The Poor of the Planet and the Planet of the Poor: Ecological Ethics and Economic Liberation

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ESSAY


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I. Thomas Paine and Adam Smith ......................... 147
II. The Market and Social Justice ............................ 152
III. The "Preferential Option for the Poor": Latin American
Origins .......................................................... 155
IV. "Preferential Option for the Poor": U.S. Church Advocacy . 158
   A. Strangers and Guests: Midwestern Catholic Bishops... 158
   B. Economic Justice for All: U.S. Catholic Bishops ...... 160
   C. Renewing the Earth: U.S. Catholic Bishops .......... 162
V. Economics and Ecology ......................................... 164
VI. Ecology, Economics, and Racism .......................... 165
    Hurricane Katrina, Racism, and Justice ................ 167
VII. Native Perspectives .......................................... 169
VIII. Exploring Alternatives, Locally and Globally ............ 171
IX. Creation, Community, and Commitment .................. 174
X. Ecological Ethics and the Poor ............................ 174
    Principles of Christian Ecological Ethics .............. 175
XI. Visions and Commitments .................................... 178

Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest, dedicates his landmark work, A Theology of Liberation, to Peruvian novelist José María Arguedas.¹ Gutiérrez returns to Arguedas later in the book. He sets the theological context by stating the following:

To know Yahweh, which in Biblical language is equivalent to saying to love Yahweh, is to establish just relationships among [people], it is to recognize the rights of the poor. The God of

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Biblical revelation is known through interhuman justice. When justice does not exist, God is not known; [God] is absent.2

An excerpt follows, then, from Arguedas's novel Todas las Sangres.3 In the story, a priest and his sacristan discuss divine presence. The priest declares, "God is everywhere."4 The sacristan queries, "Was God in the heart of those who broke the body of the innocent teacher Bellido? ... In the official who took the corn fields away from their owners ... ?"5 Gutiérrez has referred to the Arguedas narrative periodically in his writings and lectures, commenting that "the poor have a different God" than the rich.

So, too, do the poor have a different planet than the rich.

The planet of the affluent and the planet of the poor have different environments (natural and social settings); different ecologies (relationships with other biota and with nature as a whole); and different concrete realities (social contexts; impacts of prevailing social structures). The planet of the affluent is a world in which every material convenience, manufactured from Earth's natural goods, is readily available. Consumers can purchase food from around the world at nearby supermarkets or specialty delis. The latest electronic device is bought online or locally, and might have been produced by a factory in China or Mexico. The house is secure in a "gated community." A Lincoln or Lexus SUV might well be parked in the multiple-car garage. Children probably go to private schools, unburdened with the need to mix with students of a different race, ethnicity, or social class. The home is well stocked with consumer goods, including the latest appliances. The world of the affluent is jealously guarded from interference by an equitable, progressive tax structure, or from intrusion by people who are not wanted in the neighborhood except to mow lawns, wash laundry, serve as nannies, or deliver goods. When natural disasters threaten, the house is sufficiently buttressed to withstand nature's assaults, or, if needed, a sunny beach is within reach through a hastily purchased plane ticket. Global warming does not exist, or, when evidence of its impacts proves irrefutable, it is just part of a "natural" cycle, a temporary global "climate change" not related to human industrial activity or auto emissions. Water emerges pure from the faucet but that source is used only for cooking and washing; bottles in the well-stocked refrigerator provide the latest purified version. Nature is "harnessed" to provide for human wants well beyond human needs. Political and economic structures are supported and retained through coercive police actions at home and invasive military operations around the world, as deemed necessary, because they are needed to maintain the status quo. It is a world inhabited by the wealthy, but also a world to which some of the

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2. Id.
3. JOSE MARIA ARGUEDA, TODA LAS SANGRES (1968).
5. Id.
poor aspire, out of desperation or because of a lack of social consciousness and concern.

The planet of the poor provides no access to a sufficiency of pure water for drinking, cooking, or bathing. It is often a world of marginal agricultural lands relegated to attempts to provide subsistence goods for the impoverished, and prime agricultural lands dedicated to export crops whose sale will further enrich the landholder. It is a world of unjust wages; unsafe working conditions; and unavailable health care, basic education, police protection, and social stability. In this world, floods and droughts, increasingly resulting from human-caused or -exacerbated global warming, imperil survival. Access to natural goods, intended by God to provide for all people’s needs, is limited or denied. It is a world of political and economic oppression and violence, all of which provide evidence of an ongoing, one-sided class war, in which the powerful rich dominate the powerless poor, maintaining their position through institutionalized structural violence and coercive police violence, which in turn at times provoke a desperate resort to revolutionary counterviolence. It is a world dominated by structures of sin that impede people who strive just to survive from day to day, or even from hour to hour—structures that benefit people who lack compassion and do not engage in efforts to effect change even while they have time, treasure, and talent to do so. It might be a world where the churches of the affluent overflow with individualistic salvation fervor and the belief that God is rewarding them in this life and will again reward them in the next; and the churches of the poor overflow with people needing an opiate to overcome their hopelessness in this world: the opiate of a desperate hope for a better life in the next world, in which they will have their individual salvation.

Some affluent people, particularly but not exclusively those who are elderly or parents, believe that for their personal or familial safety and security they must live in gated communities because of rampant crime in the city or area in which they want to live. Their fears might be justified. The questions here are to what extent poverty and racism promote the crimes they fear, and the extent to which they are trying to eliminate poverty and eradicate racism—through judicious expenditures of tax monies on food, clothing, housing, education, job training, employment, and health care for the poor; through volunteering their time and talent to work with the poor for justice; through developing, or at least supporting, universal health care, a minimum living wage for working people, elimination of discrimination in housing and the work place, and tax increases that will help to provide good public schools with justly compensated teachers.
I. Thomas Paine and Adam Smith

The "preferential option for the poor" proposed by the Catholic Church elicits negative comments from people who benefit from the current economic and political status quo. They invoke the eighteenth century British economist Adam Smith, a pillar of capitalism, and his phrase, "the invisible hand." A counterpoint to and contemporary of Smith is the American revolutionary Thomas Paine, a pillar of the Constitution, whose statements about the requisite role of government to provide for the needs of the poor, and advocacy of property ownership as a natural right, stand in sharp contrast to the views of Smith.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809) was born and raised in England, in a working class family, and was primarily self-educated. He served in the navy and then was employed in low-paid government positions. Paine came to know firsthand the plight of the poor in England. With his upbringing, experiences, and participation in the American Revolution as a background, Paine wrote The Rights of Man—Part Second in 1792. In it, he declares:

When it shall be said in any country in the world, "My poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am a friend of its happiness":—when these things can be said, then may that country boast of its constitution and its government.6

While one may argue with Paine's apparent acceptance of a condition of poverty, as expressed in the statement that the poor are "happy," one may note also that at least the poor are "happy," presumably because they have finally received at least education and needed subsistence goods, are without "ignorance" and "distress," and have no need to be beggars on the streets.

Paine wrote the preceding ideas just sixteen years after the 1776 publication of his pamphlet, Common Sense (a major stimulus to the American Revolution), the U.S. Declaration of Independence, and Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations.7

Adam Smith (1723–1790) wrote The Wealth of Nations when he was between teaching positions in his native Scotland; originally, it was delivered as a series of public lectures. In the book, while discussing international commerce, he speaks of an "invisible hand," mobilized unknowingly by private entrepreneurs, that will effect public good in the form of the

well-being of their society. The quote, much (ab)used, bears citing at length:

As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it.

By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.

Smith here advocates that businesses maximize profits; in so doing they will benefit themselves, their industry, and their nation. The business owner who is pursuing profit will unknowingly provide a benefit to society at large, they will promote "the public interest." Smith has a strong focus on individual labor and accomplishment in his work, understandable given his social position as an educated professor and not one of the laborers, generally poor and illiterate, in Scotland and the rest of Europe. He does state that the "invisible hand" frequently becomes operative; it is not always at work. Some economists have used Smith's phrase to argue against any government assistance to people in need, or any government efforts to establish a living wage for workers, or, today, to provide universal health care for all citizens. Some have tried to argue that the "invisible hand" is divine guidance, ignoring the fact that in Christian traditions God is solicitous of the poor, and that the Bible prompts its readers to directly aid the poor. When those with disposable income control the marketplace, the poor cannot exert influence by expending their subsistence income for whatever basic nourishment, clothing, and shelter are available. The fact that poverty is rampant in the U.S. and other industrialized nations indicates well that there is no unconscious or divine "invisible hand" rectifying the excesses of the affluent. It also indicates, why the Catholic Church and other religious institutions advocate compassion, and even a preferential option, for the poor.

8. SMITH, supra note 7, at 484–85 (emphasis added).
Adam Smith had proposed the workings of an “invisible hand” in an earlier work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published originally in 1759, a book which brought him extensive public recognition. At the time, he was professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow University. Smith discusses benefits accruing to the poor through the unwitting assistance of the rich:

The produce of the soil maintains at all times nearly that number of inhabitants which it is capable of maintaining. The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor; and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants; and thus, without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition. These last, too, enjoy their share of all that it produces. In what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level.

