

# Unwrapping Our “Best Kept Secret:” A Critical Review of Some Best-Selling Textbooks in Catholic Social Teaching

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*As college-level courses on Catholic Social Teaching become more widespread, it is important to explore the contents of the CST textbooks that students are likely to encounter. Are the ideology and pedagogy of these textbooks doctrinally faithful and respectful of the Church’s teaching authority? I examine several recent, popular CST texts, and arrange them on a continuum from the strongly faithful to the openly dissenting. Of particular interest are texts halfway along this continuum: texts presenting views which do challenge the Magisterium and its teaching legitimacy, but in a comparatively subtle way that undergraduates may not recognize as tending toward dissent. I argue these troubling textbooks represent a forward edge of an expanding legitimization of what Charles Curran once proudly called “faithful dissent,” in Catholic higher education. I offer some CST text selection guidelines for college educators seeking to use authentically Catholic materials in their beginning-level undergraduate courses on this subject.*

Many Catholic educators today seek to increase the dissemination and appreciation of orthodox Catholic perspectives and doctrine within higher education, to spread the authentic gospel more actively through their professional work. They may produce a distinctly Catholic scholarship on various topics for potential use in courses, for example, or create Catholic Studies programs, or help affirm a more powerful Catholic identity and presence on campuses through revitalizing Newman societies and campus ministries.

While these approaches are certainly crucial, I think we should also carefully explore the materials employed in the college-level classroom teaching of Catholic ideas and culture, to analyze whether or how we develop a next generation of faithful, thoughtful Catholics through their experience in our courses and academic programs. In this paper I will focus on one arena of Catholic education known for some time as our “best kept secret”<sup>1</sup>--namely Catholic Social Teaching (CST)--and do so by analyzing

some of the *currently popular textbooks* used to present the field in today's college classrooms. Why CST, and why textbooks? First, I believe that of all areas of Catholic thought and application, CST is most likely to be taken up by a broader, ideologically diverse group of faculty and students with some curiosity, because of its prevalent emphasis on the culturally appealing theme of socio-economic justice. Insofar as our Catholic intellectual tradition has a presence in college curricula at all, or starts to make more of a comeback, I wager that CST either is the major carrier or will be the first venture. Thus if there is a problem in CST materials, it will have big consequences for Catholic higher education.

Second, insofar as CST has indeed been too long a "secret," then we likely face a generation of students whose awareness and knowledge of Catholicism in general, and CST in particular, is woefully thin and often downright erroneous.<sup>2</sup> Much emerging CST instruction will therefore probably be introductory-- faculty starting from scratch with students who have almost no meaningful background in Catholic ways of thinking at all, not to mention political, economic and cultural history.<sup>3</sup> In such pedagogical circumstances, many instructors who do not enjoy the privilege of more highly prepared students will likely seek decent *secondary* treatments of CST that provide some overview of core issues and point to or perhaps incorporate some pieces of key primary texts to introduce CST and related issues to a novice college-level audience. For present purposes I define "secondary text" as one which is essentially an author's personal synthesis and presentation of key CST content, or which is some type of compilation of primary CST sources set in a very prominent interpretive context by the text's editors.

I began by wondering, if I had to teach such a college course, what would I use? And how could I tell if a text were orthodox or not? Based on some preliminary reading, my questions about orthodoxy only increased: I began to suspect that some of the most popular CST pedagogical resources may be partly responsible for reproducing the problems our Church endures today by developing students with rather skewed ideas of what constitutes fidelity.

So I decided to analyze a broader range of materials to search for patterns. How to select them? It is not easy to statistically identify the best selling college-level texts in CST: publishers' sales data are not readily available; and there are no empirical studies I am aware of that address college CST textbook and author patterns, as there are in fields like sociology and psychology.<sup>4</sup> I therefore decided to go to the web pages of the largest major national bookstores, Barnes and Noble and Amazon, and track their best selling books by sales rank in the keyword areas of "Catholic Social Teaching" and "Social Justice" for three months during Summer 2002. I focused on materials produced within the last 20 years, and especially since 1990.

Certain materials tended to show up repeatedly and refer to each other, indicating the existence of a set of authors and works reinforcing each other's presence in the "definition of the field." I cannot say for sure that the texts I landed on are exactly the top sellers for college courses; but I make the hopefully plausible assumption that college sales of CST texts probably reflect the most popular materials available commercially. And because I am not working from a clear population sample I do not claim here to social scientifically generalize about CST textbook trends. But I am exploring a significant public domain of common works sold and cited, that would very likely be a

main resource base for today's CST faculty and students. Based on the selection approach described above, here is the baker's dozen of texts I ended up reviewing for this paper:

1. Rodger Charles, SJ. *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999).
2. Charles Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002).
3. Peter Henriot, Edward DeBerri, and Michael Schultheis, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret. Centenary (3<sup>rd</sup>) Edition* [first published 1985( Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; and Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 2002).
4. Kenneth Himes, O.F.M., *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002)
5. Philip Land, S.J., *Catholic Social Teaching as I Have Lived, Loathed and Loved It* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994)
6. Thomas Massaro, *Catholic Social Teaching and United States Welfare Reform* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998)
7. Thomas Massaro, SJ. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2000)
8. Thomas Massaro and Thomas Shannon (Eds.), *American Catholic Social Teaching* [includes CD-ROM] (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002)
9. Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2001 [first published 1998])

10. David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992 [still in print])
11. Michael Pennock, *Catholic Social Teaching: Learning and Living Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000)
12. Perry Roets, SJ., *Pillars of Catholic Social Teachings: A Brief Social Catechism* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1999).
13. Jerry Windley-Daoust, *Living Justice and Peace: Catholic Social Teaching in Practice* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 2001).

