Report of the President on the 10th Anniversary of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists

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Survey of the Society's History

The Society of Catholic Social Scientists was started formally in September 1992 at the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, after a mailing was done to Fellowship members the previous spring to solicit initial members. A beginning Board of Advisors of outstanding Catholic scholars was assembled and, more slowly, a Bishops advisory board was organized. By the time of the Pittsburgh meeting, about 80 members had joined. At the meeting, an initial slate of officers was selected and initial directions for the SCSS charted. During the following several months, a Constitution was drawn up and adopted by a vote of the membership, the only membership referendum the SCSS has ever had. The Constitution and the accompanying initial set of By-Laws established the framework for the election of officers—which was mandated to take place every two years—and the selection of members of the Board of Directors. The organizers of the SCSS, Dr. Joseph A. Varacalli and myself, sought to resume an effort that seemed to have largely ended in any kind of a concerted way after Vatican II: to build up, in the words of Pope Pius XI, “a true Catholic social science.” Before Vatican II, there had been a number of discipline-specific Catholic social science organizations, but afterwards they either disbanded or secularized. We sought to meet Pope Pius’s challenge with an interdisciplinary organization that would, first, be fully faithful to all the Church’s teachings and, second, emphasize solid, objective scholarship.

Our first annual national meeting-conference was held the following March at Franciscan University of Steubenville, which established the pattern of our annual meeting-conference of attempting to maximize participation by sending out a call for papers to the entire membership and accepting proposed presentations and papers that met broad subject guidelines and showed quality scholarship. It attracted about 20 presenters.

During its first few years, the SCSS was a part of the Catholic Central Union of America (CCUA). They had offered this arrangement to us to make it easier for us to operate. In 1995, after problems developed, the SCSS separated from the CCUA, incorporated, and applied for and received a tax exemption as a 501 (c) (3) organization.
During these early years, besides establishing our annual meeting-conference as a regular feature (after the first one the Board of Directors voted to have the conference in the fall), the SCSS focused its attention on expanding membership, small research projects (which resulted in a few short publications), and public and Catholic Church affairs statements. A number of public affairs statements were issued in these early years, often as letters to all the members of Congress or of one of its houses. A number of the annual conference papers were published in the CCUA's Social Justice Review.

In 1996, as a separate newly-incorporated organization, we launched our most ambitious project to that time, the establishment of the annual Catholic Social Science Review, the SCSS's refereed scholarly journal. The Review became the only interdisciplinary scholarly Catholic journal in the social sciences in North America. The Review was initially edited by Dr. Varacalli (issues I-IV), and then by Dr. Ryan J. Barilleaux (issues V-present). Dr. Dominic Aquila "brought the first issue home" when he filled in for Varacalli in 1996 for health reasons. Besides members' dues, Franciscan University of Steubenville has helped fund the Review. Villanova University assisted also for several issues in the Review's production through the efforts of Dr. Jack Schrems' office. The fact that the Review is compiled without any full-time staff—it is a volunteer effort, and we pay outside individuals and a printer for production and publishing—is itself a considerable achievement. Although we have much on-going work to do to promote it, it is being subscribed to by numerous academic libraries in addition to our members receiving it. We have made two major mailing efforts to promote it to academic libraries around the country. The most recent—a very intense effort, with initial contacts and then follow-ups with specific staff at libraries—was by John Crowley, its Assistant Editor for Promotion, about two years ago. It, along with our other publications, was also for several years promoted through the catalog of Franciscan University Press. Significantly, the Review is abstracted by Religious and Theological Abstracts and is indexed in the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index. In the near future, we are planning a renewed effort to get the Review indexed in the Social Science Index.

Many outstanding articles have appeared over the years in the Review. The current issue (Volume VI - 2002) includes an article about the results of a major study of the effects of natural family planning, which had been commissioned by the Family for the Americas organization. The Review is the main academic publication the results have been published in.

The SCSS established two major awards, the Pope Pius XI Award for Contributions toward the Building Up of a True Catholic Social Science (named after the pope who gave this charge to Catholic scholars in Quadragesimo Anno, a reward for scholarship which in 2002 has been given out for the eighth year in a row), and the Blessed Frederic Ozanam Award for Catholic Social Action. There were also predecessor awards given out for the latter, as well as awards we have given out for contributions to Catholic higher education.
Since 1997, the SCSS has also had a much smaller spring conference on a specific theme at different locations that has coincided with our spring Board of Directors meeting (since 1996 we have had two Board meetings each year). We have worked successfully to build up the Bishops advisory board to the point where its current eleven members is an all-time high. This, plus letters of support we have received from Rome, have enabled us to demonstrate ecclesiastical support. Our general Board of Advisors, made up mostly of leading Catholic scholars, now has over thirty members.