The shortcomings of this statement are readily apparent. (It should be remembered that Smith is writing centuries ago, in a different era and locale, but it should be noted, too, that Smith’s ideas are quoted today as if they were written today and apply universally.) The rich “select from the heap” as much as they can, even if it means the poor must lack necessities thereby. The rich certainly consume *much* more than the poor, not *little* more. He does speak frankly about the “natural” selfishness of the rich, and their attempt to gratify their “vain and insatiable desires.” He draws erroneous conclusions from this, however, that during such activity the rich “divide with the poor” what results from their greed, doing so to the extent that the “invisible hand” provides “nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made had the earth been divided into equal portions.” Smith claims, a divine establishment of class status: “providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters.” The result of all this, for Smith, is that the poor “enjoy their share of all that [Earth] produces” and are happy because their “ease of body and peace of mind” is about

11. *Id.* at 182 (emphasis added).
“level” with that of the wealthy. Adam Smith obviously had no real contact with the poor—otherwise he would not have made such sweeping assertions. Neither Smith nor his contemporary admirers wish for any change to the status quo that might benefit the poor and jeopardize the position, power, and purse of the affluent. Consequently, they resist government and Church efforts to enable the poor to have a more equitable share of Earth’s land and natural goods.

In contrast to Smith, Thomas Paine did not pronounce a providential establishment of a classed society, but declared in *The Rights of Man* that “there ought to be a limit to property” and the wealth of vast estates is “a prohibitable luxury” if it exceeds what is “necessary or sufficient for the support of a family.”

In *Agrarian Justice* (1796) Paine declared that “the earth, in its natural uncultivated state was, and ever would have continued to be, the common property of the human race; that in that state, every person would have been born to property . . .” Paine, in obvious disagreement with Smith, states that property in land should not exist in perpetuity, since “Man did not make the earth . . . neither did the Creator of the earth open a land-office, from whence the first title-deeds should issue.”

Paine advocated government intervention to eliminate inequitable property arrangements, since (and here is an obvious contrast to Smith’s idea of an “invisible hand”) if left with a choice regarding whether or not to provide for the needs of the poor, the rich would be unwilling to act justly: “with respect to justice, it ought not to be left to the choice of detached individuals whether they will do justice or not.” In the meantime “[t]he great mass of the poor in all countries are becom[ing] an hereditary race, and it is next to impossible for them to get out of that state of themselves.” Here the ideas of Thomas Paine the fiery revolutionary complement those of the Catholic Church: the “hereditary race” will rise from that state if people exercise a “preferential option for the poor,” and if laws are legislated which provide for their needs.

For the poor in the United States and around the world over the centuries since Smith’s book was published and his theories were accepted, while Paine’s vision and his ideas about poverty and property were largely ignored, the “invisible hand” often has been a clenched fist. The poor suffer from the impacts of “the marketplace” on many fronts from exploited working people to dispossessed farmers, from young single mothers to elderly men on street corners who “will work for food.” A major reason is that they do not have the wealth to guide the marketplace, let alone to buy into it or

14. *Id.* at 611.
15. *Id.* at 618.
16. *Id.* at 619.
to influence politicians via campaign contributions. Where is the benevolent "invisible hand" when rural villagers in South Africa cannot obtain water to drink or to nourish their crops or livestock because nationally water has become privatized to a transnational water corporation operating in the "marketplace," and their water debit card is no longer valid because, as they tried to meet their subsistence needs for water while paying inflated "market" prices, they ran out of funds? Where is the "invisible hand" when a family in Massachusetts lacks money to pay for heat for their apartment in the cold of winter? Is the "invisible hand" of capitalist theory present in the visible hand of socialist practice when Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez directs Venezuela's state-owned Citgo Oil Company to provide home heating oil to poor families in Massachusetts at 40 percent of the market rate?17

Closer to home for the University of St. Thomas School of Law, where is the "invisible hand" in Minnesota when a transnational U.S. oil or insurance company outbids a local farmer to acquire a family farm at auction—a family farm put up for sale because the family could not afford to sell their crops at prices below the costs of production and far below parity, and whose farm could not be bought by a neighboring farmer trying to give a daughter a start in agriculture, because prices for their produce were low too, and, in any case, they could not outbid a transnational corporation? Some economists ply their trade smugly stating that all will work out in the end, that if someone really wants to purchase a good (for example, a wetlands area or a forest to conserve species in their own right, or to provide habitat for deer they intend to hunt) they will come up with the funds for it and compete with others (for example, to outbid an oil company that wants to drill in the wetlands, or a timber company that wants to clear-cut the forest). Economics, rightly called the "dismal science," is scarcely scientific and certainly promotes the dismal plight of the poor.

What Paine wrote about principles of commerce is relevant here for economics: "It is one thing in the counting house, in the world it is another."18 It would do economists well to emulate, in this regard, one of Paine's most famous sayings: "my country is the world, and my religion is to do good."19 Instead, they act as if the "market" were divinely inspired or worthy of worship, an attitude described by Harvey Cox in his Atlantic Monthly article, The Market as God: Living in the New Dispensation.20 The market religion declares that people will attain "salvation through the advent of free markets."21 Writes Cox: "At the apex of any theological sys-

18. Paine, The Rights of Man, supra note 6, at 401.
19. Id. at 414.
21. Id.
tem, of course, is its doctrine of God. In the new theology this celestial pinnacle is occupied by The Market, which I capitalize to signify both the mystery that enshrouds it and the reverence it inspires in business folk."22 Unfortunately, devotees of this new religion confuse selfishness with self-love and self-interest. Smith, one of their prophets for profits, theorizes that when the rich act out of "self-interest" they will help the poor indirectly. It is obvious in the world around us that this is not so. "Self-interest" with no selflessness is selfishness, and self-destructive. "Selfless" means to have "less self," that is, to make space for others, particularly those who have pressing needs—but also for God, who is concerned about all life. "Self-interest" for all people, who as social beings live in societies on an endangered planet permeated by the immanent presence of God, includes neighbor-interest, Earth-interest, and God-interest.

Consider the case of a corporate lawyer who lives with their family in a supersized McMansion in a gated and guarded community. The lawyer, whose personal assets and professional skills are substantial, fights against property tax increases, the funds for which would repair or rebuild deteriorating public schools. The "invisible hand" is being ignored and will have no impact if the lawyer reasons: "My children are now in college, so they don't need these schools, and, in any case, they went to private prep schools and didn't have to endure a mediocre public education." The lawyer might oppose, too, universal health care and minimum wage increases for poor workers because both would cost the company that employs the lawyer a portion of its maximized profits. The lawyer's self-interest, in actuality, would rather be to promote quality public schools and health care: available data shows how crime rises with increased unemployment and poverty; social support services such as welfare payments are less costly than the costs of incarceration; and poor people without adequate health care eventually impact health costs more because of postponed visits to a health care provider. Beyond acting out of selfishness or self-interest, however, the lawyer might act out of compassion. Reflection on Church teachings about the "preferential option for the poor" might help the lawyer and others of like mind, unless their new religion of the market does not allow such considerations.

II. The Market and Social Justice

The marketplace economy contradicts the three basic types of justice in Catholic social teaching, as elaborated in the U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter, Economic Justice for All: commutative justice, distributive justice, and social justice.23

22. Id. at 20.
In their document, the bishops advocate commutative justice, which "calls for fundamental fairness in all agreements and exchanges between individuals or private social groups." Since primarily rich and powerful individuals and corporations control the marketplace, determining which goods will be produced and in what country, and where they will be made available and at what price; and since the poor have insufficient financial resources to affect the marketplace: there is not a "fundamental fairness" in agreements and exchanges, and commutative justice is violated. The bishops declare that "[d]istributive justice requires that the allocation of income, wealth, and power in society be evaluated in light of its effects on persons whose basic material needs are unmet." The marketplace makes no such evaluation of the types of allocations described; its advocates claim, essentially, that it is blind to any considerations other than what people "demand" to buy through their purchasing patterns. The bishops state that "[s]ocial justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way." The stress and requirements of survival limit poor people’s ability to be active participants in society, and society in general, and marketplace manipulators in particular do not fulfill their duty to enable participation by the poor in determining what is produced; under what work, health, and safety conditions it is produced; where it is produced; and at what price it is marketed.

The U.S. bishops describe the legitimate and necessary and morally correct role of the poor to be among those who make theoretical and practical changes to the current U.S. economic system that is based, in part, on Adam Smith’s theories:

Decisions must be judged in light of what they do for the poor, what they do to the poor, and what they enable the poor to do for themselves. The fundamental moral criterion for all economic decisions, policies, and institutions is this: They must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.

People of the United States should ask poor people, and listen carefully for the answer the poor give to them: To what extent does the present economic system and economic arrangements and the "marketplace" meet your needs? It is a question about both subsistence needs and basic human rights.

