

# To See God

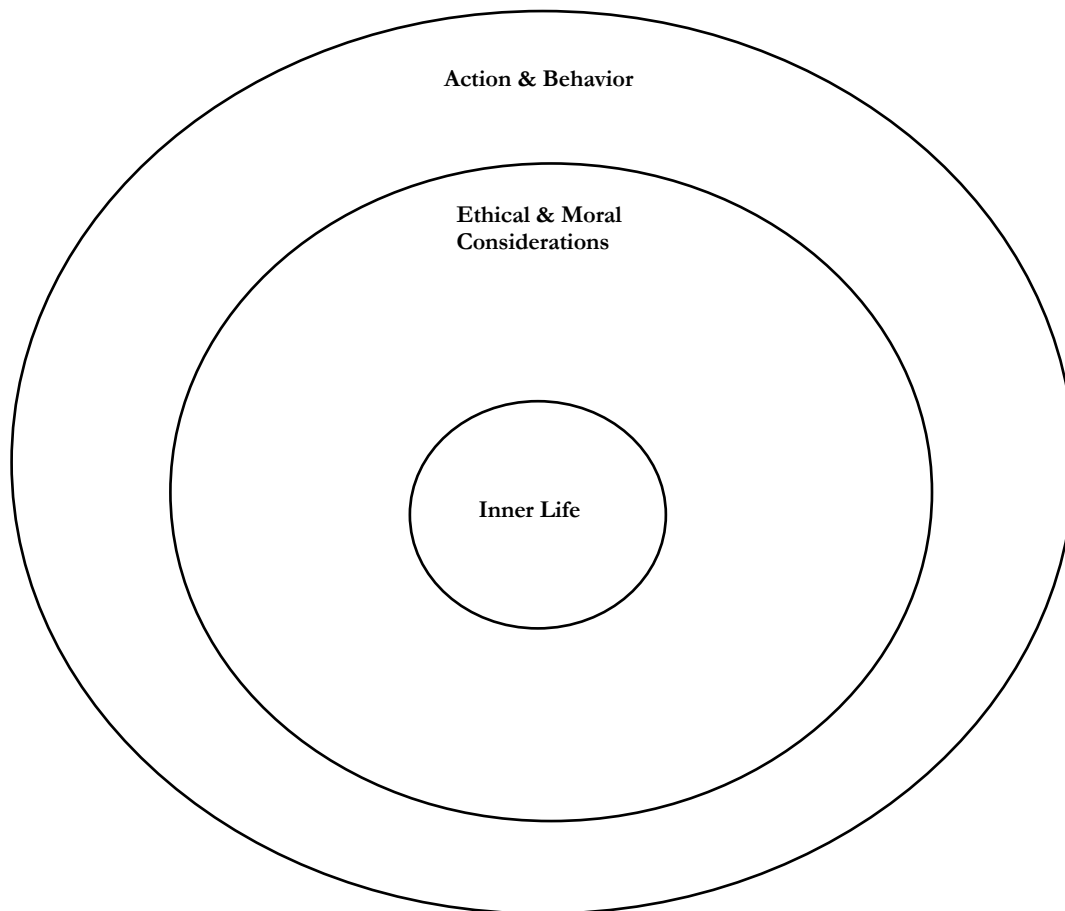
*The goal of human life is to see God* – Kenneth Kirk

*The end, we have seen reason to believe, would be a commonwealth of free, responsible beings united in love* – John Macquarrie

*The aim of a Christian social order is the fullest possible development of individual personality in the widest and deepest possible fellowship* - William Temple

*Aquinas got it right: prayer is 'loving God in act so that the divine life can communicate itself to us and through us to the world.' Christian action is not action of which Jesus approves but action that he performs through his incorporated, and therefore prayerful, disciples.* -Martin Thornton

