

BRIDGING THE RESEARCH GAP: CARA, RESPONSE TO VATICAN II

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The Gap: Study Versus Application

Contrary to a sometimes expressed opinion, considerable research on the religious and social mission of the church, including examinations of the pastoral horizons of the U.S. Catholic Church, has long been under way. Frequently, however, much of this research effort has suffered from subsequent failures to *apply* its findings. Too often, moreover, the conclusions have been lodged on the dusty shelves of academe.

Researchers, as if in defense of their scientific objectivity and “neutrality,” have felt that it would be demeaning to interpret the significance of their findings for decision-makers. In turn, the decision-makers—especially church social actionists—unable to see much sense in the technical jargon and tentative conclusions of the research specialists, have tended to deprecate the relevance of socio-religious research to the real world of the church. To the pastoral-minded, a great deal of research knowledge seems simply irrelevant, perhaps at times because from their viewpoint, as Harris Dienstrey has said in another context, “the picture of man that emerges from it is of a stunted, inept being, not fully capable of ordering his life in a meaningful way.”

It appears certain in any event that, consistent with a major strand of the American cultural ethos, those in responsible church positions have not always seemed to be holding research in

high esteem — whether for appropriate and sound reasons or not. For the most part, in fact, decision-makers in our society, whether in ecclesiastical or other areas of life, have traditionally appeared to feel that the socio-statistical researcher was pursuing “pie-in-the-sky” and that, in consequence, little insight into the human condition was to be gained from listening to his counsels.

Whatever may be the blame or reasons for their mutual sins toward each other, the fact is that for too long the researchers and the organizational churchmen have, on the surface of things, been at loggerheads, living seemingly in splendid isolation from each other, unable to appreciate, according to observers, that a little “ecumenism” might be a good thing within particular church structures themselves.

An End to the Research Gap?

Yet, despite this research gap, which has seemed to plague the relations between the academic specialists and the church decision-makers—this failure to communicate with and interpret their needs and interests for each other—strong winds of change are blowing from each camp in Catholic circles, as evidenced, one can suggest, by two events on entirely different levels: the monumental historical convening and research soundings of the Second Vatican Council and the passing circumstance of the for-

mation of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

During Vatican II, which was called to update the church, the world's Catholic bishops, undoing a supposed but factually erroneous image of ecclesiastical antipathy to research, made a number of pointed references to the role which scientific inquiry must play in modernizing the forms of the church's apostolate.

In the *Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*, the collegial assembly stated, for example, that:

The forms of the apostolate should be properly adapted to the needs of the present day, with regard not only for man's spiritual and moral circumstances but also for his social, demographic and economic conditions. Religious and social research, through offices of pastoral sociology, contributes much to the efficacious and fruitful attainment of that goal, and it is highly recommended.

In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Council Fathers related the practical realm to the insights of theoretical inquiry by recommending that:

. . . In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.

Clearly, Vatican II generated interest among church leaders and organizations with regard to the importance of research for pastoral work. A good deal of this conciliar enthusiasm for research, however, could well remain exhortation were not organizations and leaders within the church responsive to the conciliar soundings.

Fortunately, as reflected in such sympathetic statements as that of Manchest-

er's Bishop Ernest J. Primeau, the conciliar research momentum has not been lost but has, in fact, accelerated. Alluding to the serious issues confronting the future of the Catholic school system in the United States, Bishop Primeau, in forceful remarks that left no doubt about his stance, insisted:

What all of us need are fewer opinions and more facts; less rhetoric and more research; a cooling of instinctual and sometimes visceral reactions and an intensification of cerebral response to problems, real or imaginary, with which we are presented.

Post-Vatican II: Researchable Issues

It is widely accepted that the Second Vatican Council, which made a major contribution to the already-ongoing, worldwide Christian renewal, has affected not only the minds and hearts of bishops, but the lives of men everywhere.

In forecasting the effects of the Council, Cardinal Leger of Montreal said, "The minds of Catholics are bound to be shaken up."

Responding to this note, Dr. Frederick C. Grant, an eminent Protestant scholar, stated:

Protestants think this not a dangerous consequence of the tremendous work of the Council, but in fact a very good thing, wherever and whenever needed. Whatever compels men to take their religion seriously and think about it is surely a good thing, provided they have the material for serious thinking, and can reach out toward balanced judgments.

Yet, to uncover "material for serious thinking"—to move Christian renewal forward and arrive at the goals of Vatican II—will not be easy. To avoid wrong post-conciliar paths many issues, it is generally recognized, must be carefully examined.

