fortable with helping the poor, including figures that show that only about one in thirteen of those individuals who received welfare at some time over the decade sampled by the cited study were heavily dependent on it for a long time (i.e. receiving fifty percent or more of their income from welfare for eight or more years of the ten). Most poor in the U.S. are temporarily poor. This is consistent with figures that I have seen which show that those who were poor in every year of the ten year study made up less than one percent of the sample population. Of these, 48.4 percent were unmarried females with children, 32.3 percent were disabled, and 22.2 percent were females aged 65 or older. Given the likely overlap between these groups, they explain a very large percentage of the always-poor group.

Family structure and its break-up long has been recognized as a primary cause of poverty in the U.S. But whatever one thinks about the choices that were made or not made to cause poverty, or the repeated bad fortune that might have placed these individuals into the poverty group, Klay argues that further income redistribution based on some minimum untaxed income level as in a negative income tax scheme is infeasible. It would require either too high a rate of marginal taxation (benefit reduction rate) for those receiving the benefits; or, were a low benefit reduction rate chosen in order to stretch out the removal from welfare support as income rises, as much as twenty percent of the U.S. population could be on the program receiving welfare benefits--clearly an unacceptably high level. This type of calculation which Klay provides probably has not been considered by many Christians or the population at large.

So what options exist? Klay argues in essence that education subsidies are an obvious long-term public remedy for poverty. She says that Christians might see this as equivalent to the year of Jubilee that redistributed land--the primary source of capital at that time--to break the intergenerational cycles of poverty. Of course land and educational opportunity have another characteristic not mentioned by Klay. They both require the effort of the recipient as input or they will not produce a living. Presumably an asset that everyone is endowed with as a birthright, and which requires personal effort to generate a living from it, would guarantee that there would be no poor; or if there were, that it would be due to lack of effort on their part. Such an asset does not exist, but the closer that we can come to finding one with those attributes the better.

This book can best be described as a non-technical explanation of economic reasoning for a reader seeking to be socially aware. It does not criticize mainstream economics or seek to show where it has been misused from a scriptural perspective. Rather it is an attempt to summarize relevant background material on different sides of the major policy issues and lay out the economic perspectives on the alternatives. The role of government in the economy, the need for growth and macroeconomic stabilization, the importance of international trade to the U.S. and the rest of the world, our responsibility to future generations for resources and the condition of the environment, and the international economic order, are all among the issues discussed.

I felt that the author could have gone further than she did in carrying her stated purpose of making this a book for Christians, as opposed to a discourse for any good person who wants to do what is socially right. Yet the book does cite Scripture and includes periodic discussions of moral perspectives in trying to present a balanced view of the economic terrain which distinguishes it from other books of this type. Thus I believe Counting the Cost will be able to help the Christian who feels that he or she is not adequately apprised of the economic consequences of their moral choices, so as to recognize the right questions and consequently better phrase the alternatives.

"The Bishops and the Economy: A Review Essay"
prepared by Thomas F. Head (George Fox College)

Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching & the U.S. Economy
by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Confer-

Building Economic Justice: The Bishops' Pastoral Letter & Tools for Action

Bulletin: Association of Christian Economists Issue #9 (Spring 1987)
The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has undertaken the substantial task of delineating the demands of the Christian faith with regard to the economic performance of the United States. Their work began in 1980 and has involved three major drafts. The final document, approved on Nov. 13, 1986, is a book of nearly two hundred pages outlining Catholic social teaching, identifying problems with the U.S. economy, and making recommendations for change.

The Bulletin of the Association of Christian Economists already has given significant attention to the perspectives of the Catholic bishops. In the Spring 1985 issue George Monsma reviewed the first draft of the bishops' letter. Along with thoughtful critical comments Monsma presented an excellent and detailed summation of the contents of the pastoral letter. Because this has been done very well and because the central themes of the letter have not changed, my comments will not emphasize summary. In addition to Monsma's contribution James Gwartney's Fall 1985 review of Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought & the U.S. Economy--A Lay Letter, gives a good sense of the controversy between the bishops and Catholic lay men and women with regard to the basic issues of central planning, the creation of wealth, the distribution of income, and the problem of poverty.

