

A Well-Kept Secret: The Rightful Place of Social Work in Catholic Higher Education

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The Second Vatican Council in 1965 in "The Church in the Modern World," (Gaudium et Spes) stated:

The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties, of the women and men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way oppressed, these are the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties, of the followers of Jesus Christ.

Addressing what is meant by the "joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the women and men of this age," is not only the task of the Catholic Church's social teaching, but also the task of Catholic social work education.

This task is explicated in the mission statement of the Department of Social Work at the University of St. Thomas and The College of St. Catherine. The mission statement reads:

Through the teaching of social work knowledge and practice, the Department of Social Work at The College of St. Catherine and the University of St. Thomas will prepare individuals to actualize the Judeo-Christian concept of social caring; to demonstrate the intrinsic value of all humankind; to serve those in need; and to act with conviction in advancing the principles of social justice and human rights.

This mission statement clearly identifies that students are being prepared for social work practice in ways that are compatible with the goals of Christian service and the tasks of the Church's social teaching. This connection between Catholic social teaching and social work education is an important basis for understanding the place of social work education in Catholic colleges and universities.

Catholic Social Work Education

Catholic higher education was established "to train individuals with an integrated vision of faith and culture for service to society, to establish a community of Christian witnesses among faculty members and students, and to contribute to the Church and society through scientific research and the study of human problems" (Annarelli, 1987, 63). Catholic social work education was established "to prepare students for the practice of social work in ways that are compatible with the goals of Christian service" (Catholic Social Work Education, 1990, 1) and to provide staffing for Catholic social service agencies.

Accredited Catholic undergraduate programs in social work in 1994 numbered 52, or 13.9 percent of the 375 accredited social work/social welfare programs nationally. Four other Catholic undergraduate programs are in candidacy for accreditation.

In 1994, there were nine accredited graduate social work programs in Catholic colleges and universities (Foy, 1994) or 8.6 percent of the total number of 103 accredited graduate programs nationwide. The first Catholic, university-based social work courses were offered by Simmons College in 1904. Approximately 10 years later, Loyola University in Chicago and Fordham University in New York began offering social work courses. The other graduate programs under Catholic auspices that have been established since the early 1900s are ones at Catholic University, Saint Louis University, Boston College, Our Lady of the Lake in Texas, Barry University, Marywood College, and the joint program at The College of St. Catherine and the University of St. Thomas.

Doctoral programs in social work in 1994 numbered 49. The five Catholic schools that offer a Ph.D. or D.S.W., are Barry University, The Catholic University of America, Boston College, Fordham University, and Loyola University of Chicago.

The location of Catholic programs nationally reflects the pattern of Catholic immigration and settlement. Most accredited undergraduate and graduate programs are in the East and Midwest. There are few Catholic undergraduate programs in the West, South, or Southwest, and only one graduate Catholic social work program in the South and one in the Southwest. This placement of programs leaves most of the Catholic population without access to Catholic, social work education.

In reviewing the development and growth of programs at all three levels, the growth in program development under Catholic auspices has been primarily at the undergraduate level. The only graduate social work program that has been developed since 1975 is the joint program offered by The College of St. Catherine and the University of St. Thomas. At the doctoral level, the number of programs has decreased in the last four years from six to five. This limited number and, in fact, decrease in doctoral education in social work presents a problem for undergraduate and graduate programs providing Catholic social work education as well as for the Catholic social service agencies. Doctoral-level programs at Catholic institutions help to ensure there will be faculty who retain a Catholic identity available to teach at Catholic schools and to provide leadership to Catholic social services. Unless we see an increase in the numbers of programs and enrollment of students at all three levels, as well as active support for existing programs, we are assured to face a significant lack of scholars and service providers who are committed to an integrated vision of faith and culture for Christian service in the Catholic tradition.

Complementary Principles

Pope John Paul II in *On Catholic Universities (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990, 13-14)* states that every Catholic university, as Catholic, must have "an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family." The Catholic university is also a

place that protects the dignity of the human person, confronts the problems of society and culture, demands consideration of ethical concerns, and promotes social justice. Students should be challenged to combine humanistic and cultural development with specialized professional education. Professional education must incorporate ethical values and a sense of service to individuals, to communities, and to society. Faculty and students should be particularly attentive to "the poorest and to those who suffer economic, social, cultural, or religious injustice" (Pope John Paul II, 1990, 25).

