

## Citizens of the Heavenly City: A Catechism of Catholic Social Teaching

**Arthur Hippler**

St. Paul, Minnesota: Borromeo Books, 2005 (154 pages)

A striking feature of a good deal of contemporary literature on Catholic social teaching (to say nothing of the materials produced by diocesan offices of justice and peace) is its almost completely untheological character, which is to say that one is often left wondering how the imperatives to this or that set of social commitments are related to confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord or being a citizen of a kingdom not of this world. Furthermore, in many presentations of the subject, basic doctrines are routinely distorted beyond the point of recognition by any reasonably well-catechized Catholic. The claim is often made, for instance, that the virtue of justice is equal or even superior to charity inasmuch as it wills the improvement or transformation of unjust societal “structures,” while charity is merely concerned with remedying the effects of injustice in the lives of individuals. Charity, in other words, needs to be perfected by justice. Thus, wondrously, a natural virtue is elevated over the highest of the supernatural. This, of course, is not a defect in the sources of the social teachings themselves but rather in the secondary literature—much of which is catechetical. Catholics and others can be pleased, then, that Arthur Hippler has produced a catechism that explains both clearly and convincingly the connections between the most fundamental theological claims of the Church and its teaching about the nature and purpose of political life.

While it is a short work written primarily for high school students, *Citizens of the Heavenly City* makes ample use of Scripture, a number of doctors and fathers of the Church, as well as no fewer than fifty-one papal documents from most of the popes of the last two centuries. These are not marshaled for the purpose of presenting the Church’s “stand” on various social issues; rather, they are used in the course of an examination of the Ten Commandments of the Old Law, which “keep[s] in mind the Two Commandments of the New Law” (4). This means that the Church’s social teaching is understood first and foremost not in light of man’s obligations to his fellow man but to God who is his creator and final end.

That Hippler locates social life in the larger context of man’s supernatural vocation to beatitude would be enough to set this book apart from the mass of books on social teaching, but he also reminds us that the cornerstone of this teaching is the kingship of Jesus Christ. When he instituted the Solemnity of Christ the King, Pius XI declared, “As long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of Our Savior, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations” (*Quas primas*, n. 1). Hippler himself states unequivocally, “all rulers must have Jesus as their superior, or else they will rule unjustly. Society must have Jesus as its king, or else it will suffer” (16). The prohibition against blasphemy and the command to keep the Sabbath holy accordingly do not concern only the piety of individuals but are requisite to the health

of society because both immoderate freedom of speech and a work ethic that is not ordered to the attainment of spiritual goods undermine the common good.

The Augustinian principle by which the human things are viewed always in relation to man's supernatural end is found in every chapter and accounts for the book's emphasis on the limited and mostly negative role of government. Thus, in his treatment of the fourth commandment, Hippler devotes a full chapter to explaining that the duty to honor father and mother applies to the state as much as to sons and daughters. Save in emergency cases, civil government must always defer to parents' authority over their children. The state cannot determine where children will be educated and in fact "has the obligation to support religious schools in accord with the conscience of religious parents" (44). Lest anyone think this fantastical, the Second Vatican Council itself declared that governments must see to it that "public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to conscience the schools they want for their children" (*Gravissimum educationis*, n. 6).

The good of the social order depends less on the efficiency of civil government than the virtue of the citizenry. Against the Kantian leanings of some of his contemporaries, Hippler reasserts the Catholic teaching that the thing most needful for the good society is good citizens. Social teaching is to a very great extent the teaching about the social dimension of the life of virtue with the recognition that that life has its material prerequisites, which include a just wage, private property, and national security. By this account, then, modesty, "the virtue by which we protect purity through speech, dress, and our exterior movements" (144), is treated as a civic virtue that safeguards family life.

This way of speaking about the public character of what are typically considered private virtues reveals Hippler's more classical way of thinking about political things. For the ancients, the *nomoi*, or laws, encompassed not just formal legislation but also the "ways" or "conventions" of the city—what we might call "the culture." What people watch, listen to, and talk about is as much a focus of Catholic social activism as more direct civic involvement because culture forms the passions that are the soil in which the virtues and vices take root. Hippler's use of encyclicals on media and communications, beginning with Pius XI's *Vigilanti cura* (On Motion Pictures), is one of the ways in which he recovers the fuller patrimony of the magisterium's social teaching.

What is not at all classical (though, for that, genuinely Catholic) about *Citizens of the Heavenly City* is its indifference to the question of the best form of government. It reminds us that all earthly authority comes from God and is rebelled against to the peril of one's soul. Yet, the earthly city cannot be taken seriously on its own terms. Whatever it might claim for itself, it must be for the Christian a "vale of tears," the land of our sojourning.

Hippler's book will be a bracing and appealing read, especially for the young people who are its intended audience. Teenagers may question authority, but they have no tolerance for condescension and flim-flam. Happily, Hippler does not give them any:

“Above all, the hardest teaching to accept (for it is the principal of all the other teachings) is that our society cannot survive without openly honoring Jesus Christ as the King of Nations, and following the directions of His Catholic Church” (134). What sets this book apart from so many others that wish to explain Catholic social teaching is that it gives us again what Augustine first gave in the fifth century: the fundamental alternative between two cities, separated not by distance but by love (137).

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**God and the Evil of Scarcity:  
Moral Foundations of Economic Agency**

**Albino Barrera, O.P.**

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A theodicy is an argument aiming to show that the existence of evil in this world is not incompatible with God’s attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence. Failure to establish such compatibility would undermine the belief in the existence of God, or at least, the perfect and benevolent God of Christianity.

In the Jewish religion of old, an explanation for misfortune and misery was provided that was not only consistent with God’s existence but also firmly grounded on it: Yahweh punished anyone who did not observe his law or the agreements made with him. This doctrine was in itself quite satisfactory but did not square with the alarmingly iniquitous schemes whereby rewards and punishments were meted out. It would be tempting to see in the book of Job the first text in which the need for a theodicy in the modern sense is expressed. Indeed, Job, convinced of his irreproachability in the midst of the many misfortunes befalling him, reclaims a theodicy from God; he challenges Yahweh to show him his justice! Not for a moment does Job harbor the thought that God might not exist.

The general attitude of the Christian religion is well summarized by Leszek Kolakowski in *Religion* (1982), in which he explains that suffering, whether resulting from natural causes or directly inflicted by human beings upon themselves or others, “is ultimately reducible to the same source: moral separation from God.” The Christian view of suffering as a punishment for man’s sin “is a biblical view which, particularly in Saint Augustine, has become a part of orthodox teaching.”

Now, there is a mythical aspect to Genesis that requires an interpretation. If we should not wish to accept the crude biological-penal doctrine of original sin formulated by Augustine, how should we understand the state of “moral separation from God” in which mankind is supposed to lie?

Many Christian philosophers preferred to attempt to produce an explanation of evil while remaining within the bounds of natural theology rather than by way of an inter-