

THOMAS MASSARO,

*Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action.*

Franklin WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000.

ISBN 1580510469. Pp. xi + 254. Rrp. US\$11.95.

Thomas Massaro here offers a superb account of the content and development of Catholic social ethics, especially as it has developed since Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* of 1891. Presented as an introduction to the history of Catholic social engagement for the general reader or student, Massaro has written a sparkling text, moving from a chapter on why the Church has been involved in social issues, to outlining some of the pitfalls the Church has fallen into while trying to apply social ideals in different historical contexts. He then introduces the reader to the pioneers of modern Catholic social thinking before tracing the development of the modern social encyclicals.

In "The Sources and Methods of Catholic Social Teaching", Massaro considers that Christian ethics is derived from Scripture and a long philosophical tradition, which is continually reshaped by history and experience. Hence the outcome in a set of principles which has to be brought into a lively debate with concrete circumstances to determine how the principles might best apply.

The author neatly summarises the content of Catholic social principles as they stand at the moment, describing nine key themes: the dignity of the person and human rights; solidarity, common good and participation; family life, subsidiarity and the role of government; property ownership; the rights of workers and unions; colonialism and economic development; peace and disarmament; and the option for the poor.

"The Role of Catholic Social Teaching Today" surveys Catholic critiques of both communism and capitalism, and the difficulties of application today. His final chapter identifies four major shifts in Catholic social thought: a move to greater personalism so that economic systems truly serve the needs of persons; a caution against woodenly applying abstract principles by stressing the need for humility before complex data, recognising the difficulties involved; awareness of how social structures themselves can be deeply flawed with "sin"; and the need for credible public witness.

Massaro also highlights the challenge to come to grips more firmly with environmental ethics and the new post-industrial economy. The book concludes with some useful references for further reading and a short index. Each chapter concludes with a number of questions suitable for group discussion.

Massaro writes with a wealth of political and historical scholarship behind him. He is Assistant Professor of Moral Theology at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and the author of the excellent *Catholic Social Teaching and United States Welfare Reform* in 1998.

However this is not a sanitised version of Catholic history, for he notes failures and inadequacies in the Catholic social tradition, warning particularly against the "perils of the crusading spirit". This is not just a reference to the misplaced zeal of the Crusades, but he links such an exaggerated sense of Messianism to America's belief in its "Manifest Destiny", and its tragic implications for the dispossession of native Americans and a series of wars.

Nevertheless, he argues that the malaise many Catholics feel in their Church may well be healed by a deeper awareness of Catholic social commitments to justice, development and peacemaking.

Bruce Duncan CSsR,  
Yarra Theological Union,  
Box Hill, Victoria 3128.