

SEMINAR ON MORAL THEOLOGY

The seminar addressed two topics this year.

I. DOING MORAL THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF AN ECCLESIOLOGY REFLECTIVE OF MATTHEW 18 AND MATTHEW 16

One of the 1992 seminar sessions was devoted to a discussion of how moral theologians approach the Scriptures as they undertake to do moral theology. As a result of comments and suggestions at that session, a decision was made to do a follow-up in the same subject area employing a presenter-respondent-discussion format. Accordingly, Michael H. Crosby (Wisconsin) delivered a presentation on "Doing Moral Theology in light of an Ecclesiology Reflective of Matthew 18 and Matthew 16." Rather than read the thirty-one page paper he had prepared, Crosby chose to engage in an interactive lecture format. The session continued with a response from Patrick T. McCormick (St. John's University) and concluded with an exchange of questions and comments.

Crosby referred to three Scripture texts in the course of his lecture:

Matthew 16:19

I will give you [sing.] the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatever [*ho* sing.] you [sing.] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever [*ho* sing.] you [sing.] loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18

Truly, I tell you [pl.],

whatever [*hosa* pl.] you [pl.] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever [*hosa* pl.] you [pl.] loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 28:18-20

Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you.* And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.

Crosby maintains that Mt 28:20 represents the first occasion on which the eleven disciples were given the mandate to teach; before that, the authority Jesus gave (Mt 10:1) was to heal and preach. Crosby cited the works of several exegetes in support of his contention that the mandate given to the apostles to teach was not contained in either Mt 16 or Mt 18, but only in Mt 28. The binding and loosing

mentioned in Mt 16 and Mt 18 had to do with who was and who was not afforded membership in the community. The fact that the two binding and loosing texts exist in singular and plural form is not considered problematic because both approaches to determination of membership (by a person in authority and by the community acting collectively) were likely employed in the Matthean church. Crosby's survey of pertinent exegetical literature led him to conclude that the origin of the texts was either the hand of Matthew or the post-Easter community with which he was familiar.

In the second major section of his analysis, Crosby commented on the disadvantages of tying the justification of papal moral authority to a mandate given in Mt 16:19. Such a justification misrepresents the text; in addition, it devalues or dismisses the role of the community in governance, which is presumed by Mt 18. It results in such problems as the "dysfunctionality" of the Church and the "codependence" of Church members. Crosby explained that this dysfunctionality manifests itself when "Scripture (is used) to reinforce dogmatism and exclusivism and undermine the complete liberation of men and women by God. As a consequence, codependence becomes a common Catholic characteristic because people begin to equate the loyal follower of Christ with the person who submits blindly to papal authority."

As a corrective to an authoritarian dogmatism, Crosby suggests striving to achieve a balance among four stories which he arranged in a quadrilateral construct. The four elements of the construct are: (1) "The Story" (sayings of Jesus according to the Gospel writers); (2) the culture's story (which differs with time, place, and group); (3) the Church's story (the community's tradition of faith, theology and practice); (4) and "My Story" (which is unique to each individual person). In response to a question, Crosby said that he would assign priority to (1) The Story. He also said that implementing his suggestion would be complex and challenging because it would entail recognizing and doing battle with literalism and reductionism in interpreting The Story, individualism and secularism in learning from the culture's story, dogmatism and exclusivism in speaking from the Church's vantage point, and individualism and relativism as these attitudes manifest themselves in My Story.

In Crosby's opinion, the Scriptures require no less of the moral theologian than of the moral magisterium exercised either by the pope or by the pope in union with the bishops: "When the Church of Mt 16 fulfills these criteria its authority to bind and loose through any moral pronouncements will be nourished by the Church of Mt 18 and vice versa. When this does not happen—when either Mt 16 exercises its moral pronouncement divorced from Mt 18 or when Mt 18 determines for itself what morality is to be divorced from Mt 16—you do not have morality but immorality. Neither case reveals a legitimate exercise of moral authority. On the contrary, you have an abuse of that authority that undermines the basic vision of the risen Jesus in Mt 28:16-20."

