

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: CONSCIENCE AND NATURAL LAW

A. Introductory considerations

5 Many people have come in recent years to regard conscience as a personal supreme court empowered to nullify, amend, or authorize exceptions to moral norms. The formula of the radically dissenting theologians, which I quoted in chapter thirteen, section A, expresses this view. The same idea is expressed in more colloquial ways. For example, "My conscience tells me it is o.k. to x, so it is o.k. for me, and nobody has any business telling me I'm wrong." Or, "I don't see that doing x really hurts anybody and it doesn't bother my conscience, so doing x is o.k." Or again, "I know a lot of decent people who are doing x, and I don't have so authoritarian a conscience as to say they are wrong, so it would be o.k. for me to do x. Of course, I never do x myself--well, hardly ever."

15 John Henry Newman observed the beginning of this false notion of conscience and criticized it bitingly in his Letter to the Duke of Norfolk, written in 1874:

Conscience has rights because it has duties; but in this age, with a large portion of the public, it is the very right and freedom of conscience to dispense with conscience, to ignore a Lawgiver and Judge, to be independent of unseen obligations. It becomes a license to take up any or no religion, to take up this or that and let it go again, to go to church, to go to chapel, to boast of being above all religions and to be an impartial critic of each of them. Conscience is a stern monitor, but in this century it has been superseded by a counterfeit, which the eighteen centuries prior to it never heard of, and could not have mistaken for it, if they had. It is the right of self-will.[1]

25 The situation today is very like that Newman describes, except that now the supposed license is to pick up and discard bits and pieces of one's religion, thus better to suit individual tastes.

30 The present chapter will be both critical of false views and constructive. I will lay out and clarify the Catholic Church's true understanding of conscience and moral principles. Some major counterpositions will be dealt with here, others in chapter sixteen. Moreover, I will treat conscience again in part six, when I deal with various defects of conscience; these are one of the important consequences of sin.

35 B. Vatican II and Scripture on conscience

Vatican II teaches that every human person has a right to religious freedom (DH). This teaching often has been misunderstood and sometimes has been exploited to promote the false, contemporary conception of freedom of conscience. John Courtney Murray, S.J., the theological expert whose work was most fruitful for the development of this document, comments:

45 It is worth noting that the Declaration does not base the right to the free exercise of religion on "freedom of conscience." Nowhere does this phrase occur. And the declaration nowhere lends its authority to the theory for which the phrase frequently stands, namely, that I have the right to do what my conscience tells me to do, simply because my conscience tells me to do it. This is a perilous theory. Its particular peril is subjectivism--the notion that, in the end, it is my conscience, and not the objective truth, which determines what is right or wrong, true or false (Editor's note 5 to DH in the Abbott edition).

50 As I will explain in due course, Vatican II does teach about conscience in this document, but in a very traditional way.

The main teaching of Vatican II concerning conscience is in one article of another document (GS 16). The Council begins by speaking of a law which a person detects, not makes, and of conscience as the voice of this law:

55 In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of this law ["of this law" not "of conscience" as the translation mistakenly reads] can when necessary speak to his heart more specifically: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged (GS 16).

60 At this point the Council refers to what is probably the most important passage in Scripture in which "conscience" occurs:

65 When Gentiles who do not have the law keep it as by instinct, these men although without the law serve as a law for themselves. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness together with that law, and their thoughts will accuse or defend them on the day when . . . God will pass judgment (Rom 2.14-16).

The law mentioned here is called "natural law" in Catholic teaching. It is known by everyone, even persons who do not have faith, for its demands are "written in their hearts"--that is, known spontaneously. Conscience here is a co-witness with the law. The two together will accuse or defend, which implies that they must agree with each other. Vatican II expresses the same idea in its image of conscience as a voice of the law written by God in the heart--who writes it in creating persons of human nature.

75 The use of the Scriptural word "hearts" should not lead anyone to think that conscience is considered by St. Paul or Vatican II a power of feeling what is right or a disposition to love what is good. "Heart" in the Bible has a much wider reference than it does in current English.[2] The reference includes the whole of one's interior life, including one's mind and will. The thoughts which accuse or defend are partly the naturally known law and partly conscience.

80 Vatican II continues with a metaphorical description of conscience taken from a document of Pius XII (which I will consider in section O, below):

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor (GS 16).

Here the Council refers to the precept of love formulated in the New Testament (cf. Mt 22.37-40; Gal 5.14). Implicit is the statement: The law Christian love fulfills and must fulfill is the natural law. Since conscience expresses the natural law, which can

5 In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships. Hence the more that a correct conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by objective norms of morality (GS 16).

10 Here the Council speaks of "correct conscience." When correct, conscience demands that one be reasonable, not arbitrary; that one conform to objective or true norms, not to subjective substitutes chosen arbitrarily. But conscience is not always correct. Because conscience is not the voice of God, but only the voice of His law (our application of natural law), conscience is not infallible:

15 Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said of a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or of a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin (GS 16).

20 Here the Council envisages two quite different ways in which conscience goes wrong. I will consider them briefly in section C, below, and more fully in part six.

The main use of "conscience" in the New Testament is to refer to an awareness that one is going or has gone wrong. God has constituted us such that when we do wrong we are bothered--we say "by conscience." [3] The Gentiles of whom Paul speaks can have this sense of wrongdoing; along with spontaneous awareness of moral norms, conscience serves

25 as a law. As a warning of trouble, conscience is valuable, very much as the law is. But ideally, a Christian would hear little from conscience. [4]

Little children, let us love in deed and in truth and not merely talk about it.

30 This is our way of knowing we are committed to the truth and are at peace before him no matter what our consciences may charge us with; for God is greater than our hearts and all is known to him. Beloved, if our consciences have nothing to charge us with, we can be sure that God is with us

35 and that we will receive at his hands whatever we ask. Why? Because we are keeping his commandments and doing what is pleasing in his sight (1 Jn 3.18-22).

Conscience--the sense of wrong-doing--is not infallible. One can feel guilty, but if one is loving in deed and in truth--carrying out God's will--then one can ignore this

40 feeling, since God knows better. No Christian who is violating God's commandments can have a clear conscience, so one who lacks pangs of conscience while loving in deed and in truth can be quite confident. At the same time, one should not be too confident; one cannot declare oneself innocent on the basis of a clear conscience (cf. 1 Cor 4.4-5). One's real relationship

45 to God is not reducible to one's sense of wrong-doing or lack of it. Like the law, conscience is a good thing, but it is no substitute for the Spirit, for love in action, and for bodily communion with Christ.

C. The common Catholic account of conscience

50 The teaching of Vatican II on conscience obviously is not derived directly from Scripture. The source rather is the account of conscience commonly found in Catholic moral theology. This account was first formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas, and I do not think improved subsequently.

55 According to St. Thomas, conscience is an intellectual act of judgment. The judgment in question primarily is a practical one, corresponding to and preceding each choice one makes. The judgment is one's best and last judgment as to what one should choose. With this judgment in mind, one then chooses, either conforming to conscience or choosing otherwise than conscience directs. Subsequent to choice, conscience plays a further

60 roll; on reflection one compares what one chose to do with one's judgment as to what choice one should have made--for example, when one examines one's conscience. [5]

How is this judgment--which is the "voice" of a law written by God in one's heart--related to this law?

65 St. Thomas begins from what he calls "the eternal law." This law is not in any ordinary sense called "law." It is God's wisdom directing everything toward the ultimate end of creation: fulfillment in Christ. The eternal law simply is the plan of God according to which He carries out the whole work of creating and redeeming. St. Thomas calls this "law" because he does not think of law primarily as a set of rules or as commands backed up by power. Rather, he thinks of law as a reasonable plan of action.

70 Since God knows well what He is doing, He must be acting according to a law; since no one can form God's plan of action for Him, the law of His creative and redemptive work simply is His own wisdom, by which He directs everything well toward the end He has in mind. [6]

75 Since eternal law covers absolutely everything, any other law--any other reasonable plan of action--must derive somehow from the eternal law. (Thomas thinks that what we usually call law--namely, rules and commands of people in authority--truly is law only if it is sound and agrees with God's plan and will. What we call "unjust laws" for Thomas are not laws at all. Human persons are able to plan their lives reasonably only because in one or another way they share in the practical view which is perfectly present in God's eternal law.)

80 All human persons are innately disposed to grasp some basic practical principles. Thomas calls these the "primary principles of natural law," since one knows them naturally. About them no one can make a mistake. These principles are the same as the law written in one's heart (St. Paul) or the law whose voice conscience is (Vatican II).

Thomas, interpreting his text of Psalm 4 ("Who will show us any good? Lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us, O Lord"), says that natural law is: A light of reason which is in us, inasmuch as it can show us goods, and direct our will, because it is the light of God's countenance--that is, derived from His countenance.[8]

5 Although we are naturally disposed to know basic practical principles and can make no mistake about them, they are not by themselves sufficient for the judgment of conscience which we must make. Our ultimate end is to share in fulfillment in Christ, and we do not judge rightly what to do unless we judge in light of this end. So we must supplement natural law with faith, by this means drawing on the eternal law in a way
10 that goes beyond reason.[9]

Moreover, the basic practical principles of natural law and the way of Christ which faith teaches must be brought to bear by us on the particular possibilities we consider in our deliberation. This application of principles to possibilities under consideration is a process of reasoning, and only at the end of this reasoning do we reach our
15 best and last judgment as to what choice we should make. So the judgment of conscience must be reached by conscientious reflection on the possibilities before us in the light of the moral standards we have from natural law and faith.[10]

The principles of natural law and the truths of faith cannot be wrong, but one's application of them can go wrong. This can happen in two ways. First, one can misconceive faith, for one's personal idea of what God reveals is not necessarily right, and one even can misconceive principles of natural law, for these principles become embodied in articulations and in institutions which can distort them. Second, even if one has a sound grasp of faith and of the naturally known principles of practical reasoning, still one can make a mistake in reasoning and misapply these sound sources of judgment in making
25 the judgment. In other words, one's conscience can be wrong due to confusion somewhere along the line.[11]

If one's conscience--one's last and best judgment as to what one ought to choose--happens to be mistaken, should one follow it or not? St. Thomas answers this question first by referring to St. Paul: "Whatever does not accord with one's belief is sinful"
30 (Rom 14.23). St. Paul makes this statement in the context of a discussion of the eating of meat which had been sacrificed to idols and subsequently sold in the market. Paul is certain that there is nothing wrong in eating such meat; its previous use should not bother a Christian in the least. However, some Christians suffered pangs of conscience when they ate such meat. Paul advises those who know better not to press their mistaken
35 brothers and sisters to eat the idol-meat. Better not to eat it oneself than to put one's fellow Christians in a position of having their consciences troubled. And in no case is it acceptable to act against one's conscience: "Whatever does not accord with one's belief is sinful."

The explanation St. Thomas gives is simple and clear. One's conscience is one's
40 last and best judgment as to what choice one should make. If this judgment is mistaken, one does not know it at the time. If one is choosing reasonably, one will follow conscience. Here and now it seems to one to be God's plan and will. If one acts against one's conscience, one certainly is in the wrong.[12]

Thomas drives home his point. If a superior gives one an order which one cannot
45 obey without violating one's conscience, one must not obey. To obey the superior in this case would be to disobey what one believes to be the mind and will of God.[13] It is good to abstain from fornication. But if one's conscience is that one should choose to fornicate, one does evil if one does not fornicate. Indeed, to believe in Christ is in itself good and essential for salvation. But one can only believe in Him rightly if
50 one judges that one ought to. Therefore, one whose conscience is that it is wrong to believe in Christ would be guilty of moral evil if he or she chose to act against this mistaken judgment.[14]

This brings us to an essential, very important, and widely ignored final point about following one's conscience. St. Thomas asks: Does erring conscience excuse? Is
55 one who conforms to conscience when it is mistaken nevertheless sometimes morally guilty of the wrong choice? The answer is: Sometimes, yes. One must follow one's conscience as it is, since it is one's last and best judgment as to what one should choose. But the error in judgment can be one's own fault. This is so if one somehow chooses to stay in ignorance about one's responsibilities or if one fails in any way to do all that one
60 can and ought to do to know what is right and to bring this knowledge to bear in one's judgment of conscience. If one's erroneous conscience is in any way one's own fault, then to that extent one's action in conformity with erroneous conscience is one's fault. One has an obligation to avoid mistakes in conscience so far as possible by informing oneself fully and by conscientiously thinking out what one should choose.[15] If one
65 does not fulfill this obligation, one's action in accord with an erring conscience is not morally blameless.

