

MANIFESTO: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CATHOLIC SOCIOLOGIST

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INTRODUCTION Those who are committed both to Catholicism and to professional sociology need to assess the compatibility of these two commitments. There are 3 critical issues. 1) Is it necessary or desirable to partition the role commitments? 2) How can a sociological perspective rooted in concepts of relativity and cynicism serve the function of spiritual enlightenment rooted in universal and ultimate meaning? 3) In what sense can the intrinsically precarious vision of sociological analysis be imbued with religious meaning? Deductive Catholic and inductive sociological definitions of reality must influence each other in a cybernetic fashion. While compartmenting must be maintained in performing each role, integration occurs at the level of commitment to a Catholic world view and to the idea that Catholic theology must be involved both in the selection of intellectual concerns and in the interpretation of the ethical import of objective analysis. Sociology influences Catholicism by the enlightenment derived from open inductive methods of research. Catholicism legitimates sociology in that empirical analysis of social life is brought to bear on the ultimate questions of human existence. This relation can elevate both forms of commitment.

. One important theme of recent Catholic theology is the mission of Catholic individuals to contribute in their daily life to the Christianization of the World. For Catholic sociologists, a critical assessment of the compatibility of these respective commitments is mandatory. How can Catholicism be fostered through the pursuit of sociological knowledge? Conversely how can a commitment to Catholicism contribute to sociology as an intellectual discipline?

INTEGRATION VS COMPARTMENTING

. There are 2 equally extreme

ideal-typical options. One can try totally to segregate or integrate the two role commitments. In the latter case, the sociological or intellectual perspective is made to follow logically from certain given suppositions which rest on faith alone. From the viewpoint of such an extreme variant of Catholic sociology, one must submit to demands of divine revelation, as interpreted by the Magisterium. That the spirit of Pope Pius IX's Syllabus of Errors was alive and well until recently was made clear through the warnings and cautionary approach of Pope Pius XII in the 1950 encyclical Humani Generis with its call for all intellectual and scholarly activity to be circumscribed by, and interpreted from Thomism.

. The other equally extreme option is to keep as separate as possible these two role commitments. Catholic dogma, in a view represented by such a scholar as Father Joseph Fichter, undermines and impedes the development of a scientific sociology. The sociology of Catholicism here is viewed as concerned solely with the empirical and descriptive analysis of Catholics in the social or temporal world, while Catholicism is concerned with the supra-empirical realm of ultimate values. The strategy is simple. When doing sociology, one's Catholicism must be pushed to the periphery of consciousness. The other side of the argument is that sociological relativism undermines and contaminates Catholic faith and belief. The wisdom of sociology cannot intrude into the process of spiritual fortification without destroying it. Viewed from either side of this option, social science and Catholicism represent autonomous spheres in the sense that each must be forced to occupy a background status while the other is in the foreground of attention and relevance.

. We reject the first ideal-typical

position because of its needlessly deductive method which confuses theological elements grounded in a culturally specific epoch with timeless and divinely inspired truth. The Church is a mystery that must ever be open to discovery, through more inductive techniques, of new truths about the relation of humanity and society to God. The intellectual honesty and civility of Father Avery Dulles' confrontation with theological pluralism in Models of the Church presents a marked awareness that the Church is not only an incomprehensible mystery, but that both society and humanity are also complex and multifaceted. A narrowly deductive approach is inappropriate in consideration of modern society's recognition of history and tradition as dynamic processes. Humans have created the civil world, and humans should therefore attempt to understand the civil world.

. To admit to the socially constructed nature of reality (Berger and Luckman) is not necessarily to deny that the workings of civil society are intertwined with those of the sacred, supernatural Cosmos. Our opposition to the second ideal-typical option is not the contradictory position that Catholic scholars advocating a value-free sociology of Catholicism are atheists. Rather, the opposition arises from the empirically verifiable impact that such a methodological atheism has on the intellectual product of those who advocate severing the link between the empirical and the metaphysical. The results of a purely inductive empirical sociology have encouraged the development of a discipline in which the important and ultimate questions of human existence have systematically been ruled out of existence. Banishing the supra-empirical dimension from sociology assures the triumph of intellectual triviality.

