



FiRST Principles

Journal of the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology

Faith
Reason
Science
Technology

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Opening Message

In this issue of *FiRST Principles*, we offer several pieces related to Catholic social teaching (CST), which is a highlighted theme for Pope Leo XIV’s new pontificate. CST is necessarily contested, within the broad principles that guide our debates, because it deals with the specific actions, economic and power structures, and public policies that generate both material and spiritual consequences in our world. It is my hope that the following essays and explanations will spark some commentary from our members. We would love to hear from you!

CST has much to do with science. It especially influences the decisions of policy makers who provide the resources and direction for scientific research in our country. It also can – and, I would argue, should – have an impact on the choices that individual scientists and science educators make regarding the content of one’s work and the expected societal effects. For example, how should a lead physicist make decisions regarding the allocation of professional and personal resources to theoretical or applied efforts, to potentially weaponized systems, to the financial priorities of competitive corporations, etc.? Should a science teacher allocate scarce time and attention to giving a special boost to underprivileged or underrepresented students? How?

As we enter into the new entanglements of a hyper-technological age, perhaps our prayers can increase in urgency as we ask for justice, fairness, and mercy in human relations – virtues that are always grounded in the dignity bestowed by God on each person and family.

May we be blessed, both individually and collectively, with a fulfilling peace.

Christopher Reilly, ThD
Editor, *FiRST Principles*



AI-generated scene of a medieval scientist at a computer screen

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Announcements

ITEST Webinars

Watch our most recent ITEST webinars on demand.

Date	Title	Presenters	Watch/Register link
04/05/25	AI and Sin: Medieval Robots and the Theology of Technology	Christopher M. Reilly, ThD Jordan Joseph Wales, PhD	https://faithscience.org/ai-and-sin/
06/14/25	Bioethics & AI as Human Flourishing: Where Catholic & Orthodox Social Teaching Meet in One Christian Social Ethos	Constantine Psimopoulos, PhD Fr. Michael Baggot, LC	https://faithscience.org/bioethics-and-ai/

Register now for this webinar.

08/30/25	The Holy See & the United Nations: The International Conference on Population & Development (Cairo, 1994) as a Case Study	Jane F. Adolphe, LLB/BCL/JCL/JCD John M. Klink, MA	https://faithscience.org/holy-see-and-un/
10/18/25	Challenges and Opportunities of Artificial Intelligence: The MagisAI App	Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, SJ, PhD Thomas P. Sheahan, PhD Christopher M. Reilly, ThD	https://faithscience.org/magisai-app/

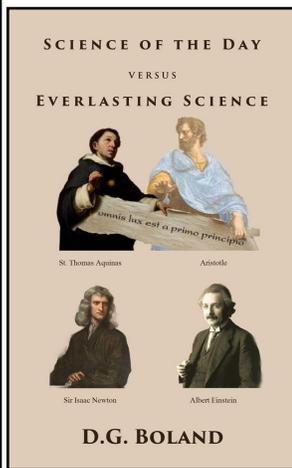
Watch all previously recorded ITEST webinars at www.faithscience.org/news-and-events/.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Chris Reilly is stepping down from his volunteer position as ITEST Associate Director. He will, however, remain in his position as editor of the *FiRST Principles* journal and will also remain on the ITEST Leadership Council and Board of Directors. We extend our heartfelt thanks for his leadership and dedication to the mission of ITEST.

Book Recommendation

Science of the Day versus Everlasting Science

By Donald G. Boland



Science of the Day versus Everlasting Science explores the profound difference between the timeless, Aristotelian understanding of science—rooted in certainty through causes—and the modern, ever-changing science driven by novelty and materialism. Contrasting classical intellectual tradition with today’s ephemeral scientific trends, D.G. Boland critiques the abandonment of metaphysical and moral foundations in favor of mechanistic empiricism. His work challenges readers to rediscover the enduring truths eclipsed by modernity’s fascination with the new and fleeting.

Learn more at <https://enroutebooksandmedia.com/scienceoftheday/>

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Urgent Questions for Our Times

By Christopher M. Reilly

As ITEST members are likely aware, the Trump administration has proposed a 2026 budget that greatly reduces federal government funding for science research to levels not seen for a few decades. Proposed cuts to the multibillion-dollar budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are near 40%,¹ while the National Science Foundation (NSF) would experience cuts by over 50%.² Already, the NIH has reportedly terminated almost 1,400 awards that represent over \$820 million in recent funding, and it has apparently delayed funding to another 1,000 projects.³

The Trump administration may be motivated to refocus limited government resources in a fiscally responsible way on “gold standard” research, with emphasis on areas that are seen as priorities for the country, such as artificial intelligence technology, quantum computing, and nuclear energy. The national media and science-related organizations have reported much concern about the effects of such a dramatic loss of government support.

