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THE FAILURE OF THE THERAPEUTIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETY AND CHURCH

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM



ADVOCATES OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERALISM CLAIM THAT THE HISTORY OF American society, up to and including the present, is one which is progressively improving and becoming ever more humane.¹ Underlying this claim are certain taken-for-granted assumptions that should be brought to the fore. One is a unilinear evolutionary scheme that posits the idea of Progress, i.e., as history marches forward, civilization moves ever closer to some utopian state of affairs. Related to this is the assumption that Progress can be measured in terms of gains in material development and accumulation, in terms of individualism defined as complete autonomy and freedom defined as unlimited choice, and in terms of the degree to which science supersedes and replaces supernaturally based religion.

Part and parcel of this supposedly inexorable march is the emergence and widespread institutionalization of the “therapeutic mentality.” By this is meant a subjectivist philosophy and practical guide for action that is concerned primarily with furthering the worldly pleasures, experiential development, perceived needs, and sense of well-being of the solitary individual. As Philip Rieff states, “that a sense of well-being has become the end, rather than a by-product of striving after some superior communal end, announces a fundamental change of focus in the entire cast of our culture...”² A far more troubling interpretation is offered by William K. Kilpatrick: “Our transformation into a psychological society has brought with it a new set of values. They are shallow and selfish values for the most part, and they are the ruling values. But that is not the worst side of the situation. The disturbing thing is the very effective suppression of alternatives. It is difficult to remember what the old values are, let alone to pass them on.”³

Supporters argue that the spread of the therapeutic mentality throughout all sectors of society, the Catholic Church included, has been salutary. One result, so the argument goes, is that there is a greater sensitivity to the American poor. Relationships between husbands and wives are likewise characterized as more consensual and caring and children are now granted legal protection against abusive parents. It is claimed that television and the mass media, for their part, now provide “dignity” to lifestyles and ideologies once unfairly portrayed as pathological and unacceptable. Formal education is now lauded for being centered on the needs of the creative, spontaneous, and potentially autonomous child. The criminal justice system is presently seen as more humane, appropriately concerned not only with the “rights” of the criminal but with the moral and intellectual complexities involved in understanding the very nature of crime itself. Similarly, the therapeutic revolution that has taken hold of the Catholic Church in the U.S. is seen, in a phrase, to make the institution much more “Christ-like.”

While there is a grain of truth to the salutary effects of the therapeutic mentality, in our present society it has been emphasized out of its proper proportion in relationship to more important allegiances that transcend the individual, i.e., the human being’s ultimate commitment to God and penultimate obligation to a society composed of

the children of God. Indeed, the unqualified application of the therapeutic mentality threatens not only a civilization necessarily built on human solidarity but, even more importantly, the salvation of souls. The evidence is in: a fair verdict is that the therapeutic mentality has failed society and Church with serious and unhappy consequences for both.

Regarding American society, we will examine how the therapeutic mentality has brought about changes in culture, the family, television, formal education, the criminal justice system, and, in general, the role of government. Regarding the Church, discussion will be centered on changes in the image of God; in the concept of sin; in participation in the rite of reconciliation; in pastoral practice to divorced and remarried Catholics, homosexuals, feminists, and youthful practitioners of pre-marital sex; in the nature and perception of the institutional Church and in the role of individual conscience; and in the religious orders and seminaries. This essay should be considered primarily interpretive and exploratory, setting up a host of issues and hypotheses to be subsequently researched more fully and tested empirically by Catholic social scientists.