### **The Art of Choosing a Faithful Textbook**

In more carefully studying these 13 works, I began noticing an uncomfortable similarity between much of the material and contemporary basic textbooks in my home discipline, sociology. There is already an extensive Catholic social scientific literature critiquing that field, which I need not reiterate here.<sup>5</sup> As those of us who select introductory sociology materials every academic year can attest, choosing one is a moral and intellectual art not only because of our need to find something consistent with our own teaching style and concerns, but probably more importantly because of the ideological or theoretical biases they contain, and the pedagogical techniques they employ to assist students readers to develop in certain directions.

For example, today's introductory sociology texts tend to place enormous emphasis on examining societal oppressions, using race/class/gender as a--perhaps *the--* primary analytic lens. More recently, a culturally relativist type of globalization has

become a new *sine qua non*. Overt advocacy of birth control and abortion, and antagonism to “homophobia,” are not infrequent. And families are defined in statistical terms as a wide range of types of domestic arrangements of adults and children, including opposite and same-sex couples as well as other groupings that heretofore would have been classified as households. This expansion of the category “family” is usually portrayed as a positive social change. Opposition to this point of view is often painted as a narrow-minded vestige of a declining, defeated worldview, a cultural lag.<sup>6</sup> In this climate my Catholic colleagues and I often acknowledge that we end up picking the “least offensive” texts of the bunch for our courses.

Sociology thus suffers from a slide into a particular liberal political advocacy. I would expect a different message from Catholic Social Teaching. Unfortunately, I found that many of today’s CST textbooks tend to draw heavily in their framing processes on the secular sociological perspective just sketched. I suggest here that the lines between Catholic Social Teaching as an intellectual organic application of the Faith, and the sociology of religion, and the interpretive sociology of social problems, may have blurred: I will argue that much CST literature has the feel and content of a sort of religiously-articulated critical sociology, though it institutionally presents itself under Catholic organizational auspices and uses Catholic encyclicals to ground its moral and theological analysis of social dynamics. While CST authors rarely adopt wholesale the specific left wing social agenda of many sociologists--for example, few argue for legitimizing abortion, yet-- they do often embrace a deeply “political” framing of issues in terms of liberal versus conservative, and lean toward that liberal agenda by pressing to redefine Catholic teaching in certain directions. For example, the influence of radical

feminism is very strong. The critique of capitalism popularized in much CST has strong roots in a Marxist sociology of knowledge, which claims that all positions taken by organizations or their members with authority are essentially latent or manifest self-justifications of power and the social status quo, however innocuous such statements might seem.<sup>7</sup> Hierarchy itself is challenged by a kind of populism and democratism with its roots in socialist political theory, developed by liberation theologians and others.

My analysis revealed a particularly alluring way in which quite mainstream CST texts can be problematic. Employing the sociologic tradition just described, especially if not very overtly, works have subtle undermining effects on the relatively untrained student reader's Faith precisely because the slippery content and doctrines are embedded in an appealing contemporary container of strong social concern for justice, peace, freedom, and equality. This is accomplished by tainting the authority of teaching tradition of the Church and employing a particular pedagogy—for example, using history and questions for discussion in a biased way—to steer student exploration and formation toward a critical stance about Church teachings and authority

### **A More Specific Framework for Evaluating the Texts**

In thinking about this I found it very helpful to draw on a notion George Weigel recently brought up in a more general critique of social trends, called **faithful dissent**.<sup>8</sup> This evocative term is originally Charles Curran's<sup>9</sup> and he meant by it, quite literally, that in order to be a "faithful" Catholic one should at times dissent significantly from key teachings or dogmas. Weigel—and now I myself—use the term in exactly an *opposite*

way, as an *oxymoron*. Weigel means by it a tragic and disturbing process of publicly rejecting central doctrines of the Catholic Faith while claiming to remain within acceptable bounds of both conceptual frameworks and institutional territory. The concept of “faithful” is made elastic to incorporate previously impossible ideas, and this reshaped concept is institutionalized in discourse.

Weigel elaborates the structural changes in Church organization and the role of the bishop that enable “faithful dissent” to prosper in more detail than can be developed here. But one key sociological aspect of “faithful dissent” is that *objectively* dissenting views on matters such as papal infallibility, sexual mores, and ordination to the priesthood take root in a system presenting itself as “the real church,” and are *not effectively challenged* by those within the Church hierarchy responsible for doing so. A new social space is thus created where dissent is normalized and normalizing: perpetuated as “plausible” and thereby legitimate in the public consciousness, by virtue of its existence and discussion within *Catholic-identified* social systems such as publishing houses, academic departments of theology and related fields, conferences of theologians and social justice activists, and diocesan structures—not to mention within broader news media.

As dissent acquires its own social capital and advertises a Catholic identity, it then takes considerable training and sophistication to distinguish this perspective from authentic Catholic culture. Since CST textbooks are a crucially important component of CST’s plausibility structure, if they are contaminated by “faithful dissent” they will help socialize students into a world where rejection of central tenets is viewed as normative, as part of, say, how “thinking for yourself” is operationalized in apparently Catholic higher

education. And from what I have reviewed, many texts are so contaminated. This *oxymoronic sense* of “faithful dissent” helps bring into better focus an *ironic* pedagogical strategy I perceived within many CST texts: students learn to be not just intellectually aware and cautious, but dubious and cynical.

In the short space permitted here let me now examine some examples of how this social movement of “faithful dissent” can be observed working its way across the continuum of CST textbook offerings.

### **The Two Ends of the Fidelity Continuum**

Some texts can be readily located as either solidly faithful, exhibiting little or no “faithful dissent,” or by contrast, designed quite intentionally to foster it. Let us start by briefly analyzing examples of these two types.