Aside from the politics, legality, and complex practical considerations, are there particular responses to federal defunding of scientific research that are appropriate for the Christian community?

We might consider, for example, the important charitable benefits that federal government funding of science research brings to disadvantaged groups who, due to poverty, marginalization, or unusual health conditions, are unable to significantly influence the direction of profit-oriented research. Does our society have a responsibility, founded on principles of justice and charity, to financially support research that helps disadvantaged persons?

What about actively supporting those who have difficulty applying their scientific talents due to a lack of opportunity – not only students and early career scientists from certain racial and ethnic backgrounds, but also persons with disabilities?

We might wonder about the proper application of the principle of subsidiarity, a crucial pillar of Catholic social teaching. Federal government support for basic and foundational science has been a successful means of enabling the kind of research that educational institutions and smaller organizations (such as specialized medical disease associations) have been unable to otherwise underwrite. On the other hand, aggressive federal oversight and political targeting of research grants may limit the flexibility and independence of

universities, organizations, researchers, and private charitable foundations and donors.

One possible response is to simply reiterate the goodness of science when integrated with the values and transcendent perspective of faith. This is the approach that BioLogos, a Christian organization encouraging a faith-based embrace of empirical science, has taken with its “Open Letter to People of Faith about Science” and “Science is Good” initiative.⁴ BioLogos affirms that “science is a God-given tool for understanding and stewarding God’s world, and we believe that Christians should be among its strongest advocates.” The organization goes further, however, by identifying a specific problem that underlies the recent decline in government funding of scientific research: “This is our considered response to a cultural moment marked by distrust of institutions, suspicion of expertise, and a sharp decline in public investment in scientific research. Federal cuts to life-saving programs and the vilification of scientists are not just political developments, but symptoms of a deeper crisis. As Christians, we cannot be silent about this.”



What do you think? Is there a decline in trust, or even a deep suspicion, of scientific research and institutions?

What do you think? Is there a decline in trust, or even a deep suspicion, of scientific research and institutions? If there is distrust, does this reflect a cultural crisis, or is it merely a political initiative driven by political agendas or fear of the government’s fiscal collapse?

The emphasis over the past decades in the articles, communications, and seminars at ITEST seems to have been largely focused on countering a secular and falsely portrayed opposition between science and faith; the secular perspective has held empirical and experimental science to be the paragon as well as the limit of human knowledge. Is the culture indeed shifting to a widespread distrust of science and, perhaps, of access to reliable truths about our material and biological world? What kind of evangelization is suitable in this cultural moment?

We would love to hear from you with your thoughts related to these topics. Send us a letter or propose or write a longer article. I hope we can feature some of your responses in an upcoming *FiRST Principles* issue. ■

Endnotes on page 4

Endnotes

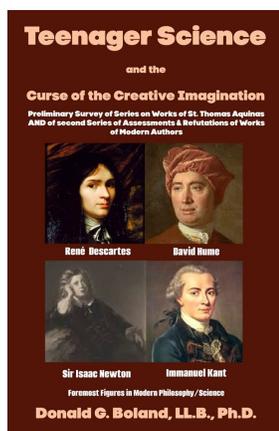
- ¹ “Trump’s Proposed Budget Details Drastic Cuts to Biomedical Research and Global Health,” *Science* (June 2, 2025), <https://www.science.org/content/article/trump-s-proposed-budget-details-dramatic-cuts-biomedical-research-and-global-health#>.
- ² Kathryn Palmer, “Details of Trump’s Budget Cuts Alarm Researchers,” *Inside Higher Ed* (June 3, 2025), <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/science-research-policy/2025/06/03/new-details-trumps-budget-cuts-alarm-researchers>.
- ³ Irena Hwang, Jon Huang, Emily Anthes, Blacki Migliozi and Benjamin Mueller, “The Disappearing Funds for Chronic Diseases [Global Health, Vaccine Research],” *New York Times* (June 4, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/06/04/health/trump-cuts-nih-grants-research.html>.
- ⁴ <https://biologos.org/post/an-open-letter-to-people-of-faith-about-science>

Some Preliminary Thoughts on Science and Its Relation to Public Policy and Public Funding According to Catholic Social Teaching

By Donald G. Boland
(c) 2025

First of all, we have to decide what we mean by science. This will govern all that we have to say about it and of anything else related to it. The other subjects bring in the modern sciences of politics and economics which also need to be understood and defined.

