

U.S. CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, GENDER, AND ECONOMIC LIVELIHOOD

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[The author analyzes U.S. Catholic perspectives on economic livelihood at the beginnings of the 20th and 21st centuries, giving particular attention to the influence of beliefs and practices surrounding gender. Contemporary Catholic advocacy for worker justice, the author contends, will increase its credibility and efficacy if its fundamental moral commitment—to universal access to economic livelihood—is highlighted, and is more carefully distinguished from disputes about the specific gender relations and family-work arrangements by which livelihood is to be pursued.]

RECENT STUDIES OF LABOR in the United States from the late-19th through the early-20th centuries have shown that the living-wage agenda that flowered during this period did not have to do simply with remuneration for labor, but incorporated influential beliefs about the meanings of work, gender, family, and the social order.¹ Reverberating in the declaration of the workingman's right to a living wage was a complicated set of judgments about what constitutes a good life and how it is to be attained. Popularly understood as pay for honest work, performed in decent conditions, sufficient for a household head to support his homemaking wife and children, the notion of a living wage crystallized a vision of a "good living" adapted to the particular requirements of industrialized

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¹ See, e.g., Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1997); Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky, 1990).

market economy. Resisting contemporaneous trends toward amoral economics, the 19th and 20th-century living-wage agenda retained a traditional, normative understanding of economy's purpose: to ensure access to a material livelihood for all its members. But the living-wage norm recast significantly both the meaning of economic livelihood and the means to it, by incorporating three key elements of modern market culture: its realignment of domestic and public economies, its altered paradigm of men's and women's economic roles, and, especially in the 20th century, its new, consumerist ideal of economic well-being centered on an ever-increasing standard of living.

From the late-19th through the mid-20th centuries, U.S. Catholics found considerable common ground between papal teaching, articulated in the social encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI, and movements for worker justice that focused on the right to a family living wage. What appeared to be a clear overlap between their religious and American loyalties helped propel U.S. scholars such as Msgr. John A. Ryan (1869–1945), Catholic leaders in the union movement, and large numbers of working-class Catholics toward energetic advocacy for wage justice. In truth, the convergence between Catholic economic teaching and the vision of economic livelihood nurtured by U.S. market culture was far from complete, a fact that became increasingly clear during the latter part of the 20th century. In the United States, the decades following 1945 witnessed a brief apogee and then swift decline of the older living-wage agenda, accompanied by severe challenges to the cultural ideology that had supported it. Today, amid a burgeoning global marketplace, renovated movements advocating a living wage are gaining momentum.² U.S. Catholics must again negotiate the commonalities and tensions between their ecclesial teaching and societal struggles for worker justice.

My article aims to contribute to that task by considering U.S. Catholic perspectives on the living wage at selected historical moments over the past century. Consonant with its original, 19th-century impetus, I examine the living-wage agenda in the context of its larger aim, to secure workers and their families a good living in modern market economies. Consonant with insights concerning ideology and power bequeathed by the later-20th century, I approach the question of worker justice attentive to the complex ways that social constructions of race, class, and sex intertwine with economic thought and practice. Our analytic lens will be focused especially on the subject of gender.

² See, e.g., Robert Pollin with Stephanie Luce, *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy* (New York: New Press [distributed by W. W. Norton], 2000). Details concerning the renewed U.S. "National Living Wage movement" of the 1990s can be found at <http://www.livingwagecampaign.org/> (accessed April 2, 2005).

In both its secular and Catholic renderings, the traditional living-wage norm (that is, the living-wage agenda from its 19th-century origins through the mid-20th century) was suffused with gendered perceptions of economy and men's and women's roles within it. Economic and cultural dynamics in the later-20th century have placed major strains on both the living wage's goal of universal economic livelihood, and its gendered means of attaining it, through a division of labor grounded in notions of male-female complementarity. In the face of these currents, Roman Catholic teaching has been stalwart in its defense of economy's obligation to deliver livelihood for all its members. Gender has received a more complicated treatment. On the one hand, official Catholic teaching since John XXIII has embraced women's full social and political equality. On the other hand, especially during the pontificate of John Paul II, a gendered notion of the distinctions between domestic and public economy has persisted, abetted by heightened insistence on an anthropology of male-female difference and complementarity.³

Contemporary Catholic advocacy for worker justice, I contend, ought to distinguish more clearly its fundamental, unwavering claim: that all workers and families deserve access to economic livelihood, from the forms of gender relations and family-work arrangements by which this aim may be pursued and attained. Catholic economic ethics can contribute to a robust Catholic "livelihood agenda" by helping to unsnarl the tangle between our tradition's unvarying support for workers' and families' right to economic livelihood, and contentious and divisive debates—both intramural and societal—regarding gender. These latter debates are critically important in their own right. But these two interwoven strands must be distinguished, and their relative independence clarified, lest conflicts concerning gender undermine efforts to attain the common goal of a decent livelihood for every worker and family.

To this end, Part I considers U.S. secular and Catholic treatments of the

³ Affirmations of women's full social equality in recent papal social teaching include Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963) no. 41; Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (1965) no. 60; Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (1995) nos. 2–6, 8. For simultaneous insistence on the distinctive traits of women, which fit them for a distinct and irreplaceable role in home and family life, see Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima adveniens* (1971) no. 13; Pope John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1981) no. 19; *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988) nos. 18, 29, 31; and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World" (July 31, 2004). English translations of these documents are available at the official Vatican website: www.vatican.va. Michelle Gonzalez offers a lucid comparative analysis of the theological underpinnings of John Paul II's understanding of gender difference, and feminist theological responses, in "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Contemporary Feminist Theology," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 566–95.

living wage in the early-20th century, focusing on how the “family living-wage” agenda configured household and formal waged economies, its assumptions concerning gender roles, and its portrayal of the material minimum required for a satisfactory livelihood. Part II identifies changed conditions in the later-20th century with respect to each of these aspects, and considers their implications for thinking and practices surrounding economic livelihood. Part III looks to the historical legacy and more recent contributions to outline features of a renovated U.S. Catholic portrayal of economic justice and a good living responsive to the complex and variegated needs of 21st-century workers and their families.

LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The “Living Wage” and Livelihood in Modern Markets

From early uses of the phrase in the 19th century, a “living wage” has referred first and foremost to *money* earned through work performed outside the familial household. Trade and wage-earning certainly existed in premodern economies. But in traditional agriculture-based economies, material subsistence—food, shelter, and clothing—was most often attained directly, by the labor of household members who cultivated their own crops, built and maintained dwellings, and produced and repaired clothing and other items necessary for daily living. For modern wage-earners, economic productivity was measured by a paycheck attained through participation in the public workforce. In a historic departure from the centrality of the local household in the economic lives of their parents and grandparents, a vast majority of workers now literally “brought home the bacon”—leaving it to others to raise, slaughter, process, and market the meat. Insofar as scarce finances had to be stretched to cover needs and wants, the household remained a place where “economizing” took place.⁴ But instead of the primary loci for economic production, households were now the beneficiaries and consumers of the goods and services that a worker’s wages purchased and upon which household members relied. This shift accorded a new social status to wage-earning, which became synonymous with economic productivity and financial independence. Households were redescribed as “units of consumption,” and their non-wage earning mem-

⁴ Economizing, or the efficient use of scarce resources in the modern household, was construed as a part of the housewife’s role. Yet, true to a long-standing Western tendency to portray women as simultaneously men’s salvation and their undoing, the sober, “thrifty housewife” image co-existed with a derogatory, equally well-known stereotype: the frivolous, spendthrift wife. Since 1930, one popular icon of both images has been Chic Young’s comic strip heroine “Blondie.”

bers as “economic dependents.”⁵ This clear modern distinction between “productive” (public, wage-earning) and “consuming” (private, unpaid) economic activities was reinforced by the geographic separation of home and workplace, a trend that the 20th-century entrenchment of the suburbs came to reflect quintessentially.

Probably the most potent tactic for legitimating and stabilizing the modern market’s rearrangement of public and domestic economies involved a tried-and-true practice: tethering the new arrangement to corresponding gender norms. The provider role for men was not new to modern market economies, but historians like David Roediger and Lawrence Glickman have shown that previous generations had anchored the ideal of respectable manhood precisely in success at *avoiding* permanent-wage earner status. Well into the late-19th century in the United States and elsewhere, the degradation suffered by workers subject to “wage slavery” was contrasted with the paradigmatic independent entrepreneur, or artisan, who worked for no one but himself. This latter image of “free labor” was widely admired and, whenever possible, emulated.⁶

Given the stark fact that in modern markets, wage earning was the lot of the majority in both working and middle classes, the notion of the living wage rewrote the earlier masculine script. Now the successful adult male was the wage earner who brought home enough money to support his household. “To support” meant, at minimum, providing for such necessities as food, shelter, and clothing. Older aspirations for male economic independence and productivity that had been symbolized by the artisan’s life became focused more narrowly on attaining income levels that would make possible home ownership or the ability to pass on to one’s children

⁵ On the history of the notion of the “unproductive housewife” who became classified as a “dependent” on U.S. census tracts only in the late-19th century, see Nancy Folbre, “The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought,” *Signs* 16:3 (Spring 1991) 463–84; Nancy Folbre and Marjorie Abel, “Women’s Work and Women’s Households: Gender Bias in the U.S. Census,” *Social Research* 56:3 (Autumn, 1989) 545–69.

⁶ Glickman, *A Living Wage* 1–35, 61–77. The racial overtones of this contrast between wage slavery and free labor, as Glickman and Roediger show, were not lost on working-class men, whose struggle for just pay and dignity became tightly linked to a quest to gain and preserve the coveted status of “whiteness.” By the end of the 19th century, living-wage discourse had effected a separation between underpaid and undignified (not uncommonly referred to as “n---r” work), and adequately remunerated jobs wherein laborers enjoyed security and status. Upon the latter was bestowed the mantle of “free labor,” while the former became the focus of campaigns against a more narrowly defined understanding of wage slavery. See also, David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) 43–92; see also Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1998).

savings or purchased opportunities (such as higher education) that increased their chances of realizing a future standard of living better than their parents. “Independent-breadwinner” discourse that associated manhood with supporting one’s family was paired with “dependent-housewife” discourse that valorized women’s role in the home. Thus included was the assumption, tartly formulated by historian Alice Kessler-Harris, that a living wage should enable men to purchase the full-time services of a housewife. For their parts, women who provided for themselves or their families by wage earning deviated from their assigned economic gender script, and were thought to threaten men’s ability to hew to theirs. “Because the living wage idealized a world in which men had the privilege of caring for women and children, it implicitly refused women that privilege. And, because it assumed female dependency, to imagine female independence impugned male roles and male egos.”⁷ In periods of high unemployment, wage-earning women were also accused of stealing jobs to which men had a prior claim. In this cultural climate, pay disparities between wage-earning men and women appeared logical and were tolerated, even though millions of women, both married and unmarried, depended on wage work to support themselves and their households.

The living wage’s feminine gender script cast women as primary guardians of the domestic sphere. In this capacity, wives, mothers, and daughters contributed great quantities of unpaid labor within and around the home. But because it involved no exchange of money, this socially reproductive labor, whether performed by women or men, was excluded from official measures of economic productivity. This relegated it to the periphery of what was considered either genuinely productive or genuinely “work.” “Do you work?”—the guileless question posed to married women through most of the 20th century—perfectly reflects this ethos. Household spending did register on the radar of the formal economy, as consumption. Yet multifarious (and steadily increasing) unpaid tasks surrounding consumption, disproportionately performed by women, remained largely invisible.⁸ By portraying the normative economic role of the husband as wage-earning breadwinner active in the public workplace, and of the housewife as shopper-consumer ensconced in the household (an image that conceals the economic and social value of unpaid domestic labor), the family living-

⁷ Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage* 10.

⁸ On the undernoticed 20th-century trend to transform certain sorts of paid work into “self-service,” unpaid labor performed in and outside the household, largely by women, see Nona Y. Glazer, *The Invisible Intersection: Involuntary Unpaid Labor Outside the Household by Women Workers* (Berkeley: Center for the Study, Education, and Advancement of Women, University of California, 1982); see also her *Women’s Paid and Unpaid Labor: The Work Transfer in Health Care and Retailing* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1993).

wage agenda updated for a mass consumer society the ideology of “separate spheres” that accompanied the rise of modern industrialized market economy.⁹ This ideology, in varying permutations, continued to influence the mores and hopes of families of all classes and race-ethnicities throughout the course of the 20th century.

