PUBLIC RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: THE ECONOMIC PASTORAL AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF DEMOCRACY

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E FFECTIVE CONVERSATION between religion and society in the United States requires a sensitivity both to the variety of meaning and to the multiplicity of voices in our culture. The variety of meaning highlights the importance of interpretation and the multiplicity of voices underscores the significance of community in our nation. An appreciation of the relation between interpretation and community necessarily entails connecting hermeneutics and democracy. In this article I explore the interaction between hermeneutics and democracy as a foundation for religious dialogue in the public arena.

Scholarly literature increasingly emphasizes the need for collaboration between religion and society.[1] In that literature the pairing of hermeneutics and democracy contributes to the design of such a collaboration, at least implicitly. For example, in theology David Tracy sketches the contours of a conversing community of interpretation.[2] In sociology Robert Bellah and associates depict the discovery of belief as interpreting tradition through community.[3] And in philosophy Alasdair MacIntyre portrays the virtue of interpreting tradition as a socially embodied argument.[4] My analysis traces a similar strategy in

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[1] See, e.g., *Religion and the Public Good: A Bicentennial Forum*, with a Foreword by John F. Wilson (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ., 1988); Joseph Forcinelli, *The Democratization of Religion in America* (New York: Mellen, 1990); Barbara M. Yarnold, ed., *The Role of Religious Organizations in Social Movements* (New York: Praeger, 1991); Joseph Runzo, ed., *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992); Linell E. Cady, *Religion, Theology, and American Public Life* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1993).

[2] David Tracy, "Particular Classics, Public Religion, and the American Tradition," in Robin W. Lovin, ed., *Religion and American Public Life: Interpretations and Explorations* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 122, 129.

[3] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1985) 65, 152–55.

[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981) 178, 207; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1988) chap. 17, "The Rationality of Tradition"; and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1990) chap. 6, "Aquinas and the Rationality of Tradition."

the pastoral letter on the economy which was published by the American bishops in 1986.[5]

I suggest that in the pastoral letter a sense of hermeneutics and a sense of democracy underlie the dialogue between religion and society with regard to the economy. However, the terms "sense of hermeneutics" and "sense of democracy" do not occur as such. I use these terms to convey the implicit appreciation of the variety of meaning and the multiplicity of voices and the explicit appreciation of interpretation and community that exist in the pastoral letter.

Moreover, the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy can be construed plausibly as indicating the meaning of what appears as an appeal to the imagination. That appeal is related to the central argument of the pastoral letter. From the outset the bishops want to engage conscience in the public arena: "The pursuit of economic justice takes believers into the public arena. . . . We are called to shape a constituency of conscience" (intro. no. 27), including "the conscience of the nation" (no. 86). And the discernment process that shapes conscience in the public arena involves the imagination: "In pursuit of concrete solutions, all members of the Christian community are called to an ever finer discernment of the hurts and opportunities in the world around them, in order to respond to the more pressing needs and thus build up a more just society. This is a communal task calling for dialogue, experimentation, and imagination. It also calls for deep faith and courageous love" (no. 126).

There is a prima facie association, then, between the imagination and the call to shape conscience through dialogue and the action of experimentation. Even though there is no explanation of what the imagination means here, the appeal does not seem to be merely rhetorical. That is evident from the association between the imagination and moral vision. It is significant that the call for an "imaginative vision" (no. 108) encompasses public and Christian dimensions. Under the title of "the need for moral vision" the bishops exhort "a renewed public moral vision," and under the title of "the Christian vision of economic life" they discuss "the Christian moral vision" (nos. 27–29). Hence, imaginative vision seems to bridge the interests of public society and Christian religion.

I do not claim that the bishops deploy an explicit approach to or

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[5] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1986). References to paragraphs in the body of this document will be included in parentheses within the text; references to the paragraphs of the introduction are preceded by "intro."

theory of the imagination. Clearly they do not intend to provide a systematic analysis.[6] However, David Hollenbach argues perceptively that despite the genre of a pastoral letter their argument coherently embodies aspects of moral theory. For example, they combine the liberal commitment to pluralism in society with the communitarian commitment to the common good.[7] My purpose is to explore further aspects of moral theory. In particular, I trace the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy as sustaining effective conversation between religion and society. Also, the appeal to the imagination appears to bridge both sides, both secular and religious, of this conversation. Therefore, the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy can be construed as indicating the meaning, at least in part, of the appeal to the imagination.