#### *Faithful Texts*

On one end of the continuum are texts that seem to me the most clearly faithful to the Magisterium and which retain the perspective of CST as a version of moral theology without drifting into sociologism. The texts by Roets and Charles fit this bill nicely. The brief text by Himes sits at the edge of this zone principally because of what he avoids presenting. And the works by Pennock and Windley- Daoust are excellent but turned out to be primarily for later high school students, though they can teach us something about effective pedagogical design.

The texts of Perry Roets, SJ, and Rodger Charles, SJ. are both 100-page monographs intended as systematic presentations of key CST ideas for a serious beginner with an ability to track basic philosophical discourse. Roets and Charles are both very experienced scholars of CST who are having a go at creating a text for use by just the novice collegiate audience I am interested in.

Roets' *Pillars of Catholic Social Teachings* is subtitled *A Brief Social Catechism*, is organized catechetically with numbered paragraphs, and uses rather complex and abstract diagrams to develop his arguments. Unfortunately the rather didactic tone, dense style, catechetical design and the complexity of the diagrams would probably ill serve today's novice students. Roets' text would likely work only with students already very committed to examining the content of CST in a careful way and pretty well prepared to do so.

Fr. Charles, on the other hand, has a clearer style and friendlier tone. His *Social Teaching* monograph is a distillation of much deep historical and theological research, an opening into the field he sees as pedagogically distinct from his more ample works.<sup>10</sup> Its main flaw is that there are few concrete examples of applications of CST principles; the book tends to the conceptual and theoretical, and an instructor would have to flesh it out with examples, case studies and exercises to help students learn how to apply his framework to specific problems.

The books by Pennock and Windley-Daoust (each having both an *Imprimatur* and *Nihil Obstat*, by the way) are primarily for high school students and thus lack collegiate depth of development, but they teach valuable lessons about pedagogical design. Both texts use visuals well, employ discussion questions in open-ended ways, and foster active/experiential learning—meaning they link textual material to research inquiry,

service learning projects, field observations, and prayer. They provide some basic social history, cite CST documents appropriately--including the Catechism in Pennock's case--and raise "challenges" to living a concerned Catholic life with no attack on or insinuations about the Church or the Magisterium at all. Why could not our CST texts for college students have more of these features?

*Himes closer to the edge*

Finally, Kenneth Himes' work *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching* is very worthwhile in one sense, but trickier; it defines an edge of the "faithful" category and begins to tilt slightly toward the "faithfully dissenting." That is, Himes does present a range of classic CST materials in a thoughtful and fair way. But in his definition of what constitutes the CST literary corpus, he shares a premise with those who are more stridently critical of the Church that the formal documents emanating from the Vatican and bishops' conferences are essentially too limiting and need to be augmented by other materials. He frames this using Fr. Andrew Greeley's distinction between "high" (official Church) and "low" (laity and other sources) traditions in CST to applaud the addition of the latter.

Like most contemporary CST text authors, Himes includes a brief concluding section identifying critical issues for future of the field. For example, in quite evenhanded language he exhorts CST to continue to address sexism by re-examining the "complementarity" model of gender roles; to examine the potentially positive value of social conflict in some circumstances, as a counterbalance to the Church's historical emphasis on social order and cohesion; and to explicate norms for just production of

goods and services, which has been inadequately examined because of the great historical emphasis on just distribution.

But he normalizes the framing of CST materials in political terms: liberal vs. conservative. And further, his CST canon *excludes* the benchmark document *Humanae Vitae*. Roets does not explicitly include this encyclical either, but his theory of the primacy of the family at least rests solidly on discussion of *Evangelium Vitae*.

There is also a pedagogical problem: namely that the text assumes considerable familiarity with basic history and politics, such as the difference between socialism and capitalism. So the questions employed to set up the explication of key CST ideas could be, sad to say, too fancy for today's college freshmen.

On the whole, then, two of the most faithful texts are strong on doctrinal correctness but rather weak on introductory college-level pedagogical design. They tend to employ inappropriate assumptions about a freshman college audience's background experience and knowledge. The text by Himes sets the boundary of the "Faithful" category by virtue of what it does not discuss and its hint of distancing from the canonical texts.

One lesson to learn from texts in this category is that truly faithful works show very explicit *humility* before the traditional CST source documents emanating from the Magisterium, and include the full range of them—those culturally "easy" and those more challenging--to define CST's general parameters. These source documents clearly retain their special status in the moral framework, and in this sense rise above the sociology of knowledge to their proper location of universal authority. Both Charles and Roets give great prominence to the set of encyclicals that historically defined the canon. Though each one adds one or two other documents, they define CST essentially in relation to the

Magisterial texts. Fr. Roets displays this attitude in a particularly poignant way: “Is [my] catechism a textbook? The catechism is not a textbook. It is a summary of the church’s social documents and a basis for teaching and discussion. Of course, the main textbook is the compilation of the church’s social teachings” (p.4).

*Texts Encouraging “Faithful Dissent” by Legitimizing Fundamental Questioning of the Church While Accurately Portraying Some CST Ideas*

At the other end of the continuum, Charles Curran’s 2002 *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis*, and Marvin Mich’s 2001 *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* represent the very definition of “faithful dissent,” in different ways. It is useful to briefly highlight a few of the ways in which their biases operate, because what is done more overtly here is, as we shall see later, done more subtly in other texts.