. We reject both the Catholic sociology, and the sociology of Catholicism as historically presented. Bounds must be imposed on the extent of the integration of roles

of Catholic and sociologist. A Catholic sociologist must bracket considerations of commitment to Catholicism in routine tasks of studying empirical social reality and must bracket the perspective of scientific rationalism in the experience of the sacred and the supernatural.

. On the other hand, legitimate Catholic sociology must recognize significant linkage between these commitments. Here, the Catholic perspective comes strongly into play both in the decision as to which issues to investigate and in the ethical interpretation of the importance of such issues. There are the dialectical and the cybernetic models for conceiving the nature of this linkage. A dialectical relation would be a mutual and reciprocal influence between Catholic and sociological commitments. This model is neither adequate nor tenable.

. The Catholic role is a primary role for any individual whose Catholicism is a source of personal and social identity. A Catholic perspective envelops other roles such as that of sociologist. Catholicism does not represent a primary role simply because it ought to have preeminence, but because preeminence is intrinsic to the Catholic perspective. We prefer a cybernetic model which involves a two-level flow of downward control and an upward feedback. To say that Catholicism stands at the command post of a cybernetic hierarchy means that it alone can provide information to the concrete activities of everyday life, given the concern of Catholicism with ultimate meaning. Sociology provides energy to the command post. By energy we mean actions which serve to mediate, translate and actualize the preferences of the command post. Sociological work, along with other concrete forms of mediation serve to make Catholicism real in everyday thought and action. Parsons has articulated this position more formally in his Paradigm of the Human Condition, where he asserts the cybernetic superordination of

the religion-based telic system. One's Catholic and sociological commitments are cybernetically related such that Catholicism controls the choice of social research problems, and sociological analysis provides feedback. Finally, Catholicism provides interpretative information on the ethical implications of the sociological analysis.

. The basic Catholic principle of subsidiarity as propounded in Pope Pius XI's Quadragesimo Anno illustrates the reciprocal nature of the Catholic-sociologist nexus. The principle of subsidiarity asserts that all social functions shall be performed by the least inclusive social unit. If education can be performed maximally by the family, then the family and not the neighborhood should take charge of education. If, in complex differentiated, bureaucratic societies, or in highly socialized societies, the neighborhood can better handle education than the state, then education should be handled in the neighborhood, and not at a more remote level. Such a Catholic orientation leads the Catholic sociologist to investigate the role of the state in the field of education. Then the feedback begins. On completion of investigation, the sociologist can become a Catholic again, and interpret the objective findings in light of the ethical need for some form of deschooling society, as Illich puts it, and to strengthen local education as a mediating structure, according to the sociologist and theologian, Berger (Illich 1971; Berger 1977).

. A second illustration of the cybernetic example involves the philosophical and anthropological understanding of Catholicism that man is neither totally depraved nor capable of a full transformation into perpetual holiness. This orientation views the mass of mankind as neither sinners nor saints and leads to a full debunking analysis of a socialism that promises total redemption from human ills on this earth. The underlying concept of man in the socialist tradition is one of plasticity and

malleability. People are shaped by environmental and social structural factors. Eliminate the sinful social structures of capitalism, and man will enter into a continued state of reason and probity. The underlying concept of man by Rudolf Solm in his Outlines of Church History is that people are corrupt, and unable to transcend the propensity for sin and evil. Solm's Lutheran position denies that either humanity or the Church can both be in and of the world, and at the same time be authentically Christian. The Catholic position, as we see it, stands between 1) a total emphasis on salvation as totally this-worldly or other-worldly; or 2) as totally an individual or collective enterprise. As the 1971 Synod of Bishops put it, a concern for justice is a constituent feature of the preaching of the Gospel.

. Elemental in the Catholic message is the worship of the utterly merciful, knowing, majestic and transcendent God. This moderate Catholic understanding of humanity guides interest in the empirical analysis of socialism and capitalism. Peter Berger's Pyramids of Sacrifice illustrates the failure of socialism and capitalism to make good on their promises. A Catholic sociologist would interpret this objective analysis into the ethical call for the acceptance of any philosophic/economic system which can demonstrate that it maximizes the health, welfare, and freedom of all people. The Catholic position is set out in its lay tradition by Andrew Greeley in his personal manifesto: The Communal Catholic.