More importantly, tracing the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy in the pastoral letter unveils a crucial dynamic that displays the contemporary relevance of its approach. In each sense there are three interactive stages that are equivalent to the practice-theory-practice model of theology. Don S. Browning presents the practice-theory-practice model of theology as a creative interaction between historical experience, the interpretation of faith, and the inspiration of action. First, faith intuitions are always meaningful or theory-laden insofar as they entail subjective commitments shaped by the secular and religious practices of the communities. The narratives and practices of religious traditions constitute the vision that animates, informs, and provides the context for historical and cultural reasoning down the ages: tradition can be described as the outer envelope of practical reason. As historical circumstances vary, the community examines its faith intuitions, interpreting its normative texts

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[6] Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., "The Economic Pastoral Letter Revisited," in John Coleman, S.J., ed., *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 205. For insightful evaluations of the pastoral letter, see, e.g., Thomas M. Gannon, S.J., ed., *The Catholic Challenge to the American Economy* (New York: Macmillan, 1987); John Langan, S.J., "The Pastoral on the Economy: From Drafts to Policy," *TS* 48 (1987) 135–56; and Richard C. Bayer, "Do We Want a Christian Economics? The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter," *TS* 51 (1990) 627–49.

[7] David Hollenbach, "Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1987) 19, 36. Although the collapse of the U.S.S.R. has alleviated the dramatic tension in the debate between liberal capitalism and political socialism, the tension between individualism and the common good remains an important concern. See David Hollenbach, "Christian Social Ethics after the Cold War," *TS* 53 (1992) 75–94; and John Langan, "Personal Responsibility and the Common Good in John Paul II," in Joseph Runzo, ed., *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society* 132–47.

and finding different meanings. Finally, the application of interpreta-
tion, as a new horizon of meaning, involves new types of activity. These
can be described as reconstructed religious meanings and practices.
These new activities are adopted until a new crisis initiates the process
again. Hence, to think and act in new ways requires the practice-
theory-practice interaction as a model for historical interpretation
within religious traditions.[8]

The different phases of the practice-theory-practice model are re-
lated integrally. They are reciprocally dependent and should not be
understood merely as a linear development from one to the other.
Similarly, Hans-Georg Gadamer argues persuasively that our biases
and commitments shape understanding as practice to theory. Also our
concern with application in action, as theory to practice, influences the
interpretative process, codetermining it as a whole from the begin-
ning.[9] My analysis suggests that the interactive stages in the sense of
hermeneutics and the sense of democracy are equivalent to the prac-
tice-theory-practice model of theology. By tracing these parallels I
hope to illumine aspects of moral theory that effectively sustain reli-
gious dialogue in the public arena.

To understand the interactive stages of the sense of hermeneutics
and the sense of democracy it is necessary to identify and explain their
common source in the pastoral letter: the relation among vision, prin-
ciples, and action. The importance of vision is evident in the title of the
concluding section of Chapter 1, "The Need for Moral Vision" (nos.
22–27). Chapter 2 begins by including in this vision a Christian and
public component. Further, this general vision necessarily inspires
"basic moral principles" (intro. no. 12). In Chapter 2, on the Christian
vision, these moral principles are discussed under the title of "Ethical
Norms for Economic Life" (nos. 61–95). Finally, these moral principles
provide the crucial connection between vision and concrete action.
These "moral principles . . . give an overview of the moral vision that
we are trying to share"; but, the bishops continue, "this vision of eco-
nomic life cannot exist in a vacuum; it must be translated into concrete
measures" (intro. no. 19).

[8] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991)
3–11. Browning explains this process as moving "from moments of consolidated practice
to moments of deconstruction to new, tentative reconstructions and consolidations," or as
moving "from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden
practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices" (6–7).

[9] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979) 261, 289.
On practice as the foundation of theory in Christian ethics and doctrine, see Stephen
Happel and James J. Walter, *Conversion and Discipleship: A Christian Foundation for
Ethics and Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 198.

The relations involved in the vision-principles-action cluster is not linear, even though these topics appear sequentially in the pastoral letter. Rather, there is an interaction that appears as consistent with the practice-theory-practice model of theology. By opting for a method that is more biblically sensitive and historically conscious the bishops seem to transcend the deductive approach of classical natural law that employs what Browning calls "the theory-to-practice model of theology."[10] The bishops openly seek a new approach: "The challenge of this pastoral letter is not merely to think differently, but also to act differently" (no. 25). The vision-principles-action interaction represents such an approach. And the structure of this new approach can be traced in the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy. These senses emerge from two clusters of themes that unpack the more general interaction among vision, principles and action. The discussion of faith, doctrine, and eschatology is the first cluster, from which the sense of hermeneutics emerges. The discussion of community, dialogue, and public policy is the second cluster, from which the sense of democracy emerges.

THE SENSE OF HERMENEUTICS

The sense of hermeneutics emerges from the interaction among the themes of faith, doctrine, and eschatology. To trace this sense I begin with the role of religious faith. Although the theme of faith appears in many ways, its most pervasive form is the moral vision that arises from Scripture and tradition.[11]

Religious Faith

The role of faith is crucial: "We are trying to look at economic life through the eyes of faith, applying traditional church teaching to the U.S. economy" (intro. no. 6). The basis of faith's convictions includes the biblical vision and historical experience. These are explored in Chapter 2. First, the bishops refer to the revelation in Genesis: "The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent worth—the sacredness—of human beings." Second, they extol experience: "These convictions have a biblical basis. They are also supported by a long tradition of theological and philosophical reflection and through the reasoned analysis of human experience by contemporary men and women" (no.

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[10] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* 7.