II: AMERICAN SOCIETY

When Edward Banfield published his thesis that one significant cause of poverty was the existence of a counter culture of pathological values, he was, unsurprisingly and unfairly, attacked by the Left as being both insensitive and racist. In brief, his argument was that certain sectors of the poor were poor because they were participants in a cultural world that stressed a present-oriented hedonism and lacked, conversely, the necessary middle-class emphasis (at that time, at least) on such virtues as marital fidelity and a work ethic.⁴ One must acknowledge that there are many other reasons for the emergence and spread of poverty in the U.S. that include the expanding welfare state,⁵ various forms of discrimination,⁶ and the move of industry and positive role models away from the inner cities and wherever the poor are located.⁷ To circumscribe Banfield's thesis, however, is not to deny it. As a matter of fact, Banfield's analysis is even more important today and not just

because of the deteriorating position of the "underclass," whether black, Hispanic, or white. Rather, Banfield is more relevant today because of the dispersion "upwards" of a worldview-now "subcultural" and no longer "countercultural"-that now extends well into the middle classes. Drugs, alcohol, and "liberated" sex are now part of the self-destructive "tool kit" of not only a certain segment of the American poor but also of yupified bourgeois Americans in search of either outright self-gratification or some "new age," therapeutically-informed religious reformulation.

As Bellah, et al.,⁸ have noted, in the area of the family, the move is clear: marriage and family are seen less and less as religious and social institutions whose function is to serve God and society and more and more as arenas of interpersonal enjoyment, romantic love, and psychic experimentation. Marriage is, more and more, for "fun" and "happiness" and, less and less, "a duty." When the fun stops, says Bishop Rene Gracida, "then we must choose between that happiness and the solemn commitments we have made to one another and to the Lord..." Given that "non-belief pervades contemporary culture," Bishop Gracida sadly acknowledges, "the cost of faithfulness is likely to seem too high."⁹ As such, divorce is the perceived logical next step and the issue of "what's good for the kids," spiritually or even materially, becomes secondary. Indeed, children are progressively seen as by-products of marriage and not as one of its primary aims. Many upper-middle class marriages today are contracted with the conscious understanding that no children are wanted and that abortion will serve as a form of birth control.

The therapeutic invasion of the family can usefully be discussed within the typology of Western family types presented by sociologist Carle C. Zimmerman.¹⁰ For Zimmerman, in the ultratraditional trustee family,

there is no acknowledgment of the rights of the individual as they are buried within the perceived collective interests of clans and extended families. In the ultramodern atomistic family, familism is replaced by individualism and by the growth and power of the authoritarian State. In his intermediary type, the domestic family, there is achieved a via media between



Edward Banfield

the rights and duties of the individual, the family, and government. The domestic family is clearly the most compatible with the Catholic tradition and suggests that the incorporation of a certain type and amount of the therapeutic worldview does humanize the trustee family. However, the present day atomistic family is greatly harmed by the uncritical application of the therapeutic mentality. Speaking of Sweden, “perhaps the most therapeutically oriented country in the world,” Kilpatrick observes that “a law has been passed forbidding parents to spank their children. Further, it is a criminal offense to threaten, ostracize, ridicule, or otherwise ‘psychologically abuse’ children. Presumably this means that parents can no longer raise their voices at their children or send them to their rooms. But there is no evidence that the Swedes are any less melancholy for this enlightenment. By all reports the young people are more bored or restless than ever.”¹¹

Related to the changes in the family are the present trends in television programming. Obviously, television not only reflects society but is itself a force of social change. No longer is the traditional family depicted either as the cognitive reality or as the normative ideal of American life. Rather there is the aggrandizement of alternative lifestyles demanding legitimacy; the depiction of normal family life as actually unhealthy; the stress on the importance of upward social mobility, status achievements, and work as the central defining aspect of personal identity, especially for women; and, in general, a psychologization of married life, which is portrayed in terms of a seemingly never ending quest for personal meaning and fulfillment. The result of this is the weakening and destruction of that most basic cell of society, i.e., the family, upon which civilization as we know it rests.