This conclusion seems to entail that in some cases one is damned if one does and damned if one does not follow conscience. St. Thomas points out that if one's mistake
70 is in no way one's own fault--if ignorance is invincible--then one is not damned if one does follow conscience. There is no moral fault here at all. If one's erroneous conscience is somehow one's own fault, then one has a way out: Ignorance is vincible and voluntary. One can inform oneself and ought to do so.[16]

Obviously, on this account of conscience, on which Vatican II bases its teaching, conscience is a stern monitor, as Newman says, and as Murray explains, "freedom of conscience" has little meaning, except to point one toward a perilous subjectivism. Conscience entails moral responsibility, and one's first responsibility is to form one's
75 conscience rightly so that one's judgments are correct.[17]

D. The predicament of those in a conscience box

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St. Thomas does not spell out the difficulty which people who are voluntarily in error might have in overcoming their error. In chapter nine I distinguished many modes of voluntariness. It is easy enough to see how people who are rather directly keeping themselves in the dark can overcome their ignorance. But what about people who would

like to commit some sin if it were not a sin, who therefore tend to hear what they would like to hear in defense of what they would like to do, who somewhat irresponsibly but without any clear-cut choice omit to inform themselves about what truly is right in the matter, who are encouraged by trusted experts and spiritual guides to follow their own "conscience," and who come finally to think the sinful act right and proceed to do it--

not just once, but as a regular practice?

Such people are not blameless, yet they cannot easily overcome their error. At times their conscience probably bothers them, but they are locked in the box of their own "conscience," for they hardly can admit that their judgment and ongoing way of life, supported by the opinions of others, is erroneous. "Why doesn't the Church change her teaching? Pope John Paul II seems to be such a fine man; why must he be so rigid on this matter?"

In a book published in 1976, Andrew Greeley provided evidence that the Catholic Church in America is a declining one. The decline, which has occurred since Vatican II, is related sociologically not to the Council itself, but to subsequent events, particularly the publication of Pope Paul VI's encyclical concerning birth regulation, Humanae vitae. Greeley personally accepts neither the particular teaching of this encyclical nor in general received Catholic teaching with respect to sexual morality. He urges that the Church "repeal" the encyclical and develop a generally "broader" approach to sexuality.[18]

In chapter fifteen I will articulate reasons for thinking that the received Catholic teachings that certain kinds of acts always involve grave matter have been proposed infallibly by the ordinary magisterium--that is, by the popes and bishops together in their usual, day-to-day teaching. If this position is correct, then the teaching of Humanae vitae concerning contraception, sterilization, and abortion certainly is true, for Paul VI in this encyclical says nothing new on these matters, but simply and clearly reaffirms received teaching (although he puts it in the new context provided by Vatican II's teaching on marriage).

Now, I do not doubt the accuracy of Greeley's sociological judgment that there is a serious decline in the American Church and that this decline is related to the publication of Humanae vitae. However, I do not think Greeley understands the moral dynamics of what happened before and after the publication of the encyclical. In my view, the main source of difficulty has not been the teaching of the Church reaffirmed in 1968 by Paul VI (and in 1979 by John Paul II), but theological dissent from this teaching and widespread pastoral failure to encourage the faithful to try to live up to it and to confess their sin when they fail in this effort. In other words, I think that responsibility for decline in the Church should be attributed not to the popes and bishops who are faithfully proclaiming Catholic teaching but to radically dissenting theologians, to negligent bishops and priests, and to pundits such as Greeley.

If the Church's moral teaching concerning sexuality is true, then people naturally have some awareness that it is true. This awareness is not easy to articulate into tight arguments against acts such as contraception, masturbation, fornication, adultery, homosexual intercourse, and so on. Moreover, the awareness is rather fragile, because sexual orgasm is intensely pleasant and sexual intimacy very satisfying, and fallen humankind has an unruly desire for such pleasure and satisfaction. (Other primates do not show the great preoccupation with sex humans do. I think this fact can be explained by the distortion of human emotion which arises from fear of death, an anxiety from which other primates are free, since they do not know they will die.) The unruly human desire for sexual pleasure and intimacy leads people to choose all sorts of sexual acts, whether they consider them right or wrong. Wrong choices tend eventually to exclude from consciousness any awareness that the acts one chooses are wrong (cf. GS 16).

Catholics do try in general to form their consciences by the Church's moral teaching. They are more or less clearly aware that the Church speaks for God; they more or less clearly think that the Church's moral teaching binds their consciences. With respect to contraception--and the same is true for other moral teachings which have been challenged in recent years--the ordinary Catholic knows what the Church's teaching is.

Whether inclined to one side or the other of the contraception controversy, ordinary Catholics spontaneously refer to the received teaching as "the teaching of the Church" and they refer to any acceptance of methods of birth regulation forbidden up to now as "a change in the Church's teaching." In speaking thus, Catholics show a true sense of faith.[19] Only people who are intellectually subtle and who are careful how they speak say that the received teaching is the "Roman principle" or the "papal teaching" or the "rule laid down in Casti connubii," and suggest that the acceptance of contraceptive methods of birth regulation by the Church would be a "genuine development" of the Church's teaching on marital morality and a "deepening" of our understanding of the moral implications of Christian faith.

Even if the Church's moral teaching concerning sexuality were false--something I do not concede--as long as the Church continues to propose this teaching most practicing Catholics would find it very difficult really to be sure that it is morally permissible to choose acts of kinds the Church teaches to be matter of grave sin. If people are not really sure that such acts are permissible yet choose to do them, then their consciences will not be at peace. If the Church's moral teaching is true, I doubt that any practicing Catholic who knows what the Church teaches will find it possible really to be sure that it is morally permissible to violate the teaching.

In dealing with the question of meat sacrificed to idols, St. Paul declared himself personally certain that in itself there would be nothing morally wrong in eating such meat (cf. Rom 14.14). Still, he urges that Christians who realize this avoid scandalizing those who think it wrong to eat idol-meat (cf. Rom 14.20-22). His concern is that those who mistakenly think it wrong to eat idol-meat not be led to eat it against their own erroneous conscience (cf. Rom 14.23). Now, the question is: Why did not Paul solve the problem more simply and directly by writing: Tell those who think it wrong to eat idol-meat that they are mistaken; tell them that I, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, say they may eat idol-meat with a clear conscience?

Someone might say that Paul did not write thus out of deference to the Jerusalem

decree (cf. Acts 15.20). But if Paul had this decree in mind and if he thought it applicable, is it credible he would not have mentioned it? It would have been a strong support for the advice he was giving: Don't do anything which would lead people to eat idol-meat if they think it wrong to eat it. I believe Paul had a different reason for refraining from an attempt to correct the mistaken consciences of those who thought it wrong to eat idol-meat: He was afraid that such an attempt might succeed only to the extent of getting these people to eat idol-meat, but fail to make them really be sure that eating idol-meat is morally permissible. That result would be disastrous, for then people would be acting against their conscience.

Catholics who are advised to disregard the Church's moral teaching are perhaps sufficiently fortified to do what they otherwise would not have done. But it is one thing to fortify people sufficiently that they do something; it is another to fortify them sufficiently that they are absolutely convinced that what they are doing is right. The Church's teaching cannot be set aside so easily; if it is in fact true, it simply cannot be set aside by people who stay in the Church and are reminded of it from time to time.

Thus Catholics who follow dissenting moral opinions continue to have a sense of guilt. They at least know they are at odds with the Church. It is this awareness, I believe, which has caused the decline Greeley observes. The still-troubled consciences of Catholics who have adopted the new sexual morality and even their drifting away from the Church provide testimony--testimony at once paradoxical, powerful, and sad--of their sensus ecclesiae, which the dissenting opinion of theologians has failed either to alter or to reduce to silence.

One can disregard the laws of one's nation if one believes them unjust without becoming alienated from one's nation; one can disregard the advice of family and friends one is sure is mistaken without becoming alienated from one's family and friends. If Catholics who dissent in practice from the Church's moral teaching really had clear consciences, the present situation would not alienate them from the Church.

In chapter eleven, section A, I explained that currently we are in a cultural period in which the reality of moral evil is somewhat hidden. This general climate of the culture makes it very difficult for Christians to recognize and admit their own moral guilt. Such recognition and admission is important not only for moral improvement, but also because we cannot accept and be thankful for God's merciful love if we do not acknowledge everything on our consciences and seek His forgiveness.

A priest working as a pastor of souls ought to be very careful to help people to realize and admit their own true state of conscience. Even if a priest were personally convinced that certain kinds of acts can be done blamelessly, he would endanger those entrusted to his care if he led them to hide from themselves the fact that their actions are at odds with their own consciences. The danger that this will happen is especially great today. I am afraid that many priests, lacking St. Paul's pastoral sensitivity, have pressed their personal opinions upon the faithful, contrary to the Church's teaching and to the great detriment of the faithful. This would be so even if the teaching were mistaken; a fortiori if it is true as I am convinced and will try to show in chapter fifteen.

Some who urge priests to condone practical dissent from the Church's moral teaching say that under certain conditions a penitent in error but good faith should be left in good faith. This may be so, but it is one thing to leave someone in good faith and another to encourage someone to continue in bad faith.

What I have said here must be applied with care to certain special cases of conscience, such as the conscience of the genuinely scrupulous person. One who deals with a scrupulant is dealing with someone suffering from a moral-psychological disease. Such people need to be handled in special ways which are examined in pastoral theology. But what I have said does apply to the pastoral care of the normal consciences of the faithful.

55 E. The conscience of the Catholic and the Church's teaching

In the light of the explanation in section C, above, of the common Catholic account of conscience, one can understand clearly why Vatican II's teaching on religious freedom does not imply any right of individuals to pick and choose among the Church's teachings. The right of religious freedom arises from the responsibility of all persons to seek the truth, "especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth" (DH 2).

The standard for this quest for truth is God's eternal law, the "plan conceived in wisdom and love." Before one has faith, one already learns of this plan by the mediation of conscience. Those who follow their consciences, as they ought, will find God. Therefore, people should not be forced to act against their consciences or, in general, restrained from living according to their religious convictions (cf. DH 3). There are obvious limits here (cf. DH 7). For example, someone might think it obligatory to practice human sacrifice.

None of this detracts from the belief of the Catholic Church in its own unique identity and truth. God has revealed the one true religion, and it subsists in the Catholic Church. The Church has the task of making divine truth known. Every human person can and ought to come to the truth of the Catholic faith and, once having found it, hold fast to it. These are serious obligations in conscience; the truth, however, can impose itself only by its own character as truth, not by force. Religious freedom excludes force. But "it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ" (DH 1).

Lest anyone miss the point, the Council includes an article toward the end of its document on religious liberty, to stress the responsibility of Catholics to their own faith (cf. DH 14). The Council begins by urging children of the Church to work to spread the faith. The first thing we must do is to pray for others, so that they might come to the truth and be saved. Next, Catholics must form their consciences correctly and live the Christian life as a sign. Prophetic witness, as I explained in chapter

thirteen, section L, is the responsibility of all those living redemptively toward other men and women.

In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Catholic Church. [The Abbott translation mistakenly omits "Catholic" here. I omit here a footnote reference to the teaching of Pius XII.] The Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth. It is her duty to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach, that Truth, which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origin in human nature itself. Furthermore, let Christians walk in wisdom in the face of those outside, "in the Holy Spirit, in unaffected love, in the word of truth" (2 Cor 6.6-7). Let them be about their task of spreading the light of life with all confidence and apostolic courage, even to the shedding of their blood (DH 14).

Finally, the Council insists that members of the Church must know and proclaim her teaching, using all means compatible with the Gospel itself. Thus the virtuous life of Catholics who live according to consciences formed by the Church's teaching will be matched by kindly words by which they will articulate the meaning of their deeds.

The logic of the Council's teaching is plain. Every person has a conscience precisely as a God-given means of finding divine truth. Catholics have the marvelous grace of having received the truth for whose attainment conscience is given. Having the truth, one must live by it and by doing so share the truth with others. It is in one's own best interest to live in the truth, to follow the way of Christian wisdom, to live redemptively toward others. Christ provides the Church as a teacher of His truth. The Catholic who is blessed to hear the truth the Church teaches must conform to it. (I will explain this point more fully in section O, below, where I will enlarge upon the Council's teaching on formation of conscience by considering the teaching of Pius XII, to which the Council refers.)

To nonbelievers, Catholics might appear to be untrue to themselves when they form their consciences by the Church's teaching. The nonbelieving world in general denies the reality of moral guilt, yet knows this reality. Hence, the world fails to appreciate the blessing Catholics enjoy in having a secure means of knowing what is morally true; the world flees from moral standards--especially those proclaimed clearly and uncompromisingly by the Church--which call in question the world's own sin. The nonbeliever's challenge is: "You Catholics are abdicating your own consciences and enslaving yourselves to the opinions of your popes and bishops." This challenge must be answered.

The first point to make is that everyone who lives responsibly relies at times on the moral advice of others. For example, any person upon first entering a profession or especially responsible job must make many judgments about how to handle problems which arise. The sensible person looks for a colleague who is experienced, upright, and willing to talk, and seeks guidance. In some cases the guidance is fully understood when it is given. In other cases, one simply has to take one's advisor's word for it and follow advice which one cannot clearly see to be correct until one has lived for a time according to it.

According to Catholic faith, humankind existing in a world sinful and redeemed is very much in need of wise advice from Christ. He is our colleague: more experienced, certainly upright, and (through the Church) willing to talk. In this way we learn in the light of faith much moral truth--some of which we could know even without faith and can come to understand for ourselves once it is taught us by the Church. Without faith, we could not know it so easily, nor be so sure of it, nor gather it without a portion of mistaken opinions (cf. DS 3005/1786).

