

PART FIVE
NORMS FOR LIVING A CHRISTLIKE LIFE

O Lord, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,
far from my prayer, from the words of my cry?
O my God, I cry out by day, and you answer not;
by night, and there is no relief for me.

O Lord, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me.

You have been my guide since I was first formed,
my security at my mother's breast.
To you I was committed at birth,
From my mother's womb you are my God.

O Lord, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me.

Be not far from me, for I am in distress;
be near, for I have no one to help me.
I am like water poured out; all my bones are racked.
My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom.

O Lord, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me.

Psalm 22.2-3, 10-12, 15, 20

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: CONSIDERATIONS PRIOR TO CHRISTIAN NORMS

A. Why should we try to understand the point of moral norms?

5 In part four I showed that Catholics can be confident of the truth of the Church's moral teaching and that we should form our consciences by it. Now I am going to explain in a general way the point of the moral norms taught by the Church. (The clarification of specific norms belongs to subsequent volumes of this work.) One might ask: If we must accept and follow the Church's moral teaching in any case, why bother trying to understand the point of the moral norms we must follow? Will not such an inquiry merely produce bad reasons for a life which ought to be lived in the light of faith?

10 The first step in reply is to note that the explanation I am about to give itself will proceed in the light of faith. Clarifications will be drawn from experience and rational reflection, but these will be subordinate to the data of revelation. If the account I propose is in some respects neither required by faith nor intelligible in itself, then to that extent it ought to be ignored. But if it helps to clarify what we believe, then it can be enriching and useful.

15 It will be enriching because human action is not simply outward behavior and moral norms are not simply devices for eliciting behavior. Human action fulfills human persons; by it they share in community. Christian action is destined to last forever in Christ. Human moral norms make possible truly good human acts and shape them toward human fulfillment. Christian moral norms make possible our fully conscious and free sharing in the life of Christ and cooperation in His redemptive work; Christian lives of holiness in this world contribute to the joy of eternal life.

20 At the Last Supper, our Lord Jesus told the apostles He regarded them as friends, not as slaves, "for a slave does not know what his master is about" but "I have made known to you all that I have heard from my Father" (Jn 15.15). An important and wonderful part of God's gift to us in making us sharers in His own life in His showing us the point of the moral norms we must follow, as we live our human lives by following the way which Jesus is. By knowing what God is doing, we understand what we are trying to do; our action has greater inherent richness and has even now the fruit of joy in divine friendship.

25 Moreover, this same action becomes by deeper insight a better and more perfect gift to God. The more we put ourselves into what we do, the more our lives constitute that rational worship to which St. Paul teaches every Christian is called (cf. Rom 12.1-2). God wants from us not empty acts of ritual but our very lives. Enriched with God's own love and united with the life of Jesus, our lives become a holy and acceptable sacrifice. In offering God this gift, we offer Him ourselves--all that we are. For although everything created is God's good gift first, our morally responsible human lives carry out the free choices by which we are of ourselves.

30 By the grace of God we are what we are, and His grace is not fruitless. By it we share the dignity of active and contributing members of the divine family. Being familiar with God, we must be conscious of what He is about and must consider what we are about. In this way, we will grow to maturity as children of God and please our heavenly Father by the richness of our accomplishments. So we may hope to share in the accolade of the heavenly Father (which is so like the proud commendation any father gives his children when they make something of themselves): "You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests" (Mk 1.11).

35 In sum, human acts express rational choices. The better one understands what one is doing, the richer in significance one's acts are. If an act is good, then the richer in meaning it is--other things being equal--the better it is. Goods can be realized in acts, and so can contribute to completion in Christ of themselves, only if they are in some way known by the person acting. Thus lack of understanding when understanding is possible detracts from the gift one could and should be offering to God. For this reason, God desires from us rational service, not empty ritual or puppet-like, unthinking responses.

B. Other uses and some limits of this part

60 There also are several secondary ways in which an understanding of the general norms of Christian life will be helpful.

65 Study of this part will help to make clear what is special about moral life when it is consciously and freely lived according to the way of Christ. In other words, in the present part, an answer will be given to a question much discussed today: What is specifically Christian in Christian moral norms? What precisely does Christian moral teaching add to the body of moral truth which could be known by upright persons even without the light of faith?