Another example of how the therapeutic mentality has reared its ugly head can be provided through reference to developments that have taken place in the public system of education over the past few decades, developments, sad to say, that find a significant reflection in their Catholic analogue. As Allan Bloom¹² has argued, character development and the belief that there is an objective truth and moral order “out there” are eschewed in favor of preaching either relativism or some quite specific utopianism (e.g. socialism, feminism) under the guise of “multiculturalism.” Relativism is promoted in order to provide a kind of emotional support and a measure of legitimating respect, regardless of consequence, for groups and lifestyles located at the periphery of society

(e.g. aggrandizing the lifestyle of the black underclass). Arthur Schlesinger has aptly termed the revisionist multicultural scholarship that bends the truth for therapeutic reasons a form of “compensatory” history.¹³ In the more radical form of multiculturalism, the alleged concern for pluralism is, in actuality, nothing more than a thin veneer, a smokescreen, for the attempted institutionalization of some class specific ideological agenda for the U.S.¹⁴ Relativism, in this latter, more virulent form of multiculturalism, is used to destroy, deconstruct, and debunk the present in order to pave the way for the radically new.¹⁵

There are various additional developments along therapeutic lines within the educational system that can all be grouped under the general category of “experiential” education. Least serious but still detrimental is the decision of some schools to eliminate traditional grading categories, i.e., from “A” through “F,” substituting instead either a “pass-fail” system or some vague and generalized reference to the degree of “self-improvement” that the teacher perceives in any particular student. Consistent with the general subjectivization of life that is part and parcel of the matrix from which the therapeutic mentality emanates, such standards of student evaluation tend away from the mastery of objective content and toward the belief that the student potential is itself the ideal. After all, the goal for all of us is to “be all that we can be;” the very claim that there exist objective standards is irrelevant at best, deleterious to the student at worst. Added to this is the tendency for progressive teachers to “pass” insufficiently developed minority students from one grade to another in the attempt to account for “past injustices” and, again, in order not to offend “sensibilities.”



Even more harmful are the incorporation into the schools of the “values clarification” model of education and of a certain type of human sexuality instruction. Accepting the definition of Simon, Howe, and Kirchenbaum, Paul C. Vitz understands the “values clarification” approach as one in which “the goal is to involve students in practical experiences, making them aware of their own feelings, their own ideas, and their own beliefs, so that the choices and decisions they make are conscious and deliberate, based on their own value systems.”¹⁶ The end

result for the student of this method, of course, is either to legitimate a value system of moral relativity or, just as likely albeit latently, to pass on the teacher's own value system—often militantly secular.

Related to this is the introduction of supposedly “value-free” human sexuality courses. In and by itself, a human sexuality course may or may not be considered legitimate from a Catholic perspective depending on one's understanding of the application of subsidiarity vis-a-vis parental authority. A prudential judgment could very well be made in favor of such instruction provided that it is consistent with the natural law and thus eschews any false claims to “value-neutrality.” This is especially the case given the empirical reality of the inadequate religious formation of many Catholic parents today, most of whom are two generations removed from a time when it could be safely assumed that the basic tenets and the inner logic of the Judaic-Christian heritage were understood. It is, respectively, unfortunate and incredible, that human sexuality courses taught by secular and Catholic educators rarely, if ever, refer centrally or positively to such papal encyclicals as *Casti Connubii* (1930) or *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Rather a “values clarification”-like approach is often utilized with the resulting message—perhaps not always unintentional—that the primary function of human sexuality is for pleasure—instrumental and isolated to boot.

Americans still grounded in the remnants of the Judaic-Christian heritage have been recently shocked in another way, i.e., by the increasing number of high profile trial acquittals in violent crime cases in the face of an apparent deluge of evidence suggesting a guilty verdict. Such concepts as free will, sin, and evil are apparently fading from everyday language use and thought processes, to be replaced, instead, by such terms as “addiction,” “illness,” “socialization,” “brainwashing,” “programming,” “behavior modification,” and others depicting various forms of scientific deterministic thought.¹⁷ Even the (now) progressive *New York Daily News*, in an editorial, speaks of “psychobabble and the misuse of psychological and social theory to excuse violent crime.”¹⁸ “Solutions” offered to the social problems adjudicated in the criminal justice system, then, become the prerogative of therapists, often government employed or appointed. Speaking of Lyle and Erik Menendez, in their first trial for the murder of their parents, Stuart Goldman states bluntly:

...in a world where morality is dictated by therapists rather than God, where evil is discounted as myth, where feeling good is the end-all and be-all, they can be comforted by the thought that murdering an “abusive” parent is not only permissible—it's healthy. Increasingly, this cut-price nihilism pervades the moral climate of modern America—its classrooms, law offices, television studios, welfare offices, mainline liberal churches and temples, and wherever two or three Ivy League Ph.D.s are gathered together in Freud's name. We have known for some time that this climate produced ghetto kids who would kill for a sneaker; we now know it also shapes rich kids who will kill for a swimming pool, two tennis courts, and a Porsche. For believers in this cheap, ersatz ethical system, remorse has been replaced by self-pity and self-righteousness, truth has been traded for moral relativism, and the only thing one can ever be guilty of is bad judgment. Of all the ugliness we've had to witness in the Mendendez case, this fact is perhaps the most shameful.¹⁹

Catholicism in the U.S.

Somewhat more unexpected is the sad reality that the negative consequences of the therapeutic mentality have so completely saturated the Catholic Church in the U.S. Even such a high priest of a more benevolently understood therapeutic mentality as the Freudian sociologist, Philip Rieff, would be surprised by this development. Writing in 1968, Rieff states that: “The Roman Catholic Church, practiced as she is for over a thousand years in rationalizing experience, seems far more likely to survive as a provender of prudence well into the age of the therapeutic, rather than those Protestant polities in the tradition of the free church, with their modalities of militant conscience.”²⁰ Disagreements aside regarding his Freudian definition of “rationalizing,” it is interesting to note, in retrospect, that Rieff himself could not possibly have predicted the speed and extent of protestantization that took place within American Catholicism in the decades since the completion of the Second Vatican Council.

Processes of secularization both within and outside of the Church have produced two new images of God that are now in competition with the more traditional orthodox Judaic-Christian image of God as “Judge” and “Lord and Master.”²¹ Both of these two new images are related to our discussion of the therapeutic mentality, although in different ways. For the more, relatively speak-

ing, secularized social activists who nonetheless still subjectively define themselves as Catholic, God is viewed as “remote or indifferent to human needs.”²² God is viewed as less directly concerned with the human condition than in the more “personal” orthodox image. Simply put, the secularized social activist doesn’t trust in God (even if he is somehow vaguely a believer) to be a factor in bringing about social justice; rather government-sponsored or movement-organized social change is where the bet lies. It is not St. Frances de Sales’ combination of grace and human action- “Pray as though everything depends on God. Work as though everything depends on you”- which is accepted. Rather the battle cry is John F. Kennedy’s more straightforwardly this-worldly command that “God’s work must truly be our own.” This development is connected to the spread of the therapeutic mentality in that the social activist sees both himself and the government as agents of what the sociologist Vander Zanden calls the “new paternalism.”²³

The other new image of God is not politically but psychologically driven. This is precisely the therapeutic image of God as “lover.” The image is not only of a God whose mercy is fathomless (which it surely is) but of a god who minds not the presumption of mercy and who rejects the need to set absolute religious and moral standards for his hopelessly flawed, and never to be reconciled, flock. For this god, human frailty and finitude and the alleged moral complexity arising out of newly emerging situations provide the rationale for the continual modification of a faith designed to mean different things to different individuals because of different desires and perceived needs. This is the god of the pro-abortion or active homosexual individual who claims a Catholic identity and who often so loudly proclaims his/her “pain and anger” and defiantly demands “justice and compassion.” In other cases, it is the god of the less defiant individual characterized by a weak ego structure, lack of ability to control impulses, and present-time orientation who makes no attempt to help himself/herself while simultaneously pleading for mercy and understanding.