A third innovation woven into the family living-wage agenda was a retreat from livelihood understood as a fixed minimum of material security attained through work and anchored in modest land ownership and economic self-sufficiency. This older notion of livelihood, with roots in agrarian, pre-industrial economy, was prominent in the thought of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI, and taken for granted by most Catholic social thinkers in this period. In the United States, this unassuming ideal resonated with the Catholic Church’s largely working-class, immigrant membership. However, by focusing nearly exclusively on highly fluid income levels rather than on stable measures of economic sufficiency, the living-wage movement, including its Catholic representatives, helped entrench a new, consumer-oriented vision of livelihood based on the ability to attain and maintain an ever-increasing standard of living.¹⁰ For those seeking adult (male) respectability by performing the breadwinner role, the bar for success was repeatedly raised as providing for one’s family was recast in dynamic, consumerist terms. Now the successful breadwinner had to bring home the means to attain and continually replenish the accoutrements of a “good” or “American” standard of living. The American standard of living became associated with the stream of items, comforts, and services one could purchase, and

⁹ The separate-spheres ideology comprises a division of labor according to *gender*, a division of labor according to *location*, and the assumption that these divisions reflect some important intrinsic, or natural, differences between men and women. Together these patterns work to segregate occupational aspirations and opportunities along gendered lines, and to systematically deny or minimize the public economic value of “women’s work,” both unpaid and paid. See, e.g., Christine Firer Hinze, “Bridge Discourse on Wage Justice: Feminist and Roman Catholic Reflections on the Family Living Wage,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 11 (1991) 116–17; Claire Fischer, “Liberating Work,” in *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, ed. Judith Weidman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 123–24.

¹⁰ On the rise of the “American standard of living” and its racist and sexist undercurrents, see Glickman, *A Living Wage* 78–92. On the dissolution of the notion of “enough” in consumerist societies that measure satisfaction primarily in terms of “relative position,” see Robert H. Frank, *Luxury Fever: Money and Happiness in an Era of Excess* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1999); Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downscaling, and the New Consumer* (New York: Basic, 1998); Christine Firer Hinze, “What is Enough? Catholic Social Thought, Consumption, and an Ethic of Sufficiency,” in *Having: Property and Possessions in Religious and Social Life*, ed. William Schweiker & Charles Mathewes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 162–88.

continue to purchase, as the novel became passé in an ongoing process of inventing, supplying, and outgrowing consumer wants and needs.

Each of these shifts whether in the configuration of domestic and public economies, or in gender roles, or in the substantive ideal of livelihood, were in their ways useful adaptations to circumstances of the day. In particular, the separation of spheres and ideology of gender complementarity that would be subject to intense feminist scrutiny after the 1960s was more than a patriarchal structure that distributed economic rewards disproportionately to men. It was also an ingenious strategy, designed to cordon off a site wherein the impersonal and commodifying logic of the capitalist marketplace would be resisted, and to identify an adult agent in each household whose chief function was to embody this resistance. The idealized homemaker, envisaged as wife and mother, became the repository of a vital social agenda: to ensure that the caring, nurturing, and preserving tasks of the household would continue to be performed, and the values and practices requisite to this familial work upheld and reproduced.¹¹ The separate spheres ideology provided a remarkably coherent affective and moral landscape within which men and women knew and could take pride in satisfaction in performing their assigned parts. These developments also harbored difficulties that would become increasingly evident as the 20th century approached its close, necessitating a rethinking of the meaning and means to a just living.

Catholic Articulations of the Living-Wage Agenda

Early-20th-century popular consensus around the family living wage tracked with parallel developments in Catholic teaching. From its official inauguration in Leo XIII's encyclical "On the Condition of Labor" (*Rerum novarum*, 1891), modern Catholic social teaching vigorously championed the worker's right to a family-supporting living wage. In the United States, priest-economist Monsignor John A. Ryan of the Catholic University of America became the country's most influential religious spokesman for the living wage.¹² Catholic thought situated a living wage within an explicitly

¹¹ Nancy Folbre points out: "One of the functional aspects of traditional patriarchal structures of constraint [on both men's and women's roles and duties] lay in the incentives they provided for care of the very young and the very old." (*Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint* [New York: Routledge, 1994] 115–16). On the economic benefits of the gendered division of labor in traditional families and societies see also Shirley Burggraf, *The Feminine Economy and Economic Man: Reviving the Role of Family in the Post-Industrial Age* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997) 15–20.

¹² Charles E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth-Century Approaches* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982) 26–92; Harlan Beckley,

normative understanding of economy's purpose: to assure all participants access, on fair terms, to the means to a decent livelihood for themselves and their families. Supervening a bare subsistence wage, "a decent livelihood" comprised the requisite material conditions for the sustenance and reasonable development of persons in accordance with their God-given dignity. A decent livelihood was itself an instrumental good serving the temporal, and ultimately spiritual, flourishing of human beings.

U.S. Catholic economic ethics in the first half of the 20th century dovetailed considerably with the agenda for worker justice that the living-wage concept distilled. Ryan's widely respected description of worker justice embraced a threefold goal: sufficiency (via a living wage) to support the worker and his family in the present; security (via wages or benefits) against sickness, calamity or old age into the future; and increased status, whereby workers could develop and express their potentials in the workplace through sharing in management, profits, and ownership.¹³ A good living in the full sense thus includes access to flourishing in both public and domestic economies. It therefore requires healthful conditions and dignified participation in the workplace, remuneration for work sufficient to support self and family in reasonable comfort, and household management and consumption practices conducive to the virtuous development, or what Harlan Beckley calls the "self-perfection" of all members toward their destiny of love and service of God and neighbor. A truly good living, finally, embraces and supports human life's spiritual purpose: to strive "to know more and more, and to love more and more, the best that is to be known and loved, namely, God and, in proportion to their resemblance to Him, His creatures."¹⁴

Catholic living-wage advocates accepted the distinction of public wage earning and dependent-household economies assumed by the culture at large. And, albeit in changing versions, Catholic thought throughout the century affirmed and lent religious approbation to the gendered features of

Passion for Justice (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 110–88; see also Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage* 9.

¹³ John A. Ryan, *A Better Economic Order* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935) 157–74; see also his *Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of Our Present Distribution of Wealth*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1942) 333–42 (earlier ed. 1916, 1927).

¹⁴ John A. Ryan, *The Church and Socialism* (Washington: University Press, 1919) 198; see also John A. Ryan, "Baccalaureate Sermon," Trinity College, Washington, June 3, 1923, 5; John A. Ryan, "Baccalaureate Sermon Delivered at the Catholic University of America," June 12, 1927, *The Catholic University Bulletin* 33.3 (July 1927) 25. (Ryan Archives CUA Library, Box 37, file: "Commencement Addresses").

this distinction.¹⁵ With Leo XIII and later, Pius XI, Ryan regarded the family living wage a right due every adult working *male*, by virtue of his patriarchal destiny in the social and familial order. In the normal course of things, a man's legitimate flourishing includes marrying and having children at some point in life, and the support of wife and children fell upon the husband and father. Therefore, Ryan argued: "because nature and reason have decreed that the family should be supported by its head" every working man has the right to a family supporting wage.¹⁶

Complementing Ryan's masculine-keyed understanding of public wage earning is his depiction of women as uniquely suited to the domestic life. Compared to men, "[w]oman is less individual and more domestic because both her functions and her limitations make her so."¹⁷ In the eyes of Catholic leaders of the day, women's special vocation for domesticity springs from qualities inhering in feminine nature, especially qualities related to motherhood. The words of Grace Sherwood, in a pamphlet issued in 1932 by Ryan's Social Action Department, sum up the predominant view nicely. After extolling the gifts and even the genuine "feminism" of great Catholic women from Catherine of Siena to Hildegard of Bingen to Joan of Arc, Sherwood reminds her readers: "But woman's greatest privilege, after all, her supreme and abiding privilege is that of motherhood. . . . All lesser privileges lead up to it, exist because of it. Moreover, most of the work that women do most happily is some extension of motherhood" This privilege of motherhood, cautions Sherwood, has its price.