Whether the pastoral ideals of Christian renewal can be fully realized will greatly depend, as Doctor Grant insists, on the quality and accuracy of information available to church leaders on the crucial problems they face. Equally, the success of the renewal process will depend on careful long-range planning and on continual re-examination of apostolic methods.

CARA'S Role: Applying Research

It was this widely felt, urgent need—the need to provide bishops, heads of religious congregations, and lay organization leaders with guidelines for apostolic action based on sound research—which gave birth to CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. CARA has no corner on the market for truth, but it was established to help find reasonably adequate answers to the urgent contemporary dilemmas facing Christian renewal.

When informing the body of Catholic bishops of the United States, on October 29, 1965, of CARA's existence and purposes, CARA's first president, John Cardinal Cody, Archbishop of Chicago, said:

With the close of the Ecumenical Council, the world looks to us, the leaders in our particular dioceses, for implementation of the far-reaching and momentous ideas that have been proposed and adopted during four historic years of prayer and deliberation.

We are now called upon to *carry out* these ideas—in the face of many difficulties and uncertainties. I think you will agree with me that never have we felt so strongly the *need for practical research utilizing the vast treasury of human knowledge available to us today.*

Despite the great accomplishments of the Church in America, we have somehow failed, until very recently, to set up an instrument geared for this specific need.

Thanks to the vision of His Eminence, Richard Cardinal Cushing, and to the moral and financial support of the religious communities of the United States, such an in-

strument has now come into being. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) is incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in the District of Columbia; it possesses a highly qualified and dedicated professional staff; and it exists to provide for us the reliable scientific and technical information we require for proper and thoughtful decisions in the very complicated areas of our ministry.

Cardinal Cody's statement to the American hierarchy was actually the culminating point of nearly fifteen years of thought and effort which had gone into the formation of CARA. Throughout the 1950's, mission-sending organizations had fostered the concept of a national research coordinating center for overseas needs, but their effort was mainly an ad hoc one. Shortly after Pope John XXIII's call for an Ecumenical Council, however, this concept was flashed out and expanded to include the *total* mission of the church, as superiors of U.S. religious orders and Richard Cardinal Cushing urged that the time was ripe to study the feasibility of such an "institute."

In his challenge to the superiors, Cardinal Cushing suggested that America's mission-sending societies "Revitalize whatever we have as national organizations of missionaries, so that they will be productive of large-scale cooperative action." As a second step, he added, "Let the mission societies come together and establish a committee charged with the duty of planning a Mission Center, or Institute, that will serve the mission cause at home and overseas."

Responding to this challenge, the religious congregations established a study commission, "to evaluate the need for a Catholic center for coordinated research and cooperation in all things pertaining to mission and international development of the Church."

After examining the matter for more than a year, the study commission recommended that this center "should be a cooperative effort of the entire Church in the United States" and "would serve and be representative of the entire Church."

The functions of the proposed center, whose charter would contain an elastic definition of research, were: "to promote, coordinate and carry on research; to serve in an informative and consultative capacity to organizations engaged in the universal apostolate; to alert to trends, information and movements; to contribute to the formation of the apostolic worker; to communicate the above knowledge; and to assist in forming the mentality of Catholics, related to their role in the universal apostolate."

*CARA: Unique Response to Church
Research Need*

With this background and support, CARA—the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate — opened in March 1965. In brief, CARA is a national Catholic research, coordination, and information center whose interests include all phases of the church's work at home and overseas.

While other church research units exist—some attached to individual dioceses, religious orders, and church organizations; others to university departments—CARA is the first instrument established by representative leaders of *all* facets of the American Catholic Church, at the service of *all* as a national liaison unit promoting the application of research insights.

While local research units may often employ one particular discipline (e.g. sociology, psychology) in their work, or may focus exclusively on particular church-related issues (e.g. religious edu-

cation; urban affairs), CARA's approach is interdisciplinary and its focus is on the totality of vital church problems. The Center's structure is deliberately flexible to permit it to respond to priority research needs as they arise.

Unlike many university research centers, CARA does not exist primarily to pose or solve theoretical questions, but rather to undertake research of immediate practical import to church planners and programmers.

In contrast to other Catholic organizations, CARA is neither a direct-action nor a policy-making body. Its purpose is, instead, *to provide church leaders with the accurate information they require* as a basis for planning effective church action.

An important part of CARA's work is to communicate already available research knowledge to church planners and programmers and to stimulate the quest for such knowledge. This the center accomplishes through close liaison with other organizations (Catholic and non-Catholic, private and government) whose work bears on its own.