24. Id. ¶ 69.
25. Id. ¶ 70.
26. Id. ¶ 71.
27. Id. ¶ 24.
In Bangladesh in 1974, a professor and chair of a university economics department was dramatically confronted by massive starvation in the city of Jobra, to which rural people were streaming daily. Muhammad Yunus, who had a comfortable personal life and a respected professional life, observed later:

I used to feel a thrill at teaching my students the elegant economic theories that could supposedly cure societal problems of all types. But in 1974, I started to dread my own lectures. What good were all my complex theories when people were dying of starvation on the sidewalks and porches across from my lecture hall? My lessons were like the American movies where the good guys always win. But when I emerged from the comfort of the classroom, I was faced with the reality of the city streets. Here good guys were mercilessly beaten and trampled. Daily life was getting worse, and the poor were growing even poorer. 28

The situation unfolding before his eyes caused Yunus to reevaluate economic theory as he was confronted by the results of economic practices:

Nothing in the economic theories I taught reflected the life around me. How could I go on telling my students make-believe stories in the name of economics? I wanted to become a fugitive from academic life. I needed to run away from these theories and from my textbooks and discover the real-life economics of a poor people’s existence. 29

Yunus decided to lend small amounts of money to poor people to start their own small business. Eventually, his efforts grew to become the Grameen Bank, which provides loans to some three million people in Bangladesh; millions more people are helped by lending agencies on five continents that have adopted his program. For his efforts, Muhammad Yunus received the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.

The disparity in lifestyles between the affluent and the poor, and the need to enable the poor to take charge of their lives, are among the reasons that the Catholic bishops have advocated a “preferential option for the poor.” The poor, lacking money for more than subsistence goods, and unable to control or influence markets, cannot compete, and need more powerful voices to speak with and for them. The Church provides such a voice, and government ears need to hear and respond to this spoken word in order for justice to be done, so that the powerful might not continue to oppress the weak, and the rich continue to oppress the poor. The U.S. bishops declare that this also means “all of us must examine our way of living in the light of

29. Id.
the needs of the poor." What might result on planet Earth if this were to occur?

The planet of the rich and the planet of the poor can change and become a single communal planet if the voices of the poor of the planet are heard, and their cries of pain and anger and their pleas for justice are heeded. Their situation will not change if those who control the political and economic structures, or those who have the power of moral suasion to influence those who exercise such control, remain among those who “having eyes do not see, and having ears do not hear.”

The planet of the rich and the planet of the poor can become one planet, with an integrated, relational community, if citizens unrestricted by the economic extremes of wealth or poverty develop a new conscience and consciousness, and consequently a concern for and commitment to the poor and to planetary well-being. Instead of a divided community they will have a relational community in which commons goods (the natural goods provided in the Earth commons) become common goods (goods shared by all community members, as needed), to provide for the needs and common good of all. A planet that is home to such a relational community will begin to become realized when people and peoples exercise a preferential option for the poor.

Reflection on and commitment to a “preferential option for the poor” will help clergy, laity, lawyers and law students, as well as the general public, to link economics and ecology, and work to make the planet of the poor equitable with the planet of the affluent. On such a planet, natural goods will provide for the common good and be used intergenerationally at an ecologically and socially sustainable pace; social goods will benefit human communities; and the integral well-being of humans, all biota, and the abiotic context of their existence will be restored, conserved, and respected in the present and in the future.

III. The “Preferential Option for the Poor”: Latin American Origins

In 1979, CELAM III, the third Latin American Bishops’ Conference (Conferencia Episcopal Latino Americana), took place in Puebla, Mexico. Its theme was “The Church in the Present and Future of Latin America.” At its conclusion the bishops issued their Final Document, which declared that a “preferential option for the poor” was a particular concern for the Latin American Catholic Church. Other bishops throughout the world took up the concept and the cause—at least in their official statements, if not with

30. ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, supra note 23, ¶ 75.
31. Mark 8:18.
33. Id.
consistent and continuous concrete projects—and it began to attract significant international ecclesial and secular interest. Concurrently, theologians, ethicists, parish members, and community activists appropriated the concept as their own, and sought to concretize it in their respective (and overlapping) educational and pastoral endeavors.

The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was coined by Gustavo Gutiérrez. Its earliest formulations are present in the documents issued by the Latin American bishops at their 1968 CELAM II conference held in Medellín, Colombia. Gutiérrez was an advisor to the bishops and the principal “ghost” writer of their major documents.

The Medellín bishops in their Document on Poverty, in the section Solidarity and preference for the poor, declared that “[t]he Lord’s mandate is to preach the gospel to the poor. We must therefore distribute our apostolic personnel and efforts so as to give preference to the poorest and neediest, and to those who are segregated for any reason.”34 They elaborated: “We wish to heighten our awareness of the obligation to have solidarity with the poor, an obligation that is prompted by charity. This means that we shall make their problems and struggles our own . . .”35 In their Document on Peace, the bishops’ Pastoral Conclusions included the statements that “[c]reating a just social order, without which peace is an idle dream, is an eminently Christian task”; and that “[f]ollowing the gospel mandate, we should defend the rights of the poor and the oppressed.”36

In his Closing Address at Medellín, Cardinal Juan Landázuri Ricketts, Archbishop of Lima, Peru and First Vice-President of CELAM, stated that “[w]e will be faithful to our ecclesial status to the extent that we make room in our heart and our pastoral activity for the words of Paul VI: the poor are a sacrament of Christ.”37

In Puebla, Mexico, at CELAM III, the bishops declared in The Final Document, in the chapter A Preferential Option for the Poor, that the Medellín Conference a decade earlier had “adopted a clear and prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with, the poor . . . We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation.”38 In the concluding paragraphs of the document, the bishops declared that “[c]ommitted to the poor, we condemn as anti-evangelical the extreme poverty that affects an extremely large segment of the population on our continent,”39 acknowledged the structural source of economic oppression, and

35. Id. ¶ 10, at 214.
36. Id. ¶¶ 20, 22, at 208.
37. Id. at 226.
39. Id. ¶ 1159, at 267.
pledged to try to alter it: "We will make every effort to understand and denounce the mechanisms that generate this poverty." They pledged, too, to collaborate with others to effect change: "Acknowledging the solidarity of other Churches, we will combine our efforts with those of people of good will in order to uproot poverty and create a more just and fraternal world."

At Puebla, too, Pope John Paul II suggested a practical and provocative process to address and ameliorate the plight of the poor. In his journey around Mexico, while in the rural village of Cuilapán, the Pope addressed a multitude comprised primarily of landless and impoverished indios and campesinos (agricultural workers). After noting that "there is always a social mortgage on all private property, so that goods may serve the general assignment that God has given them," John Paul II declared that "if the common good demands it, there is no need to hesitate at expropriation itself, done in the right way." At the close of his discourse, addressing "responsible officials of the people," he said:

"[P]ower-holding classes who sometimes keep your lands unproductive when they conceal the food that so many families are doing without, the human conscience, the conscience of the peoples, the cry of the destitute, and above all the voice of God and the Church join me in reiterating to you that it is not just, it is not human, it is not Christian to continue certain situations that are clearly unjust."

On the previous day, in his Opening Address at the Puebla Conference, John Paul II noted, to the chagrin of conservatives who had hoped to retrench from commitments made at Medellín:

"How far humanity has travelled in those ten years! How far the Church has travelled in those ten years in the company and service of humanity! This third conference cannot disregard that fact. So it will have to take Medellín's conclusions as its point of departure, with all the positive elements contained therein . . . ."

In this same address, he stated that the Church "defends human rights," and "[i]t is then that the Church's teaching, which says that there is a social mortgage on all private property, takes on an urgent character . . . . Eventu-

40. Id. ¶1160, at 267.
41. Id. ¶1161, at 267.
42. Pope John Paul II, Address to the Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas, in PUEBLA AND BEYOND, supra note 32, at 82. Interestingly, the idea of a "social mortgage" on private property, which had been expressed previously by Pope Paul VI, has a complement in a proposal by Thomas Paine in Agrarian Justice: that "[e]very proprietor, therefore, of cultivated lands, owes to the community a ground-rent (for I know of no better term to express the idea) for the land which he holds . . . ." Agrarian Justice, supra note 13, at 611. In the same essay, Paine proposed using a ten percent inheritance tax to redistribute land and wealth from the affluent to the poor.
43. Pope John Paul II, supra note 42, at 83.
44. Pope John Paul II, Opening Address at the Puebla Conference, in PUEBLA AND BEYOND, supra note 32, at 57.
ally this Christian, evangelical principle will lead to a more just and equita-
ble distribution of goods . . . . 45

The commitment to the poor expressed in Puebla, and encapsulated in
the phrase "preferential option for the poor," emigrated from Latin America
and found expression in bishops' statements from around the world, includ­
ing in the United States.