But the basic problem with the discussion lies in the two meanings of science discussed in my books on Logic, Political Science and Economic Science. The fundamental distinction in the meaning of science relevant to this kind of discussion is set out in my most recent books *Teenager Science and the Curse of the Creative Imagination* and *Science of the Day and Everlasting Science*.



The two kinds of science are what are called “Aristotelian Science,” which the Common Doctor of the Church, Saint Thomas Aquinas, takes as the true and perfect meaning and “Modern Science,” which is another meaning of science, at best imperfect and at worst a distorted notion of science. This we have explained fully in our books, most simply in the two latest ones.

Unfortunately, since the rejection of the notion of science of Aristotle, adopted by St. Thomas and therefore clearly (until most recent times) used by the Church in her statements on science (and philosophy), the modern imperfect meaning is the one almost universally adopted as the only meaning of science. Most unfortunately, as we have explained in our books, which outline the whole scope of science (and philosophy) to be found in the works of St. Thomas,

this imperfect meaning, used in a distorted way, has increasingly in modern times been largely adopted by Catholic educational institutions owing to the dominance, politically and financially, of an anti-Catholic (and anti-Aristotelian/Thomist) intellectual culture, initially a Protestant and subsequently secularist/atheist culture and government in the West (whether Capitalist or Socialist).

This deplorable educational situation has only gotten worse since Vatican II when its decrees were mistakenly (and no doubt by many mischievously) taken to downplay the importance of the teaching of the Common Doctor.

This only reinforced the exclusive use of the modern meaning of science and the rejection of the other (Aristotelian/Thomist). Naturally, this has resulted in all manner of confusion for Catholics trying to discuss matters of reason even in the context of Faith.

It is well to remember that Pope Leo XIII took extraordinary means to revive the study of Aquinas, and thereby to restore the meaning for science and philosophy of Aristotle. But the influence of modern culture on the alternative meaning of science (and philosophy or rather philosophies) had grown most powerful, for reasons too complex to go into here.

However, it is well appreciated now that this dominance of “modern culture” is failing, even at an alarming rate, and so is the virtual worship of modern science. Science as so understood attracted great public support, both politically and financially. In the “New World” modern educational institutions were founded (funded) both by Capitalists and the State. But this huge support of such private and public educational institutions can be seen to belong to the past.

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Take the present situation of Harvard and Columbia Universities. The notion of science retains its old status but much diminished. Accordingly, the relation of public policy, and public funding, to science belongs to a discussion that is becoming somewhat dated.

We could discuss what kind of public support should be given to science taken in Aristotelian terms. But this would require different considerations according to the division of the six kinds of science we have discussed in our book *Teenager Science and the Curse of the Creative Imagination*.

Obviously, the State has a different role in the promotion of Metaphysics and Morals (none where modern science is concerned) than in the promotion of Mathematics and Physics (or physico-mathematics).

In all such social concerns the principle of subsidiarity has to be brought into play. In a normal civil society, the scientific endeavour would need relatively little State support. And it is only at the lowest level of research in the natural sciences that some financial

assistance might be appropriate to individual researchers.

Aristotle had Alexander the Great lend his army to collect specimens of fishes, etc., so that Aristotle could do science in this area that still amazes. At the higher levels of science, even in natural science, much of discovery occurs “by accident.” Just think of penicillin, and radioactivity.

The modern sciences of Politics and Economics we have shown to be attempts to put into natural or mathematico-empirical form which is inimical to their practical scientific nature. Accordingly, they have no use in any public policy or public funding. Unaware of this, the politicians and economists just spread a whole lot of pseudo-scientific “doublespeak” put in mathematical language. No one is any the wiser.

There is of course much more that needs to be said with regard to these matters. But the above may give some idea of what this would be. ■

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Notes from the Editor

1. For St. Thomas Aquinas, the scientist shares an orientation to and appreciation of truth with the theologian; “all truth irrespective of who expresses it, comes from the Holy Spirit.”¹ A science is generally the demonstration of conclusions from self-evident principles (although not all principles of specific sciences with particular subject matter are necessarily self-evident).² In the ideal sense, the scientific knower apprehends the cause of what is studied and how it is the cause of its effect.³ This knowledge must be certain such that “the fact could not be other than it is.”⁴

The speculative sciences are divided among natural philosophy or science, mathematics, and theology or divine science (metaphysics). Metaphysics – the study of being itself and of the most fundamental aspects that constitute a being and without which it could not be – is the highest or preeminent, “from which all the other sciences follow, taking their principles from it.”⁵ It is also the most certain science due to the simplicity of its objects, yet, in reference to human persons, it is not so certain due to our weak intellects that have difficulty apprehending those objects.⁶