First some points about Curran, who continues in this work his own tradition of “faithful dissent” for a new generation of students. In his Afterward he is openly critical of “neoconservative” CST--including the likes of George Weigel, Richard Neuhaus, and Michael Novak--arguing that dissent is *needed* in CST because much of Catholicism’s claim to universal truth can no longer be substantiated, given that “Postmodernism, liberation theology, and feminism have raised serious questions about the claim to work from an impartial epistemological perspective” (p. 94).

In a social arena of competing possible moral positions, he believes, commitment to religious freedom trumps any notion that the Church’s position should be imposed on

others through law. Curran eventually says quite bluntly that “in my judgment, Catholic social teaching should accept and employ the religious freedom approach to all questions of law and morality” (p.243), thus arguing for the effective elimination of natural law (and, really, any more universalist) thinking on social issues altogether. Catholic-informed policy decisions thus become virtually dependent on context, setting up a situationalist approach to prudential judgments. He believes that traditional CST still tends to retain three core presuppositions: “universality, universal and impartial perspective, and certitude” (p.92). He suggests with seeming modesty that “Catholic social teaching should continue to maintain these three perspectives, but in a more nuanced and chastened way” (ibid.). His textbook, of course, will do the nuancing and chastening.

Curran proclaims here what was perhaps just a whisper in Himes: that a key epistemological and political element of “faithful dissent” is *to declare the canon of Magisterial CST documents too limited, at best, or perhaps even surpassed in importance*. Curran focuses great attention on the need to “open” CST to a broader range of voices in the name of greater responsiveness in the context of a liberal democracy where the Church has for too long defined its tradition in terms of a chain of documents and positions originating and disseminating down through the Roman hierarchy.

I have a hard time distinguishing this point of view from any other secular social critic using the lens of power structure analysis to debunk authority claims. While Curran clearly cites and acknowledges the usual CST encyclicals in his text, like Himes he edits *Humanae Vitae* out of that CST canon. Then he creates his own canon, including all sorts of contemporary moral theologians in chapters discussing the methodology and content

of CST to define its agenda and concerns as well as critique the past. His “opening” the reader to sources moderately and severely critical of major Church teachings, and positioning their claims within the parameters of what seems to be legitimate CST discourse, bypassing certain uncomfortable documents in the process, is one prototypical device for building “faithful dissent” within the Church and CST.

Marvin Mich’s *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* picks up this strategy of “opening” and gives it more popular, historical flesh. His goal is to tell the story of the CST tradition “‘from below’ and ‘from above,’ from the perspective of the official teaching and the movements that expressed and shaped that teaching.” “Our story, our history,” he says, “is more than a collection of official statements, it includes the prophets and activists, thinkers and analysts who wrestled with the meaning of Christian faith amid turbulent times” (p.1). He mentions *Humanae Vitae* only once, in commenting on the “dark cloud” it left over the papacy of Paul VI.

While Mich claims to value the canon documents as half the story of CST, it is the other half that is the much better half. Like Curran and drawing on a leftist sociology of knowledge, he perceives official Church statements less as valid summations or syntheses of a long tradition of Catholic action and thought, and more as representations of their own authors’ self-justifying views within the hierarchy. The laity, clergy and religious in the trenches of social change struggle are much more likely to come up with truth through praxis, especially if they avoid passively accepting Church pronouncements on social questions.

Thus Mich places the canonical documents in *antagonistic* relationship to other sources of what he believes to be a more bold, more authentic small c catholicism

situated below or outside the Church's recognized authority structure. He warns the reader that at times mixing material from the hierarchy and from the "prophets and activists" will be risky, like "mixing oil and water" to use his phrase. It works sometimes, like when the reader can truly profit from reading of the formal advocacy of unions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or appreciate the challenging nature of the U.S. Bishops' letters on peace and the economy in the mid-1980's. But that is not the norm. He prefers to champion social movements like feminism and peace ministries, and strongly approves the increasing role of non-Western spiritualities and environmentalism in making the church more "inclusive and universal, that is, truly catholic [sic]" (p.3).

Strident and angry in his critique, he relies on the likes of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Daly, Elizabeth Johnson, and "womanists" such as Delores Williams to represent the voices of women in relation to Catholicism. Like Curran he strongly argues that Catholic ethics may be credible to individual believers but too morally certain and absolutist to frame policy for our complex social and cultural situation, affirming a split between private and public morality inimical to Catholic consciousness. He pursues all this with an accessible yet righteously indignant style and tone that I imagine many beginning students could both cope with and, unfortunately, get fired up over.

Are such ideas what we as Catholic educators want our students to acquire? Certainly not. Well then, can we reassure ourselves that such "faithful dissent" is confined to the graying zone of '60's liberals who thankfully are being supplanted by a new generation of faithful?<sup>11</sup> I wish it were true. Instead I suggest this dissenting approach is widening out beyond the radical establishment, albeit in a less overt and strident fashion. As a

social movement, “faithful dissent” seeks to expand its influence—and eventually the number of adherents--by redefining the broad territory of theological and political discourse in its own terms, capturing first the language used to discuss issues and then the social organizations used to perpetuate and disseminate it: the professional associations, schools, publishing operations, and other intermediate group structures. Thus for me a key question is, once past overtly biased texts like those of Curran and Mich, do we see such framing systems play out in other CST materials?

I think yes. I found a number of books originating in well-established, mainstream institutions of Catholic social capital that employ these systems. They are texts perhaps less likely to be set aside by instructors as too clearly opinionated or controversial because they are endorsed on the back by Archbishop Weakland (as Mich’s text is) or another known member of the dissenting establishment, yet not “too traditionalist” either. Books in this zone of our continuum of fidelity seem less radical or outrageous on the surface, yet subtly spread the influence of certain corrosive ideas. They would thereby serve as a kind of “leading edge” of a process of legitimization and spread of “faithful dissent,” a gradual pushing out of the boundaries of such thinking across the social territory of the Church today. I call this zone of the continuum of texts “the troubling middle.”