IV. "PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR":
U.S. CHURCH ADVOCACY

The "preferential option for the poor" originally referred to a more
equitable distribution of Earth's goods, and establishment of political sys­
tems and economic structures which would make that possible and ensure
its continuity. Similar ideas were expressed in the Midwestern U.S. in the
twelve-state document issued by the Catholic bishops: Strangers and
Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland,46 in the U.S. bishops' eco­
nomic pastoral letter Economic Justice for All;47 and in the U.S. bishops'
environmental pastoral letter, Renewing the Earth.48

A. Strangers and Guests: Midwestern Catholic Bishops

Minnesota, home to the University of St. Thomas School of Law, was
one of the twelve heartland states whose bishops issued Strangers and
Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland (1980),49 which focused on
issues of land ownership and use. The document, which had been developed
over the course of two years, including thorough discussions among laity
and clergy organized by area dioceses, was signed by all seventy-two active
and retired bishops in the region. The bishops provided ten principles,
"Principles of Land Stewardship," to guide people of the Heartland and
beyond as they sought to be good stewards of God's Earth and use God's
land responsibly:

1. The land is God's.

45. Id. at 66–67.
46. 1980 Heartland Project, Strangers and Guests: "Toward Community in the Heartland-A
Regional Bishops' Statement on Land Issues," National Catholic Rural Life Conference (May 1,
1980).
47. See Economic Justice for All, supra note 23.
48. U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, RENEWING THE EARTH: AN INVITATION TO RE­
FLECTION AND ACTION ON ENVIRONMENT IN LIGHT OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING (1991) [here­
.shtml.
49. The principles and a more extensive elaboration of the pastoral letter are available in
nnesota bishops who signed the document were Victor Balke, Crookston; Paul Anderson, Duluth;
Raymond Lucker, New Ulm; George Speltz, Saint Cloud; John Roach, Saint Paul-Minneapolis;
John Kinney, Saint Paul-Minneapolis; Richard Ham, Saint Paul-Minneapolis; and Loras Watters,
Winona. The present writer served as editor and principal writer of the document and Director of
the bishops' Heartland Project.
2. People are God's stewards on the land.
3. The land's benefits are for everyone.
4. The land should be distributed equitably.
5. The land should be conserved and restored.
6. Land use planning must consider social and environmental impacts.
7. Land use should be appropriate to land quality.
8. The land should provide a moderate livelihood.
9. The land's workers should be able to become the land's owners.
10. The land's mineral wealth should be shared.\(^50\)

It should be evident that in numerous ways these principles relate to the "preferential option for the poor," and might help to stimulate projects that embody them. The first principle reminds people that they live and work on God's land, which, according to traditional Catholic teaching, is intended by God (and embedded by God in natural laws of creation) to meet everyone's needs, prior to any human division of land into private property: the subsistence needs of the poor should be prioritized and met. The second principle affirms people's stewardship responsibilities: they should care for God's land so that it might remain sustainably productive; provide healthy food, fuel, and fiber; and have unpolluted, healthy soil and water—this would benefit people of all social classes through generations, but especially the poor in the present who currently lack these goods. The third principle states that what the land provides (natural goods; products resulting from human labor on the land, and derived from natural goods) is to meet the needs of all people and communities, now and in the future, concretizing intercommunity and intergenerational concern and commitment. The needs of the poor would be met to the extent that eventually there would be no poor if this principle were put into practice. The fourth principle calls for a just division of property in land, in terms of both public property and private property, as to size and quality, since, as John Paul II taught, all property has a "social mortgage"; it is to be used to benefit society as a whole, not solely those who hold title to it. The poor in particular, but also owner-operator family farmers, would benefit from such a just distribution.\(^51\) The fifth principle affirms the need to conserve land that is being cared for well, and to restore land that has been degraded because of need (of the poor, who act from desperation trying to survive) or because of greed (of the affluent, who act to maximize their profits and increase their wealth).

The sixth principle reminds business entrepreneurs and managers, and elected government officials and appointed government personnel, that al-

\(^{50}\) Id. at 41 (citing STRANGERS AND GUESTS: TOWARD COMMUNITY IN THE HEARTLAND § 50 (1980)).

\(^{51}\) To achieve this end the bishops proposed a progressive land tax—an idea proposed centuries earlier by Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Id. at 42.
terations to urban and rural areas should not be undertaken until potential environmental impacts—on the Earth, biota, and humans as individuals and communities—have been analyzed and evaluated, with the common good as the final arbiter of choices to be made. The food and shelter needs of the poor, and the employment needs of working people in general, should be important factors in evaluating those choices. The seventh principle reminds people to make the “best and highest use” of Earth’s places and goods, bearing in mind to exercise a preferential option for the poor when making decisions about changing natural terrain, eliminating or altering human structures or transportation systems, and impacting rivers, forests, and mountains. The eighth principle states that people should seek to provide for themselves and their families such that neither they nor others are impoverished (or are maintained in conditions of poverty) when the natural goods of Earth are extracted, or when manufactured goods are sold. The ninth principle declares that people should be enabled to move beyond working for others to working for themselves, as individuals, families, or cooperatives, such that poverty will be eliminated when people have their own land or land-dependent business. The tenth principle offers a corrective to the concentration of mineral wealth (petroleum, gold, copper, etc.) in a few hands, as in the current inequitable private distribution that violates several of the preceding principles, diminishes stewardship, ignores the common good, and conflicts with consciousness of the needs of the poor and with conscientious, compassionate concretizations in community of the preferential option for the poor.

The Midwestern bishops’ land principles, then, if appropriately and conscientiously observed, would have a profound social impact, and effect a concrete expression of the option for the poor.

B. Economic Justice for All: U.S. Catholic Bishops

In 1986 the U.S. Catholic bishops issued Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. In it, the bishops describe why the Church should have a “preferential option for the poor” in diverse settings. At the outset of the document, they declared:

As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental “option for the poor”—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This “option for the poor” does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are the most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of

52. See Economic Justice for All, supra note 23.
all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. 53

The bishops traced to early Christianity, with implications for today, the idea of a preferential option for the poor:

Early Christianity saw the poor as an object of God's special love, but it neither canonized material poverty nor accepted deprivation as an inevitable fact of life . . . . The early community at Jerusalem distributed its possessions so that "there was no needy person among them," and held "all things in common"—a phrase that suggests not only shared material possessions, but more fundamentally, friendship and mutual concern among all its members (Acts 4:32-34; 2:44). 54

Such perspectives provide a basis today for what is called the "preferential option for the poor." . . . Jesus takes the side of the most in need, physically and spiritually. 55

The responsibility to have a preferential option for the poor is linked to requirements of justice: "The obligation to provide justice for all means that the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation." 56 From this responsibility flows the following:

As individuals and as a nation, therefore, we are called to make a fundamental "option for the poor." The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. 57

The option for the poor is not just an exercise of charity:

The primary purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good. The "option for the poor," therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. The extent of their suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons. 58

Economic transformation requires that the poor be invited to present new perspectives and new proposals, and for other members of society to accept them and help to implement them.

53. Id. ¶ 16.
54. Id. ¶ 51.
55. Id. ¶ 52.
56. Id. ¶ 86.
57. Id. ¶ 87.
58. ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, supra note 23, ¶ 88.
C. Renewing the Earth: U.S. Catholic Bishops

In their 1991 pastoral letter, Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, the U.S. bishops directly linked economy and ecology, the suffering of the poor and harm to Earth. They stated that "[a]bove all, we seek to explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology. The web of life is one."59 In the links, the bishops discovered that:

The whole human race suffers as a result of environmental blight, and generations yet unborn will bear the cost for our failure to act today. But in most countries today, including our own, it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness. Their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted or to host toxic waste dumps, their water to be undrinkable, their children to be harmed. Too often, the structure of sacrifice involved in environmental remedies seems to exact a high price from the poor and from workers.60

The bishops noted several themes derived from Catholic social teaching, among which is "an option for the poor, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world."61

In the section of the pastoral letter Option for the Poor, the bishops noted once again the relationship between ecology and economic justice:

The ecological problem is intimately connected to justice for the poor . . . .

The poor of the earth offer a special test of our solidarity. The painful adjustments we have to undertake in our own economies for the sake of the environment must not diminish our sensitivity to the needs of the poor at home and abroad. The option for the poor embedded in the Gospel and the Church's teaching makes us aware that the poor suffer most directly from environmental decline and have the least access to relief from their suffering. Indigenous peoples die with their forests and grasslands . . . .

A related and vital concern is the Church's constant commitment to the dignity of work and the rights of workers. Environmental progress cannot come at the expense of workers and their rights. Solutions must be found that do not force us to choose between a decent environment and a decent life for workers.62

60. Id.
61. Id. at 5.
62. Id. at 8.
The bishops noted further that “[b]oth impoverished people and an imperiled planet demand our committed service,” and that “Christian love forbids choosing between people and the planet.”

In the concluding section of the statement, the bishops declared: “A just and sustainable society and world are not an optional ideal, but a moral and practical necessity. Without justice, a sustainable economy will be beyond reach. Without an ecologically responsible world economy, justice will be unachievable.” Ecological consciousness and commitments and economic compassion and constraints are intertwined.

In his booklet, Opting for the Poor, Peter Henriot, SJ provides insights helpful for people interested in implementing the “preferential option” to remedy the plight of the poor locally and globally.

According to Henriot, Christians who commit themselves to the preferential option for the poor will work to various degrees on two levels: “meeting the poor as persons and dealing with the structures of poverty. Opting for the poor requires the personal and the structural.” Henriot notes that in the biblical and Christian traditions, and in contemporary hymns sung during Mass, Catholics proclaim that God hears the cry of the poor. But, he wonders, “Do we really hear the cry of the poor? That is the issue behind the phrase ‘the option for the poor.’” He goes on to declare that “[t]he option for the poor is essential to my being a Christian, a follower of Jesus. . . . [T]his is one ‘option’ that is not ‘optional’!”

Henriot creatively links ecology and economy, the Earth’s devastation and the poor’s deprivation:

The Environmental Protection Agency of the U.S. government requires that before any major project can be undertaken (e.g., new buildings, highway construction), an “environmental impact statement” [EIS] must be prepared. This study has to estimate what consequences such a project will have on the surrounding ecology. I believe that the option for the poor demands a ‘poor impact statement.’ One factor by which we should weigh the worth of any project, the wisdom of any decision, or the urgency of any undertaking is: what will be the impact on the poor?