Intimately related to the recent change in the images of God are those changes regarding the traditional understanding of sin. Again, there are two therapeutic understandings of sin, based on the underlying under-

standing of human nature assumed. In the first, the reality of sin is allegedly not denied but radically reinterpreted. Human nature, following Marx among others, is seen as highly malleable and plastic. As with the theology of liberation, sin is defined corporately and as the result of existing social-structural arrangements that can be, in principle, either eliminated or rearranged by the cooperative efforts of the revolutionary and the technocrat.²⁴ Here, the therapeutic mentality is not so much a mechanism for the personal fulfillment of the elite social engineer but represents a paternalistic worldview assisting, whether they like it or not, the uninformed and unenlightened.

In the second understanding, the concept of original sin is simply assumed to be a false one with its all-too-real consequences denied, i.e. the human tendency to fall towards selfishness, hedonism, and narcissism. Instead what is posited is the essential goodness and altruism of the individual, who seeks fulfillment but at the same time is also concerned with the right of others to chart their own destinies. The Church need not here forgive even

the sinner, for there is no real sin to forgive in the first place. In his powerful critique of this mentality, William K. Kilpatrick states that “our slavery to sin is the thing that Christ came to free us from. That is the most fundamental Christian belief. It follows that if you have no consciousness of sin, you simply won’t be able to see the point of Christianity.”²⁵

Changes in the concept of sin, in turn, have affected participation in the sacrament of penance. Here, too, one finds a greater acceptance of the therapeutic mentality by parishioner and priest alike. Regarding the former, the most obvious symptom is the dramatic and unprecedented decrease in the post-Vatican II era of the practice of regular confession. Indeed, the priest is progressively being replaced, at least in the middle-class, by the psychologist/psychiatrist/social worker. Related to this is the issue of what “sins” are routinely confessed. A good hypothesis is that missing obligatory weekly Mass or involvement in what Jacinta of Fatima called “sins of the flesh” are, in comparison to the immediate post-World War II era, typically underrepresented. Conversely, today it is the case that the interpersonal sins of alleged “insensitivity” and “offering offense” to one’s neighbors are overrepresented. The


“Pray as though everything depends on God. Work as though everything depends on you”
-St. Frances de Sales


truth of man's obligation to God is viewed as less important than is his obligation to a false sense of civility. Social gospel and liberation theology types-if they go to confession at all-would logically ask repentance for their failure to transform satisfactorily this veil of tears into a this-worldly Garden of Eden. One would also expect that parishioners progressively expect "lighter sentences" in terms of penance for their sins and, moreover, that the beatific vision is assumed for all on the better side of a Hitler or Stalin. Even Harvard University Professor (and Episcopalian) Robert Coles is shocked and saddened by this turn of events. For Coles, "It's a tragic mistake that the Church has allowed the confessional to go into such disuse." As Coles continues, the confessional served as a symbol during a historical period when "we were taught to embrace guilt, not to talk about it with Oprah on national TV, but to live with it and struggle with it."²⁶

Regarding the other side of the confessional, James O'Kane's study²⁷ indicates that priests are themselves going to confession less often. Additionally, an abundance of anecdotal evidence-now almost of folkloric stature-indicates that progressive priests cavalierly dismiss and even discourage penitents from confessing such sins as practicing artificial means of birth control and missing Mass while, correspondingly, absolutely insisting that the fallen tolerate cultural and even religious relativism. Many priests formed in the seminaries in the 1960s through 1980s seek above all to be "understanding" and "compassionate" in the therapeutic sense, even while still insisting that they act for Christ. William K. Kilpatrick reports of a priest informing his congregation that "the purpose of Christ's coming was to say you're O.K., and I'm O.K." In another instance, "A priest declared that children should not be taught the Ten Commandments...(because)...it was bad psychology..." In other cases, he continues, "parents are told that their children are incapable of sinning because 'that's what psychologists tell us.'"²⁸

The very same therapeutic worldview that impairs the priest in his duties during the rite of reconciliation also affects the way Church pastoral practice is implemented outside of the confessional. Many times Church doctrine or discipline is either ignored or, at least, cut at the corners to accommodate the so-called "needs" or "realities" of some sectors of the flock. Examples of such common abuses include the pastor who "blinks an eye" and allows the remarried Catholic to receive the sacraments or the Church official who allows an organiza-

tion of active and unrepentant homosexuals, like Dignity, to hold a special Mass or use for its own purposes some parish facility. Another would be the pre-Cana teacher who, while acknowledging the widespread reality of pre-marital sex and cohabitation among the young, allows spiritually, morally, and catechetically ill-formed youth to move forward in the process of securing a Church-sanctioned sacramental wedding.

