

## **A Christocentric Anthropology Versus the Culture of Death**

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Our Lord relates the parable of the ungrateful wedding guests who were replaced at the feast by the common people gathered from the street corners and roads. At the end of the parable, one of the gathered appears without the wedding garment and is recalcitrant until he is sent away.<sup>1</sup>

As social scientists, we practice our profession in the environment that was handed down to us, and we practice our faith too often outside of that environment. We come to the feast too often without wearing the garments of the faith, without identifying ourselves as believers through our research designs and through our interpretations of what we see. The consequences include loss of the opportunity to evangelize, and also reinforcement of the common view that science and social science are disintegrated from faith.

This is what we mean by the culture of death. It is that the social sciences themselves could serve life better by focusing on life, eternal life, life in grace, life as we live it as people of faith. The dis-integrity of our faith lives and our academic or work lives has left the social sciences, which are our responsibility, incapable of helping the whole person reach fulfillment and integrity.

Like God's creatures themselves, each of the social sciences in its orientation reflects something of the Creator, as does each of the social scientists.<sup>2</sup> For example, the Trinity is a distinction and a unity of three persons. Psychology tends to focus on the distinct individual while sociology is more concerned with relationships and social systems. However, in the image of God, man is neither isolated individual nor isolated

social institution, but an integration of both. So, too, we can conceive of an anthropology that views man in this perspective, and becoming the basis for reforming the social sciences. Each could continue to study the aspects of humanity that they respectively address now, but in this God-centered perspective, the social sciences would approach an integrity, like the integrity of the person, that is broader and interdisciplinary. This integrity can be found by a common focus on humanity in movement toward fulfillment. This necessarily is a Christ centered approach, because He reveals to us the fullness of humanity as sharers in the divine nature.<sup>3</sup>

Integrity of the social sciences, and our view of who we are must begin and end in Christ. That integrity is not possible through simple coordination of the contemporary social sciences because they are built on assumptions of negation: There is no grace, no direction to life, and no life after death. Perhaps most insidious is the assumption of conservation of matter which extends to denial of the possibility of creation from nothing. This denies the centrality of God and the continuity of life created not just of the physical body but also of the enduring soul. In an attempt to find a common ground of belief, social scientists ignore the influence of the Creator in our lives.

Integrity must instead come from a greater articulation between human knowledge and discovery and divine revelation. As the contemporary study of human development suffers in it Pelagianistic indifference to the action of grace in our lives, so, too, the development of the social sciences suffers from our indifference to the movement of grace toward charity and the unity of the Beatitude.

## Reconceiving Social Science

In fact, these negative assumptions actually have two manifestations. The first is indifference to the creation of man in the image of the Creator. Views of the interrelationship of creatures are either overly concerned with arguing a false equality of all creatures or with trying to identify their place in a social or morphological hierarchy with man as the pinnacle.

The second manifestation is the absence of a dynamic view of man in quest of restoration of likeness to God. This empties social science of the meaning of existence.

An understanding by the social sciences that people are created in the image and likeness of God entirely changes their orientation. In particular, this understanding provides three principles on which a new study of humanity can be built:

1. the Trinity as the point of reference for understanding human faculties, institutions, and relationships;
2. directionality and meaning to life; and
3. causality.

## Point of Reference: The Image and Likeness of Our Creator

In the image of God, humanity is endowed with free will and a predestination toward redemption. Free will is expressed in the choice to love, and redemption is realized in charity and the sacramental life. Man lives in relationality because the Trinity is relational.<sup>4</sup> Studying humanity outside of the context of human relationship is not studying humanity at all. Continuity of behavior, trait analysis, and research methodologies not sensitive to human relationality are all doomed to false attributions.<sup>5</sup> For example, the study of social reinforcement and social cognition are certainly open to

the influences of relational mankind, but are too often insensitive to the hierarchy that characterizes every person's system of relationships.

Moreover, as the Trinity is both unity and distinction,<sup>6</sup> so, mankind is both a unity and a distinction. The dichotomies between physical and social anthropology and between sociology and psychology disappears when the social science is reconceived in the image of the Trinity.

