

MORAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Beyond Revisionism: The Question of Moral Formation
Conveners: Daniel M. Cowdin, Salve Regina University
Maura A. Ryan, University of Notre Dame
Moderator: William Spohn, Santa Clara University
Presenters: Cynthia Crysdale, Catholic University of America
Timothy O'Connell, Loyola University of Chicago
James Keating, Pontifical College Josephinum

The topic was initiated by William Spohn, from Santa Clara University, who also moderated. With the renaissance of virtue ethics as well as increased attention to moral psychology, new questions of moral formation have come to the fore in the last decade, questions that proportionalism, in its focus on norms and acts, does not address.

Cynthia Crysdale presented a model of moral formation based on the work of Bernard Lonergan. The model envisions moral formation as a dialectic between socialization (the way of heritage) and discovery (the way of achievement). As we are socialized from infancy on, we develop through affectivity, apprehension of values, belief (truths accepted), growth in understanding, and experience. Yet character is not merely passed on to us by heritage, but achieved with discoveries that each individual can make concerning his or her own identity. This process moves through experience, understanding, judgments of truth, values, and love.

Chronologically, socialization precedes discovery. Eventually, however, the two dimensions become dialectically entwined. Social science can elaborate on these relations in given contexts. All things being equal, the relation between heritage and achievement is complementary. In a Christian worldview, however, the reality of sin complicates moral formation, as neither socialization nor discovery will be complete or flawless. There will be inauthenticity in both the aspirations of the individual and the handing on of the tradition, and thus the process of moral formation must include the need for conversion and grace. Such conversions can involve radical reversals, where what was once considered true is now seen to be false, or what was once good, bad.

Thus moral formation involves both heritage and personal achievement, dialectically related and interwoven with sin, grace, and conversion. It is therefore mistaken to assume that authenticity lies solely in either the tradition or the individual agent. It is just as wrong to assume that the tradition is completely bad and must for integrity's sake be rejected wholesale as it is to assume that the tradition is entirely authentic and integrity requires simple conformity to its representative authorities.

Timothy O'Connell offered comments under the title "Moral Formation: The Next Questions." After clarifying how revisionism did and did not advance thinking on this topic, he summarized the present state of the question in the asser-

tion that the native home of personal values is not the individual but the group. This led to two developmental contributions.

While acknowledging the critique of individualism associated with Robert Bellah's work, O'Connell used the work of Ronald Green and Robert Wuthnow to challenge a caricature of the contrast between individual and community. And in affirming the challenge to develop communities of moral formation, he used the sociological writings of Andrew Greeley to show that moral formation is more a matter of imagination than of ideological imperialism. He further noted that more recent publications of Bellah contrast two distinct imaginations: the Protestant, sectarian imagination which, in Bellah's view is the source of the "cultural code" that supports American individualism; and the Catholic, analogical imagination that offers promise of an alternative view. This led O'Connell to the conclusion that developments in the area of moral formation are unlikely to succeed if they unwittingly root themselves in that sectarian imagination which actually is a source of the problem.

James Keating followed O'Connell with a presentation entitled "Prayer, Formation and Moral Decisions." Keating began by affirming that moral formation may take many approaches from within the varied experiences of Christians. Formation in virtue is a lifetime of commitment to understand, enact, and love what is morally good for the human person. For the Christian, this search for the morally good cannot be separated from one's identity in Christ after baptism. The moral reality is sublated into the "new creation" one has become in Christ. And so, from the time of baptism the Christian seeks to understand moral living with the mind of Christ.

Keating's particular interest is how moral theology intersects with spirituality. Accordingly, he used the theme of prayer to contextualize the question of moral formation. Keating offered prayer as an essential component to moral formation in the following ways: it grounds the believer in Christ in a personal and transcendent matrix of moral formation; it centers the individual person in a tradition of communal prayer and counsel; it affords space to spiritual concerns beyond the reductionist tendencies found for example in some strains of commentary on genetics and politics. He concluded by looking at moral formation and prayer in the pastoral setting.

DANIEL M. COWDIN
Salve Regina University
Newport, Rhode Island