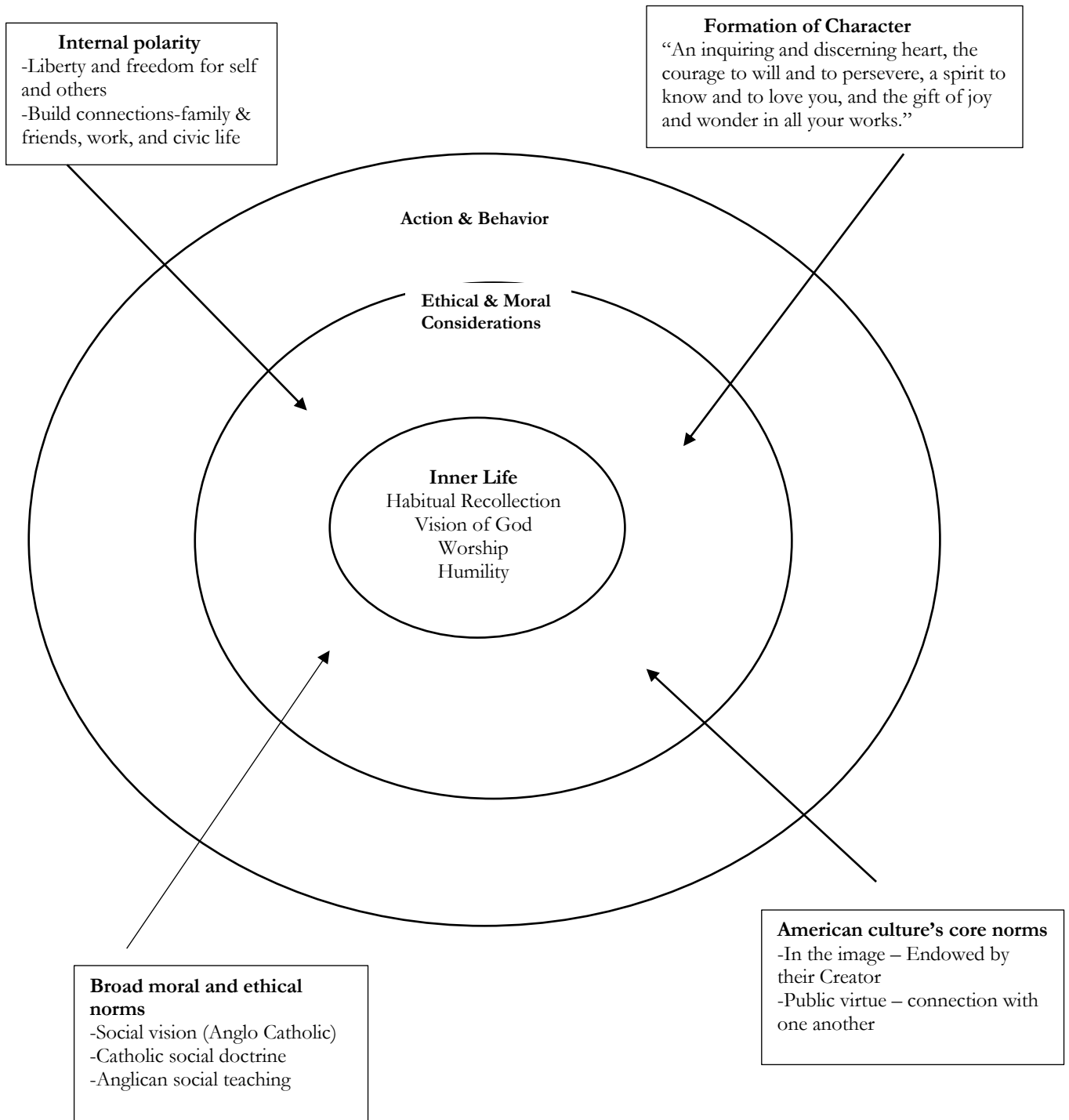
*For the fully Christian life is a Eucharistic life: that is, a natural life conformed to the pattern of Jesus, given in its wholeness to God, laid on His altar as a sacrifice of love, and consecrated, transformed by His inpouring life, to be used to give life and food to other souls.* - Evelyn Underhill



The model has three primary elements. At the center is the *inner life* of a person, a family, a close friendship, a parish church, or a society. A second ring is the set of considerations that the person or group takes into account in making *ethical and moral decisions*. The third is the person or group's *actions and behaviors*.

There are many useful models for exploring the relationship among these and other aspects of our life. This model is focused on the role our inner life plays. You may think of it as the center, as in this diagram, or you might look at it as the ground upon which we stand.

