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THE SOCIETY OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL SCIENTISTS: CATHOLIC SOCIAL SCIENCE AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

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INTRODUCTORY ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



ON BEHALF OF PRESIDENT STEPHEN M. KRASON AND THE ENTIRE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, let me start my remarks by twice thanking Christendom College. First, thanks goes to President Timothy O'Donnell for allowing Christendom College to serve as the site for the third annual S.C.S.S. Conference held on October 26 and 27, 1995; the college was, to say the very least, both a gracious and generous host. Second, thanks goes to both Rev. James W. McLucas and John Janaro, the immediately former and present, respectively, editors of this journal for agreeing to publish a selection of essays from the conference in this issue.

Given that *Faith & Reason* is generally recognized as the orthodox Catholic academic journal of record in the United States, this is, indeed, a very special honor. The quality and importance of *Faith & Reason* is a key factor in explaining why this "little" college nestled in the hills of the Shenandoah Valley of Northern Virginia casts such a long shadow throughout Catholic America. The activities and very existence of Christendom College both irritates and threatens a smug, progressive Catholic establishment which considers that a truly "Catholic university" is a contradiction in terms and which quite publically mimics the secular chant that the Catholic faith stands as a scholarly impediment to the attainment of truth.

Christendom College-like several other important orthodox Catholic entities (e.g. Franciscan University, The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, the Catholic Central Union of America, Catholics United For the Faith, The Cardinal Newman Society)-has hitherto attempted to help a young S.C.S.S. "get on its feet." The Society hopes to repay this trust by fulfilling, as much as is humanly possible, its dual missions: to bring Catholic social doctrine into the internals of the social science enterprise and into the decision-making arenas of American social policy. In this attempt, may the Society learn from the example of Christendom College to represent the Catholic faith with intelligence and civility, without adulteration or apology, and in all its subtlety, fullness, and majesty. While the related missions of Christendom College and the Society of Catholic Social Scientists are not identical, they both share in their general commitment "to restore all things in Christ." While the specific application for the former is in creating and maintaining a model and authentically Catholic institution of higher education, the specific goal of the latter is the eventual development of a unified Catholic social science and, derivatively, of a fully reconstructed American social order.

Let me end my introductory acknowledgments by offering a statement of personal thanks to *Faith & Reason*. This guest editorial marks the thirteenth piece of mine published in this journal since my first article appeared in 1986, with yet two more contributions in press. In 1986, there was little place for a struggling "Catholic sociologist" to see

his work reach the light of day. Timothy O'Donnell, then Editor, took a chance with my writing, thus affording me the needed emotional support to plan and forge ahead, leading, at least indirectly, to the formation of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. During the 1980s, I routinely had my head handed to me at the annual meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (formerly the American Catholic Sociological Society) for arguing the logic, need, and plausibility of a Catholic sociology. Failing in my reconversion effort, I first made the call to form the Society of Catholic Social Scientists in an article, "Renewing the Battle to Restore Sociology and the Social Sciences in Christ," published in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Newsletter* (Volume 14, No. 3, June, 1991). After securing the interest and commitment of my friend, Dr. Stephen M. Krason, the work of building the scholarly organization commenced in earnest.

A FOUNDING THAT SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN NECESSARY

The inaugural meeting of the S.C.S.S. was held at the Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel on September 27, 1992, immediately following the conclusion of the annual convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. Thirty-two individuals were present although the two Society co-founders, Stephen M. Krason and myself with the assistance of the likes of Rev. John H. Miller, C.S.C., S.T.D., Dr. Donald J. D'Elia, and Monsignor George A. Kelly, Ph.D. had assembled during the previous six months a list of over eighty potential orthodox Catholic members. This list came from the ranks of scholars, professors, teachers, and others in the social sciences or social science-related disciplines whose intellectual activity is tied to public and social issues. The highlight of the meeting was the inaugural address of President Stephen M. Krason, "What the Catholic Finds Wrong with Secular Science." This address—really the signature piece for the Society—was later published in the *Social Justice Review* (Volume 84, No. 1-2, January-February, 1993).

The time had come to form this group because it had become painfully obvious that the contemporary social sciences and the public policies emanating from them were presently, almost without exception, completely dependent on secular assumptions, concepts, and the-

ories. Furthermore, the widespread influence of a secular social science within government, education, the mass media, American popular culture, and within the Christian denominations themselves has been nothing less than disastrous. While it is true that most of the nineteenth and twentieth century founding figures of modern social science saw it as an "enlightened" substitute for religion, the important point to stress immediately is that social science perspectives are *not intrinsically secularist*; they can be shaped by Catholic principles and attitudes. Indeed, a small group of devoted Catholic scholars in the twentieth century did succeed—in the years prior to Vatican II—in taking up the social sciences within a general Catholic worldview and sensitivity. However, the loss of the idea of "Catholic social science" or, at least, "Catholic perspectives in the social sciences" was only one of the many casualties suffered by an orthodox Catholicism in the turbulent wake of the immediate post-Vatican II period. Put another way, the impetus behind the founding of the S.C.S.S. involved recognizing two things: (1) that, for better or worse, the social sciences are today a social fact of life that have very real consequences for the health and welfare of both the Church and society and (2) that the decision, made by many in the immediate post-Vatican II era, to abandon the idea of specifically Catholic intellectual approaches was, to understate the case, a very bad one.

Unfortunately and in a certain historical sense, the Catholic Church in the United States has come full circle in its attempt "to restore all things in Christ," the social sciences included. It is, of course, true that the social sciences did not exist as professions during the colonial period of American Catholic history. In a real sense, however, the tale of the rise, fall, and resurrection of Catholic social science starts in this period. This is so because the attempt, in the early to mid-twentieth century, to construct distinctive Catholic intellectual approaches and to create professional associations of Catholic scholars was just one of the many consequences of the calculated and reasonable reaction of the Catholic Church in America to overcome its less than auspicious beginnings in the American colonies and nation. The series of Provincial and Plenary Councils held in Baltimore from 1829 to 1884 provided the organizational blueprint and the stimulus for the Church to build up a net-



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work of interlocking social institutions (e.g. parishes, families, seminaries, schools, hospitals, newspapers, publishing houses, bookstores, professional and ethnic associations, charitable organizations) that assisted the Church in the religious, moral, and intellectual development of her members and in the evangelization of the larger culture. This Catholic social institutional network started to take shape after World War I and hit full stride in the 1940s and 1950s only to be severely weakened by both external and, more importantly, internal forces in the immediate post-Vatican II period.

Part and parcel of the development of this network was the creation of distinctive Catholic social science perspectives and the establishment of separate Catholic scholarly organizations founded on the dual premises that Catholics bring distinctive philosophical presuppositions and metaphysical starting points into their intellectual approaches and that Catholics should appropriate anything of worth in secular intellectual endeavors for the benefit of the faith. The American Catholic Historical Association was founded in 1919, the Catholic Anthropological Conference and the American Catholic Philosophical Association in 1926, the Catholic Biblical Association of America in 1936, the American Catholic Sociological Society in 1938, the Canon Law Society of America in 1939, the Catholic Economic Association in 1941, the Catholic Theological Society in 1946, the American Catholic Psychological Association in 1947, and the Albertus Magnus Guild, an organization for Catholics in science in 1953.

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council many of the various Catholic scholarly associations fell victim either to a “secularization from without,” i.e., dissolved as specifically “Catholic” organizations, or a “secularization from within,” i.e., internally transformed into shells of their once authentically Catholic selves while still formally keeping the Catholic label. Predictably enough, these secularizing developments—at least according to the progressivist or Americanist leadership wings of these organizations—were held to be legitimated by Vatican II. The alleged requirements of “ecumenism,” “academic free dom,” “critical thinking,” and “individual conscience” were used to make the case that distinctive Catholic academic perspectives and separate (but, again, not isolated) Catholic professional associations were provincial at best or contradictory at worst. The unintended by-product of the Council was to permit many Catholic intellectuals to find an uncritically comfortable home within the frame of reference of the outer secu-

lar professional societies. Many influential post-Vatican II Catholic intellectuals, rather than dialoguing with their secular counterparts, instead capitulated to their mindset. In reality, Vatican II actually affirmed the need for Catholics to engage in public dialogue about what their religion had to offer both to the world-at-large and to the various intellectual disciplines. Vatican II was hardly a declaration that distinctive Catholic intellectual approaches and professional associations were obsolescent. In truth it was a call for an open-minded but evangelistic thrust into the temporal sphere of academia.

In an ideal world, the 1992 founding of the S.C.S.S. should have been unnecessary. Those Catholic social science approaches and organizations founded earlier in the century should have evolved organically, becoming-like the developing tradition of the social doctrine of the Church upon which they are based—ever more deep, rich, sophisticated, and capable of explaining and promoting God’s design for civilization. But such a natural organic development was not to be, at least in the area of social science. Unfortunately, we must start again almost from scratch; with the founding of the S.C.S.S. we have come, in a sense, full circle.



THE ROTTEN FRUITS OF SECULAR SOCIAL SCIENCE

It is increasingly dawning on many scholars who are Catholic that there is a great deal of moral and intellectual rot generated by their once-cherished academy that is being diffused throughout American civilization. This awareness is apparent to all but the most hardened Catholic progressive or American ideologue. Consider the following examples. School administrators take for granted a Freudian-like view of human sexuality and conclude that condom distribution is both a strategic and moral imperative. Many psychologists portray supernaturally-based religion as both an illusion and opiate while seeing their discipline as a necessary substitute for it. Many in the marriage counseling profession talk of courtship and marriage exclusively in contractual and emotional terms consisting merely of social, economic, and psychological exchanges. The elderly get the short end of the deal in hospital care, especially on the part of younger “quality

