

# Woodstock Business Conference/Seton Hall Chapter

**January 30, 2008: Work, Private Property and the Common Good**

## **AGENDA**

- Welcome and introductions
- Opening Prayer
- WBC Mission Statement
- Scripture: Psalm 8: Hymn 1-2
- Meditation,
- Sharing insights on Scripture
- Reading: Work, Private Property & the Common Good
- Discussion and Reflection
- Closing Prayer

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Woodstock Business Conference is to establish and lead a network of business leaders to explore their respective religious traditions in order to ask the individual executives:

- To integrate faith, family, and professional life,
- To develop a corporate culture that is reflective of their religious faith and values,
- To exercise a beneficial influence upon society at large.

The Conference, grounded in Roman Catholic tradition, welcomes believers who are open to and respectful of one another's religious traditions. It is committed to the conviction that ethics and values grow out of one's religious heritage.

## **SCRIPTURE: Psalm 8: Hymn 1-2**

The Majesty of God and the Dignity of Man

Oh Lord, our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth!  
You have exalted your majesty above the heavens,  
Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have fashioned your praise because of your foes,  
to silence the hostile and the vengeful.  
When I behold your heavens and the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars which you set in place-  
What is man that you should be mindful of him;  
or the son of man that you should care for him?  
You have made him little less than the angels,  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the works of your hands  
putting all things under his feet:  
All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea,  
and whatever swims the paths of the seas,  
O lord, our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth!

## **SILENT EXAMEN**

1. Pause quietly and become mindful of God's presence in you, and then thank Him for the many gifts you have been given: life, intelligence, freedom, and family, friends, and opportunities to share your many gifts with others.
2. Pray for the light to see where God has been through the day- in what you experienced, thought, decided, did.
3. Look back and ask, "What happened? What did I do? To what was God calling me?" And then, "Where was God in all this?" How can I best understand the situation?
4. Evaluate how well I have done, in recognizing God, in resisting evil.
5. In the light of understanding and evaluating, "What must I do?" What action must I take? What decision must I make?

## **Work, Private Property & the Common Good**

From time to time over the past years, the Papal Encyclicals on human rights, among them *Centesimus Annus*, have been used as source material for the Woodstock Business Conference/Micah meetings at Seton Hall. Like many such documents and readings, the richness and immediacy of the messages are often missed or simply glazed over. We thought it might be useful to bring some context to some of the issues we face daily on a national, state and local basis, to sample the relevance of the papal message.

One such issue, (among many) appeared in the Saturday Newark Star Ledger, January, 19, 2008, entitled: *Ruling Plows under Five New Jersey Farmers* by columnist Mark DiIonna. Many of our grandparents and forefathers were farmers and as one whose family worked the soil here in New Jersey it is especially sad to see the last of a way of life. We have printed the article here. Following, we refer you to some excerpts from Pope John Paul's *Centesimus Annus*. In light of this issue and the larger one of eminent domain, we welcome your thoughts and comments.

### *"Ruling Plows under Five New Jersey Farmers"*

One of the promises of America is if you work hard and invest in yourself, are self sufficient and stubbornly persistent good things will come of your efforts.

It is called the American Dream.

The five old farmers in Mercer County court yesterday believed in all of that, even when the dream was elusive. Even when prices tumbled, or bitter frosts came late, or when there was not enough rain, or too much.

They stuck it out, decade after decade, some because their grandfathers and fathers had done it, some because they wanted to preserve it for their sons.

They stayed while farmers around them sold to developers, took their hundreds and thousands of dollars and moved to Florida.

They had to travel further to find milk and vegetables wholesale buyers and machinery suppliers because there wasn't enough farming left in New Jersey to keep those businesses intact. They had to sell animals, and parcels of land to keep cash flowing. They had to open retail stores, give hayrides and host pumpkin picking and do all sorts of things called agritourism.

Yesterday, the five--and a younger property owner--left the court feeling betrayed by all they believed in when Superior Court Judge, Paul Innes dismissed their lawsuit, seeking to have Highlands Act declared unconstitutional.

Perhaps worse, they expected it.

“The deck is stacked against us,” said Charles “Billy” Shoop, 75, who raised cattle on the 100 acres in Washington Township in western Morris County.. He had an opportunity to sell the land a few years ago for \$3 million, but with Highlands’ development restrictions it may be worth only 20 percent of that.

In some cases the farmers in the preservation zone are prohibited from selling and have lost equity in their land. Their only option is to enter a farmland or open space program-which will give them much less return. It also entails a lengthy application process and acceptance is not guaranteed.

“Why should they put me in farmland preservation when they don’t have to,” said Bob Best whose family has had apple orchards in Independence Township for 62 years. “I can’t sell my land.”

The state satisfied the courts that the Highlands Act is a case of the government trying to reach a “rational objective” through a “rational basis” and is therefore protected by the New Jersey constitution.

