

# Twenty Years of Interpreting *Centesimus Annus* On The Economy

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Pope John Paul II's social encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (*CA*) was published in 1991, and one of its key tasks was to propose a Christian vision of the economy in the aftermath of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the end of Cold War conflicts in the Third World. In the intervening twenty years, much has changed in the global economy. The process of globalization, already well underway in 1991, has accelerated. Financial crises erupted in Mexico, East Asia, and Russia, hampering efforts at economic development and threatening to spread throughout the global economy. China and India have brought the largest number of people out of poverty in human history through market-friendly reforms. Beginning in 2007, a global financial crisis began that shook the world economy to its core. Just as countries began to recover in 2010, crisis arose again over the ability of European nations such as Greece, Ireland, and Portugal to repay their debts, and in 2011 the ability of the United States itself to repay its debts came into question; this ongoing crisis has threatened the monetary union of Europe and the continued viability of government entitlements in many countries. Despite these significant changes in the global economy, *CA* continues to be a relevant guide for Christian discipleship in economic life through its distinctive insights on the role of the state in the economy, the relevance of ethics for economic life, and the necessity of theology for a complete understanding of economic life.

This article presents the main insights of *CA* by discussing the ways in which the encyclical has been interpreted over the past twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, there have been three interpretations of the encyclical. Perhaps the most eager interpreters of the encyclical have been the neoconservatives, who see the encyclical as a qualified endorsement of the free market economy. The second interpretation of the encyclical is that of the progressives, which claims that the encyclical

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<sup>1</sup> This article focuses exclusively on Anglo-American interpretations of the encyclical.

gives a greater role to the state in regulating the economy than is recognized by the neoconservatives, and that the encyclical is largely consistent with earlier social encyclicals as well as the United States bishops' 1986 *Economic Justice for All*. The third interpretation is, for lack of a better term, communitarian,<sup>2</sup> arguing that far from endorsing capitalism, *CA* presents a radical redefinition of the "free" economy as centered on gift-giving rather than self-interested exchange. The purpose of this article is not to provide a definitive interpretation of the encyclical, let alone to judge winners and losers in the contest to interpret it. Rather, the purpose is to identify those areas of common ground among the various interpretations as evidence of *CA*'s decisive contributions to the ongoing tradition of Catholic social teaching (CST), and to identify the areas of strongest disagreement as precisely those questions most in need of further discussion for an effective Christian witness in today's economy.

### **The Neoconservative Interpretation**

The first to present a sustained interpretation of the encyclical were the American Catholic neoconservatives. Since the 1970s, the neoconservatives, especially Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel, had criticized CST's failure to fully appreciate the creative energy and wealth-creating potential of the free market economy. The neoconservatives, particularly Novak, had attempted to present a defense of capitalism grounded in Catholic theology and ethics. They interpreted *CA* as Pope John Paul II's recognition of the virtues of the free market along the lines they had been advocating.

The neoconservatives are very clear that they interpret *CA* as an endorsement of capitalism, or at least a certain form of it.<sup>3</sup> The neoconservatives also endorse *CA* as a qualified endorsement of the

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<sup>2</sup> Advocates for this third interpretation, associated most prominently with the American Catholic theological journal *Communio* and its editor David L. Schindler, lack a shared identifying term such as "neoconservative" or "progressive." I have chosen "communitarian" both because of its linguistic connection to *Communio* and because the vision proposed by these writers could easily be classified as a theological form of the political philosophy of communitarianism.

<sup>3</sup> Novak expressed this attitude most clearly: "We are all capitalist now, even the Pope." Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1993) 101. See also Richard John Neuhaus, "An Argument About Human Nature," *A New Worldly Order: John Paul II and Human Freedom*, ed. George Weigel (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1991) 123-24.

American experience of the free market.<sup>4</sup> Given their earlier critiques of the Catholic social tradition, the neoconservatives took pains to emphasize the discontinuity between *CA* and earlier documents, particularly in its acceptance and understanding of the free market.<sup>5</sup>

Turning to specifics, one of the central components of neoconservative economic views decisive to their interpretation of *CA* is the notion of the tripartite division of society. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Novak describes the tripartite system characteristic of what he calls “democratic capitalism”: “a predominantly market economy; a polity respectful of the rights of the individual to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and a system of cultural institutions moved by ideals of liberty and justice for all.”<sup>6</sup> The economic and political spheres strengthen and limit one another, but both also depend on and are limited by the cultural-moral sphere.<sup>7</sup> Looking more specifically at the economy, Novak claims that under democratic capitalism, the democratic state provides the legal framework for the economy as well as basic regulations, and the moral-cultural sphere provides the virtues necessary for a productive economy and places limits on acceptable behavior within the economic sphere.<sup>8</sup> In *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, written after the publication of *CA*, Novak further elaborates that the rationale for the tripartite division of society is to limit the power of political and economic elites, as well as cultural institutions such as the church, in the pursuit of liberty and social justice.<sup>9</sup> The balancing among the three spheres leads to the creative tension in society necessary for social progress.<sup>10</sup>

Although *CA* does not explicitly outline a tripartite view of society, the neoconservatives rightly point to evidence that the encyclical identifies

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<sup>4</sup> Neuhaus, “The Liberalism of John Paul II,” *A Free Society Reader: Principles for the New Millennium*, ed. Michael Novak, William Brailsford, and Cornelis Heesters (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000) 33; Novak, “Tested By Our Own Ideals,” *New Worldly Order*, 139; Robert A. Sirico, C.S.P., “Catholicism’s Developing Social Teaching,” *The Freeman* (Dec 1991): 473; Novak, “Introduction,” *Free Society Reader*, xiv.