Moreover, from our Lord Jesus we learn what we otherwise could not know: our true destiny of fulfillment in Him. From Jesus we receive the power of the Spirit and the guidance to walk after Christ to glory. Without faith, we could not know at all this Truth which Jesus Himself is, and so would not know how to live in the only right way possible in this sinful world, as I explained in chapter twelve.

As in other choices of moral advisors, so in our commitment to Christ and our adherence to His truth taught by the Church, we are led by conscience to seek the truth from Christ and to accept His moral guidance as He speaks to us in the Church. Still, it will be objected, in this case one abdicates personal responsibility if one submits unreservedly to the Church's teaching and does not test each moral norm it proposes by one's own reason and experience. One who is upright never would submit so completely to any other moral advisor.

The last point is correct. There are limits to which one can trust a merely human moral guide, and one would be irresponsible to go beyond these limits. But we believe our Lord teaches in and through the Church, and that He gives us the word of the Father. Hence, our submission to the Church's teaching is not submission to mere human opinions, but to the very word of God (cf. 1 Thes 2.13).

By faith we are certain that in faith we accept God and through faithfulness live in communion with Him. Otherwise, faith would be null, since it is inherently normative, as I explained in chapter thirteen, section J. One is no more intellectually irresponsible in submitting unreservedly to the Church's moral teaching than one is in submitting unreservedly to all of the fundamental doctrines which go beyond reason and experience: the Trinity, the Incarnation, the adoption of children of God, the bodily presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and so on.

But are not Catholics degraded and treated as immature children when they are regulated by Church teaching even in the details of their intimate, personal lives? We would be if the Church were a political society. The all-inclusiveness of its moral teaching, if it were a code of law, would be totalitarian. But if moral teaching is a light from God, and if nothing is good or worthwhile apart from one's relationship to God, then humble acceptance of the whole of the Church's moral teaching, including those points which touch one most intimately, is in no way degrading.

By the liberty we demand by refusing to accept total commitment of ourselves to political society or to any other human community, we preserve ourselves in order to commit ourselves totally to God (cf. LG 36). This we do in liberty and in return we

receive the liberation of redemption and a share in the freedom of God's children. So we believe, or else we have no excuse for claiming human liberty; for unless our liberty in relation to our fellows is consecrated to a more than human relationship, it is merely an excuse for individualistic selfishness.

5 Moreover, genuine conscience is not simply an individualistic judgment. For example, a couple who wish to raise their children responsibly must discuss together what is to be done and must reach together a judgment of conscience (cf. GE 1). The same should be true in larger communities, although in many of them the work of conscientious reflection is mixed in with considerations of expediency, and in some of them considerations of right and wrong play almost no role (cf. DH 8).

10 Our life as Catholics is not individualistic. We are members of God's family on earth, commissioned to live redemptively and to communicate His truth and life to the world. The Church's common moral teaching is necessary for us to reach common--at least harmonious--judgments of conscience, so that our common life in Christ will fulfill the law of love of God and neighbor. As I will explain more fully in chapter fifteen, every member of the Church has a role to play in handing on, unfolding, and applying her moral teaching. But not all have the same role, and none can treat Catholic moral teaching as if it were merely a set of human rules. God has shown us His way.

15 Nevertheless, certain questions remain to be explored. Sometimes it might appear that there are implicit conflicts in the Church's own moral teaching. What are we to do when mother Church seems to be giving us inconsistent advice? Also, as Vatican II teaches, the pastors of the Church do not have concrete solutions to every problem of conscience which arises, nor is that their mission. The laity are to make conscientious judgments of their own, enlightened by Christian wisdom and paying close attention to the Church's pastors (cf. GS 43). How are people to make their own judgments? The Church provides a great deal of general moral guidance, including some norms which exclude certain choices. How is one to proceed from such guidance toward an affirmative judgment of conscience?

20 To some extent these questions point beyond Christian Moral Principles toward a treatise on the responsibilities of Christians in the area of practical wisdom. To some extent, they will be dealt with in part five, when I articulate general moral norms--forms of human and Christian responsibility.

25 But to some extent, these questions can be illuminated by further reflection upon the general question: What are moral norms and how do we know them? In the light of what I have said already, it is clear that some moral norms are naturally known and others are derived from revelation alone. How are the two related? The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to these two questions. In trying to answer them I hope to remove a number of confusions which are more or less common among Catholics--confusions generated because conceptions of moral norms fundamentally incompatible with faith sometimes are mixed into Catholic moral reflection.

F. Moral norms and conscience reduced to mere feelings

45 Children feel guilty and have a certain sense of right and wrong before they are old enough to make judgments of conscience and choices.[20] Such a sense is not purely emotional; it corresponds to the child's understanding of goods and spontaneous willing. An important principle of childish guilt is the child's attitude, usually of mingled love and fear, toward its parents. What is right is what pleases parents; what is wrong is what displeases them. What pleases or displeases is absorbed by the child and remains a more or less effective monitor of behavior in later life. Often adults, especially ones who are psychologically immature, find it very difficult to distinguish such childish feelings from the moral conscience I have described.

50 Freud reduces conscience to superego, which is nothing else but a childish sense of right and wrong.[21] Other humanists have attacked Christian morality selectively, claiming that parts of it--for example, Christian moral teaching about sex--is a collection of nonrational taboos: standards of action based either on a childish sense of right and wrong or on some other nonrational principle.

55 It is clear that the superego--we might as well use this convenient word--is not the conscience described by Vatican II and the common Catholic tradition. For superego is not a matter of reasoned judgment as conscience is. The distinction can appear clearly in cases in which the two are opposed. For example, a young woman brought up in a prudish environment might feel ashamed and guilty when she begins to have marital intercourse, although she knows that her choice to marry and to cooperate in normal marital sexual activity is right and good. Conversely, a young man brought up in a very tough environment might feel no pangs of conscience when he robs a store, but he might know that what he is doing is wrong, not only by conventional standards, but also in the sense that he would not wish anyone to do the same sort of thing to anyone he cared about.

60 For the present purpose, it is unnecessary to investigate the complex psychology of guilt feelings. The important point is that superego has to do with guilt only in a secondary and derivative sense, for it is tied to the whole pre-moral phase of personal development. Genuine conscience is an awareness of responsibility assessed by a judgment derived from some principle one understands or accepts from a source (such as the Church's teaching) to which one has intelligently and freely committed oneself. Once conscience is developing and the personality being integrated in a mature way, feelings of guilt will more and more coincide with choices one knows to be wrong and will be in proportion to the seriousness one judges the wrong to have.

65 Such maturing takes some time. Most adults are bothered by superego guilt feelings about some things. Probably all have some distortions in their sense of guilt--for example, perhaps feeling more guilty about sexual sins than about more existentially destructive sins against justice. For example, a Catholic man might cheat his employees of their wages, knowing this to be wrong, yet not feel very guilty about what he is doing; the same man might be scrupulous to avoid the occasions of sins against purity, since he cannot commit such a sin without feeling guilt and shame.

Part of adolescent rebelliousness is an attempt to overcome childish principles of right and wrong and the superego guilt which enforces them. To the extent that the superego persists without being integrated into mature morality, people remain in an adolescent posture toward all authorities. Thus many Catholics feel childish guilt when they violate the Church's moral teaching, especially in the area of sex, and resent the Church's authority much as rebellious adolescents resent parental authority.

This resentment shapes and colors the entire attitude of many Catholics to the Church. They fail to see moral teaching as a gift of truth; they miss entirely the responsibility to share in a common task of living redemptively and communicating God's truth and love to others. They want the Church to change her teaching for they think such a change would relieve their feelings of guilt, and they consciously or subconsciously assume that the teaching can be changed, much as a parental decision that it is time to go to bed can be changed. These immature attitudes complicate and greatly intensify the problem I discussed in section D, above.

A few moral philosophers have argued that there is no moral truth. They notice that people often use moral language--for example, "That's unfair!"--simply to express their feelings. They also notice that moral debates are hard to settle. In science one often can settle disputed questions by experiment and logic, but in moral disagreements, the facts do not settle anything, since the question is about what ought to be, not about what is. Moreover, ethical statements which are rejected are not self-contradictory. It seems to these philosophers to follow that morality is a matter of taste--in other words, that there is nothing beyond superego morality.

This position plainly is incompatible with Catholic faith; it would exclude the Catholic conception of conscience as a judgment which can be correct or mistaken. (This conception rests on the more basic truth that the world has a basic layer of meaning and value which reflects its origin in divine wisdom and love.) Moreover, the position seldom is held consistently by anyone; for example, many of its proponents draw from it the conclusion that no one ought to criticize the moral acts of others!

Furthermore, while the difficulty of settling moral disagreements does bring out the special character of moral norms--which are neither factual truths nor logical norms--this difficulty does not show that there are no moral truths. Indeed, it is worth noticing that agreement is not as easy to come by in other fields as is sometimes imagined, and agreement is at times reached in moral disputes. At times people admit that their previous judgments of conscience were mistaken--for example, on a matter like racial discrimination--and they correct them.

While no Catholic theologian is arguing that there is no moral truth, much popular discussion seems at times to approach this position. The ideas of conscience I mentioned in section A, above, exemplify what I am talking about. Moreover, the current tendency to devalue careful reflection on moral issues and to emphasize in its place a feeling of community points in the direction of a denial of moral truth.

If there were no moral truth, humankind would be floating in a void. There would be no basic meanings and values in creation, and so no place to stand in our effort to construct a worthwhile life for ourselves and to seek fulfillment. Even if moral truth is only ignored in practice, not denied in principle, people quickly begin to forget the real foundation for human community: that we share common, intelligible purposes and that we must cooperate knowingly and willingly to achieve them. When a group of people forget the foundation of their life together, their commitment begins to weaken. Hence, no amount of warm fellowship can replace understanding by the faithful of the point of their common Christian life, which must be lived together as the shared existence of God's earthly family.

G. Most moral norms are derivative

"Wives should be submissive to their husbands" (Eph 5.22). But what if my husband comes home one evening and tells me to get an abortion?

"Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God, and all authority that exists is established by God" (Rom 13.1). The people who carried out the Nazi policy of genocide against the Jews were only following orders.

A classic case: "One ought to return to the owner on demand anything which is left in one's keeping subject to this condition." But if the owner of a gun comes in the middle of the night, drunk and looking for revenge against somebody, should one return it? Obviously not.[22]

Most of the norms which one uses in reaching particular judgments of conscience are subject to exception. They hold true for the most part, but there are cases in which it would be wrong to follow them.

People usually look to their own society for moral guidance. But the norms of one's own culture and society cannot be taken for granted. Only when someone begins to question the established institutions--for example, slavery--will anything be done to alter them. In our present society, if most everyone accepts the nuclear deterrent, still one can--and I think should--question this policy.

Christians obviously cannot simply conform to the conventional morality of a society in which they find themselves, and they cannot accommodate the Gospel to every society in which they preach it (cf. Rom 12.1-2). Christian faith makes clear that the world is sinful and must be redeemed (cf. Eph 4.17-20). The New Testament is a radical criticism both of Jewish and of Greco-Roman culture.

Obviously, one must know when to accept established standards and when to reject them. Moreover, one must know when to abide by sound received norms and when to make exceptions to them. Further, one must have some principles which are not received from any moral guide or authority by which one chooses one's moral guides and commits oneself to moral authorities--including the Catholic Church.

Moreover, one must be able to generate a judgment in many cases, when received norms do not make clear what one ought to do. This judgment itself will be a norm--in fact, a general moral norm. For one only considers what one understands, and the

problems one considers in the light of understanding might occur in any number of additional instances. If in fact a person who judges what he or she should do never has occasion to apply the same judgment again, still in principle any reasonable conclusion could be applied if--as is possible--a case not intelligibly diverse arises at a later time.

There must be some more basic moral principles by which one accepts and rejects established standards, makes exceptions, enters into fundamental commitments, and generates judgments which not only make clear what one must avoid but also indicate what one must do (although perhaps no one else ever before or again will have precisely the same intelligible question to adjudicate). What are these more basic moral principles?

In trying to answer this question, one ought to bear in mind that not all norms are moral norms. There are standards of normality, such as the norms by which one considers some individuals healthy and others sick. Nobody has a choice whether to meet such standards. There also are standards of efficiency, such as the norms by which one judges some methods better and some less effective for attaining a particular goal. One has a choice whether to try to meet these standards, but the morality of this choice depends on the goal one is pursuing and the way one pursues it, not on the efficiency of one's techniques. There also are standards of what is most fitting and pleasing. One can accept these esthetic standards or one can try to replace them with others, as the creative person will do. Moral norms will be distinct from standards of normality, of efficiency, and of excellent performance.

Do we simply intuit the more basic moral norms--that is, do we know them without any reasoning at all, by a sort of moral sense? In many cases, one seems to know intuitively what is right and wrong. But such intuitions often are at the level of superego, or they reflect one's experience and established dispositions (which can be either good or bad). Moreover, any sort of moral intuitions which cannot be articulated and communicated to others hardly will provide a basis for most of our moral lives, which are lived in community with others. Responsible communal action requires agreement concerning what ought to be done--a common judgment of conscience.

Precisely when one sees that most of the norms which one applies in judgments of conscience demand some sort of solid basis beyond themselves, one also understands something of what this foundation should be.

