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LEADERSHIP ETHICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN REFORMED AND CATHOLIC ECCLESIOLOGY

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Although moral theology and Christian ethics have always been grounded within the life of the Church, many outside the community of faith have attempted to usurp philosophical morality, from a particularly cerebral position by circumventing the Church in order to develop a non-ecclesial system of ethics. In the West, systems of morality continued to distance themselves from their ecclesial roots by claiming that the very principles, which drove the ethics practiced by the system's adherents were founded upon basic human reasoning. The Roman Catholic position continues to recognize that the gospel is mediated through reason and the sciences to particular conclusions that insist upon the necessity of structured institutions (Curran, 1984). An ecclesiology of ethics is properly understood through the notion of mediation, though not at the expense of reducing a leader's standard of morality to a common rank.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although moral theology and Christian ethics have always been grounded within the life of the Church, many outside the community of faith have attempted to usurp philosophical morality, from a particularly cerebral position by circumventing the Church in order to develop a non-ecclesial system of ethics. Forester (1995) posits that the purpose served by having moral theology was for the benefit of those participating in the sacrament of penance before the Protestant Reformation. This did not cease within Protestant ecclesial communities, however, as having a philosophy of ethics served to bolster what was to be understood as Church discipline (Mahoney, 1987). However,

especially in the West, systems of morality continued to distance themselves from their ecclesial roots by claiming that the very principles, which drove the ethics practiced by the system's adherents were founded upon basic human reason. The Roman Catholic position continues to recognize that the gospel is mediated through reason and the sciences to particular conclusions that insist upon the necessity of structured institutions (Curran, 1984). An ecclesiology of ethics is properly understood through the notion of mediation, though not at the expense of reducing a leader's standard of morality to a common rank.

II. ETHICAL THEORY

A Reformed Perspective

Ecumenical social ethics were developed by deductive progression from general doctrinal pronouncements through moral principles derived from these assertions and applied in a particular context. Making concrete decisions regarding the implementation of policies ought to be left to the individuals, according to Forrester (1995) because the Church cannot make pronouncements on specifics due to a lack of technical know-how. The Church can only make general pronouncements on doctrine and morality while leaders within the social sciences flesh out the middle axioms (or, the moral principles derived from doctrines) by objectively analyzing a situation according to the constraints of the real world. Within the context of the Church, the ecclesial and theological leaders are the ones who are able to make such general pronouncements on ethics and doctrine. This process is hierarchical in nature where the Church is seen as a moral community that does not leave room for the disenfranchised members of that community. This, Forrester (1995) believes, is due to what he sees as Constantinian assumptions that pervade the Western Church.

For Forrester (1995), leading away from the "Constantinian assumptions" can most clearly be seen in Barth, who asserted that a theologian ought to hold office within the Church rather than the academy. He rightly states that Christian theology must be done in context of the Church because it is a service to the Church that helps reveal divine truth. Barthian disciples view Christian ethics as "koinonia ethics" (Lehmann, 1963). Christian ethics cannot exist separately from Church ethics because the ethics practiced by believers are necessarily tied to the life of the faith community. Church ethics serve the faith community by providing insights into that which has been received as public truth. Essentially, dogmatics *is* ethics and making a faith confession or doctrinal pronouncement cannot take place in an objectively detached fashion. Hauerwas (1984) articulates his agreement with this notion when he stated that the Church does not have a social ethic as much as it *is* a social ethic. Forrester (1995) also affirms that a Church, which assimilates into the power structures of society, does not necessarily exemplify an active Christian ethic as much as it merely conforms to the surrounding culture.

A Catholic Perspective

In a similar fashion to the Reformed appreciation for mediation within the description of progressive ethical developments, the Roman Catholic insistence upon theological mediation is an area where Protestants may find agreement. Catholicism has always maintained the notion of mediation by uniting Scripture *and* Tradition, Faith *and* Reason, Faith *and* Works, God *and* humanity, Jesus *and* the Church and has rejected the axiom, “to God alone be the glory” because humanity has been made sharers in the God’s glory through the mediation of his word and works throughout the world (Curran, 1984). Anytime an abuse within the Church had arose, such as Pelagianism’s failing to see how faith was made active in works, it was due to the reality of mediation, or participation, having been forgotten. When one recognizes the necessity of mediation, morality becomes concrete, and appealing to morality requires the use of all appropriate data from the human sciences. While people may claim to make calculated decisions based on politics and economics, it is also true, whether recognized or not, that these, or any type of decisions requires the appeal to system of morality.

A mediated ethic realizes the necessity of concrete specificity via the employment of human data, though it is worth noting that this does not always come with certainty or freedom from error. Curran (1984) argues that the Church can never be completely assuring in complex moral theology because while principles may be supported, there will continue to be shortcomings, which must also be recognized. Even official policy has not been accomplished by unanimous decision. Within a broad context of moral principles, specific judicial decisions do not carry with them the same kind of binding authority that one may find in more general principles of morality. Mediation, thus, acknowledges that preservation from error and judgment with complete certainty may not always be attained. The Catholic prominence of mediation within moral theology, according to Curran (1984), admits that social justice and reform not only require a change of a person’s heart, but a structural or, institutional shift, as well. While this has not always been the case within the Roman Catholic Church, for better or for worse, institutional restructuring has been taking place within moral theological subjects, such as just war, for centuries. For example, Curran (1984) notes how Abbot (1966) describes the ethic of peace as the result of justice and love that is rooted in the hearts of individuals. Bringing about a peaceful world requires the presence of political structures. The goal of eliminating war requires a universal, public authority endowed with effective power to unilaterally disarm any system, which does not assure peace.