<sup>5</sup> George Weigel, *Soul of the World: Notes on the Future of Public Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996) 138; Sirico, “Away from the Zero-Sum View,” *New Worldly Order*, 156; Neuhaus, “Argument About Human Nature,” 124; Peter L. Berger, “No Third Way,” *New Worldly Order*, 62. Berger is a non-Catholic broadly sympathetic with the aims of the Catholic neoconservatives.

<sup>6</sup> Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: American Enterprise Institute, 1982) 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-58.

<sup>9</sup> Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 54-55, 81.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

culture, economy, and politics as three distinct spheres of society. Novak points specifically to paragraph 42,<sup>11</sup> in which John Paul endorses a form of capitalism in which “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 creativity” are recognized within the economic sector, but also in which the economic sector is “circumscribed within a strong juridical framework” and is animated by an ethical and religious core.<sup>12</sup> John Paul outlines the dynamic interactions of these three spheres of society in the section of the encyclical entitled “The State and Culture.” Both the state and socio-cultural groups must place limits on the economy and meet those human needs not met by the economy, and socio-cultural groups such as the family and the church must provide the transcendent values necessary for truly democratic political life.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not Novak was a direct influence on *CA*,<sup>14</sup> the encyclical’s understanding of society shows some striking similarities to his, although as will be explained later, there are also important differences.

Although clearly rooted in earlier CST, *CA*’s account of the political, economic, and cultural institutions of society also represents a major innovation. Earlier CST had divided society into two planes: a temporal plane (including the economy) governed by the state and a spiritual plane of culture and religion.<sup>15</sup> The spiritual plane provides values to animate the temporal, and recognition of the spiritual plane ensures that the state respects human dignity in the temporal plane. In John Paul’s account, on the other hand, cultural and religious institutions are firmly grounded on the same plane as political and economic institutions,<sup>16</sup> even if John Paul is clear that they point toward a dimension of the person that transcends the earthly. The role of the state is also circumscribed and relativized to a greater extent than in the earlier scheme.

The neoconservatives also rightly point out that *CA* gives a certain priority to the cultural sphere of society. According to Avery Dulles,

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1991) 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-52.

<sup>14</sup> Neuhaus and Edward W. Younkins make this claim. Neuhaus, *Doing Well & Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 49; Younkins, “Michael Novak’s Portrait of Democratic Capitalism” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 2 (1999): 9, 19.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (1961) 3-5, 20, 217; Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (1967) 21, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Avery R. Dulles, S.J., “*Centesimus Annus* and the Renewal of Culture,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 2 (1999): 4.

culture takes priority over economics and politics for John Paul because the former sustains the latter.<sup>17</sup> There is certainly abundant evidence for this interpretation. For example, John Paul asserts that “the fundamental error of socialism” was not its political or economic doctrines, but rather was “anthropological in nature,” particularly its denial of the person’s transcendent dignity rooted in the relationship with God,<sup>18</sup> which is above all a matter of culture.<sup>19</sup> “The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace,” according to John Paul, precisely because of the failure to recognize the centrality of culture for human flourishing.<sup>20</sup> The Gospel, which John Paul had earlier claimed is necessary for the correct ordering of political and economic life,<sup>21</sup> is proclaimed and lived primarily in the realm of culture.<sup>22</sup>

A third aspect of the neoconservative interpretation of CA is a focus on the encyclical’s critique of the “social assistance state” and advocacy of “intermediate communities” as appropriate means of meeting human needs.<sup>23</sup> In paragraph 48, John Paul distinguishes the “welfare state,” which legitimately meets human needs, from the “social assistance state,” which “leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending.”<sup>24</sup> “Intermediate communities” have primary responsibility for embodying social solidarity.<sup>25</sup> Although the importance of “intermediate communities” and the principle of subsidiarity have been constant features of CST since its beginning, John Paul provides a stronger critique of the state’s welfare role and a greater prominence to the welfare function of intermediate communities than any earlier social encyclical. The neoconservatives justifiably see this as an instance of their ideas having some influence on the encyclical, having literally written the book on such

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. See also Neuhaus, “Argument About Human Nature,” 125; Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 124.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>23</sup> This aspect of the encyclical is emphasized by Michael S. Joyce, “The Voluntary Society and the Moral Order,” *New Worldly Order*, 97-99; Neuhaus, “Argument About Human Nature,” 127-28; Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 242; Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 125, 163.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 49.

“mediating structures,”<sup>26</sup> although whether the neoconservatives are correct on the precise role John Paul gives to the state in regulating the economy will be discussed in a later section.

One reason both the neoconservatives and John Paul warn against the bureaucratizing effects of an intrusive state is that it hinders the creative initiative necessary for economic development. According to Novak, “It is an affront to human dignity for a social system to repress the human capacity to create, to invent, and to be enterprising.”<sup>27</sup> To an unprecedented degree, *CA* recognizes this capacity. John Paul writes that, “besides the earth, man’s principal resource is *man himself*.” In the modern market economy, “the *role of disciplined and creative human work* and, as an essential part of that work, *initiative and entrepreneurial ability* becomes increasingly evident and decisive.”<sup>28</sup> Novak is therefore correct that creativity is a fundamental aspect of the human person in *CA*.<sup>29</sup> Novak also writes that the free creativity unleashed by the market economy can attain a spontaneous order beneficial to society.<sup>30</sup> John Paul echoes this in his assertion that “the *free market* is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs,”<sup>31</sup> although economic freedom is of value not only because of its efficiency but also as an expression of the transcendent dignity of the person.