70 Moreover, the explanations to follow will provide the principles by which the Church in its teaching can explain and defend specific norms of Christian morality when these are misunderstood and called into question. (Such challenges are common today, especially in certain areas. While the specific norms will be studied only in later volumes, the explanation proposed here will be used throughout the later study to supply premises for its arguments.)

75 To a considerable extent, priests in their preaching ought to stress the normative principles of Christian morality. The perceptive student will find the present treatise very helpful in this work. He will be able to develop suitable examples to illustrate the principles, even if he could not without further instruction apply the principles in the defense of specific norms or in the solution of difficult cases of conscience.

80 The more able student will realize that the normative principles of Christian life are the necessary instrument for refining and developing received Catholic moral teaching--that is, for responding to new questions in the light of faith. To a large extent, the appeal of consequentialism and other inadequate ethical theories currently adopted by some Catholic moralists is that there are new and unresolved problems, and older treatises on the normative principles of Christian life cannot provide clear and

persuasive answers to all of them. Although consequentialism is unacceptable, the gap it is used to fill still exists. Here I provide a better way to fill this gap.

As I have said already, this treatise will not get down to cases. Before one deals with the specific, one must understand relevant principles, and it is with principles that this entire volume is concerned. Anyone who is too impatient to study principles carefully shows that he or she really is not interested in precise understanding and competent handling of specific problems. Special problems in morality, such as sexual ethics, are interesting, but the character of Jesus is more basic--and far more interesting as well!

Even when fully developed and applied to specific norms included in received Catholic moral teaching, the following explanations will not permit one to eliminate all obscurity. Theology is faith seeking understanding. If some understanding is achieved, more remains to be sought. Our received moral teaching in large part expresses the unarticulated wisdom of Christian (and before that, of Jewish) faith shaping the life of God's People. The Church's moral teaching thus reflects both the mysteriousness of her Lord and the inarticulateness of loving hearts, whose reasons reason cannot always fully articulate.

C. How are norms of any kind related to a corresponding fullness of being?

A norm is a proposition which states what ought or ought not to be so. Normative truths are distinguished from theoretical truths, which state what is or is not so. Logically one cannot deduce normative conclusions from premises all of which are theoretical (or vice versa). How, then, are norms--that is, "ought" statements--related to fullness of being?

This question already has been answered at length in chapter five. Because of the importance of the answer for the understanding of moral norms, I briefly summarize here what I explained at length there.

A question about the goodness of anything arises only when one considers that thing as an entity of a certain kind with its appropriate potentialities more or less fully realized. Something which can be a more or less perfect entity of a kind while remaining of that kind will be considered more or less good depending upon the extent to which it has its appropriate fulfillment and is open to whatever additional fulfillment is possible for entities of the kind to which it belongs.

Not every realization of potentialities is good. An organism has a potentiality for sickness and death; the realization of such potentialities is destructive of the organism as such. But an organism also has potentialities for such functions as growth, nutrition, and reproduction. An appropriate realization of these potentialities means that the organism is living and is open to the more abundant life possible for organisms of its kind--for example, open to flourishing and fruitfulness.

Norms do not articulate the actual condition of things to which they refer. Rather, they articulate what is necessary for the fullness of being of things to which they refer--"fullness of being" always being understood in terms of the possibilities projected for entities of that sort. Thus we expect a mammal which has just delivered a young one to give milk: The cow ought to freshen. We do not expect roses to give milk: The roses ought to bloom soon. If such norms are not fulfilled, we assume that something has gone wrong, and that the individual somehow is defective, for it is falling short of the full potentialities of its kind.

To say of anything that it is good is to say that its actual condition is such that relevant norms are fulfilled. To say of anything that it is bad is to say that relevant norms are not fulfilled as they could and should be. "Privation" refers to the shortcoming of anything from what it could and should be. Evil is privation.

This understanding of evil, which is based upon Scripture, is an important part of the Jewish and Christian understanding of the relationship of creatures to God. All things are created by God and were created good--just as they ought to have been to begin with. Evil cannot be attributed to the good God, the Creator, nor need it be attributed to a counterprinciple, such as an evil "god" independent of God and in competition with Him. Nevertheless, evil is not an illusion. It is a real state of affairs, namely, that privative state of things created good which fail to continue and develop as they could and should. According to Jewish and Christian faith, the beginning of evil is in the abuse by created persons of their power of free choice.

