

The Past, Present, and Future of the *Catholic Social Science Review*

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With this edition the *Catholic Social Science Review* is nearly a decade old. In that time, the *Review* has served several purposes. It has been the organ for the Society of Catholic Social Scientists (SCSS) in which to publish key papers from its annual conferences, document activities of the organization, and review new works of interest to Catholic social thinkers. But the *CSSR* has also provided an outlet for serious scholarship by several leading Catholic scholars of our time and a number of less-well-known but nevertheless significant voices writing on topics of pressing importance. What has united these authors is a love of the Faith, a dedication to the truth, and a commitment to high standards of scholarship.

The founders of the SCSS conceived of a journal when they created the organization, but they also realized that it would be difficult and expensive to leap into producing a new academic publication *ex nihilo*. Consequently, while dreaming of their own journal, in the early years of the Society the leaders of the organization encouraged members to seek publication of their work elsewhere. One particular outlet for Society members was the *Social Justice Review*, a publication of the Catholic Central Bureau. This piggyback arrangement helped to provide an outlet for scholarship by SCSS members, but the *Social Justice Review* could not include in its pages all that the SCSS wanted in a journal. Making a virtue of necessity (a good Catholic thing to do), the leaders of the SCSS committed themselves to producing their own academic journal.

From the beginning, the *CSSR* would be more than just a typical academic journal, of which the United States has an abundance. Like the Society that publishes it, the *CSSR* would have more than one mission. It would be a forum for serious scholarship on topics related to Catholic social thought. It would be a place where Catholic scholars could find new scholarly books reviewed from a Catholic perspective. It would provide an outlet for publishing scholarship informed by a Catholic perspective, as an alternative to mainstream academic journals that treat religion with skepticism or outright hostility; this function would also aid members of the Society who needed to “publish or perish” in order to survive in the academic world. And the *CSSR* would be an orthodox Catholic publication; while recognizing that there are many prudential questions regarding society on which Catholics can disagree (e.g., the war in Iraq), contributors to *CSSR* would be those who embraced the fullness of the Church’s teachings on marriage, abortion, and other issues of faith and morals. To use the politically-correct vernacular so prevalent in the secular academic world in which many of the Society’s members live and work, the journal (like the Society that publishes it) would be a “safe place” for Catholic social scientists.

Some critics might see the Society’s and the *Review*’s commitment to Catholic orthodoxy as contrary to the values of academic freedom or the intellectual enterprise. But Catholics know that true freedom is found in conformity to the truth. “Ye shall know the truth,” says the Gospel of John, “and the truth shall make you free.” It is conforming our minds to the truth that we are free to see the world as it is, not in trying to make the world conform to our own preferences. The sort of thinking that generates the confusion of personal autonomy with freedom is a feature of our time and a characteristic of much

of contemporary social science. Even some natural scientists adhere to this view, but almost exclusively when they are discussing things outside of the realm of their natural science scholarship. Chemists and physicists conform their thinking to the laws of nature and the results of good research; they do not reject gravity or Dalton's law because they find these strictures of nature too confining.

The one major exception to this commitment to truth among natural scientists, however, is apparent in contemporary arguments over the idea of intelligent design of natural phenomena. Some writers have taken the position that they will consider *any* explanation for the creation of natural phenomena *except* intelligent design. Such a position is hardly consistent with a commitment to science, and not universally held by natural scientists, but it is common enough to require comment. Scientists are committed to truth, even truth that challenges their personal preferences.

Catholic social scientists understand that the Church is committed to knowing the truth about humanity, even if that truth runs contrary to certain contemporary preferences. Moreover, the members of the SCSS have seen too many cases of social science that is shaped by researchers' own preferences, rather than any empirical data, to accept naively the assertion that secular social science is committed to reality and evidence come what may. The *CSSR* is a publication that offers its contributors and readers an alternative to the standard social science journal; such journals have much to offer and the members of the SCSS read them regularly, but they generally overlook religion and are either unwilling or unable to take a theistic worldview seriously in scholarship.

From the outset, the *Review* (like the SCSS) has interpreted the concept of "Catholic social science" broadly. Not only has social science been taken to mean

sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, and political science, but it also includes history, business, law, social philosophy and theology, and essentially any intellectual enterprise focused on explicating, expanding, or illuminating Catholic social thinking. The founding editor-in-chief of the *CSSR*, Dr. Joseph Varacalli, is a sociologist. The current editor is a political scientist. But the editorial board includes theologians, historians, psychologists, and others, and the inclusion of guest editors directing symposia (a feature of nearly every issue) has broadened the leadership even more. The *CSSR* has been truly interdisciplinary in nature. Moreover, it has been international in scope, publishing work from scholars in Britain, the Phillipines, and elsewhere. The leaders of the *Review* have endeavored to keep the journal from becoming the organ of one discipline or region.

Dr. Varacalli guided the *CSSR* during its formative years, and it would have failed without his relentless commitment to its success. He, along with SCSS President and *CSSR* publisher Dr. Stephen M. Krason, established the *Review* as a presence in the intellectual firmament. Like George Washington, Dr. Varacalli stepped down after several issues to establish the principle of rotation in the editorship, and the current editor climbed into the harness. Now it is time to rotate the position again, and Volume X will have another editor.

The *CSSR* is a labor of love for all who work on it. As founding editor Joe Varacalli once put it, it is truly a labor of love because no one is being paid enough for all the time that goes into the project. His quip was decidedly not meant to express frustration, but as a lighthearted recognition that the SCSS accomplishes with mostly volunteer labor what most learned societies can do only with paid staff. Producing an

academic journal is a labor-intensive enterprise and most academic organizations employ a number of staff (usually graduate students and clerical assistants) to handle the administrative aspects of the editorial and production process. All scholarly journals of course also rely on the uncompensated input of expert reviewers who contribute to their discipline by reading and commenting on manuscripts submitted for consideration. *CSSR* relies on expert readers as well, but it appears in print because of the sacrifices of an editorial team that gives many hours to soliciting and selecting manuscripts, editing material, and publishing the journal. If at times the editor is slow to respond to contributors or misplaces a reviewer's report on a manuscript, he has no one to blame but himself. But it is all worth it to see each new issue of the *Review* appear. And it has appeared consistently for nine years, never far behind schedule.

At this writing, the new editor-in-chief has not yet been selected, but the readers and supporters of the *CSSR* have every reason to be optimistic about the future of the *Review*. It continues to be backed by a most remarkable association: the SCSS is an extraordinary learned society, marked by good fellowship, common interests, a true interdisciplinary spirit, hard work, good humor, and a prayerful commitment to making the organization and its activities a success. Dr. Krason, the experienced and able President of the Society, will continue to serve as publisher. Dr. Varacalli, the outgoing editor, and the rest of the editorial team will still be in place. And the members of the SCSS, who provide most of the submissions, review manuscripts and books, collect the documentation, and serve as its core (but not only) audience, will still be there to support the *Review* with their material and spiritual contributions.

The future of the *Catholic Social Science Review* is bright, and I am honored and delighted to have had the opportunity to serve it in these years. Catholics know that grace is at work in the world, and that grace builds on nature. The *CSSR* is the product of dedicated people animated by grace and dedicated to building a Catholic social science for our times. It is a project that must continue and will continue, and may God continue to bless the Society of Catholic Social Scientists and the *Catholic Social Science Review*.