The purpose of social work education is "to prepare competent and effective social work professionals who are committed to practice that includes services to the poor and oppressed, and who work to alleviate poverty, oppression, and discrimination" (CPS, 1992, 1). Social work programs must ensure that students acquire a liberal arts perspective which includes an understanding of one's cultural heritage in the context of other cultures. Social work programs must provide specific knowledge about values and their ethical implications, prepare students to understand and appreciate human diversity, and present strategies for achieving social and economic justice and for combating the causes and effects of oppression. Social work professionals are committed to both individual change and social reform.

Social Work Education Exemplifies Catholic Social Teaching

Six basic themes emerge as one examines Catholic social teaching. These themes include the life and dignity of the human person; the rights and responsibilities of the human person; the call to family, community, and participation; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; the option for the poor and vulnerable; and solidarity. Each of these six themes is connected to premises underlying the purpose of social work education.

The Life and Dignity of the Human Person

In the Catholic tradition, the dignity of the human person is key to the Gospel message. Each individual is a reflection of God and possesses a basic dignity that comes from God:

Catholic teaching says the reason people should be understood differently from anything else in the created order is because they possess two capacities that make them in the image of God — intelligence and free will. Human dignity means that a person has a certain kind of standing in the order of creation that demands respect (Hehir, 1991, 10).

This respect is irrespective of their race, gender, age, economic status, culture, or sexual orientation. Institutions and policies must be evaluated by their demonstrated commitment to human dignity.

Catholic universities are called upon to include in their research agendas the study of contemporary problems such as the dignity of the human person, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the search for peace, a just sharing of resources, and economic justice. The Catholic university is called to study these problems

paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions (Pope John Paul II, 1990).

Social work education is mandated to address these areas by the "Curriculum Policy Statement of the Council on Social Work Education." One of the principal social work values is that all human beings have intrinsic worth, irrespective of their past or present behavior, race, culture, beliefs, lifestyle, or economic status. Faculty must infuse this content throughout the social work curriculum and affirm the value that professional relationships are built on regard for individual worth and dignity and furthered by acceptance, honesty, and responsible handling of conflict (CPS, 1992). Students are expected to apply the concepts of unconditional positive regard, non-possessive warmth, acceptance, nonjudgmental attitude, and respect in their service responsibilities.

The Rights and Responsibilities of the Human Person

Catholic social teaching connects human dignity to individual rights and responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities include:

The freedom to conscience and religious liberty, to raise a family, to immigrate, to live free from unfair discrimination, and to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family. People have a right to food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, security, social services, and employment. In Catholic social teaching, rights correspond to responsibilities to each other, to our families and to society. Respect for the individual commands that the individual respect the rights of others, and works for the common good (US Catholic Conference, 1990, 5).

Catholic universities have the right and responsibility to be both a community of scholars and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative (The Catholic University in the Modern World, 1972). The moral and ethical implications of both research methodology and findings must be a concern for scholars and students in the Catholic university. The Catholic university must be responsible for providing accessible education to the poor, people of color, and members of other disadvantaged groups. Catholic universities must assume some responsibility for promoting the development of emerging countries (Pope John Paul II, 1990).

The "Curriculum Policy Statement of the Council on Social Work Education" addresses issues of scholarship, research, accessibility of educational opportunities, and the interdependence of nations. Schools of social work must assist students to develop an awareness of their personal values and to clarify conflicting values and ethical dilemmas, including ethical standards of scientific inquiry in their research content. Social work programs must make specific efforts to ensure equity to all students through recruitment, admission, retention, and financial aid policies and procedures. Schools are mandated to demonstrate that student aid is available to provide for a diverse student body that includes students who are economically disadvantaged (CSWE, 1991). Emphasis is placed on the admission and retention of students of color, women, and other disadvantaged populations. Internationalizing the curriculum and developing "partner

programs" with schools of social work in developing countries is being actively pursued in many schools of social work. Social work education has historically emphasized the importance of establishing services needed to meet basic human needs, which support the development of human capacities and enhance the social functioning of individuals and families.

The Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The third basic theme of Catholic social teaching asserts that human beings are not only sacred, but completely social in nature. Human dignity, rights, and responsibilities are recognized in relation to family and others in the community. This teaching emphasizes the importance and role of the family in shaping values and in addressing questions of social justice, and the requirement for each of us to contribute to the broader society. It addresses the obligation of:

State and other political institutions to protect the life, dignity, and rights of the person; promote the well-being of our families and communities; and pursue the common good. Catholic social teaching stresses that a central test of political, legal, and economic institutions is what they do to people, what they do for people, and how people participate in them" (US CC, 1990, 5).

This theme looks at the proper role of the state in civil society and identifies the principle of "subsidiarity," which calls for a pluralistic structuring of power, so that all power is not located in one place. Subsidiarity promotes problem solving at the lowest level before the problem is taken up the social hierarchy for resolution (Hehir, 1991).

Catholic higher education is an environment that exemplifies the Church's call to understand and support family and to participate in and contribute to the broader society. The Catholic university is the "custodian and the witness of Catholic civilization — a civilization of reason" (Ruud, 6). It must be a "hospitable environment where the life of the mind and the urgings of the heart are taken seriously. Both those who stand within the community of faith and those who come as fellow-searchers for the ultimate source of life and human meaning should find welcome here. There should be no enemies or aliens in a university, a truly Catholic university" (Malloy, 1992, 23). The Catholic university calls to all of its members to become part of a community of scholars dedicated to preserving and extending knowledge. With this call or invitation comes specific rights and responsibilities, which include commitment to teaching, research, and service. Each member of the academic community is called upon to participate in the life of the community and to contribute to broader communities in society. Catholic institutions of higher education must through their "Christian spirit of service be firmly committed to the promotion of social justice" (Pope John Paul II, 1990, 23).

Integrated throughout the "Curriculum Policy Statement of the Council on Social Work Education" is the mandate that social work education must promote the "development and advancement of knowledge, practice skills, and services that further the well-being of people and promote social and economic justice" (CPS, 1992, 1). Social work education

emphasizes the need to understand the centrality of the family, its importance as a basic social unit in society, and its role in shaping values. The human behavior and the social environment curriculum area must provide content on "the impact of social and economic forces on individuals and social systems, content about the ways in which systems promote or deter people in the maintenance or attainment of optimal health and well-being, and about values and ethical issues" (CPS, 1992, 8). Social work education must include teaching on the roles of the state and other political institutions as they influence policy development, protect the dignity and rights of the person, promote the well-being of our families and communities, and address the principles of social and economic justice. Central to the social welfare policy and services curriculum in social work education is analysis of what political and organizational processes do to and for people. Social work education calls faculty and students to participate in the broader community and empowers clients to exercise control over their lives to enhance their well-being.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The fourth theme which is central to the Church's social teaching establishes that:

Work is an expression of human dignity and allows one to contribute to God's creation. People have the right to decent and productive work, to decent and fair wages, to private property and economic initiative. Workers have the right to form voluntary associations such as unions, cultural organizations, and professional societies. The value of voluntary association, which is strongly supported by the Church, is at the heart of *Rerum Novarum* and other encyclicals on economic justice (USCC, 1990, 6).

Pope John Paul II's 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* contends that the economy exists to serve people, not the other way around. This principle maintains that we have an obligation to organize work so that people can make a living wage and support their families. Economic systems must be created that provide meaningful work and protect the basic dignity of the person.

Catholic higher education challenges both faculty and students "to attain integration between faith and life, and between professional competence and Christian wisdom. Students are challenged to search for the truth and for meaning in their lives, while training as leaders of tomorrow in their professions" (Pope John Paul II, 1990). A significant part of most mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities addresses the importance of combining a liberal education with career competency. Catholic higher education has expanded not only to shape minds and to build morals, but to extend the Catholic influence in society. Fostering a social, political, and intellectual environment guided by Catholic teaching and moral values has always been an integral part of the Catholic educational commitment. The growth and development of Catholic higher education has allowed numerous members of the Catholic Church and others to receive collegiate, graduate, and professional training, helping them to advance socially and economically (Leahy, 1991).

