and empathizing with others. The reflections of both Tocqueville and Stein seem to anticipate and align with Catholic Social Teaching's insistence on equal dignity and complementary roles in various church documents.³⁶ They offer a vision which emphasizes the need for women to be honored, trusted, and empowered, so that women may fulfill their capacity to shape the moral structure of society.

³⁶ For further reading on the complementarity of men and women, please refer to *Mulieris Dignitatem, Familiaris Consortio*, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World (2004), and more.

Can Women Save Capitalism?

*Magdalena Kyne**

ST. JOHN PAUL II IS KNOWN for his prolific writings on womanhood, recognizing that as societies liberalized with regards to women's place in civic life, humanity would be blessed by new "manifestations of the 'feminine genius.'"¹ Another topic important to the Holy Father, coming from communist Poland, was the need for economic and political systems that respect human dignity. Bringing together these two facets of his thought, in this essay I examine how the feminine genius might manifest itself for the good of humanity within the economic sphere—for us in the post-Cold War West, within a capitalist system.² I begin with Genesis, to establish a definition of the feminine genius in light of the Creator's original intention. Next, I establish the understanding of capitalism under which the feminine genius might promote the good. With the background from Genesis in mind, I unpack how women can counter the tendency to instrumentalize persons and the temptation towards one-sided enslavement to work.³ I conclude with a reflection on Mary,

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¹ John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, June 29, 1995, para. 11.

² I understand the complications regarding the term "capitalism," some of which I will address below when I define it for the purposes of this paper.

³ It bears mentioning that these are only two of many possible vices I could have addressed. I picked these specifically because they are the examples

whom women should seek to imitate, becoming a tabernacle of God's presence wherever they find themselves, including in the market. Under a proper understanding of capitalism, the feminine genius gives women a unique ability—and in fact, a unique *responsibility*—to oppose vice and direct the activity of the economy towards the flourishing of human persons.

I. Creation and the "Feminine Genius"

When the Pharisees challenge Christ about the Mosaic teaching on divorce, He responds by returning to the beginning: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'?"⁴ Any exploration of man and woman must similarly return to the beginning in order to proceed in light of God's original design. Genesis 1:27 says, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."⁵ Genesis continues with the entrusting of creation to man and woman, and the command to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."⁶ Genesis 2 fleshes out the full personal meaning of being created in the image of God "male and female," defined in a word as *complementarity*. While we can examine

used in the writings of Dr. Deborah Savage and St. Edith Stein, whom I draw from heavily in this paper.

⁴ Matthew 19:4-5 (RSVCE).

⁵ Genesis 1:27.

⁶ Genesis 1:28.

man and woman individually, "it is only in the duality of the masculine and the feminine that the human finds full realization."⁷

Complementarity is the synthesis of three realities: full equality, significant difference, and shared mission.⁸ In Genesis 2, Adam is created first; he finds himself amidst a wasteland "when no plant of the field was yet in the earth."⁹ Only after Adam's creation does God create Eden; then, because "it is not good that man should be alone," God brought the animals to Adam "to see what he would call them."¹⁰ Through his call to "till and keep" the garden and his naming of the animals, Adam's "masculine genius" is revealed: "discovering what things are, how they are to be distinguished from one another, and what they are for."¹¹ Even amidst this expression of his genius, "there was not found a helper fit for him."¹² Eve completes creation. She is made last, and "on the way *up* . . . a creature made, not from earth, but from Adam—that is, from something that arguably *already* contains a greater degree of actualization than dust or clay. It does seem as though

⁷ John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, para. 7. This is precisely why, in a paper devoted to the feminine genius, I spend some time with the creation of Adam and his "masculine genius." Woman and her feminine genius would not make sense without it.

⁸ Prudence Allen, "Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 87-88. In describing these three elements of male-female complementarity, I am borrowing from Sister Allen and adding the element of shared mission based on Genesis 1:28.

⁹ Genesis 2:5.

¹⁰ Genesis 2:18-19.

¹¹ Genesis 2:15; Deborah Savage, "Woman and Man: Identity, Genius, and Mission," in *The Complementarity of Women and Men: Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, and Art*, ed. Paul Vitz (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 116.

¹² Genesis 2:20.

she is made of 'finer stuff.'"¹³ With woman comes also *family* and *community*, inconceivable while Adam was in isolation. Just as Adam receives his unique task to "till and keep" the garden, Eve also receives a task, contained in the Lord's calling her *ezer kenegdo*, "a helper fit for him."¹⁴ When this term *ezer* appears elsewhere in Scripture, it carries "the connotation of divine aid."¹⁵ Her "genius," like Adam's, is explained by her place and her mission within creation. Even prior to her experience of motherhood, "her first contact with reality is of a horizon that, *from the beginning*, includes man—that is, it includes persons. . . . [S]he has never lived in a world uninhabited by persons."¹⁶

We can understand the feminine genius for our purposes, then, as woman's natural attentiveness to the person, coupled with her insight into what will advance his or her good.¹⁷ Her genius is relational. She grasps immediately and intuitively that human persons are qualitatively different from everything else in the created order. She is naturally oriented to the "*living, personal, and whole*," and her activity reflects this, "[involving] the *total person* in caring for, cultivating, helping, understanding, and in encouraging the gifts of the other."¹⁸ Since she has an unparalleled domain of bodily creativity, namely pregnancy, she

¹³ Savage, "Woman and Man: Identity, Genius, and Mission," 108.

¹⁴ Genesis 2:15, 18.

¹⁵ Savage, "Woman and Man: Identity, Genius, and Mission," 108 (emphasis original).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷ Just as is the case with the masculine genius, the term "feminine genius" is a rhetorical device, rather than something with substantial existence. It is like a charisma, endowed on women by virtue of their femininity. This working definition is just that and is by no means exhaustive.

¹⁸ Edith Stein, *Essays on Women*, Collected Works of Edith Stein, volume 2, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Freda Mary Ocen (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2017), 45, 82.

maintains a uniquely integrated relationship with her own body. This integrity, stemming from the fact that she is created with space within her body for another human person, drives her toward "an unhampered development of her personality" along with a maternal desire "to help another toward that same goal."¹⁹ As one final point, these meanings of the masculine and feminine geniuses are tragically confirmed by the consequences of sin: man will toil with a cursed ground, wrestling with the earth, while woman feels more keenly the suffering that marriage and family life will now entail.²⁰

II. The Meaning of "Capitalism": Building the Conditional

With this understanding established, we can attend to the second element of our title question, that of capitalism—itsself a loaded term, and not without its complications. At the risk of too obvious a clarification, "Catholic social teaching maintains a consistently critical stance toward the extreme forms of socialism or communism on the one hand, and unbridled or laissez-faire capitalism on the other."²¹ John Paul II articulated a central question along these lines after the fall of the Soviet Union: "[C]an it perhaps be said that . . . capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their

¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

²⁰ Genesis 3:16-19.

²¹ Deborah Savage, "Confronting a Technocratic Future: Women's Work and the Church's Social Vision," in *Holiness Through Work: Commemorating the Encyclical Laborem Exercens*, ed. Martin Schlaag (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2022). She continues, "[N]either reflects a true understanding of the human person; neither provides an authentic route to fulfillment. For neither grasps the theological and anthropological significance of human work."

economy and society?"²² He continues, "The answer is obviously complex."²³ With John Paul's nuanced answer comes the central conditional on which our title question depends. He describes two possible understandings of capitalism. Under one, capitalism means "a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality."²⁴ Under this definition, the feminine genius simply cannot help. This version of capitalism is antithetical to the dignity of the human person and the full meaning of human freedom, shown in John Paul's rejection of it as something the Church could support.²⁵ With the system *itself* diametrically opposed to human flourishing, no individual activity, such as the activity of women, could amend its *telos*.

However, in another understanding that John Paul II provides, capitalism means "an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human equality in the economic sector."²⁶ This understanding earned John Paul II's approval, and it is also an arena where women

²² John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 1, 1991, para. 42.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Pope John Paul continues in *Centesimus Annus* 42, "the realities of marginalization and exploitation remain in the world . . . as does the reality of human alienation, especially in the more advanced countries." He warns that "a radical capitalistic ideology could spread which refuses even to consider these problems," and condemns "the *a priori* belief that any attempt to solve them is doomed to failure, and which blindly entrusts their solution to the free development of market forces."

²⁶ *Ibid.*

can do great good. Vices still remain within a free-market system characterized by personal responsibility, freedom, and equality, including the instrumentalization of persons and one-sided enslavement to work. The entropy left in the wake of Original Sin means that no human system is free of vice, injustice, and abuse on this side of heaven—hence the sanctifying mission of the Church, especially the lay faithful.

III. The Curative Presence of the Feminine Genius

According to *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, "The feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, therefore the presence of women in the workplace must also be guaranteed."²⁷ There is no question of whether women can work. Woman was entrusted with the creative governance of the world alongside man, and she has the same intellect, will, and freedom (not to mention any number of interests and talents). Edith Stein also notes how work allows women to "attain the full formation of her powers."²⁸ Therefore, the workplace, broadly understood, is another arena for woman to exercise her genius, develop her personhood, and achieve sanctification. In the words of Dr. Savage:

[W]omen does not give up her prerogatives when she enters the workplace or the public arena. Wherever her vocation takes her, woman continues to be tasked with the preservation of the 'law of gratuity,' to be a prophetic witness to the personal dignity of every

²⁷ Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 2005, para. 295.

²⁸ Stein, 80.

person. . . [I]t may even be true that woman is capable of seeing the “bigger picture” because her vision includes, not only the particulars of the task at hand, but also a sensitivity to the actual existing persons whose job it is to accomplish it.²⁹

Woman, at her best, brings together her intelligence, technical expertise, and professional competence with her relational genius, preventing the subjective and personal dimension of work from being lost.

1. *The Risk of Instrumentalizing Persons*

Work is an *actus humanae* as well as a "universal calling" and a "fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth."³⁰ This understanding of work "rules out any attempt by the 'owners of capital' to pretend that the worker is merely a functionary, another kind of 'object' that operates along-side the other tools at their disposal in the effort to generate material goods."³¹ Here, the feminine genius "[insists] on a concern for the humanity of the worker *qua* person."³² In opposition to the tendency to instrumentalize persons, woman brings an innate awareness of the priority given to human persons, that everything must ultimately be oriented toward "authentic human

²⁹ Savage, "Confronting a Technocratic Future."

³⁰ See Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, vol. 10 of *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), I.1; John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, September 14, 1981, para, 9, 4.

³¹ Savage, "Confronting a Technocratic Future."

³² *Ibid.*

flourishing."³³ She is a witness to human dignity, that in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, "man is the only creature on earth God willed for his own sake."³⁴ She recognizes what John Paul II termed the "personalistic norm": that the person is a great good towards whom the only proper response is love.³⁵ Woman's mission then "is to keep constantly before us the undeniable truth that the existence of living persons, whether in the womb or walking around outside of it, cannot be forgotten while we frantically engage in the tasks of human living."³⁶ She is uniquely responsible for ensuring that human dignity is respected, and that social, political, economic, or cultural institutions attend to the needs of persons.³⁷

2. *The Risk of Enslavement to Work*

Woman's curative presence within the market is not only an expression of her dominion over the earth; it also is an expression of her mission to complement man and be *exer kenegdo*, his Divine help. Adam is tasked with tending the garden and naming the animals, demonstrating his genius for discerning the nature of things in the created world and putting them in right order.³⁸ This is not to say that Eve's presence is

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December 7, 1965, para. 24.

³⁵ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 41.

³⁶ Deborah Savage, "Redeeming Woman: The Feminine Principle in the Divine Plan," in *Man and Woman in the Order of Creation*, ed. Deborah Savage (Steubenville: Franciscan University Press, forthcoming, September 2026).

³⁷ Savage, "Confronting a Technocratic Future."

³⁸ It is significant that such tasks are performed *before* Eve is created, suggesting that man must accept and express his kingship before woman's presence is possible.

not *vitally* important. She provides the "why" behind man's governance of the world. She shows him what it is all for: "She is an ever-present reminder of the *telos* of the created order, an eschatological sign of what is to come."³⁹ She reminds man of the second part of *Gaudium et Spes* 24, that man "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self."⁴⁰ Here, woman defends the moral dimension of human work: "Her task is to remind all of us that we cannot make of ourselves a gift to a bottom-line or to our work, wherever that takes place, but *only to a person*."⁴¹ Man's governance of the world has been affected by the Fall: instead of attending to created things *for the sake of persons*, he begins to attend to them *instead or in spite of persons*. This can take the form of an over-attachment to work to the detriment of his own health and well-roundedness, his family, or his community. Woman's moral sense, her attention to persons, and her awareness of the balance and integrity required for a healthy personality protect her from this one-sidedness.⁴² Her presence reminds man of his own humanity, his need for development and sanctification, his place in the created order, and the vulnerable who require his help and protection.

IV. *What Are We Up Against?*

At this point, we have seen how the feminine genius can counteract two sinful tendencies within the free market: the instrumentalization of persons and enslavement to work. Her attentiveness to the person is a reminder of the humanity of the worker, that he is never a means to an end; her unique integration and moral intuition is a calling away from a disordered attachment to work. However—and this is a crucial

³⁹ Savage, "Redeeming Woman."

⁴⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, para. 24.

⁴¹ Savage, "Confronting a Technocratic Future."

⁴² See Stein, 74.

point—*woman can only be a curative presence within capitalism if she chooses*. We are working against centuries of a left-brain obsession with function and productivity on one hand, and on the other, the rapid disintegration of the family in favor of aggressive individualism. Both are pernicious to woman's genius and mission—uniquely so. The feminine genius is not a function. Neither are women's relational gifts subject to any productivity calculus. In a kind of tragic irony, feminism has led women in a disastrously anti-feminine direction:

[T]heir energies subsumed by the same obsession with efficiency and technology that governs modern life, intent on joining the effort to reduce the human person to his productive capacity. Woman, by rights tasked with the care of all humanity, has instead joined forces with the frenzied activity of a relentless push for power and worldly achievement underway in every quarter – and quite clearly leading to a future in which what is authentically human no longer has a place.⁴³

This contradicts "the role woman is called to play in the looming confrontation with what appears to be an unstoppable force – the power of technology and the possibility of a purely technocratic future."⁴⁴ If women surrender their place as the heart and birthplace of the family, and fail to bring their genius to "all expressions in the life of society," we will not be better for it, no matter what feminists might say.⁴⁵ If women quiet their moral voice, abandoning "[their] awareness

⁴³ Savage, "Redeeming Woman." This is not the time to unpack the entire feminist movement, which requires much more space and nuance than what I can afford here.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Compendium*, para. 295.

that *God entrusts the human being to her in a special way*," humanity loses its maternal advocate.⁴⁶

It would not be an overstatement to say that woman's mission in the world affects in the deepest possible way our understanding of our identity and source. Eve, who John Paul II calls the "first gift," emphasizes a truth at the heart of creation: that being ("*esse*") itself is a gift.⁴⁷ Her feminine receptivity is an icon of creation's receptivity to the Father: "what the world 'does' first is *receive* its being."⁴⁸ Woman has "a certain priority" when it comes to this first act of created being, imaging receptivity in a singular and bodily way.⁴⁹ Man and woman each have their identities and their inestimable value as image of God because they *received* them. Man and woman have the governance of the world because they *received* it. We have redemption and the aid of grace and the Holy Spirit because we *received* them. An aggressive individualism that seeks to unseat the family tries to erase this fundamental truth, that we did not create ourselves and we cannot save ourselves. In today's "technopoly," the proponents of the Baconian project have (intentionally or unintentionally) erased this receptivity, replacing personal and creative stewardship with total dominion—the consequences of which several voices, including C. S. Lewis and many within the Magisterium, have spelled out in no uncertain terms.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, August 15, 1988, para. 30.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 17.5.

⁴⁸ David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 246.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁵⁰ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). The Baconian project is the pursuit of Bacon's

V. Conclusion: Ark of the New Covenant

These are immense dangers, and woman has found herself in a decisive position. A common figure throughout the writings of those in the Church who have examined femininity is the Blessed Mother. She perfectly demonstrates this "first act" of receptivity in her *fiat mihi*: "Let it be to me according to your word."⁵¹ She who bore the Author of Life stands in opposition to the Enemy who was a "murderer from the beginning," and she surrendered Him to His redemptive mission at Cana and again at the foot of the Cross.⁵² Along with "all generations," we bless "the womb that bore [Christ]," and we recognize in Mary the universal vocation of all women.⁵³ Stein describes woman's journey to holiness as a journey "from Eve to Mary," from Eve's prideful disobedience to the New Eve's loving surrender.⁵⁴ Woman is to become "the vessel of the Divine Presence," called "to bring it into the world, into the family, into government, into the economic sphere, into every conference room – wherever she is found."⁵⁵ She is to take up her place in the primordial conflict with the serpent "to struggle against evil and to prepare for the spiritual restoration of life."⁵⁶ She is called "to transform the world into a home: to extend the organic relations

ambition to attain total control over the processes of nature through technological innovation or manipulation.

⁵¹ Luke 1:38.

⁵² John 8:44.

⁵³ Luke 1:48; Luke 11:27.

⁵⁴ Stein, 119.

⁵⁵ Deborah Savage, "Women in the Church," in *Interpreting the Signs of the Times: Church and Secularity in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI*, ed. Pietro Luca Azzaro and Stephen M. Hildebrand (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 2025).

⁵⁶ Stein, 64.

constitutive of the family into the structures of the world."⁵⁷ If she does so, she will answer the call that closed the Second Vatican Council: "at this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ David L. Schindler, "Homelessness and the Modern Condition: The Family, Evangelization, and the Global Economy," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 34-56. See also the *Compendium*, para. 248.

⁵⁸ "Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Address of Pope Paul VI to Women," The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December 8, 1965.

Mediating Markets in Light of Three Dimensions of Market Impersonality

*Gavin Lewis**

THE CORPORATE CHARACTER of economic enterprise has long confounded defenders of the democratic-capitalist system which has borne fruit after fruit for those willing to take advantage of the opportunities that it affords—and more so for those who do not. It is easy to blame the injustices of today on titans of finance, technology, and corporate America, perhaps due to ignorance, ill-advised thinking, or guilt that could be better defined as unwavering contempt for the broad spectrum of newfound inequalities we face as a nation. It is also clear that a malaise has plagued the dialogue of contemporary “intellectuals” to the point where most critiques of our system have become stale. For this reason, among many, it has become necessary to address a fundamental, and problematic, aspect of the nature of a free market: impersonality.