Above the road to . . . [motherhood] is set the sign of sacrifice. Everywhere upon it is to be found suffering, toil, self-forgetfulness. Motherhood is the result of marriage, and marriage, to be successful, means the subordination of the wife's interests to that of her husband. . . . There *is* an order in marriage, as in everything else in life. And in that order the husband's interests come first. To make a home for him, to encourage him and comfort him, to have children, God willing, these are the first duties of a married woman. *After they are done, properly, then can come outside things, the cultivation of what talents she may possess. But when outside things interfere with home life, THEY must be curtailed, not home duties.*¹⁸

¹⁵ For an insightful recent analysis of Catholic teaching on women and work, see Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, *The New Job Contract: Economic Justice in an Age of Insecurity* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1998) 100–19.

¹⁶ John A. Ryan, *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects* (New York: Macmillan, 1906) 118–19; see also John A. Ryan, *The Church and Socialism* 59–60; Ryan, *Distributive Justice* 282–84; Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage* 9–11.

¹⁷ John A. Ryan, "Address to Educated Catholic Women." n.d., ca. 1915–1916 (John A. Ryan Archives, Catholic University of America Libraries, Box 38, file: "Feminism").

¹⁸ Grace H. Sherwood, "The Church and the Dignity of Woman," in *Christian Marriage and the Family* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Council, Family Life Section, Social Action Department, 1932) 34–35, emphasis added (John A.

Armed with like convictions, Ryan decried the errors of the feminists of his day whose agenda centered on “false notions of freedom and the emancipation of woman as a personality.” In the economic arena, he judged, “women should in general, not compete with men but cooperate with them, and be their complement, thus developing their own capacities instead of becoming a bad imitation of men. . . . Insofar as they do compete with men in the tasks that are more suitable to men’s nature, they will inevitably suffer because they will have to abide by the rules of the game, and men will make the rules.” Ryan brushed aside feminist suggestions that working mothers “might nurse their babies during the rest periods in store or factory” or that they “might hire women to care for the children and the house,” for he insisted that economic independence for women after marriage is “incompatible with proper care of a family.” The dangers and disadvantages of housewives’ economic dependence upon a male breadwinner, major concerns for first-wave feminists, were, from Ryan’s point of view, non-issues. “The dependence of a wife upon her husband for a living is no more degrading than his dependence upon her for his meals, his household comforts, and his children.”¹⁹

In making these claims concerning women and domesticity, Ryan was well aware that multitudes of women did work outside the home, most of them due to economic necessity. In 1910, he noted, “eight million women . . . were engaged in gainful occupations.”²⁰ But he was firmly convinced that once married, women’s main sphere of activity must be the home, and that a good social order ought to make this possible for every wife and mother.²¹ Middle-class feminists who insisted otherwise were “social reactionaries” who ignored the commonweal and spurned the moral

Ryan Archives, Catholic University Library, Box 38, file: “Family”); see also Ryan, “Baccalaureate Sermon,” June 1923, 8.

¹⁹ John A. Ryan, “Fallacies of the Feminist Movement,” Typescript, ca. 1921, 3. (John A. Ryan Archives, CUA Library, Box 38, File: “Feminism”); see also John A. Ryan, *Declining Liberty and Other Papers* (New York: Macmillan, 1927) 101–14.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Likewise, Kessler-Harris elaborates: “At the time Ryan wrote, women constituted close to 25 percent of the industrial work force. More than one-third of wage-earning women and three-quarters of those living at home helped to support other family members. False conceptions of women who needed only to support themselves did a particular disservice to Black women, who were eight times as likely to earn wages as white women . . .” (*A Woman’s Wage* 10–11). For more on Black women workers during this period, see Rosalyn Terborg Penn, “Survival Strategies among African-American Women Workers: A Continuing Process,” in *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women’s Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) 139–53.

²¹ On implications of Ryan’s depiction of domesticity as the “normal” and desirable economic role for women, see Firer Hinze, “Bridgework Discourse on Wage Justice” esp. n. 11.

law. Underlying misdirected movements for women's emancipation, Ryan detected a sinful individualism whose symptoms ranged from "selfishness" and "the desire for self-indulgence," to (in the extreme) a socially destructive "anarchic individualism like that of the thief, the adulterer, and the wife deserter." In fact, true personal development for women (and, one assumes, for men) implies self-sacrifice and devotion to the common good. Since the welfare of society requires "that woman's chief functions shall be in the home . . . this is the way of her own true development also . . ." ²² His own experiences with working-class women had persuaded Ryan that "the great majority of working women would prefer to be married, and at home only." ²³ To his mind, these working-class wives and mothers recognized something of womanhood that more advantaged and educated feminists missed. For one thing, working-class women exhibited a more realistic grasp of equality as proportional to differences in talents and abilities between different classes of persons. ²⁴ In their orientation toward domesticity, ordinary working women were also more attuned to what John Paul II would later call the "special genius of woman." ²⁵ The deeply romanticized—if not sentimentalized—Catholic ideal of womanhood that animated Ryan's view is captured in a quotation with which he often concluded addresses to women's groups:

²² Ryan, "Fallacies of the Feminist Movement" 4; see also *Declining Liberty* 113–14.

²³ Ryan, "Fallacies" penned-in addition; see also Ryan, *The Church and Socialism* 236–45. Leslie Woodcock Tentler confirms this in her study, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Employment and Family Life in the United States, 1900–1930* (New York: Oxford University, 1979).

²⁴ Ryan argues that middle-class feminists ignore the fact that "Women may be equals of men as persons and yet inferior to them in economic power and in physical capacity." In this matter, the correct principle was laid down by Leo XIII. "Instead of demanding identical laws for unequal economic groups, [Leo] declared that the working classes and the poor stood in need of special laws for their weaker economic condition. The same principle applies in the economic and social relations of women" (*Declining Liberty* 113).

