

Faith, a consultation that raised fundamental problems with the text (“Rome Consultation on Peace and Disarmament: A Vatican Synthesis” in *Origins* 12 [April 7, 1983]: n. 43, 691–95).

DeBerri and Hug also downplay Pope John Paul II’s sustained efforts to correct the errors of “liberation theology.” They remark that “some Vatican offices voiced concerns” over liberation theology (24) but that such statements “can be seen as cautions against some strains of liberation theology—not, it should be noted in honesty, the main streams” (11). This seems hard to reconcile with (to choose one example) the Vatican’s 1985 decision to silence Leonardo Boff, Brazil’s most prominent liberation theologian, and the subsequent revocation of his teaching license.

DeBerri and Hug’s liberal triumphalism must overlook such incidents. They resist raising the possibility that the Vatican under Pope John Paul II criticized the American “Peace Pastoral” and liberation theology precisely because they (the Vatican and pope) are preserving Catholic social teaching from imprudent, even heretical, intrusions.

Pope John Paul II and his successors will, God willing, preserve us from the Church of the future. Its concessions to feminism, multiculturalism, and democratic liberalism would do nothing less than transform the Catholic Church into the World Council of Churches. It would sell out the Catholic patrimony for a bowl of fashionable porridge.

The authors are right to say that Catholic social teaching is a secret to many. DeBerri and Hug’s work does not, however, alleviate this problem. Even though they provide helpful reading lists and decent textual outlines, the historical commentary compromises the whole work. They claim to be revealing the secret treasures of Catholic social teaching, but they have dug up only what they themselves buried.

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## The Common Good and Christian Ethics

**David Hollenbach, S.J.**

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(269 pages)

A basic principle of Catholic social teaching states that public authority and all members of civil society ought to work together to establish and maintain the concrete conditions of the common good. The Second Vatican Council, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), defines the common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (26). The concept has a rich history in Christian social reflection. It receives its most developed articulation in the work of Aquinas but factors notably in the writings of Ignatius of Loyola, Vatican II, and the papal encyclical tradition.

Because of its apparent organic relationship to Christian thought, however, the concept is held suspect by many modern political theorists. The familiar “wars of religion” paradigm is put forward as a reason for being suspicious of any particular concept of the good life. John Rawls, for example, in *Political Liberalism*, says the concept of the common good “is no longer a political possibility for those who accept the constraints of liberty and toleration of democratic institution” (201). What has replaced the concept of the common good as the central prescriptive principle of a healthy social order? The common good has been subordinated to the principle of *toleration*. To Aquinas, the first principle of practical—and hence political—reason was “good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided”; the first principle of modern liberal political reason is “live and let live.”

Given the pluralistic constraints under which modern liberal democracies by definition operate, is the concept of the common good today still viable? David Hollenbach, S.J., professor of ethics at Boston College, thinks it is. Hollenbach, a contributor to the U.S. bishops’ pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* (1986), has been teaching and writing on issues of Christian social ethics for twenty years. No concept, he insists, has been more poorly understood by conscientious citizens than that of the common good. His book, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, endeavors to resurrect the notion of the common good for contemporary political discourse and to show how the concept is not only adequate to address the needs of modern pluralistic America but necessary in order to overcome intractable social problems.

The task he sets for himself is to argue that people from different cultural and religious backgrounds or no religion at all can live together in a mutually enriching community of shared moral values without compromising democratic values. To achieve this, however, tolerance is not enough. Tolerance is only an instrumental good. The end is the good of the life of the community itself: “*the good of being in a community at all*—the good realized in the mutual relationships in and through which human beings achieve their well-being.” Throughout the book, Hollenbach argues the noncontroversial thesis that there are goods that we can know in common that we cannot know alone, chiefly the good of community life itself, a good that cannot be simply reduced without remainder to the private goods of individuals. This good is only possible in a community characterized by what Hollenbach calls a solidarity of shared freedoms, in particular the freedoms of speech and association.

What happens to religion in all this? Hollenbach argues that religious traditions have an important role to play in contributing to the conversation about what constitutes this shared good. Because, according to classical natural-law reasoning, Christian morality is not for Christians alone but is essentially human morality, Christians can cooperate with non-Christians in defining the collective goods of the social order while not compromising their biblical faith nor requiring fellow non-Christians to compromise critical natural reason. Their right to contribute stems from their full membership within the civil community, and their commitment to do so while being respectful of

diversity stems from the community's pluralistic and democratic character. The theological model for Hollenbach's shared concept is drawn from Augustine's "two cities" paradigm in *De Civitate Dei*. There are two cities, the city of God and the earthly city, the one whose end is transcendent and ultimate, the other whose end is temporal and transitory. The purpose of the city of God is the full realization of every human possibility, temporal and transcendent, to be distinguished from the earthly city whose purpose is the realization of the political or common good. Believers and nonbelievers alike share a concern for the earthly community and therefore ought to work together for its welfare. Rejecting every coercive means, religious believers make the political good their own, while nonbelievers, eschewing a suspicious bias against religion, acknowledge the rightful role religious belief can play in contributing to a vision of the good life.