Armand Maurer explains:

“[Science] reaches its ideal, not simply when it records observable connections in nature and calculates them in mathematical terms, but rather when it accounts for observable phenomena and the properties of things by bringing to light their intelligible relations to their causes. Metaphysics reaches this goal when, for example, it explains the contingent universe through God, mathematics when it explains the properties of a triangle through its definition, natural philosophy when it accounts for change through efficient and final causes and the intrinsic principles of bodies, matter and form.”⁷

Each science has its own object and methods of study; they are not reducible to each other.⁸ Even mathematics, which is most certain to us because it abstracts from motion and the sensible qualities of material things,⁹ is not the sole or foundational approach to knowledge. Natural philosophy is most properly rational because its method is most like human beings’ natural way of knowing.¹⁰ We learn the

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natures of things by knowing their sensible appearances and properties, investigating causes from observation of their effects. This limits our certitude about what we learn.¹¹

2. Per the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the **principle of subsidiarity** indicates that “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.”¹²

The Diocese of Bismarck offers the following helpful explanation on their website:¹³ “All of the church’s social doctrine flows from the recognition that every

human person has a life and dignity that society must respect, protect and foster. Being social creatures, that is done through community, starting with the family. From the family outward, we develop groups, associations, relationships and institutions that make it possible to achieve social growth and to function as a civil society.”

“... Subsidiarity, however, is not mere local control. In fact, the word comes from the Latin ‘subsidium,’ meaning to provide aid. So, the principle of subsidiarity is really about the duty of the higher order to provide assistance to the lower order when appropriate. One example is when the lower order cannot provide a necessary function, such as defense, or has failed to protect the rights of persons and the common good, such as civil rights.” ■

Endnotes

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, 109, 1.

² *Summa Theologica* I-II, 57, 2; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Posterior Analytics* I, 7, 8.

³ *Commentary on Posterior Analytics* I, 4 and 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius’ De Veritate*, 5, 1c.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* I, 2; *Summa Theologica* II-II, 4, 8.

⁷ Armand Maurer, “Introduction” to Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 4th rev. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), ix; This summary largely relies on Maurer’s introduction.

⁸ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* II, 5; *Commentary on Boethius’ De Veritate*, 6, 2.

⁹ *Commentary on Boethius’ De Veritate*, 6, 1, Reply to the Second Question.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Reply to the First Question.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia* 5.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1883.

¹³ Christopher Dodson, “Subsidiarity: A Key Principle of Catholic Social Teaching,” <https://bismarckdiocese.com/news/subsidiarity-a-key-principle-of-catholic-social-teaching>.

Excerpt from

Message of Pope Leo XIV to Participants in the Second Annual Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Corporate Governance

June 19 - 20, 2025

“Together with its extraordinary potential to benefit the human family, the rapid development of AI also raises deeper questions concerning the proper use of such technology in generating a more authentically just and human global society. In this sense, while undoubtedly an exceptional product of human genius, AI is ‘above all else a tool’ (POPE FRANCIS, *Address at the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence*, 14 June 2024). By definition, tools point to the human intelligence that crafted them and draw much of their ethical force from the intentions of the individuals that wield them. In some cases, AI has been used in positive and indeed noble ways to promote greater equality, but there is likewise the possibility of its misuse for selfish gain at the expense of others, or worse, to foment conflict and aggression.

For its part, the Church wishes to contribute to a serene and informed discussion of these pressing questions by stressing above all the need to weigh the ramifications of AI in light of the ‘integral development of the human person and society’ (Note *Antiqua et Nova*, 6). This entails taking into account the well-being of the human person not only materially, but also intellectually and spiritually; it means safeguarding the inviolable dignity of each human person and respecting the cultural and spiritual riches and diversity of the world’s peoples. Ultimately, the benefits or risks of AI must be evaluated precisely according to this superior ethical criterion.”

Full message - <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20250617-messaggio-ia.html>

Catholic Social Teaching: Human Rights and Principles

Edward J. O'Boyle, Ph.D.

(Reprinted from *ITEST Bulletin* Vol. 48 #3, Summer 2017)

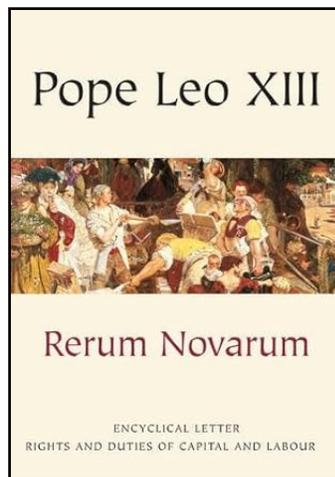
Catholic social economics is based squarely on human rights and principles of Catholic social teaching (CST) that address human need and transform mainstream economics with its reliance on individualism into personalist economics with its emphasis on personalism. Maximizing personal net advantage is not the critical force driving everyday economic affairs. Meeting human material need is.