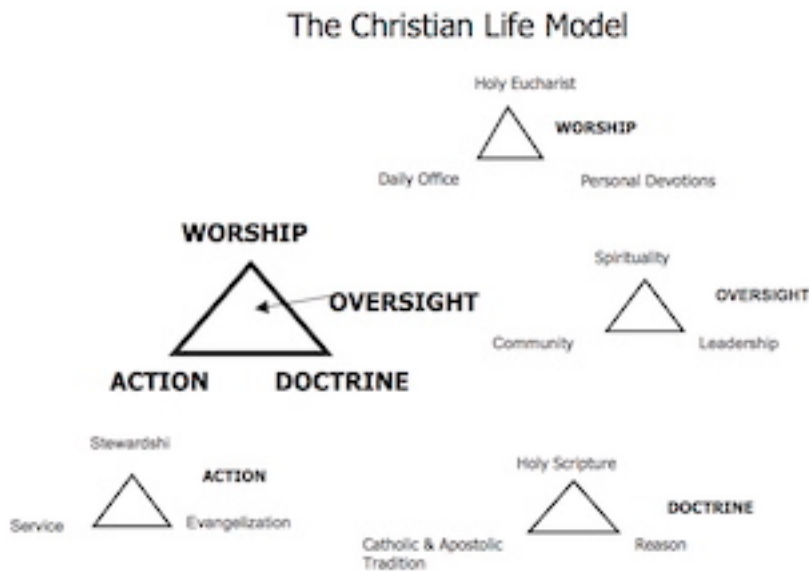
In the diagram below we flesh out the elements a bit. And we offer more specific language in the first two rings. These are our own ways of conceptualizing some of what shapes our approach. You may other ways.



## Three models relating worship doctrine and action

There are three models that may be useful in exploring the relationship: the Christian life Model, a quote from Martin Thornton, and "To See God."

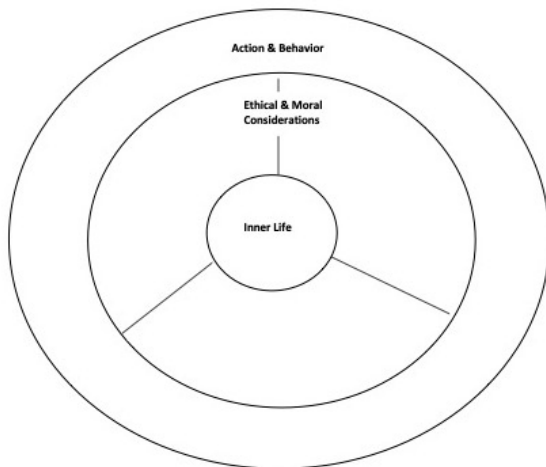
The issue is not which is correct. They are all correct. They illuminate one another. In general, when trying to communicate to most people in the parish, probably the Christian life model is best as a starting point. With people ready to go a bit further the other two can be expanded upon and help us better understand the dynamics among the three elements.



Copyright Robert A. Gallagher, 1985, 2006. For more on the model see Robert Gallagher's *PS All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, 2006 and *Power from on High: A Model for Parish Life and Development*, 1982

## Martin Thornton

"Moral action only flows from doctrinal truth by grace and faith, that is through prayer"



## The Vision of God

*The glory of God is a living human being; and the life of the human is the vision of God.* Irenaeus

Kenneth Kirk's<sup>1</sup> translation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was, "The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man is the vision of God." John Behr's<sup>2</sup> translation is "For the glory of God is a living human being; and the life of the human consists in beholding God."

We offer the whole quote in several forms as an affirmation of the radical orthodox position being asserted by Irenaeus. He is saying two things that can be lost in our times. First, the often used translation of "a human fully alive" is easily misunderstood as having to do with vigor and the pursuit of life's enjoyments. So, the blind and lame are excluded along with those whose life is filled with struggle and limitation. Irenaeus includes all human beings. Second, the source of that life is God. The work of the Holy Spirit, an energy not of our making, is the renewal of human life from sin and death to authentic life. A new life because we are taken into the vision of God.

Two areas of parish development that can be helped by making use of Irenaeus' quote and Kirk's work are apostolic practice and social ethics.

*The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* is the title of a 1931 book by Kirk. We'll summarize it with two quotes from the preface.

*Worship is the Christian's first and paramount duty*

*The highest prerogative of the Christian, in this life as well as hereafter, is the activity of worship; and that nowhere except in this activity will he find the key to his ethical problems.*

D. Stephen Long picked up on Kirk's approach when he wrote *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. It was published by Oxford University Press in 2010. In the middle of the book, he offers a few paragraphs on the various ethical stances found in the church—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, and so on. In "Anglican Ethics" he draws on Kenneth Kirk's work.