Unlike image, which cannot be lost, likeness is lost in original and personal sin and is restored in grace. The sacraments and charity are the manifestations or intermediate causes of this restoration. God is their source or first cause. Relationality, as reflecting the life of the Trinity, is properly ordered to the Beatitude.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding the basic elements of human existence must be the basis on which an integrated social science develops. God is the author and the sustainer of our lives and our relationships,<sup>8</sup> continually ordering all of them toward communion and giving each creature "its own goodness and perfection."<sup>9</sup>

As relationships themselves are properly ordered toward union in Christ, so a Christocentric social science will also be properly ordered toward human redemption. The social sciences most often confront our reflection of the Creator not in asking the "what" question, but in asking the "why" question; that is, in asking about the action of the will and causation. Simply put, social sciences are most often concerned with explaining motives, goals, and objectives, the why's of existence, because we live constitutively in the hope of redemption, and in wonder of how we got here. We are often unaware of how profound the longing for salvation is in the ways we structure our lives.

Life, then, is ultimately rational and rationality can be inferred from the behaviors of all creatures, even of animals to which we attribute no intellect. Rationality inheres in the creatures of the most rational Creator. Intentionality and directedness or purpose are how it is manifest.

In proving the existence of God, Saint Thomas addresses this issue and provides a structure on which to reconceive the social sciences that involves understanding that humanity: reflects the Trinitarian Creator, has rational origins, is directed toward communion in Christ, and lives in a universe of life of which the Creator is the first cause and sustainer Kreeft<sup>10</sup> explains these characteristics of existence, what he calls the Principle of Sufficient Reason, as necessary to explain the existence of the universe, that is, the answer to the why question.

### The Dynamic of Directionality

Saint John says,

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope based on Him makes Himself pure as He is pure.”<sup>11</sup>

Several aspects of this observation are necessary for a new social science.

Primarily, it is not possible for Saint John or for us to understand what the Beatitude will eventually bring us, but it is important to understand that it is the destiny we can appropriate through Christ. We also know that it will mean that we will be like Christ. This gives us dominion over the earth. The account of the creation of the universe in

Genesis,<sup>12</sup> with man being created on the sixth day attests to this dominion, as does the Catechism<sup>13</sup>

This dominion is in service of the Kingdom of God. Simple ethological comparisons or contrasts of human morphology or social mechanisms with those of other creatures are insufficient to explore humanity in movement toward salvation.

This is a revolutionary idea for the social sciences. By expansion of the observation that creation is intrinsically rational, it accounts for an integrated person as an atoning one, becoming holy. Jesus is the unifying principle, the integrating cause. He tells us, to incorporate all of humanity through baptism, and that He is always among us,<sup>14</sup> as the influence and the constitutive rationality of human relations and social institutions. As Uncreated grace, Jesus lives in us and is the organizing principle of human rationality and of human cognition. All creation reflects the Creator, and these faculties are so intrinsically aligned toward communion that we are often blind to their reality.

Life itself reflects the Creator. Human endeavor, human attribution, human intelligence, social organizational constructs such as infant attachment, parental bonding, and altruism, are all at base relational constructs, imbued with a divine rationality toward salvation that explains both human distinction and human union.

Directionality is perhaps most clearly expressed by Saint Thomas' fourth proof that there is a God.<sup>15</sup> He says,

“Some things are better, truer, more excellent than others. Such comparative terms describe varying degrees of approximation to a superlative ...something therefore is the truest and best and most excellent of things, and hence the most fully in being; Now when many things possess some

property in common, the one most fully possessing it causes it in the others....what causes other things their being, goodness, etc. we call God.” (p. 13)

Psychological theory, which places us on a path toward some goal, is not entirely bereft of this organizing principle, but suffers insufficiency because it does not recognize that eternal life in communion in Christ is that goal. Erikson,<sup>16</sup> for example, postulates that in proper development, people experience a last stage of integrity. However, this integrity is not rooted in anything but the experiences of the person, and, as such, cannot fully explain moral behavior outside of its own intrinsic value. Similarly, other theories,<sup>17</sup> explain the quest of integration or wholeness as a developmental principle, but find no goal that is external to the person.