Sadly Catholic social economics has been replaced at most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States with mainstream economics where *homo economicus* is a central figure and individualism supplies its philosophical foundation. Worse yet there is not a single U.S. university that offers a doctoral degree where the student can learn more about and specialize in Catholic social economics. This means that there will be no one left to teach future students about economic affairs from a Catholic social economics perspective.

Three Human Rights of Catholic Social Teaching

We begin with three of many rights asserted in CST that are commonly recognized and accepted in everyday economic affairs: the right to private property, the right of workers to form a union, and the right to legitimate rest and Sunday rest.

The **right to private property** may be restated as follows: the good or service produced belongs to the person who produces it: "... so it is just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed labor" (Leo XIII, § 10). This principle applies to both the owners, who at some risk built and operate the business enterprise, and the workers who exchange what they produce in that enterprise for wages. In this regard *Rerum Novarum* is outspoken about both classes but notably the workers: "... so have We thought it expedient now to speak on the condition of the working classes" (Leo XIII, § 2). In his reflections on *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II stated that "the key to reading the Encyclical is the *dignity of the worker* as such, and, for the same reason, the *dignity of work* ..." (John Paul 1991, § 6; emphasis in the original).



Our emphasis, therefore, is with the property rights of the workers as affirmed in *Rerum Novarum* (§§ 5 and 57), for the father as a worker (§13), and for the masses including those who work (§15). This principle may be further restated as follows: the property rights of workers protect their ability to meet their own personal needs and the needs of their families through work.

The **workers' right to form a union**, defended in *Rerum Novarum* (§§ 49-51), may be reasserted as follows: the needs of the worker are met through *private group action* in the workplace. Forming a union is one of the means by which those needs are met. In the United States the right to form a union was affirmed at the federal level by the Wagner Act of 1935.

Private group action takes the familiar form of negotiating with management on wages, hours, and working conditions, and may at times justify a strike in order to force management to negotiate in good faith. The right to form a union is meaningless without the corollary **right to strike** -- a necessary counterweight in negotiations to management's right to lock out the workers which is grounded in the right to private property. Those rights are protected best when the parties involved act non-violently (Leo XIII, §§ 20, 36, 39). By acting non-violently to resolve their differences with management, at times with the assistance of an arbitrator or mediator, unions contribute to the needs of the wider community for efficiency in production which proceeds peacefully, "that is, with the tranquility that is born of order" (Dempsey 1958, p. 371).

Regarding the connection between the union and the social encyclicals, Ken Matheny has asserted that even though union membership in the United States has been declining and the influence of unions has been waning, "the fundamental right of workers to form associations for their protection and to advance their legitimate interests remains not only relevant, but essential to a just economy." In this regard, Matheny cites the social encyclicals of John Paul and Benedict, specifically *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Centesimus Annus*, *Deus Caritas Est*, *Spe Salvi*, and *Caritas in Veritate* as the basis for his claim (Matheny 2013, pp. 2-3).

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The **workers' right to legitimate rest and Sunday rest** is stated in *Rerum Novarum* and affirmed in *Centesimus Annus*. This principle may be restated as follows: the need for rest has two dimensions relating directly to human nature. As material beings, humans according to *Rerum Novarum* have a right to legitimate rest that is "proportionate to the wear and tear of one's strength" (John Paul 1991, § 7). As spiritual beings, humans have a right to Sunday rest (John Paul 1991, § 9) that is put into effect by the common practice of allowing workers to worship on the Sabbath and select holydays, though it must be revised for some workers especially in those activities that are continuous such as air travel and hospital care. This principle is compromised increasingly by retail shops opening for business on Sundays.

For more on human rights from John Paul II, see *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

Five Principles of Catholic Social Teaching ... are the priority of labor over capital, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, and the universal destination of the goods of the world.

Five Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Five principles of CST are not so readily recognized in everyday economic affairs. They are the priority of labor over capital, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, and the universal destination of the goods of the world. Examples are provided that demonstrate how these principles are applied in everyday economic affairs. Those examples constitute a small part of a description of the significant characteristics of a personalist economy where the *person of action* and personalism replace *homo economicus* and individualism.

