

RESPONSE

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The paper by Mr. Thomas Storck and Dr. Thomas Woods' response raise important points that continue a wider debate that has been going on in the Church since the nineteenth century. Storck evaluates papal encyclical teaching and its preference for employing heterodox economics (in particular, institutionalism and German historicism) over more mainstream (i.e., neoclassical and Austrian) approaches. In particular, he asserts that the heterodox analysis of the use of power in relationships is one aspect that makes it attractive to Catholic social teaching. Woods counters on two fronts. He maintains that the Church often oversteps its competency by putting forth statements on specific economic policies and he mounts a defense of Austrian economics.

Both Storck and Woods would agree that every economic decision is a moral act that has far-reaching implications beyond the physical world. This is a point the Church is very clear on. The Fall caused economic activity to degenerate into toil, and Salvation was won when men turned three nails, a hammer, and a piece of wood against the Carpenter. At the Eucharist, the elements of bread and wine, made with human hands from the gifts of a good God, are returned to the community as the Body and Blood of Christ. The mundane acts of production, distribution, and consumption are divinely-appointed instruments that draw humanity into intimate communion with God. Economics and the heart of the Christian life cannot be separated. Following St. Paul who adapted his preaching so it could be grasped by the gentiles, the question for every generation of Christians is how to proclaim Christ's message in a way that is appropriate to the social, economic, and political conditions of the time. How to do this is what Storck and Woods disagree on.

As one delves into these issues so vital to the Church's mission, it is helpful to keep in mind that Catholic social teaching, like art, is to be appreciated at many levels ranging from pontifical teachings on broad theological principles to the daily work of Catholic Charities employees in small towns. Each layer has its own mode of analysis and interpretation. The opinion of a theologian or Catholic writer, no matter how gifted and insightful, does not carry the same ecclesiastical weight as a pastoral letter from a local conference of bishops or the authority of

a papal encyclical. The proposition that the divinely-bestowed dignity of a worker implies that remuneration should be enough to support the worker's vocation (typically, raising a family) is to be evaluated very differently from the proposition that the central government in a particular country and historical context must mandate a certain money wage. A blurring of these levels introduces a bit of murkiness in this exchange. Storck limits his observations to papal teaching in the generally recognized corpus of Catholic social teaching. Woods extrapolates Storck's comments to pronouncements of local conferences of bishops and his book, *The Church and the Market: A Catholic Defense of the Free Economy*, and applies the critique to individual non-economist writers. More explicit recognition of the multi-faceted nature of Catholic social teaching by Woods would have added clarity to his arguments.

One wonders whether Messrs. Storck and Woods base their views on subtle but fundamentally different understandings of the nature of the economy. First, there is a difference between the market as it exists in everyday life and the theories and models which are the organizing principles that explain how it works. With Pope John Paul II, one may accept the free market as a superb vehicle for unleashing human creativity but reject specific models or elements of the ideology of unfettered competition. Indeed, as Storck correctly points out, economists do not agree on the analysis of the market, so it should not be surprising that the Church is eclectic in how it uses economics.

A second difference in their views on the economy lies in the question of whether it is a product of culture or whether it has an existence that transcends our humanity. If the former is true, then the marketplace, touched by original sin, can and should be constantly reformed in light of Revelation. If the latter is correct, then Catholics must take the negative consequences of market interactions with the same resignation one takes regarding the suffering the hungry lion will inflict on the gazelle he has singled out. To take this line of reasoning further, if economic institutions are human creations then papal teaching is free to choose whatever language of economics it needs to express the Gospel in truth and charity. If the market is an independent reality, and a particular economic theory provides a comprehensive description of it, then Woods is right that the Church must resort to the concepts espoused by the economist. However, an important argument against the universality of the modern market is that it relies on other culture-bound institutions, such as a specific configuration of property rights and a certain work ethic.

A contentious question raised in this debate is the proper relationship between economic thought and Catholic social teaching—which is subject to which? The Church relies on the economist to help it articulate its social teaching but much less so in developing that teaching. The Church’s prophetic role stems back to ancient times and precedes modern economics. The dearth of scholarly analysis of the forces which shut the poor from the fruits of the economy did not reduce the eloquence, vigor, and moral truth of the message of the biblical figures who cried out for justice. Economic theory is an adjunct and a support for the Church’s preaching and teaching.

A central theme of Catholic social teaching is justice. Does “justice” refer to a process or an outcome? Although neither explicitly states it, it appears that Woods and Storck may have competing views on the matter as well. If two unevenly skilled sports teams play each other and all the rules of the game are followed, is the game fair? Likewise, the market works well if all people have access to it and the ability to fully engage in it. Few dispute that the free market lifted countless millions out of poverty. But what about those who are barred from participating in it due to illness, discrimination, or some other factor beyond their control? Both history and current events are full of examples where dominant groups use political, military, or other forms of non-economic power to disadvantage others. In regards to achieving an equitable distribution of power, the Church has never been satisfied with letting the market lead the way. Its social perspective on the issue, embodied in concepts such as the preferential option for the poor, is part of the Christian tradition and is reflected in the Church’s efforts in promoting health, educational, and charitable institutions.

Finally, the two papers come from different perspectives on the nature of the person. Economics is primarily concerned with the transaction and other economic relationships between actors. It starts with questions such as, “what drives human action?” Catholic social teaching is much more interested in who the actor is, made in the image and likeness of God, and his or her ultimate destiny. Unlike the autonomous person of economic theory who maximizes utility, the Church proposes that the human person is created to exist in a nexus of relationships. Hence, it should not be unexpected that Catholic teaching at times arrives at different conclusions than economists do and that its scope goes beyond economic relationships as it incorporates all aspects of social and spiritual life. In addition, when economic institutions hamper human development, then the Church exercises its prophetic role and seeks to have society change those institutions.

Even though the two authors disagree on many key points, they both make important contributions to the debate over the relationship between the Church's social teaching and economics. Too often the secular world dismisses the connection between the two and ignores the historical fact that modern economics has roots in theological thinking on topics such as the just price. Forgotten too, in our modern age, is that the spiritual life is lived through our economic relationships. Storck and Woods agree that economics is relevant to the Church and that the Church matters to economics. We need to do more to bring this message out into the marketplace of ideas.