

SEMINAR ON MORAL THEOLOGY

A. RETHINKING VIRTUE

The work of the group centered around readings from Aquinas,¹ Bernard Haring,² Stanley Hauerwas,³ and Alasdair McIntyre.⁴

John Boyle opened the session with a brief presentation which noted that Richard McCormick's annual "Notes on Moral Theology" rarely mentioned the topic of virtue between 1965 to 1980.⁵ But the 1981 "Notes" survey "Liturgy, Character and Morality," and the 1983 "Notes" review and critique literature dealing with "Moral Reasoning and Storytelling," including works by Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder.

Boyle also reviewed the development of Catholic theology of the virtues from Augustine and Aquinas to the theology manuals in common use in the post-Tridentine church. He said that for Thomas the moral virtues are in part constitutive of the moral personality, while the manualists tend to treat the moral virtues legalistically as an organizing principle for their discussion of various sins.

Boyle also cited the work of Stanley Hauerwas and his contention that an act-centered morality distorts the nature of ethics. Hauerwas argues for renewed attention to the importance of moral vision, character and virtue. He emphasizes too the importance of the community and the traditions and narratives which shape it in the moral formation of the agent. The presentation concluded by identifying several issues raised by the renewed attention to virtue.

The discussion began with attention being called to Aquinas' use in ST I, II of the notion of human beings as created in the *imago Dei*. Human freedom and understanding are therefore realizations of the divine exemplar.

Attention was also drawn to the work of Bernard Malamud in his *Dubin's Lives* and the importance of "moral light" in Malamud's work.

Various aspects of Hauerwas's work were discussed. Questions were asked about the disclosive character of narratives as limited by Hauerwas to members of the church community. The relationship of moral virtue to moral principles was also mentioned as a matter needing clarification.

The second session continued the discussion on the nature of virtue and raised the question of the role of affect and imagination in the moral life.

¹ *Summa Theologiae*, I, II, 55-65.

² *Free and Faithful in Christ* (New York: Seabury, 1978), vol. I, chap. 5, pp. 164-222.

³ *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), pp. 111-28.

⁴ *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), pp. 169-209.

⁵ See R. McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology 1965-1980* (Washington: University Press of America, 1981).

A number of issues were identified: the need for a more satisfactory definition of virtue; the relation of moral development to decision making; the need for a critique of emotion and for a better articulation of the relationship of reason, emotion and freedom; the relationship of the moralist's understanding of the relationship of emotion to the good and that of the psychotherapist; the need for further discussion of Haring's attempts to relate growth in virtue with a fundamental option.

Despite the fact that more questions than answers arose from the discussion, the evaluations of the participants revealed that most had found the initial discussions valuable and many want them to continue.

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B. THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

The purpose of this seminar was to bring the insights of feminist ethics to bear on the question of the interconnection between personal and social ethics. The discussion focused on articles by three feminist Christian theologians — Rosemary Radford Ruether,¹ Beverly Wildung Harrison,² and Margaret A. Farley³ — and on points raised by several panelists in relation to these articles. Lisa Sowle Cahill stressed the importance of articulating a theory of human nature that is both egalitarian and non-dualistic (that is, does not overlook the relation between body and spirit), and invited reflection on the methodological problem of developing criteria for dealing with the liberating and oppressing elements in Christian experience. Charles E. Curran observed that whereas in the past unjust stereotypes have been preserved in the tradition because of emphasis on the "natural," understood in organic and hierarchical categories, newer understandings of nature as "not just the given," as well as modern emphasis on equality and participation, are resources now available for combatting these stereotypes. John W. Glaser, using the metaphor of "gazing" to convey something of what is involved in "knowing as creating," invited consideration of the new instances of community that need to be created and the role of the theologian in promoting what doesn't yet exist. James E. Hug posited the need for moralists to be competent in feminist theology and proposed a "social ethics of the imagination" in view of the power of images to support and to change social structures. "Masculine God-language," he indicated, "is a moral issue." Finally, Joan H. Timmerman spoke to the need to resymbolize evil (going beyond associations with body and world) and to integrate *eros* into Christian

¹ "Home and Work: Women's Roles and the Transformation of Values," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), 647-59.

² "The New Consciousness of Women: A Socio-Political Resource," *Cross Currents* 24 (1975), 445-62.

³ "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), 627-46.