Many standards of social behavior, for example, admit of exception when the Golden Rule demands that one make an exception. "'Treat others the way you would have them treat you'" (Mt 7.12) can require one to break promises, set aside property rights, and so on. The Golden Rule itself does not admit of exceptions. What could justify one who treated others in a way he or she would not want to be treated in the same or a very similar situation?

Similarly, just law can never authorize acts of certain kinds against persons (cf. GS 27). If a society sets about to improve the condition of some of its members by killing others, or by enslaving them, or by in any other way using them rather than treating them as members of the society with rights like everyone else, then the legal arrangements which are made to carry out such projects do not deserve cooperation of upright citizens. The absolute rights based on the dignity of persons presuppose that certain kinds of acts always are wrong, even if they are legalized. Precisely on this basis many Americans today struggle against abortion, although the Supreme Court has arbitrarily declared it legitimate.

The Golden Rule and the principle that no one should be treated as an object to be used are related in various ways, but they are not exactly the same. As I will explain in part five, there are a number of other fundamental moral principles at the same level as these. One who judges by standards such as these is exercising conscience as it is understood in the common Catholic tradition, even in setting aside or making exception to particular norms. Exactly what are these more basic standards? Do they themselves have any ulterior foundation?

H. Moral norms not received by inspiration

Some theologians have suggested that the problem about basic standards can be solved--or even altogether avoided--by an appeal to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit illumines the Christian; the spiritual person can judge everything (cf. 1 Cor 2.15). Why cannot a Christian simply receive by inspiration whatever guidance is needed to form a correct conscience? At the concrete level one would grasp which choice is to be made and would see the limits of general guidelines, thus to be able to set them aside when appropriate. Sometimes this idea is supported by the argument that what really should bind the Christian is God's holy will, not some rational norm.

I have explained already that according to the conception of conscience taught by Vatican II, which developed in the Catholic moral theological tradition, conscience is a judgment by which naturally known and/or revealed moral truth is applied to the possibilities about which one is deliberating.

As I explained in chapter thirteen, section E, the work of the Spirit is not the communication of content of faith, but communication of the reality of God revealing, so that one can accept on divine testimony the content one receives by hearing. Because morality is not extrinsic to faith, the same thing is true of moral norms. The Christian lives by the Spirit, as I explained in chapter twelve, section P; indeed, law as such drops away to the extent one truly lives a Christian life. But the formational content of law--the guidance it provides for conscience--remains necessary. Even God acts by the law of His own wise plan.

St. Thomas teaches in a number of places that a virtuous person makes moral judgments by affective connaturality. For example, a chaste person easily detects anything which is immodest and avoids it. This teaching of Thomas has been used by some to bolster the claim that individuals can make moral judgments as if by inspiration, even against the general moral truths proposed by the Church. However, this teaching of St. Thomas is being misinterpreted, for he does not suggest that affective connaturality replaces moral norms, moral reasoning, and the judgment of conscience. Rather, he holds

that a virtuous person has integrated the moral norms, so that his or her moral reasoning is facilitated and made certain. Affective connaturality replaces only the cumbersome descriptive apparatus which a person not yet virtuous must use to try to identify the good by its describable (and thus accidental) features.[23]

5 Nowhere does St. Thomas suggest that cognition by affective connaturality could authorize anyone to set aside the moral norms proposed by the Church. Thomas always assumes that a virtuous person knows these, and even accepts and integrates them into the self to the point that they are second-nature. Moreover, anything smacking of conscience by inspiration is totally at odds with the approach of Thomas, for he constantly insists
10 that Christians receive from God what they need to live their own lives as His children.

Someone might suppose that if individuals can make personal judgments of conscience by direct inspiration from the Spirit, then their individual dignity will be protected and enhanced, for they will be liberated from the teaching authority of the Church. Some aspects of Protestant theology incline toward this view, and in recent years many
15 Catholic theologians have absorbed something of it.

However, to remove understanding of moral principles, reasoning from them, and judgment according to them is to take away from human persons their ability to act as human persons. To attribute everything to the inspiration of the Spirit is not to credit more to grace, but to fail to credit grace with its full effect: the restoration and
20 perfection of human nature and its powers so that the person can live more humanly and act well in a human mode.

To remove dependence upon the teaching authority of the Church is to enhance the individual only if the individual is thereby released to act arbitrarily--that is, given freedom to do as he or she pleases--and only if arbitrary action enhances the individual.
25 To rely upon the Church's teaching is to be free of one's individual ignorance and self-deception. Moreover, Christian life is a communal sign, as I explained in chapter thirteen, section L. The communal character and sign-value of Christian life would be lost if each Christian judged and acted by private inspirations, rather than by a common and publicly preached moral teaching which belongs to faith. Faith must be articulated in
30 the words which complete the sign of Christian life and make it effective to communicate divine revelation to the world.

Christians really should consider themselves bound by God's will, not merely by reasons for acting expressed in moral norms. But within Christian life, God's will and moral norms are not opposed; the former is expressed in the latter. God expects us to
35 act according to His will only to the extent that he makes us know it, either by the law written upon our hearts or by revelation.

Moreover, God's will can be made known to us because it is not some sort of irrational force. God does not make things right or wrong by choice; by choice He freely creates and redeems according to the plan of His wisdom. What is good and bad for
40 creatures is settled by God's wisdom, which makes them be what they truly are and require what they truly require for their fulfillment.

Moral norms are truths about how to act fulfillingly; they are not meaningless ukases: Do this or I'll zap you with my almighty power. Even those who issue ukases have some end in view. If it is not the true good of those commanded, it is someone
45 else's good. The supposition that God determines what is right and wrong by arbitrary decrees belongs with the suspicion that God creates in order to exploit His creatures--a view contrary to faith, as I explained in chapter four, section G.

Someone might object that even if in general Christians must live by norms they naturally know or receive from revelation through the Church's teaching, still the general truth of moral norms cannot come to grips with and exhaust the moral significance
50 of the unique particular choice. Here something which surpasses understanding is necessary.

This suggestion is confused in two ways. First, some norms do come to grips with possible choices. For example, "Do not commit adultery," refers to every single choice
55 to commit adultery and excludes each and every such choice as immoral. Second, as I already stated in section G, above, one chooses on the basis of what one understands. In principle, the content of any proposal one can adopt by choice is not unique; exactly the same set of intelligible factors can recur again for oneself or for someone else.

Nothing which surpasses understanding is required to know what is the right choice, except in the sense that norms received by revelation sometimes are intelligible in their guidance yet mysterious in their point. In other words, we sometimes must do God's will
60 without seeing clearly why it is His will, but we never are expected to do God's will without understanding what He wishes of us. (Usually also we have some insight, at least in the light of faith, into the point of the moral requirement.)

The claim for some sort of aconceptual, nonpropositional inspiration has been pressed especially with respect to certain questions of conscience which are particularly important, such as the judgment one must make concerning personal vocation.[24]
70 In chapter twelve, section G, I explained how one reaches the judgment that one is called to make a particular commitment. In the psychology of recognizing which option fits oneself, there is an element of intuition which goes beyond general norms and which cannot be articulated in propositions.

However, this recognition does not displace, but rather depends on, the relevant norms: One should commit oneself to seek the fulfillment to which God calls one; and:
75 One should use the gifts one has been given. To detect what suits oneself best, after having activated as fully as possible the religious aspects of one's personality, one relies on a "sense" of the fit of a possible commitment to oneself. This reliance is to discern a fact, not to intuit a norm. The fact has an immediate normative implication because it is a recognition of what will fulfill norms. One does something very similar
80 when one judges intuitively what will be a suitable gift for a friend. The judgment leads to a conclusion as to what one ought to do only because one already has made the normative judgment: I ought to give this friend a suitable gift.

Someone might object to what I have said in this section by pointing out that special divine inspiration cannot be excluded in principle. After all, some especially

5 holy souls attest to receiving direct divine guidance. No one is justified in foreclosing the possibility of it for oneself. Therefore, one ought to attend to promptings of the Spirit. One ought indeed. The difficulty is to discern which spirit is prompting one. One must put promptings to the test of their conformity to revealed truth; one also must discern supposed promptings by the fruit to which they lead.[25]

10 One of the greatest mystics, St. John of the Cross, takes a very dim view of supernatural means of obtaining knowledge: "There is no necessity for this kind of knowledge, since a person can get sufficient guidance from natural reason, and the law and doctrine of the Gospel. There is no difficulty or necessity unsolvable or irremediable by these means, which are very pleasing to God and profitable to souls." [26] John would discard anything which is not in perfect harmony with the Church's teaching. God wants human persons to be guided by other human persons; He does not want us to accept any private revelations not confirmed "through this human channel of the mouth of man." [27]

15 Vatican II teaches similarly that judgment as to the genuineness and proper use of gifts of the Spirit belongs to those who preside over the Church (cf. LG 12). This position has its foundation in the fact that the Spirit builds up the Church by working not only in every member but also in the authorities Christ set over it (cf. Eph 4.11-13; Acts 20.28-31; 2 Tm 1.14).

20 I. Basic moral norms are not facts about human nature

Beginning in the seventeenth century a theory of moral law originated by Francisco Suarez, S.J., became generally accepted by Catholic moral theologians and philosophers as the correct understanding of Catholic teaching concerning natural law. I call this 25 suarezian theory "conventional natural-law theory." It was generally believed to be thomistic, but it really is very different from the thought of St. Thomas. [28]

30 What is most characteristic of conventional natural-law theory is its notion of the objectivity of moral norms. The moral norm simply is human nature as it is given-- given, of course, not to sense experience but to intellectual knowing. Moral goodness or badness can be discerned simply by comparing the essential patterns of possible human actions with the intelligible structure of human nature considered both in its inner complexity and in its extrinsic relationships.

When compared with human nature, according to this theory, actions are seen either to conform or not to conform to the requirements set by it insofar as human persons are 35 vegetative, sentient, and rational in themselves; and creatures, fellow creatures, and rulers of lower creation in their essential relationships.

The judgment whether an action conforms or not to human nature is objective; it is a matter of making an observation. Indeed, according to the theory, this judgment is a 40 piece of speculative knowledge, and it has the kind of necessity enjoyed by a definition based upon a formal cause. The judgment registers conformity when there is consistency between the action and the nature. It registers nonconformity, intrinsic evil, when the action is incompatible with human nature in any of its essential aspects.

45 Of course, to become aware of one's obligations it is not enough to observe the conformity or nonconformity between nature and action, and so to see the badness or the possible goodness of the action. Besides this speculative knowledge, one needs a fundamental imperative to become aware of obligation: Avoid morally evil acts. This imperative may be expressed, according to the theory, in various ways: Follow reason; Act in accord with nature.

50 However the basic imperative is formulated, its full meaning is grasped only when it is recognized as a communication to the created subject of the sovereign will of God. The force of obligation derives solely from this imperative will of God. One recognizes the agreement or disagreement between possible actions and one's own nature as a source of obligation only when one realizes that the norm of nature is the specific form in which the divine will is communicated to a rational creature.

55 This natural-law theory gives practical reason only a very limited role. Its only task is to synthesize the two theoretical premises and draw the conclusion which they imply. For example, observing that suicide is contrary to human nature and recalling that God wills one to act in accord with nature, one concludes that suicide is a forbidden evil act. This conclusion is practical only because of its subject matter: something a person might do. To reach a judgment of conscience, one need only apply this 60 conclusion to any proposal to commit suicide which happens to come to mind.

65 It is easy to see why a moral system of this kind is more adept at issuing prohibitions than at providing positive direction. What does not conform to human nature can be absolutely forbidden. What does conform to it cannot be absolutely required, because people cannot possibly do everything which is permissible. Only kinds of actions specified so that their omission would be wrong can become the object of affirmative precepts in this system.

70 What is the relationship between human action and the ultimate fulfillment of the person? According to this theory, the relationship is an extrinsic one. By God's will, moral goodness in this life is a means for getting to heaven. Heaven or hell, conceived of as sanctions to motivate obedience, are not the fruits of one's life according to this legalistic theory. They are like the rewards and punishments by which one trains an animal.

75 This lack of an intrinsic link between one's present Christian life and fulfillment in Christ is a very serious defect in conventional natural-law theory. In chapter seven I showed that there is an intrinsic relationship and much continuity between a good Christian life now and the heavenly fulfillment to which we are called. Because of this intrinsic relationship, one can see the nonarbitrary character of moral norms in general, even if one is unable to grasp in a particular case why the Church directs one 80 to do or omit a certain kind of act.

Conventional natural-law theory also fails because of its negative character. One needs to know which choice one ought to make. To know this, it can be helpful, but it is never enough, to know what choices one ought not to make. The basic moral norms, of course, never will settle particular questions all by themselves. They nevertheless

should contribute something affirmative, for otherwise everything permissible according to the demands of common human nature remains equally acceptable and equally nonobligatory for everyone.

Moreover, this theory has a voluntaristic theory of obligation. God's will is exalted above His wisdom. There is no immorality which is not simply and flatly disobedience to God. This voluntarism once again makes moral uprightness seem more an imposition upon the person than a plan of human fulfillment. Confronted with a voluntaristic system, people feel as if God were saying: I've given you a place in my scheme of things, so stay put--or else!