In carrying out its tasks, CARA:

- ✓ surveys, correlates, and disseminates information useful to the church in accomplishment of its work;
- ✓ coordinates its research and data-gathering efforts with those of other organizations having related interests;
- ✓ serves as a catalyst for promotion of needed research;
- ✓ undertakes original research in accord with established priorities of need;
- ✓ translates research data into readily understood terms so that church policy-makers can apply this information on a practical level;

✓ develops formation, training, and educational programs in religious and social action fields;

✓ alerts church leaders to trends and projections, current opportunities, sources of practical information, and new approaches to the apostolate at home and overseas.

CARA's offices are located in the heart of Washington's "research row." The center at present has a limited but carefully selected and highly professional staff. Its Board of Directors includes bishops, major superiors of religious orders, representatives of church organizations, and key lay leaders. Its Research Council—membership on which is determined solely by scientific and professional competence—includes respected scholars of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths:

Joseph H. Fichter, S.J., Ph.D.
Stillman Professor of Roman Catholic
Studies
Harvard University

Andrew M. Greeley, Ph.D.
Senior Study Director
National Opinion Research Center

Samuel Z. Klausner, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion

Sister Marie Augusta Neal, S.N.D., Ph.D.
Chairman, Department of Sociology
Emmanuel College, Boston

C. Joseph Nuesse, Ph.D.
Chairman, Department of Sociology
The Catholic University of America

Lauris B. Whitman, Ph.D.
Special Assistant for Program
Development
National Council of Churches

CARA's Executive Director, Rev. Louis J. Luzbetak, S.V.D., Ph.D., is an anthropologist of note, concerned especially with the practical application of his field to church-related interests. Among his publications is the widely acclaimed *The Church and Cultures*.

CARA's Present Development

At the present time, CARA's research focus is both problem- and geographic-centered, with concentration in such areas as church vocation and seminary research; clergy distribution and utilization; parish and diocesan renewal; self-study and revitalization programs of religious orders; the role of the layman; the church and the city; social and religious problems of small town U.S.A.; and evaluation of the U.S. contribution to church efforts overseas.

Among its operating units CARA includes, e.g., such specialized departments as those of Africa and U.S. Town and Country Affairs.

In undertaking its activities, CARA seeks to promote program development of an interfaith and ecumenical nature.

Exemplifying CARA's Approach

The following is but an example of CARA's operational approach.

Perhaps the most central and pressing research issue facing the U.S. church can be seen in the critical problem area which is of immediate concern to a widening circle of church leaders, namely: the apparent rate of decline in vocations to the religious life, the need to update the seminaries, and the problem of effective utilization of church personnel.

The central problem here is that during the past several years great concern has been expressed over the apparent

fact that even though Vatican II has generated a far-reaching renewal process in the church, religion as a vocation seems to be losing its appeal. Vocations throughout the world are falling behind actual needs. All indications seem to point to a worldwide vocation shortage, with a similar situation seeming on the verge for the United States. This latter would have possibly disastrous effects for the entire church, since North America now produces about a third of the world's vocations to the priesthood.

In the face of these vocation uncertainties, there have actually been few recent studies which have evaluated the problems. General impressions, unofficial reports and some partial surveys seem to confirm the fear of many that such a crisis is in the offing. Yet, no one *really* knows. What is the *real* situation in the United States? Do the impressions represent genuine trends? If so, what is responsible for such trends?

These are the kinds of questions which CARA is called upon with frequency to examine, and the center's comprehensive manner of approaching problem areas is reflected by its development of the CARA vocation research program. In short, this program was established to throw light on the problems of vocations, seminary updating, and ecclesiastical manpower distribution and utilization by means of a comprehensive study that would be nationwide in scope, strictly professional, interdisciplinary, and continuing in character.

Preparatory work carried out by CARA's staff for the vocation research program has resulted in a vocation research index containing some 5,000 annotated entries from English and foreign-language, Catholic and non-Catholic

sources. The index has been assembled in manuscript form and is currently under review by vocation specialists. Publication of this resource material is planned if funds are available.

It is expected that the seminary component of CARA's vocation research program (a national survey of U.S. major and minor seminaries and seminarians) will be completed and ready for publication in two volumes by mid-1968. On the basis of preliminary indications, the center believes that the data obtained from this survey will give to bishops, major religious superiors, seminary rectors, and vocation directors a more complete and objective picture of the *actual* vocation situation in U.S. seminaries than has ever before been available to them.

The center has also completed, for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the first national survey of Catholic clergy distribution and utilization in the United States.

Among other projects developed under CARA's vocation research program this year are preparation, in collaboration with the National Catholic Educational Association and the office of the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Formation, of a *National Directory of Seminaries*, to include an analysis of statistical data and be published in September, 1967; publication of *A Practical Approach to Community Self-Study*, a handbook of self-study guidelines for religious communities; and forthcoming publication of a survey of Catholic parents' attitudes toward vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. (This study, to serve as a model, is now undergoing final editing.)

