
Since getting my first exposure to Catholic social doctrine from Franciscan University of Steubenville's Dr. Stephen Krason in 1996, I have tried to read as much as possible on the subject. The problem is that no one source has it all. Some books deal only with this or that topic. Others touch on many aspects of Catholic social thought, but do so in an way that leaves me wanting. Then came the ad for this book. At last, I thought after reading it, there is a compendium of magisterial teaching on this important topic.

After receiving it, however, the old adages, "You can't always believe what you read," and "Buyer beware," came to mind. Don't get me wrong. The book is exhaustive in its treatment of the subject, and is structured in a way that makes it easy to use. But it was written back in 1932. This means developments in Catholic social thought since Pius XI passed into happy memory are absent. The result is that in some places the book virtually screams for the writings of John Paul II, Pius XII, and the Second Vatican Council because of the important contributions each have made.

Another problem is the book tackles many issues that once were prominent features of the world's political landscape but now represent little more than historical memories. It also comes at them from a Eurocentric perspective, rarely touching on forces peculiar to America. The biggest example of this is the author's treatment of "Bolshevism." It is thorough and hits all of the major points. Still, with the Berlin Wall relegated to something souvenir stands sell in small chunks, the talk about communism struck me as quaint.

When Cahill makes comments about other contemporary social forces (e.g., fascism), he gives these a largely positive spin. And he rarely uses the words "Jew" or "Jewish" where he doesn't put them in the context of Jewish financiers who funded the overthrow of the Russian monarch, Freemasonry, and how this ancient and historically godly people are the greatest promoters of rampant secularism. If this illustrates the prevailing sentiment in Europe in the early thirties, Hitler's rise to power is less difficult to fathom. One finds scattered remarks about such perceived dangers as "coloured peoples," including a warning that Japan, whose population was 40,000,000 in 1892, would reach 100,000,000 people on its islands by 1960. Because of such problems, I considered returning the book. I decided, however, to continue. I wanted to see if it in any way lived up to the grandiose billing it received in its publisher's advertisement.
Given the fact that Church teaching is impervious to change, I am happy to say the book generally does live up to the advertising copy. Cahill's presentation of the truths about Catholic social thought are thorough and convincing. He begins with his vision of what a Christian state would and would not look like. In the process, he touches on the medieval economy, liberal capitalism, socialism, Freemasonry, Protestantism and its effects, and "the social question," along with all that entails. This look at the contemporary social doctrines and conditions in Europe takes up the first part of the book. The second part tackles such issues as the proper relationship between husband and wife, the individual's duties and rights, the family, the social status of women, and much more.

Cahill's treatment of these subjects is interesting. How much of it is definitive Church teaching and how much is his use of such to score ideological points is open to debate. For instance, on the social status of women, he rightly points out that men and women are entirely equal in the eyes of God. "The doctrine of Aristotle, that the woman is a kind of inferior to man (mas occasionatus) is devoid of foundation, and is specially repulsive to the Catholic, who has been taught from childhood to honour the Mother of God . . . ." He then points to the legitimate differences between the two sexes that many today ignore or deny. From there, however, he states that since women are naturally ordered to motherhood, their functioning outside the home is "against the intentions of the Creator, and must prove injurious to society as well as to the persons concerned." While recent American history would certainly seem to bear this out, the problem with such a blanket condemnation, if you will, is that it lacks the pastoral approach of a Pius XII or John Paul II. For instance, His Holiness recently stated, "Thank you, women who work! You are present and active in every area of life--social, economic, cultural, artistic, and political. In this way you make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling, to a model of life ever open to the sense of mystery, to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity." (Letter to Women attending the Beijing Conference). These are hardly the words of someone who agrees that women working outside the home go "against the intentions of the Creator, and must prove injurious to society as well as to the persons concerned."

It is possible that Cahill meant to refer exclusively to mothers. He doesn't make this clear, however, and so one is left to wonder. This is just one example of the shortcomings encountered with a book that is over 60 years old. Otherwise, though, there is not much in this nearly 700-page tome that would contradict the Catechism. Ultimately, is it worth the $50 the book costs? If you are someone in love with the social doctrines of the Church, yes. Why? Because for better or worse, despite its aforementioned flaws, there is possibly
no other resource that provides as complete a picture of Catholic social teaching than this book. It is well written and generally to the point. The question is, though, can you stomach the unfortunate parts to get to the good stuff?

-Brian K. O'Neel
Franciscan University of Steubenville


Unfortunately, this book is NOT the story of feminism. If it were, the history of the last thirty years might have been a lot less traumatic to western civilization.

Fox-Genovese is credited with being the founding mother, as it were, of Women's Studies--a dubious honor, considering the depths to which many such departments have declined. As a historian, however, she is capable of evaluating the impact of social trends. In this volume, she applies that ability to the contemporary feminist movement and proceeds to enumerate and document not only its shortcomings but its divisive effects on society, and its baneful effects on women and children.

Feminism set out to rewrite the story of what it meant to be a woman in America, she says, but from the start, it has divided women by race, religion, and class. Throughout the book, but especially in the sections on the economic revolution, is this class-consciousness evident. She carefully documents that, as women's "right to work" has progressed, the effect has been to widen the gap between educated and uneducated women while narrowing the gap between women and men of equal education and same race.

Take, for example, the famous "59 cents" slogan (supposedly women earned $.59 for every dollar a man earned), vintage 1980. Today, she notes, "young full-time women workers are earning 90 percent or more of what their male colleagues earn." (And, oh joy, she footnotes it--it's a rare pleasure to read a book about feminism which footnotes everything the reader would want footnoted!) And for educated women, as of 1992 women held almost half of all managerial and professional positions.

So much anyone might be able to guess, anecdotally. What Fox-Genovese does is to tease out the implications of that development, to analyze it. Here's where the issue of employment opportunity gets interesting. What does it mean that, between 1982 and 1992, when men lost a net 93,000 management jobs, women gained a net 520,000 management jobs? What does it mean that 70% of social service jobs in the public sector are held by women?

Fox-Genovese takes no explicit stand for or against divorce, abortion, or