## The Progressive Interpretation

Richard John Neuhaus has written, “As with the other great teaching documents of the pontificate of John Paul II, the appearance of *Centesimus Annus* was for most liberal Catholics a nonevent,”<sup>32</sup> yet this is far from the truth, as progressives have provided a second major interpretation of *CA*. Whereas the neoconservative interpretation of *CA* emphasizes the discontinuity between the encyclical and earlier CST, the progressive interpretation of *CA* reads it as largely in continuity

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<sup>26</sup> Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 117.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 32.

<sup>29</sup> Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 117. For a more developed analysis of Novak’s interpretation of creativity in *Centesimus Annus*, see Kari-Shane Davis Zimmerman, “The Role of Human Creativity in the Theological Anthropology of *Centesimus Annus* and Its Implications for Christian Economic Practices” (Diss., Marquette University, 2007), 77-101.

<sup>30</sup> Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 82, 100.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 34.

<sup>32</sup> Neuhaus, “Liberalism,” 29.

with earlier social encyclicals and the U.S. bishops' 1986 document *Economic Justice for All*. The progressive interpretation is in large part, although not entirely, a critical response to the neoconservative interpretation, and claims that the latter provides a too individualistic interpretation of the encyclical and does not adequately consider the role of the state. Although some progressives too easily dismissed neoconservative interpretations of *CA* by presenting a one-sided reading of the encyclical,<sup>33</sup> they have also raised substantive critiques of the neoconservative position.

A key element of the progressive interpretation of *CA* is that the state has a larger role in meeting human needs than is recognized in the neoconservative interpretation. The neoconservatives are not uniformly opposed to a state role in meeting human needs; for example, Novak writes that "Social welfare programs fit the logic of democratic capitalism and have a legitimate claim on it."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, they sometimes sound very much like libertarians, such as when Neuhaus writes that "The theory of the state that is propounded [in *CA*] sometimes sounds very much like what political scientists call the 'night watchman' state or 'umpire' state. That is to say, the state is to make sure that people play fairly in the public arena, it is to keep an eye out for brigands, and, when necessary, adjudicate conflicts over the rules. . . ."<sup>35</sup> In contrast to such a limited view of state responsibility, David Hollenbach points out that *CA* assigns several responsibilities that must be carried out jointly by the state and society.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, John Sniegocki writes that while John Paul draws on the principle of subsidiarity to criticize abuses of the welfare state, this is balanced by the principles

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<sup>33</sup> Richard P. McBrien cites several paragraphs critical of capitalism and encouraging an active role for the government, but does not mention those passages presenting a more nuanced view of capitalism or those critical of the "social assistance state." McBrien, "Capitalists Should Worry About Pope," *National Catholic Reporter* 18 Sept. 1992: 2. Charles K. Wilber baldly asserts that *CA* is in complete continuity with earlier CST, without examining any of the areas where there appears to be clear evidence of development. Wilber, "Argument that the Pope Baptized Capitalism Holds No Water," *National Catholic Reporter* 7 June, 1991: 10. John T. Pawlikowski references several subsequent speeches given by John Paul II to help interpret *CA*, but a nuanced examination of *CA*'s treatments of the topics mentioned in the speeches shows they can be interpreted in a way consistent with the neoconservative interpretation of *CA*. Pawlikowski, "Government and Economic Solidarity: The View from the Catholic Social Encyclicals," *Bridges: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Theology, Philosophy, History, and Science* 7 (2000): 288-91.

<sup>34</sup> Novak, *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 218.

<sup>35</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 248.

<sup>36</sup> David Hollenbach, S.J., "The Pope and Capitalism," *America* 1 June 1991: 591.

of the universal destination of goods, solidarity, and the common good, so that:

... in *Centesimus annus* John Paul assigns the state such tasks as establishing systems of social security, regulating working hours and wages, ensuring worker safety, protecting the environment, preventing monopolies, working to ensure full employment or providing an alternative income to unemployed persons, providing assistance to poor families, and in general “humanizing and guiding development” and “overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sphere.”<sup>37</sup>

Daniel Finn<sup>38</sup> and Hollenbach<sup>39</sup> also claim that the principle of subsidiarity is balanced by solidarity in the encyclical, giving the state an important role in society.

One important task of the state neglected by the neoconservatives but emphasized by progressives is that of protecting economic rights. According to *CA*, one “task of the State is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector.”<sup>40</sup> Both Sniegocki<sup>41</sup> and Finn<sup>42</sup> point out that *CA* clearly affirms the existence of economic rights, whereas Novak denies the existence of such rights because their fulfillment by the state would entail the violation of more basic political and civil rights and would hinder the efficient functioning of the free market. Sniegocki and Finn recognize that according to *CA*, “primary responsibility in this area [i.e., of protecting economic rights] belongs not to the State but to individuals and to the various groups and associations which make up society,” but are also correct to affirm that *CA* gives such rights, and the government’s role in protecting them, a more prominent place than is recognized by neoconservatives such as Novak.