Preliminary consultations are now under way, and funding is being sought for later phases of the vocation research pro-

gram which would include in-depth studies of major vocation factors—e.g., selection procedures; the “image” of the priesthood and religious life; the type of personality drawn to the religious vocation; the “vocation family,” etc. Of particular interest is a projected study of the relative maturity of minor seminarians (Does the minor seminary hold back personality development, as is often claimed by opponents of the present system?), which would form part of a research approach to the question of the validity of minor seminaries.

Applying Research Knowledge

As a center for applied research, CARA is deeply conscious of its primary assignment, which is to seek to bridge the traditional gap which has too frequently kept apart the decision-maker and the research specialist. Thus, in preparatory consultations for its vocation research program, for example, CARA has been careful to include representatives of the hierarchy, major religious superiors, seminary rectors and vocation directors, so that practical considerations would be kept in sight at all times.

Incidentally, the practical effects of the CARA study of clergy distribution may well include creation of the analytic framework within which the National Conference of Catholic Bishops will be able to carry on their discussions on the restoration of a permanent diaconate and on the establishment of a voluntary national clergy “pool” whereby the nation’s clergy may be more effectively distributed and utilized.

Information Retrieval and Distribution

With the rapid accumulation of human knowledge, church leaders have increasingly recognized that processes of retriev-

ing and distributing information which is applicable to the apostolate must be improved upon.

In the post-Vatican II period, developments in the field of pastoral renewal, for instance, are taking place so rapidly that pastors, curates, and laity concerned with this process are unable to relate these changes to their own milieu. Moreover, too many of the reports, tracts, and journals dealing with pastoral renewal are actually too theoretical for use by clergy and laity concerned with the practical issues involved in this process.

In response to these problems, CARA has suggested the creation of an experimental project under which an information retrieval and sharing system might be developed to assist those involved with the practicalities of pastoral renewal. This system would provide busy pastors and clergy-lay councils with up-to-the-minute information on reports, studies, and developments related to pastoral renewal and would be updated each month.

In brief, the retrieval system would inform subscribers on such matters as:

- ✓ successful parish programs on ecumenism, liturgical renewal, and catechetics, and how to develop similar programs;
- ✓ what parishes are doing for their communities under federal and state housing, poverty, and other social action programs and why some of these activities succeed while others fail;
- ✓ sources available for information, advice, training, or research to help parishes carry out programs of pastoral renewal;
- ✓ the changing role of Sisters in the parishes;
- ✓ how parishes can relate their expe-

riences in renewal to those under way elsewhere in the country;

✓ ways to make contemporary theological insights relevant to parishes;

✓ how successful parish programs of church management and financing get started, and why some succeed and others fail;

✓ the changing and practical role of parish councils and school boards.

CARA and the Church Federation of Greater Chicago have recently co-sponsored meetings to discuss development of a similar information system on "the Metropolis and Church Renewal"—a system which, it is hoped, would be designed to alert the 2000 or so church urban specialists to new trends and assistance for the church's apostolate in the changing city.

While the proposed information systems are only in discussion stages, CARA has developed a "CARA Information Service," which periodically issues reports and documents of immediate practical value to church organizations and administrators.

The Limitations of Research

As an applied research center, CARA, in making its studies and interpretations available to decision-makers, must constantly be aware of the limitations of its research findings and must make these limitations known to the organizations and agencies for which it conducts its investigations, lest they misconstrue the assistance which research can provide. In general, CARA approaches this issue

with the viewpoint of the distinguished theologian Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., who has observed that "the sociological report cannot take the place of pastoral decision-making . . . (it) supplies only one piece the pastor has to find a place for in the jigsaw puzzle of his pastoral enterprise."

Even though it places its research within this framework, however, CARA does not hesitate to insist that while the mission of the church is essentially a spiritual activity, it necessarily requires the use of available human resources. Scientific pastoral planning is not only justifiable; it is, CARA believes and an ever-widening church audience concurs, theologically sound.

The formation of CARA is not, of course, the only sign that the traditional gap between researchers and decision-makers in the U.S. Catholic Church is gradually being closed. Other signs include the multi-faceted research activities of the National Catholic Educational Association; the creation by the U.S. Catholic bishops of a research committee on the role of the priest in the modern world; the 1967 *Statement on the Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University*, which urged university responsibility not only for basic research but for "such research as will deal with problems of greater human urgency or of greater Christian concern"; and the establishment of other research institutes in such fields as general and religious education. Yet, the creation of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate is a strong indication that a fresh current is blowing in the winds of church research.