The **priority of labor over capital** may be construed as follows: the profits of capital are subordinate to the needs of workers. Profit-sharing, also called gain-sharing, is a common practice in the United States and has energized Cleveland-based Lincoln Electric for many years, making its employees some of the highest-paid manufacturing workers in the world and the company one of the leading producers of quality electric motors, welding equipment, and supplies. Every year since 1934, Lincoln Electric has paid a profit-sharing bonus to its eligible employees in December. For its 2,800 U.S. employees in 2016, Lincoln Electric paid an average bonus of \$24,111, raising their total earnings

for the year to \$72,323 (Koller, pp.1-2).

Gain-sharing is based on the simple proposition that workers are motivated to increase their productivity when they are promised a share in the gains that flow from those productivity improvements. Management benefits from gain-sharing because they too share in the gains. Management resistance to gain-sharing sometimes takes the form of this argument: we pay the workers once for their work; we should not have to pay them twice.

The **principle of the common good** for our purposes is taken to mean that the need of the person is fulfilled in part by that person's contribution to the common good. Dempsey puts this obligation in terms of contributive justice.

... every man has need of community organization. It is indispensable to the maintenance, development, and perfection of his personality. The members are bound to contribute to the common good of every community to which they belong; *yet the community* can only give a return to its members in the degree to which the members have by their contribution made it a sound community. ... since I have unconditional need of sound, dynamic communities ... I have also an unconditional obligation to contribute to the common good of each (Dempsey 1958, p. 465; emphasis in the original).

Becker asserted that in subordinating him/herself to society, the individual does not lose his/her selfhood. Rather he/she fulfills it by rendering to the common good his/her intelligent and freely-given service (Becker 1959, p. 6).

The response of thousands of private individuals and organizations to the desperate need of the residents left stranded in New Orleans in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is a dramatic example of this kind of subordination freely and intelligently given, sometimes at grave personal risk to the responders.

The **principle of subsidiarity** may be reasserted as follows: the need of all, though different at different times, is best met first through private group action. However, subsidiarity accepts public group action through agencies of the government whenever private group action fails.

Since its founding 130 years ago, United Way has become a highly-regarded private organization operating in many U.S. cities that brings together local

Continues on page 9

business enterprises and other organizations in order to raise funds to help those in the area who are needy. True to the principle of subsidiarity, United Way brings the source of assistance closer to the needy, enabling it to assess those needs more accurately, thereby reducing the need for government intervention. On a worldwide basis, United Way in 2015 raised \$99 million (United Way 2015, not paginated).

United Way is a prime example of a supra-firm alliance that allows member organizations to be more effective in addressing unmet needs collectively than they would be acting on their own. The supra-firm alliance is a formalized agreement that is largely independent of the more powerful public authority and is outside the direct control of the State. It is voluntary and representative of the various private firms and organizations that form the alliance.

United Way is a prime example of a supra-firm alliance that allows member organizations to be more effective in addressing unmet needs collectively than they would be acting on their own.

The *principle of solidarity* may be construed as follows: the need of every person is the need of all.

Reflecting on Leo XIII's messages in *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul in *Centesimus Annus* (§ 16) points explicitly to producer, consumer, and credit cooperatives as one of the "effective instruments of solidarity."

Ocean Spray is a producer cooperative that embraces the principle of solidarity. Founded in 1930, Ocean Spray is owned by 700 cranberry and grapefruit growers in the United States, Canada, and Chile. It has more than 2,000 employees and delivers approximately seven million barrels of cranberries to nearly 20 receiving and processing facilities. The entire global industry delivers roughly 12 million barrels annually. Ocean Spray delivers its products in 70 countries around the world (Ocean Spray 2015 and 2017).

Land O'Lakes is a member-owned and directed producer cooperative that is a second example of solidarity in action. The cooperative dates from 1921, when a group of Minnesota creameries decided to put cooperation ahead of competition. The cooperative today has 300,000 direct or indirect owners who handle 12 billion pounds of milk annually, producing a wide

range of dairy products. In 2016, Land O'Lakes had sales of \$13.2 billion compared to \$14.2 billion in 2013. It provides farmers and ranchers with a line of agricultural supplies including feed, seed, and crop protection products. Additionally, it provides agricultural assistance and technical training in more than 25 developing countries (Land O'Lakes 2015 and 2017).

Ocean Spray and Land O'Lakes are just two of more than 29,000 cooperatives (excluding housing where more than 1.2 million families reside) in the United States. Membership in U.S. cooperatives (some persons belong to more than one) exceeds 350 million. Annual revenues are greater than \$653 billion (Community-Wealth Organization c.2017).

