

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective

Roger Aubert

Preface by Charles Curran

David A. Boileau (Editor)

Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2003 (289 pages)

Students of the history of Catholic social teaching in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will welcome this collection of ten essays spanning the career of the distinguished church historian Roger Aubert. Canon Aubert, longtime professor at the University of Louvain, is known for his works of synthesis, including especially his contribution to the monumental *Histoire de l'Église* edited by Fliche and Martin—*Le Pontificat de Pie IX* (1952)—and *The Church in a Secularized Society* (1978), a contribution to a five-volume history of the Church, *The Christian Centuries*, that he helped to edit. In those two volumes, hallowed by the use of two generations of students, and in the essays here gathered and translated by David Boileau, Aubert displays the careful attention to detail and profound knowledge of the period for which he has long been known. His conclusions may at times be questioned, but his erudition will remain beyond reproach.

The editor can perhaps be blamed that the volume's ten essays are mixed both in their character and in their enduring value. A too-brief survey of Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler's contributions to Catholic social teaching heads the volume, and is followed by an interesting assessment of Catholic social thought and action in Québec, which is, however, surely dated. When Aubert wrote the essay in 1950, he looked to Québec as a possible model for a fitting marriage of Catholic social doctrine with

modern society. The rapid and disastrous secularization of Québec in the 1960s and 1970s might call for a different approach today.

The remaining eight essays in the volume all treat the development of Catholic social thought and action in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The essays turn on Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. Five of the essays consider that great encyclical with reference to its precursors; the remaining three treat its consequences, particularly in the area of the development of Christian democratic movements. The volume's most useful essay is also its longest: "On the Origins of Catholic Social Doctrine," originally published in 1966. In the course of its thirty pages, Aubert neatly summarizes the contributions of the French, Belgians, Austrians, Germans, and Italians to laying the groundwork for *Rerum Novarum*. The essay ends with a brief treatment of the drafting of *Rerum Novarum*, a subject expanded upon by one of the volume's later essays. For this essay alone, the volume should belong in academic libraries, for it is likely the best brief summary of the topic and would be much appreciated by college students.

The chief merit, then, of *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective* is to provide several short essays that handily present Catholic social thought between about 1840 and the 1970s. For a longer treatment of much of the same material, one would still recommend Paul Misner's *Social Catholicism in Europe from the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), which, however, shares Aubert's interpretive perspective on the material.

If Canon Aubert has an axe to grind, then it is the axe of democracy, or, perhaps better put, the direction by the worker of schemes for his moral and social improvement. He is forced to admit that "the veritable precursors of modern social Catholicism ... are really to be found among liberalism's most determined adversaries," and that thinkers such as Frédéric Le Play and René de La Tour du Pin not only embraced the *Syllabus of Errors* and its condemnation of a godless society but were also convinced that the improvement of the worker's lot could not be effected without the participation of the ruling class. Their vision of society Aubert stigmatizes as "reactionary prejudice" and a "romantic utopia." He does not, however, seem to see their fundamental point. La Tour du Pin expressed it best when he said, as he repeatedly did (and as Ketteler had before him), that the plight of the worker was a question of justice, not one of the failure of charity. What La Tour du Pin and many other Catholic thinkers in the nineteenth century insisted upon was that questions of distributive justice could not be settled without first having restored a regime consciously and publicly directed toward general justice.

One might very well sum up the history of the Christian democratic movement as the attempt to secure distributive justice (or, what we would be inclined to call social welfare) within the framework of liberalism. That such an attempt rapidly succumbed to the "opening to the left" and became more and more social democratic or even outright socialist should not surprise us, for the twentieth-century Christian democrats consistently found their allies to the left rather than to the right. One need not be a libertarian to affirm that something went dreadfully wrong in the labor movement in the

twentieth century and that what Ketteler and others feared has largely come to pass: the development of worker-directed labor unions that are godless and often ruthless pursuers of self-interest. With such a situation around us, it is less easy to dismiss La Tour du Pin and the other corporate theorists of the nineteenth century who hoped for a more meaningful alliance of capital and labor within trades and a state organization predicated on national well-being rather than international competition and class warfare.

Aubert's account of Catholic social thought and action from Pius IX to Paul VI, therefore, should be supplemented with the far more realistic assessment of Christian democracy to be found in Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996). Likewise his failure to address the continued relevance of the "reactionary" tendency in Catholic social thought should be remedied by the consultation of the fine essays edited by Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

—Christopher Olaf Blum
Christendom College, Front Royal, Virginia

Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny

Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler (Editors)

Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002 (538 pages)

"The Gospels and Epistles are remarkably free of economic policy recommendations" writes editor Doug Bandow (311). We must, therefore, work these questions out for ourselves. The present work is a superior contribution in that regard.

Those interested in the topic of liberal economics in a post-socialist world will find this book helpful for a variety of reasons. The book focuses on a major problem of liberal economics today: wealth creation and concern for the poor. It also explores leftist, conservative, and neoconservative critiques of contemporary liberalism. The writers in this collection agree on the goal of raising the lot of the poor (material and/or spiritual poverty) and the dependent, but many disagree about means. For example, do we remedy poverty through political means or through economic growth? The fourteen fine essays (including one by each editor), seemingly organized in no particular order, break some new ground and summarize well an ongoing debate about liberal economics. Although the book is lengthy, most of the essays are not difficult reads. For classroom use, I would recommend picking articles selectively to fit the course.

Adrian Walker is typical of those more critical of liberal economics. Liberal economics is opposed to an "economics of gift" in Walker's essay (a theme repeated in many essays). Workers should receive compensation according to their ontological status as human beings who exist only in communion with others (this "truth claim" is another idea running through many of the essays). The most serious poverty, though, is poverty of spirit—a lack of communion with others. Walker also repeats Marxist