This shared vision is called *intellectual solidarity*: "an orientation of mind that regards differences among traditions as stimuli to intellectual engagement across religious and cultural boundaries ... (rather than) a mindset marked by suspicion or fear." When intellectual solidarity is realized, it will allow for a shared dialogue about the nature of the good, its application to the civil community, and how the good is shared and shareable by all people. For this to be viable, however, the classic rights to "freedom of religion, speech, association, and assembly" must be institutionally protected, and freedom from coercion must remain "an essential precondition."

Hollenbach's vision of a fully inclusive political community is admirable but incomplete. He leaves the really interesting questions either unasked or unanswered. For example, to whom or to what do we appeal in the face of irreconcilable disagreements between traditions about the nature of the good? Is the post-Christian concept of what is "reasonable" compatible with traditional notions of moral reason? Can we even find a common vocabulary to discuss the notion of the good? Hollenbach insists that the Second Vatican Council's concept of the good leaves open the possibility for a fruitful engagement between alternative concepts. This may be true, but what gives us confidence that postmodern thinkers are willing to affirm Vatican II's concept of a good that is universally accessible to human reason? Why should someone who rejects the notion of objective and transtemporal truth grant political prerogatives to religionists whom they know to profess such truths and to hold them with religious faith? Hollenbach simply does not address the questions. Moreover, terribly divisive ethical issues in American society whose judgments correspond to incommensurable notions of the good do not get addressed (e.g., abortion versus "choice," homosexuality and "gay marriage" versus traditional notions of marriage, the rights of embryos versus the autonomy of the scientific community).

As for substantive content to the phrase *Christian ethics* found in the book's title, the work is again lacking. There is no real discussion of how a specifically Christian ethic conceives the common good or what role relevant Christian concepts such as discipleship, sin, redemption, and forgiveness should play in the larger framework. Hollenbach argues that the right to religious freedom entails, as a matter of justice, the

freedom to bring one's religious concept of the good into dialogue with other understandings. However, he gives no indication how this is to work in contemporary society. He acknowledges complexities that exist between competing religious-political concepts, for example, between the "radical monotheism" of Islam and its demand for an Islamic republic and the land-oriented self-identity of Judaism, but leaves unaddressed the question of how his notion of intellectual solidarity will help to resolve the intractable conflicts that arise as a result of such competing beliefs. One is left wondering whether in the end the beliefs themselves need to go in order to make room for the kind of solidarity Hollenbach envisages.

Hollenbach takes aim at what he terms "fundamentalist" communities. Fundamentalism, he says, expresses itself through a defensive attitude toward modern pluralistic culture. The fundamentalist mind sees modernity "as a threat to religious identity itself" and communities characterized by such a mind are inherently conflict-prone and hence unfit for the kind of intellectual solidarity Hollenbach proposes. Examples include the so-called religious right, the Catholic lay movement *Communion and Liberation*, and Islamic Hamas and Hezbollah. Hollenbach's definition of fundamentalism is one for concern. Because one of the aims of the Enlightenment project was to neutralize revealed religion (a project that in Western Europe was largely successful), Christians with a memory might find themselves defensive toward precisely those elements of modernity that see a vibrant religious identity itself as a threat, without deserving the invidious epithet fundamentalist. Reading his account of "inclusive" religious communities, among which he includes the ministry of Jesse Jackson, I found myself increasingly suspicious that he was adducing little more than a description of bland contemporary liberal Christianity.

While the book's aim holds promise, in the end, it provides little guidance as to how Christian ethical reflection can contribute to the important topic of the political common good, besides reminding religious communities that they must foster dialogue that is "interactive and mutually respectful." As to the question of what happens when there are disagreements on issues of grave moral concern, Hollenbach does not answer.

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## The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World

**Russell Hittinger**

Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2003 (359 pages)

Russell Hittinger has written a graceful, probing, and provocative account of the eclipse of natural law in the modern world of thought and action and, above all, a plea and a prescriptive analysis for its recovery. The book's title, *The First Grace*, aptly captures its central tenet, namely that the natural law is in its core a *higher law*, a God-given