

## CHRISTIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

### The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance

**David Matzko McCarthy (Editor)**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2009 (213 pages)

As someone who has studied and taught Catholic social teaching (CST) for twenty-five years—and is always on the lookout for a promising new textbook—I welcomed the invitation to review this book. The thirteen chapters plus introduction, authored by a group of colleagues at Mount St. Mary's University, offer brief, helpful studies of various themes in CST. This volume, coupled with the foundational documents of CST, would make for a solid set of readings for an introductory course on the subject.

Part 1 (Sources) consists of chapters on biblical justice, liturgy as a source of formation in CST, the Eucharist and social justice, and Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Part 2 (Love) contains two chapters that treat Saint Augustine's political thought in its own right and its influence on Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. The final chapter of the section deals with modern politics and CST. There are three chapters that comprise part 3 (Justice): natural law (with the thought of Aquinas highlighted), the modern economy and the social order, and the Catholic Worker Movement. Part 4 (Moving Forward) concludes the book with three chapters on the topics of religious liberty, compassion and hospitality, and the approach of CST to the environment.

Each chapter's last few pages feature a discussion section, where, in a collegial effort, the editor, with input from the essay's author, presents texts (e.g., the Good Samaritan passage from Luke's gospel, the U.S. Bishops' *Formation for Faithful Citizenship*), issues (e.g., health care reform, global warming), or practical exercises/suggestions for further

consideration. The remainder of this review will focus on some of the more significant chapters, in particular those that readers of this journal might find most relevant.

In part 1, the chapter by John F. Donovan, “Leo XIII and a Century of Catholic Social Teaching,” shows how Leo responded to the philosophical underpinnings of modernity, with its emphasis on the solitary individual and his right to private property, and the privatization of religion, with an account of the human person and property that took into consideration the social nature of both realities. Far from presenting a Lockean contractual understanding of the person, *Rerum Novarum* showed in Thomistic fashion how man’s rights and duties were correlative and thus embedded in social roles such as the family. The encyclical (often called the “Magna Carta” of CST) gave the Church a credible voice in the modern debate on the economy and the social order following the Industrial Revolution.

In part 2, the two chapters by William Collinge on Augustine demonstrate the importance of his fifth-century political thought for contemporary CST. Collinge describes the saint’s views on love, friendship, the Church, and the “two cities”—earthly and heavenly—in the *City of God*. The editor then relates these thoughts to the chapter in *Gaudium et spes* titled “The Community of Mankind.” The second chapter outlines Benedict’s social thought, especially as found in part 2 of *Deus Caritas Est* (DCE). Collinge shows how the pope’s emphasis on charity over justice is not a slight to the latter but rather a call to the laity to be involved in matters of earthly concern, with charity (rather than justice) being constitutive of the Church’s identity and mission (cf. DCE, nos. 25, 28–29). For Benedict, the Church’s efforts on behalf of the poor must be informed by faith and charity so as not to be mere philanthropic endeavors (cf. DCE, no. 31). (Although this book was published before the pope’s more recent social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict’s third letter reinforces and develops his earlier ideas, now in the context of the worldwide economic collapse).

Chapter 7, “Modern Politics and Catholic Social Teaching,” by David Cloutier, is useful for its overview of the public-private distinction (liberalism, or the social-contract model of politics—what the author calls *individualism* as contrasted with *collectivism*), such central concepts in CST as subsidiarity and the common good, and the threats to cooperative action on behalf of it (e.g., inequality). Cloutier writes, in what serves as a good summary of his chapter,

In the case of politics, [CST] unequivocally maintains that the purpose of the state is to promote the common good, both for individuals and in terms of conditions appropriate for all. This common good is promoted by means that enhance and support subsidiary associations [e.g., the family, labor unions] in which teamwork, cooperation, and sharing form participants in the virtue of solidarity. Such teaching offers fundamental challenges to all forms of modern politics, both individualistic and collectivist, insofar as they lose sight of the nature of human beings and their personal interdependence. (106)

The chapter by Joshua P. Hochschild, “Natural Law: St. Thomas Aquinas and the Role of Reason in Social Order,” leads off part 3. It is valuable because it shows that

“Catholic ideas about just social order are not only or even primarily religious doctrines of faith, but are part of rational human inquiry into the nature of the world” (116). This fact is illustrated by a description of (Thomistic) natural law as well as a response to some objections to it. It is a law, Hochschild notes, that governs both personal and social conduct. One of its principles—expressed in modern terms, but with classical roots—is subsidiarity. The author skillfully fleshes out its meaning with reference to secular and Catholic sources. He also briefly discusses social justice, which fittingly concludes the chapter. It was refreshing to see social justice treated not as a responsibility of the state to redistribute wealth or guarantee equal outcomes, but rather as “the virtuous activity of the members of a community.” This requires that citizens use their reason to seek “to order their actions for the common good” (123). Hence, social justice is legal justice rather than distributive justice.