The purpose of social work education is to prepare competent and effective social work professionals. Social work education must provide the knowledge, values, and skills of the profession that are transferable among settings, population groups, and problem areas. Social work programs must ensure that their graduates have acquired a liberal arts perspective upon which the professional foundation can be built. Social work education does not allow for passive observation by its members, but focuses on social action and demands that constant attention is paid to values and ethics, diversity, social and economic justice, and populations-at-risk. Social work education emphasizes that workers "strive to make social institutions more humane and responsive to human needs, are committed to assisting client systems to obtain needed resources, and are responsible for their own ethical conduct, the quality of their practice, and seeking continuous growth in the knowledge and skills of their profession" (CPS, 1992, 7).

The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The poor and the oppressed have a special place in Catholic social teaching. A basic moral test of a society is how its most vulnerable members are provided and cared for. The Catholic tradition calls its members to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Catholic social teaching contends that society must be viewed in terms of all of its members, and programs must be established that benefit everyone, not just a privileged few. Catholic social teaching calls us to respond to the needs of others, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. Catholic social teaching stresses that we must seek creative ways to move beyond our emphasis on individual rights and freedom to extend our democratic ideals to economic life and thus ensure that the basic needs for a life with dignity are accessible to all (USCC, 1990).

John Henry Newman stated "that training of the intellect, which is best for the individual himself, best enables him to discharge his duties to society. If a practical end must be assigned to a university course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of the social life, and its end is fitness for the world" (Pelikan, 1992, 137). The Catholic university does not define its mission as one of directly providing care for the poor and vulnerable in society, but as contributing to the betterment of society through the lives and careers of its individual students. Newman saw the university and Catholic education as "the ground of promise in the future," as a way to address "the wrongs of the oppressed" (Pelikan, 1992, 147).

The stated purpose of social work education is to "prepare competent and effective social work professionals who are committed to practice that includes services to the poor and oppressed, and who work to alleviate poverty, oppression, and discrimination" (CPS, 1992, 1). All graduates of accredited social work programs must be able to demonstrate that they "understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and the strategies and skills of change that advance social and economic justice" (CPS, 1992, 4). At the heart of the social work profession is a concern for the well-being of all people and a commitment to serving the more helpless and vulnerable members of society.

Solidarity

The final basic theme of Catholic social teaching focuses on the connectedness of all human beings, and includes all people as part of the "human family." Humans as social beings belong to three communities: the family, civil society, and the human community:

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers (cf. Gn4:9). In a connected and global economy, our responsibilities to one another across national and other boundaries. Violent conflict and the denial of dignity and rights of people anywhere on the globe diminish each of us. Catholic social teaching clearly identifies the Church's concern for world peace, global development, environment, and international human rights. "Loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world (USCC, 1990).

Newman notes that the Catholic university has "duties to society" on the local, national, and international level. The Catholic university must recognize an international context for its research and publication. Catholic universities must accept the challenge to become actively involved with professional international exchange programs to help prepare trained professionals in every profession for developing Third World countries. Providing the knowledge and skills for survival and growth demonstrates a commitment to the dignity of the human person, encourages individuals to take an active role in society, provides meaningful work, and assists the poor and the oppressed. A major challenge for each Catholic university is to move away from its ethnocentric views and ideology and find the resources to focus its energies on the larger international context.

Social work education is committed "to the enhancement of human well-being and to the alleviation of poverty and oppression" (CPS, 1992, 2). A premise underlying social work education states that "Effective social work education programs recognize the interdependence of nations and the need for worldwide professional cooperation" (CPS, 1992, 2). State social work organizations and schools of social work are becoming involved in "pairing programs" with developing Third World countries. Social work faculty are providing expertise in planning and social development and in curriculum development to develop professional programs in countries where professional social work education has not been available. Both the national professional social work organization and the national professional social work education accrediting organization have identified internationalizing the profession and the curriculum as a major focus.

Conclusion

Catholic social teaching, the Catholic university, and social work education are complementary and compatible. Each has a rich heritage that has put people before things, recognized the dignity of each human being, challenged the oppression of racism and bigotry, and worked for social and economic justice. Each calls upon its members to defend human rights, to participate in society at all levels, and to take action to serve the poor and vulnerable. Each requires that its members apply values and ethics to every aspect of their lives. Social work education in many respects represents the actualization

of Catholic social teaching and represents the Catholic universities' commitment to liberal education and preparation for career competency. n

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