### **The Troubling Middle**

A significant institution in advancing the popularity of this brand of CST has been the Center of Concern in Washington, DC. It was originally founded in 1970 by the Jesuit

order as a social justice apostolate, with Fr. William Ryan its first director.<sup>12</sup> Two texts from my list originate with this group: first is Peter Henriot, Edward DeBerri, and Michael Schultheis, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*. The 2002 edition represents the eleventh printing since the work first came out in 1985 under a slightly different title. It is the mother of contemporary CST texts, and still sells many copies. Henriot was in fact a staffmember and then Director of the Center of Concern until he turned over the leadership to James Hug, S.J., in 1989. The book was and is published by the Center, in collaboration with Orbis Books, which is run by the Maryknoll order.

The second is Fr. Philip Land's 1994 *Catholic Social Teaching As I Have Lived, Loathed, and Loved It*, published right after his death by the Center in collaboration this time with Loyola University Press of Chicago. Land was an early member of the Center staff; he arrived there from working earlier in the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace in Rome in support of the 1971 Synod of Bishops document "Justice in the World." One of Land's self proclaimed contributions to the formation of this document was his effort to get the controversial word "liberation" accepted for use to describe the theology and activism of developing nations. He also taught economics at the Gregorian.

Land was eventually moved from Rome because of his dissent from *Humanae Vitae*—the *very first thing* the reader learns, with just a slight note of triumph, about Fr. Land from the first paragraph of the Foreword, written by Fr. James Hug. Henriot, DeBerri and Schulties in fact dedicate their 2002 Centenary edition to Fr. Land, and draw heavily on his earlier work.

I am surprised that the Henriot *et.al.* text does so well: it is essentially an introductory interpretive essay about CST plus highly compressed "Cliff Notes" style

summaries of major CST documents, and finally a study guide consisting of discussions questions and bibliography. The authors clearly acknowledge in their opening chapter that the book is best used in conjunction with full original documents. The discussion questions vary in quality, many of them call for personal responses to situations about which beginning students would know little. No, *Humanae Vitae* doesn't make their list of foundational documents either.

Fr. Land's book, with its colorful title, is intended as his intellectual and spiritual autobiography, and is thereby of more limited value as a text for beginners. The reader is invited to travel with him in his personal journey through the unfolding of CST since the heady days of Vatican II. Some chapters do a good job of identifying key CST principles. But most describe his own personal work in various apostolates and organizations, in order to paint a sort of insider's view of how the Vatican resists change by pumping out self-serving justifications of privilege, thus raising the need for lay and religious dissident groups as a critically necessary corrective--especially feminism and environmentalism. His theology chapters are probably over the heads of beginners and in any case describe his own personal vision of the Church and Faith.

Since despite such limitations both texts are big sellers, the introductory orienting framework they employ, coming directly from Land's scholarship, acquires significance since it is their steering mechanism for influencing student development. One key feature of this framework is a set of five "methodological shifts" about how to improve CST by changing who does what research with what models and intent. They are "Imaging the Church as the 'People of God'," "Reading the 'signs of the times'," "The movement away

from a narrow adherence to natural law to a greater reliance on Scripture,” “The primacy of love,” and “An orientation to pastoral planning and action” (pp.19-21).

Land and then Henriot *et. al.* do in fact justify these methodological shifts with various traditional CST documents, such as *Lumen Gentium*, Paul VI’s *A Call to Action*, and John Paul II’s *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus*. However, the essence of their position is to take basically sound ideas—say, that Catholics should cooperate with others of good will to seek the best approaches to justice in the world, or that we cannot always derive approaches to social questions deductively, from natural law principles—and twist them into a call to social action based primarily on one’s own conscience-driven interpretation of the situation. “Experience” and “praxis” are more of a “true force for understanding and developing all authentic social teaching” (p.21).

Here again is a secularizing, leftist sociology of knowledge and social movements masquerading as authentic Catholic teaching. In effect, natural law reasoning is set aside, the authority of Church documents is defined down, and literally “all” authentic CST comes from personal and collectively mobilized experience. Quite a claim!

Because both Land and Henriot *et. al.* contain decent resumes of classic CST principles similar to those from quite orthodox sources, such as the U.S. Bishops<sup>13</sup> or Fr. William Byron<sup>14</sup>—subsidiarity, justice, personhood, dignity of work, peace, and so forth—and because the texts are written with great élan and enthusiasm, it could be easy to miss some of the implications of the foundations of their calls to action and reflection. In this sense they are not as overtly radical as Curran or Mich, but for all that perhaps more insidious.

Next let us consider what has probably been the best selling collection of original CST texts that fits my definition of a secondary source because of its interpretive passages, O'Brien and Shannon's 1992 *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. In print for a over a decade, it appears in just about everyone's bibliography as a main source text for encyclicals and other key historical materials. It includes a wide range of classic CST encyclicals and bishops' statements going up to the 1991 *Centesimus Annus*—though it too deletes *Humanae Vitae*. I can see why it has been a perennial best-seller: documents are presented in their entirety; each one is preceded by a descriptive summary of a few pages, without much editorializing. This is positive. But beneath this positive surface lays the same problem we have been discussing in other texts. In their extensive Introduction are various statements that tend to put the Church as an institution in a bad light, and invite the reader to leave it behind for a more “authentic,” activist engagement with the world in all its complexity. For example, what one learns about Leo XIII and Pius XI in the history of CST, is that they were “filled with charity and passion for justice, but these qualities were smothered by triumphalist ecclesiology, antidemocratic political values, and a conservative, even negative understanding of natural law” (p.1). (One wonders what students would make of the terminology.) “The modern documents,” on the other hand, “communicate a vision of the church [sic] as servant to humanity, a renewed concern for the human person and human rights, and increasing emphasis on popular participation, and a more open and humble acknowledgement of the historically conditioned character of human life and consciousness” (ibid.)

