Nothing is more useful than to look upon the world as it really is—and at the same time to seek elsewhere for the solace to its troubles.

--Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, Art. 18

At one time in the not-too-distant past, American Catholics could boast of a robust Catholic academic publishing sector. Major Catholic universities, most notably Loyola University in Chicago, ran presses that turned out solid textbooks for Catholic schools and works of Catholic scholarship to support the efforts of higher education. Today, these publishing houses have reshaped themselves into imitations of the presses operated by state and private secular institutions. Loyola, whose Voyages in English series taught good writing and faith to generations of schoolchildren, now offers a multicultural, carefully sanitized (i.e., secular) version of its once-dominant English text (although homeschooling programs such as Seton make the old Catholic version available.) Georgetown University Press, which promotes itself with prominent displays at academic conferences, maintains a list in public affairs that is indistinguishable from what is published by secular houses. A recent edition of the G.U. Press catalog touts the release of a major new book on religion in American public life, but it was written by prominent Protestant scholar and takes a decidedly non-sectarian approach.1

Perhaps the situation in Catholic academic publishing is related to the state of Catholic higher education more generally. The classes and publications of faculty at many of the nation's Catholic colleges and universities betray little in the way of Catholicity. Certainly, there are bright spots on the campuses and in their presses. Indeed, whole institutions--Franciscan University of Steubenville and Christendom College to name only two--are carrying on in the ancient tradition of Catholic teaching and publishing. But for students and faculty at many of America's Catholic institutions of higher education, the veneer of Roman Catholicism is thin indeed.

Is Catholicism Relevant to Social Science?

Members of the faculty of these ostensibly Catholic colleges often see their school's religion precisely as a veneer, believing that it has little to do
with what they do in the classroom or at their computers on a daily basis. Anecdotes prove nothing, but they can illustrate a point. I offer two that are relevant here. First, once I was shocked to hear a professor at one prominent Jesuit college tell me that she saw it as part of her job to disabuse her students of the prejudices and priorities instilled by their Catholic upbringing. She made no attempt to conceal her agenda to her colleagues. In marked contrast to that example, there was the decidedly devout instructor at another Catholic university who prayed before each class. A colleague of mine who had studied under this professor found it somewhat strange that each meeting of a graduate seminar in political science would begin with the Lord's Prayer. The instructor in question was the only member of the department to do so. He was also an Episcopalian.

How should we react to such events? Why should I have been so scandalized by the anti-Catholicism of a Catholic college professor? Why should my colleague have found prayer inappropriate in a social science seminar? As far as many faculty (and, apparently, graduate students) in Catholic colleges are concerned, it is only a matter of coincidence that their institutions were founded and are owned by arms of the Church. As far as they are concerned, they belong to the universal fellowship of scholars, the members of whom of course know that religion is at best a private matter. As far as they are concerned, it has little to do with contemporary scholarship in the natural or social sciences, or even the humanities.

As I have written elsewhere, contemporary social science is dominated by an explicitly secular outlook. That fact should not surprise us, for American culture has been a secular one de jure as well as de facto at least since the 1940s. As a number of observers have pointed out, it was in that decade that the Supreme Court declared public secularism to be protected by the Constitution. Gary Glenn and John Stack have examined the consequences of several rulings from the 1940s and afterward—Everson v. Board of Education (1947), McCollum v. Board of Education (1948), Engle v. Vitale (1962), and Abington v. Schempp (1963)—as the basis for excluding pushing religion more and more to the fringes of American public life. While postwar America witnessed what many regard as the high tide of Catholicism in American culture, when Catholic education and scholarship achieved a maturity and an acceptance in society it had not known before, it was also the era in which the overall role of religion was under assault by the intellectual and political elites of the nation. Academic elites certainly were in the vanguard of this trend.

Not coincidentally, in the vast majority of social science graduate programs in the United States—regardless of the type of institution in which they are housed—the practice of social research is conducted according to the tenets of behavioralism or even post-modernism. As I argued—and certainly not in isolation—these approaches have limited utility for Catholic social scientists who take their faith seriously. Contemporary social science is insufficient as a means for studying humanity, because it rejects or regards as
merely opinion several central tenets of our religion.