For Michael Novak, one of the most compelling virtues of capitalism is its impersonality. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, he argues that impersonality liberates economic life from older, restrictive hierarchies and tribal loyalties. In contrast to agrarian and feudal systems—where one’s role in the economy was tied to birth, land, or class—capitalism

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introduces a system in which contracts, not castes, determine economic participation. As Novak puts it, “the separation of the workplace from the household... raised capitalism to a degree of impersonality not possible under agrarian or feudal familism.” That separation, though emotionally costly, created space for new freedoms, new identities, and a market dynamic no longer bound by the particularities of religion, race, or nationality. “The purchaser of goods or services often does not know the seller or the maker,” Novak notes, and in that anonymity, he sees both alienation *and* liberty— “opposite sides of the same experience.”¹

For Novak, impersonality in markets is not a flaw to be corrected but a feature. It is what allowed the American South, in his example, to become more just after World War II—not by moral reform alone, but through the very logic of capitalism. If a seller wants to make money, then they can, and should, increasingly sell to anyone—regardless of creed, color, or background. What matters in an impersonal market is not who you are, but what you offer. And yet, this is precisely where Novak’s framework begins to reveal its blind spots.

Though he asserts that impersonality makes characteristics like race or religion irrelevant in economic exchange, our current moment suggests otherwise. In today’s consumer culture, group identity is not erased by impersonality, rather it is often amplified by it. Corporations don’t ignore personal characteristics; they lean into them, leveraging labels like “Black-owned,” “queer-led,” or “Christian business” as signals in the economy. These aren’t throwbacks to tribalism, but instead are responses to consumers navigating identity in a system where *everything*,

¹ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1991), 44.

including identity, is for sale, or at least monetizable. The impersonal market did not eliminate difference; it created a new playing field on which difference could be packaged, priced, and promoted.

Novak also suggests that large-scale corporations, while structurally impersonal in ownership, have in fact become more personal in their behavior towards the consumer. “The new corporations,” he writes, “spend as much energy on instruction, repair, service, and marketing... as upon production.” The result, he claims, is that modern economic relationships are now “far less distant and less impersonal, far more human, cultural, and political.”² And here again, Novak sees liberation: transnational capitalism, paradoxically, enables closer contact between producer and purchaser than ever before. But this too demands scrutiny. While it may be true that brands now offer more customer touchpoints—through support lines, targeted ads, loyalty programs, and personalized UX—the *substance* of these interactions is often scripted, automated, and commercialized. They may appear intimate, but they are rarely interpersonal in any meaningful sense. The relationship between buyer and seller is increasingly mediated not by people, but by systems. The illusion of intimacy replaces real exchange. In this sense, Novak is half right: markets are less overtly tribal and more technically connected—but this is not the same as being more human.

Still, Novak’s account remains valuable because it reminds us that impersonality can, in fact, foster fairness and freedom. It allows strangers to cooperate, enables scale, and prevents cronyism. However, the lesson of our time is that impersonality, if not culturally mediated, can grow extreme. It can erode the very personal responsibilities,

² Ibid, 230.

relationships, and moral commitments that capitalism depends on. Novak was right to defend impersonality as a structural principle, but he underestimated the way its unexamined extension—especially through new technologies and abstract institutions—might dissolve the cultural soil that once nourished democratic capitalism.

This paper builds on the tension between the benefits and risks of market impersonality. It asks: How can the human person remain central to economic life in a hyper-impersonal, efficiency-driven market system—especially when modern technologies (1) amplify detachment from property and (2) depersonalize exchange? It defends impersonality as a necessary tool for scale and cooperation but argues that, without cultural mediation, it erodes the moral foundations of democratic capitalism. The solution lies not in dismantling impersonal markets but in fostering moral formation and cultural practices that reassert personhood, ensuring markets serve human dignity.

Detachment from Property

To understand the depth of the problem, we begin with the first and most foundational pillar of economic life: property. In the classical and Christian traditions, property has long been recognized not only as an economic asset, but as a moral and social institution. As Wilhelm Röpke insisted in *The Economic Necessity of Freedom*, the survival of civilization itself depends on restoring man to a "humanly tolerable existence"—one in which labor is made purposeful "by the institution of private property."³ Property, for Röpke, is not merely a possession, but a condition of personhood: a form of rootedness that allows

³ Wilhelm Röpke, *The Economic Necessity of Freedom*, trans. E. M. Huggard (New York: Springer, 1955), 235.

individuals to live as responsible, free members of families and communities. It is the antidote to massification and alienation.

Aquinas affirms that the possession of external things is indeed natural to man, though not in an absolute sense of ownership. In *Summa Theologiae* he writes: “Man has natural dominion over exterior things, since by his reason and will he can make use of exterior things for his own advantage, as things made for his sake.”⁴ This dominion, however, is not about absolute power but ordered use—“not to the ownership of God, in Whom all things obey at will,” but rather stewardship in line with human reason. For Aquinas, private property was not merely a matter of economic utility, but a moral structure—allowing people to care for creation, provide for themselves and others, and participate in the order of creation through rational use and responsibility.

Yet in the modern era, especially under the corporate structures of contemporary capitalism, we witness a stark shift. Joseph Schumpeter, hardly a romantic or reactionary thinker, diagnosed this shift with remarkable clarity. Capitalism, he observed, was undermining its own moral foundation: “The capitalist process, by substituting a mere parcel of shares for the walls of and the machines in a factory, takes the life out of the idea of property.”⁵ When ownership becomes dematerialized—when it is abstracted into exchange-traded funds (ETFs), index funds, and fractional shares—stewardship dissolves. The shareholder owns but does not manage; profits are gained, but no responsibility is borne.

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.66, a.1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

⁵ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 142.

This erosion is not only institutional but cultural. Property no longer connects a person to a place, a craft, or a responsibility in the way it once did. More often than not, it is simply a mechanism for exposure to market gains. Finance has been reduced to speculation; ownership has become a tool of distance, not engagement. The rise of enormous asset managers only deepens this disconnection. They possess voting rights, influence governance, and steer the direction of companies, while the individual investors who technically "own" the shares remain entirely removed. The result is a sense of malaise—a growing perception that capitalism is not grounded in virtue, but in detached, impersonal mechanics.

Some have begun to look elsewhere. Blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies, while not without serious philosophical and moral questions, present one possible response. They promise verifiable, personal control over digital property. Unlike traditional markets where ownership is filtered through layers of custodians and intermediaries, blockchain offers direct access—radical transparency, clear provenance, and decentralized authority. Yet there is irony here. In eliminating the need for trust through verification, these technologies also remove an essential dimension of market life: the human act of trusting. Exchange, as a moral act, requires risk, vulnerability, and judgment. Can a flourishing economy exist when those are outsourced to code?

Still, the very fact that crypto exists—and that so many see it as a solution—points to the deep hunger for more grounded, responsible, and meaningful participation in economic life. This is not a rejection of impersonality as such. It is a call for its reordering. Markets must be impersonal to be fair and scalable—but they must also be mediated by persons if they are to be humane. And that mediation, as we shall see,

depends on our ability to restore the moral dimension of property as the bedrock of freedom and virtue.

Depersonalization of Exchange

Much has been said about the human person. To articulate, or even add to, the already existing schools of thought on this subject would indeed be a herculean task. Instead, it seems fitting to turn to the grandeur of Wojtyła's understanding of the human person in order to fully grasp the meaning of acting "personally," as opposed to impersonally.

In his *The Acting Person*, Wojtyła illustrates that the human person is not simply a biological or economic unit, but a dynamic subject—someone who acts with intention, responsibility, and moral weight. "Only man can act purposely and deliberately," he writes, emphasizing that true human action (*actus humanus*) arises from free will and self-determination.⁶ Importantly, it is through action that the person is both revealed and realized: we come to know the person as a subject not by what happens to them, but by what they freely do. This is more than a philosophical point; it's a challenge to systems—economic or otherwise—that treat persons as interchangeable, efficient parts of a mechanism, a "system." Such a view is not merely incomplete or lackluster—it's dehumanizing, albeit over the course of time, and especially at scale.

A refined and nuanced notion of consciousness is key to understanding the importance of action as it fundamentally relates to

⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 19.

the human person. Conscious actions carry not only intent, but interiority. As Wojtyła notes, “man not only acts consciously, but he is also aware... that it is he who is acting.”⁷ This reflexive awareness is the root of personal responsibility, moral engagement, and ultimately, the irreducible dignity of the person. Without this recognition, no economic system can claim to serve the human good. Interestingly enough, we find ourselves at an inflection point—seen or unseen—where these uniquely human capacities are increasingly overlooked, or worse, outsourced. The very builders of artificial intelligence now speak freely of “AI agents,” designed to complete tasks with seeming autonomy, mimicking the deliberative process once reserved to persons. And in a paradox of technological optimism, the same entrepreneurs who succeeded by acting decisively—who created wealth by applying their freedom and judgment—are now constructing tools that remove others from that very process.

Yet it is precisely *human action* that makes an economy function at all. As Ludwig von Mises insisted, economics begins not with capital or commodities, but with *praxeology*—the study of purposeful human action. Markets are nothing more than the aggregated consequences of people choosing, evaluating, working, exchanging. There is no supply and demand without subjects who perceive needs, weigh costs, and decide. To act is to step into reality as a person—not a product. This makes the rise of algorithmic decision-making all the more unsettling. In today’s economy, our consumption is increasingly shaped not by deliberation but by design. Recommender engines, feed algorithms, dynamic pricing, and automated prompts anticipate what we’ll want, when we’ll want it, and how we will be nudged to take it. For defenders of the free market, this poses a problem far deeper than regulation: it

⁷ Ibid, 23.

challenges the premise that economic freedom means personal choice. If algorithms increasingly determine what appears before the consumer, then the space for authentic human deliberation—the kind Wojtyła calls us to—is narrowed.

If human action is the foundation of economic life, then to strip exchange of its human character is to hollow out the marketplace itself. And yet, that is precisely what we risk as transactions become faster, more automated, and increasingly invisible. Aside from the digital landscape—where algorithms learn our preferences before we do—the depersonalization of exchange may be most notable in the mundane moments of economic life. Whereas markets once *bustled* with the friction and fullness of human presence, today’s economy smooths over that friction with convenience.

Novak once captured this bustle with remarkable clarity: “Economic activism generates excitement and intellectual stimulation out of increased human interaction. Markets ‘bustle.’ Cosmopolitanism flourishes.” Commerce, he reminds us, was never just about goods; it was about “the coming together of peoples.”⁸ And yet, what Novak described as dynamic, communal engagement has in many ways become disembodied—abstracted from place, context, and person. What he saw as a rich vortex of human energy is now rerouted through touchscreens and tracked through data.

This shift is not inherently dystopian. Self-checkout is not evil, nor is ordering coffee ahead of time on an app a sign of societal collapse. But these small design choices, replicated at scale, point to a deeper change in the moral texture of exchange. Today, we often transact without

⁸ Novak, *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 105.

recognizing the other. The barista becomes a backend processor. The customer becomes a dataset. The act of buying becomes less an act of trust and mutual understanding, and more a response to preloaded stimuli. The relational becomes logistical.

Here, Wojtyła's account of the acting person provides not just a critique but a reorientation. If to act is to reveal oneself as a moral subject, then the person must never be reduced to a passive node in a system of optimization. Economic freedom loses its meaning if choice is engineered, if exchange is predetermined. Human flourishing depends on *encounters*—not just transactions—because in true exchange, both parties recognize one another as ends, not means. This is why depersonalized exchange is more than a change in form; it is a change in *meaning*. Without attention to this shift, we risk mistaking activity for engagement, and speed for relationship. It is not a call to nostalgia, but a reminder: markets depend on persons, not just prices.

Mediating, Not Moderating, Markets

If impersonality is the condition of possibility for scale, efficiency, and innovation in free markets, it is also the source of their greatest threat: the erosion of meaningful personal action. As Novak rightly emphasized, the market liberates us from rigid hierarchies and inherited roles. But left unmediated, it also strips the human content from our exchanges. What remains is a hyper-functional landscape—productive, optimized, and increasingly indifferent to the person at its center. This does not mean the market is broken. It means it requires mediation, not moderation. What's needed is not top-down reform or the design of more “responsible” platforms, but a renewal of culture—of the norms, expectations, and stories that teach people how to rank what matters. As Buchanan observed, “persons must recapture an

ability to imagine themselves capable of becoming better persons than they are. But the ranking of prospects requires valuation.”⁹ This is not a technical task; it is a moral and educational one. The future of the market rests on whether it can sustain not just freedom of choice, but the formation of judgment.

To mediate, rather than moderate, is to recognize that we are not passive recipients of market logic—we are agents who shape it. We do so through what we build, promote, imitate, and celebrate. When we treat markets as neutral landscapes, we forget that they reflect us, amplify us, and ultimately train us. In a world of relentless scale and algorithmic precision, what we need most is intentionality—not to reject impersonality, but to surround it with cultures that restore context, dignity, and personal responsibility.

The market doesn’t erase the personal, but it can redirect it. Left to drift, it mirrors prestige, power, and popularity. But shaped by morally serious cultures, it can signal virtue, excellence, and service. This is not about shrinking markets down to some nostalgic ideal, but about embedding them in a larger human story—where scale exists for the sake of people, not people for the sake of scale.

We already see glimpses of this mediation in ethical investing, in localist renewal, in faith-driven entrepreneurship and community-first commerce. These are not silver bullets, but signals—practices that remind us that markets are not merely efficient systems, but deeply social ones. Fellowship must come before networks, responsibility

⁹ James M. Buchanan, “Natural and Artifactual Man,” in *The Logical Foundations of Constitutional Liberty*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of James M. Buchanan* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 7.

before reach. This is not a task for policymakers alone, and certainly not for technocrats. It begins with how we live, what we admire, how we desire, and what we pass down. Because if impersonality is to serve the person, then persons must reclaim the authority to shape what our markets express.

Markets, in their impersonality, have helped to lift billions from poverty, unleash creativity, and dissolve oppressive hierarchies. But if left unchecked, that same impersonality risks dissolving the very conditions that make markets human: responsibility, relationship, and meaning. Our task is not to dismantle what works, but to embed what matters. If democratic capitalism is to endure, it must not only be defended in principle, but it must also be mediated in culture.

Reject Cookies: Eat Like Aristotle

*Monay Licata**

Introduction

IN A WORLD SATURATED with digital advertisements, infinite scrolling, and personalized product recommendations, the lines between what we need, what we want, and what we are told to want have begun to blur. Or perhaps according to philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains,” highlighting how society has always had a way of creating unnecessary wants.¹ According to surveillance capitalism, a term coined by Harvard professor Shoshana Zuboff, is the “unilateral claiming of private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. These data are then computed and packaged as prediction products and sold into behavioral futures markets.”² This process has become the invisible architecture of modern life. Every click, every purchase, every hesitation is captured and used to refine the next offer. Yet the problem is not merely the process. It is us; our virtue compass is weak. The success of surveillance capitalism does not depend on coercion, rather it depends on our own failure to govern our desires.

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¹Jean Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*. 1762.

² John Laidler. *High Tech is Watching You*. The Harvard Gazette. 2019.

In this way, it does not force us to consume; it reveals that we have never learned how not to.

This paper argues that the deeper crisis behind surveillance capitalism is our cultural inability to say no. Further, while I am using the term surveillance capitalism, I recognize that this is not a peculiar problem of “capitalism” and is a challenge of every form of political economy existing on earth. While it is easy to blame corporations, algorithms, opaque privacy policies, and technology, the truth is more uncomfortable: we have not cultivated the inner strength to resist what is constantly offered. Consumerism is not simply a feature of the market; it is a failure of formation. To live freely and decently in a society built on endless acquisition, we must become the kind of people who can limit our desires. If we can’t limit our desires, we become enslaved to our appetites and therefore live no better than animals. Drawing on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, this paper proposes that the most meaningful resistance to surveillance capitalism lies not in external regulation alone but rests in developing virtue. Virtue is not a question of gritting your teeth and living the hardest life you can to be virtuous. Virtue, rightly understood, is the liberation of the human being, the fulfillment and the happiness of the human being. Not for a moment does such a virtuous person yearn or want to be the slave to disordered appetites. It is only through virtues that we can reclaim our attention, our freedom from unbridled consumption, and ultimately, our happiness.

The Habit of Virtue

The root problem of consumerism is not the market, but a cultural failure to teach people how to want and desire well. Economic systems offer choices and reward productivity, but they do not teach

individuals what is worth choosing. In a culture where desire is unformed and unchecked, participating in markets easily devolves into the pursuit of more for its own sake. Skidelsky and Skidelsky capture the contrast to this reality where “the just and temperate person accumulates just those things he needs for a good life and then stops.”³ This vision presupposes that a person has learned to distinguish between need and excess, between good and what merely appears good. However, in reality, this moderation rarely takes hold. In fact, we often consume relentlessly because “at no level of material wealth will [individuals] feel satisfied with what [they] have, because someone will always have more than [they] do.”⁴ This logic of comparison undermines the possibility of sufficiency. Advertising and social media – both trained and tailored on an individual basis due to the collection of personal data – train us not to be content but to always seek the next thing. The result is a society in which desire is not governed by reason or virtue but by scarcity and envy. Without formation in the virtues, especially temperance, desire becomes limitless, and we become captive to our own appetites.

However, Aristotle’s account of the human good shows that consumerism is not only irrational but disordered, because it confuses means (wealth, pleasure, personalization) with ends (true happiness, eudaimonia). At the foundation of his moral philosophy is the conviction that every action aims at some end, and that all lesser ends must ultimately point toward one final goal: happiness. With this, what we should direct our desire towards is happiness or eudaimonia rather than obsession with goods and wealth. This point is conveyed as

³ Skidelsky, Robert, Skidelsky, Edward. *How Much is Enough?: Money and the Good Life*. Allen Lane. 2012. p. 74.

⁴ *How much is Enough?*, p. 37.

Aristotle states “if, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake... clearly this must be the good and the chief good.”⁵ True happiness, or eudaimonia, is not found in the endless pursuit of pleasure or wealth, but in living a life of excellence in moderation and thoughtfulness. As Aristotle explains, “the many... identify the good with pleasure... which is why they love the life of enjoyment.”⁶ Consumerism capitalizes on this idea of pleasure by creating more material desires in consumers. With this, consumers are enticed to satisfy their pleasure with new products for the deep fulfillment of a life lived well. However, happiness, Aristotle argues, is not another object to be acquired; it is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.⁷ Here, Aristotle teaches us that happiness is not found in acquiring and having more, but in choosing what is truly worthy of pursuit.

Further, surveillance capitalism does not victimize us; it functions because we fail to exercise restraint. Its power lies not in force or coercion, but in our willingness to exchange our information for convenience. For example, when navigating to a website like Ulta Beauty, users are informed via a cookie that “We “sell” and “share” your personal information through the use of certain Third-Party tools on the sites and offline, including those relating to analytics and advertising. Specifically, we make available certain of your personal information, online identifiers and other persistent online identifiers with advertising, analytics, and marketing partners that may be considered a “sale” or “sharing” of your personal information.”⁸ However, by clicking “accept” to cookies on a website, users are given

⁵ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 350 BC. Book I, §2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §13.