Henriot observes that while direct assistance to the poor in times of need is necessary, profound societal changes are needed as well: “The preferential option for the poor comes alive in the effort to live and work in ways which transform society toward greater justice for all, especially the

63. Id. at 11.
64. Id. at 14.
66. Id. at 13.
67. Id. at 24.
68. Id. at 26–27 (emphasis added).
poor." He further adds, "[i]n order to achieve justice for the poor, structural transformation is an absolute necessity."

Proposals for social structural transformation are met with resistance by those who benefit from the present political and economic arrangements in their country. Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil, famously observed some years ago: "When I fed the poor, they called me a saint; when I asked, 'Why are the poor, poor?' they called me a Communist."

While the "preferential option for the poor" has referred traditionally to the equitable distribution of land and goods, and the economic and political structural changes needed to effect this, it can and should, with some urgency, be extended to address another problem on local and global scales that is affecting the "least brethren": the surging ecological crisis, which is having an ever-greater impact on all of Earth's living creatures, but especially on impoverished people.

Brazilian theologian and social activist Leonardo Boff has forcefully made the link between property and poverty, between economics and ecology in his works *Ecology and Liberation* and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. In the latter, Boff states that "the most threatened of nature's creatures today are the poor" as he integrates concern about endangered and threatened species with compassion for the poor. He declares further that "social (in)justice cannot be separated from ecological (in)justice." Harm to humans is linked to harm to Earth; caring for humanity's well-being is related to caring for Earth's well-being.

V. Economics and Ecology

The words "economics" and "ecology" share a common root: "eco-," from the Greek *oikos*, which means "house." "Economics" has to do with management of household goods, and "ecology" relates to the study of the relationships in the house.

The common good of the integrated and interdependent biotic (and human social) community, and the common good of Earth as biota's shared home and household, find common ground in interrelated forms of justice and in interrelated forms of injustice. Economic liberation and ecological liberation are linked.

69. Id. at 40.

70. Id. at 43.


73. Id. at 1. Boff declares that "[t]he aim of this book is to connect the cry of the oppressed with the cry of the Earth." Id. at xi.

74. Id. at 132.
The Catholic community, as (institutional) Church and as church (community of believers), has a particular responsibility to be compassionate toward the poor and caring about creation, in order to be faithful to its religious and moral ideas and ideals. Church teachings abound. Catholic institutions have the opportunity to impart these teachings in a variety of contexts: in parishes through liturgies, homilies, study groups, and community projects; in educational endeavors for elementary school classes and on through university graduate courses and programs; and in outreach from dioceses, parishes, and educational institutions through collaborative projects with members of other faith traditions; labor unions; concerned business groups; responsible elected officials and government agency staff members; and nonprofit organizations whose members are socially concerned and environmentally engaged.

VI. ECOLOGY, ECONOMICS, AND RACISM

African American theologian James Cone states very clearly the link between race, economics, and ecology:

People who fight against white racism but fail to connect it to the degradation of the earth are anti-ecological — whether they know it or not. People who struggle against environmental degradation but do not incorporate in it a disciplined and sustained fight against white supremacy are racists—whether they acknowledge it or not. The fight for justice cannot be segregated but must be integrated with the fight for life in all its forms.75

Cone uses as supporting data a 1987 United Church of Christ Commission of Racial Justice report which notes that “forty percent of the nation’s commercial hazardous-waste landfill capacity was in three predominantly African American and Hispanic communities.”76

In the same vein, womanist theologian Emilie Townes declares that “toxic waste landfills in African American communities” are “contemporary versions of lynching a whole people.”77

Sociologist Robert D. Bullard deserves credit for the most thorough studies of environmental racism in the U.S. with his landmark work, Dumping in Dixie.78 Bullard states from the outset his “assumption that all Americans have a basic right to live, work, play, go to school, and worship in a clean and healthy environment.”79 He laments that “[p]eople of color in all

75. James H. Cone, Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?, in EARTH HABITAT: Eco-INJUSTICE AND THE CHURCH’s RESPONSE 23 (Dieter Hessel & Larry Rasmussen eds., 2001). Cone deepens the meaning of “white supremacy” beyond media usage, to mean white cultural, economic, political, theological, and social hegemony and domination. See id. at 23–32.
76. Id. at 27.
77. Id. at 26.
79. Id. at xiii.
regions of the country bear a disproportionate share of the nation's environmental problems. Racism knows no geographic bounds." In an observation that complements the ideas of Cone and Townes cited above, he states that "[m]ainstream environmental organizations were late in broadening their base of support to include blacks and other minorities, the poor, and working-class persons." He observes further that:

[S]ocial justice advocates take note of the miserable track record that environmentalists and preservationists have on improving environmental quality in the nation's racially segregated inner cities and hazardous industrial workplaces, and on providing housing for low-income groups. Decent and affordable housing, for example, is a top environmental problem for inner-city blacks. Although environmentalists and the public at large in the dominant culture are unaware of or do not care about the link between environmental degradation and racism or other forms of discrimination, such as classism, for those suffering from it "environmental discrimination is a fact of life. Here, environmental discrimination is defined as disparate treatment of a group or community based on race, class, or some other distinguishing characteristic." Racial is part of national structures:

Institutional racism continues to affect policy decisions related to the enforcement of environmental regulations. Slowly, blacks, lower-income groups, and working-class persons are awakening to the dangers of living in a polluted environment. . . . Blacks and other minority groups must become more involved in environmental issues if they want to live healthier lives.

In the past, "environmental risks were offered as unavoidable trade-offs for jobs and a broadened tax base in economically depressed communities. Jobs were real; environmental risks were unknown. This scenario proved to be the de facto industrial policy in 'poverty pockets' and job-hungry communities around the world." Bullard is quite explicit with his data. He notes, for example, that "nationally, three of the five largest commercial hazardous-waste landfills are located in areas where blacks and Hispanics compose a majority of the population. These siting disparities expose minority citizens to greater risks than the general population." Moreover, "Lead poisoning is a classic example of an environmental health problem that disproportionately affects Af-

80. Id. at xiv.
81. Id. at 1.
82. Id. at 10-11.
83. Id. at 7.
84. BULLARD, supra note 78, at 15.
85. Id. at 27.
86. Id. at 35.
American children at every class level"87; and "[r]acism influences the likelihood of exposure to environmental and health risks as well as of less access to health care."88 These findings are supported by the 1987 national study by the Commission for Racial Justice, which found that "[r]race was by far the most prominent factor in the location of commercial hazardous-waste landfills, more prominent than household income and home values."89

In his study, Bullard quotes Amos Favorite of Geismer, Louisiana, a community in the infamous "cancer alley" region:

We are the victims. . . . We're all victimized by a system that puts the dollars before everything else. That's the way it was in the old days when the dogs and whips were masters, and that's the way it is today when we got stuff in the water and air we can't even see that can kill us deader than we ever thought we could die. 90

"Cancer alley" is located in Calcasieu Parish, LA, where fifty industrial facilities discharge wastes and cause environmental devastation.91

Bullard declares that "[t]he solution to the problem of unequal protection lies in the realm of environmental justice for all Americans. No community—rich or poor, black or white, urban or suburban—should be allowed to become a sacrifice zone."92 He notes that "when people of color compare their environmental quality with that of the larger society, a sense of deprivation and unequal treatment, unequal protection, and unequal enforcement emerges."93 He adds that "[o]nce again, institutional racism and discriminatory land-use policies and practices of government—at all levels—influence the creation and perpetuation of racially separate and unequal residential areas for people of color and whites."94

Bullard concludes that "[t]here can be no environmental justice without social justice," and that "[t]he richest nation on earth can no longer afford to sacrifice any of its people and communities to environmental pollution. The solution is environmental justice for all."95

Hurricane Katrina, Racism, and Justice

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005, African American residents of New Orleans suffered beyond what they had experienced as poor people before the catastrophe struck. Some, such as Jamie

87. Id. at 98–99.
88. Id. at 98.
89. Id. at 35.
91. BULLARD, supra note 78, at 154.
92. Id. at 135.
93. Id. at 138.
94. Id. at 138–39.
95. Id. at 159.
Phelps, an Adrian Dominican Sister, reacted angrily to news stories and commentaries that focused not on the poor, but on some people's conduct as Katrina's impacts were afflicting the city. The plight of the poor, ordinarily hidden because the news media usually do not raise issues of race and poverty in the U.S., was momentarily visible but not treated sympathetically. Phelps observed:

I was horrified, saddened, and angered as the television images unmasked the shrouded systemic patterns of social injustice that characterize much of our current social, political, economic, and ecclesial relationships. Sadly these dynamics have operated so long within the social systems of our society that too many of us, regardless of our ethnic-racial identity, think that racial and class segregation and alienation is natural. . . . The poor, disabled, elderly, and black people, who are generally invisible on a day-to-day basis in the South and all over our country, became visible as the floodwaters made us see poor black and white people and other people of color who are poor.

Ordinarily we see and do not see; we hear and do not hear; because our self-absorption, materialism, individualism, and economic greed blind us to the reality of the poor. . . . Ordinarily the poor of the gospel are the despised who are viewed as the disposable of our society. 96

The poor populations of New Orleans, including African Americans, continue to suffer today, she states, as do the structural economic and political injustices that preceded Katrina.