²⁵ John Paul II wrote: "It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother . . . to devote herself to taking care of her children . . . Having to abandon these tasks in order to take up paid work outside the home is wrong from the point of view of the good of society and of the family when it contradicts or hinders these primary goals of the mission of a mother" (*Laborem exercens* [1981] no. 19). Through motherhood, women "first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person . . . because of the dignity which comes from being a person . . . This is the fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women" (*Evangelium vitae* no. 99). See also, Leonie Caldecott, "Sincere Gift: The Pope's 'New Feminism'," in *Readings in Moral Theology no. 10: John Paul II and Moral Theology*, ed. Charles E. Curran & Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1998) 216–34.

Into her arms we are born, on her breast our helpless cries are hushed, and her hands close our eyes when the light is gone. Watching her lips, our own become vocal; in her eyes we read the mystery of faith, hope and love; led by her hand we learn to look up and walk in the way of obedience to law. We owe to her, as mother, as sister, as wife, as friend, the tenderest emotions of life, the purest aspirations of the soul, the noblest elements of character, and the completest sympathy in all our joy and sorrow. She weaves flowers of Heaven into the vesture of earthly life. In poetry, painting, sculpture, and religion, she gives us ideals of the fair and beautiful. Innocence is a woman, chastity is a woman, charity is a woman.²⁶

Though sharing much with other advocates for the family living wage, the Catholic agenda was distinctive in subtle but significant ways. Most fundamentally, Catholicism's religious, non-materialistic (though decidedly incarnational) understanding of human nature and destiny provided a religious foundation for the universal right to a decent material livelihood. Economic rights were warranted by the sacred dignity bestowed on each human personality by God. This same religious warrant underlay proscriptions of untrammelled material gain seeking or consumerism. Rather, flourishing as God intended dictated honesty, industriousness, and concern for the commonweal in production and wage-earning, and moderation in consumption and spending. This spiritual vantage point inclined—or at least should have prodded—Catholics to challenge and resist major premises and features of the mass-consumerist ideal of livelihood that predominated after 1920.

A second distinctive feature of the Catholic living-wage agenda was its integrated and normative understanding of the social order and economy's role within it. This societal schema assumes God-given moral patterns and parameters designed to protect and foster the personal dignity of its members within three basic, "natural" social relations: the familial, the economic, and the political. Economy and polis exist for the well-being of their members, and in a real sense are servants of the family, regarded as the foundational community and cell of society. Catholics' organic social vision sees the household sector and the public waged sectors as interdependent and complementary rather than divorced or at odds. It also refuses to identify productive work only with paid work, and expects domestic and formal waged economies to cooperate in serving personal and social welfare. This viewpoint contradicted culturally popular dichotomous or privatized views of the domestic sphere. It also preserved potential space for a variety of arrangements whereby adult family members might participate in and contribute to domestic and waged economies.

These characteristic Catholic emphases come into play, for instance, in

²⁶ Ryan attributes these words to Archbishop John Lancaster Spalding (1840–1916). "Baccalaureate Sermon," June 1923, 23; see also "Fallacies of the Feminist Movement" 4.

Ryan's persistent denunciation of the materialist values and lifestyle he saw taking hold in the U.S. culture of his day. He frequently inveighed against the philosophy of life—"so widely adopted that it might almost be called the accepted standard of our time"—whose rule and aim is "money and material enjoyment."²⁷ People of all classes have come to the practical conviction that the highest good is to be found in material enjoyment and emotional satisfaction, and therefore one must strive to continuously increase these. To fulfill these desires we require income. "To increase our income [thus becomes] our principal and constant endeavor." For the vast majority, life and welfare are conceived "in terms of quantity rather than in terms of quality." In this milieu, the notion of economic sufficiency, of enough, effectively dissolves, for adherents of this philosophy of life "find it possible and practically inevitable to expend substantially all their income and all the increases in their income" to attain more, new, and better physical and emotional sensations.²⁸

Ryan judges this consumerist lifestyle "false, deadening, and delusive." It lures people into "a maimed and partial life" chained to their lower nature and desires. It is deadening "because it lowers the capacity for productive work." and for all worthwhile achievement. This comfort-oriented life enervates people, atrophying "the foundation of the power to do: the power to do without." Its cult of enjoyment thwarts self-development by eliminating "that training in self control and self denial that is essential" to sustained effort and worthy achievement. The religious sense and the altruistic sense, Ryan contends, are also weakened.²⁹

Ultimately, a life based on pursuit of material enjoyment is delusory, for it defeats the very thing it purports to deliver, namely, happiness. True happiness will be attained only by that minority who accept "a rational halting place in the pursuit of material comforts," and who recognize that "there is an upper limit, just as certainly as there is a lower limit, to the material goods and enjoyments that are consistent with right and reasonable human life." To come to adulthood without learning this is to have one's education not only stunted, but "radically perverted."³⁰

Ryan's words indicate the brakes that Catholic social ethics sought to build into the pursuit of economic gain and material satisfaction, in particular by insisting that one works—and consumes—to live and not vice versa. "Living" in its fullest sense is a spiritual-incarnational reality to be supported by, not reduced to, the cycle of economic production and con-

²⁷ Ryan, "Baccalaureate Sermon," June 1923, 3; see also Ryan, *The Church and Socialism* 180–216; *Declining Liberty* 320–28.

²⁸ Ryan, "Baccalaureate Sermon," June 1923.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 6; Ryan, *Declining Liberty* 325.

³⁰ Ryan, "Baccalaureate Sermon," June 1923, 6.

sumption. This vision motivated Catholics' support for just wages, humane conditions of work, and for the chance to exercise one's higher capacities within the workplace. But it also involved a countercultural rejection of the idols of endless wage-production, or of endless consumption. Ryan and contemporary Catholic leaders applauded movements for shorter hours of work.³¹ But they went further by wedding the norm of limited work with a norm of limited material consumption. Time gained by fewer hours of paid work was to be primarily directed not to increasingly sophisticated consumption but to developing one's higher faculties and potentialities, to fulfilling one's communal responsibilities, and to fostering one's spiritual vocation and relationship with God. A related and equally countercultural element of Ryan's Catholic agenda was his argument that all material wealth gained in surplus of measurable upper limits ought to be redistributed, put *wholly* at the service of alleviating the conditions that cause others to suffer deprivation.³²

The moral purposes of work and economy affirmed by the Catholic living-wage agenda—to satisfy members' material needs, to develop and utilize their talents and potentialities, and to further the common good of family and community—could, at least in theory, be fulfilled by a number of different gender strategies. Though waged vs. domestic work arrangements were visualized in gendered terms, Catholic treatments of men's and women's economic roles retained a certain elasticity based on their function in service to, rather than as constitutive of, larger socio-moral purposes. But herein lies a rub, one that chafes against the convictions of many who seek to formulate a Catholic agenda for work justice today. Does not Catholic social teaching's evolving yet persistent emphasis on gender-differentiation expose an intractable "two natures" approach to men and women? Would a new Catholic agenda for livelihood that moves away from a gender-complementary interpretation of economic spheres be impossible to square with its 20th-century predecessors?