⁸ Ulta Beauty. *Ulta Privacy Policy*. 2025.

access to better performing website features, personal advertisements, and convenience in saving information for a later visit. We click “accept” because we have not developed the habit of asking whether convenience is always worth the cost. This dynamic reveals a deeper moral failure: we have become the kind of people who will readily trade goods like privacy for ease and convenience. Therefore, aspects of surveillance capitalism like cookies do not deceive or trick us, they offer us what we already crave in the form of effortless personalization and aesthetic. While cookies may make the lives of consumers easier, they do not make it more meaningful. The endless stream of personalized options does not liberate us, rather it entraps us in a cycle of consumption, disguised as freedom. As Pope Francis warns, “we are free as long as we have the supposed freedom to consume,”⁹ but this so-called freedom leaves us restless, constantly chasing satisfaction in things that cannot fulfill us. Freedom, rightly understood, is the orientation of the soul towards happiness. The more we consume, the emptier we feel, as anything less than over consumption leaves us feeling worthless and excluded. Because we lack the virtues necessary to say no, we participate willingly in our own reduction to a consumer profile. Surveillance capitalism thrives not because it preys on the completely powerless, but because it mirrors our own failures to govern ourselves.

However, we can learn to exercise restraint by practicing moral virtue and turning it into a habit which develops our character. Our greatest protection against consumerism and digital manipulation is character. Aristotle teaches that moral virtue does not arise by chance or by isolated moments of willpower; it is built through habit. For instance,

⁹ Whaples, M. Robert. *Pope Francis and the Caring Society*. Independent Institute. 2017. 11-12.

he writes, “We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”¹⁰ In this way, moral strength is something we train into our character through repetition. Because we have not practiced asking whether a convenience is worth its cost, we do not think to ask. Because we have not practiced restraint, we become unable to exercise it when it matters. Aristotle insists that “states of character arise out of like activities,” and that “it makes all the difference” whether we form good habits early and consistently.¹¹ Forming the habit of questioning what is offered to us, delaying gratification, and choosing goods that are truly worthwhile creates a foundation of inner freedom that feels much more rewarding. In this sense, the temperate person is not just someone who occasionally resists consumption, but someone who no longer desires what is excessive. Therefore, temperance is a liberative force that allows the morally virtuous person to control the self and direct the self in freedom. We must do the slow work of forming these habits so we can protect ourselves from being susceptible and deceived.

In a world that says, “more is better,” moral strength begins with learning to say “no.” Consumerism thrives on the availability of choice and the widespread unwillingness to refuse it. While many view today’s “take it or leave it” digital environment as coercive, the reality is that individuals retain the power to “leave it” and can exercise their right to opt-out. James Otteson elaborates on this by saying individuals have “the right to say no: no to any offer, suggestion, command, edict, mandate, question, inquiry, or demand for information.”¹² This right is not merely legal; it is ethical. When prompted to “accept” or “reject”

¹⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, §1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Otteson, James. *Seven Deadly Economic Sins*. Cambridge University Press. 2021, 246.

cookies on a website, a person can choose to close out of the website, opt to use cookieless features, or cease from using the internet completely. But to do so requires moral clarity and the ability to see that convenience is not always worth the cost and that ease is not the same as goodness. Saying “no” is not just a form of withdrawal; it is the first step toward ethical formation.

Further, to learn how to say “no” to surveillance capitalistic tendencies and consumerism and exercise our right to opt-out, we must make a good-faith attempt to practice temperance—the habit of desiring the right amount, at the right time, for the right reason. Aristotle conveys this point when he states, “The man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent,” however “temperance... [is] preserved by the mean.”¹³ Aristotle recognizes that complete indulgence or complete abstinence cannot be sustainable or help lead us to a eudaimonous life. Rather, it is finding a medium that helps lead us closer to virtue and mastering temperance. The person who refuses to be instantly gratified and is able to say “yes” to some things and “no” to others has already begun the work of temperance. This must be supported by habit, building our moral muscle and restraint. For consumers, this may look like practicing interior questions like: why do I want this? Would I still want it if no one saw it? With this, we can train ourselves out of over-consumeristic tendencies by forming new habits that strengthen willpower and clarify desire. Further, virtue, for Aristotle, lies in the mean between deficiency and excess. Therefore, the practice of moderation is not just resisting temptation, but also acquiring virtue. Moderation is the way one truly liberates oneself from their slavery to passion, enabling happiness, flourishing, and satisfaction of human life. This is because

¹³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, §2.

the person of moral virtue is in control of the self and directs oneself toward deep satisfaction in life. The virtuous person does not yearn to be the slave of disordered appetites and therefore leads oneself towards moderation. However, in the context of surveillance capitalism, even a person of moral virtue may struggle with understanding privacy policies and fail to know when to say “yes” and when to say “no.”

While modern privacy policies like the “terms and conditions” are framed as indicators of consent, they often function as barriers to it. These documents are saturated with dense legal jargon and long clauses designed but to be accepted rather than read. The act of clicking “I agree” according to these documents is presented as a legitimate exercise of individual choice, yet the conditions under which this choice is made render it meaningless. This is not real consent but rather the performance of consent under forced ignorance. One who practices temperance and masters the ability to say “no” may still be accepting something that goes against these practices due to the inability to thoughtfully understand what is in front of them. To present this as a morally sufficient form of agreement is not only inadequate but also demeaning. It suggests that the appearance of choice is enough, and that we as citizens and consumers, should be content to act without understanding. This destruction of meaningful consent undermines the very conditions in which reflection can flourish. If moral strength begins with saying no, then such agreements train us to say yes without thinking. No one, not even the highly educated and virtuous individual, is equipped to understand the technical language embedded in these policies.

One might think, however, that expecting individuals to read and comprehend every legal document they encounter online is unrealistic.

As Sara Conly notes, “she is not trained in financial investing or in nutrition or child psychology or medicine, so how could she be expected to make good decisions in such cases for herself?”¹⁴ In the same way, privacy policies and terms of service are often written by legal and compliance experts, and it seems reasonable to expect users to place a degree of trust in that expertise. Yet this line of reasoning, while practical on the surface, further erodes the very conditions of consent. Trust cannot be ethically meaningful when it is given blindly, without access to understanding or the ability to opt out meaningfully. As such, the responsibility must fall, at least in part, on the legal and structural systems that allow this practice to persist. Laws may recognize the formal presence of a user’s agreement, but they must also recognize the ethical emptiness of that agreement when it is built on unreadable language.

Virtue is not developed in isolation but in community, and magnanimity helps reorient our desire away from comparison toward self-respect and the good. We grow in virtue not alone, but in community. As Aristotle famously writes, “man is by nature a political animal.”¹⁵ We are not self-sufficient beings, but ones whose flourishing depends on shared life with others. In this context, virtue is not a private possession but a public practice. It is something we learn, refine, and sustain with the help of others who also strive for the good. When we surround ourselves with people committed to temperance, generosity, justice, and other virtues outlined by Aristotle, our own moral development deepens. This is particularly important in an age shaped by consumerism, which depends on isolating individuals and encouraging endless comparisons. Aristotle’s account of magnanimity

¹⁴ *Seven Deadly Economic Sins*, 102.

¹⁵ Aristotle. *Politics*. 350 BCE. Book I, §2.

offers a way out of this consumerism trap. The magnanimous person, he writes, “must be unable to make his life revolve around another... all flatterers are servile and people lacking in self-respect are flatterers.”¹⁶ Unlike the consumer who constantly seeks validation through trends or physical goods, the magnanimous person is grounded in a sense of intrinsic worth and excellence. He is not impressed by wealth or admiration, because “nothing to him is great,”¹⁷ meaning he is not easily swayed by the superficial. Pope Francis teaches a complementary view to that of Aristotle where the antidote to consumerism is not just self-rejection, but service and a reorientation of desire away from the self and toward the good of others. He states, “feeling happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness” becomes the daily practice of evangelization and love enacted in community.¹⁸ By giving ourselves to others, our desires are purified. The magnanimous man focuses on refining his own character and usually refrains from entangling himself in the everyday needs of others. Yet, when faced with a moment of great importance, he is both willing and ready to commit himself fully for the good of the entire community. In a culture that encourages us to perform and compare, community becomes the context in which we can learn how to desire rightly alongside one another.

Conclusion

In the face of surveillance capitalism’s quiet domination over our lives, it is tempting to place blame on intrusive technologies and manipulative corporations. However, it becomes clear that the deeper

¹⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV, §3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*. Vatican Press. 2013. §272.

issue lies within. We have not been taught to desire rightly or to resist what is constantly offered. Consumerism is not simply a cultural force; it is a moral habit that is reinforced by ease and comparison. With this, what we need is not just better laws or clearer terms, but better selves. Using Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as a framework, we are reminded that a good life thrives through the cultivation of character and not in an abundance of things. It is through the habitual practice of temperance that we learn to say "enough." Further, through magnanimity, we develop a sense of purpose outside ourselves and in helping others that no algorithm can manipulate. As both Aristotle and Pope Francis affirm, this transformation does not occur in isolation. We become good through community, walking with others who also desire the good and giving ourselves in service. In a world that tells us freedom is found in consumption; virtue reminds us that freedom is found in self-mastery. The path forward is not easy, but it is necessary to become the kind of people who no longer need what surveillance capitalism sells and ultimately learn what it means to live well.

Promoting Virtue through Markets: A Catholic Defense of Institutional Separation

*Madeline McCarthy**

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH has a rich history of involvement in economic life, guided by its social teaching and subsequent emphasis on human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity. The initial modern Church contribution to the promotion of ethical principles in economics came in 1891, with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which addressed the social and economic challenges of the Industrial Revolution. *Rerum Novarum* illustrated the need for a just wage, the right of workers to organize, private property, the state's role in protecting the common good, and the morality required of employers. The Roman Catholic Church warns against the role of unregulated capitalism and its exploitative abilities, as well as against the extremities of socialism in denying privatization and individual freedoms. Through charitable work, educational funding, and healthcare advocacy, the Roman Catholic Church has a history of serving marginalized communities, influencing economic life, and social justice. The Church encourages the responsible practice of business in an attempt to serve society. The focus of this world is to address and compare the social teachings of

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the Roman Catholic Church's Vatican II, particularly those articulated through *Gaudium et Spes*, with the ideologies of Wilhelm Röpke's work on market order, testing Röpke's frameworks' ability to address the relationships of economic order, human dignity, and moral shaping of a just society. Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* will provide a brief influence as well as a relevant perspective in bridging elements of Catholic Social Teaching with market-oriented economic principles. While both Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* and Wilhelm Röpke's market order promote the central importance of human dignity as well as ethics in economics, this paper contends that virtue is best produced through the cultural and religious formation of a free market— not through ecclesial, papal, or state interference. Differences in the two works articulate distinct ideals for what constitutes a just economic order; for *Gaudium et Spes*, ecclesial moral authority and the role of communal responsibility, while Röpke's work emphasizes the decentralization of markets through moral tradition. In contrast to the rising contemporary Catholic movements of integralism and post-liberalism, which generally call upon the integration of Church and state, the morally ordered market society depends on institutional separation and the non-political witness of the Church. As specifically evaluated through Michael Novak's defense of democratic capitalism and Röpke's emphasis on cultural morality, this ideology promotes and protects freedom and virtue through markets.

Gaudium et Spes and the Church's Moral Vision for Modern Society

Gaudium et Spes, directly translating to the Latin for “joy and hope,” acts as one of, if not the, principal document of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, 1962-65). Vatican II acts as a landmark for modern Church history, which actively sought the ability to engage with the Catholic Church in a more connected and deepened manner

with the modern world. With the official title of *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes* was publicized in 1965, reflecting the Church's articulation of social teaching as She regards contemporary global challenges, in an ever-changing society. Its opening line reflects the Church's desire to address hopes and anxieties of humanity in a rapidly changing and advancing civilization: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ,"¹ *Gaudium et Spes* was produced amid a period of rapid social change and economic development across the world, emerging from post-war reconstruction, the rise of communism and the push for capitalism, and an era of technological advancements. Vatican II was created by Pope John XXII to address the need for renewal of the Catholic Church and to curate a deeper understanding of Catholic teachings in the twentieth century. The conversation initiated by Vatican II reflects a strong desire for dialogue and engagement with a more progressive world society. The work of *Gaudium et Spes* emphasized the need for the dignity of the human person, specifically emphasizing the importance of social justice and the Roman Catholic Church's role in contributing to the common good.² Contrary to the assumptions and interpretations of integralist thought, *Gaudium et Spes* explicitly affirms the need for legitimate autonomy of secular affairs,³ indicating the Church's role is not to govern political society, rather to form the citizens and individuals who influence it. The Church chooses influence over coercion. It is important to emphasize the need for

¹ Catholic Church, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Second Vatican Council, December 7, 1965, 1.

² Ibid, 76.

³Ibid, 36.

natural mechanisms to promote the common good at the community level, inserting the idea that a Catholic neglecting his duty to God and the civil society is a rejection of moral obligation. The work of *Gaudium et Spes* illustrates the pivotal movement to promote Catholic Social Teaching to affirm the Church's commitment to constructive engagement with the world and advocacy for an economy rooted in ethical principles. *Gaudium et Spes* assigns the Church both an autonomous role to influence social and economic life, marking its role as not only a spiritual institution but an engaging structure with the world's issues of justice and human dignity. The Second Vatican Council views economic development as a necessity for the full flourishing of the human person, rather than simply for technical efficiency and profitable advancement. The anthropological focus promotes the role of economic development as a means for the common good and addressing structural injustices. The encyclical marks a transformative moment for Catholic Social Teaching, embodying the broader vision of Vatican II for renewal and engagement. *Gaudium et Spes* is a presentation of a human-centered approach to morally grounded social and economic life, employing means of solidarity, subsidiarity, and ethical responsibility. Human dignity is at the heart of the encyclical, the affirmation of the inviolable dignity of the human person.⁴ The anthropocentric principle of the encyclical rejects an economic state that archetypes human beings as a tool for production or means of consumption. Rather, economic activity is to be structured to serve the full developmental capabilities of the human person in community with others. The common good is the guiding goal of economic policy rather than profit or efficiency alone. The encyclical emphasizes the moral imperative to correct the social and economic inequalities and disparities within societies: “The

⁴ Ibid, 63.

joys and hopes... of the followers of Christ,”⁵ reflects solidarity rather than a governing agenda. Wealth is not to be idolized or hoarded, but rather shared in ways that respect both ownership and human interdependence. Rather than promoting a congressional state, the encyclical promotes a morally engaged yet non-political interventionist state, committed to human dignity and cooperation with free institutions. The Church does not claim political authority but exemplifies a moral influence to shape public life. This balanced vision presented by Vatican II promotes collaboration between Church and state, supporting economic policy that reflects justice, human dignity, and solidarity.

A Humane Economy: Preserving Dignity in a Standardized World

Wilhelm Röpke (1899-1966), was a German economist and social philosopher, best known for his post-WWII influence on economic and market order, particularly in West Germany. Röpke’s work is best presented through the development of the social market economy, *soziale Marktwirtschaft*. Röpke sought restoration of economic life in a foundation of ethical, cultural, and moral principles backed by his Western humanist tradition, devout Protestantism, and anti-totalitarianism. Röpke was educated in economics throughout a time of war, intellectually developing during a time of political instability, economic collapse, and the downfall of Germany. Forced into exile in the 1930s for his staunch opposition to Nazism, Röpke began teaching economics in Istanbul and then Geneva.⁶ With firsthand experiences of fascism and statism, Röpke believes in deeper human convictions, a society based on more than market mechanisms, and rather sustained moral order within culture. Röpke was an advocate for a market

⁵ Ibid,1.

⁶ Shawn Ritenour, 2016. "Wilhelm Röpke," Mises Institute.

economy, regulated by a legal framework that promotes competition, while maintaining individual freedom. Röpke resisted all forms of centralized control, both economic and ideological, challenging the modern rise of Catholic post-liberal propositions advocating for reassertions of moral orthodoxy and implementation through the state. The heart of Röpke's conviction identifies that bureaucracy and corporatism introduce the threat of loneliness and separation that cause a lack of self-identity, "loneliness, separateness, and isolation are becoming the destiny of the masses, and this situation which is so highly pathological that one is tempted to agree in this respect with certain serious authors who regard our modern world as afflicted by collected lunacy."⁷ This vision by Röpke extended further than market-based, arguing that a healthy economy is dependent on a moral responsibility of institutions and cultural values. Röpke found that both collectivist economists and laissez-faire ideologists had lacked the essential integration of morality. *A Humane Economy* by Röpke offers a critique of modern mass society and subjection to dehumanization for the sake of capitalism. Röpke asserts the need for a way between collectivism and market fundamentalism, aimed at promoting the dignity of the human person and social order through market-based justice. Röpke's perspective provides value to the Catholic Social Teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*; both share a commitment to human dignity, yet they diverge in their theological foundations and institutional perspectives. Röpke's idea of the humane economy is reflected through an effort to make efficient markets ethical so that they can promote a truly free and just society. The community has the power to protect the individual against mindless subjection to the diminishment of the common good. The critiques by Röpke against

⁷ Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market*, trans. Elizabeth Henderson (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998), 94.

excessive state intervention are rooted in his historical distrust of centralized authority, which he experienced firsthand. Collectivism, in more than just Marxist form, is a threat to individual freedom and thus human dignity for Röpke. There is an emphasis by Röpke on subsidiarity and skepticism of state power to maintain the common good. Economic systems through a humane economy are not to be morally neutral but emphasize natural law, tradition, and humanism. A humane economy emphasizes the intrinsic worth of the individual, and the role of the state is nuanced, not as a central planner but rather a guarantor of legality and institutional framework. For Röpke, the obsession with standardization of markets and production will eventually be detrimental to society: “the standardization of objects demands and eventually enforces the standardization of persons.”⁸ A state should additionally exercise restraint, prevent monopolies, ensure the prevention of paternalist overreach, and maintain subsidiarity. The intermediate institutions of society are emphasized in Röpke’s ideal state, a need for families, religious organizations, and the formation of local communities, not to be replaced by industrialization and consumerism. Röpke calls for a humane economy and criticizes totalitarianism. His criticisms of totalitarianism and collectivism warn against Church-state fusion, especially in market economies, as moral life is best upheld through cultural and intermediate institutions. For Röpke, the market is not self-justifying; rather, it is a social institution that requires moral constraints to remain humane and sustainable. Without a strong moral foundation, economic freedom regresses to materialism and exploitation. The work of a humane economy is essential; an economy that ignores moral responsibility will destroy the freedom it depends on.

⁸Ibid, 101.