The conception of evil as privation helps clarify why God redeems as He does in Jesus. The zealots wanted an earthly messiah who would lead Israel in the destruction of enemies (with whom evil was identified). The Pharisees tried to externalize and segregate evil; they failed to realize that they themselves also were enmeshed in sin. Early in Christian history, heretics (the gnostics) tried to explain evil away as an illusion. The divine strategy for redemption is to overcome evil by a fresh creation--the new heavens and new earth. In Jesus, the Father attempts to establish solidarity with those who are subject to evil, in order to eliminate the evil by healing love without destroying any of the good which still is present even in those most damaged by evil.

In summary, norms of any kind are statements which indicate how something must be if it is to be good. Goodness is fullness of being--that is, it is a fulfillment of potentialities which disposes to continuing and greater fulfillment. Evil is privation. The distinction between good and evil is objective; it is no mere illusion and in no way is arbitrary. Something which can actually be or fail to be as it could and ought to be can really be good or evil. This real distinction between good and evil is objective, although it is unlike the factual difference between two kinds of things (for example, pork and lamb) or between two positive factual states of affairs (for example, being of Jewish or of gentile birth).

D. How are moral norms distinguished from other, nonmoral norms?

Many norms have no moral significance. "The cow ought to freshen" and "The engine ought not to be started when there is no oil in the crankcase" clearly refer to nonmoral

good and evil. Human persons are complex; our reality can be fulfilled in several distinct domains. As organisms, life and health are goods for us; as intellects, truth fulfills us; as performers of our own intelligent projects, skillful execution is a good. (These goods of human persons are described in chapter five, section H.)

5 Although such goods are not unrelated to morality, since human persons can and should by their free choices pursue fulfillment in every domain of their being, the norms of organic well-being, of straight (logical) thought, and of excellence in outward performance--for example, in an art or a sport--are not directly and of themselves moral norms.

10 Unlike anything else in the world of our experience, human persons can enjoy or lack various levels of personal and interpersonal integration or harmony. The properly moral dimension of persons (which I call the "existential domain" and which I discussed in chapter five, section G) is that dimension which is relevant to free choice. The aspects of the self which are given prior to any free choice of one's own can be more or
15 less fully respected and utilized in one's freely chosen acts; both the distinctiveness and the unity of these aspects of the self will be furthered by some choices and diminished by others. Similarly, the self given prior to choice can be more or less perfectly harmonized with the life which executes one's choices. Individuals freely directing their own lives can exist in more or less discord or harmony with one another. And hu-
20 mankind by its solidarity in human choices can more or less alienate itself from God or accept His reconciling friendship.

In the existential domain, harmony at the various levels is good, while division, conflict, and unnecessary limitation is bad. Harmonious personal and interpersonal relationships unify a multiplicity in such a way that both the unity of the whole and the
25 diversity of the parts which make up that whole are emphasized and furthered at the same time. Bad, disharmonious relationships emphasize unity at the price of lessening diversity or emphasize diversity at the price of lessening unity. As I explained in chapter six, sections C and D, love is a disposition to fulfillment--that is, to good. Proper love of oneself and unselfish love of others is a disposition toward fulfillment in all
30 of the dimensions of human persons, but especially in the existential goods which embrace and perfect all the rest.

"Self-integration" and "inner peace" refer to harmony within a person; "integrity," "practical reasonableness," and "wisdom" refer to harmony between a person and his or
35 her own life; "justice," "peace," and "friendship" refer to harmony among persons and groups of persons; "friendship with God," "reconciliation," and "holiness" refer to harmony between human persons and God. Human persons are not called "good" without qualification in virtue of the fulfillments they enjoy in other domains. For example, a person who knows a great deal might be called a "good scholar" and a person who is
40 skillful might be called a "good player," but no one is called a "good person" unless he or she is thought to enjoy and to be growing in the goods of the existential domain--that is, in the various forms of harmony.

Morality is concerned with this goodness; the moral virtues are aspects of a personality which has such goodness. Moral norms point to flourishing in the goods of the
45 existential domain. These goods express proper love of ourselves and of others, and such love unfolds by free choices. Hence, moral norms primarily guide free choices toward personal fulfillment--that is, toward the fullness of individuals and groups of persons in the love which simultaneously advances both diversity and unity.