The Contemporary Existence and Grounding of Moral Norms

Despite Roman Catholicism’s development of aspects within moral theology such as just war theory, the re-emergence of pacifism as a moral alternative to war has, undeniably, taken place as of late. This moral pacifism is founded in the adherence to the gospel’s example of Christ’s pacifism and unwillingness to take up arms or engage violence. Since a Christian ought not to be preoccupied with efficacy, since everything rests in God’s hands, non-violence can be seen as a primary witness and effective means toward social change. While theologians and faithful Catholic practitioners

debate on whether pacifism must be a moral absolute, the bigger picture dictates that there exists a deeply divided approach to morality within the Catholic Church. First, the (older) deontological approach asserts that certain actions are always impermissible no matter what the consequences. However, one must also consider the (revisionist) teleological approach, which states that pre-moral evil can be done if there is commensurate reason. Curran (1984) describes the revisionist approach as being more relational and less absolute.

The revisionist approach to moral theory concerning the certitude of moral norms opposes what is now seen as the moral alternative to war; that is, pacifism. From the deontological perspective, war, killing, and violence are never permitted on any level and must not be encouraged or supported by ecclesial leaders, nor urged upon their lay faithful. In contrast, some revisionists purport that not only can violence and killing as pre-moral evil be justified by commensurate reason, in the name of justice, violence can be considered morally acceptable, and even virtuous. Curran (1984) notices a consistency between the Roman Catholic teaching on peace and war and the Catholic ethical acceptance of the reality of mediation along with all its consequences, which can be perceived liturgically as well as sacramentally.

III. LITURGY, BAPTISM & EUCHARIST

Liturgy

Worship is an indispensable dimension to the service of God, his Church, and the world. The relationship between worship, which is seen as the truest path to commune with God, and ethics is a contentious one. The Old Testament prophets saw justice and compassion for the poor as the earmark of a person who knew God. Worship, in Forrester's (1995) understanding, acts as an alternative of service toward one's neighbor. Sobrino (1978) agreeably states that access to Christ can only be actualized through the praxis of discipleship, which finds itself in tension with the cultic worship of God. Sobrino (1978) and Forrester (1995) both assert that there is no direct access to God through the praxis of cultic worship, whereas service to humanity (mostly the disenfranchised) does, indeed, offer access to God. They both contend that an interest in worship turns Christianity into a "religion", which they use in a pejorative sense. So, worship is not only superfluous, but it acts as a distraction from the praxis of discipleship and the action of doing justice. Bypassing one's neighbor and all ethical issues of justice and peace for God's creation in exchange for worship engages and validates Marx's criticism of religion. This line of thinking implicitly asserts that worship is ritualistic and, in no way, transformational to the practitioner. They merely confirm the social order, which forces individuals to accept the status quo of injustice and oppression.

Forrester (1995) does, however, rightly challenge this notion through Driver's (1991) argument that while ritual concerns itself with order and community, transformation is the greatest result of worship. The social order is necessary for communal love to be a possibility. When allied with justice, this love is devoted to the liberation of people and groups from their oppressing forces. So, not only does worship challenge the social order, it also helps bring about a higher, divine order that is transformative, in nature. The Church is, thusly, the means of salvation as the new life

of recreated humanity. Worship is to be perceived as a resource for moral life and the Church, expressed sacramentally, is a social ethic manifested through worship, service, and sacrifice (Schmemmann, 1986).

Baptism and Eucharist

Baptism is the initiation into a new life of following Christ as the superlative leader of his Church. Within this new life, the family of God follows the guidance of God's Holy Spirit through the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Baptism is dynamic and encompasses a person's entire life (Forrester, 1995). The community of God's people is fully manifested in the Eucharist because He embraces all facets of life. Participating in this sacrifice requires reconciliation and sharing amongst those within the family of God who are all struggling to achieve the balance between the social, political, and economic relationships of life. Injustice, slavery, and separation are challenged when the community of God shares in Christ's body, soul, and divinity, illustrating the inconsistent behavior of humanity in contrast to God's reconciling presence throughout history. Judgment, pride, materialism, obstinacy, and power abuse all fly in the face of Christ's vision for divine rule and the renewal of his creation (Forrester, 1995). God's grace is made manifest through those leaders who work toward justice, love, and peace toward everyone for whom they're responsible. Participation in the Eucharist is transformative in nature because it appeals to the leader of God's Church to govern the lives within the Church, containing the humble faithful. When the Church's members empty themselves *of themselves* in favor of God's divine rule, the possibility to attain divine grace to assist in strengthening the relationships of this world become evident. This notion, however, is no more visibly contented than from a context of church profusion.