Not necessarily. Arguably, what motivated Catholic social leaders—along with the majority of men and women in their congregations—to support so passionately the breadwinner-homemaker arrangement was not the wish to reify unchanging roles for men and women. Rather, it was the ardent desire to preserve and sustain the familial household, and the indispensable contributions of this sphere to the overarching moral aim of assuring people a decent economic livelihood and a good living. Witnessing the enormous

³¹ Benjamin K. Hunnicutt, "Monsignor John A. Ryan and the Shorter Hours of Labor: A Forgotten Vision of 'Genuine' Progress," *The Catholic Historical Review* 69 (1983) 394–402; see also John A. Ryan, *A Better Economic Order* (New York: Harper, 1935) 88–91.

³² John A. Ryan, *Distributive Justice* 233–48.

power of industrial market and mass consumer economies to influence, reshape, or dismantle values and relationships that had constituted traditional culture, the cult of separate spheres reflected an accurate social intuition: that certain extra-market values and relationships were crucial to people's material and spiritual well-being and urgently needed to be protected and maintained. Like their secular compatriots, Catholic living-wage advocates embraced emotionally powerful gender-ideological means to perpetuate these domestically situated relationships and values, and to insure that the attention and labor they required would continue to be supplied. In the face of the exigencies of market economy, their particular interpretation of gender, and its corresponding division of labor, was one way to secure nurturing adult presence and participation in the domestic household. It was not, however, the only possible way.

My attempt to distinguish the moral aims of modern Catholic thought on worker justice from its gender-differentiated articulations admittedly faces obstacles. Prominent among them is the tight fit that has persisted to the present day between the notion of a family living wage and social assumptions concerning a gendered separation of roles and spheres, itself reinforced by the continued emphasis on gender difference in official Vatican teaching.³³ But evidence to support this distinction exists, even in the writings of one of female domesticity's devoted adherents, John A. Ryan. Ryan's pragmatic and moral sensibilities often led him to prioritize the needs of real women and families over his attachment to gender ideology. Concerning family allowance systems that adjusted husband's wages according to the size of their families, for example, Ryan argued: "In view of the very large number of women wage earners who have to support dependents, they ought to be included in any family allowance system. Objections drawn from the integrity of the family, the normal place of the mother, and the responsibility of the father, seem insufficient to outweigh the actual human needs of so many thousands of working women and their children." He also favored equal pay for women who performed the same work as men.³⁴ Undeniably, however, Ryan considered dual-sphere gender assignments optimal for personal and social well being in market economies. This conviction fueled his fierce—even virulent—opposition to feminist attempts to dismantle them. It also sometimes led him to let his attachment to gender-complementary ideology occlude his sensitivity to the actual economic difficulties faced by workers and families. One example of this was Ryan's dismissive response to feminist worries about homemakers'

³³ See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," July 31, 2004.

³⁴ Ryan, *Distributive Justice* 284–85; see also his *A Living Wage* 107–9.

economic dependence, despite the obvious and widespread suffering of women whose husbands failed to live up to the expectation that breadwinners would (and could) voluntarily and faithfully support their households.³⁵

Ryan, and 20th-century Catholic social thought as a whole, never came close to a *laissez-faire* mentality with respect to economy, work, or gender. In particular, a resolutely normative notion of family—centered around a procreative marriage covenant and exhibiting differentiated masculine and feminine roles—militated against any fully pluralistic approach to social and economic arrangements. Nonetheless, the larger scope and substantive nature of its vision of flourishing equipped 20th-century Catholic economic thought with a rich fund of experience and wisdom, and its commitment to engage the concrete circumstances of workers and families lent it certain elasticity conducive to change and development.

LATER-TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the face of historical confluences between elements of Ryan's scheme for economic justice and key programs of the New Deal, increasing acceptance of Catholics into the American cultural mainstream after 1945, and the apparent compatibility of the Catholic living wage and gender script with middle-class family and work norms during the 1950s and 1960s, it was easy for later-20th-century Catholics to forget the tensions that in fact remained between a good living understood culturally and its Catholic counterpart. As long as Catholics resided primarily in the working and lower-middle-classes, their temptation was to presume that what was good for U.S. workers and families was good for Catholic workers and families *tout simple*. By the 1950s, the demographics of the Euro-American Catholic populace were moving beyond their historical blue-collar base, and upwardly mobile Catholics encountered new challenges. Arguably, entrance into white-collar professional and managerial circles and the access to consumer culture that accompanied it threatened to desensitize increasingly affluent middle-class Catholics to twin legacies: the countercultural aspects of Catholic economic teaching, and the (at least potentially) critical perspective on market economy the semi-marginalized status of their working-class immigrant forebears had afforded. Among the casualties of upward mobility was a working-class insight that had been reinforced by Catholic teaching concerning labor's purposes and limits: that work is not everything, and that one works for the sake of time and activities apart

³⁵ Eleanor Rathbone, a British contemporary of Ryan, articulates this and related problems with the family wage ideology in *The Disinherited Family: A Plea for the Endowment of the Family* (London: Arnold, 1924).

from and transcending work.³⁶ With the steady fall of real wages after 1973, families found themselves having to increase their weekly hours of work to maintain their financial status quo. Simultaneously, late-20th-century Americans in both working and middle-class households found themselves drawn into what economist Juliet Schor would describe as the revolving squirrel cage of a consumerist, “work-spend cycle.”³⁷ Now more mainstream than ever, Catholic families were carried along by powerful cultural currents purportedly headed toward a vast sea of private consumer comforts. But those same currents frequently left other values, especially those connecting economy to a larger fabric of non-consumer, public and civil goods and relations—such as community service, savings, leisure time, and environmental preservation—behind in their wake.³⁸

Beginning in the early 1960s, dramatically changing economic and cultural conditions exposed flaws and created cracks in the older living-wage agenda. The sharpest criticisms were directed by second-wave feminists against the gendered breadwinner-homemaker ideology on which the standard living-wage argument had relied. At the heart of their critique was the claim that the gendered dichotomizing of household and public economies had bred serious injustices by supporting the economic and social devaluation of women’s work, and by depriving women of rights and opportunities in the waged economy. The major shift that this feminist critique helped unleash—abetted by economic dynamics, and further shaped by the consumerist gospel of the American standard of living—was a massive increase in women’s paid work-force participation, and some movement toward rectifying disparities between men’s and women’s wages and workplace opportunities.