The lawyer for the farmers and Warren County, also a plaintiff in the suit, claimed the boundaries are capricious, as is the objective of protecting the environment, including agriculture, without first figuring out a mechanism for how landowners could be compensated.

In the case of Hank Klumpp, a second generation Hunterdon county farmer who owns 150 acres in Tewksbury, his land was not in the original preservation zone, but was added when the town requested it be included.

In the case of Best, his bank killed a deal to refinance because it could no longer evaluate the value of the property. The bank was local and specializes in farm loans.

“We’re almost done. The state said the Highlands Act is supposed to protect agriculture? Hell, they’re putting us out of business,” said Best, 72. “See, this what they don’t understand. I don’t want to sell. I want my kids to take over the business, but with no equity I can’t run the business. This is criminal!”

For these farmers the loss of land value because of development restrictions means no comfortable retirement, if any.

“This is our 401K plan, our pension,” said Dave Shope 70, who raised beef cattle on 57 acres in Lebanon Township. “We are being penalized for sticking it out all these years,” he said.

There are a million reasons why the Highlands Act is Good. It protects water sources and open space, and cuts down an rampant growth and sprawl. The intent, as the state said yesterday, “is rational.”

But what is not rational is this: Property owners and farmers didn’t have their land condemned and paid for; they didn’t have it purchased by some open space trust, they didn’t have it put into mandatory farmland preservation. In order to get preservation and open space or Green Acres money, they have to go through the painstaking, time-consuming and expensive process of applying.

If the state was going to devalue their land, it could at least come-up with a corner-cutting process and fair evaluation process before; shortly after Highlands Act was passed in 2004. It is 2008. There is still no solution.

“There is no remedy,” Best said.

“Basically, the value of our land has been stolen, Shope said. “It’s unfair.

#### **Excerpts from Centesimus Annus, John Paul II Part IV: Private Property and the Universal Destination of Material Goods,**

30. In *Rerum novarum*, Leo XIII strongly affirmed the natural character of the right to private property, using various arguments against the socialism of his time. This right, which is fundamental for the autonomy and development of the person, has always been defended by the Church up to our own day. At the same time, the Church teaches that the possession of material goods is not an absolute right, and that its limits are inscribed in its very nature as a human right.

While the Pope proclaimed the right to private ownership, he affirmed with equal clarity that the "use" of goods, while marked by freedom, is subordinated to their original common destination as created goods, as well as to the will of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Gospel. Pope Leo wrote: "those whom fortune favours are admonished ... that they should tremble at the warnings of Jesus Christ ... and that a most strict account must be given to the Supreme Judge for the use of all they possess"; and quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, he added: "But if the question be asked, how must one's possessions be used? The Church replies without hesitation that man should not consider his material possessions as his own, but as common to all...", because "above the laws and judgments of men stands the law, the judgment of Christ".

The Successors of Leo XIII have repeated this twofold affirmation: the necessity and therefore the legitimacy of private ownership, as well as the limits which are imposed on it. The Second Vatican Council likewise clearly restated the traditional doctrine in words which bear repeating: "In making use of the exterior things we lawfully possess, we ought to regard them not just as our own but also as common, in the sense that they can profit not only the owners but others too"; and a little later we read: "Private property or some ownership of external goods affords each person the scope needed for personal and family autonomy, and should be regarded as an extension of human freedom ... Of its nature private property also has a social function which is based on the law of the common purpose of goods". I have returned to this same doctrine, first in my address to the Third Conference of the Latin American Bishops at Puebla, and later in the Encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods. The earth, by reason of its fruitfulness and its capacity to satisfy human needs, is God's first gift for the sustenance of human life.

...An important principle is undoubtedly that of the right to "private property". The amount of space devoted to this subject in *Rerum Novarum* and all the Encyclicals shows the importance attached to it. We are well aware that private property is not an absolute value, and we proclaim the necessary complementary principles, such as the universal destination of the earth's goods.

On the other hand, it is certainly true that the type of private property which Leo XIII mainly considers is land ownership. But this does not mean that the reasons adduced to safeguard private property or to affirm the right to possess the things necessary for one's personal development and the development of one's family, whatever the concrete form which that right may assume, are not still valid today. This is something which must be affirmed once more in the face of the changes we are witnessing in systems formerly dominated by collective ownership of the means of production, as well as in the face of the increasing instances of poverty or, more precisely, of hindrances to private ownership in many parts of the world, including those where systems predominate which are based on an affirmation of the right to private property.

#### **REFLECTION:**

- Among the issues raised by the two readings: primarily, the right to private property vs. the common good. Who determines "the common good?" The Pope sees them as complimentary but does the state? Have you ever experienced a work situation where the issue of the common good has been breached? What about lay-offs? Citibank, Country Mortgage?
- Another issue raised here is the issue of compensation. What has been your experience, personally or as part of an organization, of unjust compensation?