What, then, can we do about this situation? I propose that we can construct a Catholic social science, one that is consistent with our faith and which undertakes a rigorous examination of human society. Constructing that Catholic approach is not the work of a single essay or study; it will be the work of a body of scholars proceeding into the various reaches of social science.

In this essay, I will sketch some principles on which a Catholic social science ought to be based. In order to make my case, I will begin with an examination of the limits of secular social science. Then I will proceed to outline ten principles for Catholic social science. Finally, I will propose an agenda for Catholic social research.

The Limits of Secular Social Science

Elsewhere I have examined the case against the reigning secular approach to social science.\(^4\) As it relates to the development of a Catholic social science, there are several key problems inherent in contemporary social scholarship.

First, secular social science essentially abandons the search for truth. Its focus is on observable phenomena; in practice, this leads most social researchers to limit their studies to quantifiable data points. Rather than seek truth, secular social scientists seek "findings" that can be defended on the basis of precision and methodology. Moreover, under the influence of the current fad of post-modernism, which rejects the very notion of truth on the grounds that all reality is "socially constructed," much of the current discussion of social phenomena is carried on without any reference to whether scholars are giving us more or less insight into truth. Instead, ideology has become the major variable in a lot of research: the ideology of the researcher, the ideology of subjects under study, the prevailing ideology in society that "constructs reality," etc.

For Catholics, there can be no abandoning the search for truth. As Pope John Paul II made clear in his encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor*, "The splendor of truth shines forth in the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God."\(^5\) Truth must not only be the goal of Catholic social research and thought, it is relevant to morals as well as to more mundane and quantifiable aspects of society. This fact leads to another problem inherent in contemporary social research.

Second, secular social science holds the most important principles governing life to be opinion-like "values" that are essentially private in nature. It distinguishes between "facts," i.e., quantifiable data points, and "values," i.e., nearly all matters of principle. The Behavioral Creed that dominated the discipline of political science in the 1950s and 1960s--and which still deeply influences the field today--explicitly stated that "the truth or falsity of values (democracy, equality, freedom, etc.) cannot be established scientifically and are beyond the scope of legitimate inquiry."\(^6\) The Behavioral Creed was not isolated to political science, but had parallels in other social science
By the lights of behavioralism, the theological virtues and cardinal virtues are matters of opinion. By the same standard, the Ten Commandments, dictates of natural law, even political principles of the American founding are merely ideas for individuals to accept or reject as they choose. As I have put it elsewhere, for the behavioralist, there is no real difference between the Nazi Final Solution and the Clinton health care plan except in the scope of the undertaking. Secular social science cannot take our religion seriously, except as one motive that helps to explain the actions of individuals in society (and many contemporary intellectuals regard religion as some kind of holdover from a more primitive era and a irrational component of human thought.)

This position on facts and values points up a third problem. Despite this obstensible objectivity and focus on "facts," secular social science is not value-free. To be fair, this problem arises more from the practice than the theory of secular social science, but it is widespread enough to be a serious flaw in the enterprise of behavioralism. Many works of social science that receive acclaim, praise, and prominence in professional journals are riddled with assumptions, value-judgments, and statements that belie the claim of scientific objectivity. Several examples can illustrate this point: studies of gays and lesbians that treat homosexuality as normal, natural, and even admirable; studies of politics in which presidents are judged positively or negatively on the basis of whether the researcher likes the chief executive's policies; work on social welfare that equates federal government funding for welfare programs with the level of compassion in the nation; feminist research that recognizes only women with a particular agenda as representative of women in public life; psychological studies that treat religious faith as one more "lifestyle choice;" and study of environmental politics that begins, "The relationship between presidential elections . . . and the degradation of the environment is not thoroughly understood."7

Just as behavioral science has a problem with values, it also has a problem with ethics. Ultimately, if all values are personal and private, then one cannot truly expect anyone to adhere to norms of decency, honesty, honor, and related "outmoded" notions. This problem becomes apparent when behavioralists try to take on an issue such as character in public life (e.g., the case of Bill Clinton, or of Dick Morris) or even personal responsibility in private life. Many a secular social scientist has run aground on the problem of trying to explain the need for academic honesty to students who have also been told that each person defines his or her own values. In practice, a rough kind of utilitarianism has become the foundation for defining right conduct in private and public life.