Quite the opposite is true of a Christocentric anthropology. The Holy Father says that

“People who are destined to go to heaven are simple like children, and like children are full of trust, rich in goodness and pure. Only people of this sort can find in God a Father and, thanks to Jesus, can become in their own turn children of God.”<sup>18</sup> (p. 9)

Here is the key to the Christocentric approach. The self-directed fulfillment of contemporary social science is the natural outcome of assuming that humanity has a disposition toward independence. This directionality is disordered. In fact, God’s creatures are interdependent on each other and radically dependent on Him.<sup>19</sup> People are most excellent, in Saint Thomas’s words, most like Christ, when they depend on each other.

Adam was created as a fully functional adult, still needing a companion. Nevertheless, to undo his disobedience, Christ comes into the world not as Adam did, but as we do, dependent in the wombs of our mothers. This radical dependence is a

sacramental sign of our union with Christ, a union that brings about the reconciliation of us with the Father and undoes the sin of Adam.

Dependence does not compromise the goodness and perfection of each individual creature.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, human interdependence is the invitation to charity. Again, creation, as reflection of the Creator contains both the distinction of perfect individualization and the union of perfect interrelationship. For creatures, this interrelationship is interdependence. The need for each other and the will to fulfill the need for each other are the living out of the commandment to love one another in the radical and Eucharistic way that Jesus has loved us.<sup>21</sup> That way is reflected most nearly in marriage, interdependent love.

### Causality

The Catechism affirms that God is the ultimate cause of the universe, that He sustains and upholds His creatures and

“enables them to act and brings them to their final end. Recognizing this utter dependence with respect to the Creator is a source of wisdom and freedom, of joy and confidence...”<sup>23</sup> (p. 86)

God has created the universe in process of attaining the ultimate perfection toward which He has destined it.<sup>24</sup> As a benevolent Father, He invites us to participate in the unfolding of His plan, giving us the capacity and free will to act and become causes in this realization.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, then, God is the first cause of movement toward the perfection of creation:

“The truth that God is at work in all the actions of His creatures is inseparable from faith in God the Creator. God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes...”<sup>26</sup> (p. 81)

Saint Thomas bases his arguments for the existence of God on causality. His first argument is that everything changes, and that whatever changes is changed by something external to it. However, the chain of changes must start somewhere, because there would be no subsequent changes without a first cause of change.<sup>27</sup>

The best approach of the social sciences to causality is the experiment. Groups are randomly assigned to experimental conditions, in which the variance is partitioned according to the values of intervening variables. Independent variables are manipulated, and the influences of unknown intervening variables are assumed to be randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. Impact of the manipulation is then measured on the values of the dependent variables. The internal validity of this approach is often realized at the expense of external validity or generalizability. That is, the greater the experimental control, the less likely the conditions being studied are to be observed in nature.

Recognizing God as first cause orders all findings toward life and goodness. All findings of the social sciences are most reasonably explained in terms of the natural order of the universe toward the Beatitude. Experimental manipulation, then, draws its impact from consistency with the natural order. An example follows.

Tolman<sup>28</sup> studied latent learning in rats by randomly assigning individuals to one of three experimental conditions. The first group was reinforced with food for completing a maze, and the amount of time it took for the rat to complete each successive maze trial was measured. The second group was given no reinforcement for completing the maze, and performed at a much slower rate. Both groups were then given food for

completing the maze starting on the eleventh trial. A third group was never given food for completing the maze.

After the eleventh trial, the second group performed virtually the same as the first, much better than the third, and better than the first group had on the first trial. The second group performed virtually the same as the first. Experimental psychologists would agree that running the maze became associated with the reinforcement, and carried information into the second half of the experiment that food was forthcoming. It is clear that a God centered explanation would hold that the information carried was consistent with fulfillment of creation. That is, the maze performance improved only when it was related to the continuity of life and that the faculties of the animals were ordered toward that rationality.

Premack<sup>29</sup> held that the probability of a response increases if that response brings a stimulus that gives the animal an opportunity to perform a behavior that is even more probable. In fact, if all things are ordered toward God as the first cause, then the concept of probability is superfluous. Premack's principle becomes that events or stimuli are reinforcing if they are in concert with the first cause: life and holiness.