Kirk "suggested that Christian ethics best proceeds by avoiding both formalism and rigorism. Formalism seeks to bring all of life under kind of a codification, the setting out of codes and laws that proscribe what is not to be done in advance, but actually demands very little; for all it asks is that we avoid violating some formal code. ... Rigorism reacts against this formalism and demands a higher standard." Kirk sees both as lacking because they miss that the true purpose of life is the vision of God. Kirk uses the whole of Irenaeus' quote,

*The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man is the vision of God*

Long goes on to explain Kirk's notion that worship is the key to humanity's ethical problems. The way of worship is the alternative to a moralism "that becomes so preoccupied with one's own virtue or morality that it turns into a self-preoccupation; a 'vision of self' supplants the 'vision of God'. Worship re-directs us from self to God." A useful orientation in an age of virtue signaling and performance everything

We'll highlight one additional point Kirk makes. In a section on "Worship and service." He writes, "The end of all our praying and worship is contemplation or the prayer of union. He's not writing about a set of contemplative practices as we think of today but a state of being. He seems to be saying much what Martin

Thornton means by habitual recollection. In Thornton's words it's a state of "constant recollection of Christ's presence" or "a continuous, even subconscious, awareness of the divine presence everywhere."

For Kirk, worship is not about our enjoyment or what pleasure we may gain. It isn't selfish. "To look towards God, and from that 'look' to acquire insight both into the follies of one's own heart and the needs of one's neighbors, with power to correct the one no less than to serve the other—this is something very remote from any quest for 'religious experience' for its own sake. Yet this, and nothing else, is what the vision of God has meant in the fully developed thought of historic Christianity. ... The Christian tradition of the vision of God seems, even so, to have a message for the restless energizers of the modern world, with their problem, programs and calls to discipleship. The concept of service embraces two very different ideas. Only one of these is Christian – indeed, only one of them realizes the ideal of service at all; for service of the other kind is self-destructive and nugatory. For the purposes of the present discussion, they may be called the service of humility, and the service of patronage. It should not be difficult to see that only the former of these two has real worth. Once this is recognized, it becomes not unreasonable to suggest that worship alone guarantees to service that quality of humility without which it is no service at all."

William Temple echoes Kirk on worship, service, and humility. "The divine humility shows itself in rendering service. He who is entitled to claim the service of all His creatures chooses first to give His service to them. 'The Son of Man came not to receive service but to give it' (Saint Mark 10: 45). But man's humility does not begin with the giving of service; it begins with the readiness to receive it. For there can be much pride and condescension in our giving of service. It is wholesome only when it is offered spontaneously on the impulse of real love; the conscientious offer of it is almost sure to 'have the nature of sin' (Article XIII), as almost all virtue has of which the origin is our own deliberate will."<sup>3</sup>

It accords with George Herbert's

Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things thee to see,  
And what I do in any thing,  
To do it as for thee

Sound parish development requires grounding the community in the teaching of Irenaeus, Kirk, Thornton, Temple, and Herbert.

## Ethical and Moral Considerations

### *Social Ethics*

Social ethics is a compilation of values and patterns of behavior of a group. Used by that group in reflection and discernment as it determines appropriate action. We offer four sources that have proven helpful to us.

### *Formation of Character*

Our interest here is that mix of moral, mental, and emotional qualities and beliefs that are expressed with some degree of consistency by a person (or a community of people). What kind of person are we forming through life in a parish community?

You can also find a fuller description of this material in *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, Robert. A. Gallagher, Ascension Press, 2008. Pages 160 - 166

Baptized into the Body of Christ -- A new person in Christ; becoming salt, light and leaven; “An inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.” A believer in God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit; called to “persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return...proclaim by word and example the Good News...seek and serve Christ in all persons...strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

The Full Stature of Christ -- In Ephesians there is the call to grow into the full stature of Christ; that the graces and practices necessary for that growth: humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance born of love, eagerness to maintain unity in the bond of peace, truthfulness mediated in love, mutual kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness; and in Galatians that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Sins, gifts, and virtues – A traditional set of categories to describe character. Here we are drawing largely on Richard Holloway (one-time Presiding Bishop of Scotland) in *Seven to Flee, Seven to Follow*, 1986

Holloway’s definition of sin is "a wrongly directed effort; a good drive that fails to find the right object; a good thing in itself that is done to excess." This fits Newman’s understanding that, “Evil has no substance of its own, but is only the defect, excess, perversion, or corruption of that which has substance.” Martin Smith, in his book on reconciliation, urges, “Fix your mind on the positive virtues, of which sins are the shadow.” In a related understanding, Martin Thornton viewed the purpose of self-examination as aiming at “*tranquillitas*; not the suppression of desire, not *apatheia*, but harmony between the elements of personality.” So, in all this we are dealing with health and wholeness rather than simply avoidance and self-protection.