Despite their differing theological backgrounds, *Gaudium et Spes* and Wilhelm Röpke's work, particularly that of *A Humane Economy*, both reflect significant ideas of convergence of morals to curate economic life. There is a commitment within *Gaudium et Spes* and *A Humane Economy* to uphold the dignity of the human person. Unregulated economic models that curate the person as an instrument of market production or consumption are condemned by both Vatican II and Röpke. For the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, human dignity is rooted in the Catholic idea of *imago Dei* (image of God), which fosters full holistic development of the human person in a community of markets. Röpke's work is rooted within ordoliberal economic foundations, promoting a strong legal framework to maintain competitive markets, but it maintains a sense of individual responsibility. *Gaudium et Spes*, in contrast, promotes greater state intervention when necessary to promote the common good within markets. The root of the difference is based on the differences between respective views on the Church's role. Röpke views the family as the immediate social structure for a humane economy, while the Vatican II encyclical sees the Church as necessary to protect the family and dignity of the human person, so that the individual can meaningfully contribute to their work. The two documents' conceptions of distributive justice and how it should pan out differ. Röpke's main concern is the maintenance of a moral order that promotes both opportunity and responsibility. Rather, *Gaudium et Spes* specifically endorses a manner of distributive justice promoted within Catholic Social Teaching.

Pluralism and Virtue: Novak's Vision for Market Society

In a later economic commentary, Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* offers a bold and influential defense of moral

culture and maintenance of markets without political overreach.⁹ Novak's work is written in the context of the Cold War, responding to both Marxist critiques and Catholic ambivalence.¹⁰ Novak chooses to freely argue for democratic capitalism as a promotional tool toward a moral cultural framework.¹¹ Novak emphasizes capitalism not for greed but rather as an enabling tool for human creativity and virtue. Post-liberal Catholicism demands the subordination of political institutions under theology, whereas Novak envisions a pluralistic order where the Church shapes the community and life of the individual through witness rather than institutional intervention.¹² Novak's vision offers an essential alternative to both technocratic capitalism and coercive post-liberal politics: a free society rooted in faith where moral conviction is the guiding point, rather than political intervention. The work of Novak acknowledges that markets require a moral cultural underlay, but that culture is cultivated independently from the markets by the Church.¹³ The Spirit of democratic capitalism insists that each sphere of life —economic, political, and religious— should be distinct yet interdependent.

The convergence between *Gaudium et Spes*, Röpke, and Novak reveals that while economic life must be grounded in moral principles, those principles are best promoted while the Church and state's roles and direct impact on one another remain entirely separate. Integralism detracts the distinction between temporal and spiritual orders, risking abuse of papal and ecclesial authority, undermining the

⁹ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 23–26.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 18-22.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 66-71.

¹² *Ibid*, 104-107.

¹³ *Ibid*, 91-94.

importance of Vatican II's promotion of religious liberty and independence of non-theological institutions. The championing of human dignity and other values of the common good is to be promoted by the cultural and ethical realm— the Church contributes to a freer and more virtuous market society. Post-liberal Catholicism, despite its concern for moral clarity, falls short in leaning toward state-enforced virtue, leaving out that virtue without freedom is not an improvement of character but rather mindless compliance. Economic systems must be value-neutral rather than value-free; it is through cultural virtue promoted by communities centered around the Church and families, rather than state control, that economic justice and solidarity can be achieved. A humane and just market order is dependent upon bottom-up formation of virtue through community and family, promoted through churches, voluntary institutions, and civic engagement within a society, promoted through free market economies, morally accountable civil societies, and separation of Church and state. This will allow the Church to most impactfully contribute to a virtuous and free society.

The Silent Crisis: The Spiritual Absence of Men and the Revival in Christ

*Julia Nore**

BUT HIS FATHER ORDERED his servants: *Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.*¹ Today, our culture suffers not merely from broken institutions, but from broken men: fathers who have abandoned their spiritual vocation or never discovered it at all. The deprivation of spirituality among men, particularly with fathers, has created a crisis within the family. By reclaiming masculine spiritual leadership through the restoration found in Christ, men are able to fulfill their nature as fathers and spiritual guides, reviving the family in faith and unity. I will present within this essay the nature of man through the writings of Edith Stein and St. John Paul II, the decline of spirituality among men based upon statistical evidence, the consequences to this deprivation, and ultimately the final solution, which is a total return to the Father, who waits patiently for His son.

Nature of Man

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¹ Luke 15:22-24 (New American Bible, Revised Edition).

To begin to understand masculinity in relation to spirituality, one must come to know the nature of man himself and the way in which he behaves. Man, as illustrated by the writings of Edith Stein in *Essays on Woman*, has two unique masculine vocations: first as ruler/master of the created world, and secondly as father. As master, his primary vocation, man's body and soul are equipped to fight and conquer it, to understand it and by knowledge to make it his own, to possess and enjoy it, and to make it in a sense his own creation through purposeful activity.² As father, his secondary vocation, man is called to be head of the family and contribute his share to its spiritual well-being. Being the direct leader of his family, he is concerned with its health, maintaining order and harmony within family life, and aiding in the development of the talents and energies of its members. Man's leadership entails a duty to conduct his family, a microcosm of the Mystical Body, such that each member may develop his gifts, contribute to the salvation of the whole, and attain his own salvation.³ While the man does not have the capacity to grant his children their talents and abilities, he does have the power to nurture them, bringing them to development for the welfare of all. As a shepherd, he is additionally appointed to lead his sheep spiritually as an imitator of Christ, which helps to develop the seeds of grace within each member. In particular, man has a duty to strengthen the spirituality of his wife, not permitting her to lapse into a life of mere sensuality.⁴

Man's natural temperament is drawn towards a more objective outlook: it is natural for him to dedicate his faculties to a discipline,

² Edith Stein, "Essays on Woman", trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 57-85.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

such as mathematics, technology, a trade or business management.⁵ In other words, men are naturally inclined to channel their intellectual and physical energies into a focused pursuit, often one that demands rigor and order. They prefer to see things from a detached, analytical perspective, rather than through emotional or relational lenses.

Furthermore, as described within the words of St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, man has a calling to perform the task of exercising generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother.⁶ He also must have a commitment to education which promotes stability, introducing the children into a living experience of Christ and the Church.

The Decline

In his book titled *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II*, Stephen Bullivant illustrates the lasting historical impact of people, specifically cradle Catholics, who chose to reject their Catholic identity after the Second Vatican Council, and provides the reasons they left the Church. Brilliantly, Bullivant also included statistical evidence to support his argument, in particular the relationship between men and women in both the United States and Great Britain who are regularly practicing Catholics, low/no practicing Catholics, Christian (other), non-Christian religion, and those who have no religious affiliation. He discovered that 37% of women vs 30% of men are regular practicing/low to no practicing Catholics in the United States, and 34% of women vs 22% of men are regular

⁵Edith Stein, "The Significance of Woman's Intrinsic Value in National Life," in *Essays on Woman*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996), 248.

⁶John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio", §25.

practicing/low to no practicing Catholics in Britain.⁷ The United States has a 7% difference between men and women practicing the Catholic faith, while Great Britain has a 12% difference. This only furthers the connection of women with religiosity and that, in comparison to cradle Catholic men, cradle Catholic women are indeed more likely to retain a Catholic self-identity, and to be relatively more practicing.⁸ Bullivant also concludes that even though women are less likely than men to disaffiliate, they are more likely to adopt a different Christian or religious identity than men. It is clear that women are more likely to establish a religious identity for themselves and outnumber men in regard to cradle Catholics.

Research conducted by the Pew Research Center appears to further support this data. Their study titled *Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off* is one of the largest surveys of religion in the United States, based on responses from over 36,000 adults. They have found that atheists and agnostics have greater shares of men than women, with 59% of men identifying as atheists in comparison to the 36% of women who share the same identification.⁹ In addition, 55% of men identify as agnostic in comparison to the 41% of women. These wide differences between men and women could suggest that men do not feel as inclined to find a personal connection with religious associations or with God.

⁷Stephen Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 41–42.

⁸Ibid.

⁹ Pew Research Center, *Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off: Findings from the 2023–24 Religious Landscape Study* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, February 2025), 319.

The tragic irony of these statistics is in the anthropology established earlier: man's secondary vocation as father: the one responsible for leading his family in direct relationships with Christ as imitators of Him. Or is it ironic? Spiritual warfare could precisely be the method to the madness of dismantling the family directly: attacking the shepherd of his sheep. To view spiritual warfare as a threat to fatherhood is not melodramatic, but rather a recognition of the genuine struggle against the devil's schemes. If men are not finding Christ and if they are not practicing in their faith, who is supposed to lead the family? Who is going to care for and nourish the spiritual developments of his wife and of his children if he falls first to sin? Without men standing in their God-ordained role, families drift, children grow up spiritually starved, and the moral foundation of society erodes. Surely, this presents as a crisis within the family. If the enemy can undermine the father, the entire family is vulnerable.

Consequences

With these issues of men and spirituality, the natural question of consequences arises. In particular, what are men turning towards if not God? What are the effects of their spiritual poverty within the family? St. John Paul II answers these exact questions in his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*. He speaks to the danger of worldly temptations that can assault men, particularly the temptation to lose interest in the family and in the education of their children. As a result, men are susceptible to the vice of pride, tempting him to disregard his family and their needs in favor of his own desire. An example of this is that of "machismo," referring to a masculine pride that takes the form of dominant, aggressive, and controlling behavior, especially towards women. St. John Paul II warns against such behaviors, writing that these attitudes and actions humiliate women and inhibit development

of healthy family relationships.¹⁰ Additionally, he mercifully addresses the impact on families when the father is no longer present, especially the resulting psychological and moral imbalances.

Edith Stein argues that the root of man's problems and his failure to live out his original vocation comes from his perverted relationship to God. Decades before St. John Paul II's warnings about man's failures within the family, Stein goes directly to the source, pointing to sinful decadence as the reason men shirk their paternal duties. Since the Fall, man is tempted to enter into a deterioration of kingship which results in brutal authority, creating a master and slave exchange. This can manifest itself in man's sexual desire, which was originally created to be a beautifully profound gift shared between a husband and wife for the intended purpose of intimacy and bearing children. Within the relationship of master and slave, however, women's natural gifts and their best possible development are no longer considered; rather, man uses her as a means to achieve his own ends in the exercise of his work or in pacifying his own lust.¹¹ Certainly, with this sort of relationship, children are also deeply affected by these actions. Stein breaks this down into two levels: the lowest level reveals itself in sexual intercourse for the sheer satisfaction of sexual desires without any concern for offspring; on a higher level, man may be able to fulfill his material obligations well but perhaps will completely disregard his duty to share in the child's formation.¹² This is harmful to the nature of the family, especially in man's original role as head.

¹⁰ John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio," §25

¹¹ Stein, "Essays on Woman," 57-85.

¹²Ibid.

Furthermore, Stein addresses the vice, greed, within the hearts of so many men. As stated earlier, man's one-sidedness makes him more capable of devoting all his talents to a specific task or career. However, the decay of man's dominion is seen when we consider his relationship to the natural riches of the earth: instead of reverential joy in the created world, man seeks to exploit it greedily to the point of destruction or to senseless acquisition without understanding how to profit from it or how to enjoy it.¹³ Consumption has become the new means to an end, rather than gratitude to God for the gifts that He has given to us. The concern is no longer how he might give of himself or faithfully support his family, but how this resource can be leveraged to serve his own ends. This is also seen in man's work, when the obligations within his occupation lead him further away from his duties as a father and husband to his family. Work is good and necessary for the livelihood of the family, as financial health is important to its well-being. However, when man devotes himself in a perverted way to work, such that it detracts from his other duties to his wife and children, it becomes unhealthy and negatively affects every member of his household.

Reflecting back on the formerly presented questions, it appears that man increasingly turns toward culture to shape his understanding of his identity. As a result, fulfillment is no longer sought in the Creator, but in worldly desires and personal gratification. If they are not turning towards God or a religion to find their purpose, they are most certainly allowing other influences to fill that role. Not only that, but their families are deeply wounded by their failure to live as imitators of Christ. Man's role as father and husband within the aspect of spiritual leadership cannot be replaced by another member within the

¹³Ibid.

household. A wife cannot assume the duties of the husband, and likewise for the husband to his wife. God ordained it such that the husband, the head of the family, must spiritually lead in order for the family to prosper. This does not diminish the role of women within the family life, for they are called to live in holiness just as courageously as men. In fact, her faith influence can be an immense witness to not only her husband, but also to her community and to her children. As Edith Stein writes in *The Significance of Woman's Intrinsic Value in National Life*, the wives must win back the husbands to the faith and to pray constantly for their conversions. This, Stein continues, is of greatest responsibility which only few know how to handle in the right way.¹⁴ However, one must keep in mind that the head and leader of the family has been given to the man, and that cannot be undone or changed, including in spirituality. He is to be the shepherd of his home, as Christ is to His Church.

Restoration

No earthly knowledge can substitute for divine grace in matters of faith and devotion. Returning to the earlier study by the Pew Research Center, it is key to note the sex ratio of the religiously unaffiliated. Overall, the curve on the ratio suggests a balance over time. Today, 47% of unaffiliated Americans are women, 50% are men, in comparison to 2007 when about 41% of religiously unaffiliated adults were women, while 59% were men.¹⁵ This could be interpreted as a sign that secular identity among men is no longer growing rapidly, or that men who are unaffiliated are now part of a more normalized,

¹⁴Edith Stein, "The Significance of Woman's Intrinsic Value in National Life," in *Essays on Woman*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996), 254.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center, *Decline of Christianity*, 319.

settled demographic, rather than a countercultural outlier group. There is only one possible solution to such an observation: Jesus Christ is moving.

In order for man to fulfill his original vocation, he must return to Christ as the source of his redemption and the perfection of his nature as a spiritual leader. Stein writes that man can fulfill his most noble vocation, which is to be the image of God by subordinating himself humbly to God's guidance.¹⁶ Likewise, as a man grows in devotion to God, his relationship with the Creator deepens, enabling him to fulfill his vocation more completely. The more we come to understand and grow in relationship with our Savior, as Stein illustrates, the more we are captivated by His gentleness and sublimity, which is in total devotion to the Father's will. This will slowly transform the lives of men: the more they allow God to penetrate their hearts, the more sensitive and aware they will become. Eyes are opened to the full knowledge of human nature, and we achieve total humanity through Him and, simultaneously, the right personal attitude.¹⁷ There is no one simple solution to such a problem, for the answer is found in a Person, who created the very being of man himself. Christ has to be the mover in the hearts of men in order for a restoration to be found within the family. But His movements cannot be confined into expectations and policies, for it is a question of God's mystery which we cannot penetrate.¹⁸ Each individual is so uniquely created in the Image and Likeness of God, and each possesses a personality and an inclination to certain temperaments. Because of this, there is no one-size-fits- all solution. Man must enter into a total surrender and prayer to the One

¹⁶Stein, "Essays on Woman" 57-85.

¹⁷Stein, "The Significance of Woman's Intrinsic Value," 252.

¹⁸Ibid, 254.

who knows him so intimately. Through this, men are more able to be the fathers and husbands that God has ordained them to be and more fully live out their vocations.

Conclusion

The return of the prodigal son is not just a personal redemption story; it is a model for the restoration of fatherhood itself. In a culture where the spiritual presence of men has faded into silence, this parable reminds us that the Father is always waiting, ready to clothe His sons with dignity, identity, and purpose if they are ready to return and be received. And when this great return occurs, it does not just happen once; it is a constant conversion. The feast begins not just for one man, but for every family revived through his faith.

The Love That Opens Worlds: The Artist's Mission and the Task of Being

*Dean Robbins**

AESTHETICS HAS BEEN CAUGHT UP in misunderstandings of ontology and societal authority for too long. If Being is misunderstood, so too is society and the cultural artifacts it produces.

Drawing from the work of philosopher Ferdinand Ulrich and Communion & Liberation Founder Fr. Luigi Guissani, this paper will attempt to clear up the ontological basis for the meaning of art: that the capacity of art as revealer flows from our collective taking up of Being as a gift and a task.

Ulrich was a Thomist phenomenologist who attempted to interpret Aquinas in light of G.W.F. Hegel and phenomenologist Martin Heidegger. Hegel believed that history is a linear progression resulting from dialectic in which Spirit (or *Geist*), which is the full potential of the world, is slowly unveiled.¹ He also saw Christianity as an invaluable part of Spirit's progress because of its unique emphasis on individual

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¹ Paul Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2025 May 31, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel/#PheSpi>.

freedom.² Ulrich extracts from Hegel the necessity of Christianity within the philosophical tradition.

Heidegger was a phenomenologist concerned first and foremost with Being and our position as conscious investigators of Being.³ In his most famous work on aesthetics, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, he sees art as having a fundamental “thingliness,” or a physicality, even as it functions as a sign of something else.⁴ In fact, it is the physicality that makes the art able to represent other things in their thingliness. Many great works of art help us to see not only the subject in a new light, but the very materials or the medium too.

The paintings of Van Gogh, who Heidegger references, have a rich vision of reality emerging from noticeably thick and varied brushstrokes. However, the physical elements as arranged in the artwork are always already situated within a world of meaning and utility, which he calls “equipmentality.” To give an example, the physicality of an axe is derived from its metal which is also the origin of its capacity of durability as an axe.⁵ The potential of the metal is found in its use, but the materiality is greater than just the

² Jon Stewart, “Hegel’s Philosophical Interpretation of Christianity,” in *An Introduction to Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Issue of Religious Content in the Enlightenment and Romanticism* (Oxford, 2022).

³ Fred J. Wertz, “The history of humanistic and existential psychology: The possibility and cultural contexts of renewal in science,” in *APA handbook of humanistic and existential psychology*, ed. Louis Hoffman, Dan Hocoy & Eugene DeRobertis (APA Books, forthcoming), n.p.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The origin of the work of art,” trans. K. Haynes, in *Martin Heidegger: Off the beaten track*, ed. J. Young (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

equipmentality. He says, “the equipmentality of equipment first genuinely arrives at its appearance through the work and only in the work”.⁶ The tension between the equipmentality and the materiality of the work, caused by the materiality having been brought into view through equipmentality but also reduced by it, is what the art aims to pull at. He writes, “In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigating of this striving [between the two]”.⁷ Art allows the truth of both to reside in itself, which is why, unlike Romantic conceptions, he sees truth as paramount to beauty. Things have meaning in how we interact with and interpret them as well as in the material form or essence they are composed of. Being is what allows things to have both world and earth, or social, related meaning and nature, or better said that which is beyond human. As humans who are being-in-the-world, man has a special responsibility to take up their lowercase being in relation with others.⁸

Heidegger believes that we suffer from a “forgetfulness of Being”, especially in its ontological difference between potential and actual, between Being and beings.⁹ His philosophy is an attempt to reclaim the meaning of Being as an ontological difference, which Ulrich will also do. However, unlike Ulrich and Hegel, he thinks metaphysics has to be

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, language, thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸ Upper-case Being refers to Being as a concept or entity unto itself while lower-case being is our individual being in the verb sense. In this paper, I have strived to follow this convention, although some quotes use lower-case being with an upper-case meaning. That is partly because the (ontological) difference between the two gets increasingly blurry in Ulrich’s ontology.