Secular social science is much like New Age religion: rather than having a common set of principles to which all practitioners adhere, the enterprise consists in individual researchers defining for themselves what values are correct and judging the world by those standards. Wars are often waged
among behavioralists about the works that result from this approach, but they often take the form of battles over methodology. If all values are equal and personal, then one can criticize one's peers only for not making their values clear and explicit. After that, one can argue only over the techniques of scholarship. Perhaps that is one reason why the professional journals are often crowded with feuds over particular methodological disputes. The core issues are off-limits, so peripheral ones dominate.

For Catholics, secular social science has provided a number of tools that can be useful in our search for understanding about the truth. Moreover, contemporary social science is not without insights into political institutions, human behavior, and society. But it is an insufficient and inherently flawed approach to understanding humanity. Catholics cannot rely on a social science that treats religion as merely a variable on some personality survey. What we need is a Catholic social science that incorporates our faith, its tenets and values in a serious and systematic fashion.

Catholic Social Science: Just Add Faith and Stir?

How should we proceed to construct a Catholic social science? One can imagine a number of paths, although they are not equally appealing. Consider some possibilities.

1. Ghettoization: Catholic social scientists could isolate themselves in areas of morality, ethics, and philosophy. When I say "isolate themselves" I do not mean to suggest that these issues are unimportant; on the contrary, they are core issues for us. Rather, what I mean is that one course of action would be to undertake scholarship only in those areas, i.e., to study only certain subjects. In political science, for example, Catholic scholars could focus their attention only on Catholic political philosophy.

   This kind of approach is one that some Evangelical Christian scholars have adopted. Repelled by secular social science and determined to witness to their faith, they conduct research only on "Christian perspectives on . . ." or "Christian thought on . . ." While such work can be useful and informative, it nevertheless leaves to the secularists the broad field of social science research.

   Much of this ghettoization of Christian social studies flows from the faith/reason dichotomy in many aspects of the Protestant tradition. Secular social science is identified with reason, i.e., rationalism. Therefore, it must be avoided at the peril of one's soul. Faith and reason are seen as contradictory, so the only legitimate Christian social scholarship is that which propounds Christian faith against the claims of reason.

   An extreme version of this Evangelical approach can be found in those writers who see proof-texting as the antidote to secular social science. In order to avoid any pollution of their Christianity by worldly ways, they go so far as to look for Biblical passages as the evidence for any observations they make on social phenomena. Want detailed guidance on raising children? Consult Barilleaux 115
certain passages in Proverbs, etc. Want a plan for proper economic policy? Check out passages in the Gospel. There was even one writer who found a supposed proof-text in Leviticus for his claim that the American separation-of-powers system was ordained by God.\(^8\)

An authentic Catholic social science cannot proceed on the same grounds. For Catholics, as the Council of Trent reminded us, faith and reason work together.\(^9\) Moreover, it cannot advance the cause of our faith to surrender broad swaths of social science to secularism just to avoid the difficulties involved in taking on the secular social science establishment. Rather, we might conceive of the task of constructing a Catholic social science as a kind of intellectual missionary work.

This missionary work will not always win acceptance in the mainstream outlets of social science research. To that extent, Catholic social scientists will have to accept a certain amount of ghettoization in where our work is presented and published. But this kind of ghettoization is a far different thing than imposing on ourselves a narrow range of topics for study.