. In terms the phenomenological concepts of foreground and background, such a cybernetic conception of a Catholic sociology weaves back and forth between the commitment to Catholicism and the commitment to professional sociology. A deductive Catholicism and an inductive sociology are in continuing conversation, and are compartmented in a 3-stage sequence which is integrated in the cybernetic process. At the

head of the cybernetic hierarchy is a diffuse attachment to Catholicism modified by an openness to influence from the bottom upward in an objective, inductive sociological analysis. Given this cybernetic relation, what is the nature of sociological feedback, and what is the nature of Catholic control? The first is the sociologizing of Catholicism, referring to a Catholicism that is sociologically aware and informed. The second is the Catholicizing of sociology. It refers to a sociological form of analysis which is spiritually aware and informed.

SOCIOLOGIZING CATHOLICISM

. The sociological perspective seeks to describe the arbitrary, relative, and even farcical aspects of social life and human existence. Its chief objectives include the demystification, debunking and unmasking of human action and belief. Such a perspective attempts to explain the degree to which meaning systems such as Catholicism, perceived by adherents as absolute, taken-for-granted and universal, are socially, culturally, and historically constructed and grounded. Sociologists point out that no person could function socially without routines and taken-for-granted structures. The individual Catholic is not forever wearing sociological glasses. Yet there is considerable potential influence of the sociological perspective in leading one to question personal beliefs and routines. Routines and beliefs may be taken for granted, but they may not be performed or adhered to with any great intensity or seriousness. To a significant extent, action and the world view may become devoid of meaning. A sociological orientation to the world can, and sometimes does degenerate into a crass cynicism. The existence of virtue is discounted. Human action and belief are described in terms of underlying interest, social and cultural indoctrination, and delusion.

. Given that the sociological perspective contains the seeds of a

profound nihilism which questions the objective validity and truth of particular definitions of reality, how can it serve to enlighten and enhance a Catholic world view? It has been argued that both the sociological and the Catholic perspectives share the maxim that we are in but not of this world. The sociological approach identifies the comical and inauthentic qualities of social reality. The Catholic approach applies the doctrine of other-worldly asceticism. One could label this as the elective affinity position. Two independent perspectives which in many respects are contradictory seem to reinforce each other in a crucial respect.

. A sociological awareness, in this view, intensifies Christian faith by providing yet another justification for believing that this world is not to be taken seriously. There are two major criticisms of this position. 1) A radical interpretation of the sociological perspective serves to undermine all meaning systems pertaining to this world and any other world. A radical sociological historicism precludes taking any sphere seriously, whether empirical or super-empirical, given the fact that any meaning system is specifically grounded in a socio-historical context. Recognizing the plurality of meaning systems at any one historical era makes it exceedingly difficult to develop criteria for the validation of any one system versus alternatives. 2) The conclusions of the Vatican II theological conference encourage the individual to take this world seriously. The emphasis on social justice bears witness to such a worldly orientation. The World is neither inherently good nor evil. The World is what individuals and individual Catholics make it. Every effort should be made to create a thoroughly Christian domain. While detachment from particular worldly entities or ideologies is emphasized, engagement in the World is certainly given theological legitimation.

. Such a spirit of worldly participation has led to a dialogue between the Church hierarchy and secular knowledge systems of the social sciences, history, and philosophy, and the ideological systems of humanism, and Marxism. How can Catholicism profit from such a dialogue with sociology? The very quality of the sociological perspective, that of relativism which is so conducive to secularization can lead to a more adequate, sophisticated and enlightened Catholicism. Cynicism, skepticism, and nihilism are not the only possible outcomes of a sociological world view. Sociology can contribute an understanding as to the peculiar challenges facing Catholics in any given social, cultural, or historical setting. Whereas Catholicism expresses universal truths which are impervious to the flux of worldly fads and transitory definitions, the universal is necessarily filtered through particular empirical contexts. A Catholic in contemporary America confronts fundamentally different problems than Catholics in other historic eras. The American Catholic, and modern Catholics generally, must confront and seek to comprehend the issues of secularization, rationalization, consumerism, individualism, anomie, privatism, identity crisis, inequality, and pluralism.