In 1997, the SCSS sent a letter to all the U.S. bishops expressing concern about the trend in establishing "homosexual ministries" in various dioceses, which espoused, among other things, a "gay spirituality." Drafted by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, this letter generated national attention for the SCSS.

In 1998, the SCSS published a full-length book, an anthology edited by Dr. Paul C. Vitz and myself, *Defending the Family: A Sourcebook*. In 1999, the SCSS final an *amicus curiae* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court, which was co-authored by our member Richard Garnett of Notre Dame Law School and myself, in *Troxel v. Granville*, the Court's most noteworthy parental rights case of recent years. Both this brief and the anthology generated additional public attention to the SCSS. These two projects followed from the decision of the Board of Directors some years ago to give special focus, especially in our public and Church affairs efforts, to family and economic justice issues.

We have periodically raised additional money for publications, though our main source of funds by far is the members' dues, which have stayed at $25. We have successfully maintained fiscal responsibility by insuring that our annual meeting-conference pays for itself with the registration and meal fees and working to raise money for extra, large projects that we have undertaken. The registration costs for our meeting-conference have stayed in the $20-$23 range for members and $30-$33 for non-members. Since we have wanted to encourage members to come to the meeting-conference, we have tried to keep the cost low. Another big help has been that Franciscan University of Steubenville has provided financial assistance to the production of the *Review* each year. Their funding, along with $10 of each member's dues, makes production of the *Review* possible. The SCSS has received strong support from both Franciscan University presidents over the course of our existence, Frs. Michael Scanlan and Terence Henry. In fact, both—along with the president and acting president of Ave Maria College and Dean Bernard Dobranski of Ave Maria School of Law—sit on our Board of Advisors.

Our treasury, as of mid-September 2002, is at about $24,000, though this fluctuates with expenses during the year, especially after expenses for the meeting-conference are met. Fund-raising is an area that we need to work on in the future, as we attempt special projects. We especially want to raise additional funds to provide financial security for the *Review*. One reason why we have been able to accumulate this large of a treasury is the very fact that
we have sought to raise extra money when we have had special projects instead of using our revenues from dues. Still, the growth of our treasury means that we may be able to do some extra projects in the future with the funds on hand. We also now have our funds in two interest-bearing accounts, so that we add to our money—even if only a little.

The annual meeting-conference for the last several years has averaged about 50 presentations, mostly in breakout sections. Most of the time, we have had one or more plenary session speakers, usually made possible through funding assistance by the institution where we have the meeting-conference. The SCSS normally gives out its Pope Pius XI and Blessed Frederic Ozanam Awards at the meeting-conference and we often feature the award winners as plenary session speakers, as well. The annual meeting-conference over the years has been held seven times at Franciscan University of Steubenville, twice at Ave Maria School of Law, and once at Christendom College. Such considerations as location, facilities, a member present to handle organizing, and local staff support have determined where to hold it.

Since the beginning of the SCSS, the President has tried to communicate with the membership regularly by three or four general mailings per year.

Current Projects, Membership, and Subsidiary Groupings in the SCSS

Now, the SCSS has embarked upon what may become its most significant and influential scholarly project: the production of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science, and Social Policy: An Encyclopedia, a one-volume reference work which we are under contract with Scarecrow Press to bring out by 2006. The contract with Scarecrow, which came about largely through the efforts of Dr. Varacalli, who is serving as lead editor of the encyclopedia and pouring much time into it, will enable us to do this project at little cost to ourselves. This effort is well underway, with numerous members of the SCSS and the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars volunteering to write entries for the work. Co-editors with Dr. Varacalli are Professor Richard Myers, Dr. Michael Coulter, and myself. The volume, which will be fully loyal to the Church's orthodox teaching and will be careful not to subordinate Catholic social teaching to ideological predispositions, should become a standard reference work on this subject for years to come.