2. \textit{Just add faith and stir:} This path is the one that takes secular social science as it already exists, but then declares that the researcher is a Catholic and will proceed from the assumptions and views of that religion. It has the appeal of being potentially more acceptable among secularists, but in the end it will be unsatisfactory both to Catholics and secularists alike. For Catholics, it continues to cede the definition of good scholarship to those whose agenda is aggressively secular and, in many cases, anti-Catholic. For secularists, a Catholic-biased secular scholarship (for that is what it would be) is, in the end, bad scholarship because it is biased by irrational assumptions and preferences.

3. \textit{An integrated Catholic social science:} Unless we are prepared to surrender the field to secularism in scholarship, and we reject the "add faith and stir" approach as serving neither Catholic nor scholarly ends, we must work toward the development of an integrated Catholic social science. By "integrated" I mean a social science that incorporates an authentic Catholic perspective throughout. In some cases, the assumptions and principles of Catholic moral and social teaching will be explicit; in others, they will not. But no matter what the subject matter at hand or the research method employed, an integrated Catholic social science must be true to our faith.

\textbf{Organizing Principles for a Catholic Social Science}

How are we to construct an integrated Catholic social science? Let me suggest a number of organizing principles for our scholarship. If we incorporate these principles into our work, the result will be the discovery of knowledge and truth rather than a set of "findings" that advance secularism.

I offer these principles as a basis for discussion. Some might arrange them or state them differently, or suggest amendments to the list below. But any attempt to define a set of principles for Catholic social science must be true to the teachings and principles of the True Faith.
1. First Things First

In an earlier critique of secular social science, I noted Peter Kreeft's comment that the believer's worldview is superior to the secularist's because the believer's universe contains all that is in the atheist's, plus the spiritual dimension. An authentic and integrated Catholic social science begins with a fundamental understanding that God comes first: He is the Creator, guide, and judge of all things. All that we do or know or describe comes from our Father in Heaven, through His Son Jesus Christ and in union with the Holy Spirit.

Catholic social science does not divorce reason from faith; it is a social science founded on an explicitly theistic conception of the world, reality, and truth. It does not regard religion as the enemy of reason or a vestige of primitivism in man; it sees the quest to know, love, and serve God as a core feature of human nature.

Catholics understand that human nature is not malleable: it was created by God, in Whose image all men are made. As Pope John Paul II reminded the United Nations General Assembly in 1995, God wrote into each human heart a universal moral law that imposes "objective and inviolable demands" on persons, groups, and nations. That universal moral law is intertwined with what Catholics (and others) have long identified as the natural law.

2. A Commitment to Truth

An authentic Catholic social science takes truth as its goal and its standard. Catholic social scholars must take as their model Christ, Who told us that He was born to testify to the truth. Moreover, according to Christ's words in the Gospel of John, it is the truth that will make us free.

In this commitment to truth, an authentic Catholic social science stands in opposition to both the positivist tradition and to current intellectual fads that have been subsumed under the title of post-modernism. While an older school of positivists subscribed to the notion of truth, many positivists have been influenced by the idea of a socially-constructed reality. This view, based on the ideas of Thomas Kuhn and other philosophers of science (often misinterpreted), holds that concepts of truth and reality are not objective. They are subjective creations of cultures.

Of course, at some level there is an element of truth to the notion of socially-constructed reality. Ideas such as "conventional wisdom" and ideology capture the notion that culture can influence how we perceive the world. But the academic promotion of the idea of a socially-constructed reality is part of a project as old as the Sophists, summarized in Pilate's question to Christ, "What is truth?" Many positivists, nearly all post-modernists, and a variety of others deny the very idea of truth, holding that there are disconnected facts and a raft of socially-constructed understandings of reality. Of course, this view denies anything approaching natural law, justice, universal moral law, or any other objective standard for human
conduct. An authentic Catholic social science responds that truth exists and it is the role of social scholars (among others) to understand it. As the Holy Father pointed out in *Veritatis Splendor*, contemporary behavioral science—he portrays it in its secular manifestation—is of only limited value for understanding the world, especially moral questions. All that secular social science can do is identify empirical and statistical trends:

> In fact, while the behavioral sciences, like all experimental sciences, develop an empirical and statistical concept of "normality," faith teaches that this normality itself bears the traces of a fall from man's original situation . . . . It is the Gospel which reveals the full truth about man and his moral journey, and thus enlightens and admonishes sinners . . . .