In his response, Patrick McCormick expressed general agreement with the overall presentation and made three suggestions. First, McCormick questioned assigning priority to *The Story* because *The Story* does not come to us in a "pure" form but, rather, as culturally conditioned. Second, McCormick opined that it might make sense to see the moral endeavor less in terms of a quest for objective truth or propositional statements of what is right and wrong and more in terms of the advantages to be gained by initiating and sustaining a serious conversation among all four elements of the quadrilateral construct. Finally, McCormick suggested that if the Roman Catholic magisterium had been open to contemporary U.S. culture, as well as to the voices of the thousands of women who related their stories, the pastoral letter on women's concerns would have had a successful conclusion.

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II. THE CHURCH AND CHILD SEX ABUSE

The second session of the Moral Theology Seminar heard papers by André Guindon (Saint Paul University, Ottawa) and Susan L. Secker (Seattle University) on the topic of the Church and child sex abuse.

Background materials for the session included two recent ecclesiastical documents: Cardinal Bernardin's report "On Clerical Sexual Misconduct with Minors" and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops report, "From Pain to Hope."

Guindon's presentation was entitled "The Need to Move from an Approach of 'Private Troubles' to One of 'Public Issues'." Guindon argued that the Bernardin and Canadian statements on clerical child sex abuse are inadequate because the texts focus too exclusively on the personal-psychological problems of the abuser priest and not on the public-institutional patterns of Church life which facilitate the problem.

In Guindon's view, the overall mentality and way of life of the institutional Church facilitates clerical child sex abuse in three ways. First, the institutional Church does not effectively challenge society's stereotypical association of males with aggressive behavior. This stereotype subtly fuels child sex abuse by adult males. Second, the institutional Church still encourages the view that clergy are more functionaries than persons and more power wielders than caregivers. This mentality provides a seedbed for clerical child sex abuse by distancing the priest's person from his function and emphasizing the priest's capacity for power over his obligations of care. Finally, the institutional Church still effectively isolates and discourages seminarians from serious affective relations with men and women. This pattern of clerical training delimits avenues of normal adult

friendship and creates a context where admiring children and adolescents are open to abuse.

Guindon concluded by saying that the juridical and psychological approaches of the Bernardin and Canadian statements will not stop child sex abuse in the Church. For abuse to stop, the Church's deeper, structural problems must be squarely faced.

Secker's presentation was entitled "A Cry in the Land: Our Children and Their Church's Moral Famine." Secker argued that the stories of victims and their families provide the Church with vital moral insights not available in the "official stories" of clerical child sex abuse as told in the Bernardin and Canadian statements. Clerical child sex abuse is a catastrophic problem; equally catastrophic is the Church's rush to solutions without listening to and fully appreciating the victim's experience. According to Secker, attention to the descriptions of victims is in keeping with the insight of Catholic moral theology that knowledge about our human reality is critical to moral judgment.

In view of this thesis, Secker cut off her presentation and introduced her guest, Jeanne Miller, mother of a victim and founder of "The Link-Up," a national organization of clergy sexual abuse victims. Miller presented her family's traumatic story of clerical abuse, inadequate Church communications, financial and personal threats, and ultimate resolution. Underlying the many problems Miller encountered in the Church's official response to her son's abuse was the question: how has it come about that the Church's institutional reflex is to protect its clergy first and its children second?

The subsequent discussion included many questions and contributions, some by people also experienced in the issue. Questions were raised over why the problem did not surface earlier and how the issue is being treated internationally. Contributions were made citing positive changes underway within religious orders and the suggestion that Church positions on AIDS, abortion, and birth control may require rethinking in the light of the Church's response to clergy child sex abuse. A concern emerged that—even in the light of this tragic affair—the institutional dignity of the Church not be wholly jettisoned; such a development could cripple the positive work for global economic and political justice carried out in its name.

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