Saint Thomas continues with his second way of proving the existence of God through causation. He describes how the world we observe has causes that are derived from other causes. Something causing itself has never been observed because things cannot precede themselves and causes precede effects. Like change, the chain of causation must stop (or begin) somewhere because earlier links cause intermediates, and intermediates cause later links. An effect is eliminated when its cause is eliminated.

Therefore, a last cause and intermediary causes cannot exist without a first cause. That first cause is God.

In experimental research, the experimenter and experimental manipulations are intermediary causes. Similarly, there are causes that dispose the experimenter to the research design and the research question. A Christocentric social science necessarily means great attention to these dispositions, because it is not the variables under manipulation that cause change, but God. Part of experimental study must be an interpretation and a design that explains results in terms of the known fruits of creation; that is, causation is best explained with reference to:

“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Saint Thomas argues that the very existence of things is proof of the existence of God as cause.<sup>31</sup> He argues that there are two possible types of things in the universe, those that must exist and those that need not exist. If everything was of the second type, then there was a time when the universe existed when there was nothing. This cannot be true, because nothing would now exist. Saint Thomas builds to this conclusion by saying that things can only come into existence by something already in existence. Therefore, there must be something that (someone who) always existed, and this is God.

### God as Source and Aim

Recognizing God as the object of social science gives it the character of prayer. We are obliged to the truth first and foremost,<sup>32</sup> which expresses the natural law written

on our hearts. This means that social science is always a moral endeavor. An example from the world of educational measurement illustrates this most clearly.

As the science of measurement develops naturally toward a discovery of God in the truths of cognitive skills, the questions of test validity become increasingly clear as issues of morality.

In the recent environment of states and the federal government raising achievement standards, the goal has been to remove the burden of lowered expectancies from population groups who have been traditionally disenfranchised and relegated to sub-standard educational opportunity. The validity issue, then, is not confined to how sensitive the test is to its blueprint or specifications, or even how sensitive the test is to the intended domain of measure. These are all intermediary validity issues. Rather, these bridges must ultimately be anchored in whether or not the tests serve the goal of raising expectations and therefore raising achievement of all of children, the goal of viewing every child charitably.

For state governments, this is evaluated on four levels: statewide, school district wide, school building wide, and child. The state evaluates performance on these levels to assure the learning standards have been fully implemented. Moreover, at each of these levels, the state must also assure that all populations are fairly served. This is a moral issue, and as such, must be addressed by first gathering information about what is truth. Obviously, this has a profound effect on how we conceive of test validity.

Early attempts of casting validity as an ethical issue saw it separated into evidentiary (statistical) and consequential (effects of testing) sources of evidence.<sup>33</sup> If the charitable goal of testing, however, is to bring equity in education to the children, then

the evidentiary division is really deceptive, because the statistical evidence must address test sensitivity to the impact. It must address the issue of truth. Therefore, these two sources of validity are in fact the same source: test sensitivity to universal access to education and the role of testing in promoting that access.

### The Imperative of a Moral Social Science

Finally, a Christocentric anthropology leads ultimately to the marriage of social science and theology. Both seek to know God, and to find in Him the Father that is our object and our motive. As a moral endeavor, then, this social science must obey the principles of moral teachings. A structure for doing this is found in Grisez's eight modes of responsibility, which are intermediate principles derived from the first principle: In making choices,

“one must always will in accord with a will toward integral human fulfillment.”<sup>34</sup> (p. 86)

This fulfillment, naturally, is communion in Christ.

The first mode of responsibility is negatively worded. Social science should not be deterred from undertaking design, study, or interpretation because of perceived inertia. The death of a moral social science will be realized by restricting our endeavor to the way it has always been done.

The second mode of responsibility admonishes us to refrain from structuring our social science on enthusiasm or impatience stimulated by some idiosyncratic or individualistic perspective. That is, the social science is not a place to address an idiosyncratic world view or even to assume responsibilities or actions that can be better

addressed by others. Whenever one acts alone when there is no reason not to involve others, there is a danger of breaching this second mode.