Here is illustrated another central feature of “faithful dissent:” *gnostic temperocentrism*. This is the notion that the group the writer ascribes to sits at the cusp of history, and carries within the force of a new dawn more important than any other dawn before. With this special consciousness one is given permission to read history backward, through the lens of contemporary values, and also to claim freedom from historical shaping in one’s own development.

We saw this in Curran and Mich, to be sure: their sociologism supposedly gives them a special debunking insight and freedom. But it emerges also here in the Troubling Middle. Defying the hallmark “long view” of authentic Catholic thinking that recognizes only one true historical fractal, the birth of Christ, and His embodiment in the Church forever, Shannon and O’Brien share with Land and Henriot *et.al.* the vision of a new, revolutionary moment and shift in political consciousness of which they are a vanguard party. Things are qualitatively different now. The untrained student reading such claims could easily conclude that the bad old days are passing, and they are part of a revolution changing the face of the Church and society. In fact they are *replacing* the institutional Church herself.

Next is the matter of what constitutes the CST canon. In 1992 O’Brien and Shannon were still looking forward to the day when CST anthologies would expand beyond the set of encyclicals and bishops’ statements they felt obligated to present as the canon.

Anticipating the call of Curran, Mich, and Himes to a lesser extent, O’Brien and Shannon wrote

“The documents need to be examined in light of the overall life of the contemporary church(sic); these teachings are one, but only one, important expression of Catholic faith and life. They can be understood and evaluated only in relation to other expressions of Catholicism, from the spiritual lives of

individuals through the worship and fellowship of congregations to the ongoing development of Catholic theology” (p.6).

That word ONLY, appearing twice, suggests to me a movement of distancing from the established CST canon and the responsibility to honor it. This is confirmed later in the Introduction, where *the laity* are set forth as *the only* authentic arbiters of CST theory and practice:

The documents are best read and evaluated from the viewpoint of the laity...[A]s the Second Vatican Council affirmed, social, political, and economic problems are the special concerns of the laity. They are uniquely qualified to describe what in fact is going on and to evaluate what should be done. In the past there has been too little effort to consult the laity in the development of these teachings, too little effort to ask lay people what they think before telling them what to do. Given the situation of the church [sic] in the modern world, and given the experience of all local churches since the Second Vatican Council, it is clear that this will no longer be acceptable, if it ever was. It is the laity who must reshape the course of history. It is they who must act and, if they are to act, they will have to be more fully enlisted in the process that determines what that action should be. Of course, there are elements of faith which for Catholics evoke the unique charism of the hierarchy; but it is not hard to determine in these documents where such matters of doctrine end and more complex matters of applied theology, including morality, begin. At that point the laity have the right, and indeed the obligation, to speak up and act” (pp.6-7).

Here, to all the emphasis on the primacy of laypeople’s private conscience, is now added a veiled threat directed at the Church if those in the hierarchy don’t go along with this vision. I find particularly striking the rhetorical shift in tone in this passage: it begins with a matter of fact claim that the laity has an important role to play in the living witness of CST—not very controversial. But more and more is added along the way: the laity are then uniquely qualified, then too often excluded, then given the ultimate historical mission to reshape the course of history, then declared to be the final arbiters of the boundaries of Church doctrine! This could be Lenin talking about the mission of the proletariat, but in any case there is a clear rhetorical shift from a *language of*

*consolidation* of the laity as a group deserving a place at the CST table with other groups, to a *language of ascendancy* where the laity are actually superior to other actors and elements in CST evolution.

Thus while I can appreciate this prominent text as a good compendium of documents, its underlying orientation presses the untrained student toward a basic stance of antagonism toward the Magisterium and its public output on social issues. The basically positive ideas that a student must read CST documents with active attention to context and work hard to form their own conscience, are polluted with signals that dissent is acceptable if it comes to that, and we will be better off for it. This jeopardizes the whole thrust of the text in my view, and seems a sad example of precisely the sort of distorted subjectivism John Paul II warned about in *Veritatis Splendor*.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, let us consider the works of Fr. Thomas Massaro. Three of his books appeared in my baker's dozen: *Catholic Social Teaching and United States Welfare Reform* (1998); *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (2000); and *American Catholic Social Teaching* (2002), which he edited with Thomas Shannon. These works serve different niches of CST pedagogy, but all have in common good expository writing appropriate to the level of college undergraduates.

Massaro's case study of welfare reform policy is a very good textbook, but I found it is intended for a more advanced student audience, so I will not analyze it further. It is interesting simply to note that Massaro can write good interpretive sociology and does so there: this text strikes me as not a work of CST per se, but rather a social science text informed by CST ideas. This signals that he may be part of the trend in CST toward a blurring of the lines between social science and CST which, despite its positive

possibilities, may also be part of the larger problem of the latent secularization of CST as a field being explored here.

I might very well use Massaro's *Living Justice* in a course because of the qualities of his writing, objective summaries of CST ideas, and helpful learning aids for students such as charts linking main CST themes with locations in 12 classic encyclicals, council texts or bishops' documents where the theme is most fully developed. He treats these documents in an orthodox way, and poses a future for CST evolution that is not particularly strident or overtly rebellious. No *Humanae Vitae*, of course, as Massaro follows the general trend of defining CST as an arena of political economy, and avoiding the doctrinally uncomfortable. He starts pedagogically smart, with stories about individuals making choices in our society: stories about encountering the poor, offering legal aid to immigrants, and the like. His discussion questions at the end of the chapters are mostly well-formulated, and ask students for personal reflections in a way that does connect to experiences they are likely to have had.