The bishops' work should be of particular interest to economists with a concern for bringing together the perspectives of faith with those of economics. It makes important observations and raises serious questions. It should also be of interest to church people looking for a discussion of economic issues from a Christian perspective. It has a place in both college and church libraries. It can helpfully be on the reading lists for a variety of courses from ethics to economics, and it can serve as the stimulus for discussion groups and special symposia.

Economic Justice for All, the first citation above, is a compact and inexpensive ($2.95) paperback edition which will be useful for discussion groups, supplemental course readings, etc. Unfortunately it lacks an index. The second work cited, Building Economic Justice, is a large format paperback which contains the entire contents of Economic Justice for All, as well as illustrations, an index, discussion questions, brief commentary, a guide to scriptural references, and a listing of selected resources; it is priced at $7.95. This sturdier and more complete edition is best for library acquisitions, and purchasing a copy for the benefit of teachers and group leaders using Economic Justice for All would be worth the investment.

I will now turn to my own critical responses to the bishops' letter. Despite the importance and quality of this document, it is not without its factious and disappointing aspects. Although the letter comments extensively and repeatedly on economic problems, it is frustratingly void of economic thinking. By this I mean that it does very little to use the insights of the discipline, to ask how economists might frame and analyze the issues at hand, and to reach for new levels of understanding by letting moral vision and economic science mutually inform each other.

If I had to sacrifice either "moral vision" or "economic science," I would certainly have no trouble quickly deciding to let go of economics. In this sense the bishops and I share the same priorities. We believe that eternal biblical truths must shape all that we do. But since I see my work as an economist as a moral undertaking, sacrificing one or the other does not make sense to me. Just as I believe that economics is flawed when it is not shaped by moral vision, I believe that attempts to delineate "The Christian Vision of Economic Life"--as the bishops title their second chapter--are needlessly weakened when the perspectives of economics are neglected.

So, I think the bishops missed an opportunity to lead their congregations and the wider Christian community into a deeper understanding of economic problems and a more creative posture for responding to the challenges that are before us. A Christian vision of economic life which goes beyond offering judgment and guilt in the face of problems such as unemployment, poverty, agricultural crises, and global imbalances needs to empower people by teaching some of the basic lessons of economics. Declaring moral principles without considering what we know about how we can and how we do respond to those principles is a frustratingly incomplete approach.

The bishops' treatment of poverty can be taken as an example of this incomplete approach. They repeatedly,
and I think correctly, bring to our awareness a Christian obligation to the poor. They devote particular attention to biblical passages addressing this responsibility. In a representative portion of their letter in this regard, they write:

In the Last Judgment so dramatically described in St. Matthew’s Gospel, we are told that we will be judged according to how we respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger. 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 lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. [From the preface, “A Pastoral Message,” paragraph 16]

This emerges as a central theme of the bishops’ letter.

I do not fault the bishops for being concerned about the poor. Poverty is for many people on this earth a real and crushing problem, and it demands the attention of Christians. My discomfort has to do with the kind of attention that the bishops have given the matter with regard to identifying the incidence of poverty, assessing the nature and causes of poverty, and evaluating responses to poverty.

First, with regard to the incidence of poverty, it is clear that whatever measure we use, we will identify needy people in this country. It is also clear that improving their lives is a desirable goal. But there is room for legitimate debate over how many poor people there are and how poor they are. Furthermore, it is important to have a sense of the value of noncash benefits and services (e.g. Food Stamps, medical care, housing subsidies, public education, etc.) made available to those in this category. And it is useful to delineate the transitional poor from the chronically poor. I find the bishops to lean in the direction of making the problem sound as grave as possible. There certainly is no virtue in erring in the opposite direction and pretending that poverty does not exist. But the bishops’ almost unqualified acceptance of a simplistic approximation of the extent of poverty, as well as their polemical use of this number, causes me to wonder how well they understand or want to understand economic suffering. The bishops seem overly anxious to identify every member of the U.S.’s federally-defined poor population as a person to whom Jesus was referring when He spoke of the hungry, thirsty, naked, and alien. They do not seem to be inclined to develop a biblical perspective on the nature and extent of economic need.