⁹ Chintamani M. Pathak, “The problem of being in Heidegger,” Master’s diss., (McMaster University, 1972).

out of the conversation and criticized “onto-theology,” or the use of God as a tool of philosophy. For him, metaphysics often thinks of beings without considering what Being is itself.¹⁰ He does not see how a proper understanding of Being can be reconciled with theology or at least believes there has not been a solution yet.¹¹ Ulrich agrees with Heidegger that onto-theology is bad but does believe it may be possible to properly understand Being while accounting for the Divine. Accordingly, he criticizes in Hegel the subsuming of God beneath philosophy, or the dialectic.¹²

What Ulrich proposes positively is the concept of the human’s experience of Being as a “movement of finitization” in which the infinite is made finite through the individual. Being *only* finds fruition in the *acting* of it, just like the equipmentality appears through the usage of the material in Heidegger’s conception of art. His magnum opus *Homo Abyssus* explicates a sentence from Aquinas’ *De Potentia* that “being is complete and simple yet nonsubsistent”.¹³ What this means is that being is not an entity in itself (subsistent) but is still separate (complete and simple) from beings. Being only exists in our doing of it but cannot be reduced to us. This avoids the forgetfulness of Being criticized by Heidegger. Ulrich scholar D.C. Schindler writes, “being cannot be grasped in itself (because it is not *a* being) but only in the

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Robert Mixa, “Ferdinand Ulrich and Christian Philosophy: An Interview with D.C. Schindler,” *Spe Salvi Institute*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.spesalviinstitute.com/post/ferdinand-ulrich-and-christian-philosophy-an-interviewwith-d-c-schindler>.

¹³ Philip Gonzales, “A massive sea change in recent theology,” *Church Life Journal*, March, 24, 2021, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/a-massive-sea-change-in-recent-theology/>.

things that are, and the things that are can be understood most fundamentally in their being”.¹⁴

The consequences of misunderstanding Being and the ontological difference can be dramatic, even from childhood as Ulrich outlines in the essay *Man in the Beginning*.¹⁵ This is because manifesting being is the fundamental role of the human person. The movement from potentiality to actuality is the only traversal of the ontological difference, defined again as the “discontinuity between being [as nonsubsistent] and that which is”.¹⁵ The act of traversing the ontological difference is something gifted to everything in Creation, but is most fully carried out as a task to humans through their freedom. A misconception of Being is then also a failure to take up the task presented by it.

Ulrich diagnoses certain “configurations” of thought arising from a misconception of Being: first, the “schizoid” and second, the “depressive”.¹⁶ The schizoid person hears voices that are all still reflections of himself: “on account of his fixation on himself and his own orbit he covered up the known reality with himself and did not grant space within himself for the known’s possible self-revelation”.¹⁹

¹⁴ D.C. Schindler, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich’s homo abyssus* (Humanum Academic Press, 2019), 114. ¹⁵ Ferdinand Ulrich, *Man in the beginning: Toward a philosophical anthropology of childhood* (Humanum Academic Press, 2024).

¹⁵ Schinder, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich’s homo abyssus*, 119.

¹⁶ Ferdinand Ulrich, *Death in knowledge and love*, trans. Jude McFarlane, 207 and 212.

¹⁷ It is my belief that Ulrich pulled these categories from psychologist Fritz Riemann’s 1961 book *Grundformen der Angst*, but there is no known confirmation of this. Melanie Klein also uses those terms. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

Ontologically speaking, such a person tries to subsume the completeness of Being within himself and thus reduces it to their own limited conception of it. They cannot welcome the possibility of the Other and, instead, projects themselves on everything. Conversely, the depressive person clings to the Other, killing themselves and ultimately the Other, in the process. In our everyday life, we see this in our relationships. In our clinging to the life of others (such as overbearing parents or partners), we kill them before they even die by suffocating their uniqueness and freedom. The depressive person cannot allow the distance necessary to contain the Other, rather than their image of the Other, within themselves.

Our ability to reach out beyond our schizoid projections or our essence is made possible through the “superessentiality” of being, or its ability to continuously welcome new modifications to its essence through *esse*.¹⁸ The being of finite entities stretches out beyond their finitude to incorporate into themselves the new. This is only possible by accepting the Other, or literally what is not-yet them. This is more banal than it might appear: to become who we will be tomorrow, we must no longer be who we are today. The tricky part is that this requires both surrender (to what we might become) and intention (towards what we could or want to be). This movement outward and back inward are called “exitus” and “reditus,” concepts pulled from Aquinas, wherein the person bridges the ontological difference.¹⁹

Ulrich says this moment of finitization “can be experienced and understood not merely as a deficient expression of the originally

¹⁸ Schindler, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich's homo abyssus*.

¹⁹ Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo abyssus*, trans. D.C. Schindler (Humanum Academic Press, 2018), 15.

complete being itself, but as a positive breakthrough and creative revelation of God's inner self-enactment".²⁰ In a sense, finitization is God revealing Himself but through the freedom of His Creation. It is through the externalization of the multiplicity of being that the fullness of God's love is revealed, or that "every dimension of reality is a distinctive revelation of God's creative generosity".²¹ Ulrich defines this love as "in one respect as pure generosity and in another respect as fundamental obedience".²² For Ulrich, the love that engenders being is both a gift of generosity and a task for obedience.²³ All of Creation participates in being as a movement and the emergent meeting of matter and form (literally becoming finite out of the depths of possibility) but only the "embodied spirit" is able to actively participate in the *gift* of being or finitization.²⁴

Being is, in a sense, an open space for beings to transcend themselves in a way only they individually can, to reach toward God. We are all called to be saints, but no two saints are the same. Finitization is then an ever-renewing process that calls all of us to active engagement with reality. The work of Luigi Guissani, the Catholic priest who founded the Communion & Liberation movement, rests solely on this call to responsibility in every moment. For Guissani, everyday experience points us toward a singular encounter with our infinite Father. Because of this singularity, Guissani declares that "Christianity is an event"

²⁰ Ibid., 158.

²¹ Schindler, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich's homo abyssus*, 22.

²² Ibid., 21.

²³ Ulrich, *Homo abyssus*.

²⁴ Ibid., 300.

more than it is doctrine or institution.²⁵ Yet at the same time, this event operates within the boundaries of truth, unlike the non-denominational understandings that place emphasis on a wholly personal relationship with God. Like in Ulrich's definition of love, our encounter with God (who is love) requires both generosity *and* obedience. Without generosity, God becomes a cruel despot incapable of letting us bridge the ontological difference freely. Without obedience, God becomes the extension of one's own concupiscent (or schizoid) will. This combination of generosity and obedience undergirds a loving relationship with God which can be imitated throughout life with others, and which Guissani and his successor Julian Carron call authority. Carron writes: "In our life, we experience authority as an encounter with a person with a rich consciousness of reality who introduces us to the complex of circumstances, incarnating a hypothesis of meaning for adequately interpreting and facing them, calling us at the same time to put it to the test, to verify its substance personally".²⁶

We are meant to obey God, but again he allows us to do so as unique individuals. Our lives are given to us by God and the social reality that forms us, and we are then tasked in return with perfecting what we have been given and amending what needs to be fixed. God does not abandon us in this pursuit but rather offers true authority to look to in the figure of Jesus Christ.

²⁵ Javier Maria Prades Lopez, Luigi Guissani, & Stefano Alberto, *Generating traces in the history of the world: New traces of the Christian experience* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 9.

²⁶ Julian Carron, *The radiance in your eyes* (Human Adventure Books, 2020), 138.

Because we also turn away from God though, we look for this authority in perverted forms.

Authentic authority is nearly incomprehensible in today's modern political climate, which cannot imagine a world where truth is followed devotedly, but not violently enforced. Because of the overflowing depth of the human person through grace, the possibilities of expression are limitless and ever emergent. Inauthentic authority attempts to flatten this possibility by forcing everyone to be the same kind of "saint." The political order is perhaps the most powerful form of inauthentic authority, but it exists everywhere from work to home. It exists in art as propaganda and anything that could be described as "forced" or "obvious". While this inauthentic authority is often identified in authoritarianism, it also exists in total "freedom." This appears in art as works that offer too little substance in hopes that the viewer will fill it in. Ambiguity is a hallmark of great art, but too much of it can be a crutch for an artist without a fully formed vision. This kind of authority is best described as impotent. It can be identified in the political order as unfettered liberalism.

Navigating the balance between inauthentic and impotent authority is very hard and impossible to perfect. It always eludes us because only God can provide authentic authority to guide us in our encounter with Being. Still as we make passage through the city of man, we must deal with and attempt to improve the imperfect manifestations of authority. Despite this ²⁷never-ending obstacle, true authority can be mirrored most closely in our loving relationship with others and the formation of community. "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins".²⁹ Guissani says, "Community,

²⁷ Peter 4:8, RSVCE.

precisely because it is essential shared living, is an interior dimension, at the origin of our thoughts and our actions. Otherwise, it is not community but calculation”.²⁸ The political is often an evasion of this authentic sense of community. We attempt to institutionalize community, which results in bureaucratic selfishness that puts the institution above the real community. And if authority is misunderstood, Being is misunderstood. If Being is misunderstood, nothing, including the creative act, can be understood. Ulrich’s monumental task in *Homo Abyssus* is to properly understand Being where our enactment is predicated on both an obedience to proper authority and an ability to act freely out of God’s generosity.

The finitization of being completes being, but it also does not render Creation incomplete and God “impotent,” as Ulrich describes.²⁹ When we reciprocate God’s love by opening ourselves in turn to His providence (to Being), we become who He has always desired us to be. In that way, obedient freedom is a coming to fruition of God’s divine order within the individual. Schindler, writing on Ulrich, says that “seeing things not only as substances but also as subsisting beings, enacting their existence, we recognize a kenotic, self-giving self-transcendence in the procession of accidents”.³⁰ In our freedom, we ought to empty ourselves to transcend our own essences. Conversely, Being in its super-essential wealth “lowers itself” to be confined within unique, individual human action, which has given itself to the wealth. This “kenosis” is obstructed by sin. Giussani defines sin as “the fact of identifying our own definitiveness with an idol”.³¹ Rather than open

²⁸ Giussani, *The risk of education*, trans. Mariangela Sullivan (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 54.

²⁹ Ulrich, *Homo abyssus*.

³⁰ Schindler, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich’s homo abyssus*, 59.

³¹ Giussani, *The risk of education*, 7.

ourselves up to the wealth of Being's possibility and God's grace, we reduce ourselves in enslavement to an idol. "All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit".³² Sin and its resultant guilt forces us to see our own nothingness without God, or Being's own non-subsistence. Without the hope of transcendence, our facticity and finitude are a cage.

Our finite restriction to the present moment should not be our weakness, but rather our direct entry into infinity. Fr. Antonio Lopez, who has synthesized the work of Giussani and Ulrich among others, writes that, "time, reflecting the non-subsistence of finite beings, separates finite beings from God. Yet it does so not by denying God, but by imaging him".³³ This imaging consists of the total immanency of investment in the present moment: a radical, intimate presence. He later continues, "Eternity is the truth of time that, in manifesting itself through time, distinguishes itself from time".³⁴ Ulrich calls this the "little way" of Being in imitation of St. Therese of Lisieux, or the pathway to the transcendent through our materiality and finitude.³⁵ The task given to us constantly anew is to conquer the limitedness of our finitude by surrendering ourselves to the possibilities of finitization.

The whole of human history is the drama of accepting and accommodating the wealth of being or rejecting it and imposing one's

³² Isaiah 44:9-20, RSVCE.

³³ Antonio Lopez, *Gift and the unity of being* (Cascade Books, 2014), 45.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rachel M. Coleman, "The little way: Ferdinand Ulrich on accidents," *Nova et Vetera* 22, no. 2 (2024): 377-396.

own “truth” as inauthentic authority which without the wealth of being is nothing. Schindler writes on this:

“But after the fullness of the meaning of being is revealed, one either adopts (whether consciously or unconsciously) the perspective of love or refuses it and is then reduced to compensating for the resultant deficiencies through the self-driven dialectics of reason or the self-asserting will to power”.³⁶

Because Being and the generous gift of grace are always inexhaustible, the meaning of Being is only *calcified*, or lost, if it is rejected. A person who attempts to hold onto something that is no longer true or authentic holds onto nothing.

The difference between authentic and inauthentic art can be sensed. It is a gift of the Spirit that artists can relate the intimacies of their lived encounter with God and Being in a way that others can understand and see through their eyes. This ability is itself a technical application and magnification of the task of Being to which we are all called. What is needed then is an authentic Catholic aesthetic, the difficulty of which cannot be overstated. Catholic arts can extend to any subject and any medium. In fact, a work of art can be Catholic without any overt reference to doctrine. It could be a painting of the grandeur of nature or a novel about the endurance of the human spirit. Several of the films on the Vatican list are completely devoid of direct reference to God. What matters is that a Catholic aesthetic contains the pregnant possibility for God. Authentic Catholic aesthetics is a “both and” that is able to contain all the joys and sorrows of living, all the mysteries

³⁶ Schindler, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich's homo abyssus*, p. 24.

and anatomies of nature, and all the works of God in history. It is an overflowing excess of Being.

The artist's special mission is to draw us into conversion through beauty so we can come out of our forgetfulness and see the gift and task of Being for ourselves. Carron described this conversion as "the recovery of faith as recognition, as intelligence of the newness in and among us, and as obedience".³⁷ This mission is never-ending, just as the multiplicity of human experience and culture is ever-expanding. Like all missions, it is a cross that demands dedication to achieve technical prowess and courage to realize vision.

The task of Being we all take on, as explained by Ulrich and Giussani, is to receive the super-essential wealth of Being into our poverty and then to find a way to do justice to the wealth we have inherited. Schindler explains that "there is no more decisive expression of the dominion of the world entrusted to man than the task of saying things in an *adequate* [original italicized] way that does justice to their essence and gratuitously, mercifully, elevating them to a mode of existence not given in their essence alone".³⁸ As Catholics, we must not allow ourselves to close up and fail to render justice to Creation. All of us in our own way, but artists most especially, must walk the "little way" of speaking the treasure of our weakness back to the world so that all can share in God's grace and abiding love that opens yet more worlds.*

³⁷ Carron, *The radiance in your eyes*, 135.

³⁸ Schindler, *A companion to Ferdinand Ulrich's homo abyssus*, 84.

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Labor, Family, and Community: Examining Remote Work from the Perspective of Catholic Social Teaching

*Jeffrey Schremmer**

THE SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS of 2020 through 2022 required many industries and businesses to modify or, in some cases, completely restructure their workspace arrangements. This restructuring was accompanied by rapid developments in telecommunications technology, greatly augmenting the ability of many workers to engage in what became known as remote work. Even as social restrictions were eased and eventually eliminated, the practice of remote work has continued at relatively high rates in industries which can accommodate it, with employees demanding greater flexibility and companies realizing the cost-saving effects of eliminating physical workspaces. The tradition of Catholic Social Thought recognizes the capacity of new technologies to either enhance and dignify labor or to supplant and alienate it. Further, the tradition calls for the thoughtful consideration of strategies for the proper use of emerging technologies that accomplish the former while avoiding the latter. This essay will consider both the authentically constructive capabilities of the phenomenon of remote work as well as its potential dangers. This analysis will be conducted, in part, from the perspective

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of Pope St. John Paul II's theology of labor and concept of human ecology. It will begin, however, with an examination of the remote work phenomenon as such and the ways in which remote work technologies are currently employed.

In April 2025, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that approximately 21.6% of those employed in the United States engaged in either hybrid or full-time remote work, characterized as “telework” or “work at home for pay.”¹ This statistic is vague and encompasses numerous phenomena that deserve explanation. First, one who is working “remotely” may in fact be employed by a business in his own community and simply completing some or all of the responsibilities of his employment from home rather than from a physical office space. On the other hand, an employee may engage in remote work for a business that lacks a geographic nexus or physical office space due to the nature of the product or service offered or the structure of the business itself. In addition, certain businesses may find value in having employees work remotely from diverse geographical areas, allowing for flexibility in communication with regional clients or business hubs. In other circumstances, some employees, empowered by remote work technologies, may decide to move away from the communities in which their businesses operate in order to take advantage of cost-of-living differentials, to be closer to family, or to live in communities which more closely conform to their moral and religious standards or preferred lifestyle choices. Many other practices, with diverse motivations, similarly fall under the “remote work” umbrella. Though distinct, each of these practices present opportunities to enhance authentic labor and to facilitate human flourishing but also present

¹ “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey.” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 2025.

dangers which ought to be avoided. The tradition of Catholic Social Thought, with a particular focus on Pope St. John Paul II's theology of labor, provides a robust framework for identifying and addressing such opportunities and dangers.

John Paul II's 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* recognizes how modern technology, including telecommunications technology, is "undoubtedly man's ally" when it "facilitates his work, perfects, accelerates and augments it."² On the other hand, such technologies "can cease to be man's ally and become almost his enemy" when employed in a manner which does not take into account the nature of labor and the proper subject of labor – man. Because of the inherent geographic component of remote work technologies, their role as an ally or enemy of human labor can be better understood through John Paul II's concept of "human ecology," expounded in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. The concept of an authentic human ecology begins with a recognition that individuals come into being in the context of a "natural and moral structure" which must be respected.³ This structure includes the "social ecology of work" as well as one's immediate community, but John Paul II makes clear that the "first and fundamental structure for human ecology is the family," where a proper analysis of the effects of remote work phenomena must begin.⁴

The family, recognized in the tradition of Catholic Social Thought as the foundational unit of society, fills an essential function in the human ecology by providing the context in which life "can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is

² John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens*, 1981. Section 5.

³ John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus*, 1991. Section 38.

⁴ *Ibid*, Section 39.

exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes human growth.”⁵ In examining remote work phenomena, then, the primary responsibilities of parents to foster these conditions must be taken into account. Often, the community of one’s employment is not conducive to raising and educating children in the faith. Poor moral and academic standards in public schools accompanied by unaffordable private school tuition rates force many parents to make undesirable decisions regarding the education of their children. The high cost of living in urban areas can make a single-income arrangement unsustainable, making a balanced home life and family faith formation more difficult. The liturgical and social resources in certain communities may be lacking or non-existent. Remote work technologies can alleviate many of these circumstances by allowing families to maintain employment while living in communities which better serve their needs, and which better allow them to fulfill their responsibilities. With remote work technologies, families have more flexibility to live in communities with higher quality and more affordable schools, lower costs of living, and more robust faith communities, even if those communities lack employment opportunities in industries which align with one’s skills. By empowering families to live in communities which promote their authentic flourishing and growth, remote work technologies can indeed function as man’s ally. That being said, the family is not the only component of an authentic human ecology, and the effects of remote work upon the social ecology of the business firm as well as upon the local community must also be considered.

