

Catholic scholars in Baltimore

A “healthy” and “ethical” capitalism can coexist, but such a capitalism “must never be satisfied or justified when 14.3 percent of Americans are living in poverty,” said Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien in a Sept. 25 homily at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

“As hard as we labor for and gain our daily bread, Jesus reminds us that everything we will ever have is only entrusted to us,” Archbishop O’Brien said in a liturgy attended by members of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. “We cannot, morally speaking, consider our material resources absolutely ours, to be used in any way we wish.”

The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars held its 33rd annual convention in Baltimore Sept. 24-26, attended by 145 participants from across the country. Speakers addressed a wide variety of topics related to history, politics, literature and Catholic intellectual life.

Reflecting on the parable of the rich man who suffered eternal torment after ignoring the poverty of Lazarus, Archbishop O’Brien said too many people dehumanize the poor “by turning a conveniently blind eye in their direction” or “by justifying our inattention to them.”

“It is our challenge as a baptized community of believers to see the suffering face of Christ in all those Lazaruses who stand at the doors before us,” Archbishop O’Brien said.

Curt Stiles, an economics professor at the University of North Carolina, said more scholars need greater awareness of the relationship between the church and social justice.

“There’s so much to learn from the teaching of the church on social issues,” he said.

Clara Sarrocco, a C.S. Lewis scholar at St. Joseph Seminary in New York, said gatherings like the annual scholars convention are important for moral support among Catholic academics who are often confronted with atheism.

“The biggest challenge is a lack of belief in God and thinking that people who are religious must not be smart,” she said. “We can prove to them that we are part of the intellectual community and hopefully some of them will see the light.”