The theme of the editor’s chapter, “Modern Economy and the Social Order,” is best captured in his own conclusion: “Our social responsibilities ought to guide our economic activity. The economy does not have a life of its own, but is given its structure by human choices and actions. It is possible, if things were different, to direct our economic activity in a way that better serves the common good” (138). Ranging over a hundred years of papal social encyclicals from *Rerum Novarum* to *Centesimus Annus* and covering topics ranging from the just wage and labor associations to the nature of capitalism and socialism, McCarthy makes clear that modern CST, “can best be understood as an attempt to assert the social nature of the human being in a world where the common good and reciprocal roles and duties are no longer taken for granted” (134). In this context, McCarthy stresses how for CST, “social relationships come before economic theory” or economic mechanisms as understood by either Marxism or capitalism (131). “From the side of Catholic social thought,” he argues, [Adam Smith’s] “self-regulating mechanism of competition is illusory. According to the Catholic tradition, mechanisms of the economy have their source in personal choices. People make choices that create the structure of the economy and too often these market mechanisms privilege those with the power to control the economic system” (131–32).

The final chapter in the book is Brian G. Henning’s, “From Despot to Steward: The Greening of Catholic Social Teaching.” He argues that, “historically speaking, Christianity bears some responsibility for having fostered a destructive and arrogant attitude toward the environment, but that properly understood a respect for nature [e.g., as stewards of creation] is an essential part of Christian faith.” Indeed, CST has “the potential to make a unique contribution to contemporary discussions of environmental protection” (184). In this regard, spotlighting the connection between this protection and social justice might be its “most important contribution” (188).

Collectively the authors stress, in an overlapping consensus, that CST is rooted in the Christian spiritual life, based on a holistic (i.e., nondualistic) anthropology; accessible to reason/natural law, oriented to action on behalf of the common good; and, as the essay by Kathy Dow Magnus on Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker Movement shows, involves a radical identification with or preferential love for the poor. As McCarthy writes, “Catholic

participation in social life is a way of life that draws from our faith in Jesus Christ: to be formed by the presence of God in worship, to be shaped by the story of scripture, and to join together in imaginative ways to allow God's love to animate our roles in social life" (91–92).

Although none of the authors explores his topic in-depth, the essays are nonideological, balanced, informative, and hold together well. Thus, the collection is well worth the read. Undergraduates in CST courses would be an especially good audience for the book. While not everyone will agree with all of their judgments (e.g., some of the authors' understandings of capitalism or Hochschild's notion that the new natural law theory is more Kantian than Thomistic [204 n.18]), the authors do strive to be faithful to the vision of CST. One factual error was the reference on page 119 to *Centesimus Annus*' having been promulgated in 1981; it should be 1991.

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## Christian Theology and Market Economics

**Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg (Editors)**

Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar, 2008 (245 pages)

Jesus Christ had much to say about money and the role that “treasure” plays in our lives. Ironically, as the contributors to this volume correctly point out, theologians have generally avoided pecuniary topics or have portrayed money as a necessary evil—perhaps even a continuing symbol of the Fall. The contributors acknowledge that many theologians have focused on the injustices of capitalism, both real and imagined. Rather than rejecting those criticisms out of hand, the authors suggest that these negative views of free-market capitalism suffer from excessive simplicity as they fail to account for the unintended consequences (both seen and unforeseen) of their anticapitalistic views and neglect the positive ways businesses contribute to the common good.

The text's overall purpose, as explained in the introduction, is “to reach out to those of our professional colleagues who know little if anything of the Christian faith, let alone Christian theology, and at the same time to those of our Christian brothers and sisters who evince deep suspicion or at least puzzlement over our involvement with the ‘economic.’” Broadly speaking, those goals are accomplished, although the book does a better job of enlightening Christian theologians to the role economics plays in moral theology than to educating non-Christians. It would have been preferable for the authors to focus on engaging Christians or non-Christians, rather than both. Reaching out to non-Christians is a worthy goal, and the authors do make progress in that area but not sufficiently to remove readers' ignorance of Christian doctrine as well as to correct various misunderstandings regarding the faith.

Economics is a vast topic that can easily overwhelm uninitiated readers simply with the volume of specialized terminology and statistical information. The editors smartly