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12-18-2008

### December 18, 2008: The Hatred of Unions

Bruce Ledewitz

*Duquesne University*, ledewitz@duq.edu

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Title: The Hatred of Unions

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12/18/2008—One cleavage that can still be seen between conservative Catholics and conservative Protestants is the attitude toward unions. I don't think hostility toward unions is pronounced among Catholics. It certainly is among certain Protestants. The difference may lie in differing understandings of solidarity. Conservative Protestantism in America is very individualistic, even heretically so. Karl Barth would not be at home in it. American hostility to unions is a long standing tendency. It is part of why socialism did not quite catch on here. You see it in the hostility toward public education and teacher unions. And you see it in attitudes toward the automobile loans as opposed to aid to the financial industry. It did not occur to anyone to ask about compensation among ordinary workers in the financial sector, whose compensation, of course, is quite extraordinary. Somehow, that was not even on the table, whereas it is regarded as an affront that ordinary autoworkers make good money. Naturally, good money isn't so good when your industry is asking for public money, but that was true for Wall Street brokers too. I don't know why many American Christians do not see the importance of unions. Our economy is foundering today in part because ordinary wages have lagged. They have lagged for many reasons, but we should not assume that pure market forces are always at work. Partly, management takes more because it can. It can because unions are weak. Stronger unions raise all wages. Ask the nonunion workers at the Nissan plant in Tennessee whether they want to see the United Auto Workers Union broken. They may not want to be unionized, but I imagine they know that potential unionization improves their situation. We need to return to an economy of widely spread wealth. It will be best for the rich too.