[11] See "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" no. 43, in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1975).

28). Later, using the title "A Living Tradition" the bishops emphasize
the need for both Scripture and experience. There they explain that
reflection upon faith must "be rooted in this biblical vision of the king-
dom and discipleship, but it must also be shaped by the rich and com-
plex tradition of Catholic life and thought" (no. 56).[12]

Experience, then, is indispensable for developing the biblical vision
and the living tradition. This integration is like Browning's vision of
tradition that functions as a context for practical reason.[13] Also, John
E. Thiel argues that such an integration of biblical vision with expe-
rience and reasoned analysis requires the theological imagination.[14]
And Harold Bloom emphasizes the need for experiential creativity as
we engage conversation in the public arena.[15] In the pastoral letter
religious faith is based upon a biblical vision that is inseparable from
the experiences and practices of historical communities. Religious
faith, then, can be considered as oriented to practice. Therefore faith
necessarily entails a process of interpretation to relate biblical vision
with historical experience. Hence the sense of hermeneutics begins to
emerge, especially as faith is interpreted and articulated in doctrine.

Doctrine

What I refer to as the theme of doctrine occurs most frequently in the
pastoral letter in the discussion of moral principles. I have argued that
religious faith is practice-oriented, based upon the connection between
biblical revelation and historical experience. Now I suggest that the
articulation of faith in doctrine is theory-oriented because of the con-
nection between Catholic social teaching[16] and the interpretative pro-
cess that relates moral principles with ethical norms.

Turning to Scripture and to the social teachings of the Church, the
bishops outline six basic moral principles that encapsulate their bib-
lical vision of the dignity of the human person, realized in community
with others (intro. nos. 12–19). These principles promote: human dig-
nity as the criterion for evaluating economic decisions and institu-
tions; community as necessary to realize and protect human dignity;

[12] The expression "living tradition" implies what Gadamer means by participating in
the evolution of tradition (*Truth and Method* 261).

[13] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* 11.

[14] Specifically, he argues that the theologian's imagination interprets the meaningful
relations among Scripture, tradition, and experience; see John E. Thiel, *Imagination and
Authority: Theological Authorship in the Modern Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress,
1991) 214.

[15] Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*
(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) 38–41.

[16] Here "Catholic social teaching" refers mainly to the period beginning with Leo
XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* in 1891.

the right of all to participate in the economic life of society; the special obligation of society to the poor and vulnerable, especially formulated in a fundamental option for the poor; human rights as minimum conditions for life in community; and the moral responsibility of society to enhance human dignity and promote human rights through public and private institutions.

The critical concern here is moving from moral principles, that give an overview of moral vision, to "ethical norms for economic life"—the title of a major section in Chapter 2 (nos. 61–95). And the interpretative process that is involved can be gleaned from the theme of participation that recurs frequently in the section on ethical norms. In particular, the discussion of "justice and participation" (nos. 68–76)[17] provides the most helpful clue about the process of interpretation. To grasp the novel approach here we need to recall the classical discussion of justice: "Catholic social teaching, like much philosophical reflection, distinguishes three dimensions of basic justice: commutative justice, distributive justice, and social justice" (no. 68). In this classical distinction, commutative justice deals with fair exchanges between individuals, distributive justice considers resource allocation in society in terms of persons who are needy, and social justice encourages relations between individuals as productive participants and society.[18]

However, the bishops want to go beyond the classical discussion of justice. To do so they employ a process of interpretation based upon convergence: "the converging demands of these three forms of basic justice" (no. 73). Convergence entails promoting the common good in the option for the poor as the means for upholding human dignity.[19] In this stance each of the classical distinctions of justice is included: the common good as the outcome of social justice; the option for the poor as

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[17] The pastoral letter can be read as promoting justice as participation; see David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace, and Human Rights: American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) chap. 5. Participation should also include investigating the meaning of justice as the communicational activity of society; see Paul Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," in Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike, eds., *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 194.

[18] For an account of how the Catholic social tradition has employed these three concepts of justice as interrelated and mutually limiting, see David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace, and Human Rights* 26–33.

[19] The contribution of convergence adds a deeper meaning to Stephen J. Pope's interpretation of the common good in personalist rather than aggregative fashion; see his "Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor," *TS* 54 (1993) 270. For other accounts of the common good that, e.g., engage the classical debate on liberalism with modern Christian socialism, see Gary J. Dorrien, *Reconstructing the Common Good: Theology and the Social Order* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990).

the outcome of distributive justice; and human dignity as the outcome of commutative justice (nos. 69–71). The bishops go beyond the classical discussion by weaving the strands of justice together in an interpretative process of convergence in order to establish distinctive norms for economic life today.

Articulating the vision of religious faith in ethical norms, or doctrine in the broad sense, entails a shift from being practice-oriented to being theory-oriented because of the process of interpretation that is involved. Insofar as this process is based upon convergence it differs from the classical approach of natural law in two ways. First, convergence relies upon an argument of the fitting.[20] By contrast, in classical natural law there is a more linear reasoning that is constrained by the ontological order of goods.[21] Second, convergence operates in an inductive way. For example, the bishops emphasize "the situation which is proper to their own country" (no. 26). By contrast, in classical natural law guiding principles are applied by a deductive use of logical inference.[22]

The sense of hermeneutics is evident here insofar as the articulation of faith in ethical norms, as doctrine in the broad sense, involves a process of interpretation. Clarifying that process as based upon convergence conveys the theory-oriented nature of this movement from faith to doctrine. Confirmation of the sense of hermeneutics appears in the application of religious faith and doctrine to concrete reality.[23]

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[20] Elsewhere I have discussed the contribution of imagination to convergence as an argument of the fitting; see Gerard Magill, "Imaginative Moral Discernment: Newman on the Tension between Reason and Religion," *Heythrop Journal* 32 (1991) 496–99; and "Moral Imagination in Theological Method and Church Tradition: John Henry Newman," *TS* 53 (1992) 462–63.

[21] This order need not mean a hierarchy of goods but can mean basic goods as equally fundamental; see John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 81–99.

[22] See, e.g., Joseph Boyle, "Natural Law and the Ethics of Traditions," in Robert P. George, ed., *Natural Law Theory: Contemporary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 11–12; and John Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983) 69. For a recent account of the methodological change in Catholic social teaching from the deductive approach of classicism to the more inductive approach of historical consciousness, see Charles E. Curran, "What Catholic Ecclesiology Can Learn from Official Social Teaching," in Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 108–9. Also, for an exploration of this shift in recent papal encyclicals, see Philip Land, S.J., and Peter J. Henriot, S.J., "Toward a New Methodology in Catholic Social Teaching," in Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg, eds., *The Logic of Solidarity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989) 65–74.

[23] Doctrine, as an understanding of faith, must always pay close attention to the

This application entails a movement from theory to practice, from the interpretative process of formulating doctrine to its practical implementation in specific actions. And this movement needs to be grasped within the specific context of the doctrine of eschatology.

Eschatology

What I refer to as the doctrine of eschatology is most evident in the need for "prudential judgments" (intro. no. 20). These judgments allow the moral vision and principles to be translated into concrete measures, as I mentioned earlier.[24] However, this process of implementation must face the reality of sin in the world: "The world is wounded by sin and injustice, in need of conversion and of the transformation that comes when persons enter more deeply into the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ" (no. 60). The bishops adopt the doctrine of eschatology to guide this process. Under the title of "a community of hope" they explain that as the biblical vision "unfolds under the tension between promise and fulfillment" we are "summoned to shape history" (no. 53). But that summons must combine hope and realism: "The quest for economic and social justice will always combine hope and realism" (no. 55).

This combination of hope and realism means that our belief cannot be realized between the times of promise and fulfillment. Therefore believers who seek to live their faith must shape history accordingly. The doctrine of eschatology urges concrete action as "Christians relate religious belief to the realities of everyday life" (no. 21). But those actions must be driven by the hope of biblical vision while rooted in the realism of concrete circumstances. Although these prudential judgments do not have "the same kind of authority" that marks the bishops' "declarations of principle" (intro. no. 20), they are the concrete measures whereby we "enact" the biblical vision "in very different historical and cultural contexts" (no. 56). This enactment means that prudential judgments are necessarily practice-oriented.

Also, these prudential judgments influence one another. In the conclusion of Chapter 3, on concrete issues, the bishops emphasize the interaction between them: "None of the issues we have addressed in

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actual variety of practices; see David S. Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1991) 212–14.

[24] On the relation between principles, church teaching, and prudential judgments in the bishops' earlier pastoral letter on peace, see Dennis P. McCann, *New Experiment in Democracy: The Challenge for American Catholicism* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1987) 107.

this chapter can be dealt with in isolation. They are interconnected, and their resolution requires difficult trade-offs among competing interests and values" (no. 293). This interaction means that the prudential judgments influence the entire process of relating faith, doctrine, and action from the beginning. Here there is a stance akin to Gadamer's hermeneutic theory that any application in action codetermines the interpretative process as a whole from the beginning. Prudential judgments are practice-oriented in two ways: they combine hope and realism to yield concrete measures of action, and they codetermine the whole interpretative process. The sense of hermeneutics that emerges from this theme of eschatology includes both of them.

In sum, the practice-theory-practice model of theology is operative here insofar as the biblical vision of religious faith is articulated in doctrine and enacted in prudential judgments. Faith is practice-oriented, doctrine is theory-oriented, and prudential judgments are practice-oriented. And from this interaction within the faith-doctrine-eschatology cluster the sense of hermeneutics emerges. It emerges from several connections: between biblical vision and historical experience in faith; between church teaching and interpreting principles through convergence in doctrine; and between hope and realism in the prudential judgments of Christian eschatology.