This reminder from the Holy Father brings us to an important dimension of our understanding of the nature of truth: it is to be found through the message of Christ and within the Church that He founded. Catholic social scientists cannot do otherwise.

3. Fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church

As I noted above, many faculty in Catholic colleges of the United States have come to see the religion of their institutions as incidental to what they believe to be the overriding mission of higher education—free inquiry. Indeed, a common response in Catholic education circles to the publication of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which defined the mission and role of Catholic institutions of learning, was to object that it limited academic freedom.

In this respect, many Catholic intellectuals have implicitly accepted the notion that faith and reason are incompatible. In the inevitable contest between the two that they see at work in Catholic higher education, they have declared their loyalty with reason and the secular academic world. They reject the authority of the Church, most especially its teaching authority, in the name of the freedom of individual conscience.

As the Church has taught us, human dignity requires that we respect the dictates of conscience. But that requirement is essentially a recognition of the free will with which God endows each of us. Dignity does not require that anyone be empowered to teach just anything and call it Catholic. Just as Catholic institutions of learning have a special mission within the Church to advance the work of the faith, so do Catholic social scientists have an obligation to remain faithful to the Magisterium.

This obligation is fundamental to being a Catholic social scientist. If one proceeds from the assumption that Church social teaching is well and good in most areas, but can ignored in the matter of abortion, contraception, euthanasia, subsidiarity, etc., then one has given up being a Catholic scholar. Christ empowered Peter to bind and to loose; the Roman Pontiff is the successor to that power and we as Catholics must accept it. Therefore,
Catholic social scientists must accept the totality of Church teaching; there is no cafeteria selection available.

Our acceptance must be undertaken in a spirit of humility. We must also be humble when we teach and conduct research, even if correcting error in interpreting or applying Church teaching.

4. The Leonine Reality Axiom

In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII (to use Etienne Gilson's famous phrase) "speaks to the modern world." He is speaking to all people interested in living the Gospel message, but some of his words have particular relevance to those of us who engage in social scholarship. One axiom in particular could serve as the motto of Catholic social scientists: "Nothing is more useful than to look upon the world as it really is—and at the same time to seek elsewhere for the solace to its troubles."15

What does this axiom mean for Catholic social scientists? I see at least two distinct meanings. First, Catholic scholars are not to hide from the world. We may certainly engage in thoughts on social reform, but we are not merely to think of things as we would like them to be. We live in a fallen world and we ourselves bear the marks of the fall; no amount of wishing can erase the effects of original sin on ourselves, other humans, or human society.

Second, Catholics—in general, but with intellectuals particularly in mind—cannot be millenarians. That is, we cannot accept any program, ideology, model, scheme, or policy that proposes to bring about an end to all the troubles of the world within the confines of this world. In short, utopianism is opposed to Catholicism, because it purports to deliver the perfect life that can be found only in union with God in Heaven. Why is this warning relevant to Catholic social scientists? The reason is that, historically, it has been intellectuals who have been most susceptible to seduction by utopian theories and schemes. For example, as more than one wag has put it, the last bastions of Marxism are American and European universities.

An authentic Catholic social science cannot embrace such illusions. Catholic scholars are given the task of working in the world, studying it, but not seeking perfection in this world.

5. The Correct Values

Secular social science is not really value-free. Rather, it usually embodies a set of values reflective of the views of the researchers who engage in the enterprise of secular scholarship. This problem has led critics in several disciplines to call for an explicit set of values to govern our understanding of social phenomena. One of the most aggressive groups in each of the social sciences has been the Marxists, who unapologetically propose remaking political science, economics, or whatever into an engine for advancing that revolutionary faith. Other groups include the feminists and homosexuals (Ever hear of "queer theory?")
Catholic social scientists, too, represent a set of values, but we represent the correct ones. Nor do we need to be apologetic about the principles for which we stand.

