

Book Reviews

Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith That Does Justice. Expanded Edition. By Roger Bergman. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023. xxii + 227 pages. \$32.00.

Catholic social learning remains an underexplored aspect of Catholic social teaching. While Catholic social teaching itself is often referred to as the Church’s “best kept secret,” Catholic social learning feels even more elusive, like a hidden treasure locked away on a high shelf. This presents a clear paradox: social teaching should not remain theoretical but must be lived out in daily life. In his book, Roger Bergman, long-time director of Creighton University’s Justice and Peace Program, not only illustrates how Catholic social learning can be accomplished but also highlights how universities can serve as fertile ground for cultivating social justice. As spaces where we regularly engage others, universities offer opportunities for the personal encounters Bergman sees as “the key to perspective transformation and therefore to an effective justice pedagogy” (11).

Originally published ten years ago, the book has since then been expanded with two new chapters and an afterword by the current director of the Justice and Peace Program, Daniel R. DiLeo. These additions provide spiritual and theological reflections, particularly focusing on the complexities of shame and the enduring belief in God’s saving grace, using Job as a moral exemplar. The expanded edition excels in both scholarly depth and pedagogical insight. Bergman navigates complex topics like Aristotle’s philosophy of virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre’s emphasis on moral inquiry, or St. John Henry Newman’s vision of the university, making these ideas accessible while advancing his central concept of promoting justice in the world. His work is deeply grounded in Ignatian pedagogy and the pastoral circle—what Bergman calls the “pedagogical circle” (33)—which he integrates with Joseph Cardijn’s see-judge-act method.

Bergman presents three ways his students experience social learning: an immersion experience in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, local service-learning projects, and encountering the lives of moral exemplars. The semester abroad experience offers a profound cultural and spiritual immersion; the drawback is that it is only accessible to a few students. Bergman also reflects on local service-learning programs involving a larger student population. Whether it is

serving in soup kitchens, tutoring in underfunded schools, or working with people experiencing homelessness, these experiences foster deep personal reflection, especially when students witness the suffering of their neighbors up close. Additionally, Bergman emphasizes the powers of moral exemplars—such as Dorothy Day, St. Oscar Romero, or Martin Luther King, Jr.—in showing the virtues people may need to acquire as they confront a world “riddled with injustice, violence, and suffering” (115).

Bergman suggests that universities are uniquely positioned to offer these transformational experiences. Drawing on the writings of St. John Henry Newman and St. Ignatius of Loyola, he insists that education is not an end in itself but should be a catalyst to change the world. In this expanded edition, *Catholic Social Learning* remains a crucial resource, especially for educators seeking to integrate Catholic social teaching into people’s daily lives and foster the “culture of encounter” for which Pope Francis has been advocating. However, given the evolving landscape of Catholic higher education, it may be time to reconsider the role of Catholic universities as vehicles for change. With many students themselves belonging to vulnerable populations, it is worth exploring how the virtues learned in social justice work might be practiced both within and beyond the university setting.

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A Primer in Christian Ethics: Christ and the Struggle to Live Well. By Luke Bretherton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. vii + 377 pages. \$34.99.

The term *primer* can have multiple meanings across varied fields, referring to an introductory text for new students, a guide to a previously unknown domain, a devotional manual, and even (in chemistry) a catalyst for reactions that generate new compounds. Luke Bretherton’s aspirations in his new volume incorporate all these valences, though perhaps the last (the laboratory sense) is the most prominent. In the final chapter Bretherton admits, “I am aware that throughout this book I raise more questions than I answer” (360), suggesting that the goal of the book is to use classic concepts from Christian ethics to spur novel kinds of theo-political reflection. In this sense, it follows the lineage of Bretherton’s colleague Stanley Hauerwas, whose *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* moved well beyond explaining introductory concepts to the task of constructive and controversial ethical analysis.