E. A further note on the relationship between moral and other goods

50 According to the explanation given, moral goodness is only one aspect of the total fulfillment of human persons. Moral goodness primarily pertains to the will, by which one makes choices which either promote or detract from the various forms of personal and interpersonal harmony which are most essential to the fulfillment of persons as persons.
55 Someone can be physically sick, mentally retarded and ignorant, and be inept and unsuccessful, yet be morally good. Such an individual will be recognized as a good person, although he or she might be considered unfulfilled. A person need not be one the Greeks would have called "happy" and contemporary humanists would say has "adequate quality of life" to be a morally good person.

60 Nevertheless, the goods of all other aspects of persons are relevant to moral goodness. One who truly cares for others will not love them in a merely abstract and general sort of way, but will be concerned with whether they are hungry, thirsty, or in any way
humanly in need. To love others is to be concerned about every evil from which they suffer, and to be interested in every good of persons in which they can be fulfilled.

65 Thus Vatican II expresses the love of Catholics for all of their brothers and sisters:

The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts (GS 1).

70 Similarly, to reveal His Father's love and to express His own human love for fallen humankind, Jesus went about doing all sorts of human good; He did not limit Himself to moral instruction and the forgiveness of sins.

Justice is concerned with the impartial distribution of burdens and benefits pertaining to means to all human goods, and also directly to the fulfillment of nonmoral
75 aspects of persons--for example, health, education, opportunities for play, and so on. Similarly, if one wishes to express one's love for another, one gives a gift, shares a meal, or something of the sort. All such friendly acts involve some contribution to or sharing in human goods other than love itself. Interpersonal relationships, including the religious relationship of humankind to God, would lack substance if they did not
80 center around goods which pertain to persons but not specifically to the moral dimension of persons--I mean around goods such as life and truth, which are realized and experienced when a group of persons eat and converse together as at a banquet.

The immediate reason for this complex relationship between moral goods and other aspects of personal and interpersonal fulfillment is that the moral goods are forms of

harmony--that is, various levels in which unity and diversity are perfected by love. Harmony cannot be a mere form; it requires some definite content. Music cannot be harmony without harmonious sounds; sounds have many characteristics studied by physics which human art can only respect and cannot change; yet the art and beauty of music centers upon harmonies which human art creates among sounds. Similarly, the harmonies in which moral goodness consists must have some real content, and this content is drawn from the other domains in which persons participate.

Each of the other domains includes standards of fulfillment in its own order. As an organism, a person can be sick or healthy, and what distinguishes these conditions can be explained by the art of medicine without reference to moral standards. Similarly, standards of intellectual activity and skill in outward performance pertain to their appropriate domains, and the moral standards of life cannot tell one how to construct good arguments or how to create great works of art.

However, since the potentialities of persons are many, since the realization of these potentialities depends upon reasonable deliberation and free choice, since human persons cannot be fulfilled except in community with one another, and since humankind is a creature in relation to God the Creator and a family fallen and redeemed in relation to God who reveals Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit--for all these reasons the ultimate good of persons is not in any of the other domains but is in the moral domain. For in the moral domain all of the aspects of each person and of all persons are brought together for good or ill--that is, either into harmonious and ever-expanding fulfillment or into disharmony, disruption, mutual frustration, and unnecessary self-limitation.

In his Republic, Plato seems to have come closer than anyone else outside the Jewish-Christian tradition to understanding and articulating the true character of moral rightness. According to Socrates in the Republic, rightness is essentially a matter of harmony; it is found not in one or another particular good which satisfies one or another part of human possibility, but in consistent openness to and growth toward the fulfillment of the whole of persons as individuals and communities. Socrates projects the Good Itself as the objective of the thrust of persons toward complete fulfillment, and he carefully abstains from any attempt to define in an affirmative way what is meant by the "Good Itself." He says only that it is beyond all the particular goods which participate in it yet never exhaust it.

With our clear and explicit understanding of free choice, Christians understand (in a way Plato could not) that moral goodness pertains to the will, which is the capacity for choice. We tend to put God or divine goodness in the place which Plato reserved for the Good Itself. Then, since we recognize harmony with God (which is the good of religion) as one level and indeed as the highest level of moral good, we are tempted to confuse the good of religion with divine goodness itself. If we make this mistake, we are likely to imagine that moral goodness consists in a preference for our own share in divine goodness over every other human good. The essential role of other domains of human goodness often has been overlooked by Christian moralists; they sometimes have forgotten that the harmony which is the proper object of good will must have some substance.

