

## SEMINAR ON MORAL THEOLOGY

The Moral Theology Seminar sponsored five separate sessions. The general session, chaired by Anne Patrick, heard a paper by David Hollenbach. He reflected on his experience of numerous conferences on the U.S. bishops' Economics Pastoral. His first thesis was that theologians need consultation and dialogue as much as the bishops, since theology is not sufficiently in touch with people and their problems. Contemporary theology risks being a private language. Theologians thus contribute to what R. Bellah calls a "culture of separation." Such splitting one segment of life from another weakens the common good and social solidarity.

The bishops do not oppose the modern world, but rather try to evoke a new sense of wholeness. They seek not to impose a unity from above but to draw from our culture a vision of an essentially communitarian life. All the positive recommendations of the draft Pastoral flow from this vision of participation. The Pastoral has been shunned because the business community thinks that its real life decisions are not taken seriously. Business people *assume* that the first word of the Church will be condemnation of business. Church tradition emphasized the dangers of riches; religious persons at times make business success and accumulating wealth almost synonymous with evil. The tradition, however, is ambivalent since it also values the goodness of creation and the creative use of talent. Business and work can be seen as dedicated to building up the community. We must point to what Bellah calls a "culture of coherence."

The concluding section of the Pastoral, Hollenbach suggests, is the most important. There one can find a bare outline of a lay spirituality. Sanctity can be achieved in daily work; discipleship is possible for the blue-collar worker and the blue-chip broker. Unfortunately, not many in the Church find religious significance in the work that occupies much of people's lives. The Church must be *for* the world, committed to "Building the Earth." Such work by the laity for justice is a basis for holiness; economic life is not outside redemption.

In the discussion, there was much agreement, though a number worried that a sinful world should not undialectically be affirmed. Many wealthy people would like to hear Hollenbach's theme, but perhaps there is reason they ought to feel judged. Business ethics needs development comparable to that in medical ethics. We need an American public language that replaces rationales for work such as self-interest or feel-good emotivism. The Pastoral itself suffers from terms like "common good" or "solidarity with the poor" which have no resonance for Americans comparable to language like "life," "liberty," "creativity," or "progress."

In a separate, evening session, John Harvey described his work with homosexuals in New York through the organization called "Courage." This program provides group spiritual support to lesbian and gay persons who want to live chastely in accord with the norms of the Church. Harvey traced the evolution of the group, outlined the pattern of its meetings, and made suggestions for expansion.

On the second day, three concurrent sessions were held. The first, moderated by Walter Woods, addressed the question of Professional Ethics. Anne Patrick began by noting Daniel Maguire's exclusion from previously arranged teaching engagements. This situation, and others in which ecclesiastical officials have acted adversely toward particular theologians, should cause us theologians to assess the quality of our own moral agency. In situations that call for some response on our part, we should examine the context of our work and consider the probable consequences of our actions and omissions.

Patrick underlined the relationship between ecclesiology and moral theology. Of particular significance is the degree to which the Church is seen as similar or different from secular society. This nature/grace issue has implications for the way power is exercised and legitimated in the Church. Patrick concluded with the hope that a less supernaturalized view of the Church might allow God's own freedom to be exercised more fully among us and that theologians might work to transform a climate of intimidation in the Church into one of trust and mutual respect.

Bishop Raymond Lucker, the second presenter, offered four points. 1) Because theologians have a responsibility to the *Word of God*, they must work collaboratively to help people come to a deeper relationship with the Lord. Would it then be ethical for a theologian to work outside the context of faith and prayer? 2) The theologian's responsibility to *theology* should involve a recognition that there is a pluralism of acceptable positions in theology. This precludes an arrogant presentation of one's own view as the only valid expression of the faith. 3) The theologian also has a responsibility to the *people of God*. Granting that people can be confused by theologians' views, how do we prepare people to receive new insights in theology? What are the negative and the healthy consequences of shocking the faithful? 4) With respect to the teaching authority of the Church, Bishop Lucker asked how one should handle dissenting views. Would it be morally right to publish positions that diverge from official teachings without reference to those teachings?

The ensuing discussion noted differences among the various cases of theologians in difficulty with church authorities. While some participants questioned the responsibility of the *New York Times* ad, it was suggested that the official response to the signers and the stance of theologians toward the entire episode also require attention. On another topic, it was generally agreed that the married, women, the sick and dying, for example, sometimes have a better grasp on the truth than one finds in published sources. This means that ordinary people can contribute wisdom to theological and pastoral deliberations, and openness to them is necessary.

