

Sacred and Social: Theological Foundations for Catholic Social Teaching. By Kenneth R. Himes, OFM. Georgetown University Press, 2025. ix + 337 pages. \$149.95 hardback, \$49.95 paperback, \$49.95 e-book.

When I sought out a text to introduce myself to the historical development of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and its relationship to social ethics, Kenneth Himes's *Sacred and Social* had just been published. His monograph foregrounds the Catholic sacramental imagination as he traces the theme of the human person as sacred and social throughout the development of doctrine and analyzes the anthropological implications of those beliefs. Himes plots the "ethical coordinates" of the CST tradition in order to construct a vision of a good society, the heart of which is human dignity and community.

Himes's focus on theological anthropology reflects his belief that errors in understanding the human person will lead to a faulty comprehension of both society and the communal nature of the human person. He begins with the human as *imago Dei*, treating central Christian doctrines like Trinitarian theology to establish his claims about the human person as sacred and social in his first three chapters. The orientation of the human person outward is inherent, as Himes articulates: "Christians do not so much seek a social vision as they encounter one through their relationships with other people who are already participants in the life of the Body of Christ" (82). From here, Himes maps the contours of dignity in community, highlighting insights from *Gaudium et Spes* and further theological reflections on reason, conscience, freedom, and sin in Catholic understandings of the human person in his fourth and fifth chapter. After establishing a foundation for the "ethical coordinates" of the tradition that inform the principles from which CST develops, Himes focuses on the common good, human rights, solidarity, subsidiarity, and integral, just, participatory, and sustainable development. He offers readers a strong foundation from which to develop practical insights on how to apply and engage tenets of CST from an anthropologically-informed theological perspective in the book's final three chapters.

The manner in which personhood is placed at the center of moral judgment creates occasional instances of tension and opportunities for scholarly disagreement in the text. One such place is where Himes exemplifies his prioritization of agape in his analysis of Matthew 25. He notes that it is "more than a bit surprising" that Jesus's judgment of the sheep and the goats does not include "overtly religious practice" but rather "caring or not caring for 'the least of these' with whom the Lord identifies" (64). "No question about church attendance, no query about whether one was married before a priest, no request to produce a baptismal certificate—nothing of that sort is determinative" (64).

Himes simultaneously casts off religious ecclesial practice while noting that “Perhaps one of the most powerful doctrines for shaping Christian behavior was the belief that all disciples were joined together as part of one faith community that foreshadowed and anticipated what ought to be true for all people” (70). While Himes’s person-centered view and call to serve reflects a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith, this demand to love and serve must be rooted in religious practice with a community striving for eternal life together. Faith practice within a rightly-ordered community provides the support and grace necessary to live out Christ’s challenging call to serve “the least of these.”

One of the monograph’s master strokes is the ease and clarity with which Himes draws on Scripture, the tradition, ecclesial documents, and more recent historical figures. In most chapters, he begins with Scripture, effortlessly weaving together the Old and New Testament in order to lay a foundation for the contemporary Christian understanding of concepts integral to Catholic social thought like sin and conscience. Christian notions of such concepts frequently follow a philosophical or historical overview, with notes of departure and convergence between them. Chapters reference Augustine, Aquinas, and other titans of the tradition with the text’s characteristic integration and coherence as well as more contemporary figures ranging from Lisa Cahill to Walter Kasper to Karl Rahner. His clear, accessible exposition makes the text accessible to undergraduates who have never encountered these ideas as well as graduate students and scholars seeking a cohesive and fairly comprehensive overview of the history of Catholic social thought. Yet Himes also identifies points of tension or complexity within the tradition that he lacks the time to tease out which invite further elaboration in an undergraduate class setting, or further research from scholars. This text would pair well with articles on new perspectives in CST, bringing new voices in the field into conversation with the rich, masterful overview of the sacred and social nature of the human person as a foundation for CST that Himes develops.

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Theology and Catholic Higher Education: Beyond Our Identity Crisis.
By Massimo Faggioli. Orbis Books, 2023. ix + 192 pages. \$30.00.

Massimo Faggioli’s volume joins a list of recent books concerned about Catholic higher education, including James Heft’s *The Future of Catholic Higher Education* (2021), among others. Faggioli’s book appropriately locates the decline of the study of theology at the