So, I admire this brief book. Yet there are two important cautions to be made. First, in looking toward the future Massaro builds his case for a "new" CST with a rather positivistic, sociological rationale. He notes that previously "...[T]he church exhibited more confidence that the conclusions it drew from using natural law reasoning were fixed and final. Recent decades, however, have witnessed such rapid social change that the need for ongoing social analysis and data collection could no longer be ignored" (p.210). "Reality" is being defined in terms of statistical patterns in thought and behavior, and what can be observed to change over time. Thus in building a possibly useful bridge

between Catholic Social Teaching and social science, perhaps Massaro has stepped over a line that students would find quite confusing.

Second, in his final missive to readers Massaro gives those outside of the Church hierarchy the primary role on shaping CST—and with a curious tone.

It might be appropriate to close this book with a reminder that places the contributions of Catholic social teaching in proper perspective. Even if popes and bishops suddenly decided to stop writing encyclicals and publishing documents on social issues, the work of the Church in pursuing justice would not cease. The God of justice is present whenever Christian people, motivated by their faith and acting on convictions about the proper ordering of political and economic life in society, engage in efforts to make the world a place of greater fairness and peace. Just as no one may limit the actions of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to chain the gospel of justice and peace (p.236).

What might an uninformed student make of such a dramatic send-off? Who or what is doing the chaining? It is the Church hierarchy itself. This innuendo becomes clearer in the next paragraph: “What we often need most is not another bishops’ committee or another encyclical to quote but, rather, a greater commitment on the part of many of the faithful to live out their beliefs about social justice in a courageous yet prudent way” (ibid.) Citing saintly models of individual activism such as Peter Claver and Mother Theresa, Massaro takes the well-accepted point that CST is in fact teaching and not specific doctrine, and the valid sociological criticism that the Church can act too much the bureaucracy, and signals to students that the “authentic” Church is more what regular people can rise to do than what the institution hands on.

In summary we see a subtle message relying on sociological thinking to build the CST field, and driving a growing wedge between “official” and “popular” CST—and precisely in a pedagogical context in which the CST source documents are identified and referred to with some respect and deference. His citations of primary sources are not

absent or hostile; his sociological concerns and criticisms are rather accurate; his exhortation to commit one's life to justice rather noble. It would be easy to miss an underlying project of detachment from the very idea of needing a Magisterium and hierarchy to help us make proper social analyses and choices.

Then we come to the 2002 Massaro and Shannon collection of *American CST* materials. This work presents a doubt-inducing message with a different twist: they fulfill the longing expressed by O'Brien and Shannon back in 1992 to free themselves from the constraint of having to present Magisterial documents as part of the CST canon at all.

Massaro and Shannon indicate they seek to expand the parameters of the CST canon in three directions: back in time, so as to include materials produced prior to *Rerum Novarum* (which is where CST document sets typically begin); more locally, so as to include materials written by individuals or groups, lay and ordained, about particular situations or issues within particular dioceses or regions; and finally, in a more applied direction, so as to embrace materials produced by a wider variety of individuals inside and outside the Church that are particularly cogent or compelling on a particular issue.

Their book consists of a written text with enclosed CD-ROM. The latter includes "Volume I: The Documents" generated over time by the American hierarchy, such as U.S. bishops' councils, conferences and task forces. The paper text students have before them contains "Volume II: Analysis of the Tradition," a series of articles from 1792 to the present by ordained and lay authors. Some are classics, like Fr. John Ryan's 1924 "A Living Wage" or Bishop John Ireland's 1913 "Catholicism and Americanism." But most are drawn from contemporary liberal and feminist traditions, many from the pages of *America* magazine.

In expanding the canon of CST in this *very* broad way, and not too subtly placing the student's physical focus on the current debates rather than even the American "source" texts by splitting up their presentation and placement technologically, Massaro and Shannon have stretched the category "CST" in a new and I think distorted way that *elides the traditional foundations altogether*. The link to Rome is decidedly snapped. What might the untrained student make of this? "CST is what's in the book, isn't it?" I would surmise. To use this text without another that does include Magisterial classics would be a serious distortion of the meaning of CST as a field.

### **Some Ways to Improve CST Texts and Pedagogy**

Let me conclude with four suggestions to assist future textbook development, concerning both CST thematic content and pedagogical strategies. First, as I have noted, gender issues are making their way into CST texts, thus expanding the traditional emphasis in CST on political economics into areas of culture and social psychology. But they are broached in a highly biased way, often through writings of Marxists, or of radical feminists many of whom admit they remain in the Church simply as a tactic to leverage their critique. Insofar as there exist valid concerns about sexism and related issues in society and the Church, faithful CST text writers ought to work to broaden the scope of CST themes beyond political economics to include more cultural analysis. For example, key CST source documents should always include *Humanae Vitae* and related culture of life material. They should challenge the types of feminism commonly set forth, and directly address the contemporary pattern of men's and women's work, home lives

and family structure issues in the manner of John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*, for example, or the recent document on family, marriage and “de facto unions” put out by the Pontifical Council for the Family.

Second, in doing this broadening faithful texts must always continue to include the traditional, Magisterial Church teachings and clearly indicate their authority and status; commentaries and analyses must also be assigned a clear status that is different from the others. We must ensure that in presenting CST especially to beginning students, we show the important *positive* relationship between documents originating from the pope or the Magisterium and other relevant materials. Too many texts suggest that this relationship is now antagonistic.