The SCSS's membership seems to have stayed in the range of 350 the last few years. This is both a blessing and a disappointment. In spite of the aggressive efforts at recruiting new members undertaken by Dr. Varacalli when he resumed the Membership Chairman position a few years ago, which briefly brought us to 400 or so members, we have not been able to permanently stay at that plateau. This has been because we have roughly averaged around 40 nonrenewals of membership each year. This has been in spite of our sending of
four official notices about dues payment over a six-month period each year, and my sending of personal appeal notes and the making of other contacts by Dr. Varacalli and me to many of those who have not paid their dues by the time we get near to the end of that period. It is also despite the efforts to make renewed mail appeals to former members to rejoin a year or two after they let their membership lapse.

Another area we need to work on is getting more members active in our projects. Here, the response to the encyclopedia project has been very heartening. Many of our members will be writing articles for it. We need more people to help with such things as: writing reports about our conferences and activities that could be sent out to the Catholic press (publications such as The Wanderer, the National Catholic Register, and the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly, at minimum, are likely to run them), drafting public and Church affairs statements, fund-raising, proofreading assistance on the Review, and working on local and regional chapters and disciplinary section activities. On the latter, we have some active local and regional chapters, but others have only started up and we want to try to get them active. About two years ago, I encouraged a shift away from a local base to a broader regional base for our chapters, since in only a few individual metropolitan areas are there enough SCSS members in to form a viable chapter. So, e.g., we are now working to form a Chicago Regional Chapter which encompasses the northern half of Illinois and Indiana and the southern half of Wisconsin, and a regional chapter for Texas which would include all of our members in that large state. Such chapters perhaps can orient themselves toward one significant event per year, perhaps a small regional conference or a seminar. Some chapters, such as the Mid-Continent Chapter (northeast Kansas, northwest Missouri, and southeast Nebraska), have piggybacked on existing events which certain members already have in place at their universities. Eleven local or regional chapters have been recognized by the Board of Directors, but some have yet to have any events which is a prerequisite for continued recognition.

We have had meetings of disciplinary sections at each annual meeting-conference. They have discussed ideas, but activating sections during the rest of the year has been a challenge—probably because there are not a large number of members in some of the disciplines and members are scattered throughout the U.S., Canada, and even abroad. The Political Science Section, which is one of the largest, has gotten a niche for itself by having from one to three panels, which its members organize and sometimes co-sponsor with other organizations, at the annual American Political Science Association Convention each Labor Day weekend.

At their meetings at the 2002 SCSS annual meeting-conference, I placed two possible project proposals before the sections which may help them become more active. One of these projects is immediate, the other more long-term. The immediate one is to enlist a few of the members of each section
to write articles for a symposium, which I am willing to coordinate, in the 2003 or 2004 issue of the Review. The symposium will essentially be an examination and critique of the state of each of the social science disciplines, both from a general professional and a Catholic standpoint. The longer-range one is to have the sections consider whether, in the future, they might be able to function as minor accrediting bodies in their disciplines, wherever feasible. The idea is simply this: Under the influence of Ex corde Ecclesiae, more Catholic college administrators and faculty are going to realize that they have to try to regain some of their Catholicity. They will have to make a choice: simply secularize or take steps to recover their Catholic heritage, at least to some degree. They may, here and there, be interested in looking to a distinctively Catholic scholarly/professional organization to come in to examine their social science programs and advise them about how they might make them more “Catholic,” as a supplement to the general evaluation of certain of their programs by various secular mainstream professional organizations. I am encouraging those of our disciplinary sections who think they can do something like this to prepare themselves for it and we will then put them forward to the Catholic academy as able to act as such informal evaluative bodies. As time goes on, I believe that at least some Catholic colleges may call upon them. This idea, by the way, came from my bringing in two SCSS members from our Political Science Section—Drs. Ryan Barilleaux and Gary Glenn—to do an evaluation of our Political Science Program at Franciscan University as part of our self-study prior to our regional accreditation visit in 2004.

The SCSS’s web page has made significant progress. Originally based at and an appendage of Franciscan University’s web page, we have now established a separate site with our own web page address. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Paul Sullins, it is hosted by The Catholic University of America, though it still has a link to Franciscan University’s page. It is now managed by Dr. Michael Coulter from his base at Grove City College, and has expanded its scope to now include the full text of issues of the Review, other scholarly articles submitted by members, and public affairs articles and statements. We have also asked members who are seeking or know of social science positions in the academy or elsewhere which might interest our members to so inform Dr. Coulter, so they can be listed on the web page in a special job opening section. Recently, we were also asked to post positions available in one of the federal executive branch agencies.

