

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

American Catholic university in the larger decline of the liberal arts in favor of more technocratic, market-oriented, ‘professionalizing’ courses of study. Skyrocketing tuition and the demographic decline have put American universities under competition to survive. Catholic institutions—which once relied on the inexpensive labor of vowed religious—struggle to keep their doors open, while lay theologians rightly expect proper compensation for their work. The bitter fruit of these factors, Faggioli argues, is the “great displacement of academic theology” (3). He identifies essential questions for American theologians today: where can theology be taught and studied in the church and understood in the public square? Will Catholic colleges and universities be *Catholic* without theology requirements? And most fundamentally, What are theology departments *for*?

Faggioli offers an historical perspective to ground his *cri de coeur*, with chapters engaging the “identity crisis of Catholic higher education” since Vatican II; the disconnect between Catholic universities and the wider church in reception of the council; a history of the gradual decentering of theology from university curricula; uneasy political influences; consequences in Catholic formation for the church; and finally the roles and responsibilities of Catholic theologians in the academy, wider culture, and church life.

Faggioli’s historical survey allows for insightful observations. With the 1967 “Land O’Lakes Statement,” Catholic universities sought emancipation from ecclesiastical control *de jure*, but Faggioli laments that this *de facto* uncoupled the US Church from adversion to academics’ expertise. Bishops decreasingly consult academic theologians from their territorial universities; in many institutions “Catholic Studies” has moved from the theology classroom to other disciplines and venues. With fiery strokes, Faggioli sees this divorce as welcomed by conservative Catholic donors advocating traditionalism paired with libertarian economic ideology, who foment “insurgency against the mainstream reception of Vatican II in the United States” (67).

Faggioli’s question “What is theology *for*?” invites sobering reflection. Given the variety of Catholic voices across time and geography, can theologians offer a common vision? Faggioli challenges the trend of gearing theology courses to students’ perceived interests, which he believes “will ultimately make theology less relevant” (16). Somewhat surprisingly, he suggests that “Catholic theology is often reduced to Catholic social teaching, which . . . as fundamental and important as it is, doesn’t reflect the full range of Catholic theological exploration” (16). He suggests that the ‘Catholic academic complex’ lacks a sense of ecclesial commitment and must engage the concerns of increasingly traditional or conservative Catholic students. Failure to do so results in the perception that theology and religious studies departments are “anti-Catholic or somehow hostile to the faith” (18).

That is a charged statement; “ambivalent about the full range of church teaching” seems to be closer to the mark.

This leads to one criticism; his analysis often reads as, “on the one hand, conservatives do X, which is not great, but on the other, progressives do Y, which we are learning is just as unhelpful.” While Faggioli rightly challenges divisions in American Catholic higher education; he overlooks a robust middle who don’t neatly fit the extremes (or whose research does not focus on the reception of Vatican II). Some of his sharper characterizations—grouped along American political lines—may mean that those he hopes to fraternally challenge will not recognize themselves in his descriptions.

Nevertheless, I heartily recommend it to theologians, deans, presidents, and those involved in board leadership at Catholic universities in the US and beyond. Faggioli offers several entry portals to the conversation that makes it accessible to non-specialists. It sparked passionate conversations in a reading group at my own institution, and is a worthy complement to the books mentioned at the outset.

What is needed to move beyond our identity crisis, Faggioli suggests, is a “Land O’Lakes Statement” for the twenty-first century. Pope Francis’ vision of the “field hospital” that cares for the whole human person presents a compelling model for a Catholic university. A church without theology, he observes, “is at risk of becoming a body exposed to the political, social and economic alliances of the day” (151). Well observed. And yet I am left to wonder, with declining populations in the college-heavy Northeast and Midwest of the United States, is there need for so many Catholic institutions? I am pleased that Faggioli is challenging theologians to be part of that conversation. If we wait too long, the conversation may be over.

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