The progressives tend to overstate the role given to the state in *CA*, however. In some cases this overstatement is blatant. In their commentary on paragraph 48 of the encyclical, Edward P. DeBerri and

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<sup>37</sup> John Sniegocki, “The Social Ethics of John Paul II: A Critique of Neoconservative Interpretations,” *Horizons* 33 (2006): 24.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Finn, “John Paul II and the Moral Ecology of Markets,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 669-70; Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus Annus* (*On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*),” *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 2004) 451-52.

<sup>39</sup> Hollenbach, “Christian Social Ethics After the Cold War,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 91-93.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 48.

<sup>41</sup> Sniegocki, “Social Ethics,” 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*,” 461.

James E. Hug rightly point out the responsibilities assigned to the state, but fail to mention John Paul's caveat giving primary responsibility to social associations and his criticism of the social assistance state.<sup>43</sup> Donal Dorr writes that John Paul is not proposing to discontinue the welfare state, but rather to reform it so that it empowers the poor, but does not mention that one of the primary means of reform is to transfer some responsibilities to intermediate communities.<sup>44</sup> More subtly, although Finn and Hollenbach are correct that John Paul presents subsidiarity and solidarity as balancing principles,<sup>45</sup> John Paul also makes it clear that subsidiarity in fact enhances solidarity, since it is precisely "intermediate communities" that "give life to specific networks of solidarity" and "strengthen the social fabric, preventing society from becoming an anonymous and impersonal mass,"<sup>46</sup> which is precisely why such groups have priority over the state in meeting human needs.<sup>47</sup> In other words, intermediate communities and the state must embody solidarity, governed by the principle of subsidiarity.<sup>48</sup>

The progressives also point to criticisms that John Paul makes of contemporary capitalist society, particularly concerning consumerism and the destruction of the environment, that are downplayed in the neoconservative interpretation of *CA*. John Paul warns against consumerism, which he defines as "a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards 'having' rather than 'being', and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself."<sup>49</sup> According to John Paul, those living in the developed world must make changes in their lifestyles so that necessities can be provided for those who are in need in the developing world. Lifestyle changes are also necessary to prevent the destruction of the environment, which John Paul links with consumerism.<sup>50</sup> In his summary of the encyclical, however, Novak does not mention

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<sup>43</sup> Edward P. DeBerri, S.J., and James E. Hug, S.J., *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003) 109.

<sup>44</sup> Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992) 347.

<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Himes and Finn seem to recognize this when they characterize John Paul's critique of the welfare state as a communitarian one. Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., "The New Social Encyclical's Communitarian Vision," *Origins* 21 Aug. 1991: 167; Finn, "Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*," 452.

<sup>48</sup> Russell Hittinger makes this point. Hittinger, "The Pope and the Liberal State," *First Things* Dec. 1992: 36.

<sup>49</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

consumerism or environmental destruction as important themes.<sup>51</sup> Neuhaus explains away these concerns, writing of John Paul's statement on changing lifestyles: "There is nothing in the argument that prepares the reader for it, and there is no follow-through to explain what the Pope means by it. It has, in short, all the appearances of being a throwaway line," "a vestigial rhetorical fragment that somehow wandered into the text and is notable chiefly for its incongruity with the argument that the Pope is otherwise making."<sup>52</sup> Rather than being vestigial, John Paul's warnings against consumerism and environmental destruction are central to the encyclical, and the neoconservatives' failure to grasp them illustrates a weakness in their interpretation of it.

Progressive interpreters of *CA* rightly point out that there is a social dimension to John Paul's understanding of the human person that is missing from the neoconservatives' more individualistic interpretation. For example, the neoconservatives tend to read John Paul's warning against consumerism as a re-articulation of traditional admonitions against the personal vice of greed. It is clear that in John Paul's mind, however, consumerism is a highly social phenomenon, as he suggests that it is a "structure of sin"<sup>53</sup> and a problem pertaining to "the entire socio-cultural system."<sup>54</sup>

The individualistic emphasis of the neoconservatives is also illustrated by their misunderstanding of John Paul's concept of "the subjectivity of society." Neuhaus interprets the subjectivity of society to refer to "the truth that society is composed of persons who are the agents or subjects of human action,"<sup>55</sup> yet in *CA* John Paul refers to the subjectivity of society as something different from the subjectivity of the individual.<sup>56</sup> In fact, it appears that John Paul means, in a nuanced way, precisely what Neuhaus says the subjectivity of society cannot mean: "to attribute to an abstraction a life of its own, as though Society were an agent of action."<sup>57</sup> In *CA*, John Paul closely links the subjectivity of society to the notion of participation, which has a distinctive meaning in his thinking. In his pre-papal philosophical work *The Acting Person*, Karol Wojtyła defines participation

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<sup>51</sup> Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 119-20.

<sup>52</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 224-25.

<sup>53</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 38.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 21-22; see also *idem*, 151.

<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 13.

<sup>57</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 21-22.

as humans acting together in community.<sup>58</sup> When persons act together, the community as a whole can be said to act, in a derivative sense.<sup>59</sup> This understanding of participation lies behind John Paul's notions of structures of sin<sup>60</sup> and the subjectivity of society. Finn is therefore right to criticize the failure of the neoconservatives to recognize that for John Paul, "groups and societies are organic wholes and actually have a life of their own that not only arises out of the self-understanding of their members but reciprocally has an influence on those members' understanding of themselves and their world."<sup>61</sup> Consumerism, according to John Paul, is not only a personal vice, but a problem in the life of society as a whole.

