

# Admirable presents Catholic social thir

## **Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations**

Edited by Kenneth R Himes OFM *et al.*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

Reviewed by **Bruce Duncan CSsR**

This is a book that we have long waited for, giving a splendid overview of Catholic social teaching with sufficient detail to make it fresh and compelling reading. It will undoubtedly be regarded as a classic in its field. Based on first-rate scholarship, it is still accessible to the informed reader, indicating further reading with its generous footnoting and short bibliographies.

At 563 pages in double columns, this collection of essays is the fruit of extensive collaborative work by twenty of the most prominent scholars in these fields. But it is not a hagiographical treatment, and identifies weaknesses and blind spots as well as achievements.

The foundations of Catholic social teaching are examined in the first four chapters. John R Donahue SJ in 'The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching: will this Engagement lead to Marriage?' offers a superb treatment of how central to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are justice and concern for the 'poor'.

Stephen J Pope in 'Natural Law in Catholic Social Teaching' traces the development of theories of natural law from the ancient and medieval worlds, into the Enlightenment. He outlines the retrieval of natural law in more recent Catholic social thought, especially from Leo XIII to John Paul II, and summarises the current state of debate.

In 'The Ecclesiological Foundations of Modern Catholic Social Teaching', Richard R Gaillardetz focuses on these issues: the relationship of the Church with the world; the ecclesial processes in the formation of Catholic social teaching; the status of that teaching; and the implications for the Church itself. He traces the historical development of Church social teaching and debates until the Church began to respond to the new social question of industrialisation.

Gaillardetz highlights the shift with Vatican II, and the Church metaphor of a 'dialogical journey'. Pope Paul VI developed the impetus for 'integral human development' for all peoples, especially through dialogue and discernment at the local level, not simply by applying abstract social principles. He traces the change with John Paul II, along with more recent approaches of the US neo-conservatives; the more 'radicalist' groups challenging western culture and capitalism; and the middle groups urging critical collaboration in society, with the Church modeling a transformative presence in the world. But he also notes the trend back to a more Rome-centred approach, and a retreat from a more collaborative engagement with current issues.

Michael J Schuck sets the development of Catholic social thinking in a longer perspective in his 'Early Modern Roman Catholic Social Thought, 1740-1890'. Drawing on his 1991 book, *That they be One: the Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals, 1740-1989*, Schuck considers Catholic thinking through several periods: from Benedict XIV in 1740 to Pius VI's break with the French Revolution in 1791; from 1792 until 1848, the year of revolutions in Europe; and 1849 to the Paris Commune of 1871 with the killing of leading clergy; and from 1872 to 1890, as Pope Leo XIII prepares to issue *Rerum Novarum*.

Schuck highlights the complexity of the social thinking of Catholics during these periods. He organises these competing currents of thought under three general headings: 'traditionalism', which places a high value on the 'longstanding social customs of a particular people'; 'cosmopolitanism', which is more 'sanguine over the possibilities for modernity', and tends to view social questions through a global lens; and 'transformationism', with 'visionary proposals and experiments urgently seeking greater equity in

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social structures and processes' (p. 101). Schuck's treatment demonstrates the great variety within Catholic social traditions of thought and action, and after a period when the role of centralised papacy has been so dominant, sets the social encyclicals in a longer context.

Fourteen commentaries by eminent writers on various social encyclicals follow in a standard format. After an introduction, there is an outline of the document, and then it is situated in the church and social context. The writing process and authorship of each document are considered, with a treatment of its contents, an excursus on more detailed matters, and then reactions to the document. A select bibliography and further notes provide judicious further sources.

Thomas A Shannon takes us through Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, and Christine Firer Hinze through Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*. John P Langan SJ looks at the Christmas messages of Pius XII, which are often neglected in commentaries. Marvin L Mich analyses John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* of 1961, while Drew Christiansen SJ comments on *Pacem in Terris* of 1963.

The relevant Vatican II documents are covered, *The Declaration on Religious Freedom* by Leslie Griffin, and *The Church in the Modern World* by David Hollenbach SJ. Allan Figueroa Deck SJ considers Paul VI's *Development of Peoples* of 1967,

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and Christine E Gudorf, his *Octogesima Adveniens*, while Kenneth R Himes takes up the 1971 Synod of Bishops' *Justice in the World*.

A modest selection of documents from John Paul II appears, with Lisa Sowle Cahill analysing the *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* of 1981, and Patricia A Lamoureux commenting on *Laborem Exercens* (1981). Himes, Shannon and Charles Curran together tackle *On Social Concern* dated 1987, and Daniel Finn discusses *Centesimus Annus* of 1991. Charles Curran summarises the reception of Catholic social teaching in the United States, and Ted Whitmore reviews the reception of Catholic teaching on war and peace in the USA.

The final chapter by John A Coleman SJ is in some ways the most arresting of all, looking at the 'The Future of Catholic Social Thought'. He argues that the new contexts of globalisation and environmental issues present new challenges to develop Catholic social thinking more vigorously. He stresses that Catholic thinking was always more than the official Church statements, and was best carried by various writers, lay activists and social movements, especially labour movements and other institutions, including Catholic schools. Coleman notes the decline of key institutional carriers of social Catholicism, but insists that others still operate, especially the schools, hospitals and welfare organisations, and new forms need to be created. He argues that the Catholic social tradition was open to ideological or class distortions at various periods, but that the anthropological core founded on the dignity of the person has many resonances with communitarian currents in liberalism.

Coleman favours a retrieval of natural law with a substantive view of the good, but considers this does not offer a universally valid morality, since the views of others may be framed within different traditions and assumptions. He rejects the views of 'procedural liberals' that religiously informed views must remain private and have no place in public discourse as 'privileging choice over commitments or tradition'. But social Catholicism needs to engage closely with contemporary debates in terms others can understand. He warns that the notion of the 'common good' needs to be used with caution, since it is often manipulated by powerful or self-interested groups. The tasks for social Catholicism include a critique of the international markets so that they truly serve human wellbeing for as many as possible, and to join in a great collaborative effort to raise global living standards more equitably.

Coleman concludes that social Catholicism can pursue a thinner notion of the common good than total human flourishing, with the possibility of a real but limited social consensus as a core goal. Hence 'public order' may be the most that can be agreed on to encourage civilian virtue and institutional arrangements to promote human wellbeing in pluralistic societies.

*Modern Catholic Social Teaching* will certainly be regarded as a key reference work on the historical development of Catholic social thought and teaching, and a wonderful addition to the literature. **m**

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