Phelps's assessment was mirrored in comments by Dwight N. Hopkins, an African American theologian and Baptist minister:

Hurricane Katrina showed the United States what it should have seen before. Under monopoly capitalism, fewer and fewer people amass wealth, and more and more people become poor. In the midst of all of this, black folk receive their disproportionate negative share. The defining crisis in the United States is not terrorism but poverty. . . .

Katrina just pulled the covers off the reality of poverty—a poverty that is disproportionately racialized and disproportionately feminized. . . . 97

New Orleans is not an aberration or exception; it represents America. 98

98. Id. at 60.
It did not require a hurricane for the African American community to see the link between environment, racism, and economics. In “To Love the Wind and the Rain” Diane Glave and Mark Stoll present a significant historical, theological, and ecological ethics study of the history of African American engagement with nature dating back to slavery and beyond. In it, they cite a recent statement, the 1993 National Black Church Environmental and Economic Justice Summit statement, which declared:

“We, African-American Church leaders, historically committed to justice issues, affirm the unitary nature of life and commit ourselves to the ministry of converging justice and environmental issues that are critical matters of life and death for our Church and for our community.”

For her part, Glave elaborates African American thought in the chapter “Black Environmental Liberation Theology.” In words reminiscent of Bullard’s sociological analysis, she states that “[i]n the United States, the government and corporations have long targeted people of color and the poor—including African Americans—by dumping toxins and garbage into marginalized neighborhoods.” She offers a fifteen-point “Agenda for Action,” and the observation that “[t]he African American church must be practical while resolving environmental racism, even when biblical beliefs including unconditional love and the realities of mainstream racism collide.”

VII. NATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Native American Indian, or Indian, perspectives on environmental justice are presented in Defending Mother Earth, edited by Jace Weaver. In the book, theologian, Lutheran minister, and traditional spiritual leader George Tinker states:

Given the fundamental differences between American Indian cultural values and those of Euro-American peoples, it should be no mystery that the relationship between the two has been consistently one of conquest, colonization, and finally the eco-devastation of our territories. . . . [W]e must understand the connection between ecological and social injustice in the world if there is to be significant transformation from the current global crisis to a healthy and sustainable future. Hence, it becomes empty quixotism to think of treating ecological devastation apart from treating issues of racism and ongoing colonialism, including especially.

100. Id.
101. Id.
102. Id. at 197–98.
those new forms of colonialism some have called neo-colonialism.  

Tinker goes on to take the churches to task for not making connections between systemic forms of oppression, and seeking to alter them:

"Especially at the level of theological reflection, the churches have not yet begun to deal with ecojustice, let alone ethno-ecojustice and racism, as a systemic whole, as a system of oppression rooted in structures of power that touch every part of our lives."  

Tinker views the shift from communal values to individual values, which occurred when the Euro American culture was imposed on Indians, as a major factor in environmental devastation and injustice:

I am arguing that modern ecological devastation is in no small part generated by the Western, European shift that devalued communal interests in favor of the increasing prominence of the individual and that this shift can be measured in the lack of political and economic respect and the lack of theoretical recognition given to the legitimacy of self-governing, autonomous, long-lived indigenous communities.  

Tinker concludes by stating that "American Indian peoples may have something of value—something corrective to Western values and the modern world system—to offer to the world. The loss of these gifts, the loss of the particularity of these peoples, today threatens the survivability of us all." He advocates that to help promote both indigenous peoples' survival and global survival, "international recognition of indigenous political sovereignty and self-determination."  

The issues of economic poverty and environmental racism are, then, intimately intertwined. The "preferential option for the poor," as a consciousness and a commitment, can be expressed more broadly as a "preferential option for the oppressed," and help to overcome these and other forms of injustice. Then, in church communities and the wider social community, Paul's vision will be realized: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Distinctions that divide people will be erased in a relational human community.

105. Id. at 167.
106. Id.
107. Id. at 172.
108. Id.
VIII. EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES, LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

An internationally admired Minnesota model for cooperation among distinct constituencies is the late William C. Norris (1911–2006). He was a naval commander; engineer; computer pioneer; and founder, CEO, and Chairman of the Board of Control Data Corporation (CDC), long a Fortune 500-listed company. As head of CDC, Norris traveled throughout the world promoting responsible business practices, education, and, most pertinent in the present context, compassion for people in need—of employment, health care, flexible work time, just wages and benefits, education, a good home, and a good work environment. Both the U.S.S.R. (Gold Mercury Award for Contributions to International Relations and World Peace, 1980) and the U.S. (National Medal of Technology, 1986) honored Norris for his efforts to implement CDC’s corporate slogan: “Seeing society’s unmet needs as profitable business opportunities,” or, in other words, “[d]oing well by doing good.” His intellect and innovations impelled him to seek to effect positive social change to benefit working people, the poor, Native American Indians, women, and farmers, while he promoted business innovation, energy conservation, and environmental protection. His work inspired similar efforts among other corporate leaders, and more than forty spin-off businesses emerged from CDC, many of which carried the same commitment. A visionary corporate leader and social innovator who was willing to explore in new technological and social directions despite prevailing and dominating business “wisdom” and transnational corporations’ hegemony, Norris noted on one occasion: “Whenever I see everybody heading south, I have a great compulsion to head north.”

The William C. Norris Institute, which was established in Bloomington, Minnesota when Norris retired from CDC and is headquartered now at St. Thomas University in the Opus College of Business, has carried on his work. In its first dozen years, the Institute’s efforts included the Job Creation Collaborative, which served as an incubator to help proposed innovative new businesses become operational and stable and create new jobs: it evolved over time into the Inner City Business Development and Job Creation Program, which worked with local communities to assist the startup and growth, in disadvantaged communities; of small, technology-based companies; Transforming Schools Consortium, an interstate effort focused on personalized education; Norris Education Innovations, Inc., which developed software to assist schools in meeting educational standards; Technology-Based Engineering Education Consortium, whose seventy higher education institutions focused on developing innovative technology-based engineering curricula; Academic Quality Consortium, to improve higher education programs and services; Academic Position Network, a web-based

employment service for higher education; SAMAN, an international joint venture to promote technology, research, and cultural exchanges, particularly between Minnesota and Russia; and LOGIN, Inc. (Local Government Information Network), which integrated information transfers among local governments.111 The principal effort of WCNI today is the Norris Fund for Technology Innovation, which provides seed funding for proposed small businesses that have innovative ideas and projects.112 In the spirit of William Norris, the Fund’s criteria for applicants to be considered for funding include that “the company be based on innovative technology that is socially beneficial.”113 William Norris was concerned about diverse societal and environmental issues, in both urban and rural areas. He observed that: “[r]ich and poor nations alike are burdened with the economic problems brought on by the decline in the availability of cheap energy, the degradation of the environment, limited supplies of natural resources, and lagging creativity and innovation.”114

His origins on a Nebraska farm (homesteaded by his grandfather in 1872) made Norris particularly concerned about owner-operated family farms:

Little regard has been paid to the ... loss of jobs, damage to the environment, harmful effects on human health, and depletion of future production capacity caused by [large scale agricultural practices] that are equivalent to mining the soil. ... So much attention has been given to improving and further expanding large farms that the needs of small family farms have essentially been ignored; as a consequence, America’s small farms are in deep trouble.115

Control Data Corporation promoted its employees’ involvement in social transformation. Norris noted that: “[o]ur Social Service Leave policy, introduced in 1977, allows employees to continue receiving their normal company salaries while working for non-profit organizations on social problems.”116

The latter policy stimulated numerous CDC employees to contribute to socially beneficial community projects, and to complement, by their volunteer work, the social improvement efforts made by their employer.

Norris developed diverse coalitions to realize his vision. He saw as a given the need for public-private partnerships, but went further:

111. Id.
113. Id.
114. WILLIAM C. NORRIS, NEW FRONTIERS FOR BUSINESS LEADERSHIP 49 (1983).
115. Id. at 123.
116. Id. at 160.
One key change is for business to take the initiative and provide the leadership in planning, managing, and implementing programs designed to meet society's needs and turn them into business opportunities. Along the way, business must cooperate with government, labor unions, universities, organized religion, and other influential segments of society.\textsuperscript{117}

Some churches did work with Norris and CDC in the City Venture Corporation (to revitalize urban areas), and the Rural Venture Corporation (to revitalize agricultural areas), to assist impoverished people and others in need of employment and social assistance. Norris noted, however, that "[m]ost religious organizations are reactionary, having a penchant to criticize without offering realistic solutions to problems and remaining on the sidelines when it comes to confronting major social issues."\textsuperscript{118} This criticism remains valid today, in places where church leaders—clergy and lay—are not directly and collaboratively involved in social change efforts to benefit the poor.

If religious and other social institutions are not just to "remain on the sidelines when it comes to confronting major social issues," and instead are to work to implement the preferential option for the poor, their members and leaders must appreciate and advocate consciousness of and commitment to the commons good and the common good, and work with members of other organizations and institutions to effect needed economic change.