Furthermore, conventional natural-law theory is based on a logical equivocation between two senses of "natural." In one sense, the natural is the given; in another sense, it is the appropriate. In the first sense all human acts, including sins, are equally natural; in the second sense, immoral acts are unnatural. But how can one tell what is unnatural--in the sense of being inappropriate--to human nature? Arguments about kinds of acts produced by conventional natural-law theory usually are question-begging. A well-known example is the argument that contraception is wrong because it frustrates the procreative end of sexual intercourse. Anyone who does not already believe that contraception is wrong will wonder what is wrong with such frustration, and will produce counterexamples: Is it immoral to use earplugs?

20 J. Consequentialism once more -- why it is plausible

In chapter nine, section C, I considered consequentialism insofar as it is a theory which emphasizes the importance of consequences and misses the full significance of human acts. There I argued that the theory fails inasmuch as it requires one to determine the morality of free choices by a weighing of goods which, if it were really possible, would preclude the very possibility of the free choice it is supposed to regulate. Most Catholic theologians and philosophers who advocate consequentialism were brought up on conventional natural-law theory. Having looked at the latter, I now consider consequentialism again. Here I am interested in consequentialism to the extent that it offers a theory of the primary moral norms--a theory comparable with conventional natural-law theory.[29]

The background of most consequentialists is an interesting and important fact because it helps one to understand them. When they say that one must weigh the good and bad consequences of acts to determine their morality, they are thinking of acts as chunks of behavior--much as conventional natural-law theory did. Thus consequentialists must look to consequences to find the relevance of acts to persons; they fail to see actions as expressions of self-determination, in which the human good already is at stake, before any consequences whatsoever.

Moreover, when consequentialists are impatient with moral absolutes, part of their impatience is rooted in their voluntaristic conception of moral obligation. If God is not going to be arbitrary in stamping "forbidden" on acts, one seems to need some plausible reason for His doing so, such as that they cause more harm than good. (The consequentialist neglects to ask whether human persons can know good and bad results as God can.) Similarly, when consequentialists insist, as they often do, on the dynamism of human nature--its historical character and openness to real change--they are rejecting the static human nature envisaged by conventional natural-law theory. Imagining that the best reasons which can be offered in support of received Catholic moral teaching are the question-begging arguments of conventional natural-law theory, many Catholics brought up on such arguments are tempted to dismiss the moral norms the Church teaches along with the bad arguments for them--to throw out the baby with the bath water.

It is worth noticing that as an account of basic moral principles consequentialism has some plausibility. It does not leave everything to incommunicable intuitions or inspiration as do the views I criticized in section H, above. It does relate morality to some aspects of human fulfillment--namely, to the goods of persons which are affected by human actions. Consequentialists are certainly right in thinking that the fulfillment of persons has to settle what is morally good. After all, moral goodness is one dimension of human goodness--in other words, moral fulfillment is part of total human fulfillment.[30]

Consequentialism also gains some plausibility from the derivative character of most moral norms, which I described in section G, above. Very often when people break a promise, set aside some previously accepted moral standard, or otherwise show their conviction that most moral norms are not absolute; they justify their judgment by saying that the consequences of breaking the promise are not as bad as would be the consequences of keeping it, that the standard which is set aside is no longer helpful, and so on. Such justifications certainly sound like what the consequentialist says one should expect. For according to consequentialism the rightness and wrongness of choices to make exceptions, to adopt new moral standards, and so forth will be determined by the preponderant value of the prospective effects which would follow from each of the alternatives between which the choice must be made.

Many consequentialists point out that ordinary upright people often explain their conscientious judgments by saying that they chose the lesser evil or made the best choice possible, all things considered. People who normally respect the property rights of others will make an exception if someone's life is at stake, saying that life outweighs property rights--the one good is greater than the other. Theologians who have adopted consequentialism claim to find many examples of consequentialist reasoning in the Catholic moral theological tradition, where expressions such as "proportionate good" often appear.

Consequentialism also gains plausibility for many people because it seems more elastic than an account of basic moral norms which keeps unexceptionable standards, such as: Adultery is always wrong. In an ideal universe, it is argued, perhaps one could live with ideal standards of behavior. But in the universe broken by original sin, they claim, compromise is necessary to make the best of a bad situation. When one looks at various cultures which have been studied carefully, they add, one hardly finds absolute moral standards anywhere. What absolutes one does find are more likely submoral

expressions of superego than true norms of reasonable conscience judgment.

Finally, when consequentialists propose their theory, they often make it sound self-evident. For example, in arguing for consequentialism (in application to certain moral problems) Richard A. McCormick, S.J., says:

5 . . . the rule of Christian reason, if we are governed by the ordo bonorum, is to choose the lesser evil. [By "ordo bonorum" here McCormick means pretty much what I mean by "basic human goods," which I clarified in chapter five, sections D-E.] This general statement is, it would seem, beyond debate; for the only alternative is that in conflict situations we should choose the greater evil, which is pat-

10 ently absurd.[31]

Like many other Catholic theologians, McCormick does not say clearly how extensively he is prepared to apply consequentialism. His use of consequentialism is limited to kinds of cases he regards as problematic--"conflict situations." As much of traditional Catholic teaching as he feels at any time is acceptable is left standing--for the time.

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K. Why consequentialism cannot give an account of basic moral norms

The plausibility consequentialism draws from its contrast with even weaker alternatives does not argue in its favor unless there is no better candidate. The plausibility consequentialism derives from the nonabsolute character of derivative moral norms only shows that there must be some basic norms, not that "Always choose the greater good" or "In conflict situations choose the lesser evil" is the basic, absolute norm or even one of several such norms. I have pointed out already that people sometimes do use other norms, such as the Golden Rule, to take care of the limitations of certain derivative

20 moral norms.

The language people use, although it sounds consequentialist, does not show consequentialism correct. Sometimes people use consequentialist language because they are engaged in rationalizing choices they otherwise would have to admit immoral. More often, people talk about "lesser evils" and "proportionate goods" and the like, using these expressions in order to refer to higher moral principles of judgment.

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For example, when an upright person breaks a promise, the consequences of keeping it and of breaking it are evaluated in the light of the Golden Rule; if one would not want others to keep a similar promise to oneself in similar circumstances, then one is released from keeping the promise. Again, when a person says that life outweighs property rights, an appeal is being made to the merely instrumental status of property, which morally ought to serve the intrinsic goods of persons, and to the moral fairness which establishes property rights and so can make exceptions to them.

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Even if it is shown that many traditional Catholic theologians have used arguments which really are consequentialist in form, this fact must be regarded much as we regard the widespread use of certain invalid forms of syllogism. It is one thing to use an argument of a faulty type. It is quite another thing to articulate and systematically employ a faulty form of reasoning. When a form of reasoning has been articulated and is being criticized, it is a very weak defense to point out that in the past it has been used by able and upright people. The whole point of critical reflection is to make less

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40 likely mistakes which are very likely without such reflection.

The flexibility of consequentialism is one reason why it is not acceptable as a Christian account of basic moral principles. St. Paul rejected the idea that evil may be done that good might follow therefrom (cf. Rom 3.8). The entire Jewish and Christian tradition maintains that there are some absolute moral norms, such as: Adultery is always wrong.

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Anyone who has a real sense of faith realizes that we stand in a Church which includes all the faithful throughout the centuries. How are we to prove to this whole Church that one may sometimes choose adultery as a lesser evil? Imagine trying to prove this to some martyr who gave her life rather than to commit adultery, perhaps praying as she died that God would care for her orphaned children. Imagine what a welcome King David would have given a consequentialist prophet!

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As for the theory that moral compromises are necessary because the world is broken by sin, it implicitly contradicts both God's strategy in redeeming humankind and the success of this strategy. The theory of compromise derives from a Lutheran conception of redemption, a conception according to which grace does not inwardly transform Christians so that they actually can fulfill the law of God but only covers over their sinfulness.[32] This position was explicitly and definitively condemned by the Council of Trent (cf. DS 1536-1539/804; 1568/828). Jesus made no moral compromises; the Christian is called to follow Him. If one does not find absolute moral standards in cultures not

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65 shaped by Jewish or Christian faith, this fact hardly shows that the People of God has a false morality and the world at large one more likely true.

Turning to McCormick, if he were right in thinking that the only alternative to "Choose the lesser evil" is "Choose the greater evil," then consequentialism would be self-evident and its alternative absurd, as he claims. Of course, if this really were the case, then one could hardly violate this "rule of Christian reason." Morally significant choices can be unreasonable but they cannot be logically impossible; as I explained in chapter nine, section C, if consequences could be weighed as the consequentialist thinks, then there would be no choice to make.

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The answer to McCormick's argument is that in any morally significant choice, there are at least some aspects of good and evil which cannot be measured by any available common standard. So one is not reduced, as he imagines, to a choice between a measurably lesser and greater evil. For example, if one has a choice between (1) caring for a very severely defective child as fully as one would for a normal child and (2) withholding all care so that the child will die quickly, on what scale does one weigh whatever goods one recognizes in these alternatives? One who chooses (2) naturally will say that its early death was a lesser evil than would have been its somewhat prolonged but miserable life and the waste of scarce resources. But what does this use of "lesser evil" mean except that one has chosen it and refuses to admit guilt for doing so?

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As I explained to some extent in chapter seven, section P, St. Augustine sharply

distinguished between the disposition of an upright will toward God and its disposition toward everything else. God alone is to be enjoyed in heaven; everything else, everything on earth, is to be used to reach heaven. Augustine was a faithful enough Christian, however, that this view did not have all the practical implications one might expect of it. However, in the modern Western world, people imbued with Augustinian ways of thinking have lost their faith. God is removed and only utensils remain.

This situation is absurd. However, an apparent order is restored and life once more takes on some meaning if something within the remaining reality is elected to fill the place from which God has been deposed. Naturally, something human seems appropriate. So secular humanism emerges. Whatever each form of secular humanism takes to be the proper object of enjoyment, it takes everything else to be a mere means. In Augustine, human goods could ground absolutes to exclude the killing of the innocent, adultery, lying, and so on. In any secular humanism, there are no absolutes in such matters.

For example, the British utilitarians treated preferred states of human consciousness as the only self-validating value. On this theory, moral norms must yield whenever necessary to promote the enjoyment or lessen the misery of most people. (I criticized hedonism in chapter five, section C.) No Catholic theologian is adopting the utilitarian, hedonistic conception of what is good. But the radically dissenting theologians are imitating secular humanists to the extent that they demote some of the goods of persons to a merely instrumental status and idolize others. For example, those I argued against in chapter five, section J, do not regard bodily life as a personal good; they might consider the misery a defective child can suffer and cause others a significant personal disvalue.

The following is a purely theological argument against consequentialism. If one really believes that one should choose the lesser evil and also really believes in divine providence, then one can solve moral problems very easily: If in doubt about what is right, try anything. God does not permit evil except for the good He can bring out of it. Therefore, if one manages to do anything, what one does cannot on the whole and in the long run be the greater evil.

This paradoxical implication of consequentialism--which emerges if it is taken seriously in a theological context--shows why St. Paul rejected it. Human responsibility is a participation in God's plan, but only a participation. We are not responsible for bringing about the greater good, which we have no way to know until we reach fulfillment in Christ. The basic moral norms for our lives must be more modest than one which cannot be applied without seeing God and the plan of His divine wisdom.

As I pointed out in chapter thirteen, section L, consequentialism destroys the sign-value of Christian life. It also undermines unconditional commitments, which are essential to Christian personal vocation. After one lives in any state of life for a few years, one has a very different awareness of its good and bad points than one had upon entering it. Marital and religious vows often are set aside today with the encouragement of consequentialist theologians, who argue that in some cases the choice to set them aside is a lesser evil than continuing fidelity without any apparent good consequences.

Oddly enough, a thorough-going consequentialism also is more rigoristic than traditional Christian morality. Christians always have thought that one can be good without being heroic. If one always should choose the greater good, then whenever choice is possible, there will be only one truly upright choice. Anything less will be more or less immoral.

None of the points I have made in the present section is intended to replace the argument I propose in chapter nine, section C. That argument is conclusive, I think, against every type and version of consequentialism. Some of the points I make in the present section do not apply to qualified and limited versions of consequentialism. But I think what I have said here is enough to indicate why we need an account of basic moral principles better than consequentialism if we are to have any understanding of the teaching of the Church about natural law.[33]

L. Choice no substitute for basic moral norms

Anyone who is confronted with a moral problem in which a derivative moral norm breaks down can solve the problem by determining what is the greater good or lesser evil according to a higher moral principle. For example, one who breaks a promise when the Golden Rule requires it does so by determining that fairness is a greater good than dependability. This judgment is by no means consequentialist; it does not involve the consequentialist's weighing and balancing of goods and bads prior to a moral norm in order to justify a judgment that some goods can be attacked for the sake of promoting others or preventing "greater evils." Fairness is a greater good than the dependability of keeping promises because the latter has moral value from the former: One ought (usually) to be dependable because it is (usually) unfair not to be.