Although the interaction among faith, doctrine, and eschatology never appears explicitly in the pastoral letter, it is suggested clearly in the association that the bishops make among believers, principles, and active citizens: "The pursuit of economic justice takes believers into the public arena, testing the policies of government by the principles of our teaching. We ask you to become more informed and active citizens. . . . We are called to shape a constituency of conscience" (intro. no. 27). The sense of hermeneutics that emerges is oriented toward religious dialogue in the public arena. Hence the call to shape a constituency of conscience includes the conscience of the nation. Also, the relevance of this sense of hermeneutics for religious dialogue in the public arena, especially within an eschatological context, fits well with recent scholarship. For example, Browning encourages religious interpreters to develop a new horizon of meaning by devising tests for the practical adequacy of new meanings.[25] Robin W. Lovin describes the public aspects of religious language as understanding and incorporating the idea that originates in one community into the ideas of another.[26] And Philip Rossi, S.J. argues that the discourse of religious

[25] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* 6.
[26] Robin W. Lovin, "Religion and American Public Life: Three Relationships," in

ethics and public conversation can be advanced by considering human destiny.[27]

Moreover, the concern for conscience in the public arena leads to the role of community in the dialogue between religion and society. In turn, the role of the community involves an understanding of democracy in the process of moral discernment. So, in the call to shape conscience there is an important link between the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy in the pastoral letter.

THE SENSE OF DEMOCRACY

The bishops unreservedly embrace the contribution of believing communities to the discernment process of principles and actions in the public arena. Communal discernment is based on the "long tradition of Catholic social thought, rooted in the Bible" (no. 25). But the bishops also recognize that "Christian communities have the responsibility . . . to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives for action"—that biblical and social tradition is "a living, growing resource that can inspire hope and help shape the future" (no. 26). In other words, traditional teaching and communal discernment are integrally related as we "add our voice to the public debate" (no. 27). Here communities have significant responsibility for discerning principles to guide concrete action in the public arena. This suggests an interaction among community, dialogue, and public policy from which the sense of democracy emerges.

Community

Community is a basic referent in the pastoral letter. That is clearly established in the opening lines of Chapter 2, which explores the vision of religious faith: "The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured" (no. 28). At the end of this chapter the appeal to the imagination that accompanies the vision of faith focuses primarily upon the communal responsibility for discernment. I have explained that all members of the Christian community are called to the process of discernment as a communal task calling for dialogue, experimentation, and imagination. Hence, it is primarily as "a com-

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Robin W. Lovin, ed., *Religion and American Public Life: Interpretations and Explorations* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 23–24.

[27] Philip Rossi, S.J., "Conflict, Community, and Human Destiny: Religious Ethics and the Public Construction of Morality," in Joseph Runzo, ed., *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society* 118.

munity of believers" or as a "believing community" (intro. nos. 8 and 24) that the Church enters the public arena to respond to contemporary concerns.[28]

Focusing upon community engenders the impact of faith upon conscience in the pursuit of justice. It is because the pursuit of economic justice takes believers into the public arena that we are called to shape a constituency of conscience in the nation. This connection between faith and conscience develops a basic theme from the pastoral letter on peace, "the Church: a community of conscience."[29] As a community of conscience the community of faith enters the public arena to shape the conscience of the nation. But community is not only the source that inspires influence in the public arena, it is also the anticipated outcome. As the believing community shapes the nations's conscience it engenders the same hope that nations seek by establishing relations together: "hope for a new form of community among all peoples, one built on dignity, solidarity, and justice" (no. 13). Therefore, the significance of community is twofold. Community constitutes both the religious source of influence and the secular outcome of that influence.

The sense of democracy that emerges from the relation between community and conscience respects both the discernment process of the community of believers and the pluralistic democracy of the public arena. And this interaction between community and conscience bears a striking resemblance to the relation between biblical vision and historical experience from which the sense of hermeneutics emerges. On the one hand, the biblical vision of religious faith clearly includes the believing community. That is evident from the opening paragraph in Chapter 2, on the Christian vision.[30] I have cited the first sentence of this text to explain the emphasis upon the vision of religious faith and the second sentence to convey the focus upon community. On the other hand, the role of historical experience that develops the living tradition of religious faith includes the contribution of conscience. That is evident from the responsibility that is incumbent upon the believing community of conscience, as a religious source of influence, to shape the conscience of the nation, as the secular outcome of that influence.

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[28] For a similar emphasis upon the key role of community in the bishops' pastoral letter on peace, see Todd David Whitmore, "Moral Methodology and Pastoral Responsiveness: The Case of Abortion and the Care of Children," *TS* 54 (1993) 328–30.

[29] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1983) 274.

[30] "The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent worth—the sacredness—of human beings. The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured" (no. 28).

Also, the sense of democracy that emerges here is practice-oriented insofar as the understanding of community is both experiential and historical. I have explained that in the opening paragraph of Chapter 2 the convictions that inspire the community include the reasoned analysis of human experience. Hence experience constitutes an indispensable dimension of the community of conscience as a religious source for influencing the nation. Moreover, I have indicated that in the section on "A Living Tradition" (nos. 56–60) the Christian community is obliged to enact the vision of Scripture and tradition in different historical and cultural contexts. Hence, the historical context delineates the concrete circumstances for using the tradition to influence the conscience of the nation as a secular outcome. However, this understanding of community, both as a religious source for influencing the nation and as the secular outcome of that influence, necessitates dialogue.