The common understanding among American Catholics of the nature and role of the institutional Church and, correspondingly, of individual conscience has been reshaped by the therapeutic mentality. The sacred and divine reality of the Church is now commonly underplayed in favor of a far more human side consisting, alternately, of fragile and needy clients and a power hungry, insensitive, and patriarchal leadership. Rejected is the concept of conscience as necessarily formed by the willing and active internalization of the Church's teachings; rather conscience is seen as itself autonomous or at least potentially autonomous. Following not only the cognitive but also normative understanding of sociologist-priest Andrew Greeley, the "communal Catholic" sees the Church as, at best, a nonobligatory "resource," as an environment from which one "picks and chooses" cafeteria style, with the individual being legitimated as the ultimate locus of authority.²⁹ That the secular values of America's public sphere institutions are actually forming individual conscience is either ignored or denied. Within the context of a Freudian understanding of the "uses of faith" in the contemporary world that has its similarities with Greeley, Philip Rieff observes that "the dominance of releasing motifs ... implies a movement of Western culture away from its former configuration, toward one in which old ideological contents are preserved mainly for their therapeutic potential"³⁰ All other areas of the institutional life of American Catholicism have, to one degree or another, been contaminated by the therapeutic worldview. Regarding religious orders, for instance, Catholic psychologist William Coulson has reported on the devastating consequences on the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Providence, the Society of Jesus, and, especially, on the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of swallowing-hook, line, and sinker-the essentially antinomian "non-directive psychotherapy" or "humanistic psychology" of Carl Rodgers. As Coulson states, "humanistic psychotherapy, the kind that has virtually taken over the Church in America-holds that the most important source of authority is within you ...The proof of authenticity of...(this)...model is to go against what you

were trained to be, to call all of that phoniness...”³¹ Speaking of the Society of Jesus, Catholic historian James Hitchcock similarly observes that “in part what happened in the Society after 1960 was the discovery of psychology, of the affective dimensions of the human condition.. For the first time, large numbers of Jesuits began to think and talk about their feelings, their desires, their ‘needs.’ Some became deeply involved in various aspects of the ‘human potential movement’...In time, various kinds of therapeutic techniques, derived from humanistic psychology and the human potential movement, became an institutionalized feature of the training of young Jesuits, and part of the standard equipment of many older Jesuits as well.”³² Similarly, as William Kilpatrick notes:

Many of the clergy, nuns, and lay leaders began, out of good intentions, to mix their faith with sociology, psychology, and secular causes. At the same time, many of them elevated personal development to a place all out of proportion to spiritual development. Their faith eventually became so thinned out with admixtures that it was no longer strong enough to sustain them when a personal or social crisis struck. Thousands left the church. When asked in a survey why they had left, one population of former nuns checked off ‘inability to be me’ as the main reason. The faith of the average believer was also shaken. Some stuck it out. Some turned away altogether from their faith. Others joined Christian churches that seemed more certain and unconfused.³³

Indeed, the therapeutic mentality makes its initial impact on the priest during his seminary training. For one thing, it now strongly influences the seminary curriculum. For another, it affects the nature of the authority relationship between the seminarian and his rector/dean; relationships are now more “collegial” and the seminarian is more likely to exercise his “rights.” After ordination, many would-be associate pastors actually interview their prospective bosses for “compatibility.” Taken in a certain proportion, all of this can be seen as positive, as humanizing, as energizing more fully the talents and potential of the seminarian/priest. The situation, however, for many seminarians/priests vis-a-vis their legitimate ecclesiastical authority is way past any proper proportion. Indeed, the “rights” mania, part and parcel of the general society, as discussed by Mary Ann Glendon³⁴ among others, has now thoroughly infected the Catholic body: one need only consider the recent (and incredibly naive) 1989 agr-

reement, Doctrinal Responsibilities, signed by the Catholic Bishops to grant procedural and contractual rights of review to dissenting theologians.³⁵