Progressive interpreters of *CA* also criticize the neoconservatives for identifying consumerism as primarily a cultural problem. Neoconservative authors generally agree with George Weigel's assessment that "the Pope seems convinced that consumerism-as-ideology ought to be blamed, not on the market system, but on the moral-cultural system's failures to discipline the market . . ."<sup>62</sup> There is strong textual evidence for this conclusion, as John Paul writes: "These criticisms [of consumerism, environmental destruction, and the breakdown of the family] are directed not so much against an economic system as against an ethical and cultural system."<sup>63</sup> Within the tripartite system, the weakness appears to lie in the cultural sphere. As several progressive interpreters of *CA* have pointed out, however, society is not neatly divided into political, economic, and cultural spheres; for example, giant corporations, which are clearly economic entities, have an enormous influence on the culture through the entertainment media.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Holland, Boston, and London: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1979) 261-71.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-80.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984) 16: "Whenever the Church speaks of situations of sin, or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, she knows and she proclaims that such cases of social sin are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins."

<sup>61</sup> Finn, "Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*," 450-51.

<sup>62</sup> Weigel, "*Centesimus Annus*: The Architecture of Freedom," *Free Society Reader*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 39.

<sup>64</sup> John Langan, S.J., "Ethics, Business, and the Economy," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 113; James E. Hug, S.J., "*Centesimus Annus* – Rescuing the Challenge, Probing the Vision," *Reflections on the Papal Encyclical Centesimus Annus: Contributions from the Center of Concern Staff*, ed. James E. Hug, S.J. (Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 1991) 9. Also see Dulles, "*Centesimus Annus*," 5.

A close reading of the encyclical justifies this progressive critique. Although John Paul identifies the problem of consumerism with the cultural system rather than the economic system, he also writes that “The economy in fact is only one aspect and one dimension of the whole of human activity,” and that the root of consumerism is “not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimension, has been weakened, and ends by limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone.”<sup>65</sup> This passage suggests that rather than seeing the economy and culture as two distinct spheres of society, John Paul sees the economic system (and the political system) as part of a broader, overarching cultural system. Consumerism is the mistake of allowing the part, the economic system, to overtake the whole, the entire cultural system.

Yet it is precisely because, for John Paul, the economic system is itself part of and a product of the cultural system that consumerism cannot be seen as a product of the free market economy, as some progressives suggest. Sniegocki writes that consumerism is “closely linked to the very nature of capitalism,”<sup>66</sup> and John Coleman faults the encyclical for not fully recognizing that “the logic of the market has a built-in tendency toward market imperialism, a tendency to extend its logic where it does not belong.”<sup>67</sup> Yet the notion that phenomena such as consumerism are “built in” to the mechanisms of the market is a reflection of the very materialism for which John Paul faults Marxism.<sup>68</sup> John Paul’s views are highly nuanced: the culture of consumerism takes on concrete form in particular economic institutions and arrangements, and yet at the same time market exchanges themselves and the basic institutions of the free market (“the economic system”) are legitimate and positive.

### **The Communitarian Interpretation**

Like progressive interpreters of *CA*, the encyclical’s communitarian interpreters also deny that there are sharp boundaries between the

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<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 39.

<sup>66</sup> Sniegocki, “Social Ethics,” 26-27. Perhaps “capitalism”, rather than describing an economic system, could be described as a cultural system giving a particular form to the free market economy. Such an understanding would be consistent with John Paul’s criticism of “capitalism”, running through his social encyclicals, as the priority of things over persons.

<sup>67</sup> John A. Coleman, S.J., “*Centesimus Annus*: Who Got the Stronger Penance?” *No Heaven Without Earth*, ed. Johann Baptist Metz and Edward C. Schillebeeckx (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991) xi-xii.

<sup>68</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 41.

cultural and economic spheres. Unlike the progressives, however, the communitarians raise concerns about the role of the church in relation to “the world,” including the economic sphere. The communitarians argue that the end result of the neoconservative understanding of society is an economic sphere governed by an inner logic of profit-maximization that thwarts full human flourishing and that threatens to spill over into other, non-economic, areas of life. This market logic is, at its foundation, based on a faulty understanding of the human person. A proper interpretation of *CA*, according to the communitarians, shows that the moral-cultural sphere, and specifically the church, must not only provide limits for the economic sphere, but must in fact give economic life a concrete form based on a proper understanding of the human person as first of all a being whose existence is a gift from God. This interpretation of *CA* leads at least some communitarians to propose a radical re-visioning of the free economy as an economy of gift.

David Schindler, the most thorough-going communitarian interpreter of *CA* and critic of the neoconservative interpretation, argues that the neoconservative perspective does not give the church an adequate “worldly” mission. In the neoconservative view, according to Schindler, “the Church adds something definite and gratuitous to the world, but only by way of inspiration (privately), and in anticipation of the life to come.”<sup>69</sup> What Schindler means is that the neoconservatives conceive of the political and economic spheres (“the world”) as relatively self-contained and functioning according to their own logic. The church’s public role is to provide moral limits to economic and political life and to provide personal moral inspiration to those engaged in worldly life. This moral inspiration is couched in the language of “public morality,” meaning norms and virtues oriented to the “natural ends” of the political and economic spheres. Schindler claims that this understanding makes the church’s doctrinal and sacramental mission extrinsic to its worldly mission. The church, in Schindler’s view, must give concrete form to political and economic life, a view the neoconservatives reject as sectarian and burdened by a “premature eschatology.”<sup>70</sup> Schindler likens the relationship between the church and the world to marriage, in which the two are united in a new identity without losing their distinctiveness;<sup>71</sup> the neoconservative understanding of this relationship is too contractual, in Schindler’s view, as neither party is fundamentally transformed by the union.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996) 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Schindler's description of the church's relationship to the world, and his critique of the neoconservatives, appears consistent with the earlier analysis showing that in *CA*, John Paul does not see the cultural-moral sphere (including the church) as situated outside the political and economic spheres, but rather as an overarching reality encompassing both the political and economic spheres, the latter of which nevertheless retain a certain autonomy. Schindler also writes that his view of the church helps explain John Paul's insistence that the church's social teaching does not present a "third way" between capitalism and communism or an economic model of its own,<sup>73</sup> precisely because the church's teaching is not a political or economic ideology but rather the proclamation of "the *communio sanctorum*, the sacrament of the trinitarian *communio* revealed in Jesus Christ," which, despite being "unworldly," gives concrete shape to life in the world and proves transformative of all political and economic systems.<sup>74</sup>