The commensurability of goods and bads the consequentialist needs cannot be established in this way or in any other way. The benefits of neglecting a defective baby are not and do not include the basis on which its life calls for respect--a call against which the choice to kill it simply and flatly says: No! Nor can the various goods and bads be reduced to a common denominator in any other way. As I have shown (chapter nine, section C), if they could be, then there would be no choice to make. For a long time opponents of consequentialism have been pointing out the problem of incommensurability to its proponents. Most of the proponents make no attempt to answer this objection.

One who does try to answer it, and does so explicitly, is Richard A. McCormick, S.J. As I pointed out previously, McCormick limits consequentialism to the cases he calls "conflict situations." But his treatment still concerns basic moral norms, for in such situations he does not try to explain the commensuration of goods by some prior moral principle by which one judges what is right. In other words, he thinks: "Choose the lesser evil," is a basic moral norm--a rule of Christian reason, as he calls it.

McCormick's answer to the problem of the noncommensurability of goods is that one makes the noncommensurable commensurable by choice:

. . .What do we do? Somehow or other, in fear and trembling, we commensurate. In a sense we adopt a hierarchy. We go to war to protect our freedom. That means we are willing to sacrifice life to protect this good. If "give me liberty or give me death" does not involve some kind of commensuration, then I do not know what commensuration means [*italics his*].[34]

And McCormick goes on to add several examples like this one. But he also gives examples--such as the assertion of Jesus that there is no point in gaining the world if one loses one's soul in the process--in which the comparison is not consequentialist. (Jesus is asserting the superiority of being a mature child of God to anything less, especially to having anything, even everything which can be had.)

One must admit that commensuration does occur once one adopts a hierarchy. About this McCormick is right. People do choose to go to war; having done so, they say it is a lesser evil than loss of liberty (unless they have some other, nonconsequentialist, moral justification for war). The trouble is that the commensuration is in the choice; the choice settles the question which according to the consequentialist theory was to have been settled rationally prior to the choice. Choices do determine the limits of options to be considered, consequences to be inquired about, and persons to be taken into account; when choice cuts off deliberation, these boundaries are drawn automatically. Moreover, choice does determine which good henceforth will be considered greater and which evil lesser, because the good with which one identifies oneself in choosing becomes part of one's personal scale of value.

McCormick could reply, as some secular philosophers do, that choice simply is the ultimate basis of all moral principles. One can be reasonable back to a point, but the basis of all reasoning in morals is a fundamental option which has no reasonable justification at all. But McCormick says nothing of the sort. If he did say it, he would be clearly and explicitly rejecting the Catholic conception of conscience and its principles, already laid out in sections B-C, above: "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience" (GS 16). Like the secular humanists, anyone who makes human choice the ultimate foundation of morality denies (at least implicitly) that we are creatures, that our lives are subject to the plan of God, and that only in living according to this plan will we find our fulfillment in Christ.

It is worth noticing that many other Catholic theologians who have adopted consequentialism look to some nonrational principle to make goods commensurable, although their procedure usually is much less clear-headed than McCormick's. Joseph Fuchs, S.J., says that the value of acts is settled by weighing the priority and urgency of different values "for the individual, for interpersonal relations and human society, in connection, of course, with the total reality of man and his society and in view of his whole culture." [35] While this phrasing is ambiguous and the remainder of the essay is far from clear, Fuchs seems to think that culture as it is enables one to weigh.[36]

If he does mean this, he is adopting the nonrational principle of the choices people have made in the past in a particular society--choices morally good and morally bad alike--as the basis for morality. In an even less clear-headed way, many theologians argue in justification of various practices that many people have chosen to engage in them, thus to suggest that majorities determine morals.

I do not deny, of course, that choices made according to moral norms can put one who makes them under fresh obligations. One who chooses to accept Christian faith thereby accepts the responsibilities of a member of the Church, comes to know many responsibilities he or she otherwise would ignore, and undertakes to live a life in union with Jesus. However, one does not create these fresh obligations by one's choice; one only accepts the moral implications of what one chooses to be. To take a simpler example: A married person can have an obligation to engage in sexual intercourse which no nonmarried person can have. But the choice to marry does not create this obligation. Rather, the obligation arises from what one becomes by marrying.

Anyone who makes a choice the ultimate basis of morality--whether in general or by settling a hierarchy of goods to render the noncommensurable commensurable in so-called conflict situations--is claiming something very different: that choice can make right what otherwise would be wrong. This claim is very similar to the voluntaristic conception of God's law, except that it moves the arbitrary source of right and wrong from heaven to earth and installs it in the heart of each individual. Theologians who make this move do not know what they are doing, and so they offer no justification for doing it.

Philosophers who make this move often support it with sophisticated arguments which turn on equivocation. "Decide," for example, means both judge and choose. Judgments of conscience and choices both can be called "decisions," but they are decisions in very different senses. One can decide something is wrong (judgment of conscience) and decide to do it anyway (choice against conscience). Decide as judgment is a matter of detecting what is right and wrong; decide as choice is a matter of doing what is right or doing what is wrong. If one overlooks this distinction, one is likely to overlook the sheer arbitrariness which would be involved if ultimate moral principles were settled by anyone's (even God's) decisions--using "decisions" to mean choices.

Some existentialist philosophers who claim that moral norms ultimately derive from arbitrary options say that once one has made one's option one's moral quality is a matter of one's authenticity--being wholly what one has chosen to be. It follows that an authentic pervert is a saint! This position is absurd, however, not merely because of what it canonizes, but also because it assumes that a human person is nothing but a power and act of self-determination. In reality, human persons are complex realities, whose fulfillment has many dimensions, which I outlined in chapter five, sections F-H. To be a good person, one not only must be a person of authenticity (integrity--not double-minded or a liar), but also must love God and neighbor.

A more plausible approach than that of the existentialists, and one I think describes the actual situation in many societies, is as follows. In general, people do what they please, without much concern about whether what they please is reasonable. In other words, conscience normally is ignored. But since no one lives alone, and since

everyone desires something more personal out of life with others than mutual manipulation, most people accept something like the Golden Rule as an ultimate moral norm (which is not to say they always act according to it). As long as this norm is not violated, the demands of efficiency in getting what one wants are accepted as a justification for setting aside any other qualms of conscience (consequentialism).[37]

5 An approach of this sort, because of its respect for the Golden Rule, is not wholly amoral. Given the facts of human nature and the mutual dependence of people on one another, this approach can generate the sort of orderliness one finds in most cultures.

10 But this approach will hardly admit of any absolute moral standards, such as one finds in Christian morality. Moreover, it is incapable of providing any guidance for one's private life. In most cultures, one is at liberty to go to hell. It is characteristic of Christian morality to suggest that one has no right so to neglect oneself. The Christian conscience not only demands that one be fair to others, but also that one be faithful to a personal God, to whom one is unfaithful if one violates one's own goodness, since one's own goodness is a manifestation of His, and He loves it with a tender and jealous love.

15 Derivative moral principles need a foundation. Catholic teaching calls this foundation "natural law." I have shown that natural law is not something we receive by inspiration; it is not a set of facts about human nature; it is not consequentialism; and it is not something we choose arbitrarily. Natural law is God-given but is known and reasoned from; it is truth although not fact; it is a knowledge of good but not a calculating of consequences; it directs all our choices and is determined by none of them.

25 M. An initial sketch of the principles of natural law

In part five I will articulate an account of the natural law, which is fulfilled by the law of Christ. The present section is only a brief sketch, by way of introduction to part five. I place it here both to make clear how the account I will lay out is related to the ones I have criticized, and to indicate at once in a general way what the Church means when it teaches moral norms based on natural law.

30 Much Catholic teaching on natural law refers to the work of St. Thomas on the subject (cf. DH 3, note 3). Vatican II continues to commend his work as a guide for theology (cf. OT 16). Hence his treatment of natural law is a legitimate source.

35 According to Thomas, the first principle of practical reason is: Good is to be done and pursued; evil is to be avoided. Practical reason is the mind working as a principle of action, not merely as a power by which we grasp what already is. Moral reason puts order into human will acts. Thus this first principle is directive, not descriptive. Thomas explains that this principle underlies all practical thinking, just as the principle of contradiction underlies all theoretical thinking. "Good" here cannot mean the morally good only; rather it refers to whatever can be understood as intelligibly worthwhile. "Evil" here is whatever is understood as a privation of intelligible goods. The fact that Thomas says "Good is to be done and pursued," not "Do good!" also makes clear that what he has in mind includes not only moral goodness but any good a person can pursue.[38]

45 Since this very first principle is so extremely broad, of what use is it? It does not settle what is good and bad morally. Even immoral choices and their rationalizations are dependent upon this same principle, for the immoral choice is not insane, and though arguments for it are unreasonable, they are understandable. What the first practical principle does do is to provide a foundation for practical thinking.

50 Conventional natural-law theory lacks such a basis; it tries to reduce practical thinking to theory. Proponents of inspiration try to substitute orders or whispers from God for practical thinking. Consequentialists try to substitute calculation for practical thinking. Those who advocate choice as a basis for morality try to substitute arbitrariness (plus theory and perhaps calculation) for practical thinking.

55 The first principle of practical reason directs thinking toward the fulfillment which is to be realized in and through human action. It follows, as Thomas points out, that reason naturally grasps as goods all the fulfillments to which human persons are naturally inclined, so the basic precepts of natural law correspond to the order of natural inclinations. Thomas very quickly sketches these inclinations and the goods to which they direct attention. (I have provided a more developed treatise covering the basic human goods in chapter five, sections E-H.) Thus, on the account of natural law Thomas offers, the primary precepts of natural law would be: The good of human life is to be pursued--promoted and protected--while evils opposed to it are to be avoided; and similarly for each of the basic goods of the person.

60 At the same time, Thomas says that the precepts of charity (cf. Mt 22.37-39) are the primary and general precepts of natural law, and that the Ten Commandments--which he also thinks belong to natural law--derive from the precepts of charity as conclusions follow from a principle.[39] Is he not being inconsistent in listing precepts corresponding to human goods, and also the precepts of charity as basic? No, because the goods are fulfillments of persons. And, as I explained in chapter seven, section D, to love God is to remain in friendship with Him and to keep the commandments; to keep the commandments is to avoid (at least) harming one's neighbor; to love one's neighbor is to pursue his or her good. And the basic human goods are fulfillments of persons, not something apart from persons.

75 Thus, St. Paul points out that love fulfills the law because one who loves certainly avoids harm to his or her neighbor (cf. Rom 13.8-10). Jesus urges that we seek perfection like that of the Father, and therefore love enemies (cf. Mt 5.43-48). He obviously does not mean us to seek the metaphysical perfection of the Father, but rather to love everything good, even the good of an enemy, and not to limit our love arbitrarily as we are tempted to do. St. Paul formulates the point: "See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all" (1 Thes 5.15).

In attempting to formulate the most fundamental norm of human activity, Vatican II

begins by pointing out that human activity is important not only for its results, but also because it develops persons. The person is more precious for what he or she is than for what he or she has. Justice and friendship are more important than technical progress; the latter is only instrumental. Growth in human fulfillment is more important than any sort of riches.

Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it (GS 35).

Human activity is guided by the standard of human good, but not simply by a standard of good consequences. One also must maintain a dynamic openness to ever-expanding fulfillment, for this dynamic openness is the human moral contribution to one's growth toward ultimate fulfillment in heaven.

The significance of such a view of the foundation of morality can be brought out by considering various ideas we have of moral evil, and seeing how they make sense on this foundation. We often think of moral evil as sin, as the violation of the rights of others, as a kind of practical folly, and as a sort of self-mutilation. If moral evil detracts from the goods God loves and prevents us from being open to Him, then it is sin, for sin is alienation from God. If moral evil detracts from the human fulfillment which is our neighbor's good, then it is likely to violate his or her rights (or, at least, to lessen well-being, which is unfriendly even when not unjust). If moral evil detracts from the goods whose pursuit reason prescribes as self-evidently worthwhile, then it surely is a sort of folly. And if moral evil detracts from the good of human persons, then clearly it is a kind of self-mutilation, for no person is an island, and no person can willingly harm any person without more seriously harming himself or herself as well (cf. GS 27).

But how can we commit sin, how can we choose what we ought not? If every choice is of the good, and good is what we ought to choose, how can any choice be excluded as wrong? In a classic text, St. Paul suggests that there is a law in our members which struggles against the law of the mind (cf. Rom 7.22-23). Again, he talks of natural passions and desires which must be crucified so that Christians can walk according to the Spirit (cf. Gal 5.24-25). Throughout a long tradition, still repeated by Vatican II (cf. GS 16), this view has been repeated. Human persons are tempted because emotion competes with intelligible good for the role of determinant of behavior, and one can choose to allow oneself to be determined by emotion to the detriment of the reasonable judgment of conscience.

To say this is by no means to say that human emotion as such is bad. Jesus had emotions and there was nothing wrong with them, yet He was tempted in every way in which we are, but did not sin (cf. Heb 4.15). Emotion of itself urges us toward what would fulfill our concrete sentient nature here and now as it is; intelligence urges us toward what fulfills our total human capacities, including our capacities for free choices such as unbreakable commitments, by which we constitute ourselves and maintain dynamic openness for ever-expanding fulfillment.