Dialogue

From the beginning, the bishops call for "dialogue and the action it might generate," and they reiterate this stance later: "We will listen to other voices in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue" (intro. nos. 3 and 22). Dialogue, then, is indispensable for the development of "common ground," which means "a common culture and a common commitment to moral values" (no. 22).[31] Not surprisingly, then, the participation and solidarity that dialogue requires is a leitmotif in the pastoral letter. When guidelines for action are explored in Chapter 3, the vision for a new community relies openly upon "the principle of social solidarity" and "the principle of participation" (nos. 187–88). Dialogue, through participation and solidarity, are the means to attain what is referred to in the same section as "a revised sense of personal responsibility and commitment" (no. 209). And the affinity between participation and responsibility is crucial for both the religious and the secular community. On the one hand, "members participate in the mission and work of the Church and share, to varying degrees, the responsibility for its institutions and agencies" (no. 339). On the other hand, in society "there are a number of ways to enhance the coopera-

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[31] To recognize the difficulty of achieving a shared language and vision in the development of this common ground the bishops refer to Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart,* and to Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). However, in seeking common ground we need to be attentive to context and develop an ability to talk in myriad vocabularies; see Jeffrey Stout, "On Having a Morality in Common," in Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, eds., *Prospectus for a Common Morality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1993) 215–32.

tive participation" that brings "hope for increasing partnership and strengthening mutual responsibility for economic justice" (no. 297).

In my previous discussion of participation, from which the sense of hermeneutics emerges, I explained that the process of interpretation is based upon convergence. The discussion of participation here, from which the sense of democracy emerges, entails a commitment to dialogue that calls for consensus, "for cooperation and consensus-building among the diverse agents in our economic life" (no. 124).[32] Participation, then, provides a vital connection between the interpretation and dialogue.[33] I also indicated that the bishops relate this communal process of discernment to the imagination. This connection between interpretation and dialogue, including its association with the imagination, fits well with modern scholarship. For example, David Tracy explains that in theology emerging consensus prevails as a claim to truth arising from an arguing community of inquiry and a conversing community of interpretation.[34] Using analogical language Tracy also employs the imagination to hold contending claims in creative tension through conversation that is open to the interpretative transformation of each of the claims.[35] Similarly, Robert N. Bellah and his associates in sociology have confidence in conversations, as characterizing the social imagination, to integrate past traditions with future possibili-

[32] Also we need to be wary lest consensus-building stifle particular turns in social conversation; see Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge Univ., 1989) 61–68. Philip J. Chmielewski argues insightfully that the ordering of society in solidarity and free participation provides a more complete understanding of the parameters of social interaction by interrelating rights and duties. He contrasts that interrelation with the two major political-economical models of socialism, which emphasizes duties, and liberalism, which secures individual rights (*Bettering Our Condition: Work, Workers and Ethics in British and German Economic Thought* [New York: Peter Land, 1992] 228–30).

[33] For an historical study of consensus in the Catholic episcopate, see Richard F. Costigan, S.J., "The Consensus of the Church: Differing Classical Views," *TS* 51 (1990) 25–48. On obtaining consensus by the participation of the laity, especially in theology, see Hans Küng, "Participation of the Laity in Church Leadership and in Church Elections," in Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church* 80–93, also Hans Küng, "Dialogability and Steadfastness: On Two Complementary Virtues," in Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike, eds., *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion* 237–49.

[34] David Tracy, "Particular Classics, Public Religion, and the American Tradition," in Robin W. Lovin, ed., *Religion and American Public Life* 122, 129. This view develops John Courtney Murray's commitment to public conversation in the context of understanding the religion clauses of the U.S. Constitution as articles of peace in a pluralist society; see John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1960) 78.

[35] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 409, 423, 449–53, and *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) 1–27.

ties. This integration includes cultural and personal resources for common life and institutions as patterned ways for living together.[36]

The connection between interpretation and dialogue highlights the interaction between the sense of hermeneutic and the sense of democracy in the pastoral letter. In particular, the discussion on ethical norms in Chapter 3 relates the need for dialogue with the multiplicity of voices. The bishops explain that "the country needs a serious dialogue" because there is "room for diversity of opinion in the Church and in U.S. society on how to protect the human dignity and economic rights of all our brothers and sisters" (no. 84). Similarly, Chapter 4 explains that because policy issues are related to circumstances "which can be interpreted differently," varying opinions "should be expressed in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue" (no. 135).

Furthermore, this connection between interpretation and dialogue predominantly crafts the Church's ethical stance in society in two important ways. First, the "call for collaborative dialogue together with prayerful reflection on Scripture and ethical norms" implies that "the laity must seek to instill a moral and ethical dimension into the public debate" (no. 336). The sense of democracy that emerges from this commitment to collaborative dialogue provides a challenge to change society. Second, as a believing community that influences the secular community it is appropriate for "the Church to become a model of collaboration and participation" (no. 358). The sense of democracy that emerges from this commitment to ecclesial dialogue provides a challenge to change the Church.