This issue would have surfaced more clearly had the bishops not relegated Third World poverty to a subcategory in their discussion of the “complexity of economic relations in an interdependent world.” They can be credited for acknowledging the Third World, and what they do say on the subject is fine. But the whole matter seems to be an afterthought. For a group of writers who make a fundamental “option for the poor” the cornerstone of their economic thought, the disproportionate concern with American poverty versus global poverty seems odd. It is not a fully satisfying explanation that the subject on which they are writing is the U.S. Economy. A “preferential option for the poor” ought to inform the choice of topics just as much as it informs what is said about those topics.

The bishops have not worked through the basic contradiction implicit in their treatment of poverty. It is one matter that secular standards vary as we traverse national boundaries and historical periods. It is quite another matter when a biblical understanding of economic justice seems to be so mutable. I do not want to be too harsh on the bishops here because I think that they have unwittingly fallen into this inconsistency. They are obviously deeply concerned for the poor—all of the poor. But I cannot help but think that an assessment of human needs and poverty that began with a global perspective, rather than appending the rest of the world to a discussion of American experiences in the 1980’s, would have provided not only a keener vision of the global economy but also a deeper understanding of the functioning of the U.S. economy and the ways it addresses the problem of poverty.

The line of inquiry which I suggest here can easily be abused by those wishing to ignore the real human misery that exists in our country, and this possibility has given me some pause about even raising these questions. I am not interested in adding one bit of legitimacy to the calloused indifference to human suffering that we can fall into far too easily. On the other hand, an exaggerated condemnation of the U.S. economy’s performance and capacity to respond to human needs should not command all that much respect either. I think the bishops’ message would be much more compelling had their starting point been a more reflective response to the question: Who are ”the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, and the strangers” in the world today?
Second, with regard to the nature and causes of poverty, the bishops seem to be quite willing to function with the premise that poverty is basically a failure of the economic system. I find this attitude somewhat analogous to a belief that automobile accidents are caused only by engineering defects in cars, poor roads, and adverse weather conditions. All of these do contribute to accidents and need our attention. But to attend to these without considering the role of the driver is to misunderstand a good bit of the problem.

Again, I have some hesitation about raising this issue because I do not want to discourage us from looking at the design defects in our economic institutions. We have ample evidence that both private and public structures can make things worse for the poor. But it is not clear that poverty exists solely because we have the wrong mix of policies and institutions. For churchmen, the bishops seem reticent about the element of sin. It is mentioned, but in the end the bishops seem reluctant to conclude that it has much to do with the problems they address. I am not sure that they have adequately explored the roles that greed, dishonesty, theft, vandalism, neglect, violence, bigotry, exploitation, gambling, drug abuse, and sexual immorality play in causing and perpetuating poverty. Obviously, some of these things result from poverty, and separating cause and effect is difficult. Also, it is exceedingly important to note that sin is exercised at all levels of society; I am concerned with human events in palatial corporate suites no more or no less than events in dark, squalid streets.

The key issue to me here is that the economy suffers from the impact of sin just as all other aspects of life do. In this regard some of the misery which we measure is not the result of an unjust economic system, which we might call economic or structural immorality, but the economic manifestations of damage done as a result of a good number of other forms of immorality. Knowing which is which becomes important when one turns to making policy suggestions. I think the crucial point which the bishops miss is that enhancing the justice of our economic structures is not going to address the poverty caused by other factors. In fact, attempting to insulate the economy from the impact of sin may in many cases run counter to having the economy function justly.

Justice is not a one-dimensional concept. As the bishops note, "Justice has many nuances." (paragraph 39) Efforts to address one element will at times conflict with addressing other aspects of justice. That there might be any difficult trade-offs in the socioeconomic sphere is a possibility which the bishops seem not to want to hear about. One of the contributions of economic analysis is to articulate the nature of such trade-offs, and I believe that the bishops would have developed a much stronger document had they been more willing to grapple with this facet of the problem.