Third, we must improve the pedagogy of the texts as learning tools. Too many current texts assume too much basic socio-historical knowledge on the part of student readers in both their explication and discussion questions; we are perhaps as guilty as other academic experts of forgetting what novices don't know about our material and how it fits together. This for example: “If you had lived in the years before *Rerum Novarum* was published in 1891, would you likely have joined the effort of the early pioneers of ‘Social Catholicism?’ Why or why not?” (Massaro, 2000, 77). More distressing to me in the *Dissenting and Troubling Middle* books is how often discussion questions are highly loaded and directional: “Cesar Chavez combined the social teaching of the church [sic] with the organizing skills of the Industrial Areas Foundation (Saul Alinsky). What does this tell us about effective social action?” (Mich, 2001, 176). Questions should open students to inquiry, not pass on ideology in the guise of inquiry.

Finally we must beware of how history can be misused pedagogically. I could not help wondering *why* authors attempting to redefine the content and message of CST would so frequently make erroneous assumptions about student background knowledge. Historical revisionism may be a part of this but I also believe there is an effort to form the student's conscience in a particular way, around expressive individualism and pride, by reading history as a history of intergroup struggle, personal liberation, and identity politics. A faithful text should therefore not evoke student interest with cheap emotional arousal, rejection of authority, and a promise of personal liberation, but rather on the discernment of fundamental and eternal truths and an ability to carefully reflect on one's own personal and social situation.

I encourage educators to be more alert to the exact nature of the pedagogical biases in current CST texts, their roots in particular theology and ecclesiology, and their legitimation through structures of "faithful dissent." I invite them to begin to develop new CST texts more faithful to our tradition, so that we can build a stronger base of college classroom resources for our Church leaders of tomorrow.

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### **Notes**

This paper is based on a more detailed presentation by the same title given at the October 2002 meetings of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, Ave Maria School of Law, Ann Arbor, MI.

1. This phrase appeared as early as 1985, in the title of one of the books to be explored later: Peter Henriot, Edward DeBerri, and Michael

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Schultheis, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*. Centenary (3<sup>rd</sup>) Edition, first published 1985. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, and Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 2002).

2. "Summary Report of U.S. Bishops' Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education," appearing in *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions. Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*. Publication 5-281. (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1998); and Paul Sullins, "Catholic Social Teaching: What Do Catholics Know, and What Do They Believe?" Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, Ann Arbor, MI, 2001.

3. For an interesting parallel effort to examine the anti-Catholic bias in history instruction at the secondary and college level, including specific "politically correct" errors and distortions in common history textbooks, see Diane Moczar, "Education: The Plight of the History Student," *Latin Mass* 12, No.2 (Spring 2003): 70-73.

4. One important if specialized exception to this is the very fine analysis of how CST is taught in today's Catholic seminaries, *Catholic Social Teaching at the Seminaries: The Formation of America's Future Priests*, a panel discussion by Robert Royal, Samuel Gregg, Joseph Capizzi, Brian Benestad, and Robert Zylla, OSC (Washington, DC: Faith and Reason Institute, 2002). They consider many of the same textbooks I will refer to in this paper, and with the same concerns, though approach issues from a more deeply theological perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Joseph Varacalli, "Secular Sociology's War Against Familiaris Consortio and the Traditional Family: Whither Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Sociology?", appearing in Anthony Mastroeni (ed.), *The Church and the Universal Catechism: Proceedings from the 15<sup>th</sup> Convention*. Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, 1992: 161-85; or Anthony Haynor and Joseph Varacalli, "Sociology's Fall from Grace: The Six Deadly Sins of a Discipline at the Crossroads." *Quarterly Journal of Ideology*, Vol. 16 Nos. 1 and 2 (June 1995): 3-29.

6. For example see Mark Beeman, Geeta Chowdry, and Karmen Todd, "Educating Students About Affirmative Action: An Analysis of University Sociology Textbooks," *Teaching Sociology* 28, No.2 (March 2000): 98-115. Or for a review article summarizing themes in the literature on sociology textbook development, including extensive bibliographic references, see Diana Kendall, "Doing a Good Deed or Confounding the Problem: Peer Review and Sociology Textbooks," *Teaching Sociology* 27, No.1 (January 1999): 17-30.

7. A poignant example of this approach may be found in the entry entitled "Feminism and Catholic Social Thought," written by Barbara Hogan, appearing in Judith Dwyer (Ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994). Hogan explains (p.395) that "the patriarchal organization of the church [sic] and of modern scholarship" so "shapes the process by which official Catholic social teaching has been formulated" that the corpus of CST cannot be taken as much more than the male biases of its authors.

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8. See George Weigel, *The Courage to be Catholic: Crisis, Reform, and the Future of the Church*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002), especially chapter 3.

9. Charles Curran, *Faithful Dissent* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1986).

10. More recently, for example, he has produced a very thorough two-volume analysis of CST documents and issues entitled *Christian Social Witness and Teaching: The Catholic Tradition from Genesis to Centesimus Annus* (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing Press, 1998).

11. This encouraging challenge among both laity and clergy is documented, for example, in Colleen Carroll, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002).

12. See Philip Land, SJ, *Catholic Social Teaching as I Have Lived, Loathed and Loved It*. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), p.32; and James Hug, SJ, "Thirty Years of Struggling for Social Justice." *Center Focus: News from the Center of Concern* (30<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue) No.152 (June 2001): 1-3.

13. U.S. Catholic Conference, *op.cit.*

14. William Byron, SJ, "Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching." *America* (October 31, 1998): 9-12.

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15. See John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)*  
(Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1993), especially paragraphs 32 ff.