

Schmiesing, Kevin E. *Within the Market Strife: American Catholic Economic Thought from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II*. 184 pp. \$22.95 softcover.

The lengthy title and subtitle of Kevin Schmiesing's book is an apt description of the territory it covers. One may wonder, given the more recent developments in Catholic social teaching, why *Rerum Novarum* and the convocation of the Council were chosen as the delimiting bookends of this study. The reason stems from Schmiesing's thesis that the American Catholic response to the social question is rooted in both the social encyclicals and the social, religious, and economic milieu. As he states, "The period chosen is illuminative because, among American Catholics, there were few disputes over core issues of Catholic theology or morality ... The juxtaposition of theological unity and economic policy disparity during the period demonstrates clearly, then, that positions on religious and economic issues were not inexorably connected" (xiii). After the Council, "[n]o longer was it only the application of papal teaching that was in question; instead, dissent from moral principles themselves became widespread" (152). Hence, this work is a case study of the diversity of economic thought in a period of a large degree of theological homogeneity. Lest one gets the impression that Catholic thinking on economic issues is monolithic, this book convincingly demonstrates otherwise.

Schmiesing takes us through a historical journey of Catholicism in American intellectual and religious history. Early American Catholic responses to the social question tended to mirror European sentiments. The efforts at addressing the issues were typically parallel to—but separate from—those of the Protestants, as Catholic-Protestant relationships were strained by nativism, concern over Protestant proselytization, and the Americanist controversy.

The beginning of the 50-year period from 1890 to 1940, which Schmiesing labels the "Age of Reform," coincides with the publication of Pope Leo XIII's great encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. The three dominant movements within this time frame addressing the social question were Populism, Progressivism, and the New Deal. For various reasons, Populism was not attractive to Catholics, and few Catholics joined the Progressive movement.

However, the fact that Catholics tended not to join the dominant movements at the turn of the last century does not mean that they were disinterested in social reform. Working from their own tradition articulated in *Rerum Novarum*, many dialoged with the Progressives and, to various degrees, accepted some of their platform. Not surprisingly,

Msgr. John Ryan, one of the dominant Catholic figures of the era, takes up much of Schmiesing's attention. The U.S. Bishops' 1919 *Program for Social Reconstruction* reflected Ryan's influence and was often interpreted as allying the bishops with the Progressives. However, Ryan's social and economic views were not universally accepted within the Church. Other approaches were championed by anti-progressives. For example, Fr. Frederick Kenkel, who headed the Catholic Central Verein, espoused Peschian solidarism. Catholics debated the bishops' authority to recommend specific policies when the issue is not doctrinal in nature. Others questioned Ryan's definition of the just wage, its relationship with commutative justice, and whether paying the just wage is an obligation of justice or of charity.

Schmiesing offers the case of Fr. Edward McGlynn as an example where the Church distinguished between Catholic social teaching and the prudential judgments necessary for its application. McGlynn publicly supported Henry George's views on a single tax on land, which conflicted with Catholic teaching on private-property rights. McGlynn was excommunicated, although it was later lifted on the grounds that the issue was one of disobedience to ecclesiastical authority and not doctrinal.

The Great Depression was another example where Catholics generally agreed on the basic principles of Catholic social teaching but disagreed on the means of implementing it. Ryan, who enthusiastically supported the New Deal, thought that the course of treatment for the sick economy involved greater governmental intervention. Fr. Kenkel, on the other hand, was concerned that the New Deal would bring the United States closer to socialism. Many in the Catholic Worker movement believed that the solution lay not with the political process but with personal spiritual reform and social action.

Within the Market Strife shows that Catholic social teaching leaves room for a viable and active marketplace of different policy recommendations. Schmiesing wisely resists the temptation of placing thinkers along the "liberal-conservative" continuum, as if social and economic thought were merely two-dimensional. He is also cognizant that there is no such thing as pure economic justice—the economic sphere is far too integrated into the other spheres of human society to stand completely on its own. Hence, he describes how developments in other aspects of American life affected the discussions within Catholic circles.

The reader is placed in a front-row seat to some of the exchanges. There are times when the "debaters" are not given equal time, however. For example, Schmiesing treats us to a discussion

between Georgetown professor Goetz Briefs, who emphasized the positive aspects of the market, and Fr. Raymond McGowan, who took a corporatist approach. Several pages are devoted to Briefs's side, but the contents of McGowan's memo that sparked the argument are barely mentioned.

This historical survey presents a historical context to the post-conciliar debates, although it does not address these discussions directly. For example, many of the economic assumptions underlying the prudential judgments regarding specific policy recommendations put forth in the bishops' 1986 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, were debated in previous decades.

The book is engaging and makes a good addition to the library of anyone who is interested in the relationship between Catholic social teaching and economic policies. It is also recommended for those who would like a fresh perspective on what it means to be a Catholic in America.

Emil Berendt
Siena Heights University