What changed far less between the 1960s and the 1990s was the actual influence on attitudes and practices of the older, dual-spheres ideology. The tenacity of this gendered way of understanding paid and family work had three enormously significant consequences. First, the massive collective transfer of women’s time and energies from domicile to workplace during these decades was not accompanied by a similar transfer of men’s time and energy into the household. In line with the separate-sphere ideology, most men continued to conform to the ethos of what Joan Williams

³⁶ Historian Benjamin Hunnicutt offers a marvelous case-study of the implications and evanescence of this working-class attitude in *Kellogg’s Thirty-Hour Week* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1996).

³⁷ Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic, 1991).

³⁸ An insightful treatment of the pervasive impact of consumer culture on contemporary Catholics and others is Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

calls the “ideal worker,” which normed the full-time worker as someone able to devote undistracted time and energy to the workplace, while others (ideally, a full-time domestic caregiver) took care of all details on the home front.³⁹ Women entering the full-time workforce were measured by this ideal-worker standard, but routinely lacked the wealth of “backstage support” that men with wives enjoyed. Second, as women moved into the formal workforce, they also continued to perform a disproportionate share of the crucial work of the home.⁴⁰ This situation created frequently insuperable hurdles for women struggling to overcome the social and economic marginalization that had been their lot under the older family wage arrangement. And as the household economy accrued mounting deficits in adult time and attention, the performance of crucial labor and maintenance of crucial relations—along with the major beneficiaries of domestic care work, children, the frail, and the elderly—were bound to suffer.⁴¹

Third, the contradiction involved in moving domestic caregivers into the ideal-worker arena without either reformulating the relations between household and public economy, or reinvesting energy and attention into the household economy through other means (such as greater presence and participation by men) was barely recognized as a public or structural problem. Instead the resulting circumstances were widely construed as challenges to be coped with by individual working women attempting to “have it all” and “do it all” (middle-class version); or who needed the means to afford paid child care while they worked to make ends meet (working-class version). With these structural and cultural setups cloaked in the guise of the hard choices facing individual women, it is not surprising that by the 1980s a “new traditionalism” was beckoning women—only a minority of whom could afford it—back into some version of the older breadwinner-homemaker arrangement. Women, who in line with popular sentiment continued to regard the domestic economy as primarily their responsibility,

³⁹ Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (New York: Oxford University, 2000).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Arlie Hochschild with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989).

⁴¹ In this regard, Sylvia Hewlett speaks of the “time famine” afflicting middle-class families, compounded by the “resource famine” facing working-class and poor families. See her *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children* (New York: Basic, 1991). Bruggarf contends that the reallocation of time in a degendered work force produces great pressures insofar as “many of the efficiencies of gender specialization that once formed the base of the family economy have lost their economic value,” while “degenderization of [public] economic production roles has put stress on the caring functions of the family for which there are no technological substitutes” (*The Feminine Economy* 19, emphasis in original).

were subject to harsh criticism, and frequently equally harsh self-criticism, to the extent that conditions in this sphere were perceived to deteriorate.⁴²

By the 1990s, the flaws and cracks in this way of approaching the goal of a good living for individuals and families had come into clearer view. What was not yet clear was the most viable and promising path(s) for a reconstructed U.S. Catholic agenda for livelihood suited to the economic circumstances and human needs of workers and families in the new century. The foregoing analysis and the resources it has plumbed provide, I believe, direction for such a reconstructed vision, and for practical strategies to advance it.

TOWARD A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AGENDA FOR WORKER JUSTICE

Drawing on the historical resources I have examined and recent Catholic social thought, and keeping in mind the circumstances of a globalizing, late-capitalist economy, I conclude by mentioning some base points for a 21st-century Catholic approach to livelihood that *retrieves* accurately the essentials of the Catholic living-wage legacy, including some of its lesser-known components, and *revises* certain historically contingent elements, particularly in light of selected reconstructive-feminist proposals, to fashion a viable “concrete historical ideal” that contemporary working families and policy-makers may find both worthy of pursuit and practically realizable.

This new Catholic agenda for livelihood ought to preserve and renew the central features of the Catholic economic legacy. Having elaborated these above, I now recall Catholic social thought’s religiously grounded affirmation of human dignity and the conditions needed to honor it as the ground and motive for economic structures and activities; its integrated view of collaborating yet distinct social economic, political, and familial spheres; Catholicism’s normative understanding of economy as the arena through which the material goods of the earth God intended for us are made accessible to all, on reasonable terms; its broad understanding of livelihood as comprising minimum conditions for holistic human flourishing; and finally,

⁴² The tendency of women to regard as their individual responsibility the maintenance of (at times unrealistic) standards for presence in the home and domestic care-work, and to blame themselves for failures to meet those standards, is a theme found in Williams (*Unbending Gender*), Hochschild (*The Second Shift*), and a raft of recent works on work-life balance. One of the most informative and wise of these is Catherine M. Wallace, *Selling Ourselves Short: Why We Struggle to Earn a Living and Have a Life* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003). For a glimpse at the burgeoning field of work-family studies, visit the website of Boston College’s Sloan Work and Family Research Network at (http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/wfnetwork/index.html).

its subsumption of work, economic gain-seeking, and consumption within this larger, incarnational-spiritual vision of human nature and destiny.

These basic premises warrant the following principles that ought to guide the shaping of more just practices and policies: First, the God-given dignity of each human person and the normative purpose of economy dictate that the first priority for economic arrangements and policies is to afford every worker and every household access to the minimum material requirements for a decent livelihood, on terms that respect and support (e.g., through reasonable limits on hours of work) livelihood's holistic meaning. Second, respect for the dignity of each person and the meaning of a good living requires that Catholics resist that the current dominance of values and relations fostered by mass consumerism in favor of a Rynanesque ethic of "enough." A new ethic of sufficiency will identify for the present day specific maximum, as well as minimum, moral limits on one's material standard of living. It will also open the way for reclaiming public and non-consumer values and goods that mass consumerism belittles or ignores. Third, justice and conditions for flourishing of persons and families require that the crucial contribution of socially reproductive labor or care-work, including that performed in the domestic arena, be societally acknowledged and fairly rewarded, and that responsibility for such work be shared equitably among all adults.