In *Centessimus Annus*, a business firm is first and foremost understood as a “*community of persons* who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the

⁵ Ibid.

whole of society.”⁶ This communal aspect of a business is essential to evaluating remote work technologies, which almost necessarily restructure the business in a manner that is remote or virtual rather than shared in a common physical space. To authentically accomplish its mission and fulfill its responsibilities, a business firm need not necessarily operate in a physical workspace. In fact, many faith-based businesses and Catholic apostolates are able to operate successfully precisely *because* of their virtual or remote structures. However, by operating in a shared physical environment, a business community encounters opportunities for authentic human growth and development which ought not be understated. Physical workspaces facilitate authentic human interaction in a way that is made more difficult when mediated through telecommunications technology. By working in proximity to one another, employees more authentically encounter each other as complete human beings, rather than simply through the medium of the other’s work output, e-mails, or appearance on a video call. These circumstances are more conducive to the comprehensive collaboration and vibrant social ecology of the workplace that the tradition of Catholic Social Thought promotes. Indeed, as Notre Dame theologian David Cloutier points out, “Catholic Social Thought wants us to see the workplace as a vital, social space for living out the social nature of the human person.”⁷

The tradition of Catholic Social Thought also identifies the business firm’s role in the authentic moral and social development of its employees.⁸ In this role, the business firm acts as a school of virtue –

⁶ Ibid, Section 35. Emphasis added.

⁷ Cloutier, David. “Remote Work Has Real Ramifications for Society” *U.S. Catholic*, 2022.

⁸ *The Vocation of the Business Leader*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2014.

enhancing the dignity of employees by facilitating the “development of virtues” and “promoting interaction between [people] in a way that is mutually beneficial.”⁹ Once again, this essential role of the business firm can certainly be accomplished through the medium of remote work technologies, but such technologies also make it more difficult, in many cases, for employees to participate in this important element of their labor. Some of this difficulty comes down to the way in which remote work technologies, through the removal of the business community from a shared physical environment, can facilitate or even encourage the consistent prioritization of one’s own preferences, comfort, and ease over those of others – who are not physically present. Again, from David Cloutier:

When people talk about remote work, they often focus very much on their own satisfaction. They don’t have to share space, talk to people who are annoying, or negotiate a common refrigerator for lunches. While these all may be legitimate beefs, avoiding them does not actually help people grow in virtue. From a virtue ethics perspective, we can see that the office requires us to become better people. We learn to share the world with others.¹⁰

Further, remote work technologies are often employed by individuals as a means of avoiding social interaction or facilitating personal comfort rather than for any of the authentically positive and pro-family opportunities listed above. A shared physical workspace, then, can be

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cloutier, David. “Remote Work Has Real Ramifications for Society” *U.S. Catholic*, 2022.

an important component of the business firm's role as a school of virtue. Remote workspaces certainly do not eliminate the possibility of such an environment; they simply require more effort on the part of employers and employees to recognize and fulfill their responsibilities to cultivate it.

A similar argument can be applied to another component of human ecology – the local community. The topic of the local community has been unfortunately largely overlooked in the tradition of Catholic Social Thought but has a strong presence in the tradition of classical political philosophy, including that of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. The local community is an expression of man's social and political nature, and in the same way that individuals have robust responsibilities within the context of the family and business community, individuals have responsibilities to those with whom they live in community. These responsibilities can and should be carried out in diverse ways that go far beyond one's professional occupation, but one's professional occupation is traditionally one of the primary and most significant ways that he contributes to the common good of the local community. It is for this reason that John Paul II calls attention to the "serious problems of modern urbanization" and the damage that these practices do to the "social ecology of work."¹¹ When cities are designed so as to facilitate labor which takes place in isolation from the local community, with individuals living together but working apart – remotely, it becomes more difficult to work towards the common good of the community. Along these lines, when John Paul II advocates "urban planning which is concerned with how people are to live," one can easily imagine that he is referring to robust local communities in which professional labor and business firms play an active role in

¹¹ John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus*, 1991. Section 38.

working towards the common good rather than communities which serve as mere aggregations of homes, with labor being exported via telecommunications technology.

Now, all of this is not to say that the geographic ambiguity facilitated by remote work technologies is necessarily destructive of the social community of business firms or of the common good of local communities. In fact, authentically social and collaborative business environments can and frequently are developed without physical workspaces; robust and vibrant local communities can and frequently do flourish without specific local industries; and individuals can and frequently do fulfill their responsibilities to their local communities through means other than their professional occupations. It is to say, however, that practices and technologies which remove labor from its physical and geographical contexts present circumstances which have the capacity to be destructive of man's social nature and the many communities he occupies.

It is worth noting that these practices and technologies include but are not limited to remote work phenomena. In fact, the practices of long-distance commuting and urban sprawl pose similar dangers to the ones I have described above related to remote work. Many physical office spaces, in their reliance upon certain telecommunications technologies and anti-social workplace arrangements and practices, can be just as or even more destructive of the community of the business firm than not sharing a physical office space at all. In many of these circumstances, remote work technologies may actually facilitate an improvement in the ability of individuals to fulfill their social responsibilities to their families, business communities, and local communities. It is for these reasons that remote work technologies cannot be blanketly praised or condemned. The circumstances in which such technologies are

employed are diverse and represent a wide variety of motivations, practices, and effects. As a result, rather than searching for a universal moral principle with which to evaluate remote work, it is far better to consider a framework for evaluating the circumstances, responsibilities, and communities which influence the positive and negative consequences of this emerging phenomenon. John Paul II's theology of labor and conception of authentic human ecology, detailed above, provide such a framework.

Using the principles outlined throughout this essay, strategies and standards for the proper use of remote work technologies, both on the part of businesses and employees, can be developed to consider the ways in which these technologies will work to either enhance or impede the development of robust human communities. From a business perspective, such an analysis may include questions like –

- How can authentic relationships and community between employees be facilitated while working remotely?
- How can the firm continue to fulfill its role as a school of virtue in lieu of a shared physical workspace?
- How can the firm use remote work technologies to provide families the geographic flexibility to flourish according to their circumstances and needs?
- How can the firm ensure that employees have the capacity to fulfill their duties to their local communities outside of work?

From an employee's perspective, such an analysis may include questions like –

- How can I ensure that I am authentically employing remote work capabilities to facilitate the flourishing of my family and/or community rather than to cater to my own personal preferences?
- How am I taking advantage of remote work capabilities to enhance the quality of my family life above what it would be if I were working in-person?
- How can I work towards the development of a collaborative social environment in the virtual workspace?
- How am I fulfilling my duties to and contributing to the common good of my local community outside of work?

In the end, the use of remote work technologies and related practices must be discerned in a manner that ensures that constructive ends are authentically achieved and that potentially destructive effects are recognized and rectified. Above all, both businesses and employees must be wary of relying heavily on these technologies simply on the basis of convenience or personal preference. Such practices can easily lead to an economistic view that denies the business firm's roles as a community of persons and a school of virtue and that denies the individual employee's responsibilities to his family and local community. Such roles and responsibilities are essential elements of Catholic Social Teaching's conception of the nature of the business firm and of man's social nature, and they form the underlying basis of an authentic human ecology and the proper approach to man's relationship with telecommunications technology. In the end, it is this human ecology, encompassing man's overlapping responsibilities to the communities he inhabits, that informs a thoughtful, Catholic response to both remote work and its inevitable future developments.

Reclaiming Male-Female Complementarity in the Post-Industrial Age: A Catholic Response to the “Trad Wife” Movement

*Rachel Schroder**

Modern Feminism, while claiming to champion individual choice, praises women who work outside the home while labeling those who choose vocations inside the home as full-time mothers and homemakers as “antiquated” or “oppressed.” In response, it is common to hear women on the cultural Right say they “just” want to be a stay-at-home mom, implying that higher education and practical savvy are insignificant in such a role. A reactionary movement of “Trad Wife” proponents has even presented work outside the home as universally unfeminine. Both modern Feminism and its “Trad Wife” opponent fail to acknowledge the robust contributions of women in the realm of work—which are rightly limited *neither* to the corporate world *nor* to the kitchen. While modern Feminism pushes women toward out-of-home work, the Trad Wife movement posits that women should not work outside the home at all. This paper will challenge this false dichotomy and present a family-first justification

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for women in the workforce drawing on the teachings of Pope St. John Paul II and the 20th century Carmelite philosopher Edith Stein.¹

Saint John Paul II writes in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* that “work is a universal calling.” The Pope delivered these words as a response to Soviet Communism, insisting that – absent labor - human nature erodes. The call to work does not discriminate between the two sexes, especially seen in the realm of the family. Before the Industrial Revolution, production for the needs of the family took place largely within the household, so fathers and mothers worked together for the material needs of themselves and their children. In fact, the English word “economy” derives from the Greek roots *oikos* (house) and *nemein* (manage). Household work is “traditional” work—and not only for women.²

In the nineteenth century, factories and machines largely replaced men’s and women’s subsistence labor inside the home since mass-produced food and textiles shifted the market economy to the city, nation, and even globe. Because the Industrial Revolution displaced breadwinning from the home and made homemaking less demanding, the universal call to work had to take new forms for both men and women. For some women, this meant working with their husbands in the factories; for richer women, this meant spending more time enhancing the domestic sphere. In both cases, this change created a space for women to fill needs in the world in new ways, and for many women, the traditional maternal role began to include a broader

¹ Also known as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

² See also Friedrich Baerwald, *The Family as an Economic Unit*, 24 *Fordham L. Rev.* 116 (1955).

“giving-of-life” to their community by applying feminine strengths and perspectives to the workforce, politics, and civil society.

World War II brought this to a new level, since women were uniquely needed to keep their communities afloat when their husbands were deployed.³ Due to the limited hours of the day, however, a certain competition arose between women’s domestic and workforce roles. As many women began to favor the latter’s demand on their time even after the war, women began to appear interchangeable with men in the working world. And they began to overlook maternal responsibilities.

In the 1960s and ‘70s, matters worsened. The Sexual Revolution normalized contraception and abortion, further diluting society’s appreciation of women as life-givers. These cultural changes reduced women’s perceived value in society to *chiefly* her productivity outside the home. Consequently, woman lost her uniquely honored place since her value was only appreciated in the categories of labor shared with men.

The illusion that men and women, respectively, have nothing unique to offer to society has created a reactionary movement from conservatives who rightly emphasize sexual differences. Today, many long for the days before the 1960s Sexual Revolution. Conservative men are increasingly looking for their “Trad Wife,” which they imagine as the idealized 1950s homemaker.⁴ The Trad Wife movement, which emphasizes strict sex roles in which the woman stays home and the husband works outside the home, seeks to respond to the devaluation

³ “Women in the Work Force during World War II,” National Archives and Records Administration.

⁴ In reality, the 1950s was far from ideal for women. See Mary Harrington, “Why Tradwives Aren’t Trad Enough,” UnHerd, January 30, 2020.

of motherhood with a reappraisal for the beauty that women can bring to the world *through* the home.

While this motivation is commendable and bears aesthetic value, this solution is only one of the many ways the feminine vocation can be realized in the modern age. Baking sourdough and bearing children are not the *only* means of enlivening and nurturing persons, which is a particularly feminine aptitude. Men are looking for a not-Feminist, so they have chosen the guise of a past era to escape the individualistic attitudes with which modern Feminism has lied to women. A girl in a 1950s rockabilly dress seems a safe alternative to the latter, but a healthier perspective would be for men to pinpoint what may be their truer desire—a woman who puts her family first. Women have much to offer society, provided that their contributions are integrated with their *full* vocation and harmonious with family needs. Saint John Paul II himself in his “Letter to Women” commends this integration of women in “social, political and economic life,” arguing that it must respect the role of mothers.⁵

The Trad Wife movement relies on the truth of male-female difference as its primary premise. However, conservatives are wrong to chart the sexual dichotomy onto male and female *social* roles. In other words, understanding masculinity and femininity—or their corresponding social roles—requires keener study than that which is required to merely acknowledge biological sexual differences. Simplistic definitions of a man or woman⁶are insufficient to define masculinity

⁵ This is not to argue that every individual woman is called to biological motherhood, though woman by nature has a maternal intuition which can be directed toward spiritual nurturing.

⁶ *What Is a Woman?*, directed by Justin Folk (2022; Nashville, TN: The Daily Wire, 2022).

and femininity, which are realities of the whole human person as body and soul. Pope John Paul II writes in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* that “‘masculinity and femininity’ are ‘two different ‘incarnations,’ that is, two ways in which the same human being, created ‘in the image of God’ (Gen 1:27), ‘is a body.’”⁷

A human person cannot interact with the world except in unity with their body. Since masculinity and femininity are the incarnation of the image of God in the male or female body (respectively), masculinity and femininity implies two distinct ways of knowing creation.⁸ Aquinas writes that “knowledge is the cause of love,” so masculinity and femininity results in different natural aptitudes toward human virtue within the *single* and universal call to holiness.⁹

The Genesis account illuminates this. In the beginning, Adam achieved knowledge of the world through naming creatures in nature, and in doing so realized his need for a person like himself to love.¹⁰ He discovered his call to love through perceiving the *lack* of persons in the material world. Eve, on the other hand, was made from Adam’s rib and then was immediately brought to him. From her first moment of existence she was seen, accepted, and loved by another human person directly. She discovered her call to love from being received and affirmed by Adam directly, giving her a more intuitive and embodied sense of her need for personal relationship. Unlike Adam, who realized the call to love after an inductive analysis of material objects, Eve was

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 157.

⁸ This description of masculinity and femininity was offered by Magdalena Kyne, a 2025 Röpke-Wojtyła Fellow.

⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 27, a. 2, “I answer that.”

¹⁰ Deborah Savage, “Man and Women: Identity, Genius, Mission,” Catholic Answers, June 30, 2023.

born into a created order that immediately included receiving love from another person.¹¹

As illustrated in this anthropology, men tend to more intuitively understand the external world and see the value in productive labor in the material realm, which secondarily points to the need for personal relationship within the created order.¹² This is the masculine aptitude. It is therefore unsurprising that we see a disproportionate number of men in technical, objective disciplines.¹³ Men's sense of belonging in the external world makes them especially equipped to lead and to provide for the material needs of their families.

The feminine aptitude, on the other hand, intuitively focuses on persons, which then secondarily points to the need to work in the world as a way to serve those persons.¹⁴ While the man tends to see external labor as a path by which to build his sense of personal belonging, the woman's desire to receive and reciprocate love embraces the need for personal connection in a more direct and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Edith Stein provides a similar analysis in her *Essays on Woman*, Chapter 2: "The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace."

¹³ Male's external disposition is present even from early childhood when boys, unlike girls, will choose to play with toy trucks over dolls. The National Institute of Health confirms, "sexually dimorphic toy preferences reflect basic neurobiological differences between males and females and are not caused solely by socialization." Williams, Christina L, and Kristen E Pleil. "Toy story: why do monkey and human males prefer trucks? Comment on "Sex differences in rhesus monkey toy preferences parallel those of children" by Hassett, Siebert and Wallen." *Hormones and behavior* vol. 54,3 (2008): 355-8.

¹⁴ Stein, "The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace."

embodied way. Unlike men, women nurture their unborn children *within* their bodies and nurse their born babies *from* their bodies. Yet the feminine orientation toward interpersonal relationship extends beyond her potential reproductive capacity. In their work, women disproportionately choose nurturing vocations such as nursing, and women are more sensitive to offensive personal interactions. Woman's particular openness to love makes her especially equipped to nurture the hearts of those around her, especially within her own family.

As a result of these respective aptitudes, men more naturally develop external virtues like courage, and women more naturally develop interpersonal virtues like compassion. However, these are *human* virtues that men and women are *equally called to live*. Women may have to work harder to achieve the virtues to which the masculine aptitude is oriented, and men may have to work harder to achieve the virtues to which the feminine aptitude is oriented. Understood even more clearly though, since the male or female body orients the soul toward the world from distinct angles, the body reveals the natural form of each virtue. Courage for a woman will generally be more embodied, while courage for a man will generally be expressed more externally (bearing a child versus wrestling an enemy who threatens a child, for example). At the individual level, some men may have a stronger or weaker masculine aptitude, and some women may have a stronger or weaker feminine aptitude. Colloquially, a man can sometimes be called "feminine" or "effeminate" or a woman "masculine" or "manly." These words are merely informal descriptions of the strength or weakness of one's male or female aptitude though; language like this must not confuse the mutually exclusive categories of men and women.

The uniqueness of a person's personality in no way compromises his male identity or her female identity, because these are bodily incarnations of the person and hence cannot be changed.¹⁵ Rather, manly or womanly personality is merely the *typical* effect of sexually embodied personhood. The overlapping dispositions toward the world among men and women is one result of their shared human nature, and this can even be fitting since both men and women are called to equal virtue. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote prior to assuming his papacy as Pope Benedict XVI, "the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible."¹⁶ The shared human nature and unique personalities among men and women are the soil from which each soul can grow in virtue. Each individual's vocation will be as nuanced as their personal relationship with Christ, since we are called to Him by name, not by sexual category.

Followers of the Trad Wife Movement correctly recognize men's and women's differences in their efforts to reclaim male-female complementarity within the family. However, the *overlapping* abilities and talents, and hence, roles in the world that stem from a shared humanity, are missing from their picture.

Equality in the call to holiness is the only foundation upon which to fully understand male-female complementarity. Man and woman, both fashioned in the *Imago Dei*, are together assigned the task of procreation and mastery over the world as expressed by God's command to "[b]e

¹⁵ You cannot separate your biological identity from your spiritual identity because only death separates body and soul.

¹⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World." Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church. Rome: Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 31, 2004. Paragraph 14.

fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.”¹⁷ Parenthood *and work in the world* were the shared prerogative of the original couple before sin. Complementarity between men and women fundamentally presumes this shared mission. Adam had countless animal creatures at his disposal which could help him in utilitarian ways, but none proved a suitable helper.¹⁸ Only when Adam recognized “bone of my bones,” someone who shared his nature, could a loving partnership happen.¹⁹ Converse to the utilitarian relationship possible between man and beast, a complementary relationship required natural intellectual equality.

You can only love one with whom you have a connection. Because Adam and Eve shared a single human nature in different bodily incarnations, they could teach each other to love more fully. From his creation, Adam was immersed in the external world. He had such a grasp of the essence of external things that he was tasked with *naming* the living creatures. Eve did not have to discover the external world alone because Adam already had done so. He could lead Eve into the external world because he knew it before she did, and hence, he could love her through providing for and protecting her. Eve, however, had to teach Adam interhuman love. While they met each other simultaneously, Eve never knew a world without another human, and therefore, she had a more intuitive familiarity with human persons because her original experience of the created order included Adam.²⁰ Woman, because she was made second, offered human community to

¹⁷ Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace,” referencing Genesis 1:28.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:20.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:23.