Third, with regard to responses to poverty, the bishops offer a list of conventional ideas: stimulate the economy and create more jobs, eliminate discrimination, foster self-help efforts, reform the tax system, educate the poor, support the institution of the family, and reform the welfare system. I have no doubt that we can and should work conscientiously in each of these areas. And, when improved effort in one or more of these categories means higher spending, we ought to call for a more compassionate understanding of national priorities than we presently witness in our society.

Although I find the discussion of guidelines for action to be satisfactory, it leaves me with an empty feeling. Part of what is missing for me is a realistic vision of what our society would look like after we had successfully implemented the optimum mix of these policy suggestions. Would poverty be gone? I think not. It would be reduced but not eliminated. What then is our response to the remaining hungry and hurting? How does a person of faith confront the intractable aspects of life? We cannot fix everything. So then, how do we relate to brokenness? For me, the bishops lean a bit too much toward the view that we are going to get it all fixed, and I fear that they may do so at the cost of subtly drawing us away from a deeper understanding of our earthly milieu and the spiritual roots of compassionate action.

Something else which is missing for me is a broader theoretical understanding of the connection between economic systems and the elimination of poverty. For example, the bishops largely ignore that fundamental debate of political economy between capitalism and socialism. I offer no simplistic application of this rich debate, but it does seem to me that the discussion is weakened by not acknowledging the differences between the mechanisms of allocation used in each model and the historical experience of each model in creating wealth and eliminating poverty. The disclaimer that the pastoral letter "does not embrace any particular theory of how the economy works" (from the
preface, "A Pastoral Message," paragraph 12) is wishful thinking. One cannot measure economic performance, evaluate the functioning of the economy, and suggest directions for policy, without embracing theories about how the economy works. That the bishops do not seem to know or do not want to know the theoretical basis of their economic observations is symptomatic of the document’s basic weakness: the reluctance to study economics.

In sentiment, if not in precise wording, the solution to poverty and other economic problems which the bishops call for is something of a safety net which guarantees that the basic economic needs of people will be met. This represents a significant socialist component in an otherwise capitalist economy. Their case for this outlook would have been greatly strengthened if they had directly acknowledged the nature of the questions at hand: if they had critically analyzed the pros and cons of their theoretical approach; if they had studied more fully the historical experience of this in other nations; and if their advice had come with a convincing assessment of the benefits and costs of their policy recommendations.

Repeatedly I felt that I was reading comment on the economy which was formulated without the benefit of the discipline of economics. In voicing this discomfort I do not want to be saying that I think that the bishops should have left economics to the experts. Quite to the contrary! I think there are some basic ideas and lessons from economics which are easily accessible to anyone willing to do a little homework. And it is the responsibility of our profession not to attempt to mesmerize listeners with needless complexity and scientific technique. We can often speak more clearly than we do without being in the other direction of oversimplifying very involved matters. Our profession must accept some of the blame for the bishops mediocre grasp of economics.

In sum Economic Justice for All is a significant and challenging document. It has the power to convict us about troubling matters in our midst and to call us to a keener sense of the responsibilities of Christians in this world. But its hesitancy to embrace economic analysis diffuses the power of its moral vision. I fear that it is more of a passing critique of Reaganomics than a classic piece of social witness. But I do have the nagging feeling that I should like the document more than I do; and perhaps my respect will grow as I prayerfully labor with its truths. Its insights and its shortcomings can serve as creative stimuli to Christian economists to carry the power of the Gospel more fully into our work and to make that work more intelligible and accessible to the church and the larger society.

We see something of this process in God, Goods, & the Common Good, a collection of responses to the bishops' letter commissioned by the American Lutheran Church. Although all of the eleven commentaries are written by Lutherans, they represent a wide range of experiences, occupations, and perspectives. The book intentionally and successfully presents widely divergent views. One of its principle aims is to provide resources for discussion groups in churches, schools, and other settings. Its variety, accessible style and content, and effective discussion questions all contribute to its usefulness for this purpose. I will briefly summarize and comment on each chapter in the book.

