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Catholic Social Teaching and Economic Rights (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Oct. 1-3, 2015, Dayton, Ohio

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Research Panel: Religion and Human Rights

Presenter: John Sniegocki, Xavier University

Title: Catholic Social Teaching and Economic Rights

Abstract: Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has much to contribute to ongoing discussions of human rights. One important feature of CST is its holistic understanding of human rights, which includes social and economic rights along with political/civil rights. This paper will explore the understandings of economic rights and of economic democracy that are developed in the Catholic social tradition, with particular attention to the thought of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis.

Some implications of these concepts for current realities in the United States and globally will be highlighted. Attention will also be given to critics of economic rights and economic democracy, such as Catholic author Michael Novak. Novak argues that an affirmation of economic rights would grant excessive power to the state and thus undermine liberty. This paper will argue that it is rather the absence of economic rights that is currently a more fundamental threat to liberty, leading to both concentrated economic power and concentrated control of political processes by monied interests. The deep connection between economic democracy and political democracy that is present in Catholic Social Teaching will be stressed. Concrete actions that could be taken to help foster greater political and economic democracy will be highlighted.

Keywords: Catholic social teaching, economic rights, economic democracy, Pope Francis

Biography: John Sniegocki is associate professor of Christian ethics and director of the Peace Studies minor at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He received his Ph.D. in Christian Ethics from the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *Catholic Social Teaching and Economic Globalization: The Quest for Alternatives* (Marquette University Press, 2009), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters on Catholic social teaching, economic justice, food ethics, ecology, war and peace issues, the Catholic Worker movement, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue.