

## SEMINAR ON MORAL THEOLOGY

### THE FUTURE AGENDA OF CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY IN AMERICA

The seminar had two goals: 1) identification of the most important areas within the field of moral theology in need of exploration and research over the next five to ten years; 2) discussion of ways that the CTSA can assist in bringing about this exploration and research. The seminar began with brief statements on the first goal by four panelists. Richard A. McCormick identified eight topics which deserve priority in future research by American Catholic moralists: 1) moral issues related to feminism; 2) the responsibilities of wealth; 3) the theology of virtue and character; 4) morality of the arms race and nuclear warfare; 5) the question of rights within the Church; 6) the problem of pluralism and unity in moral theology; 7) business ethics; 8) continuing exploration of unsettled questions of bioethics (especially abortion and genetics). Charles E. Curran observed that in recent years the agenda for most American moral theology has been set by the need to respond to controversial moral questions internal to the Church (e.g., contraception, sexual ethics) and the effort to develop methods for making this response (thus the protracted discussion of the basis of moral norms and the role of the magisterium). He suggested that the agenda now needs to be broadened, and he proposed three focal points: 1) an effort to bring questions of personal and social morality into a greater unity with each other; 2) a more systematic exploration of the properly *theological* aspects of moral thought; 3) the development of more adequate understandings of moral agency and character. Benedict M. Ashley proposed the following as important areas for development: 1) the study of the actual moral convictions of Christians through history; 2) an increase in the philosophical rigor of moral theology; 3) a stronger emphasis on the social and policy implications of moral theology; 4) the need to overcome the dichotomy between historical consciousness and more classical modes of approaching moral theology. Finally, Anthony R. Kosnik reflected on the implications of his recent research on the thought of Pope John Paul II for American moral theology. In Kosnik's view, the Pope has been strongly influenced by the Marxist critique of the West and feels that Western (including American) values need to be strongly challenged. The result of such papal interventions is likely to be an increased pressure on American moral theologians to conform with views which are rooted in John Paul II's anthropology. Thus the agenda for American moral theologians includes an increased emphasis on mutual dialogue and support around controversial topics such as the role of authority, sexism, politics, and the nature of ministry. Kosnik also called for the development of more pastoral and popular literature on moral questions.

The discussion which followed the initial remarks highlighted four major areas that the seminar as a whole regarded as important areas of future development. The interconnection of personal and social ethics received the most attention. This topic was seen to include basic anthropological questions such as the

meaning of the relationality and autonomy of the human person. It also concerns the influence of large-scale social structures on moral questions ordinarily treated as questions of personal ethics. In addition, it concerns the interrelation between the moral content of cultural systems and personal virtue and character. The second major theme of the discussion was the proposal (made by Daniel Maguire) that justice, both as a personal virtue and a social norm, could provide the overarching framework for the future work of the seminar. The third area of consensus was on the need for greater attention to the theological foundations of Christian ethics. Finally, there was consensus on the desirability of a careful analysis of the major moral virtues and a reinterpretation of their meaning in light of psychological and sociological understandings of personality.

The final portion of the seminar was devoted to a short discussion of the ways CTSA might assist the community of moral theologians in America in their efforts to respond to this agenda. A questionnaire was also given to seminar participants to gather their views on this topic and to solicit nominations for a steering committee to guide the work of the seminar in future years. Fifteen of these questionnaires were returned. The results of this discussion and the questionnaires will be communicated to the steering committee which will be appointed by the President on the basis of the nominations received.

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