Larry Rasmussen, a seminary ethics professor, emphasizes the role of the church as an arena of moral deliberation on significant issues of the day. He evaluates Economic Justice for All in this context and is favorably impressed with the way the document carries Christian perspectives into a pluralistic society in which many people do not find the claims of Christianity compelling. With regard to the letter’s recommendations, Rasmussen is critical of apparent inconsistencies between the moral level and the strategic level. In his words, “. . . the difficulty is that, for the bishops, a radical faith is to pursue a liberal policy agenda by using gradualist means.” He feels that because power issues have been ignored, the bishops have not come to grips with resolving conflicting interests in shaping a new economic experiment.

Another theologian, Robert Benne, is considerably less enthusiastic about the bishops’ work. Although he praises the document for keeping the issue of economic deprivation before us, he is critical of the bishops’ neglect of the subject of economic growth and their attribution of all economic inequalities to injustice. He is conversant with many of the economic ideas which were left out of the bishops’ writings and gives considerable attention to the harmful effects of neglecting issues such as efficiency and productivity. He faults the bishops for “dissolving the inevitable tension between efficiency and equality” by ignoring the former altogether. Although he approaches the subject as a theologian rather than an economist, he touches on many of the same themes that were bothersome to me.
Gregory Krohn, the only economist writing in the volume, reviews data on unemployment, poverty, and income distribution and the deteriorating performance of these measures during the first half of the 1980's. Krohn does not express any of the reservations which I have about the bishops' use of the data. My speculation is that this is because we have focused on somewhat different questions. I do not think that we would have any substantial differences about the meaning of these standard measures as indicators of economic performance, and Krohn's effort is a straightforward reporting of that record. More controversial issues arise when we try to characterize what that record means with regard to justice and what is the best response to it, as is clear when Krohn turns to commenting on the roles of market forces, government, and the church in promoting economic prosperity. Krohn seems more inclined in this piece to note the controversies rather than to push toward resolving them. He both appreciates the role of markets and is realistic about their failings. He considers suggested reforms in the welfare system, makes a strong plea for renewed efforts by the church, and argues that we must be willing to pay the price of higher taxes and more significant church contributions to promote economic justice.

A lively and challenging international perspective comes from Sibusiso Bengu, a South African. He praises the bishops for their prophetic witness about "the way some economic systems and structures dehumanize the people of God." He commends the bishops' recognition of linkages between the U.S. and the Third World, but is critical of the fact that the letter views these issues too directly from an American perspective. He offers a glimpse of the world through the eyes of the victims of economic and military exploitation. In his central criticism of the bishops' letter, he states that: "It is a good attempt at papering over the cracks of an unjust economic system, but I do not see it as addressing the root causes of unjust economic structures." In short, he sees capitalism as hopelessly flawed and wants revolutionary change rather than mere reform of "an evil system." Bengu's contribution is sure to be a stimulus for heated discussion, but I am skeptical about it doing much more than that since he does no better than the bishops when it comes to studying the economic possibilities. Both Bengu and the bishops tell us about the horrible aspects of the U.S. economy; neither does the hard work of comparative analysis of existing and proposed economic systems.

Allan Nelson and William Swanson, two businessmen, affirm the concerns of the bishops and move the discussion of those concerns in a fruitful direction emphasizing the role of the church in forming and maintaining moral and ethical values. They are well versed in the flaws of our economic system and have plenty to say about desirable reforms. But to them, a less-than-foolproof system is not the essential culprit; instead they point to the human struggle between serving God and serving mammon. In their words: "A highly efficient economic system producing worldly treasure can be a strong competitor with the will of God for the hearts of human beings." And later: "The church must realize that the cause of our problems is not a particular economic system but sinful disregard for the rights and dignity of people, the laws of God, and the teachings of Christ." Without discouraging efforts to make the system as good as we can, they accept failure (by individuals and systems) as a possibility. Nelson and Swanson focus on Christian compassion and responsibility in the face of failure, and in so doing they offer a compelling and engaging treatment of Christ's demands. For me, admittedly an incurable academician, this balanced and reflective chapter does more to convict and instruct than do many of the more impassioned observations that appear in either Economic Justice for All or God, Goods, & the Common Good.