It is true that the human will is open to every intelligible good, and intelligible goods are not merely one class of goods among others but rather are all goods in their whole objective reality (or, at least, in all of their reality accessible to us). This openness of the human will is what makes it possible for human persons to freely accept in faith a sharing in divine life which goes beyond the capacities of human persons as human.

Nevertheless, the very openness of the human will means that it has no perfection proper to itself. The fulfillment of the will is in the harmonious fulfillment of all the goods to which a person concretely is disposed by other aspects of the personality, which are unfolded fully only in harmony with one another, by an unwavering reasonableness, with the cooperation of other persons, and with the gifts and power of God. Thus moral goodness is in preference for harmonious fulfillment by reasonable choices in respect to all the goods of persons. Moral evil falls short of this standard. I will explain this point more directly in section I, below.

In sum, to be a person good without qualification--that is, good in the moral sense--is to have a good will; to be a person of good will does not require that one be fulfilled in all the other aspects of one's personality; nevertheless, a person of good will is not someone concerned exclusively with moral goodness (a moral fanatic) but rather is someone impartially concerned about every human need and interest, including life, truth, and every sort of excellence. Thus St. Paul summarizes the proper concerns of Christians in a very inclusive way: "Finally, my brothers, your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous, or worthy of praise" (Phil 4.8).

F. How should Christians regard the moral norms commonly accepted in society?

In every society, some norms are proposed and generally accepted as standards of morality. Human fulfillment is defined in terms of a rich enjoyment of those goods understood and appreciated in the society. The common pursuit of these goods is the primary purpose of most political societies; secondarily, political societies try to create zones of liberty in which their members can pursue personal ideals of happiness in their own ways.

Any society must establish and defend a certain level of fairness; even among thieves there must be mutual honor. Modes of behavior which express selfish impulses, contrary to accepted standards of fairness, are considered immoral. So are modes of behavior based on impulse contrary to the rational requirements of the pursuit of the common good, even if these modes primarily have their adverse effects only upon those who engage in them. Thus laziness, drunkenness, and excessive fearfulness are frowned upon in any society, particularly when they lead to unfairness according to its standard.

Such systems of conventional morality are rather plausibly described in terms of the consequentialism which I have examined in chapter nine, section C, chapter fourteen,

sections J-K, and chapter sixteen, section C. Accepted social goals provide the criterion by which various patterns of action are considered to be more or less acceptable, or altogether unacceptable. Norms of behavior reflect commonly accepted limits which are necessary if the society is going to function. Anything which is not unfair to others and which is acceptable to the individuals involved seems morally of little significance.

Not everyone lives up to conventional standards of morality. What is more interesting, some who are reflective and critical always find the conventional standards more or less seriously defective. Such persons seek a higher standard; they wish to criticize accepted moral norms and to find true moral norms, ones grounded in reality rather than in the mere fact of social acceptance. The Greek and Roman quest for a natural law beyond the law imposed by social authority is an example of this movement from sociological fact toward principles. Socrates also set out from conventional morality in his quest for wisdom and an examined life, which he considered would be worth living in a way that life lived according to uncriticized conventional norms cannot be.

St. Paul points out that without belief in the resurrection, human life in the fallen world hardly would seem worth living (cf. 1 Cor 15.58). If death is the end, one must obtain what fulfillment one can in the present life (cf. 1 Cor 15.19, 32; Is 22.13). The wisdom of the world is absurdity with God (cf. 1 Cor 3.19); worldly liberty is slavery to sin (cf. Gal 4.8). Conventional morality is part of that world which defines itself by opposition to Christ (cf. Jn 17.14-17).

Moral truth goes beyond any conventional morality in demanding openness to all human goods, not merely to certain commonly accepted objectives, and in aiming at perfect harmony on all levels, not merely at some level of fairness among persons belonging to a particular group. Moral truth extends to the whole of the person, to the whole of life, to the whole of humankind, and to the whole of reality by way of the human relationship to God.

Redemption from conventional morality and its service to human stuntedness is an important part of the liberating work of Jesus. The world as we know it is passing away, and so the Christian will no more conform to it than a fashionable person will adopt styles just as they are going out (cf. 1 Cor 7.31).