²⁰ Savage, “Man and Women: Identity, Genius, Mission.”

the world for the first time. So, while man leads woman to understand the world of the physical, woman guides man to understand the interior world of human relationships.

Paradoxically, complementarity between man and woman requires their equality, but presumes their difference. Man and woman discover themselves in each other, seen from Genesis when Adam is only described as “male” in the Hebrew (*is*) in relation to “female” (*issah*) after Eve is made.²¹ Men and women, then, discover themselves in the other; in understanding the other, they ultimately discover the *Imago Dei* that each represents in a unique way. Man and woman help guide one another toward a cohesive knowledge of the created order in both its external and its interpersonal dimension, forming for both people a more complete understanding of the Creator. In the complimentary human couple, the man is to help the woman understand the physical dimension of creation, and the woman is to help the man understand its personal dimension. Since this pedagogy is mutual, each individual, in seeking to see God more clearly, benefits from both the masculine and the feminine eye. The partnership between a man and a woman, then, points to the inner wholeness of each man and woman individually before God. Just as the union of man and woman in marriage bears life-giving fruitfulness, the fuller vision of God which this partnership facilitates makes each individual more equipped for his or her shared human vocation to love. Man and woman do not come together to form a complete person; rather, their unity allows them to become more integrated as individuals before God.

Charting a complete dichotomy in men’s and women’s social roles overlooks their shared mission in which complementarity is grounded.

²¹ John Paul II, *A Theology of the Body*, 139, 147. See Genesis 2:23.

Rather, the personality of each individual person should factor strongly into his or her vocational discernment. Edith Stein writes, “The strong individual differences existing within both sexes must be taken into account. Many women have masculine characteristics just as many men share feminine ones. Consequently, every so-called ‘masculine’ occupation may be exercised by many women as well as many ‘feminine’ occupations by certain men.”²² This flexibility, for Stein, is not an indication of ambiguous sexual categories. Rather, it is an effect of men’s and women’s shared humanity and shared vocation to love. Though masculinity and femininity are non-overlapping identities, shared masculine and feminine *characteristics* among individuals point to the universal call to develop human virtue that transcends male or female categorization. She continues, “Christ embodies the ideal of human perfection ... the masculine and feminine virtues are united and their weaknesses redeemed ... [by imitation of Him] we see in holy men a womanly tenderness and a truly maternal solicitude for the souls entrusted to them while in holy women there is a manly boldness, proficiency, and determination.”²³ Neither men nor women can claim particular virtues as more suitable to their sex because Christ alone is the ultimate standard for holiness.

The Western Tradition has understood humans to be specifically different from other species on the basis of the rational faculty. The equal rationality between man and woman is the basis for their equal freedom. This right entails for both a responsibility to discern his or her gifts, talents, and aptitudes, and thus act virtuously in the family and in the world. The freedom of each individual will necessarily entail

²² Stein, “The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace.” Note that she excludes the priesthood from this generalization.

²³ *Ibid.*

unique discernment, which forms the basis for vocational discovery. This latitude is not license for fathers and mothers to neglect their responsibilities to their family and community in favor of career advancement or status. Rather, freedom affords the human person the opportunity to apply himself best to these responsibilities. Stein clarifies this ordering of priorities when she writes, “[Women’s] professional activity counterbalances the risk of submerging herself all too intimately in another’s life and thereby sacrificing her own; however, an exclusive preoccupation with her professional activity would bring the opposite danger of infidelity toward the feminine vocation” since “there is a limit to such professional activities whenever it jeopardizes domestic life, i.e., the community of life and formation consisting of parents and children.”²⁴ Cardinal Ratzinger clarifies that this warning extends to fathers too when he writes, “[Children] learn to know the face of God inasmuch as they receive a first revelation of it from a father and a mother full of attention in their regard.”²⁵

The Industrial Revolution’s separation of productive labor from the home presents new challenges to both working mothers and fathers—but it also offers an invitation. Indeed, the maternal and paternal care of persons which takes place firstly in the family is needed in every part of society. Women bring particular interpersonal values to the working world and can thereby improve society as an extension of their life-

²⁴ Ibid. Stein holds that mothers ought only to engage in professional work when family needs do not “exact her total energies.” A woman’s family, therefore, has first right to her time and energy before professional work.

²⁵ Ratzinger, “On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World.” Paragraph 13. This closely echoes the Catechism of the Catholic Church which describes how God reveals Himself through parents, “who are in a way the first representatives of God for man.” §239.

nurturing aptitude. The “Trad Wife” need not be the universal model for healthy feminine expression, since women’s life-giving role is not inherently defined by the garden fence. *Some* women are called to live their feminine vocation through work outside the home. The assumption that productive labor in the world is exclusively “man’s domain,” while emotional nurturing in the home is exclusively “woman’s domain” overshadows the complementarity of masculinity and femininity that permeates the human heart. Since both men and women are called to equal virtue, each should live within both the external and interpersonal dimensions of the created order. This allows men and women to each fully participate in their shared mission. American lawyer Erika Bachiochi, who raised her children at home while working part-time as an author and pro-life legal scholar, provides a dose of practical insight. She suggests that husbands and wives respond to the “duty of the moment” together as a single team, informed, but not exclusively determined, by their sexual difference.²⁶ As she correctly notes, spontaneous mutual contribution toward the shared goal of family flourishing follows the long tradition of marriage partnership. For some couples, this partnership might resemble the “Trad” lifestyle. For others, it will not. After all, men and women are not called to holiness by sex alone, but to a vocation as personal as their name.

²⁶ Erika Bachiochi, “The Duty of the Moment: Retooling the Agrarian Model of Work/Home Integration,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* (2024): 110-113.

Who Cares What the Pope Says About Taxes?: Toward a Proper Hermeneutic for Reading Catholic Social Teaching

*Sean Scully**

I. INTRODUCTION

NOBODY KNOWS HOW TO READ Catholic social teaching. At least, that's the impression you would get from the widespread disagreement over how to interpret it. In the 134 years since the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, scholars continue to squabble over the "real" meaning of certain terms and injunctions. Even if they happen to come to an agreement on how the text should be understood, they still struggle to answer the additional question of how *binding* its claims are on the consciences of the faithful. Is every word of every document infallible? Do some claims possess more authority than others? Are there some issues on which one can simply disagree with what the pope teaches? Unfortunately for well-meaning seekers of truth, the answers to all these questions have been obfuscated by wildly varying interpretations that are amplified by public intellectuals desperate to have the pope in their camp.

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These confusing circumstances, however, should not allow us to lose hope in finding instructive value in these documents. Today, we have a renewed incentive to do so. Our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, has made it clear that he took his name with the intention of following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Pope Leo XIII. Expressing a desire to offer “the treasury of [the Church’s] social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence,” Pope Leo XIV has signaled to us that understanding the tradition of the social encyclicals will be key to understanding the magisterium of his pontificate.¹ As I will argue in this paper, the Church’s magisterium provides us with the tools necessary for reading, understanding, and faithfully applying the teachings contained in these encyclicals. In doing so, I will highlight some of the challenges readers encounter when interpreting these texts as well as solutions for overcoming them.

II. MAGISTERIUM: THE POPE’S TEACHING AUTHORITY

A proper understanding of Catholic social teaching ought to begin with a clear view of the authority exercised by the pope in teaching on moral and social questions. To start from the very beginning, the teaching office of the Church, or the magisterium, descends from a commission given by Christ himself. Shortly before his ascension into heaven, Jesus exhorted his apostles to go “and make disciples of all nations... *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded of you.”² Since then, the appointed successors of the apostles have served as custodians of Christ’s teaching, spreading it to new peoples and guiding them in its

¹ Pope Leo XIV, “Address of the Holy Father to the College of Cardinals,” May 10, 2025, The Holy See.

² Matthew 28:19–20, *Revised Standard Version* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1971).

interpretation. In this teaching ministry, St. Peter was given a special role. To this fisherman from Galilee, Christ entrusted the “keys [to] the kingdom,” declaring that whatever he bound “on earth shall be bound in heaven.”³ Upon St. Peter's martyrdom in Rome, the authority of his office was passed down through his successors, from Pope St. Linus all the way to Pope Leo XIV today.

From early on, the exact limits of papal authority were a point of contention among Christians. While the bishop of Rome asserted his power in various ways throughout Church history, the most comprehensive definition of the Petrine office did not arrive until the nineteenth century. Challenged by a number of nationalist and anti-clerical movements springing up around Europe, Pope Pius IX felt it was necessary to firmly define the scope of his power. It was these circumstances that led to the convening of the first Vatican Council, with one of the strongest assertions of papal authority, *Pastor Aeternus*, produced as a result. Its contents, pronounced by an ecumenical council as dogma, bound the faithful to an unambiguous view of the Holy Father's preeminence over the Church.

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to draw a few insights from this document. First, according to the council fathers, the pope has “a primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church of God... [that was] directly promised to the blessed apostle Peter and conferred on him by Christ the lord.”⁴ In other words, the pope is unique among bishops in that he exercises authority not only over his own diocese of Rome, but over the universal Church. Thus, his teachings, unless

³ Matthew 16:19, *Revised Standard Version* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1971).

⁴ First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus*, chap. 1, §1, July 18, 1870.

otherwise noted, apply to all the faithful. Moreover, the pope's authority can be as weighty as it is far-ranging. When moments of theological confusion arise, the pope can make infallible declarations - that is, teachings which are definitive, irreformable, and free from error.⁵ When making such teachings, the council fathers affirmed that "the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter" to guard him from teaching any error or heresy.⁶

Now, it should be clarified that such pronouncements are not made often. The last instance of such a declaration occurred in 1950, when Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption of the Virgin Mary as a dogma of the faith.⁷ Even when the pope pronounces a teaching without invoking his infallibility, his teaching still possesses a great deal of authority. According to *Lumen Gentium*, another conciliar document, a "religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra," or infallibly.⁸ Thus, it is not only infallible declarations which require intellectual assent; encyclicals, homilies, and even speeches given by the pope require a certain kind of obedience from the faithful. To summarize in a sentence: if the pope promulgates a teaching with the intention of instructing the Church on matters of faith and morals (more on this later), the teaching ought to be submitted to.

⁵ Ibid, chap. 4, §9.

⁶ Ibid, chap. 4 §6, §9.

⁷ Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, Apostolic Constitution, November 1, 1950.

⁸ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*], November 21, 1964, no. 25.

This being the case, the documents of Catholic social teaching possess a fairly strong degree of teaching authority. It might appear questionable to the reader how the pope's jurisdiction could encompass the political and economic realm. It is sensible enough, they might concede, that the pope would have supreme authority over matters pertaining to his religion, but what bearing does Catholic doctrine have on fiscal policy or welfare programs?

In response to this objection, the Church would maintain that such an argument draws a false dichotomy between the "moral" and "political" spheres. As we discussed at the beginning of this section, the chief responsibility of the Catholic hierarchy is to promote and defend the Gospel message as passed onto them by Christ. The Gospel, however, is not just a composite of spiritual wisdom. Rather, its testimony of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has all-encompassing implications for how we conduct our lives. Therefore, since the Church was charged with preserving and promoting the Gospel, and since the moral teachings of the Gospel touch on every aspect of life, it follows that the Church, under the leadership of the pope, has the right (and, in many cases, the duty) to promulgate teachings on the political and economic spheres. As Pope Pius XI stated quite clearly, "the deposit of truth that God committed to Us and the grave duty of disseminating and interpreting the whole moral law... bring under and subject to [the Church's] supreme jurisdiction not only social order but economic activities themselves."⁹ Thus, when the title of "vicar of Christ" is attributed to the pope, it is certainly no exaggeration. According to Catholic teaching, the pope holds the highest degree of moral and doctrinal authority of any individual on Earth. The universality of his

⁹ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* [*On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*], May 15, 1931, no. 41.

jurisdiction and the scope of the Gospel's teachings enable him to speak on nearly any issue and, in doing so, bind the consciences of men and women around the world.

If you are reading this paper, you likely already had at least a rough idea that this was the case. Most people currently have a vague idea that the popes are very important, which is exactly why the meaning of their teachings are so hotly contested. If we want to draw anything useful from Catholic social teaching, however, knowing the extent of papal authority is not enough; we must also have a clear understanding of its limitations.

III. THE LIMITS OF PAPAL AUTHORITY

St. Peter's power was not self-endowed. Without Christ, he would have remained a mere fisherman. The authority of all the apostles, you may recall, was derived from Christ's original commission: "go and make disciples of all nations."¹⁰ In this way, the authority of the apostles and their successors is subordinated to the authority of Christ. If their teachings in any way contradict Christ and His word, then their teachings are in error. This encapsulates the first major limitation to the pope's authority: Scripture and Tradition.

When it comes to his teachings, the pope cannot innovate. He is not like the President of the Mormon Church, who can simply declare new "revelations" which upend former doctrines and replace them with new ones. Rather, any doctrinal pronouncement made by the Holy Father must have the Word of God and Sacred Tradition as its

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19, *Revised Standard Version* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1971).

foundation. Pope Benedict XVI expressed this idea eloquently: “The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law. On the contrary: the Pope's ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word. He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God's Word.”¹¹ This very idea was affirmed by Vatican I, with *Pastor Aeternus* likewise declaring that the pope cannot “by his [own] revelation, make known some new doctrine,” but must instead “religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the apostles.”¹² As Catholic teaching makes clear, the pope is the custodian of moral teaching, not its creator.

Operating within the bounds of Scripture and Tradition, popes have another significant limitation on their power. We mentioned earlier that the Roman Pontiff has the authority to comment on virtually any issue the Gospel message touches on. This prerogative, however, has often led to the mistaken belief that any papal statement is binding so long as it does not contradict previous teachings. Ever since Christ exhorted his apostles to “render...to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's,” the Church has understood that there was a sharp distinction between the spiritual sphere and the temporal sphere, with the latter encompassing the political, economic, and social order. Having the transmission of Christ's teachings as their mission, the preeminent concern of the Church has always been God's kingdom on Earth and its sanctification.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass of Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome*, Basilica of St. John Lateran, May 7, 2005.

¹² First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus*, chap. 4, §6, July 18, 1870.

It is for this reason that, as *Pastor Aeternus* lays out, the bishops and popes of the Church only teach authoritatively when speaking on “doctrine[s] concerning faith or morals.”¹³ Although prelates do frequently comment on political, economic, and social matters, their office only grants them binding authority over these issues when their teachings are ordered toward the salvation of souls. *Lumen Gentium* elaborates on this idea by making a distinction between the pope “pronouncing judgment[s] as a private person” versus when he acts in his capacity as “supreme teacher of the universal Church.”¹⁴

As we proceed to discuss Catholic social teaching, it is important to keep this distinction in mind. The Church has the right and the obligation to elucidate the moral and theological principles in play with emerging social and political situations. When determining how to *apply* these principles, however, the Church cannot presume to have any particular expertise over specific political circumstances or economic policies. Over such issues, popes and bishops alike can only express their opinions as “private persons.”

How readers can properly distinguish between these two kinds of judgements will be elaborated upon later in this paper, but for now, we should note that this limitation is explicitly acknowledged several times within the social encyclicals themselves. For example, in *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI stated that the Church has authority not “in matters of [economic] technique for which she is

¹³ The pope, of course, also has ultimate authority when it comes to matters of ecclesiastical governance and disciplines. Outside the governing structure of the Church, however, the pope’s authority is only binding on matters of faith and morals; First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus*, chap. 4, §9, July 18, 1870.

¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 25.

neither suitably equipped nor endowed by office,” but only in things “connected with the moral law.”¹⁵ Again, in *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II made clear that his “analysis [was] not meant to pass definitive judgments” on particular economic circumstances because “this does not fall *per se* within the Magisterium's specific domain.”¹⁶

By now, we have established that reading the documents of Catholic social teaching must be approached with nuance. Not every statement made by the pope should be presumed to be infallible simply because it was said by the pope; some subjects, as we have shown, fall outside of his sphere of authority. With this in mind, we can now turn to the question of how the social encyclicals ought to be read and what they ask of the faithful.

IV. THE FUNCTION OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Initiating the tradition of Catholic social teaching, Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* with the intention of treating the “social questions” of his day “in order that no misapprehension may exist as to the principles which truth and justice dictate for [their] settlement.”¹⁷ From the very beginning, then, the aim of Catholic social teaching has been to guide the faithful in their approach to emerging social and economic issues by making clear the moral *principles* that apply to them. At their best, the social encyclicals accomplish this by defining the objectives faithful Catholics ought to strive for as well as the extremes they ought to avoid.

¹⁵ *Quadragesimo Anno*, no. 41.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991, no. 3.

¹⁷ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* [*On the Condition of Labor*], May 15, 1891, no. 2.

In this way, Catholic social teaching is distinct from other doctrinal pronouncements made by the hierarchy. In theological matters such as Christology or ecclesiology, the pope's pronouncements will have an unambiguous and immutable degree of authority. Contemporary moral issues such as abortion and IVF can also be dealt with definitively through the Holy Father's ability to promulgate doctrines on morality. The political and economic problems treated by the social encyclicals, however, involve the *application* of theological and moral principles to concrete circumstances. How these principles are applied is usually contingent upon various political and economic factors that the pope, in his capacity as pontiff, has no particular competence in.

For example, in *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis cites the Genesis account of Creation to emphasize the moral imperative to care for creation. As members of the Church, faithful Catholics may not dispute this principle as outlined by the Holy Father. He goes on, however, to critique the proliferation of air conditioners on the grounds that they harm the environment.¹⁸ Yet, as should be readily apparent, the environmental impact of air conditioners is not a question of faith and morals, but climate science. Furthermore, determining whether the regulation of air conditioners is worth the economic impact it would cause requires an economic assessment that cannot be resolved by moral or theological reasoning alone. As such, although the moral principle of environmental stewardship is one that Catholics must assent to, the faithful are not likewise obligated to assent to Pope Francis' assessment of contingent scientific and economic facts.

The differing levels of authoritative weight these claims carry can be difficult to discern. As a rule of thumb, when evaluating the

¹⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, May 24, 2015, no. 55.

propositions of Catholic social teaching, ask whether a statement concerns a theological or moral principle directly rooted in Scripture or Tradition. If it pertains instead to the prudential application of such a principle (such as a policy proposal or an empirical claim), it deserves respectful consideration but not uncritical acceptance. Prelates, by virtue of their office, are not all-knowing when it comes to the particular circumstances of political, economic, or social situations. As such, there are many instances in which a sound moral principle can be inappropriately applied because of an incorrect understanding of the relevant facts.