The SCSS’s By-Laws call for us to have several specific committees. As the organization has developed, they have not played as significant of a role as expected. The Chairmen of the Membership and Public and Church Affairs Committees play an important on-going role in those areas, but the full committees have not had to be called upon much. Part of the reason for this limited utilization of the committees has been that when we have done different projects they have not required the standing committee structure.
FUTURE PROJECTS

Three of the ideas for major initiatives for the future are actually things that we have done at different times or which I had suggested for the SCSS in my 5-Year Report in 1997. Other tasks and projects intervened to make it difficult to pursue these, however. It would be desirable to reemphasize organizational statements, through the Public and Church Affairs Committee, about different public and Church affairs questions in which particularly we could bring to bear our expertise and could seek to apply Catholic social teaching. We made a number of statements, as noted, on public issues in our earlier years. To do this, however, we need members who would be willing to undertake to draft these, on short notice, when their area of expertise needs to be called upon. On the public affairs front, we should also consider doing more *amicus curiae* briefs in other future Supreme Court cases, especially in the pro-family area, which would make to the Court the kinds of Natural Law arguments they will not otherwise hear. We should try to testify before Congressional committees and governmental advisory bodies on important public questions where our perspective and expertise would be valuable.

Early in our history, we briefly attempted to start a “rapid response” project to comment quickly on particular public developments or attacks on the Church or on spurious social science studies which might be released. In my 5-Year Report, I also said that I as SCSS President would like to try to do periodic commentary pieces that could hopefully find their way into the general media and would both promote Catholic social teaching and our organization. What might be considered for the future is the starting of an actual commentary service in which interested SCSS members could write timely commentary pieces—attempting to examine and respond to current public questions in light of Catholic social teaching—to send out to both the Catholic and secular media with regularity. We might call this the “Catholic Social Commentary” or CSC Service. Obviously, only a limited number of such pieces would be picked up by newspapers or newsmagazines, but we could also routinely include them in both the “Public and Church Affairs” section of the *Review* and on our web page. Over time, we may be able to get enough pieces published to be able to make a valuable contribution to public debate. The Public Relations Office at Franciscan University has told me they would be willing to help to send these out for us.

In my 5-Year Report, I also suggested periodic seminars in Washington geared to Catholics on Capitol Hill and the executive branch. I have had this in mind for some time, and have recently received some advice and assistance from Patrick Fagan, an SCSS member who is on the staff of the Heritage Foundation. The hope is that the SCSS might be able to plan one or more special small conferences or seminars for Hill staffers, in a way that might aid
the pro-family efforts in Congress and educate them on certain pro-family issues. I am turning my attention to this currently. Thus, as we keep our scholarly activity up with the Review, the Encyclopedia, and our regular conferences, we can at least turn a bit of our attention to bringing Catholic social teaching right into the public arena and to address, where indicated, concerns within the Church.

We have tried to keep the U.S. bishops aware of our existence and our willingness to serve them, but they have not called upon us and this is not something that we should anxiously await. We shall keep our organization before them by occasional communications to them and trying to have information about ourselves appear in the Catholic press. We try to keep our Bishops Board members fully informed about our activities—they receive all our mailings and the Review and all our publications, and sometimes write to acknowledge them—and will try wherever we can to involve them in our programs. To this end, Dr. Varacalli has been successful in scheduling Bishop William Murphy of Rockville Centre for a luncheon talk at our coming spring conference at Varacalli’s Catholic Center at Nassau Community College.

As we look to the future, it is important that the SCSS keeps its mission in focus: of proclaiming the Church’s social teaching in full, not diluting or reshaping parts of it to fit secular ideological imperatives, and engaging in scholarly and professional work which bears this out. We must be very clear about our Catholic commitment, even while making the case about the wisdom of the Church’s teaching in a way that may be best geared to reaching the different people we may be called upon to address or witness to along the way. We must not be afraid to proclaim the truth fully and be led to where the evidence leads us, even if it means tackling unpopular issues or coming to unpopular conclusions. Ultimately, it does not matter what the world thinks of us, but only what God thinks of us. We obviously must realize that there can be different prudential approaches, but we must not be reluctant to make sober-minded decisions about the application of the Church’s social teaching (as we are attempting to do in some of our Encyclopedia articles). This teaching is not something that can exist only in theory or on the level of general principles. We must always keep in mind that the “building of a true Catholic social science” called for by Pope Pius XI was meant, like all things, to be in the service of “reestablishing all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10).