More shocking, however, is that the therapeutic mentality has both provoked and attempted to legitimate all kinds of sexual misconduct on the part of both heterosexuals and homosexuals both inside and outside of the seminary. A small amount of homosexual activity may have always been practiced by a few Catholic clergy and religious, but historically such behavior has been strongly checked by the normative elements and other social control mechanisms of the Church. This sexual pathology, however, and unfortunately, has been allowed to spread greatly under the contemporary auspices of the progressive or “Americanist” leadership of the Church in America: witness the increase in cases of priests involved in pederasty.



Conclusion: What is to be Done?

As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger makes clear in his Report,³⁶ modern man is too uncritically taken with the belief in his own ability to change the world according to his own design. Translated into the concern of our essay, orthodox Catholic reformers who rail against the effects of therapeutic mentality on both society and Church must recognize that God has ultimate power over seemingly “inevitable” social developments and over the best laid plans of secularists and religionists, dissenters and reformers alike. The first thing “to be done,” then, is to pray to God for a spiritual revival that would serve as the necessary antidote to our present cultural crisis or, at least, to petition God to continue to give his servants the strength to fight the good fight against the present day odds.

Fighting the good fight in the secular realm entails identifying, developing, and supporting intelligent and committed lay leadership in both formal government (e.g. Congressmen Henry Hyde and Christopher Smith) and within civil society (e.g. Mrs. Mary Cummins and Dr. Irene Impellizzeri in their opposition to the homosexual agenda in the New York City school system). Fighting the good fight within the Catholic scene basically translates into working cooperatively with Bishops and clergy

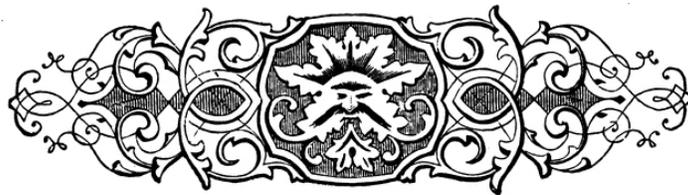
supportive of Magisterial authority and also joining and actively supporting and (where necessary) creating Catholic organizations devoted to worthy apostolates.

Regarding the latter, the newly formed Society of Catholic Social Scientists and other like-minded organizations and individuals have an important role in opposing the uncritical and exaggerated institutionalization of the therapeutic mentality both inside and outside of the Church. Richard W. Cross, for one, has recently and persuasively demonstrated the contradictions in Catholics accepting or trying to baptize humanist psychology.³⁷ William Kirk Kilpatrick, for another, points out not only the ineffectiveness but the self-serving nature (in terms of the sociological trilogy of wealth, status, and power) of the therapeutic industry. For Kilpatrick:

We are forced to entertain the possibility that psychology and related professions are proposing to solve problems that they themselves have helped to create. We find psychologists raising people's expectations for happiness in this life to an inordinate level, and then we find them dispensing advice about the mid-life crisis and dying. We find psychologists making a virtue out of self-preoc-

cupation, and then we find them surprised at the increased supply of narcissists. We find psychologists advising the courts that there is no such thing as a bad boy or even a bad adult, then we find them formulating theories to explain the rise in crime. We find psychologists severing the bonds of family life, and then we find them conducting therapy for broken families.³⁸

It is important to point out that the related goals of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists-to bring the social teachings of the Church into both social science and public policy discourse-are made possible by the very nature of the Catholic faith. Unlike Protestantism, Catholicism need not solely make recourse to the submission of faith; rather, the Church in her acceptance of the natural law also utilizes reason and empirical evidence. One important task of the S.C.S.S., then, is to provide a blueprint of the "Good Society" in the U.S. and, more specific to the case at hand, an analysis of how the institutionalization of the therapeutic mentality frustrates the noble attempt to reconstruct the social order along the lines of the natural law.