An examination of key passages by neoconservative authors shows that Schindler is correct in his assessment that, in the neoconservative view, the church primarily provides extrinsic guidance to an economy operating by its own internal logic. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Novak writes that the market economy operates with a functional rationality of profit-maximizing and efficiency. The market economy is not amoral, however, since economic rationality itself requires certain virtues, such as hard work, self-discipline, and foresight. These virtues are not sufficient for the complete moral life, however, and must be "directed to moral purposes" by sources external to the market.<sup>75</sup> From Schindler's perspective, the key point here is that the virtues of economic life arise from economic rationality, rather than being informed by a broader conception of human moral flourishing; "moral purposes" are imposed from the outside on an already existing set of virtues and practices.

Commenting on the study of economics rather than economic virtues, the neoconservative Samuel Gregg writes that as a theoretical discipline economics is dependent on the notion of *homo economicus*, an abstract representation of the human person as exercising economic rationality by seeking personal satisfaction. Although if *homo economicus* were a real person he or she would resemble a "sociopath," "when a policy is described as economically rational, the implication is that *real* people

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<sup>73</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) 41; John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 43.

<sup>74</sup> Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 9-11.

<sup>75</sup> Novak, *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 180-81.

are assumed to behave in the same manner as *homo economicus* in similar circumstances and to derive satisfaction from the same sources and to the same extent as *homo economicus* does.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, although people do not actually behave like *homo economicus*, within the economic sphere this theoretical construct provides an accurate description of human behavior in the aggregate; it becomes morally problematic, however, if economic logic spreads beyond its proper boundaries. Again, Schindler’s assessment bears out, as Gregg envisions an economic sphere governed by its own autonomous rationality, on which moral purposes are imposed from the outside. In other words, for Gregg and other neo-conservatives, “it is the task of economics in the proper sense to show how best to produce, possess, and exchange things, while it is up to theology, philosophy, and culture to order this production and exchange and these things to a good end, or to give them a moral intention,” a view Schindler ultimately finds problematic and inconsistent with *CA*.<sup>77</sup>

Schindler and other communitarians argue that the liberal free market necessarily implies an inner logic inconsistent with Christian anthropology, despite the claim that the free market is neutral and open to a diversity of moral aims. This inner logic of the free market is based on a faulty and diminished understanding of the human person, and is a central reason for John Paul’s critique of capitalism in *CA*. Both William Cavanaugh and Adrian Walker point out that liberal capitalism is based on a limited notion of human freedom, that of being able to choose absent from restraint, rather than a more robust freedom to achieve life’s ultimate purpose, union with God.<sup>78</sup> Liberal ideology claims that the freedom of the market allows one’s choices to have such a purpose, but, according to Cavanaugh, by making such purposes a matter of choice, liberal ideology makes them arbitrary and a matter of preference. In reality, in the free market the fulfillment of preferences and desires itself becomes the ultimate purpose, leading to a consumerist and hedonist lifestyle and a failure to recognize the unfreedom of those, primarily in the developing world, who make consumption possible.<sup>79</sup> The notion that liberal institutions can be divorced from

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<sup>76</sup> Samuel Gregg, *Economic Thinking for the Theologically Minded* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001) 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> Schindler, “Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism: Toward an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude.” *Wealth, Poverty and Human Destiny*, ed. Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003) 359; see also Adrian Walker, “The Poverty of Liberal Economics,” *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*, 26 n. 10.

<sup>78</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, “The Unfreedom of the Free Market,” *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*, 106-8; Walker, “Poverty,” 21-22.

<sup>79</sup> Cavanaugh, “Unfreedom,” 112-13.

liberal ideology, according to Schindler, is a “finesse” because “this very extrinsic relation [between institutions and ideology], which is taken to guarantee a supposedly ‘empty freedom,’ already embodies a definite, though hidden, conception of human nature and destiny.”<sup>80</sup> The neo-conservatives divide society into three parts to preserve pluralism and avoid “monism,” the imposition of a single ideology on society, but in fact their understanding of the economy already implies a definite understanding of the human person.<sup>81</sup>