IV. ECCLESIOLOGICAL PLURALISM

The Church, as described by Curran, (1984) is a community that is actively involved in the life of society, constantly struggling for justice and peace in this world. This requires ecclesial leaders to try to be the leaders of society, which, at times, involves a critical eye concerning the ethics of the surrounding cultures. This does not mean that the Church must always adopt a contrarian approach to the sectarian movements that come into vogue within pockets of society. There are times when the Church and society will find agreement and it is in these times when the people of the Church ought to step up and act as leaders for the movements toward the ethical good—a notion that is always in concert with God's divine nature. Curran (1984) posits that there exists pluralism within the Catholic Church, which recognizes a variety of possible options that can be held by members within the Church on complex ethical issues like justice and war. While there are limitations to the plurality of ideas that can be held within the bounds of orthodoxy, Curran (1984) does not define the boundaries, nor go into how these boundaries are reached. Existing within the bounds of the Magisterium's teachings is one way that members of God's assembly can avoid overstepping the demarcations of the plurality of ideas that are permitted to be believed about ethical issues. This should always be tempered by viewing each situation through a lens of what Christ said or did in the gospels.

The range of ethical views that may be held within Catholic theology, according to Curran (1984) is founded upon the necessary notion of mediation. Without mediation, there can be no room for pluralism. And as was stated earlier, the Church got off the tracks when mediation was forgotten. Curran (1984) seems to be setting up a bit of a straw man's argument with this relationship between mediation and pluralistic ethics in order to bolster his own, personal conclusions concerning justice and war. So, while it may be permissible to appeal to the Magisterium's teaching on such ideals as just war, even more vital is one's appeal to Christ's words and actions in the gospels, especially when confronting what ought not to be complex ideas within Christian ethics. It is imperative for Christian leaders to live a more black and white life than those they serve in order to be perceived as acting above reproach in the eyes of those who emulate their example. There is far less room for error when God has placed someone in a position of ecclesial leadership because there are more judgmental eyes on the person's behavior; not to mention the fact that ecclesial leaders are often looked at as examples of right living. Falling from grace can be a more significant trauma for an ecclesial leader who does not live up to the strict standards that have been established for them—like those found in the Pastoral writings concerning the qualifications of bishops and deacons. For ecclesial leaders, no evil ought to be tolerated. No matter the consequence, every kind of pre-moral evil ought to be avoided in order that he or she may be able to confidently present two bruised cheeks to Christ. This, thusly, renders the revisionist approach to ethics untenable for those who've been placed in high leadership positions within the Church. If leaders cannot remain principled to the teachings and life of Christ, then they cannot be counted on in other areas of ministry to carry on the mission of the Kingdom of God. While an ethical pluralism may be less intolerable for those outside the Church, members of God's family are called to a stricter ethic of living, and even more so for ecclesial leaders who will continue to serve as mission ambassadors, exemplifying Christ toward the rest of his flock. Maintaining a position of ethical leadership is closer to the gospel of peace and any acceptance of violence should not even be seen as a last resort—it should not even enter the minds of ecclesial leaders. Curran (1984) sees pacifism as a vocation that ought to be merely tolerated within the Church, while the remainder of the Church, especially those in leadership positions must continue to act in a militaristic fashion in light of immanent eschatology.

Curran (1984) down plays what he calls "triumphalism" within the Catholic Church, stating that he believes that the Church ought not act as exemplary leaders to the rest of society because it damages the prophetic function of the Church. The Church's prophetic function is to be understood in specific contexts where moral certitude is absent and the anticipation of the eschaton can change the stakes at any moment. Comprised of saints and sinners, Curran (1984) borrows Luther's axiomatic expression of the Church as being saved and sinful at the same time. He pays no mind to the continual historical tradition which calls the Church, herself, a blameless organism, that is comprised of people working toward holiness in Christ. Curran (1984) argues that the Church's prophetic role cannot contradict human reason, which he implicitly holds at the same esteem as God's divinely revealed truth. By minimizing the Church's prophetic role in society, Curran's (1984) articulated views can unquestionably be classified as pluralistic but certainly not Catholic.

V. CONCLUSION

Moral implications on ecclesial leadership are founded upon the teachings of the Church, which help govern the faithful in their endeavor to lead the world in an ethical fashion. Understanding ethics from a Catholic ecclesiology means that one implicitly accepts a paradigm wherein two sides of an issue must be believed in tandem. Faith and reason, faith and works, Scripture and Tradition, Jesus and the Church are non-competing ideals that must be believed and practiced by ecclesial leaders to serve as an example to the whole of society. This does not necessarily include ascribing to an idea of just war just because it has been taught and accepted by famous Catholic theologians. Christian pacifism avoids pre-moral evil no matter the consequences because it is founded on the teaching and action of Christ in the gospels. Employing a revisionist approach by accepting the rationale that pre-moral violence caused by war is reasonable appeals to an ethic of relativistic plurality, which competes with the strict standards that leaders are held to in the Church. Organizations have attempted to create ethical systems apart from the Church but only within an ecclesial context can morality be properly understood and practiced.

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