The *universal destination of the goods of the world* may be reasserted in these words: the profits of the company are subordinate to the need of all. In *Centesimus Annus* (§ 6; emphasis in the original) John Paul credits Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* with an awareness that "private property is not an absolute value" and for proclaiming "the necessary complementary principles, such as the *universal destination of the earth's goods*." John Paul also connects the universal destination principle to subsidiarity by arguing that the State has a duty to create "favourable conditions for the free exercise of economic activity, which will lead to abundant opportunities for employment and sources of wealth" and to solidarity, according to which the State has an obligation to defend the weakest (John Paul 1991, §15).

To uphold the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the world, John Paul calls for some public control of the market mechanism to assure "an abundance of work opportunities, a solid system of social security and professional training, the freedom to join trade unions and the effective action of unions, the assistance provided in cases of unemployment, the opportunities for democratic participation in the life of society ..." (John Paul 1991, §19).

The policy of allowing rival pharmaceutical companies to manufacture and sell as a generic drug a product originally developed by another company once its patent has expired allows the originator to re-coup its research and development costs and earn a reasonable profit. This policy effectively makes that medication available to more persons in need because as a generic drug with little or no research and development costs, it can be sold at a lower price. Thus generics are one means for achieving the objective of the universal destination of the goods of the world.

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Person of Action: The New Economic Agent

Notwithstanding the language and intent of mainstream economics as to the importance of price determination and profits, it is human beings who are of the utmost importance because they alone are capable of *acting* in economic affairs as living, breathing, existential actualities. In 1890, Alfred Marshall stated in the very first sentence of his insightful *Principles of Economics* that “Political Economy or Economics is a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life...” (Marshall 1948 [1890], p.1).

Economic agency as represented in mainstream economics is seriously outdated in large measure because it has deliberately oversimplified the economic agent -- the individual or *homo economicus* that originated in the Enlightenment of the 17th-18th centuries -- in order to simplify economic analysis and produce empirical findings about which it can claim certitude. We propose as its replacement the *person of action* who is more faithful to 21st century understanding of human nature according to the encyclicals of John Paul II and CST, and better aligned with human activity in current economic affairs.

The *person of action* dynamically carries out such uniquely economic activities as producing, distributing, exchanging, consuming, saving, investing, credit-creating, lending, borrowing, innovating, developing, and (re-)vitalizing. We suggest *person of action* for two reasons. First, whereas *homo economicus* reduces the economic agent to an individual being, *person of action* recognizes the economic agent as a human being acting in economic affairs both as an individual being and a social being. Second, whereas *homo economicus* is tied to the philosophy of individualism, *person of action* links our conception of economic agency to the philosophy of personalism that aligns much more closely to CST.

With the *person of action* emphasis is on creating new options from which the economic agent is able to choose. This kind of participation in economic affairs is dynamic. With *homo economicus* the emphasis is on choosing from among an array of options without creating new ones. This kind of participation is passive. The *person of action* is entrepreneurial. *Homo economicus* is not.

The result of this change in how the economic agent is represented admittedly introduces more complexity in economic analysis, which in turn demands more judgment on the part of the economic analyst in cor-

rectly interpreting the findings that the analysis brings forth. This proposition rests on the premise that certitude purchased at the price of oversimplification is an illusion.

Economic agency as conceived by mainstream economics is based on the proposition that *homo economicus* maximizes utility and profit and that the economy functions best when it reaches Pareto optimality wherein no one can be better off without making someone else worse off. Maximizing utility and profit means that the good invariably consists in *having* more. This construction misrepresents human nature because it asserts that the economic agent passively selects from among a set of options in order to maximize personal net advantage. In mainstream economics the economic agent is perceived as a “rational, self-interested, calculating *machine*” (Blinder 2000, pp. 18, 24; emphasis added).

Calling to mind Aristotle on virtue, we propose instead that human beings routinely maximize personalist capital in which certain good habits or virtues such as justice and love are learned and practiced by which a human being develops more fully as a human person.

Calling to mind Aristotle on virtue, we propose instead that human beings routinely maximize personalist capital in which certain good habits or virtues such as justice and love are learned and practiced by which a human being develops more fully as a human person. Further, as human beings develop more fully as persons, they become more effective and more highly valued as economic agents. It should be added that human beings become less fully human persons by learning and practicing certain vices such as injustice and hatred and become less effective and less highly valued as economic agents. This proposition rests on the premise that the economic agent is inseparable from the human person. Maximizing personalist capital rests on the assertion that the good inheres in *being* more.