Even those who do not explicitly believe in Christ are able to transcend conventional morality to some extent, for if they do what they can to pursue human goodness, their good will is assisted by the grace of the Spirit (cf. GS 22). This help explains why in various times and places some higher level of moral truth and goodness has begun to emerge despite the limits of conventional morality. The work of a Socrates or a Buddha is the fruit of cooperation of some group of good men who happen to be able to break through the limits of their own society.

However, without the integral Gospel of Christ and the stabilizing order of His Church, such moral breakthroughs suffer from the limitations of human error and from extreme fragility. They are unable to shape fallen humankind into a community in friendship with God. This achievement belongs only to Christ and to those who cooperate consciously in His work.

G. What are the primary principles of all practical reasoning?

As I explained in chapter fourteen, section M, the very first principle of all practical reasoning is: Good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided. [1] "Good" and "evil" here do not refer specifically to moral good and evil. Rather, the principle is concerned with anything which a person can understand that would make a possible course of action seem appealing and worth deliberating about, or make it seem unappealing and perhaps to be excluded from further consideration. All human practical reflection--whether it leads to morally good action, to bad action, or to no outcome at all--presupposes the first practical principle.

In many cases, something is not understood to be good or bad in itself, but by its relevance to something else. Thus, an empty gasoline tank is understood as an evil by a person who wishes to drive somewhere, not because an empty gas tank is in itself a human evil, but because it prevents the person's doing as he or she wishes. Getting to the desired destination normally seems good not in itself but for the sake of what can be done there. For example, a man wishes to get home to eat dinner, to play with his children, to watch a television program, and so on. As in this example, any intelligible chain of human purposes always ends in some goods which are appealing in themselves, because they contribute directly to the fulfillment of persons. Similarly, what interferes with, damages, or destroys good at any level is considered evil. But all humanly significant evils in the end are reduced to privations of the basic human goods.

The basic human goods have been listed and described at some length in chapter five, especially sections F-H.

Corresponding to each of the basic human goods is an evident principle of practical reasoning which proposes that good as a good to be pursued and protected, and which directs that the evils opposed to this good be avoided and prevented. Thus, human life itself is understood as a good to be preserved, and death as an evil to be avoided.

Because the various basic human goods can be divided into many distinct aspects--as life can be divided into survival, health, safety, and so on--one cannot make a simple, exhaustive list of the basic principles of practical reasoning. As I explained in chapter five, section K, the understanding of basic forms of human goodness is stable and invariant in one respect, but open to development in another.

One who understands that life is a good to be pursued always knows that survival is humanly significant and in itself desirable. But the rich possibilities of human fulfillment are only gradually specified as humankind realizes, experiences, and presses on to expand them. Health, for example, has a much richer content for us than it did for persons living in any primitive culture. Even new levels of viciousness deepen human understanding of human goods; Nazi genocide, for example, helps clarify the meaning of injustice, and so allows us better to understand what justice is.

The very first principle of all practical reasoning is like the principle of non-contradiction; one cannot consciously proceed in violation of it. However, one can

undertake an action and then discover that in reality the good sought cannot be attained. In such a case, the action is seen to be pointless and the undertaking is abandoned, unless some other good would be served by continuing it.

5 The many evident principles of practical reasoning which correspond to the various basic human goods render interesting diverse and often incompatible possible courses of action. The goodness of these goods is not directly challenged. For example, in the debate over euthanasia, no one suggests that death itself is a human good. A woman who is contemplating suicide does not think of her life as something in itself bad or valueless, but rather thinks that under the existing conditions, she would rather be dead, 10 for by death her suffering would be ended. Thus, principles of practical reasoning which correspond to the basic goods are violated indirectly when for some other reason or motive one chooses to adopt a course of action somehow incompatible with one or more of these principles.

15 H. Further remarks on the primary principles of practical reasoning

The very first principle of practical reasoning is a self-evident truth. One understands it to be true as soon as one understands what its terms mean. Someone might suggest that for this very reason, the first principle is simply a matter of juggling 20 words--that it does not tell one anything at all. There is, indeed, a sense in which the first principle is uninformative, for it does not specify what is good and what is to be done. However, it is not a mere matter of juggling words. The principle plays an important role.

To understand the meaning of the terms of a principle is not only to know something 25 about words. It is also to have some knowledge of the realities to which the words by way of concepts refer. The very first principle of practical reasoning is a grasp upon the necessary relationship in reality between human goods and appropriate action bearing upon these goods.