The local and global justice efforts of Minnesota's international entrepreneur William C. Norris are complemented today by those of Nobel Peace Laureate Muhammad Yunus, who has a different type of commitment. He focuses on microcredit to the poor, particularly women, to enable them to provide for themselves and their families as small business entrepreneurs. His institution, the Grameen Bank (Village Bank), which gives loans to poor people so that they might emerge from their impoverished condition in capitalist economic systems, also has had spin-offs. In \textit{Banker to the Poor}, Yunus states that in Finland, for example, "[t]he cooperative Eko-Osuusraha, a 'green' credit union, gives microloans to people in ecological and social fields."\textsuperscript{119} His vision complements that of William Norris. As he looks toward the future, Yunus declares:

\begin{quote}
So the real question is not so much where we will be in the year 2050, but where we would like the world to be in 2050.

By that time, I want to see a world free from poverty. This means that there will not be a single human being on this planet that may be described as a poor person or who is unable to meet his or her basic needs. By then, the word 'poverty' will no longer have relevance. It will be understood only with reference to the past.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Id.} at 49.
\item\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Id.} at 52.
\item\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Yunus, supra} note 28, at 192.
\end{footnotes}
Poverty does not belong in civilized human society.\textsuperscript{120}

The visions of Norris and Yunus are complemented by, and can be realized through, concrete commitments to the preferential option for the poor—within church communities and in the diverse societies of which they are a part.

IX. Creation, Community, and Commitment

As they consider their commitments to the poor in the context of humans’ responsibility for Earth, Catholics and other Christians might recall the words of Pope John Paul II in The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility, his 1990 World Day of Peace Message:

“Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.”\textsuperscript{121} “Essential” means something integral to, necessary and required for, and expected of the practice of faith, not an optional practice that might or might not be part of Christian life. Duties toward creation and Creator must be observed by all those who call themselves “Christians,” by definition and without exception.

People of faith might recall, that we live in a sacramental commons. As I have elaborated elsewhere,\textsuperscript{122} a sacramental commons is creation that is revelatory of its Creator, in which at least the subsistence needs of all biota are to be met in the context of a dynamic abiotic (nonliving) Earth with all its geophysical turmoil, and an evolving biotic community with its cooperative or competing interests and activities, and the predator-prey relationships that occur at times as those interests interact.

In the creation context, people should consider the needs of the communities to which they belong, other communities with which they are interdependent, and yet other communities with which they are in competition or collaboration as they seek to meet their respective needs; when planetary and communal responsibilities are understood and exercised, these needs will be met in complementary ways. Consciousness of human responsibility for the commons good and for the common good, and consequent commitments to realize them socially and globally, will benefit not only the poor, but people of all social classes.

X. Ecological Ethics and the Poor

Ecological ethics is the study of relationships in the Earth environment. It considers the needs of human communities; human responsibilities

\textsuperscript{120} Id. at 248.


toward the biotic community as a whole; the link between life and its Earth habitat; and the development and concretization of principles that would help promote ecosystemic integrity. Basic values expressed in ecological ethics\textsuperscript{123} are:

- **solidarity**: consciousness of and actions for the shared interests and needs of the human species and all biota;
- **sociality**: interrelation with and regard for the human community and the broader biotic community;
- **sufficiency**: acknowledgment of, and efforts to provide for, the integrated primary needs and integrity of humankind, all biokind, and abiotic creation;
- **sustainability**: attention to the present and projected integral viability of life in its diverse forms, communities and relationships, and of life’s habitats, throughout biotic and geologic time;
- **subsidiarity**: responsible resolution of biotic conflicts—including human-human and human-otherkind—by local constituencies in local communities, using external consultation or more extended laws as necessary—for technical expertise not locally available, and for an objective complementary analysis—and more extended laws as necessary—where national laws would provide greater commons protection—to the greatest extent possible; this process would include special regard for local ecosystem conservation and, in the case of human communities, for local energy production and local economic development;
- **security**: safeguarding the integrity of individuals, species and their habitat, to enable them to meet their respective requirements through time, as resolved in competitive and cooperative relationships in evolutionary Earth commons settings; and
- **spirituality**: consciousness of and relatedness to the Spirit from whose vision, creativity and love the cosmos and the commons emerged and are emerging.

The values that inform Christian ecological ethics can be expressed in essential principles, a form of “ten commandments” for responsibility in creation, which, in turn, can stimulate projects to promote care for creation and community.

**Principles of Christian Ecological Ethics**\textsuperscript{124}

1. *Care for the Earth commons, which is the revelation of the Spirit and the home of the biotic community.*

Since the plight of the poor and Earth’s degradation are inextricably linked, care for the Earth would enable the poor to obtain natural goods

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{123} Id. at 217–18.
\footnote{124} Id. at 219–20. The principles are listed in the book, and developed further here.
\end{footnotes}
from Earth's unpolluted bounty. It would help to eliminate impacts of eco-
racism, too, since the poor would not live in "cancer alley"-like places, but 
in healthful environments. When Earth is polluted, and species are being 
extincted, Earth cannot be a sign of the presence or creativity of God.

2. Respect the intrinsic value of abiotic and biotic creation; conserve 
the instrumental value of creation; be grateful for the instrumental value of 
the biotic community.

Abiotic being has intrinsic value, an inherent worth acknowledged (not 
assigned) by humans, because it is part of creation, which is God's work 
permeated by God's presence. When people use natural goods such as water 
or petroleum to meet their needs, they should be conscious of the limited 
quantity and availability of these goods, and conserve them well. In the 
Earth's context, some species and their individual members, through evolu-
tionary dynamics, have come to have instrumental value for others, when 
these others use them to provide for their needs: trees become boards for 
homes; deer become food for mountain lions. People should recognize and 
appreciate that other species' lives enable them to have life, and take life 
only as necessary to meet human needs.

3. Respect natural laws and rights and acknowledge their authority 
over civil laws and customs.

It has long been a Catholic tradition that creation operates according to 
natural laws. By natural law, according to Thomas Aquinas and Thomas 
Paine, all things are shared in common. Civil amendments to this natural 
state enable societies to meet human social needs, but civil laws that pre-
vent humans from meeting their subsistence needs, while "legal" in a judi-
cial system, are immoral according to natural law.125 Earth's land and 
natural goods are intended by God to provide for the biotic community and 
for human communities. Conservation of abiotic nature is essential for this 
to be possible.

4. Prioritize the community common good over the individual good.

The Catholic social ethical tradition and other intellectual formulations 
express a special concern for the well-being of the community, the common 
good. When a community benefits from a law or an equitable distribution of 
Earth's earth and natural goods, so, too, do individuals within it benefit. 
When individualism and selfishness prevail, individually and structurally,

125. See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part 1 of the Second Part (Fathers of the 
English Dominican Province trans., Benziger Bros. 1918). In his discussion of natural law related 
to the seventh commandment, Thomas Aquinas taught that it is not theft for a person in need to go 
quietly to the barn of their lord to take what the law says is the lord's property, to provide for their 
own or their neighbor's subsistence needs. He states that since by natural law all things are in 
common, "in case of need all things are common property," and so a peasant in need actually is 
taking what is theirs, since in times and places of need the natural law takes precedence over the 
civil law. Id. at q. 66 a. 7. Unlike Robin Hood, the hero of English lore, the peasant does not 
confront the lord directly; but the result is identical: the transfer of property from the rich to the 
poor. See id. at q. 57 a.a. 2–3; q. 66 a.a. 2, 7.
however, the common good is subsumed under a perceived individual good. If the individual "good" is prioritized, the community might be harmed. While individual good and well-being are recognized, and should exist in correlation with the common good, they should not be exalted over community well-being.

5. **Prioritize community and species needs over an individual's or another community's wants.**

Human needs always take precedence over human wants. "Human needs," in this context refers to the basics, as noted in papal teachings and in Catholic social thought in general: food, clothing, shelter, energy, health care, education, and spiritual well-being. When these needs are met, citizens may rejoice in the accomplishments and state of their country, as Thomas Paine said, and Christians may rejoice in the knowledge that the community is caring for the "least of the brethren" in at least a minimal way.

6. **Promote the commons good, the common good and, as necessary, common goods—in Earth's land, Earth's other needed natural goods, and assembled goods resulting from human labor upon Earth goods—in order to integrate and ensure the well-being of people and planet, the community good and individual good.**

Earth's well-being means that Earth can provide for the needs of communities and individuals. The poor will benefit from this provision. A well-ordered economic system and well-ordered property distributions will integrate the respective needs of the planet, and of people as individuals and communities.

7. **Regard the common good as both an instrumental good and an intrinsic good.**

The common good is intrinsic in that it represents a more universal sense of human (and cosmic) interconnectivity; it is instrumental in that it promotes material and social well-being. When people regard all "others" as their neighbors and children of God, this sense of the common good will eliminate poverty, racism, classism, and other expressions of structural sin.

8. **Ensure that human communities in all their ethnic and class diversity have a sufficiency of subsistence goods designated as common goods, and that these are available for and accessible by individuals: through community ownership and cooperative enterprises, and equitable (re)distribution of land and of Earth-related goods.**

As Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, in particular, have taught, all property has a "social mortgage"; private property is on loan from the community: it is intended by God to meet the needs of all people and peoples, even while those who own it provide their own livelihood to sustain their own lives. The neighbor is entitled to meet their needs. When possible, community ownership of natural goods should be encouraged (for example,
as national forests, free flowing “living” rivers, and petroleum reserves), and cooperatives should be fostered as ownership models that benefit both the individual and the community. Redistribution of some lands and their natural goods, and new forms of distribution of other lands and their natural goods, will help promote the common good.