NOTES

¹This paper was read at the Second Annual Conference of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, Franciscan University, Steubenville, Ohio, on November 5, 1994.

²Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1968), p. 261. While this essay's theme that of the "failure of the therapeutic"-is a conscious play on the title of Rieff's volume, it should be made clear that my analysis of the therapeutic mentality need not necessarily accept (as does Rieff) a Freudian framework. There are, for one thing, other psychologies such as those proposed by Carl Rodgers and B. F. Skinner whose popularity also could be used to help explain the spread of the therapeutic mentality. Additionally, a more radically sociological analysis, following a tradition starting with George Herbert Mead and running through Arnold Gehlen, would analyze the emergence of the therapeutic worldview in terms of the interplay between culture, social structure, and human beings who, relative to the rest of the animal kingdom, are "instinctually deprived." That neither Freud's, Rodgers', Skinner's, or Mead's understanding of "human nature" is compatible with a Catholic view of man is an important issue that need not, for purposes of this essay, be pursued at this point.

³William Kirk Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 124

⁴Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974)

⁵Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984)

⁶Charles V. Willy, "The Inclining Significance of Race," *Society* (Volume 15, July/August, 1978)

⁷William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)

- 8 Bellah, et. al., op. cit., 1985, see Chapter 4
- 9 Bishop Rene H. Gracida, "Pastoral Ministry to the Divorced and Remarried: A Pastoral Letter," *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Newsletter* (Volume 17, Number 3, June, 1994), p. 17
- 10 Carle C. Zimmerman, *Family and Civilization* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947)
- 11 William K. Kilpatrick, op. cit., 1983, p. 30
- 12 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987)
- 13 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville: Whittle Books, 1991), p. 22
- 14 See my article, "Multiculturalism, Catholicism, and American Civilization," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (Volume XCIV, No. 6, March, 1994)
- 15 Bryce J. Christensen, *Utopia Against the Family: The Problems and Politics of the American Family* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990)
- 16 Paul C. Vitz, "An American Disaster: Moral Relativity," p. 44, in *In Search of a National Morality* (Edited by William Bentley Balle), Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1992.
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- 20 Philip Rieff, op. cit., 1968, p. 256
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- 22 Leege, *ibid.*, 1987, p. 10
- 23 James Vander Zanden, *Sociology: The Core* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) p. 190
- 24 See my unpublished paper, "Recovering the Sacred: A Catholic Sociological Critique of Gustavo Gutierrez' *A Theology of Liberation*," presented at the Annual Conference of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, Atlanta, Georgia, September 23, 1989
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- 29 Greeley elaborates this theme in such works as *The Communal Catholic* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) and *The American Catholic* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). I have critiqued Greeley widely. See, for instance, my "Sociology, Catholicism, and Andrew Greeley," *Lay Witness*, (Volume 13, Number 9, June, 1992); "Strengthening and Creating Catholic Mediating Structures," *Social Justice Review* (Volume 83, Numbers 11-12, November-December 1992); "A Catholic Plausibility Structure," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (Volume LXXXIX, Number 2, November, 1988) and "The State of the American Catholic Laity," *Faith & Reason* (Volume XIII, Number 2, June, 1987)
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- 31 William Coulson, "Repentent Psychologist: How I Wrecked the I.H.M. Nuns," Interview conducted by Dr. William Marra, *The Latin Mass: Chronicles of a Catholic Reform, Special Issue*, 1994, pp. 16, 15. Also see Thomas Sowell's Commentary on Coulson, "An Education 'Sinner' Repents," *New York Post*, Friday, August 12, 1994, p. 27
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- 33 William K. Kilpatrick, op. cit., 1983, p. 24

34 Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991)

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