This last principle, given the complicated subplot of gender in the story of U.S. struggles for economic justice, suggests that a renewed Catholic work ethic's efficacy will depend on its ability to bridge the highly divisive issues that currently separate equal-rights feminists (many of whom argue for the abolition of all gendered relationships), difference-oriented feminists (who regard women as especially attuned to an ethic of care and nurture), traditionalists (who call for the reinstatement of the gendered separation of spheres), and a range of hybrid positions. An approach true to the evolving arc of the Catholic tradition will leave room for some forms of gender differentiation in personal, social, and familial relations. However, it ought to acknowledge and champion a generous diversity in the ways such differences might be individually and socially expressed. Some who find compelling the strong emphasis on gender difference promoted in the writings of John Paul II may find the reinstatement of a homemaker/breadwinner gender division meaningful and fulfilling. But given the sincerely held and deeply contested differences among the faithful on this matter, a genuinely Catholic moral position on economy should champion collaboration and partnership among men and women by way of a variety of social and economic arrangements. Furthermore, Catholic teaching's recognition of the dignity and uniqueness of each human person, its stress on the fundamental, common humanity shared by men and women, and the appreciation of local empowerment embodied in its principle of sub-

sidiarity should lead Catholics to support social policies that protect the freedom of families to craft gender strategies and work arrangements that best suit the identities, personalities, and needs of particular families and local communities. Most importantly, social practices or policies that make or assume links between gender and particular economic activities or work arrangements are only justified insofar as they concretely honor and advance mutual adult accountability and equitable rewards for domestic and waged work, and access to livelihood for all.

The most promising model for worker-family economic justice, therefore, will be one that eschews assigning a “gender” to household or public workplace, or to the tasks performed within each.⁴³ Economic practice and policy ought rather to be reshaped along the lines of what sociologist Neil Gilbert has called a “social partnership” model of domestic-public economic spheres. This model insists on the mutual and equal voice and status for men and women householders, but expects couples and family members to decide how to divide labor most effectively in light of members’ needs and family responsibilities. The partnership model assumes that a productive and fulfilling division of labor within family life can take many forms, but insists that however labor is allocated both partners is contributing to a joint enterprise and deserve to share equally in the benefits that accrue over time. As Gilbert notes, this has “distinct implications for social policy.”⁴⁴

⁴³ My claim here is not, as theorists such as Susan Moller Okin suggest, that “gender” as a category ought to be dismantled. Rather, aligning myself with the more pragmatic approach of Joan Williams and others, I am pressing for social norms (backed where appropriate by public policy) that hold men and women mutually and equitably accountable for care work in both home and public waged arena, and *changes in family and workplace culture that will reflect this mutual accountability*. This shift does not require that gender be dismantled, but it does prohibit the use of gender to sluce accountability for care work, or its burdens and rewards, disproportionately either to women or to men. Given historical and contemporary circumstances, this is to argue for major changes in social ideology and economic practice. Susan Moller Okin describes the ideal of a “genderless society” in *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic, 1989) 170–86; contrast Williams, *Unbending Gender* 204–42.

⁴⁴ Neil Gilbert, “Working Families: Hearth to Market,” in *All Our Families: New Policies for a New Century*, ed. Mary Ann Mason, Arlene Skolnick, and Stephen Sugarman (New York: Oxford University, 1998) 193–216. The ideas mentioned here and in the conclusion draw on conversations with Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, and on our co-authored essay (which provides more specifics concerning social policies a social-partnership model may require): Christine Firer Hinze and Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, “Whose Marriage? Whose Health? A Christian Feminist Ethical Response,” in *Marriage, Health, and the Professions*, ed. John Wall and Don Browning (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 145–66, esp. 163–66.

In articulating a social-partnership approach that seeks to unite, rather than further divides, various constituencies concerned with work and family justice, U.S. Catholic economic ethics will be aided and enriched by dialogue with the work of contemporary feminist theorists such as Joan Williams. Any strategy for work-family justice that expects gender to disappear as a medium for cultural identification and communal organization, Williams argues, is doomed to failure. Such strategies also distract attention from the more basic values and goals concerning economic and domestic well-being that members of opposing "gender camps" often share. Along with a social-partnership type direction for policy and cultural practices, Williams calls for a realistic reappraisal of ways that gender has harmfully constricted people and opportunities. But she also points to the considerable malleability and flexibility that has in fact always attended social mores and practices surrounding gender, perhaps especially so today. This elasticity and bendability, she argues, "highlights the open-ended quality and complexity of genderings." To the extent that, without denying the fact of human sexual differentiations, gender is exposed as "a field of social power with which people establish relationships of great complexity" for a range of different ends, Catholic advocates for work-family justice will be in a better position to address critically, but capaciously, this persistent ingredient in economic policies and practices.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

A social-partnership model for the familial and wage-earning spheres, and a retrieved ethic of sufficiency that enables Americans to recognize abundance and share it properly, are essential elements of a 21st-century Catholic agenda for livelihood. While leaving room for a range of positions on male-female difference, a Catholic ethic must resist social and economic arrangements that allocate status, roles, resources, or power asymmetrically on the basis of sex. It must also reject the version of justice to which affluent classes in a majority-poor global economy may gravitate, wherein elite men and women enjoy identical civil rights and social expectations, but class and racial-ethnic inequalities are left intact.⁴⁶ A good living available to all requires instead a social norm in which men and women across race and class lines are able to fulfill flexibly similar responsibilities for

⁴⁵ Williams, *Unbending Gender* 258–59.

⁴⁶ Besides remaining uncontested in such circumstances, racial-ethnic and class inequalities are regularly exploited in the service of this so-called justice among elite men and women. See Christine Firer Hinze, "Dirt and Economic Inequality: A Christian-Ethical Peek under the Rug," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 21 (2001) 45–62.

supporting families through work, both domestic and waged. In such a transformed U.S. economy and culture, economist Nancy Folbre suggests,

[M]en would substantially increase their hours of unpaid work, devoting more time to home, children and community. Their formal labor force participation rate would decline to levels more typical of women today. Forms of work that women once specialized in, such as child care and teaching, would be re-valued. High skill levels, as well as high wages, would be required. The family would remain an important economic institution, and common commitments to certain kinds of unpaid household labor would reduce class and race inequalities.⁴⁷

Modern Catholic social thought has steadfastly insisted on the universal right to a decent livelihood—material sufficiency, security, and status—through honest work. As this legacy grows into the circumstances of the new century, it requires continued development. A U.S. Catholic economic ethic based on a social-partnership model of domestic and public economies will actively promote policies and practices that acknowledge the essential and related contributions by men and women in both spheres. Equipped with a critical grasp of their tradition's complex and holistic social vision, Catholics should be active and perspicacious collaborators in contemporary movements for economic justice. Their engagement promises to advance the capacity of households and public workplaces to serve as vital loci for human well being, and thus too for God's creative and redemptive work.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Nancy Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids?* 103.

⁴⁸ An earlier version of this article was presented at the University of Notre Dame during a series on "The Living Wage," March 2002. I am grateful for the invitation and support of Professor Todd David Whitmore.