The third mode warns that we should not use the social science to satisfy an emotional desire that is not part of the quest for truth, but has, instead, only the motive of satisfying the desire. Social science for the sake of ego satisfaction is doomed to miss the truth.

The fourth mode advises that the social science should not be used to avoid some emotional aversion, except when it does so to avoid evil. The third and fourth mode both involve the choice to act in accord with emotions rather than to act in service of the truth and human fulfillment.

The fifth mode states that the social science should never be structured on feelings of preferences toward different people unless that preference is necessary to achieve human fulfillment. That is, the social science should not prefer any group of people to another group except as a means of special aptitudes or characteristics that are in the service of all people.

The sixth mode of responsibility for the social science is the admonition that it not behave in accord with emotions related to experiential aspects of good or evil rather than with communion and fulfillment. Specifically, one can pursue popular topics or opinions, and derive a reputation for friendliness or sensitivity at the expense of pursuing the truth and providing for human fulfillment. This mode is particularly important for social scientists who can be deterred from the proper course of study by trying to remain in the public arena.

The seventh mode of responsibility demands that social scientists not be moved by hostility away from the path of human fulfillment. Vendetta, revenge, and attempts to belittle people or tarnish their reputations are inconsistent with this vision of the social science.

Finally, the eighth mode of responsibility requires that social scientists not act against fulfillment through realizing one intelligible good because the desire for another instance of that good or another good is stronger. Essentially, this mode states that the ends do not justify the means. Evil, done in the name of attempting to bring about a greater good, is never justified. This leads to proportionalism, in which the desired outcome, by some unknown metric (often proposed as a saving of a number of lives) outweighs the evil means.

### Conclusion

This paper provides for the reconceptualization of an integrated anthropology that serves the Beatitude and is in service of the truth. Having been given the garment of faith, it is no longer possible for social scientists to dis-integrate their lives into a scientific and a faith-filled persona, to sterilize social science of life. We must choose to wear the garment and view the social science as an opportunity to find the truth in human life. Social science, then, can reach fulfillment itself, as a vehicle in the pursuit of redemption and a prayer for humanity.

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*Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22: 11-14.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), most especially #41, p. 17, and also #s 299-300, pps. 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> Vatican Council II (1965) *Dei Verbum*. In Flannery, A. (Ed.) *Vatican Council II: Volume I, the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), #2, p. 751.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Op. Cit.*, #255, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, #255, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, #254, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, #734, p. 194.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, #338, p. 87-88.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, #339, p. 88.

*Endnotes*

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<sup>10</sup> Kreeft, P. *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics*.

(San Francisco, Ca: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 29-35.

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 3: 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 6: 21-27.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Op. Cit.*, #342, p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 28: 17-20.

<sup>15</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*,

(T. McDermott, Ed.) (Allen, Tx: Christian Classics, 1989), Ia(3), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, C. S. & Lindzey, G. *Theories of Personality (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)*.

(New York, NY John Wiley & Sons, 1978), see pp 99-100.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. Jung's theory of development of the transcendent function, p. 138

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Letter of the Pope to Children in the Year of the Family*.

(Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1994), p. 8.

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<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *Op. Cit.*, 1997, #340, p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, #339, p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> John 13: 24.

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Op. Cit.*, 1997, #301, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, #303, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, #306, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, #308, p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Op. Cit.*, Ia(3), p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Nevin, J. A. *Problems and Methods*. In J. A. Nevin (Ed.)  
*The Study of Behavior: Learning, Motivation, and Instinct*  
(Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Company, 1971), p. 12,  
citing Tolman, E. C. & Honzik, C. H. "Introduction and  
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(University of California, 1930).

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<sup>29</sup> Catania, C. A. *The Nature of Learning*, in Nevin, J. A.,  
*Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> Galatians 5: 21-25.

<sup>31</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston, Ma:  
Pauline Books and Media, 1993), #59, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Messick, S. "Evidence and ethic in the evaluation of tests." Invited address  
to the Division of Measurement and Research Methodology of the  
American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, April 1981  
(Reprinted at Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service).

<sup>34</sup> Grisez, G. & Shaw, R. *Fulfillment in Christ: A Summary of Christian Moral  
Principles* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 86.