

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The workshop on Catholic social teaching combined the topics of the common good and family policy. David Hollenbach (Boston College) and Christine Firer Hinze (Marquette University) presented. Hollenbach spoke first, focusing on the idea of "a community of freedom." His remarks presented the main conclusions of a study "Liberalism, Catholicism, and the Renewal of American Public Life" sponsored by the Woodstock Theological Center and the Government Department of Georgetown University. A volume of essays proceeding from the study is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

Hollenbach emphasized three ways in which the Catholic tradition can make a contribution to the renewal of American public life. The first is by drawing upon resources within the tradition to bring attention to the plight of civil society. When functioning well, civil society consists of the interaction of nongovernmental associations like churches, labor unions, families, neighborhoods, corporations, and universities. Hollenbach referred to civil society as "the soil of the growth of human sociality." Catholic social teaching has emphasized this reality through its principle of subsidiarity, which affirms a plurality of institutions in society and declares that the smaller, more intimate groupings of persons are to have priority in addressing the problems of the day. Larger institutions are to involve themselves only in a supporting role, not a role which replaces the more immediate groupings.

Hollenbach argued that the primary threat to civil society in the North American culture is not the invasion of the various spheres of life by the state, but by the market and its cost-benefit ethos. He cited writings and studies which disclose the degree to which short-term market outcomes are shaping health care, law, and politics. The ideal of the common good calls for participation in multiple forms of association. According to Hollenbach, "Such participation is threatened when any single social institution gains the power to control the whole of human life, whether this institution be the state, the market, or, for that matter, the church." At the moment, the second of these is the most foreboding.

The second contribution that the Catholic tradition can make to the renewal of American public life is the conviction that a shared understanding of the good life can be established that is more than simply a matter of taste or preference. Hollenbach provided a quick listing of the many contributions of the Catholic tradition to public philosophy. These are made in the spirit of what he called "intellectual solidarity—a willingness to take other persons seriously enough to engage them in conversation and debate about what they think makes life worth living." Such spirit differs greatly from the emphasis on autonomy and the ethos of non-interference that marks standard liberalism.

The third contribution which Catholicism can make is an emphasis on self-transcendence that contrasts with liberalism's stress on enlightened self-interest. With self-transcendence, freedom is not simply a matter of being rid of infringements on the part of others. It does not involve simply the establishment of a "private" sphere of activity. Rather, freedom is the capability to move beyond oneself and to enter into relationship with others. This does not deny self-possession, but instead builds on the conviction, in Hollenbach's words, that "self-possession and self-determination grow in and through the self-transcendence that makes such relationships possible and actualizes them."

Christine Firer Hinze's presentation both extended and complemented Hollenbach's. While the focus was specifically on families and family policy, the analysis also broadened to include feminist insights. Drawing from Nancy Fraser, Hinze stated explicitly that her aim was to forge "bridge discourse" between different groups, particularly Catholic social thought and liberationist and feminist theory. She was also explicit that it is precisely this kind of discourse that one finds in the the kind of interactive common good that Hollenbach described.

Hinze began by outlining the tensions that are present in debates on family policy. There is disagreement both with regard to what constitutes a family and what is workable policy. On the former issue, the tension is between those who emphasize two-parent heterosexual nuclear families as the norm and others who seek to broaden what is understood as a family. In general, persons who stress the nuclear family also are less enthusiastic about government involvement in aiding families. The concern is that such involvement actually weakens the values that are necessary for strong family life.

Hinze argued that given the fact that virtually all policy affects families, the question is not whether or not to have family policies, but which ones to have. She then brought modern Catholic social thought to bear on the question. Catholic social thought has always stressed the importance of the family as a basic building block of society. As such, it also requires the support of other institutions in society, including the state. Since the Second Vatican Council, Church statements have integrated the emphasis on the family with the "option for the poor." This is evident with the American bishops in both *Economic Justice for All* and the 1991 *Putting Children and Families First*. Hinze elaborated on the latter, and then raised the question of why, given all of these articulations of the need for family policy, no such policy exists. She mentioned the three obstacles of racism, classism, and sexism, and discussed in detail the last of them.

Hinze focused on the tension between children's and women's concerns. While she noted approvingly the position of Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Jean Bethke Elshain, and Mary Ann Glendon that women's concerns must not lead to the neglect of the well-being of children, she also countered that the care of children must not be carried out through the unjust treatment of women. Citing the American bishops—"A society that discriminates against women impoverishes

its children"—she argued that the just treatment of women versus the care of children is a false trade-off.

Next, Hinze elaborated further on the problem of sexism through discussion of the subtexts of gender and the public/private distinction that pervade dialogue on families. Here she argued that one key reason that there is no policy action on family issues, even though there is recognition of them, is that family matters are considered to be women's issues and therefore matters of the private sphere of the home. Attempts to be gender neutral on the issues usually reinforce the status quo. Therefore there must be an explicit stance to change the present gendered structure of family life and policy. Doing so will disclose the structuring of society into public and private realms. Catholic social thought needs to address this explicitly as well. Only then will family concerns be addressed as matters of policy attention.

Hinze closed by relating the commitment to families to the well-being of the common good. The discussions concerning each of these issues must be carried out in intersecting ways. The good of the one depends on the good of the other.

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