

BOOK REVIEW

Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith That Does Justice. By Roger Bergman. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011. 203 pp. \$24. ISBN 978-0-8232-3329-8.

Written by a Creighton University professor, and founder of their Justice and Peace Studies Program, this book offers a well-constructed experiential and pedagogical framework for how educators can help university students to learn about Catholic social teaching (hereafter abbreviated as CST), with the overarching aim of helping to stimulate in students a deeper hunger and thirst for “faith-justice” (9, 14-15, 24).

The book is divided into three sections: *foundations of CST* (a discussion of the essential importance of personal encounter, a review of Jesuit pedagogy and of a moral philosophy of education); *applications* (various pedagogical options for learning about CST); and *institution and program* (education for faith-justice in a Catholic context, and recommendations for higher education). The first two sections nicely set the stage for the third.

One of the overarching themes of the book builds on a point which Bergman takes from *Populorum Progressio* and from the philosopher Gabriel Marcel, namely, that personal encounter is the key to real change (11-12). This timely emphasis gets to the heart of true education, most especially in a Christian context.

Given his Jesuit education and teaching background, the author understandably takes a largely Jesuit approach, though even those unfamiliar with this method should still find the text thought-provoking and relevant. Drawing on the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm of *experience-reflection-action* (28), and the pastoral circle of *insertion – social analysis – theological reflection – pastoral planning* (36), Bergman proposes, for Catholic social learning purposes, a strategy which he calls the pedagogical circle of *insertion – social analysis – theological reflection – vocational discernment* (37): help students to be immersed into personal encounters with people suffering from injustice, to think about this critically, to understand the reality of the suffering as Christian disciples, and to respond to Christ’s call to engage with those suffering from injustice. As regards the *discernment* part of the circle, Bergman is especially concerned with the kind of persons that students are becoming in the face of injustice and suffering.

Bergman offers a quite thoughtful, and necessarily brief description of Alasdair MacIntyre’s work on practice, tradition, narrative and virtue—as relevant to his topic of Catholic social learning (39-55). One point he draws from MacIntyre is the role which immersion into a shared practice and tradition can

play in forming the virtues (94). This implies a communal context, and so Bergman links this point with the idea of university as community. His underlying question therefore is how faith-justice education within the university community can help to form students into agents of social change. In addition to St. Ignatius and MacIntyre, Bergman draws on the works of Aristotle and Blessed John Henry Newman, as well as Nietzsche's text "Schopenhauer as Educator."

One of the strengths of the book lies in Bergman's description of three possible applications of Catholic social learning within a higher education context: chapter four on intense mission visits, chapter five on service learning, and chapter six on the study of moral exemplars. This range of applications is helpful to consider for many reasons. For example, these applications can work together, and thus potentially could all be implemented within a single institution. By comparison, some institutions or programs may not have the support or available resources to implement all three, so describing a range of educational options in terms of cost and time requirements is helpful.

All three options are well-described and illustrated with examples and student testimony, drawn from Bergman's experiences. To highlight just one point: Bergman's description of a moral exemplar approach to faith-justice education is rightly nuanced, and does not fall into the trap of thinking that simple imitation of exemplars (e.g., just read about Dorothy Day and your students will become committed in one semester to serving the poor and homeless!) is automatic or sufficient (93-94, 109).

Another point Bergman emphasizes is the importance of narrative in MacIntyre's thinking. He uses this idea to ground the efficacy of his third approach of learning from moral exemplars, which clearly ties to narrative and biography. The author goes on to describe an Aristotelian take on common criteria shared by moral exemplars: a commitment to moral principles; the disposition to act in accord with one's principles; a willingness to risk one's self interest for the sake of moral values; a tendency to inspire and move others to action; and a sense of realistic humility about oneself (98-99). The author also makes clear that deep imitation of moral exemplars is a life-long process (109), a helpful reminder for those teaching as well as those learning.

Bergman notes that most typical US university students are by definition entering into a liminal state, moving from their childhood and teenage years into a new and likely more ambiguous state. This can create an opening for creativity and transformation, including in terms of faith-justice (100), and thus the author encourages educators to consciously build on the openings which accompany this liminal state.

Bergman's style is quite readable and approachable. I recommend this

instructive and relevant book to faculty and staff at Catholic or Christian institutions of higher education. Ideally, it would be read in common with departmental or interdepartmental colleagues, faculty and staff at a university. Additionally, I echo Bergman's advice to become familiar with the documentary heritage which provides the backbone for CST (19).

A related recommendation would be to read this book within a larger context of Catholic faith identity, life, prayer and formation, so that students, faculty or staff do not inadvertently narrow the faith only to its social teaching and implications. For example, drawing on the 1971 Synod *Justice in the World*, Bergman rightly, though briefly, points out how shared liturgy should form the Church and Christians to be able to engage in faith-justice efforts (19). Lastly, it would also be worth reading Bergman's book in conjunction with Church documents such as *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and/or the *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*.

Given his decades of involvement in faith-justice education and learning, I was hoping to read about Bergman's experiences with long-term and fundamental changes in students he has taught, though unfortunately this was not a major topic in this text. Those engaged in teaching about Catholic faith-justice, or supporting academic programs which do so, will benefit from reading, studying and discussing this text with colleagues. Bergman brings experience, knowledge, commitment and passion to this vital topic in our contemporary Christian higher education structures.

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