9. Maintain human populations at intergenerational levels appropriate to the carrying capacity of the Earth commons and the bioregional commons.

Earth has limited land area to provide space for human shelter, agriculture, commercial enterprises, and energy generation facilities, among other human constructs. Natural goods that would serve as a material base to provide for human needs, such as food, clothing, and medicine, for sustaining life, exist on a limited land area (some of which will disappear as the polar ice caps and Greenland melt and ocean levels rise). People must reproduce themselves responsibly, and in accord with the teachings of the religious institutions with which they are affiliated, as appropriate.

10. Consume responsibly products and goods that are directly or indirectly derived from commons goods, in a manner consonant with abiotic integrity and intergenerational biotic community needs.

Consumerism—the unrestrained use, or wasteful manufacture and use, of Earth’s natural goods—imperils the well-being of Earth, and steals from the poor the necessities of life to which, by natural law and divine command, they are entitled. Species, natural goods, and productive land are disappearing as a consequence; the poor suffer first and continuously when this occurs, but all life will eventually be impacted. Intergenerational responsibility requires of us that we live as simply as is possible, according to our own health and work requirements, as individuals and communities. Here, again, a “preferential option for the poor” will be helpful: people will try to consume less material goods, and develop more social relationships, so that the poor “other” might consume more.

XI. Visions and Commitments

Church concern for the poor, linked to impacts global warming has had on the poor, is being expressed more frequently in papal and Holy See (Vatican) statements. Recently, in his Address to the 15th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development on May 15, 2007, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, representing the Holy See, stated that:

The scientific evidence for global warming and for humanity’s role in the increase of greenhouse gasses becomes ever more unimpeachable, as the IPCC findings are going to suggest; and such activity has a profound relevance, not just for the environment, but in ethical, economic, social and political terms as well. The consequences of climate change are being felt not only in the environment, but in the entire socio-economic system and, as seen
in the findings of numerous reports already available, they will impact first and foremost the poorest and weakest who, even if they are among the least responsible for global warming, are the most vulnerable because they have limited resources or live in areas at greater risk.\textsuperscript{126}

The Catholic community, as Church/church and in its educational institutions, has a particular responsibility to be compassionate toward the poor and caring about creation, if it intends to be faithful to its religious and moral ideas and ideals. Church teachings and parish groups, environmental organizations’ data and personnel, socially and ecologically responsible corporate leaders and government officials, socially committed workers and professionals, and grassroots organizations’ members all are available for a collaborative effort to effect needed personal and structural change as they work together to renew Earth and revitalize communities. Cooperative endeavors by these otherwise distinct constituencies, including efforts such as those envisioned and enacted by socially concerned and community oriented Minnesota entrepreneur William C. Norris, will enable the “preferential option for the poor” to be activated and to have a social and planetary impact.

Peter Henriot proposed that a “poor impact statement” should precede major decisionmaking, paralleling the federal government’s Environmental Impact Statement. The U.S. bishops suggested that people should consider beforehand how their actions might impact the poor, and how they might include the poor in decision-making processes. Students, faculty, and administrators at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, and the readers of the Law Journal, should ponder and act upon their response to the question: In what ways might lawyers and law students work on a “poor impact statement,” engage their colleagues and clients in discussing and exercising a “preferential option for the poor,” and by these means assist in the development of a more just society, a transformed Earth, and a more equitable (re)distribution of Earth’s natural goods?

In this regard, William Norris’s exhortation to business leaders to address impoverished people’s employment needs is relevant for addressing the overall needs of the poor, who endure both ecological and economic hardship, “[w]e have within our grasp the resources we need to affect the lives of millions of people and change them for the better, and we must start recognizing our obligation to do so.”\textsuperscript{127}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[127.] Norris, supra note 114, at 100.
\end{footnotes}
Part of that obligation is expressed in the “preferential option for the poor.” While some free marketeers opposed to alterations in the relentless rush of capitalism, and libertarians objecting to government interference in business and private greed expressed in public selfishness might want churches and government not to intervene in economic policies that preserve the status quo and benefit a diminishing number of people, the “poor get poorer” under the present economic arrangements. Bishop Lawrence McNamara of Grand Island, Nebraska, who became bishop after heading the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, reflected a quarter-century ago on opposition to the Midwestern bishops’ development of Strangers and Guests. He observed perceptively: “I have never heard a poor person complain about the Church’s involvement in social issues.” Indeed. A biblically-based hymn sung during Mass declares that “The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.” Christians can do no less when confronted by the poor of the planet. They are called to hear and respond to the cry of the poor. They are called to exercise a preferential option for the poor.

Edward O. Wilson, Pulitzer Prize winning Harvard biologist and self-described “atheist reductionist” and “secular humanist,” writes his latest book, The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth, as an invitation to a Southern Baptist pastor to “meet on the near side of metaphysics” to work together to save life and Earth.128 He notes that Earth is in dire straits, and declares that “religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today,” and that if they work together, they will effect in the present and for future generations “a beautiful, rich, and healthful environment.”129

Currently, Wilson’s speaking engagements include presentations to evangelical Christian conferences as he invites people from his former tradition to become involved in efforts to save Earth and conserve species.

Ecology is one area in which religion and science, theology and ecology, can be mutually supportive. Creation care consciousness and commitments were provided an additional boost on October 13, 2007, when the Nobel Prize Committee announced that former U.S. Senator and Vice President (and evangelical Christian) Al Gore, who had won a 2007 Academy Award for best documentary film for “An Inconvenient Truth,” had been awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his environmental work.130 Here are two examples of public figures, a scientist and a politician with diverse

129. Id. at 5.
views on faith, whose efforts promote care for creation—and will assist the poor simultaneously.

To exercise a “preferential option for the poor” does not mean that we all should sell all we have and give to the materially poor through Catholic Charities, or become members of Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker movement—although some of us might be called to do just that, or to contribute financially to their efforts. It does mean that we should all live more simply so that others might simply live, with at least a sufficiency of Earth’s natural goods, and human-manufactured goods, for their use. It does not mean that we should live in a rat-infested apartment or in a tent city under an overpass on a highway, although that might be the vocation for some. It does mean that we should work for a living wage, not a “minimum wage,” for all working people, and for full employment at jobs that enable workers’ creativity, embrace workers’ dignity, and enable workers’ ability to provide for themselves and for their family in a healthy, safe, and personally beneficial work environment. It does mean that we should not vote for the politician who promises to cut our taxes the most, but for the politician who states how they will use our tax money most responsibly and equitably. It means that we should work to ensure universal health care for all people, so that all might have at least essential medical services in this, the richest country in the world. It means that we should provide decent housing, good public schools, and a good, safe transportation system for all, and good communication among all. It means prioritizing community and individual needs over individual and national acquisitiveness and greed. It means a transfer of innovative industrial machinery and techniques, and energy conserving technologies, including for alternative energy generation, to materially poor people and economically impoverished nations, so that they will not have to depend on current, often outdated, energy wasteful, polluting, and global warming technologies as they struggle to emerge from poverty. It means recognizing that our understanding of “nature” and of “natural law” is, or at least should be, dynamic and open to necessary revisions based on increased knowledge about, and greater ethical commitment to, human physiological and psychological diversity, and human interdependence in creation. It means recognizing that it is possible to “legislate morality,” indeed it is necessary to have good, enforceable laws that promote the common good in order that, in the words of Hammurabi in the first known written Code of law, “the strong will not oppress the weak.” It means recalling the story of the law of King Agud of Persia (now Iran) in 996, though not replicating its potential severity of application. When a drought afflicted his country, poor people were dying daily in the streets (much like the situation Yunus would describe a millennium later). Agud decreed that for every poor person who died, a rich man would be executed. No one starved thereafter: the rich had been hoarding food to an extent far beyond their needs, and distributed it more equitably as a result of the de-
Here, indeed, the Persian ruler provided a dramatic "preferential option for the poor."

The words E.F. Schumacher used as the subtitle of his classic work, Small Is Beautiful, are appropriate here: "economics as if people mattered." The phrase might be focused even more—"economics as if the poor mattered"—to inspire Christians to be more concerned about the needs of real people than the wants of a nebulous and self-centered "marketplace."

When church members are committed to a preferential option for the poor, and when attorneys, politicians, business leaders, and educators, among others, fulfill their responsibilities to address social issues seriously, then the priest and the sacristan, the employer and the employee, the poor and the rich, will all have the same God. Throughout Earth, economic systems and ecological systems will benefit all biota and human communities, in an integrated ecological-economic liberation. Concern for, and commitment to, the commons good and the common good will effect a renewed creation and a relational community. After people participate in local, national, and global economic systems structured as if the poor matter, the poor of the planet will disappear into a classless and integrated human community in which each and all have a sufficiency of both Earth's natural goods and human labor's manufactured goods, all equitably distributed. The planet of the poor will disappear, as Earth is regenerated, Earth's abiotic integrity is restored, and Earth's ability to provide for the needs of all biota is renewed. If this becomes our social vision and our social project, we would be not only exercising a "preferential option for the poor": but we would also be enabling ourselves and our descendants to live as integrated members of God's creation, solicitous of the well-being of our Earth home, of all Earth's creatures, and in particular of our own communities.