Perhaps the most daunting aspect of this twofold challenge to change the Church and society involves "the democratization of decision making" as a protection "against concentration of power and a consequent loss of responsiveness to public need" (no. 233). This citation occurs in the discussion of policy issues in Chapter 3 and it refers to the ownership and control of land especially in farms. However, in light of the need to be a model, it also suggests a relevant strategy for the Church to become a more effective model of participation. Of course, this participatory view of the Church does not mean that the believing community must adopt secular principles of democracy.[37] The bishops shrewdly talk of the democratization of decision making in order to avoid such an implication. Equivalently, John Coleman, S.J.,

[36] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* 27, 275, 283; and *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) 4.

[37] On the role of democratization in the historical development of American Christianity, especially in the early republic, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1989). For a systematic analysis of the meaning of democracy for Christianity, see Alois Muller, ed., *Democratization of the Church* (Concilium Series; New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

refers to an ethos of democracy in order to contrast the participatory nature of dialogue in the Church with the majoritarian rule of secular democracy. He explains that the language of democratization has a theological foundation in the concept of participation as constitutive of the revealed meaning of ecclesial communion. This language does not necessarily apply a secular notion of democracy to the Catholic Church.[38]

The theme of participation in the pastoral letter is the theological foundation for interpretative dialogue in the Church as the means for the democratization of decision making. But democratization requires more than discussion: "The completion of a letter such as this is but the beginning of a long process of education, discussion, and action" (intro. no. 28). In other words, the communal process of interpretative dialogue cannot be separated from education and action. This communal anticipation of meaning, closely aligned to education and action, is an important tenet of hermeneutic theory.[39]

Interpretative dialogue, then, intertwines with the meaning of community. As the sense of hermeneutics emerges from the process of interpretation which is aligned to convergence, so the sense of democracy emerges from their understanding of communal dialogue which is aligned to consensus. Relating interpretation with convergence and dialogue with consensus represents the movement from practice to theory in the practice-theory-practice model of theology. But the movement from practice to theory cannot be separated from the movement back to practice. Therefore dialogue demands action; hence the open commitment to dialogue and action at the beginning of the pastoral letter.

For the bishops, religious dialogue in the public arena requires concrete action. This transition from interpretation to action, from theory to practice, draws an important connection between religious belief and its application. In such a transition Francis Schüssler Fiorenza finds a response to Jürgen Habermas's criticism that moral convictions based upon religious belief are necessarily private and therefore unamenable to public discourse. His response asserts that churches, as religious communities of interpretation, can engage in moral discourse in the public arena. Doing so requires establishing a reflective equilibrium between interpreting their normative traditions and attempt-

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[38] John Coleman, S.J., "Not Democracy but Democratization," in Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church* 228–29, 233–34.

[39] Gadamer, e.g., argues: "The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text . . . proceeds from the communality that binds us to the tradition. But this is contained in our relation to tradition, in the constant process of education" (*Truth and Method* 261).

ing to achieve a discursive consensus on principles of justice as a matter of political and social practice.[40] In a similar fashion, the commitment to dialogue and action in the pastoral letter reveals a crucial connection between justifying and applying moral belief, between the interpretation of principles and their applications to concrete policies.

Public Policy

In this movement from dialogue to action there is a shift from theory to practice that involves establishing public policy. The title of a section in Chapter 3, "Policies and Actions" (nos. 239–47), indicates the revealing association that characterizes this last stage of the practice-theory-practice model of theology. Then in Chapter 5, on the commitment to the future, the purpose of this shift to practice is described clearly as "the need to elaborate policies that will reflect sound ethical principles" (no. 336).

The shift to practice can be complicated: "In focusing on some of the central economic issues and choices in American life in the light of moral principles, we are aware that the movement from principle to policy is complex and difficult and that although moral values are essential in determining public policies, they do not dictate specific solutions"; that is the task of "prudential judgments" that arise when moral principles "interact with empirical data, with historical, social, and political realities" (no. 134). Reaping the harvest of collaborative dialogue, these prudential judgments should be collective formulations of policies, e.g. in the option for the poor: "We also carry out our moral responsibility to assist and empower the poor by working collectively through government to establish just and effective public policies" (no. 189). The collective nature of this shift from moral principle to public policy is emphasized in the title of Chapter 4, "A New American Experiment: Partnership for the Public Good"; hence the bishops there express their desire "to seek creative new partnership and forms of participation in shaping national policies" (no. 316).[41] From this col-

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[40] Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Church as a Community of Interpretation," in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* 67, 74. For a more detailed study of Catholic theology and social ethics in light of the critical social theory of Jürgen Habermas, see Paul Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory: The Discourse of the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990). Lakeland presents the Catholic Church as a community of communicative action, or a "consensus community," where truth is sought through dialogue.