Dean Kleckner, an Iowa farmer and farm leader, considers the bishops' recommendations on agricultural policy, an important subject which I did not treat in my review. He concurs with the bishops' concern for family farms and diverse ownership of agricultural assets, but feels that they have an exaggerated sense of the crisis in farming today. Kleckner presents informative data on farm size, income, debt, and prices. He considers the bishops' suggestion of a broader application of mandatory production-control programs and argues that it would work against the bishops' own goals. He also discusses international trade issues, employment practices, and environmental concerns. His review of the impact of the past fifty years of direct government involvement in agriculture leads him to the judgment that the bishops rely too heavily on the government for solutions.

Although Anne Kanten, a Minnesota farmer and state agricultural official, offers a somewhat different view on the plight of farmers and rural people in the U.S., she is, like Kleckner, critical of federal policy. She writes: "Nowhere does the pastoral say in plain language what most farmers know in their hearts: the U.S. farm/food crisis starts with Washington political policy." She focuses on price, interest rate, and trade policies, and argues that the bishops have too easily diverted attention away from these key issues. Her discussion addresses what she considers to be the
two fatal flaws in our agricultural policies: a bias against producers and in favor of marketers and an unjustified faith in finding technological fixes for all agricultural problems. She feels that the bishops did a good job of presenting Christian values and beliefs, but that their discussion of actual problems was unfocused and largely unhelpful. She concludes that: "Too often, the letter's agricultural section uses slogans as substitutes for substantive discussion."

George Tinker, a citizen of the Osage Indian Nation, is a pastor and seminary professor. He writes on the theme "Does 'All People' Include Native Peoples?" He believes that the bishops have badly underestimated the degree of poverty among native Americans but that this understatement is only a small symptom of the much larger problem of the document's narrowness. He argues that it ignores the experiences, views, and needs of the indigenous peoples in the U.S. and elsewhere. Tinker finds that the bishops both frame questions and offer answers which take account only of Western culture and values. In his words: "Even the right to employment is an answer that assumes a question that already misses the point from the Indian perspective. The right to employment will not make a strong, healthy nation of Namibia, nor will it insure the survival of the Campa peoples of Peru." Just as I have argued above that the bishops' letter was weakened by not having an adequately global economic perspective, Tinker maintains that it has also been weakened by not proceeding from a satisfyingly global cultural perspective.

Mary Bradshaw Henry offers the personal reflections of a black woman who has spent many years combating poverty and racism. She is justifiably weary of expressions of concern that end only in discussion and dialogue and are never adequately carried into action. She reminds us in graphic language that many of the poor cannot relate to more talk, especially "God-talk." Her anger and her hope bring her to quote one of the bishops' concluding thoughts: "We cannot be frightened by the magnitude and complexity of these problems. We must not be discouraged." (paragraph 364) She forcefully makes the point that the only real human solidarity is solidarity in action.

June Nilssen, a pastor in Milwaukee, is, like Sibusiso Bengu, an observer who does not accept the reformist approach of the bishops. She feels that the system cannot be fixed and that it needs to be torn apart and rebuilt. I found myself alternating between being inspired by her prophetic witness and being discouraged by my suspicion that she has not worked through some of the important issues. She is dissatisfied with the bishops and calls for radical alternatives, but all of her specific ideas and models are just as gradualist as those of the bishops. She says that we need "a whole new way of being."

"But that is what the bishops say and that is what Christianity in general says, because that of course is what the Gospel says. What she fails to recognize is that this "whole new way of being" is worked out in the real world of everyday actions and choices. She states that: "Tinkering with the world's ambiguities only postpones facing the death of systems that must come under judgment by the Word." True, but which is which? When is giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty a bit of reformist tinkering and when is it the Holy Spirit presiding over the death of systems? I think Nilssen is unfair to the bishops. Despite a failure to do their economic homework, the bishops do offer a transforming spiritual vision which hardly can be said to resemble a "preservation of the status quo."