Schindler and Walker propose that the understanding of the human person proposed by the neoconservatives, and liberal economics generally, falls short by giving freedom and creativity priority over receptivity. For example, Novak claims that for John Paul, the doctrine that humankind is created in the image of God means that “to be creative is the essential human vocation.”<sup>82</sup> Freedom does not exist for its own sake, but for creativity.<sup>83</sup> According to Schindler, however, although creativity is important, one must first recognize that one’s being is received as a gift from God. This receptivity then gives a specific form to both freedom and creativity “by generously extending to others what has first been given and what we have therefore always-already first received.”<sup>84</sup> Schindler points to paragraph 37 of *CA*: “Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God’s prior and original gift of the things that are.” Schindler proposes Mary’s *fiat* and *magnificat* as the model of personal receptivity, of “a self whose disposition of grateful receiving informs all of its doing, having, and making—a self that recognizes that it is, *strictly*, never the owner of its being and acting.”<sup>85</sup> In his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, John Paul also proposes Mary’s reception of the divine gift as the model of human freedom.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Walker proposes that our receiving personal existence as a gift from God makes freedom possible and orients our freedom toward self-giving communion.<sup>87</sup> Schindler associates the priority of receptivity over creativity to John Paul’s statements, made in the context of consumerism, on the priority of being over having, and

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<sup>80</sup> Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 33-34.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>82</sup> Novak, “Catholic Social Teaching, Markets, and the Poor,” *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*, 64.

<sup>83</sup> Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 117-19; see also Schindler, “Homelessness,” 355-56.

<sup>85</sup> Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 92-93.

<sup>86</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (1987) 37.

<sup>87</sup> Walker, “Poverty,” 29.

claims that the neoconservative anthropology fails to escape dangers such as consumerism.<sup>88</sup>

Like the progressive interpreters of *CA*, Schindler and Walker critique the neoconservatives' failure to recognize the fully social dimension of the problems associated with capitalism, particularly consumerism, although their critique is more theological than that of the progressives. Schindler argues that the personal being we receive as gift is inherently relational, and therefore dependent, primarily through our primordial relationship with God, but also our relationships with other persons.<sup>89</sup> This insight is central to John Paul's anthropology, expressed, for example, in his concepts of "original solitude" and "original unity" in the *Theology of the Body*.<sup>90</sup> In John Paul's thought, culture is something that is received before it is chosen. Schindler argues that this helps explain John Paul's notion of structures of sin, which are distorted cultural institutions that transcend individual responsibility.<sup>91</sup> By giving priority to creativity rather than receptivity, the neoconservatives overly emphasize the voluntary nature of social arrangements and therefore fail to recognize the structural dimension of social disorders such as consumerism, and therefore misinterpret *CA*.<sup>92</sup> Schindler further states that, in its actual history, capitalism has been permeated by a faulty anthropology that ignores receptivity,<sup>93</sup> a claim consistent with the suggestion that for John Paul "capitalism" describes a cultural system of which the economy is only part. Likewise, Walker writes that because capitalism serves as a cultural system and not merely an economic system, the logic of *homo economicus* has encroached beyond the borders of the economic sphere, "cannibalizing" those sources of cultural values meant to put limits on economic rationality.<sup>94</sup>

The communitarians propose that Christians must give a concrete form to economic life different from the economic rationality or economic virtues proposed by the neoconservatives, yet they disagree amongst themselves on what that form should be. Schindler focuses on individual acts of production and exchange, giving three examples

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<sup>88</sup> Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 103-4.

<sup>89</sup> Schindler, "Homelessness," 353-4.

<sup>90</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 146-69.

<sup>91</sup> Schindler, "The Significance of World and Culture for Moral Theology: *Veritatis Splendor* and the 'Nuptial-Sacramental' Nature of the Body," *Communio* 31 (2004): 133.

<sup>92</sup> Schindler, "Homelessness," 390-91.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>94</sup> Walker, "Poverty," 30-31.

of how receptivity can take concrete form in the economy. Schindler's purpose is to show that Christian faith not only provides interior inspiration to economic acts that otherwise follow an already given economic logic, but rather provides a new logic that makes a concrete difference for production and exchange. His first example is that of a mother who prepares a meal "with love"; Schindler argues that the preparation and final product in this case are tangibly different from food preparation which is done merely for profit.<sup>95</sup> In his second example, Schindler compares the health care provided by Mother Teresa to that of a nurse performing his or her duties merely as a means of obtaining a paycheck: "Mother Teresa's very manner of touching the patient, of looking at the patient, of dressing the patient, of arranging the bedding of the patient are all different."<sup>96</sup> Although these first two examples suggest that market exchanges with a profit motive are inherently problematic, his third example is an actual act of market exchange, and responds to Adam Smith's famous statement that bakers bake bread out of self-interest rather than benevolence. Schindler counters that if a baker were truly concerned about making bread that was objectively good for the consumer (in terms of health, taste, etc.), then the act of baking would in fact be concretely different than if the baker were merely concerned with profit alone.<sup>97</sup> Seeking profit is not wrong, but seeking profit must be integrated into the pursuit of the objective good of those one serves; his examples therefore are in line with John Paul's own statement in *CA* that "Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; *other human and moral factors* must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business."<sup>98</sup> One weakness of Schindler's examples is that they are all individual acts of production; he provides no examples of institutional forms of receptivity.<sup>99</sup>

Cavanaugh, on the other hand, provides several examples of institutional enterprises that could be described as embodying a logic of receptivity. In *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, Cavanaugh describes the Mondragón Corporation of Spain, which is engaged in a wide variety of enterprises, such as insurance, financing, manufacturing, and retail sales. At Mondragón, workers democratically take part in the decision-making, and within each cooperative

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<sup>95</sup> Schindler, "Homelessness," 359-60.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-61.

<sup>98</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 35.