There’s the seven deadly sins: 1) pride or self-esteem raised to an inordinate level, all sense of proportion lost 2) Envy or jealousy in which we have “sorrow for another's good.” We see malice, skill at noticing the defects in others, and hypocrisy. 3) Covetousness or avarice in which there is an “Itching hunger for the good things of life” (success, possessions, popularity). 4) Anger seen as a disproportionate response to danger in destructive acts of—impatience, retaliation, lack of control, and resentment. The antidote is to give ourselves to systematically willing another person’s good and to act quickly as anger breaks out to minimize the damage. 5) Lust is a distorted instinct that is good in itself. It is rooted in a pursuit of pleasure that becomes twisted gives consent for exploitation, even if mutually agreed upon. This may move into an addictive cycle and diminishing one’s capacity for committed, joyful relationships. 6) Gluttony is our excessive pursuit of appetites—too much drink, food, smoking, talk; compulsive behavior. They are natural instincts that are allowed to play a disproportionate role and can end up dominating the personality. An approach to lust and gluttony is learning self-discipline and redirect the instincts toward “the good.” 7) Sloth is “The instinct for rest and creative idling taken and distorted into an unattractive passivity,” “everything is too much trouble.” Instead of taking our life in our own hand we drift along, not really

Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit: 1) Fear that you will not have the life you could have; the life God wants for you. It is as opposed to a life that is not for "the good" or that is trivial. This is the "fear that establishes

proportions and recognizes consequences.” 2) Piety or affection is “A kind of fondness or love, a recognition of what you owe the land that bred you,” gratitude for the love, forgiveness and understanding one receives. 3) Knowledge is a capacity to accept paradox, to hold things in balance, to see more completely. It is the knowledge of God and the dynamics of awe and affection. 4) Courage or fortitude is our effort to close the gap between belief and action “by reaching beyond themselves to Christ.” Standing fast even though you want to run. 5) Counsel or guidance is an openness to the Holy Spirit; openness to an energy for good that comes from beyond ourselves. It is related to developing a capacity for listening and an inner silence. 6) Understanding is the gift of balance, an awareness of the situation along with self-knowledge. 7) Wisdom is the coming together of the other six gifts, wholeness. Most contemporary books on the spiritual life speak of spiritual maturity.

The Four Cardinal Virtues are interdependent. if you don’t adequately possess one of them, the others are distorted in some fashion. 1) Prudence is having the capacity for practical judgment. The virtue of it is in being grounded in reality and directed toward what is good. 2) Justice is rooted in the understanding that we live with one another. Which in turn brings questions about what we as individuals owe society, what we own other individuals, and what society owns individuals. 3) Fortitude is about removing barriers to justice. It requires perseverance. 4) Temperance is the self-awareness and self-control needed if we are to enjoy life and at the same time be good people.

### *Anglican*

In *Christianity and Social Order*, in 1942 William Temple wrote that what he was offering were not “an expression of a purely personal point of view but represent the main trend of Christian social teaching.” He suggested considerations such as these:

- The world...results from His love; creation is a kind of overflow of the divine love.”
- “The aim of a Christian social order is the fullest possible development of individual personality in the widest and deepest possible fellowship.”
- In a chapter on “How Should the Church Interfere?” he began with an affirmation of the lay apostolate. “Nine-tenths of the work of the Church in the world is done by Christian people fulfilling responsibilities and performing tasks which in themselves are not part of the official system of the Church at all.” In a later work, Temple wrote of the organic reality of the Body, “the stream of redemptive power flows out from the church through the lives of its members into the society which they influence.” (*What Christians Stand for in the Secular World*)
- “It is of crucial importance that the Church acting corporately should not commit itself to any particular policy. A policy always depends on technical decisions concerning the actual relations of cause and effect in the political and economic world; about these the Christian has no more reliable judgment than an atheist...”
- His answer to how the church should interfere had three parts: 1) through its members fulfilling “their moral responsibilities and functions in a Christian spirit;” 2) its members exercising their civic rights in a Christian spirit; and 3) offering its members “a systematic statement of principles” to guide the first two.
- Cautious about utopian approaches. “...no one really wants to live in the ideal state as depicted by anyone else.”
- “The art of government in fact is the art of so ordering life that self-interest prompts what justice demands.”
- Every child should “find itself a member of a family housed with decency and dignity” without having to face lack of food or conditions that are overcrowded, dirty or drab, and “have the opportunity of an education...as to allow for his peculiar aptitudes and make possible their full development.” Every citizen should have an income to “enable him to maintain a home and bring up children,” “have a voice in the conduct of the