of life” doctors and nurses. In many sociology classes, the traditional nuclear family is depicted as an abusive prison for women and children. Many anthropologists—apparently subliminally ignorant of the claims of natural law—seem to be unable to condemn such practices as human sacrifice, homosexuality, and children being born out of wedlock, thus promoting, either unconsciously or not, the philosophy of moral relativism. Many political scientists, forged in the Marxist-inspired and anti-Western civilization era of the 1960s-1970s, routinely and uncritically consider all American military intervention as a form of economically self-serving imperialism. Too many lawyers interpret the first amendment in such a manner as to clearly deny Christians their rights and duties in the public square. Afro-American courses tend to assume, *a priori*, that all Caucasians are racists; the reality of black racism is never broached. Similarly, much feminist scholarship simply defines men as sexist and ignores the injustice done to men in employment through the use of quotas. Governmental action increasingly erodes parental rights. The recent decision of President Clinton to veto the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, as well as that of the courts to lift the bans on assisted suicide, mark American civilization’s further descent into the culture of death. Neo-Malthusian scholars fabricate the concept of the “population bomb” while the positive effects of natural family planning for marriage, family, and society are not only denied but met with outright derision. While racism, sexism, homophobia, and ageism are unquestionably seen as real “social problems,” the deleterious effects of abortion, euthanasia, divorce, day-care centers, and sex education are either not addressed or not addressed squarely.

Intellectual discourse within the social science departments of America’s colleges and universities—Catholic institutions definitely included—take place within the narrow parameters of “politically correct” thought. Such thought and behavior, again, is anything but absent within important sectors of the Catholic clergy; witness the effects of a “therapeutic mentality” on conceptions of sin and in the implementation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To top things off, even many Bishops, when trying to form and implement positions on social issues and pastoral policy, rely heavily on secular social science with, predictably, unsatisfactory results. Put crudely, a secular social science attacks the Church from both without and within while the American social fabric continues unabated in its precipitous decline.

RESURRECTING AND FURTHER DEVELOPING CATHOLIC SOCIAL SCIENCE

That the social sciences can, in some sophisticated and qualified sense, be “Catholicized” is supported both historically and theoretically. Historically, as previously alluded to, there were such attempts as embodied in a number of Catholic scholarly organizations. Theoretically, the idea of Catholic social science or, at least, of Catholic perspectives in the social sciences, is plausible given the fact that all social science disciplines are rooted in, or at least abstracted from, some nonempirical philosophy or worldview. Today, for instance, sociologies exist based on positivism, phenomenology, pragmatism, Marxism, feminism, laissez faire capitalism, and even Calvinism. So why not a social science that weaves into its theoretical framework Catholic—i.e., true—conceptions of the person and of human freedom and dignity, and of such principles as subsidiarity and solidarity? Given that no social science is “valuefree,” why not social science in which the values of orthodox Catholicism influence such issues as *motivation, choice of research projects, employment of analytical concepts, definitions and theoretical frameworks, interpretation of data, and social policy recommendations?* Minimally, the establishment of Catholic perspectives in the social sciences would guarantee the Church a presence in the existing intellectual market place with all the derivative effects on society that this would entail.

TOWARD THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

Over its first four years of existence, the Society’s attempts in the area of social policy have been modest but certainly in the right direction. Thus far, the Public and Church Affairs Committee has published a series of concise statements, inspired by the social doctrine of the Church, on a wide array of subjects including homosexuals in the military and homosexual ministries run by Catholic dioceses, fetal research, abortion, national health insurance, parental rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Committee Chairman, Dr. Ryan J. Barilleau, is also presently coordinating the production of a series of pamphlets devoted to specific social policy issues, some of which represent the third and concluding section of the Society’s first national project, *Catholic Political Activity in the United States*. Additionally, many solid suggestions regarding the promotion of healthy marriage and family life are contained in the Society’s upcoming second national project, an an-

thology of essays to be *entitled Defending the Family*, co-edited by Paul Vitz and Stephen M. Krason. Likewise, it is the case that a great number of useful ideas regarding the reconstruction of the social order along Catholic lines can be found in the forthcoming first issue of *The Catholic Social Science Review* under the direction of Acting Editor, Dominic Aquila, as well as in the previous publications of and about the Society via such outlets as the *Social Justice Review*, the *Catholic Central Union of America*, *Faith & Reason*, *Lay Witness*, *Catalyst*, *National Catholic Register*, *Our Sunday Visitor*, and *The Wanderer*. Again, our thanks to all of the above. And it is the case, of course, that the mission to reconstruct the social order is furthered through the activities of all the various facets of the Society (e.g. our Bishops Board headed by John Cardinal O'Connor, our prestigious Advisory Board, as well as our numerous local chapters, committees, and disciplinary sections). For more information about the S.C.S.S., please contact Dr. Krason at the Political Science Department, Egan Hall,

Franciscan University, Steubenville, Ohio, 43952 (614-283-6416).

A FINAL WORD

When initially reviewing the papers presented at the Christendom College Conference, Stephen M. Krason and I divided them into those more obviously “social scientific” in nature and those more in the broader Christian humanistic, liberal arts tradition. The former were to be considered for publication in *The Catholic Social Science Review* and the latter in *Faith & Reason*. The papers published in this issue went through the regular editorial process as directed by John Janaro. I am both proud and thankful to see them published, essays clearly consistent with the missions of both the Society of Catholic Social Scientists and Christendom Press.