Since choice is an act of will, a capacity at the intellectual level, how can we choose to follow emotion, which is tendency at the experiential level? This question will be treated with care in part six. We do not directly choose the emotion. We choose an intelligible good even when we do what is evil, but we do not choose it for its own intelligible goodness. Rather we choose it because it pleases us--that is, brings a certain participation in self-integration, which legitimately includes our emotional side, but which we wrongly allow to be limited by the emotional side of ourselves.

For example, a parent feels more affection for one child than another, and so thinks of doing more for the more favored child. The understandable needs of both children and the similar responsibilities of the parent to both dictate a different resolution. The choice to follow affection will be unfair favoritism. The parent can make this choice, however, to satisfy the affectionate desire to benefit the favored child. The parent who does this is acting unreasonably but intelligently, not indeliberately or insanely. The choice is unreasonable, because although it is based upon some intelligible goods, it is not equally responsive to all of them. Some aspects of some of the goods in view before the wrong choice are excluded from consideration in the choice. One can call such wrong choices "exclusivistic."

As I will explain in part five, I do not think that the Ten Commandments, despite their evident and special importance, provide the ideal framework for a systematic account of the foundations of Christian morality. Instead, I shall begin from the Beatitudes to develop a description of the basic norms and virtues which specify the meaning of human and Christian moral goodness.

To each of them there corresponds a norm, such as the Golden Rule, which is expressed in one or more virtues, such as the fairness or impartiality of a person who follows the Golden Rule. All of these norms and virtues are deepened and transformed in the style of good human life creatively lived by our Lord Jesus. The norms at this level all are basic, nonderivative, and absolute. They interpret the more fundamental principle of love of persons and pursuit of their goods. However, the norms at the level of the Golden Rule all have a role to play in shaping derivative moral principles, as it does. All together, these norms can generate judgments of conscience which will comport well with received Christian moral teaching.

The truth of moral norms according to the foregoing account is not in their conformity to any existing state of affairs. Moral objectivity is not that of facts or of logical necessities. The truth of a norm, such as "One ought not to commit adultery," is its correspondence to realization with constant openness for further realization of goods of persons--for example, the unique sort of friendship possible in marriage. People who commit adultery define the interpersonal relationship by what it can give, and so they limit it; Christians who are absolutely faithful in marriage define the interpersonal relationship by an unrestricted commitment to intelligible goods, which transcend emotion and experience, and so they open it to communion in Christ.

Moral truths, although real, are fragile. It is hard to ignore a stone wall in

one's path; it is possible by choice to ignore an absolute moral prohibition. This fragility is in the nature of moral truths and would obtain even if there were no original sin. In our actual condition, as persons fallen though redeemed, moral truth cannot seem realistic unless one looks for it with the light of faith. For as things are, passion not only falls short of good will, as is natural and was true in Jesus too, but also in us it regularly makes unreasonable demands. At the same time, the intelligible demands of virtue in a sinful world appear to be humanly insupportable. Without faith and the power of the Spirit, they are.

10 N. Natural law and revelation as norms of Christian life

It belongs to the very notion of natural law, as the law written in our hearts, to be knowable by reason without divine revelation. From this fact many have drawn the conclusion that natural law cannot include any moral norm which people in general do not see to be true, that the only ground for accepting any moral norm of natural law is the argument which can be articulated in defense of it, and that the teaching of the natural law cannot fall within the proper sphere of the Church's authority, which is based upon divine revelation rather than upon natural human knowledge.

These conclusions are false. Vatican I teaches that although God can be known naturally not only as the source but also as the goal of creation, still He chooses to reveal Himself and the decrees of His will, partly so that "even in the present condition of the human race, those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can easily be known by all men with solid certitude and with no trace of error" (DS 3005/1786). In the present condition of the human race, fallen humankind's wounded nature interferes with certain and accurate knowledge of important truths concerning our end and God's will which in principle are naturally knowable.

Vatican I adopts in this matter the position of St. Thomas.[40] Thomas expands on the general position with respect to the particular question: Can the natural law be wiped from the human heart? His answer is that the most common principles in themselves cannot be ignored, but their application in the concrete can be ignored due to unruly passions, and norms which must be derived from the most general principles by any sort of reasoning can be ignored due to bad customs and corrupt habits.[41]

Pius XII refers to Vatican I and expands upon it in line with the teaching of St. Thomas:

...although, absolutely speaking, human reason by its own natural power and light can arrive at a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, who by His providence watches over and governs the world, and also of the natural law, which the creator has written in our hearts, still there are not a few obstacles to prevent reason from making efficient and fruitful use of its natural ability It is for this reason that divine revelation must be considered morally necessary so that those religious and moral truths which are not of their nature beyond the reach of reason in the present condition of the human race may be known with a firm certainty and with freedom from all error (DS 3875-3876/2305).

Thus the Church teaches that truths of natural law are included in revelation. It follows that they belong to the proper sphere of the Church's authority to teach, that if one does not find cogent arguments for them they must be accepted on faith, and that one cannot expect people who refuse to accept such moral norms on faith to see all of them to be true.

In the place where St. Paul asserts the reality of natural law, he also points out that Gentiles in fulfilling it were fulfilling the law--that is, the requirements of the covenant (cf. Rom 2.14-15). Obviously, he does not mean that the Gentiles could know and keep the precepts peculiar to Mosaic law, which are abolished in Christianity. Rather, that moral content common to the old and the new covenants--such as the Ten Commandments and their foundation in the law of love--constitutes natural law. The Decretum of Gratian, compiled in the mid-twelfth century and authoritative as canonical law until the code of 1917 was enacted, begins with the famous definition: "Natural law is what is contained in the Law and the Gospel"--that is, in both the Old and New Testaments.

Hence, St. Irenaeus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the whole Catholic tradition consider the Ten Commandments to pertain to natural law and, at the same time, to divine revelation.[42] St. Thomas maintains that all moral precepts of the old covenant are included, in one way or another, in natural law.[43] He also holds that the law of Christ, in its moral aspects, is an expression of the requirements of human virtue which pertain to natural law.[44]

Thus it is clear that revelation at least includes much of natural law. Does revelation somehow include all of natural law, at least in an implicit way? Both Trent and Vatican II teach that the Gospel which Jesus proclaimed and commissioned the apostles to spread is the "source both of all saving truth and of all moral teaching" (DS 1501/783; DV 7; note that the "omnis" comes before the first "et"). Thus the councils seem to assert that all the moral guidance one needs is contained somehow in the Gospel.

In chapters eleven and twelve I showed at length that in Jesus God reveals how human individuals in a sinful world should respond to His love and live a good human life, which necessarily will be a redemptive life like that of Jesus Himself. Thus, Vatican II teaches that Christ "fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (GS 22). "Whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man" (GS 41). By Christian holiness "a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society" (LG 40). Christian life is human life; it must be good human life, humanly good, to be a human expression and response to God's love, and to be an effective sign of this same love to nonbelievers.

Nevertheless, in many of its documents the Church contrasts the law of nature with the divine law, contained in revelation, which includes the principles of Christianity taught by Christ Himself.[45] And it seems clear enough that Christian morality does require something more than that one live a generically good human life. If this distinction and contrast is true, how can the norms of natural law and the moral content of the

Gospel be identified, as I have just now argued that they are?

Popes Pius XI and XII make several statements which point toward a solution. Natural law does not exist apart from Christianity, but belongs to the unique "Christian order of salvation in which nature and grace are united." In this Christian order, the natural law is restored, completed, and elevated so that it now serves to direct human-kind not only to human but also to heavenly fulfillment.[46]

This is the reason why Vatican II is able to teach that Jesus directs us to promote human goods which we will find again in the heavenly kingdom (cf. GS 39), that the Church in preaching the Gospel imparts knowledge of divine and natural law (cf. GS 89), and that in the matter of birth regulation the Church authoritatively interprets divine law in the light of the Gospel to make clear objective standards based on the nature of the human person and his or her acts (GS 50-51). (The Council also points out that consciences must be conformed to this divine law [cf. GS 50].)

The basic demands of natural law precisely as such are open-ended; they would hold for human persons under any conditions whatsoever. The law of Christ does not add a separate set of requirements over and above these. Rather, it specifies the norms of natural law to guide us as to what we must do in our actual condition: as sinful and redeemed. In our actual condition, "Love your neighbor," takes on a meaning it can only have in a world at once fallen and redeemed: "Love your enemy."

To be redemptive, love of neighbor must take forms which might otherwise be possible but would not otherwise be required, or perhaps even reasonable. To constitute an acceptable sacrifice, human life must be united with the sacrifice of Christ. To live in communion with God Christians must accept the responsibility of membership in Christ's Church. Thus as soon as one understands the real situation of humankind, which is revealed in Christ, one sees what the law of human nature now demands: a life like Christ's. No other kind of life can really fulfill the law written by God in human hearts--the natural law.

The preceding explanation also undermines two common objections launched from different theological perspectives against Catholic teaching concerning natural law. Some Catholic theologians have suggested that natural law is more or less irrelevant, since human persons never exist in a state of pure nature. Many Protestant theologians argue that natural law is no longer relevant and trustworthy, because fallen humankind which follows nature merely conforms to its own corruption. The answer to both lines of objection is that human nature is found as it should be in our Lord Jesus; the law in every human heart is fulfilled in Him in an exemplary way. The theological articulation of moral norms and virtues I will provide in part five will be based upon Him, not upon any abstract pure nature nor upon nature as we find it in ourselves and in sinful humankind generally.

0. Moral norms, the Church's teaching, and conscience

I discussed conscience and the Church's teaching in section E, above. In the light of the intervening explanations, I now return to this subject.

First, it is the work of conscience to direct upright persons to seek the truth, especially religious truth, which they will find in the Catholic faith; it is the work of conscience to direct persons to embrace this truth when it is found and to conform their lives to it (cf. DH 1-3). Before one has faith (logically if not temporally "before"), one naturally knows enough and is given enough help to come to God. The human condition of misery and the sign of holiness given by genuine Christian lives which are both lived in and explained by the light of the Gospel call nonbelievers to Christ. A nonbeliever who is morally upright and open to the truth will find that the way of Christ respects truth and fulfills the moral dimension of human fulfillment as nothing else can. Hence, the decision to accept the Gospel and seek living faith from the Church can be a responsible one for a nonbeliever.

As I explained in chapter twelve, section B, once one accepts faith responsibly, one is aware that one's acceptance is in one's own best interest. The ultimate ought within Christian life--One ought to share in redemption--has all the force and appeal for one who believes the Gospel and is clear-headed it requires to make all the particular duties of Christian life appear to be gifts which one is privileged to fulfill. Consequently, the Church's service of proclaiming Christian truth, including the whole of natural law in the light of the Gospel, should not be regarded by Catholics as if it were some sort of legal imposition upon their personal consciences.

For her members, the Catholic Church is the supreme moral authority under God. To her teaching we ought--if we are faithful we will--conform our consciences in every respect, in every detail, and in every question. This we will do not only because in the Church's teaching we hear the voice of Christ speaking for the Father, but also because by our own conscientiously made commitment of faith we have accepted the Church as our own more than humanly wise moral guide.

If one makes the judgment of conscience that one ought to listen to a certain moral advisor and follow the advice one receives, whatever it might be, then one violates one's own conscience if one listens to this moral advisor and acts contrary to its advice. An important part of what the act of faith means is that one has more confidence in the Church's moral wisdom than in one's own insights.

Moreover, the community of the Church is the only earthly community whose common life is guided immediately by the divine plan which is bringing all things to fulfillment in Christ. As members of the Church, the requirements for our personal lives of sharing in the common life of the Church reasonably override the requirements which arise from our participation in any lesser community--whether it be the family, the state, the clerical fraternity, the religious order, the university, the society of professional theologians, or any other.

In section E, above, I quoted and commented upon the teaching of Vatican II that the faithful in forming conscience must attend to the sacred and certain moral teaching of the Catholic Church (cf. DH 14). The Council incorporates in its own teaching, by making a general reference to it, the teaching of Pius XII on the right formation of

Christian conscience in the young.

Pope Pius states that to go along the way of salvation "means, in practice, to accept the will and the commandments of Christ and to conform one's life to them--that is, each single act, inner or exterior, which the free human will chooses and decides upon."

5 But where will the educator and the youth find in each individual case with ease and certainty the Christian moral law? They will find it in the law of the Creator imprinted in the heart of each one as well as in revelation, that is, in all the truth and precepts taught by the divine Master. Both the law written in the heart, that is, the natural law, and the truth and precepts of supernatural revelation, 10 have been given by Jesus the redeemer into the hands of His Church as humanity's moral treasure, so that the Church may preach them, intact and protected against any contamination and error, to all creatures, from one generation to another.[47]

The Pope goes on to point out that some today object to this teaching which the Church has proposed for centuries. They wish to leave matters to the individual's conscience. 15 But this position leads consciences off the way of Christ: "The divine redeemer has given His revelation, of which moral obligations are an essential part, not to individual men but to His Church, with the mission to lead men faithfully to accept that sacred deposit." Moreover, divine assistance to avoid error is promised not to individuals but to the Church. Therefore, individualistic autonomy of conscience is completely incom- 20 patible with Christ's providential plan of salvation.[48]

Just as in matters of faith, so in respect to moral norms, a faithful Catholic never will permit his or her own opinions, any seemingly cogent deliverances of experience, even supposedly scientific arguments, or the contradictory belief of the whole world outside the faith to override the Church's clear and firm teaching. As one real- 25 izes that one's own opinion in any doctrinal matter can be in error, that the world cannot know the generosity of God's love, that reason cannot grasp the truths of Trinity and Incarnation, and that experience cannot perceive Christ in the Eucharist; so one realizes that one's opinion in any moral question can be mere rationalization, that the world does not know how to live in God's love, that reason cannot grasp the way of Christ, 30 and that although one cannot experience it He lives in one's liturgy of obedience to faith.