The Church delegates a fairly high level of freedom to the laity in the application of the principles offered to them. As Pope Paul VI articulated, “lay people must consider it their task to improve the temporal order. While the hierarchy has the role of teaching and authoritatively interpreting the moral laws and precepts that apply in this matter, the laity have the duty of using their own initiative and taking action in this area—without waiting passively for directives and precepts from others.”¹⁹

Some excerpts within Catholic social teaching seem to run counter to this conclusion. In *Quadragesimo Anno*’s treatment of labor relations, for example, Pope Pius XI prescribes a very specific, syndicalist solution.²⁰ Yet, as we have covered, such a claim is contingent on several economic and political facts that the pope does not have the authority to teach definitively on. Thus, as we read through the pages of these social encyclicals, we must take a discerning approach by

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* [*On the Development of Peoples*], March 26, 1967, no. 81.

²⁰ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, no. 92.

asking ourselves what we are bound to accept and what we are called to seriously consider as a recommendation. Pope John Paul II beautifully summarizes this approach in a statement worth quoting in full: “[t]he Church has no [economic] models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another. For such a task the Church offers her social teaching as an *indispensable and ideal orientation*.”²¹ In approaching social doctrine, then, the laity must be respectful of doctrine yet attentive to prudential considerations and the disagreements they may produce.

V. CONCLUSION

If I am correct in my interpretation, then there is no *one* economic system, no *one* political system that can definitively be called Catholic. Therefore, when faithful Catholics advance a particular policy, their burden of proof should not be that their proposal is *the* policy of the Catholic Church but rather that it is *compatible* with its teachings. The role of the social encyclicals, then, is not to dictate precise solutions, but to define the moral objectives Catholics ought to strive for in the political and economic realm as well as the extremes they ought to avoid. As Pope Leo XIV begins to publish his own social encyclicals, we should bear in mind that they should not be weaponized against fellow Catholics who happen to disagree on political or social matters. As our Holy Father himself recommended, we should understand social “[d]octrine, ... as a serious, serene and rigorous discourse [that]

²¹ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 43.

aims to teach us primarily how to approach problems and, even more importantly, how to approach people.”²²

²² Leo XIV, *Address on the Anniversary of Centesimus Annus*, May 17, 2025.

After Civic Virtue: Contemporary Pluralism's Failure, the State, and Ordered Bureaucracy

*Stephen Wiecek**

IT IS AN UNPLEASANT PART of history, “when corruption begins to prevail, when degeneracy marks the manners of the people, and weakens the sinews of the state.” If this should ever become the deplorable situation of the United States, let some unborn historians, in a far distant day, detail the lapse, and hold up the contrast between a simple, Virtuous, and free people, and a degenerate, servile race of beings, corrupted by wealth, effeminated by luxury, impoverished by licentiousness, and become the *automatons* of intoxicated ambition.

-Mercy Otis Warren (1805)

Contemporary pluralism sows the seeds of its own destruction. Pluralism creates bureaucratic individualism, a fusion of individual and collective tyranny, which destroys the very moral-cultural system that pluralism relies upon. To restore the common good and the ideals of the American nation, the virtue ethics tradition must be resurrected.

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Political action is necessary to create the social conditions for virtue ethics to re-emerge. The Founding Era civic virtue tradition is inadequately prepared to protect the inalienable rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Ordering the state and its administrative apparatus towards a substantive moral end will create the conditions for the common good and beget the completion of the American project.

Novak’s Contemporary Pluralism and its Failure

In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Michael Novak defends the pluralistic order of Democratic Capitalism. He argues that traditionalist and socialist views of society impose a unitary order that is not fit for modernity. Pluralism in politics, economics, and culture is ideal. It creates the greatest freedom, liberty, and human flourishing of all other organizational modes.

In the political system, pluralism manifests itself as less rigid than a “specification of ends and means” but more substantive than simple “interest-group pluralism.”¹ The state’s end is not a *telos* but a practice: “One must pledge only to respect the practical principles of the Constitution. The Constitution itself exemplifies a practical, rather than a creedal, vision of the good society.” American pluralism’s end is a “unity of practice, diversity in belief.”² It springs forth from a “multiplicity of motives, incentives, presuppositions, and purposes.”³ Novak’s pluralism is a vague, practical good towards which all can strive and is undergirded by conflicting desires, notions, and incentives.

¹ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, (Lanham, New York: Madison Books, 1991), 66.

² Ibid, 54.

³ Ibid, 69.

Pluralism is reinforced by Christianity and its influence. According to Novak, the Christian and Jewish faiths hold the individual conscience sacred. The individual must freely choose religious belief. The democratic-capitalist system, though requiring religion as an anchor, cannot inculcate religion within its inhabitants.

Novak relies on his moral-cultural system to defend this pluralism. Pluralism relies on Judeo-Christian theological underpinnings to maintain its legitimacy. Yet the moral-cultural sphere is unable to impose such a substantive morality. Nevertheless, it is the spreading of immorality which threatens the very stability of pluralism and the moral-cultural system. As I have argued elsewhere, there does not seem to be a theory of reversing cultural decline in Novak's political economy other than helplessly handwaving towards "civil society."⁴

Novak asserts that democratic capitalism ostensibly transcends the standard means-ends distinction inherent in most societies. Democratic capitalism can survive, according to Novak, without a *telos*, but rather a consensus of practice. This is not the case. Even taking Novak's claims to be true about the "unity of practice, diversity in belief," democratic capitalism's pluralism is self-undermining and unstable.

⁴ Stephen Wiecek, "The Postliberal Class War: The Revised Postliberal Governance Model," (Politics Honors Thesis, University of Virginia, 2025), 20-26.

Coevolution: Discourse and Social Context

Alasdair MacIntyre's description of pluralism is similar to Novak's, although the implications diverge. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that moral discourse has utterly collapsed. Through a dialogic relationship between material transformations of the world, and the history of moral utterance, the tradition of virtue ethics has been relegated. Less suitable moral frameworks, such as the Kantian, Weberian, Lockean, and Utilitarian traditions have emerged. These philosophies terminate in interminable moral disagreement. In contemporary discourse, individualistic natural rights are frequently pitted against collectivistic utilitarian arguments. There are no ways to rationally resolve these conflicts between inalienable rights and utility. The result of this moral dialectic is called *Emotivism*. Emotivism is the philosophical theory (and state of moral discourse) that "all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude...insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character."⁵

Emotivism is both a theory proposed by some philosophers (primarily relativists), and a state of discourse. Participants in emotivism regard morality as the competition between conflicting personal wills. Individuals are often unaware of their participation, making its presence particularly insidious.

Emotivism is a discursal force. Through this force, individuals understand themselves in the arc of moral history. Emotivism also

⁵ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 12.

evolves alongside a distinct sociology.⁶ Moral discourse coevolves with social history, which is more concrete and material.

Certain moralities justify new social roles. The contemporary social realm consists of unique and hegemonic roles, like the therapist, manager, and aesthete. The “Manager” (and managerial bureaucracy) thrives upon the inscrutability of ends but the maximal efficiency of means. Managers are not allowed to deliberate upon ends, only to minimize or maximize means. This role minimizes the moral conscience of the self, especially fit to an age where interminable moral debate must be closely regulated. The libertine choices of the individualistic self must be closely hemmed by the equally arbitrary imposition of managerial fiat.

MacIntyre introduces the concept of Bureaucratic Individualism to explain this phenomenon. Modern society’s debates are:

often staged in terms of supposed opposition between individualism and collectivism...On one side there appear the self-defined protagonists of individual liberty, and on the other the self-defined protagonists of planning and regulation, of the goods which are available through bureaucratic organization. But in fact what is crucial is that on which the contending parties agree, namely that there are only two alternative modes of social life open to us, one in which the free and arbitrary choices of individuals are sovereign and one in which the bureaucracy is sovereign, precisely so that it may limit the free and arbitrary choices of

⁶ Ibid, 115.

individuals...the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interests...Thus the society in which we live is one in which bureaucracy and individualism are partners as well as antagonists.⁷

The bureaucracy and the “individual” are partners, deracinating the embedded, relational self. Individual “rights” must be wantonly asserted, and equally capricious bureaucratic statutes must be counter-asserted to prevent social anarchy. This vicious cycle begotten from discursal interaction and delivered into social reality is bureaucratic individualism.

Bureaucratic individualism destroys Novak’s moral-cultural system (civil society) and leads to Tocquevillian-esque *soft despotism*. Such soft despotism “covers the whole of social life with a network of petty, complicated rules that are both minute and uniform, through which even men of the greatest originality...cannot force their heads above...It does not break men’s will, but softens, bends,... enervates, stifles, and stultifies so much that in the end each nation is no more than a flock of timid, hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd.”⁸ However, if Tocqueville saw such a force expanding forth from the state, such a tyranny may well originate from the whole of the managerial apparatus, private or public.

⁷ Ibid, 34-35.

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, J. P. Mayer, and George Lawrence, *Democracy in America* (New York, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 692.

Such a soft despotism would constitute the end of anything resembling the democratic capitalism espoused by Novak. Pluralism, which institutionalizes the emotivism that engenders bureaucratic individualism, creates the very seeds of its own destruction.

Towards an Ordered State

Novak and other classical liberals generally speak favorably about limiting the government as a mode of protecting individual liberty to pursue virtue.⁹ By preventing arbitrary state power, the individual can be free to live their version of the “good life.” We can’t force people to be virtuous after all! The virtue ethics tradition must compete in the free marketplace of ideas to re-establish dominance.

If MacIntyre’s diagnosis is true, such reasoning is faulty and naive. While the revival of virtue ethics as a discursive phenomenon plays an important role in reordering the state, so are political and economic transformations. It was the “historical process” whereby production moved outside the household that decimated the narrative unity of medieval human life embedded within community.¹⁰ Deprived of its background social context, the discourse of the virtues became window dressing on a society largely devoid of relational selves. Conversely, a restoration of the virtues will accompany a tremendous political and economic re-embedding, one which MacIntyre is not himself willing to embark upon.¹¹

⁹ Novak, 186.

¹⁰ MacIntyre, 228.

¹¹ Ibid, 255.

Virtue cannot be disintegrated from the political authority ordering its citizens towards a substantive end. The whole conception of a single virtuous life presupposes a flourishing communal life—the *commune bonum* (common good). The common good is the unitary “flourishing of a well-ordered political community” within which all members may participate.¹² In practical terms the political community thrives by encouraging “moral rule, well-regulated family life, respect for religion and justice, the moderation and fair imposing of public taxes, the progress of arts and of trade, the abundant yield of the land—through everything, in fact, that makes the citizens better and happier.”¹³ Virtues are embedded within this rich social life by integrating themselves with the ultimate end of the common good. A society without a *telos* is a society without purpose, justice, or goodness.¹⁴

To reinsert the virtues into moral discourse requires not only discursal reassertion but political, economic, and social reassertion. It requires a state willing and able to assert a substantive good and a socioeconomic order capable of sustaining virtue.

The “Partial Restoration” of Republican Virtue

Some contemporary theorists, like Dr. Adam White, argue for a return to republican or “civic virtue” to protect the public interest (or common good).¹⁵ Free governments are only fit for moral men. We

¹² Adrian Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism* (Medford: Polity Press, 2022). Vermeule echoes Aristotle’s *Politics* with this formulation.

¹³ Pope Leo XII, Papal Encyclical on Capital and Labor, *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891, §32.

¹⁴ MacIntyre, 232.

¹⁵ Adam White, “A Republic, If We Can Keep It,” The American Enterprise Institute, February 4, 2020.

must cultivate virtue as citizens, such as “civility,” to ensure free discourse. Republican virtue is the core of the American Founding, contained within writings like the Federalist papers to which we must return. The President must exercise civic virtue when he faithfully executes the law. Judges must use virtue when they strike down laws. Congress must patiently deliberate, persuade, and reach consensus. The people themselves must cast aside their passions in pursuit of higher virtue. All must be trusted to deny their passions and act in accordance with virtue.

However, such civic virtue, as MacIntyre painstakingly explains, is at best, a “partial restoration” of the true Aristotelian virtue ethics tradition. Civic virtue’s history flows through the egalitarian “corporate ethos” of Renaissance Italy.¹⁶ The tradition is often defined in terms of equality. Egalitarianism paved the way for the civic virtues of liberty, equality, and fraternity of the Jacobin French Revolution. The tradition’s most successful proponent, however, was the American Founding.

The founding generation’s ideology, although being quite heterogeneous, established a country to protect the inalienable rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” rights embedded within the common good. Republican virtue played a large role in establishing and sustaining the young republic. Mercy Otis Warren’s *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805), attests to republican virtue’s key role in animating the American Revolution. The Federalists and Anti-federalists fiercely debate the merits of relying upon virtue in governance. George Washington makes several mentions of virtue in his famous *Farewell Address* (1796).

¹⁶ MacIntyre, 237.

Much of the founding era thought centered around virtue, but not the *virtues*.

Civic Virtue errs like Stoicism

Republican virtue can be related by philosophical analogy to Stoicism. Much like the erroneous doctrines of Stoicism, the republican virtue mistakes virtue as an end rather than a means. Republican virtue “makes virtue primary and the virtues secondary.”¹⁷

MacIntyre articulates in great detail how virtue ethics disintegrated and was replaced by Stoicism with the emergence of empire.¹⁸ As the Macedonian and later Roman Empires dominated territories which were once lands of shared common goods, a deepening conflict emerged between the private and public good. To do good for oneself was disintegrated from the flourishing of the empire. The nature of political and economic order shaped the course of moral discourse. Stoicism represented a disintegrated view of virtue, shaped by social history.

According to MacIntyre, however, the feudal-medieval order, with philosophers like Aquinas, managed to resurrect virtue ethics. Feudalism once again allowed communities to be ordered towards a common flourishing. Jesuit political philosopher Giovanni Botero would describe this triptych as “peace, abundance, and justice.”¹⁹ Embedded within a web of complex social relationships between

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ MacIntyre, 168-171.

¹⁹ Botero, Giovanni, *Botero: The Reason of State*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 71.

ecclesiastical and temporal power, the entire kingdom oriented the self towards shared communal (and spiritual) ends.²⁰

The medieval resurrection of virtue ethics implies that a new formulation of the virtues is possible. America's own stoic, civic virtue tradition steadily unraveled itself in successive generations, playing handmaiden to the bureaucratic tyranny besetting the American project. A new formulation, much like Aquinas's formulation, can revive the virtue ethics tradition and restore the goals of the founding.

New Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Administration

The modern state requires bureaucracy. If virtue ethics is to be reasserted by the modern state, then accommodating the concept of bureaucracy and administration within the tradition is key.

Bureaucracy, according to some, is an aberration of both America's founding principles, self-governance, and of Aristotle's vision of the polity. They believe this mode of governance spawns from bad ideas and is almost entirely destructive to the common good. If only Americans simply rejected this institution, then the natural order would be restored! Whether administration is compatible with the common good is of great importance.

Bureaucracy is a material fact of modern life and thus ought to be accepted and ordered towards the common good. It cannot simply be rejected and abolished. Theodore Lowi, in *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*, convincingly argues that *administration* (bureaucracy) is the historical result of capitalism. Capitalism's early

²⁰ MacIntyre, 172.

proponents never managed nor desired to integrate administration into capitalist public philosophy.²¹ Administration emerged to clean up the “flotsam and jetsam” created by capitalism’s externalities but also to manage its own firms.²² As Julius Krein argues, managerialism (bureaucracy) emerged from the large-scale accumulation of capital and the logic of profit maximization.²³ Bureaucracy exists as a result of largely unalterable material conditions; it cannot be destroyed by winning some phantom “war of ideas.”

Bureaucracy must play a role in the new state which aims to create the socioeconomic conditions for new virtue ethics. Bureaucracy reflects the vision of society towards which it is ordered. It makes modernity legible, imposing order upon the infinitely complex phenomenon of social life.²⁴ Adrian Vermeule in *Common Good Constitutionalism*, arguing from classical Roman law, contends that bureaucracy, rightly ordered, is the living voice of the law.²⁵ Much like the urban *praetors* of Rome who made specific the general *ius civile* (Roman civil law), so too does the contemporary administrative state make specific the general laws of the legislator. By making laws more specific in particularly liberal ways, liberal bureaucracy reflects a liberal, autonomous vision of society. *Ordered bureaucracy*, contrary to liberal bureaucracy, directs social life towards the common good. It specifies laws, understanding its fundamental embeddedness and contingency upon the common good. Instead of trying to “drown the administrative state in a bathtub”

²¹ Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²³ Julius Krein, “James Burnham’s Managerial Elite,” *American Affairs* I, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 126–51.

²⁴ Lowi, 22.

²⁵ Vermeule, 136-137.

as some political commentators would entreat, the administrative state must be ordered towards a substantive good necessary to revive the virtues.

Bureaucratic individualism's tyranny derives primarily from its systematic "disembedding" of the person from social roles. Ordered bureaucracy aims to reverse this disintegration. Rather than taking the individualistic self as the unit of society and aiming to maximize autonomy, economic liberty, or any other secondary good, ordered bureaucracy views the self as embedded within a socioeconomic order oriented towards the non-excludable common flourishing of all. Ordered bureaucracy has categorically different ends than bureaucratic individualism.

Virtues create true freedom as the self is oriented towards true justice and happiness. Ironically, by ordering the state and bureaucracy towards the common good, the government may be more limited. Subsidiarity would prevail, not only juridically, as Vermeule argues, but also socially.²⁶ A return to virtue ethics would reduce the necessity of bureaucratic control. It would re-embed individuals such that less intermediation would be necessary. MacIntyre says, "it is...difficult to envisage the exaltation of bureaucratic expertise in any culture in which...the moral virtues [are] firmly established."²⁷ A world of less bureaucratic intermediation is one where the moral virtues reign supreme.

²⁶ Ibid, 154-161.

²⁷ MacIntyre, 155.

Towards American Virtue Ethics

States are renewed by returning them to their core, founding principles. Although I have critiqued the American Founding's reliance on civic virtue, it recognizes the fundamental human dignity of the person and its embeddedness within the dictates of the common good. The American Founding contains the seeds for a new virtue ethics capable of directing man fully towards that dignity.

The founders' ultimate aim was true. Similar to Botero's "peace, abundance, and justice," they aimed to protect the inalienable rights of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."²⁸ The founding tradition provides the framework through which the ideals of the American Revolution, true justice and national happiness, can be achieved.

A new virtue ethics lies within our grasp! However, it will not be achieved by clinging to the theories of idealistic pluralism or longing for neo-libertarian, sovereign city-states. This new tradition will arise from statecraft, which aims to reorder the political, economic, and social order towards the common good. Around this moral order a new tradition of the virtues can evolve and flourish. A politics of American Virtue Ethics may finally bring to fruition the sacred promises of the American Revolution.

²⁸ When one considers that by "peace" Botero meant freedom from violence by internal and external threats, "life" seems quite similarly ordered and placed. The other ends of the American and Botero's medieval state have similar parallels though it goes far beyond the scope of this essay to expound them all.