<sup>99</sup> Davis Zimmerman, "Role of Human Creativity," 191-94.

they decide on a maximum ratio between the highest and lowest salaries. The internal operating of the corporation is governed by the full flourishing of the people involved, not by narrow economic “rationality.”<sup>100</sup> Cavanaugh also mentions community-supported agriculture, in which a local community of consumers provides support to local farmers. The purpose of these arrangements is to foster relationships between producers and consumers, which are typically eliminated by economic globalization. Closer relationships also encourage higher quality farming methods, and therefore higher quality produce.<sup>101</sup>

Whereas Schindler focuses on individual acts of production and Cavanaugh on enterprises embodying a logic of receptivity, Walker proposes a radical re-structuring of the entire economy. He claims that the economic rationality of the liberal economy is embodied primarily in contractual exchange, and therefore if we are to develop a truly free economy, “contractual exchange cannot be the primary paradigm of economic freedom without *ipso facto* undermining the very economic freedom of which liberalism (wrongly) prides itself on being the sole guarantee among economic systems.”<sup>102</sup> Walker reasons that by its nature, contractual exchange is not ordered to the objective good of the human person since it must remain open to individuals who disagree over such matters. Rather than being neutral or empty, however, the contractual exchange “does have a finality of its own: the mutual satisfaction of self-interest in the form of financial gain. Thus, while claiming to leave freedom open to the objective good of the person, liberal economics surreptitiously weighs it in the direction of self-interest understood as financial gain.”<sup>103</sup> Walker proposes that an economy of gift-giving rather than economic exchange is necessary to truly promote the objective good of the human person, and he suggests that this is in fact what John Paul is proposing as the “free market economy” in *CA*.<sup>104</sup>

Walker’s proposal of a gift economy, however, does not seem to be an accurate interpretation of *CA* and is not a necessary element of the communitarian interpretation of the encyclical. Walker is simply incorrect to suggest that John Paul is proposing something other than

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<sup>100</sup> Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008) 17-18.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87. Kari-Shane Davis Zimmerman also mentions local farmers’ markets as a practice consistent with the economic vision of *CA*. Davis Zimmerman, “Role of Human Creativity,” 203-6.

<sup>102</sup> Walker, “Poverty,” 22-23.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

contractual exchange in his advocacy of the “free market,” as the latter describes as a positive dimension of market mechanisms that they “give central place to the person’s desires and preferences, which, in a contract, meet the desires and preferences of another person.”<sup>105</sup> John Paul also refers to contracts between employers and workers as a normal part of the economy.<sup>106</sup> Walker’s mistake is to conclude that contractual exchanges by necessity have financial gain as their “finality.” Schindler has shown how a producer, while seeking profit, can also have the objective good of the consumer as his or her ultimate aim. A consumer might just as well be motivated by promoting the objective good of family, community, etc. to the extent possible given limited resources. This issue requires more adequate treatment than can be provided here, however. Neither Schindler nor Cavanaugh’s proposals are inconsistent with the basic structures of a market economy understood as based on contractual exchange, and in fact both implicitly depend on them. An important weakness in their proposals is the lack of an account of these broader economic institutions, institutions shared by others who do not subscribe to the Christian vision, which is necessary for a full interpretation of *CA* and a full account of the meaning of the economy in the Christian life. The communitarians in fact seem hesitant to do so, given that it seems necessary to include some notion of freedom not oriented to the full human good proposed by Christian anthropology.

## Conclusion

The common themes and sharp disagreements among the interpretations of *CA* help bring to the fore those areas in need of further discussion within the Catholic community and those areas of greatest concern for Christian discipleship within today’s global economy. Three topics on which John Paul placed great emphasis and over which interpreters of *CA* disagreed vehemently are of particular relevance.

The first is the respective roles of the state and “intermediate communities” in meeting basic human needs. *CA* presents the first sustained critique of the excesses of the welfare state in the tradition of CST and proposes a substantial role for intermediate communities in providing for those basic human needs not met by the market. Neoconservatives and progressives have disagreed over the role of the state in meeting these needs, and this debate continues to have relevance because not

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<sup>105</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* 40.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

only do the needs of many continue to go unmet, but today many nations face a fiscal crisis because of the inability to continue funding welfare state “entitlements.” More and more people are recognizing the need for reforms of social assistance programs or their scaling back, but the exact shape these reforms should take is unclear. Catholic social teaching should retain a vital role in these discussions.

The second topic of continuing relevance is the relationship between culture and market institutions. The progressives and communitarians are right that the culture and the economy cannot be distinguished in the way proposed by the neoconservatives; *CA* proposes that the economic system is only one part of a broader cultural system, and that therefore ills such as consumerism are by their nature social. This recognition, however, makes Christian discipleship in the economy all the harder; consumerism is a social force over which we as individuals have little control, and which continues to shape us despite our best efforts at virtue. Continued discussion is necessary on how to live as Christian disciples hoping to have a transformative impact on the culture and economy.

The third and final way in which *CA* and its interpretations continue to have relevance is the question of theology’s role in understanding economic life. The communitarians propose that the problems with the global capitalist economy are ultimately theological in nature, and they propose that economic life must be based on a theologically informed vision of the human person. Nevertheless, Christians must continue to live and interact with those who do not share their faith, leading the progressives and neoconservatives to agree that Christians must support a public morality of economic life. The question of how to live the distinctive life of a Christian disciple in a pluralist economy continues to be open to debate. The insights of *CA* into these topics and the discussions it has raised demonstrate that, despite the great changes in the global economy since its publication, *Centesimus Annus* continues to have relevance twenty years later.