6. A Non-Materialistic Perspective on Social Phenomena

Secular social science holds to a materialistic perspective on humanity and society, which it derives from the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment rejection of religion. As Albert Dilanni has explained,

Enlightenment thinkers Hume and Kant, enthralled with the efficacy of modern science and its methods, had advanced powerful arguments against the proofs for the existence of God. Until recently, the conventional wisdom has held that these arguments are unassailable. 19th century thinkers, Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, built on them and presented religion as projection or an alienation that masks what human beings really desire—wealth, sex and power.16

Indeed, Jacques Maritain argued that this rebellion against God was itself a mask for a revival of the old faith/reason dichotomy: Enlightenment and nineteenth-century thinkers repeated the old errors opposing faith and reason, and took sides with reason. But, as Maritain points out, they could not really deny faith, only exalt reason and fight faith by denial and blasphemy.17 He singled out Nietzsche as one thinker who thought he was destroying the concept of God, but who in reality kept searching for the divine: "Poor Nietzsche," Maritain called him.18

An authentic Catholic social science begins with a humble return to God, rather than trying to reject Him. Following the principles outlined above, it presumes that religion is not alienation or a mask, but essential to human nature. It presumes that this world is not the beginning or the end of all, nor is man really just *homo oeconomicus* or *homo politicus*. Catholic social science assumes, with Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, and Shakespeare—to name but a few in whose company we find ourselves—that there is a spiritual dimension to the universe that is more important than its physical aspect.

7. Respect for the Dignity and Freedom of Persons

Social science not only concerns human beings in the abstract, but in the concrete as well. This is true in two ways. First, social scientists deal with real people: psychologists have patients, historians write about actual human lives and events, sociologists examine human relationships, economists and political scientists engage in projects that influence public policy and the lives of real people. As much as we may belittle our own efforts—or see them belittled by others—the work that we do affects actual persons.

Second, much of research involves studying actual people. We interview them, observe them, test them, interact with them.
In both of these kinds of concrete involvements with humans, as well as in our philosophical investigations of human life and society, we must give due respect to the dignity and freedom of persons. Maritain reminded us that we are not concerned with individuals—a term that is popular with positivists and Enlightenment thinkers—because to focus on *individuality* is to limit oneself to the material aspect of existence. In contrast, he argued, we must be concerned with *personality*, which incorporates the spiritual dimension as well.\(^9\)

This concern for persons is an essential characteristic of Catholic social thought. In his 1995 address to the United Nations General Assembly, Pope John Paul II praised the U.N.'s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* precisely to the extent that it "spoke eloquently of the rights of persons."\(^20\) Catholic social scientists understand that human persons are made by God in His image and likeness, are endowed by Him with free will and dignity, and that no other human person may deny those attributes. As we describe and analyze humans and their society, and as we study them, we must always pay due respect to persons, born and unborn.

8. Respect for the Community of Mankind

Another aspect of the Catholic understanding of Creation is that we are not created in isolation from one another. God created us to be part of a community of mankind. But this community is not the collectivity of socialist honeybees.

The human community created by God has two important institutions to give it particular shape, identity, and guidance. The first is the Church, which Christ instituted through the Apostles and under the direction of His Vicar. The second is marriage and the family that is created by the union of man and woman. Catholic social scientists understand that these two institutions are the foundations of human society, not merely masks or socially-constructed artifacts. They are divinely ordained realities of social life.

9. Openness as to Research Methods

Social scientists are fond of arguing about methodology. While I know less about disciplinary disputes outside of my own field, there has been enough conflict over methods in political science to damage several professions.

These methodological disputes are often proxy wars that are waged in place of battles over the real issues at stake. For years, political science witnessed disputes between the traditionalists and the behavioralists: the real issue was the place of values (i.e., principles and truth) in scholarship. The behavioralists won that battle, with the attendant result that implicit values replaced explicit ones. In more recent years, there have been other fights, such as between the behavioralists and two types of critics. On the one hand, there are the public choice theorists, who employ self-interest models derived from economics to explain political affairs. On the other hand, there are the post-
modernists, feminists, Marxists, and others who attack behavioralism for its implicit ideology. These critics want to install a new, more ideological kind of scholarship (if it can be called scholarship) in the place of positivism.