God, Goods, & the Common Good is concluded with a chapter by its editor, Charles Lutz. He provides an informative discussion of Protestant statements which have received considerably less publicity than the Catholic publication and identifies themes that they have had in common with the bishops' letter. These common topics include the dignity of the human person, the obligations of the wealthy to relieve poverty, stewardship of God's creation, the role of government, church engagement with public policy, personal conversion and action, and the moral example of the institutional church. Lutz provides his own interpretive comments on capitalism and selfishness and wonders why church statements do not discuss this subject more than they do. He also believes that these various church statements have not given adequate attention to the matter of economic development at the local community level. His discussion of what we can do in our own backyard will be welcomed reading to those anxious to transform all of this thinking and talking into some immediate action. This chapter's perspectives and syntheses provide a thoughtful conclusion for the book.

I found God, Goods, & the Common Good to be a useful and insightful companion to the bishops' letter. Besides the eleven essays, it contains the text of the bishops' "A Pastoral Message" which introduces and summarizes the principal themes of Economic Justice for All. Consequently for some groups it may stand on its own as a resource for study and discussion.
"A Critique of Capitalism" Grove Booklet on Ethics No. 5, and "A Christian Critique of Socialism" Grove Booklet on Ethics No. 5b  
Reviewed by William P. Snavely (Liberty University)

These two short monographs, separated by some seven years in publication dates, are strikingly different in critical intensity. First published was "A Christian Critique of Capitalism," and it is this work which is by far the more probingly critical in its evaluation. Whether this difference reflects a critical mellowing on the part of the author during the long interval between the two works, or simply reflects the author's personal preference function, this reviewer is in no position to say. That such a marked contrast in critical intensity exists is unfortunate, however, for the misleading impressions that may be conveyed to uninformed readers. The two books will be considered in chronological order.

At an early point in his "A Christian Critique of Capitalism" Hay develops a brief philosophical discussion of three broad themes: 1) creation and man's dominion over nature; 2) man and his work; 3) the distribution of income. Under the first theme he contrasts the biblical concept of trusteeship in the holding of resources by individuals, with what he perceives to be the prevailing attitudes under capitalism concerning the institution of private property. Capitalism is identified as a system which falls far short of achieving biblical trusteeship in the use of property. The thought that this failure is more a reflection of man's imperfect nature than of capitalism as an economic system is not developed. Nor is reference made to the fact that contradictions between the biblical principle of trusteeship and the actual usage of property have been present throughout history.

Under the theme "man and his work" Hay reminds us that with man's fall work became toil. Recognizing this, he emphasizes that Christians still should not accept institutions which reduce man's dignity, which "... reduce him to a mere element in society," and which "... aggravate the conflicts between men." His implication that the system of capitalism, per se, must result in such negative circumstances is seriously misleading. The high degree of employee-employer harmony which has prevailed, at least until recently, in many Japanese industries clearly demonstrates that employment disharmony is not an inherent characteristic of capitalism.

The author's final philosophical theme is "the distribution of income." Here he develops the thoughts that everyone is entitled to share in God's provision for mankind; that there is a maximum standard to which an individual should attain; and that personal dominion over resources does not carry with it the right to consume the entire product of those resources. Christians can readily agree with one of his points here: namely that some minimum of food, clothing, and housing is needed for human existence, dignity, and the rearing of children. Where legitimate disagreement arises is with regard to the means by which society should seek the realization of this objective.

In the discussion of the maximum standard to which an individual should attain, it is unclear how Hay would apply this principle in practice. If he merely wishes to condemn an attitude of covetousness, he certainly is on sound biblical ground. If, as this reviewer concludes, he means to condemn the acquisition of wealth under capitalism through the Christian application of God-given talents coupled with a full measure of Christian tithing, there is certainly room for disagreement.

From his broad philosophical discussion Hay then turns to more specific and detailed criticisms of capitalism in practice (as contrasted with a more textbookish laisses-faire, competitive model). The problems mentioned are the familiar ones of oligopolistic competition, externalities, public goods, natural monopolies, the rate of investment, involuntary unemployment, the impersonal labor contract, dehumanizing methods of production, the distribution of income, consumer manipulation through corporate planning, and the institution of inheritance.

In condemning capitalism on the basis of such factors, no mention is made of capitalism's remarkable flexibility and adaptability. Over time, as new problems have arisen and been identified, techniques have been developed for dealing with them within the broad framework of the system. This process has been going on for over two cen-