The second concurrent session, moderated by Ed Vacek, addressed the question of homosexuality. John Harvey appealed to the Church's dynamic remem-

bering of both its Scriptures and tradition which propose the heterosexual norm. Arguments from authority are buttressed by reflections on the nature of homosexual activity. Such activity does not lead to a true union of persons on the genital level; only a pseudo-complimentarity results. Such activity also lacks a quality of transcendence in procreation and family, and it leads to psychological sterility. On the subjective morality of homosexual activity, Harvey said that even persons caught in compulsive activity retain enough freedom to begin to change their lives. Abstinence is difficult, but it is a dogmatic thesis that God always gives sufficient grace. In the public arena, the bishops have affirmed the rights of homosexuals and spoken against injustice and prejudice. While the homosexual person has a right to employment and housing, these rights are circumscribed by the rights of others and the common good. Hence, in the case of the Executive Order 50 in New York City, Catholic agencies have a right to refuse employment.

Kevin Gordon, a theologian and psychotherapist, proposed a hermeneutic of suspicion. One needs to be suspicious of the suspiciousness that religion has of sexuality. Gay and lesbian persons are learning from the liberation and feminist movements of ideologies in the Church and society. History must be reexamined from the viewpoint of the losers, and advocacy must begin for those whose existence is filtered out by the monochromatic lens of married heterosexuality. One must avoid heterocentrism no less than androcentrism. Older teleological views of sexuality must be modified by the findings of nonphilosophical disciplines. Any new understanding must, at least in part, come from the self-understanding of lesbian and gay persons. A sociological revolution has occurred in which gay and lesbian persons have become a visible, self-conscious community with its own distinctive public discourse. A new sexual theology is called for. The present theology misses millions of Americans, including the single, divorced, remarrieds, those practicing contraception, and lesbian and gay persons. Further suspicion arises when, in Gordon's experience, it is impossible to raise the issue of homosexuality without being sidetracked into an authority issue. Theology's goal should be to subvert present positions so as to empower authority to serve again as a credible witness to authentic life.

In the discussion, questions were quickly raised about the moral theories underlying the two positions. Some tried to establish the moral object of sexual activity. One person argued for more modesty about what is normative; people in fact grow creatively in most peculiar ways, ways not charted on the moralist's traditional map of human development; patience is needed as persons explore new possibilities of human development. Several persons called for a more adequate view of sexuality. Others thought that we already have an adequate theology of sexuality; there has been enlightened development in the Church beyond Augustine; Catholicism has been, as in its valuing of sensuality, a forerunner in developing a sensible sexual ethics. The differences expressed were at times sharp. One person suggested that perhaps, when the issues are pushed to their foundations, we really have different faiths and churches. Further differences appeared in discussing scientific explanations of the origin of the homosexual orientation and in discussing the rights of homosexuals. In spite of the differences, however, the conversation was irenic, civil, and scholarly.

The third concurrent session, chaired by Lisa Sowle Cahill, began with a presentation by Drew Christiansen on "the preferential option for the poor" as a primary moral standard. Biblical tradition and church teaching support this criterion, and it serves as an antidote to the recurrent American tendency to forget the poor. At least three questions can be raised in response to neoconservative critics of the letter: 1) Has and does capitalism, in fact, advance without stimulating or even relying on mass impoverishment? 2) Has and does an ethic of self-interest readily give rise to a persistent concern for the poor and oppressed? 3) Can voluntary association bring about a morally responsible economy without the coordination and intervention of government as the arbiter of the common good? Since the phrase "option for the poor" has provoked some adverse reactions, Archbishop Weakland proposed recently the substitute phrase, "option to eliminate poverty." Christiansen objected that this phrase downplays the importance of moral relationships among persons in community, and also evades the need for personal and corporate conversion as a way to justice. Catechesis is needed for a people whose political economy rests on a morality of liberty and merit. Since the Church's commitment to an "option for the poor" gives gospel witness to our culture, the Pastoral ought to include a sustained analysis of liberal economic philosophy.

Oliver Williams, C.S.C., in a second presentation, approached the Pastoral from his experience as a theologian who has published on the ethical culture of business firms, for example, on Hewlett Packard and Cummins Engine. He notes that in the 1950s anticommunism, birth control and Catholic education were key Catholic concerns. In the last twenty-five years, there has been a renewed awareness that Christians should have concern for the opportunity of all people to lead a humane life and thus also for the social organization of the community. However, business executives lack guidance from the Church; they are treated either with undue deference as rich benefactors, or with immediate condemnation as "robber barons." While the Pastoral attempts to provide guidance, its method of deduction from first principles is not well understood by business executives who are skilled at making trade-offs in conflict situations and tend to approach moral dilemmas through compromise rather than deductive analysis. A more effective approach to the business community would be to pose the problem of poverty and business and the economy in terms of possible trade-offs and their effects. Williams proposed a more inductive method: 1) the presentation of a concrete problem, such as poverty; 2) an exploration of the tradition on this problem; 3) a more in-depth look at the problem in the light of the tradition along with a sample of proposed solutions.

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