For Catholic social scientists, the lure of the methodology wars must be ignored. That is not to suggest that we should engage in bad scholarship with a Catholic veneer--as I argued above, that serves no one. Rather, we should keep our sights on the important issues: the principles described above. Research methods are tools; there value begins and ends with their ability to support and advance research.

Catholic social scholars should be free to employ a variety of methods and techniques, so long as they can demonstrate and explain the logic and validity of their research to others in light of our Catholic faith. We must evaluate methods according to their contribution to our larger purpose; we cannot measure our Catholicity by an R-squared or a well-wrought Straussian textual reading.

10. A Spirit of Charity in the Conduct of Research and Intellectual Debate

Concomitant with an openness as to methods, as well as the vigorous disagreements that accompany scholarly research, we must always conduct ourselves with a spirit of charity. Our models must be the great Catholic intellectuals--Augustine, Aquinas, Bellarmine, Catherine of Siena, and others--who gave as good as they got in intellectual debates, but who always proceeded with humility and charity to correct the errors of their adversaries. This caution about charity reminds us that our ultimate purpose is to advance the cause of Christ, not merely to score points in an academic forum.

Toward a Research Agenda

These principles are intended to guide Catholic social research in a general way. It is up to scholars in social science disciplines to develop specific agendas for that research. But the principles I have sketched above do suggest some broad outlines for the future.

First, those whose work focuses on individual persons should direct their attention to improving our understanding of personality in a non-materialist way. This research may involve clinical studies, experiments, philosophical and ethical investigations, and much more. But we do know that much of contemporary scholarship in the human person proceeds from the assumption that "wealth, sex, and power" are all that drive human behavior. This assumption has had particularly devastating consequences for the unborn and the handicapped. Catholic social scientists can offer important insights into how wrong that assumption is and how adversely it has affected us.

Second, those whose work focuses on human relations can direct their attention on the special role of the family, the Church and religion generally, and other "mediating structures" in society. Much of contemporary social scholarship sees people as radically autonomous actors, with disastrous
results spilling out of that view.

Third, those whose work focuses on human institutions--political, economic, social, and religious--can help us to understand the role these institutions play in this world, as well as the limits on their ability to prepare us for the next. As Pope John Paul II told Americans during his visit to the United States in 1995, we need to "make room for the mystery of God." Scholarship on human institutions must do so as well.

Finally, our scholarship should provide us with opportunities to advance the cause of our faith and defend the Church that is the faith's shield. If our research leads us to deny the Magisterium, question natural law and morality in the name of free conscience, or exalt reason against faith, then we have undermined the very purpose for which we engage in Catholic social scholarship.

The Holy Father continually admonishes us to "be not afraid." He urges us to "expel the paralyzing burden of cynicism from the future of politics and human life." In one sense, materialism and secularism are but synonyms for cynicism. They give up on eternity in order to deal exclusively with the here-and-now. Catholic social scientists must always have their eyes fixed on eternity.

Notes

1. Ronald F. Thiemann, Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1996). The book is an excellent and thoughtful treatment of its subject; my point is that almost any publisher in the nation could have issued the book.


4. Barilleaux, op. cit. This section draws heavily upon that essay and summarizes it. I have provided it as a basis from which to contrast the principles of Catholic social science I will outline in this essay. Readers desiring a fuller explication of my arguments are referred to the earlier piece.


8. These are representative rather of one strand of fundamentalist Protestant thinking.

9. The journal Faith and Reason from Christendom College Press was established as a testimony to that very point.


13. At one time, the sentence from St. John that makes this point was used to decorate academic buildings across the nation. Modern academic buildings generally celebrate secularism and/or multiculturalism, so Gospel passages are verboten.


18. Ibid.