A human being is not an automaton. A disposition to act one way or the other does not program a person to act in any predetermined manner. Otherwise that person would not be truly free for integral human development. Because the economic agent is a complex union of individuality and sociality, he/she is free to act in a self-centered or other-centered manner, in a

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rational or emotional way, a benevolent or mean fashion, a generous or greedy mode, among many other behavioral options. This process of human development certainly is one of the profound mysteries of human nature and one of the reasons that predicting the behavior of economic agents is so weighed down with uncertainty.

Final Remarks

At the end of his professional work in employment security, in which field he was recognized as a leading researcher, Becker who for many years served on the staff of the Institute of Social Order, reminisced on the reasons that prompted him into that line of work. His ultimate motive was “a vision of Judgment Day and of the Judge saying: ‘I was unemployed, Joseph, and you supported me’” (Becker 1991, p. 56). In private, Becker offered this advice to one of his graduate students: “If you’re really serious about this kind of research, you must roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty in the information available only at the state employment security agency.”

Good advice then and good advice now because it underscores the importance of (1) keeping in mind why Catholic social economists do what they do and (2) doing the ditch-digging work necessary to develop an accurate description of the significant characteristics of a personalist economy. Without that kind of work, CST will never be seriously re-examined in terms of everyday economic affairs, and in the worst case, it is in danger of wasting away.

Orthodox economics of the kind espoused by Thomas Divine, who studied under Lionel Robbins at the London School of Economics, informs the thinking of economic faculties across the United States, including those at Catholic colleges and universities. In that sense, there is very little difference between economics faculties at Catholic institutions of higher learning and other private or state institutions. A survey of the textbooks used to teach the principles courses would demonstrate that in general the same ones are used in Catholic colleges and universities as in private or state institutions. The personalist economics espoused years ago by Bernard Dempsey, a student of Joseph Schumpeter at Harvard, is barely visible. Even so, Dempsey’s perspective is the key to a re-invigoration and re-establishment of Catholic social economics because, unlike orthodox economics, it is constructed on a concept of the economic agent and a philosophy that are drawn directly from CST.

Eventually the differences between Jesuit colleagues

Dempsey and Divine, who were largely responsible for establishing the Catholic Economics Association in the early 1940s and who wrote on social justice, the just wage, human perfection as the primary goal of society, and business ethics were reconciled. Divine noted as a graduate student that the French Catholic social movement involving individualists and corporatists were characterized as “divided on theory but united on social action.” In effect Dempsey and Divine were *divided on theory but united on social action* (O’Boyle 2014, p.5).

Putting Catholic social economics back into the economics curriculum and supporting rigorous research along those lines, notably though not exclusively applied to real-world problems such as employment security, discrimination, market failure, and non-collusive cooperation, will take a huge commitment on the part of Catholic university administrators who somehow must convince their economics faculties that the mainstream paradigm based on the autonomous, entirely rational, self-interested, utility and profit-maximizing individual and strict individualism do not square with CST, notably John Paul II’s writings on person and personalism. There is much work to be done in re-thinking economics, re-constituting the economic agent as the *person of action*, and applying this thinking to current economic affairs and problems -- a worthy undertaking for any economics faculty free to explore beyond the boundaries of mainstream economic thought.

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Our own reflections on these matters led us to re-think economic affairs in terms of a personalist economy that is based on private property, the market mechanism, private enterprise, the common good, economic freedom, subsidiarity, solidarity, worker participation in enterprise decision-making, the universal destination of the world’s goods, the legitimacy of profit, personalist capital, and the *person of action*. A personalist economy represents a viable option to both a market economy and a command economy because it is organized around private groups positioned between the individual person and the more powerful State, groups that emerge due to the

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suffocating influence of the State and the marketplace on the human person. These private intermediary groups reconcile the individual good of the market system and the common good of the command economy, and are the distinguishing characteristic of a personalist economy.

If such a recovery at Catholic universities is not forthcoming, the work will be left to men and women acting alone without the benefit of mentors who would have seen to it that they were thoroughly grounded in the rights and principles of CST and would have been willing to undertake the work of arriving at an accurate de-

scription of the significant characteristics of a economic order that is consistent with those rights and principles. A website constructed and maintained possibly by a generous Catholic university, which identifies or better yet provides access to the full range of CST materials already published and relating either to its philosophical base or empirical observations, would be most useful in pointing to what has been done to date and what remains for the interested CST scholar to do. Once that work has been completed, a coherent and effective social economic policy is more likely to emerge. ■

Ed O'Boyle was a long-time ITEST member who went on to meet the Lord in July 2022. He held a doctorate in economics from Saint Louis University. He worked for 10 years in public service doing research and held a faculty position at a Louisiana public university for 30 years. He and his wife Meade were married for over 52 years. They have four children and 13 grandchildren.

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