business or industry which is carried on by means of his labor,” “have sufficient daily leisure with two days rest in seven,” “have assured liberty in the forms of freedom of worship, of speech, of assembly.” “The resources of the earth should be used as God’s gifts to the whole human race, and used with due consideration for the needs of the present and future generations.”

### *What kind of social vision emerges from the Anglo-Catholic tradition?*

First, it is a corporate vision. It is a social vision, a vision of a cooperative society, a community bonded together by a fundamental and unbreakable solidarity, a community of equals....

Secondly, it is a materialist vision. It is a vision which is deeply and unashamedly materialistic, which values the creation, which rejoices in the physical, in the flesh, in human sexuality, and which is rooted in the principle that matter is the vehicle of spirit, not its enemy. When [William] Temple said that Christianity was the most materialistic of all religions, he stood within a long tradition of incarnational and materialism....

Thirdly, it is a vision of transformation, of a transformed society, not simply an improved one. At the heart of Anglo-Catholic spirituality is the eucharistic offering with its two-fold emphasis on offering and consecration. Bread and wine, fruits of the earth and work of human hands, products not only of nature but of the industrial process, are, at the eucharistic offertory, brought within the redemptive process....

Fourthly, this tradition is a rebel tradition. The Tractarian movement began as a critique of the church/Tory alliance and as a protest against state control of the church.... And this culture of dissent was intensified by the fact that ritualism became a criminal offence in the second phase of the movement. So Anglo-Catholicism and a rebellious spirit became allies....

Finally, the Anglo-Catholic social vision is one which moves beyond the Christian community and is concerned with the working out of God's purposes in the upheavals and crises of world history. It is a Kingdom theology rather than a church theology

Kenneth Leech, *The Renewal of Social Vision: A Dissident Anglo-Catholic Perspective*, in *The Anglo-Catholic Social Conscience: Two Critical Essays* (Croyden: Jubilee Group, [1991]), 1-11.

### *Catholic Social Doctrine*

Catholic social doctrine seeks an equilibrium between respect for human liberty and concern for the whole society, including the weakest and poorest. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has identified these seven key themes of Catholic Social Teaching. For our purposes in the material below we are highlighting and quoting the broad theme involved in each. We may or may not agree with the specific applications offered by the bishops.

#### *Life and Dignity of the Human Person*

Human life is sacred. every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

#### *Call to family, community, and participation in the pursuit of the Common Good*



The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society -- in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community

#### *Rights and responsibilities; social justice*

Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.

#### *Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable*

Through our words, prayers and deeds we must show solidarity with, and compassion for, the poor. When instituting public policy we must always keep the "preferential option for the poor" at the forefront of our minds. The moral test of any society is "how it treats its most vulnerable members.

#### *Dignity of work*

Society must pursue economic justice and the economy must serve people, not the other way around. Workers have a right to work, to earn a living wage, and to form trade unions to protect their interests. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions. Workers also have responsibilities—to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. Workers must "fully and faithfully" perform the work they have agreed to do.

#### *Solidarity and the universal destiny of the goods of the Earth*

All the peoples of the world belong to one human family. We must be our brother's keeper, though we may be separated by distance, language or culture. Jesus teaches that we must each love our neighbors as ourselves and in the parable of the Good Samaritan we see that our compassion should extend to all people. Solidarity includes the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us—including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families.