. Their relevance to Catholic commitment is 2-fold. It is characterological and macro-social. The characterological dimension refers to sociological enlightenment on the issues which lead to the spiritual enlightenment of the individual Catholic. The Catholic can become sensitized to fundamental existential, moral, and ethical dilemmas confronted in modern daily life. Sociological enlightenment must become incorporated in the very process of spiritual development by providing a systematic rationale for individual spiritual crisis and ambivalence. A so-called social psychology of modern society can make us more aware of these social and cultural forces and undercurrents which are secular

in nature, like consumerism and hedonism, which pose direct threats to a Catholic way of life, and those forces which are potentially liberating, such as educational opportunity and urbanization, which can lead to a reconstituted Catholic world view. By the macro-social dimension we mean the implications of these socio-cultural forces: 1) for the church as an institution, and 2) for institutionalizing Christian values in American society and the world.

. In terms of the cybernetic model, sociology energizes and provides feedback to Catholicism by explaining how the immutable is filtered through or mediated by particular socio-historical contexts. Sociology specifies the influence of socio-cultural forces in delimiting, circumscribing, and concretizing the way in which Catholicism is experienced. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has traditionally been wary of confronting the secular world. More and more Catholics are involved in professional commitments in various academic disciplines and vocations in the temporal sphere. However, there has been a relative lack of recognition of the role that sociology might play in their spiritual life. It is true that social justice advocates in the Church have cited Marxian and other sociological analyses of inequality as legitimation for a plea for a church-directed political movement. Many of these analyses have been impressionist and polemic, with little systematic effort to connect sociological insights with Catholic dilemmas. On the characterological level, philosophical and psychological approaches have carried the day. The cause of sociological enlightenment has far to go within the clergy, and among the educated Catholic population and the more traditional Catholic lay population.

CATHOLICIZING SOCIOLOGY

. How can sociological work be imbued with religious meaning? Those of the compartmentalist position argue that the two are

intrinsically incompatible, and that they must be cognitively segregated. A second position based on Parsons' work holds that Christian values have become institutionalized into all institutional spheres, whether or not the individual actors know it. Our problem is to describe explicitly how a Catholic meaning system can inform and support sociological work.

. Two general relations can characterize the two spheres. 1) A body of sociological work may be similar in content, but may include different legitimations. Or different legitimations may result in different sociological styles, and may lead to the investigation of different sociological problems. In the first case, sociologists may be led by different meaning systems, such as science, humanism, Marxism, and Catholicism, to study very similar questions and issues. Those interested in a Catholic sociology might very well be interested in much sociological literature which is not legitimated through Catholicism. 2) The requisites of a Catholic sociology are such that different work is done. A Catholic sociology is humanist, which means that sociological work must address ethical, moral, existential, and spiritual issues confronting individuals. The obsession with causality, determinants, and prediction which is characteristic of sociologists who operate under scientific legitimation is notably muted. When a choice must be made, adherence to the requirements of scientific verification loses out to the investigation of ethical factors. Sociological work which is vindicated on the ground of the search for truth results in research which is guided by the mechanics of a narrow scientific regimen which, from the Catholic viewpoint, is devoid of spiritual import. Being guided by Catholic concerns is no less objective than if it were guided by the concerns of scientific rationalism. Catholic sociological work is not necessarily less systematic or less rigorous. But such

research is less consumed with the preemptive passion for prediction, and more consumed with the passion for enlightenment on the human condition.

. The control or information function of Catholicism in sociology can be best understood in the context of legitimation. Catholicism can provide an explicit, affirmed meaning to sociological investigation. Catholicism confers meaning by establishing standards of justification for engaging in sociological analysis and by posing absolute principles and guidelines for human conduct in terms of which historically specific social arrangements can be assessed. Legitimation involves both motivation and interpretation. Motivation constitutes the initial control state of the cybernetic process. The interpretation phase constitutes the final control phase of the cybernetic process.

. Such a notion of Catholic legitimation could be greeted with widespread alarm and scorn by the sociological community. For some, sociology must be value-free in the sense that it is concerned exclusively with empirical truth, and must divorce itself from any ideological bias. Such sociologists fail to recognize that scientific rationalism is itself an ideology and a form of legitimation. Other sociologists recognize the inevitability that sociological work must be guided and assessed in accordance with ideological concerns and principles, provided that one utilizes the correct ideology or one worthy of toleration or acceptance. We believe that most sociologists do not view Catholicism as fitting into either category. The future marginal position of a Catholic sociology alternative in an already-pluralist discipline is not our present concern. We must focus on the creation of a Catholic sociology movement. We hope that our thesis will serve as a manifesto which will inspire like-minded sociologists to enter and support such a movement.

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