Nevertheless, there is an essential and very important role for conscience within Christian life. We must make the Church's moral teaching our own standard of judgment; this appropriation is a work of conscience. We must add to it whatever is compatible 35 with it and necessary to find and fulfill our personal vocation. In carrying on this creative work, we must develop new moral norms to unfold the Church's teaching when nothing in it tells us precisely what to do. Furthermore, with conscientious docility we must communicate with our fellow believers concerning how we ought together to fulfill the law of Christ. In this communication, we ought to make known to our bishops 40 with all frankness and confidence whatever difficulties we find in accepting the moral teaching of Christ and living up to it (cf. GS 62). They in turn should examine such difficulties and provide what guidance and help they can, and thus carry out their duty with the light and strength of the Holy Spirit (cf. CD 16).

There remains one difficulty and it is a serious one. Not all teaching in the 45 Church is infallibly proposed. Teaching which is not proposed infallibly might possibly be mistaken. If some moral norm proposed in the Church were mistaken, then it could be inconsistent with some other norm included within or implied by faith. How are we to proceed when inconsistencies seem to be present in the guidance we receive from the Church?

50 To answer this question, one must examine what is meant by infallibility, clarify the conditions under which one can recognize teachings proposed infallibly, and more exactly understand one's responsibilities to conform to teachings even when they are not infallibly proposed. To this task I next proceed.

55 Notes to chapter fourteen

1. John Henry Newman, Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans Considered . . . in a Letter addressed to the Duke of Norfolk (London: Longmans, Green, 1897), p. 250. Proponents of the legitimacy of dissent from the Church's moral teaching often quote the 60 sentence at the end (p. 261) of this section: "Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink--to the Pope, if you please--still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards." They neglect to mention that the immediately preceding context concerns the question of a possible obligation in conscience to disobey--not a moral teaching--a 65 precept of the Pope. In other words, the issue is when one has to follow papal orders. The whole context of the letter is a suggestion by Gladstone that Catholics might not be loyal citizens because they have bound themselves to follow the orders of the Pope, and the papacy is a foreign power (see p. 179).

2. See John L. McKenzie, S.J., Dictionary of the Bible (New York and London: 70 Macmillan, 1965), pp. 343-344. Since "heart" in the Bible has so wide a meaning, one cannot take what is said about heart as a statement about conscience unless one has some independent way of knowing that the statement is true of conscience. Thus a study of the Bible's remarks about the heart is hardly likely to be very helpful.

3. C. A. Pierce, Conscience in the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 75 108.

4. Ibid., p. 109. Pierce's careful study, considered as a whole, makes clear the very minor place conscience has in New Testament thought.

5. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1, qu. 79, art. 13.

6. Ibid., 1-2, qu. 90; qu. 91, art. 1; qu. 92, art. 1. 80

7. Ibid., qu. 96, art. 4.

8. Ibid., qu. 91, art. 2; qu. 92, art. 2-3; qu. 19, art. 4.

9. Ibid., qu. 19, art. 4; qu. 71, art. 6, ad 5; cf. Vatican I, DS 3005/1786, also section N, below.

10. Summa theologiae, 1, qu. 79, art. 13.

11. St. Thomas Aquinas, De veritate, qu. 17, art. 2.
 12. Ibid., qu. 17, art. 3-4; Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 19, art. 5.
 13. De veritate, qu. 17, art. 5.
 14. Ibid., art. 3 and 5; Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 19, art. 5.
 5 15. Ibid., qu. 19, art. 6; Quodlibet, 8, qu. 6, art. 3.
 16. Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 19, art. 6, ad 3; Quodlibet, 8, qu. 6, art. 3.
 17. St. Thomas does not consider the proper formation of conscience to belong in the study of moral principles. He deals with it in a treatise on prudence, Summa theologiae, 2-2, qu. 47-56. I think he is correct in this view. The right moral education of children, the proper procedure for judgments about personal vocation, and formation of one's own and the social conscience all are important responsibilities within Christian life. I plan to treat these matters in the first major part of volume two.
18. Andrew M. Greeley, William C. McReady, Kathleen McCourt, Catholic Schools in a Declining Church (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1976), pp. 28-39, 103-154, and 316-324.
 15 19. To consider how the faithful speak, not what they want, as evidence of the sensus fidelium is in line with the view of John Henry Newman, who insists (On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine, ed. John Coulson [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961], pp. 54-55, 63, and 102-103) that by "consulting" the faithful he does not mean asking their advice but rather ascertaining the fact of their belief as a witness to a traditional teaching.
- 20 20. I do not unqualifiedly recommend, but suggest as an introduction to the study of development of conscience, Dorothea McCarthy, "Development of the Normal Conscience," in William C. Bier, S.J., ed., Conscience: Its Freedom and Limitations (New York: Fordham University Press, 1971), pp. 39-61.
 25 21. See (with the same caution as in note 20) Robert J. Campbell, "Superego and Conscience," in Bier, ed., op. cit., pp. 82-91.
 22. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 94, art. 4-5; 2-2, qu. 51, art. 4; qu. 120 (all); De malo, qu. 2, art. 4, ad 13; In V Ethicorum, lect. 16. The example is used in connection with epikeia--the virtue of doing justice in exceptional cases. Some modern theologians abuse the classic treatment of this virtue to promote their subjectivist teaching on conscience.
- 30 23. See Germain Grisez, "The Logic of Moral Judgment," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 36(1962), pp. 67-76.
 24. For references to one version of this argument and a criticism of it, see
 35 Donal J. Dorr, "Karl Rahner's 'Formal Existential Ethics,'" Irish Theological Quarterly, 36(1969), pp. 211-229. Like most Catholic theologians of his generation, Rahner always presupposes that natural law means the sort of thing I will criticize in section I, below. Hence his well-intentioned attempt to supplement natural law is very confused.
- 40 25. See Thomas Dubay, S.M., Authenticity: A Biblical Theology of Discernment (Denville, N. J.: Dimension Books, 1977), for an excellent and detailed treatise on this matter.
26. St. John of the Cross, The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 174.
 45 27. Ibid., p. 182.
 28. An accessible treatment of conventional natural-law theory is Thomas J. Higgins, S.J., Man as Man: The Science and Art of Ethics, rev. ed. (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 14-146. His extensive bibliographies are a good introduction to the literature of this approach. The chief source is: Francisco Suarez, S.J., De legibus ac Deo legislatore; the most relevant passages are in: Suarez, Selections from Three Works, J. B. Scott, ed., The Classics of International Law, no. 20 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1944). A good historical study of natural law, which divides Catholic theories from others, although it still confuses the Suarezian and Thomistic theories, is: Heinrich A. Rommen, The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy
 50 (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1947).
 55 29. Some typical examples of what I am discussing are in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., Readings in Moral Theology: No 1: Moral Norms and Catholic Tradition (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), especially the articles by Louis Janssens, Joseph Fuchs, S.J., and Bruno Schüller, S.J. The articles in this collection by John R. Connery, S.J., and Paul M. Quay, S.J., offer some sound criticisms of the consequentialist movement, but neither of these critics makes clear the fundamental failings and untenability of consequentialism.
- 60 30. Aware of the strength of their position to the extent that it takes into account this important truth, consequentialists call their approach "teleological" (an ethics of fulfillment) and label all alternatives "deontological" (ethics of duty and arbitrary commandments). The division is inadequate, because an approach such as I articulate, following St. Thomas, fits into neither category. To set up an inadequate division and use it in this way is a sophistic device; it is like the marxist saying that every nonmarxist is a capitalist exploiter, thus to leave no room for Catholic
 70 social teaching.
31. Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Ambiguity in Moral Choice," in Richard A. McCormick, S.J., and Paul Ramsey, Doing Evil to Achieve Good: Moral Choice in Conflict Situations (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1979), p. 38.
- 75 32. A clear and responsible development of this idea by an admirable Lutheran is: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 110-119, 240-241. Bonhoeffer writes dialectically; one must read his whole work to understand any of it fully. The position as a whole is deeply Christian, even if (as a Catholic must believe) imperfect in certain essential respects. When Catholic theologians remove from its context and adopt a Lutheran theory of compromise, the resulting moral
 80 advice is satanic, not Christian.
33. Catholic theologians are beginning (1979) to claim explicitly that consequentialism is natural law, but they are not providing anything adequate to justify such a claim. See Timothy E. O'Connell, Principles for a Catholic Morality (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), pp. 144-154. Virtually nothing O'Connell says about the history (pp. 125-

- 143) supports the identification he makes; his history also is untrustworthy. See also: Gerard J. Hughes, S.J., Authority in Morals: An Essay in Christian Ethics (London: Heythrop Monographs, 1978), pp. 26-63, whose version of consequentialism is notably different from O'Connell's. Once the presupposition of faith is set aside, theologies proliferate pluralistically unto babel.
34. McCormick, in McCormick and Ramsey, eds., op. cit., p. 227. I do not cite McCormick because he is worse than other theological consequentialists, but because he is better in trying to think things through, and so makes the problems of the position explicit.
35. Joseph Fuchs, S.J., in Curran and McCormick, eds., op. cit., p. 113.
36. Ibid., p. 114, where he suggests that missionaries perhaps should not expect members of an African tribe to accept Christian marriage. Polygamy is common in parts of Africa and is an obstacle to the spread of Christian faith; those who advocate compromise on this matter show little regard for the dignity of women. To promote this dignity, some Africans (even some who are not Christian) are working to abolish polygamy.
37. For a clear account and criticism of this kind of ethics, proposed systematically by R. M. Hare, see Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., "Aquinas and Prescriptive Ethics," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 49 (1975), pp. 82-95.
38. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 94, art. 2. See Germain Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason: A Commentary on the Summa theologiae, 1-2, Question 94, Article 2," Natural Law Forum, 10 (1965), pp. 168-201.
39. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 100, art. 3.
40. Ibid., 1, qu. 1, art. 1.
41. Ibid., 1-2, qu. 93, art. 6; cf. qu. 77, art. 2.
42. Ibid., qu. 100, art. 1 and 3; St. Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, IV, 13, 1 and 4.
43. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 100, art. 1.
44. Ibid., qu. 108, art. 2.
45. See Josef Fuchs, S.J., Natural Law: A Theological Investigation (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), p. 10. This book, written before Fuchs became a consequentialist, is in general reliable, although he is imbued with the conventional Suarezian-influenced conception of natural law.
46. See ibid., p. 12.
47. Pius XII, "Nuntius Radiophonicus de Conscientia Christiana in Iuvenibus Recte Efformanda," AAS, 44 (1952), p. 272.
48. Ibid., p. 273.

Questions for study and review

1. Summarize the teaching of Vatican II concerning conscience, and contrast this teaching with the popular view of conscience.
2. Explain the relationship between conscience and law in the teaching on conscience laid out by St. Thomas and commonly accepted in the Catholic moral tradition.
3. Why is one bound to follow an erring conscience? Why is one not always free of guilt if one follows one's erring conscience?
4. I offer an explanation of the decline in the Church which Andrew Greeley observes. Summarize this explanation. Even if this explanation is not sound, it has implications which still could be correct for the pastoral care of consciences. What are these implications?
5. Answer the following objection: "You Catholics are abdicating your own moral responsibility by delivering your consciences over to the Church, whose moral teaching you blindly conform to."
6. Contrast conscience with superego, and the judgment of conscience with emotive attitudes about actions.
7. Explain what it means to say that a moral norm is derivative. If most moral norms are derivative, what does this fact show? Why does it not argue in favor of consequentialism?
8. Several suggestions have been made which would introduce an element of inspiration or aconceptual "seeing" into the formation of conscience. What in general can be said against any such attempt?
9. What is conventional natural-law theory? What are the most important criticisms which can be made of it?
10. Why is consequentialism plausible? What additional considerations are adduced here to show that consequentialism cannot provide a theological account of basic moral norms in harmony with the Church's teaching on natural law?
11. Explain and criticize views which attempt to ground moral norms on an act of choice.
12. Summarize the sketch of an account of basic moral norms articulated in section M.
13. What is the relationship between natural law and the law of Christ?
14. Answer the objection: "Catholic moral teaching is proposed as belonging to natural law. Therefore, one ought to be able to see why it is true, and need not believe it if the reasons given are not rationally decisive."
15. Summarize the teaching of Vatican II and Pius XII concerning the manner in which Catholics ought to form their consciences. Explain the relationship between this teaching and the obligation of each Christian to live prophetically--as a sign for fellow believers and for nonbelievers.