#### *Care for God's creation*

A Biblical vision of justice is much more comprehensive than civil equity; it encompasses right relationships between all members of God's creation. Stewardship of creation: The world's goods are available for humanity to use only under a "social mortgage" which carries with it the responsibility to protect the environment. The "goods of the earth" are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. Man was given dominion over all creation as sustainer rather than as exploiter, and is commanded to be a good steward of the gifts God has given him

## American culture's core norms

We'll make use of David French's thinking. French is a political conservative, war veteran, attorney, and Evangelical Christian. In a 2022 article<sup>4</sup> on Substack he explored America's aspirational stance through the thinking of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence and John Adams's Letter to the Massachusetts Militia. French wrote, "In two pairs of sentences these documents define the American social compact—the mutual responsibilities of citizen and state—that define the American experiment."

From the Declaration, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers

from the consent of the governed.” From French, “the first sentence recognizes the inherent dignity of man as human beings created in the image of God. The second sentence, nearly as important, recognizes the unavoidable duty of government to recognize and protect that dignity.”

The Adam’s letter is about the responsibilities of citizenship and includes a well-known assumption, “our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” French focuses on two sentences preceding that: “Because We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions unbridled by morality and Religion. Avarice, Ambition, Revenge or Galantry, would break the strongest Cords of our Constitution as a Whale goes through a Net.”

French writes, “Put in plain English, this means that when public virtue fails, our constitutional government does not possess the power to preserve itself. Thus, the American experiment depends upon both the government upholding its obligation to preserve liberty and the American people upholding theirs to exercise that liberty towards virtuous purposes. Of course, neither side can ever uphold its end of the bargain perfectly (and there are many safeguards built into the system to preserve it from inevitable human imperfections), but that’s the general thrust. Citizen and state both have obligations, and if either side fails, it imperils the republic.” The article is deeply pessimistic <sup>5</sup> however the two core norms remain. At least for now. They are what we have on that front.

## The Internal Polarity

This is more of a behavioral science framework. The task of engaging and ethical and moral pathway into faithful action takes place within a personal polarity that all people experience. I want to have a “self”, be a “self” that has the freedom to develop and live with integrity. And I want to be connected with others. I want to be in community with others in my family, friendship, at work and in civic life. The struggle involved ranges from “I fear getting enmeshed with others and their expectations and in that losing myself” or “I fear becoming so isolated and individualistic that I am part of nothing larger than myself.”

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* is the title of a 1931 book by K.E. Kirk.

<sup>2</sup> *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, John Behr; Dean and Professor of Patristics, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York. Behr makes the case that the ‘heretics’ were intolerant, they would abandon a church community to be part of a different church community that agreed with them. “The early Church was ‘catholic’ not because it was monolithically uniform, but because it embraced a variety of voices all willing to work together within shared parameters — a New Testament, rule of truth, apostolic tradition, and succession — that became clearer through debate. The theological vision elaborated by Irenaeus is important both as a historical phenomenon and also for our own contemporary situation: it answers questions we have today about Scripture, interpretation of Scripture, Adam and Christ, and what it means to be human in a tremendously positive fashion. Never again does someone say, with such clarity and force, that ‘the glory of God is a living human being’; yet that he is speaking of a martyr simultaneously challenges us in a unique manner today.”

<sup>3</sup> William Temple, *Readings in St John’s Gospel*, pp. 203-206, 1938.

<sup>4</sup> David French, “John Adams’ Fear Has Come to Pass: Two sentences explain our broken nation and our broken culture” April 24, 2022

<sup>5</sup> French’s article is pessimistic. “Our social fabric is fraying. The social compact is crumbling. Our government is imperfect, but if this republic fractures, its people will be to blame.” He notes how the nation has been

---

through times of high stress many times. Then writes, “Yet our nation seethes again today. Its politics are gripped by deep hatred and abiding animosity, and its culture groans under the weight of human despair. Hatred rules our politics; anxiety, depression, and loneliness dominate our culture. Deaths of despair take American lives at a terrifying rate, to the extent that they were lowering American life\_expectancy even before the pandemic. Those many cultural critics who look at the United States of America and declare that “something is wrong” are exactly right. Something *is* wrong. We all feel it. We all experience it. We all see the results. Suicide does not sweep through healthy communities. Riots don’t erupt in healthy cities. Insurrections don’t spring from healthy cultures. ... And if you think that most-partisan cohort is seething with anger because they suffer from painful oppression, think again. The data is clear. As the More in Common project notes, the most polarized Americans are disproportionately white and college-educated on the left and disproportionately white and retired on the right. The people disproportionately driving polarization in the United States are not oppressed minorities, but rather some of the most powerful, most privileged, wealthiest people who’ve ever lived.”