[41] Dialogue between religion and society is necessarily tentative in the sense of the ongoing pursuit of a new American experiment in democracy; see Max L. Stackhouse, "Public Theology and the Future of Democratic Society," in Dieter T. Hessel, ed. *The*

lective approach to public policy the sense of democracy emerges clearly.

However, this collective discernment of policies relies upon prudential judgments. The prudential nature of this discernment indicates its practice-oriented character from a philosophical perspective and, more especially, its eschatological significance from a theological perspective. Previously I explained that the sense of hermeneutics emerges from the practical interpretation of actions that enacts belief by holding hope and realism in eschatological tension. Similarly, the sense of democracy emerges from the collective discernment of policies that implies the same eschatological tension between hope and realism. That tension is suggested at the beginning of Chapter 3, which discusses economic policy issues (referred to in this citation as economic arrangements): "The Church must encourage all reforms that hold out hope of transforming our economic arrangements into a fuller systemic realization of the Christian moral vision" (no. 129). Hope of transformation and concrete realization combine together in eschatological tension.

This eschatological tension highlights the practice-oriented nature of the prudential judgments that collectively discern particular policies. In other words, the believing community through interpretative dialogue moves to policies and action. These policies are practice-oriented not only because they impel the community to action but also because they reshape the community. By collectively discerning these policies the community crafts new forms of participation that create hope for a new form of community built on dignity, solidarity, and justice. The influence that making policy has upon the meaning of community and communal dialogue accords well with hermeneutic theory today. For example, Gadamer argues that practice and solidarity are interactive in the process of dialogue as a requirement of interpretative and practical knowledge.[42] Therefore, the relation among community, dialogue, and public policy is not merely linear in the sense of impelling action. The discernment of policy necessarily contributes to the whole process of interpretation from the beginning. That is the significance of the practice-theory-practice model of theology. In other words, the bishops' concern for participation suggests that shaping public policy codetermines the nature of interpretative

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Church's Public Role: Retrospect and Prospect (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993) 63–83.

[42] In a summary description Gadamer writes: "Practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity. Solidarity, however, is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason" (*Reason in the Age of Science* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1981] 87).

dialogue and the vision of community. From this interaction among community, dialogue, and public policy the sense of democracy emerges.

CONCLUSION

The interaction between hermeneutics and democracy is imperative for religious dialogue in the public arena. If the Catholic Church is to avail itself of the best means for effective conversation between religion and society, then it needs to nurture sensitivity to the variety of meaning and the multiplicity of voices in this nation. That occurs in the pastoral letter on the economy. By tracing the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy in the pastoral letter we discover helpful vocabulary for a more appropriate language to enhance this conversation. The illuminating interplay in the vision-principles-action cluster portrays a fundamental approach that unfolds in two other clusters of themes. From the discussion of the faith-doctrine-eschatology cluster the sense of hermeneutics emerges. From the discussion of the community-dialogue-public policy cluster the sense of democracy emerges.

Moreover, these two senses can be construed as indicating the meaning, at least in part, of the appeal to the imagination in the pastoral letter. There is no explanation of this appeal, but it does not seem to be merely rhetorical. Insofar as imaginative vision openly encompasses both a public and a Christian dimension, it is plausible to understand the appeal to the imagination as a conduit for conversation between religion and society. However, the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy also sustain the same conversation. Therefore, the appeal to the imagination can be interpreted meaningfully as involving the interaction between these two senses.

Also, the clusters of themes in the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy interact in a way that is equivalent to the practice-theory-practice model of theology. This means there is no merely linear progression among the themes. Rather, there is a dynamic interplay so that the particularity of concrete practice necessarily codetermines the whole cluster. On the one hand, the sense of hermeneutics indicates an interpretative process that tries to respect a variety of meaning. In this process religious faith is articulated in ethical principles and norms to ascertain concrete actions by prudential judgments. However, because these actions must witness to the eschatological tension between hope and realism they influence how faith and doctrine interact from the beginning. On the other hand, the sense of democracy indicates a communal process that tries to respect the multiplicity of voices. In this process, the religious community is involved in open dialogue to ascertain public policy by prudential judgments.

However, because public policy must operate within historical reality it influences the meaning of communal dialogue from the beginning.

Finally, the sense of hermeneutics and the sense of democracy interact with one another. That is evident in the way that the interaction among faith, doctrine, and eschatological action parallels the interaction among community, dialogue, and public policy. First, the vision of faith celebrates the central role of the religious community. Then, the interpretative process of articulating faith in doctrine embraces communal dialogue. Finally, the prudential judgments that inspire eschatological action also determine public policy for historical reality.

In the pastoral letter the bishops, perhaps unknowingly, sketch the contours of an exciting terrain for religious dialogue in the public arena. As in most explorations, there is much that remains uncovered. But their sophisticated guidance involves a fascinating approach to hermeneutics and democracy that provides a provocative agenda for many other topics. As health care reform occupies center stage in the current conversation between religion and society, perhaps its complex dilemmas concerning reproductive issues, for example, can benefit from the bishops' approach to hermeneutics and democracy.