This necessary relationship is not one which we find in the world, since we do not 30 find our own actions in the world; rather we put them there. What the first principle of practical reason tells us is that we must act--we must do things--to be fully the human persons we can and ought to be. In telling us this, the first principle of practical reason provides human fulfillment as the basis for all of the normative demands which reason ever will make upon us. When at a later stage of practical reflection one 35 wonders, "But why should I do this?" one is asking about the intelligible good to be achieved. One asks this because one knows one's action would be absurd if it were not directed to some good or other.

To say this is not to exclude that in a particular case the right answer to "Why should I do this?" might not be simply "Because God wills it, as the Church teaches." 40 Such an answer is not ultimate. It assumes that what God wills is wise, and that His wisdom orders all things to good (cf. Wis 11.20-26). It also assumes that for a human person it is humanly good to trust and obey God, who has shown His love and faithfulness --for example, in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The various inadequate explanations of moral principles, which I discussed at some 45 length in chapter fourteen, sections F-L, fail to grasp the primary moral principle and attempt to substitute something else in its place. Conventional natural-law theory proposes an imperative: "Do good and avoid evil." But "good" and "evil" here are understood in a moral sense. One confronted with such an imperative can reasonably ask: "But why should I be moral at all?" For those who take this approach, the tight relationship 50 between morality and basic human goods is loosened. To say that one must do what is morally good because God wills it solves nothing, but rather suggests that God's will might be arbitrary and alien to human fulfillment.

Consequentialists wish to overcome such a suggestion. For them, the basic principle is to bring about in the world more good and less evil. This specification of the 55 first principle of practical reasoning seems plausible, for it does make clear that human action and its moral quality depend upon the fulfillment of human persons. However, the consequentialist errs, as I have explained, in requiring an impossible comparison of the values and disvalues to be expected from the adoption of various courses of action which are considered in deliberation.

60 Thus the very first principle of practical reasoning is a normative truth, which relates human actions to human goods by requiring action in pursuit of the goods, without specifying the relationship of actions to goods in any way which would preclude genuine human deliberation and free choice among possibilities.

By themselves, the first principle of practical reasoning and the many evident 65 principles which correspond to the basic human goods do not settle the morality of any kind of action. However, these principles are relevant to the formulation of specific moral norms. To reach such norms, one only needs to add a criterion by which to distinguish moral good and evil--a criterion which for practical purposes must be expressed in a number of manageable modes of moral responsibility--and an understanding of some possible 70 action whose morality is to be determined.

I. How the principles corresponding to the basic goods become known

Questions about the knowledge of basic principles always are difficult. Knowledge 75 derived from principles can be accounted for by the principles and by logical processes. But how does one come to know that life is a good to be preserved or that justice is a good to be sought after? Such normative principles are presupposed by all practical thinking. They make sense only in the context of the very first practical principle--that good is to be done and pursued--but they cannot be deduced from this principle, for 80 they add to it intelligible content which identifies various goods as humanly relevant.

The question I am considering now must be distinguished from a different one, namely: How can one defend the principles of practical reasoning against someone who calls them into question? The answer to the latter question is that one can show that in practice these principles are presupposed; one also can show that arguments by which

they are called into question are fallacious or lead to unacceptable consequences. In chapter five, section J, I proceeded in this way to defend the basic goodness of human life against objections which would reduce it to the status of an instrumental good.

5 The question I am now considering is the first of the two questions dealt with in chapter five, section K. The treatment there, which would better have been reserved to this chapter, might well be reviewed at this point. A few remarks can be added.

10 First, the givenness and constancy of the inclinations which underlie the basic principles of practical reasoning help to account for the naturalness and fundamental unalterability of natural law. At the same time, the dynamism of the inclinations--their tendency toward continuing and expanding fulfillment--helps to account for the openness of natural law to authentic development.

15 Second, the principles of practical reasoning clearly are understood by small children. They can consider them one at a time. Simple willing (described in chapter nine, section E) is the disposition toward the good which responds to the basic practical principles; acts done by spontaneous willing (described in chapter nine, section F) require only the further understanding that some possible manner of acting will participate in one of the goods.

20 The fact that small children in their premoral acts proceed according to the principles of practical reasoning thus far described helps to make clear that an additional principle is required to account for the distinction between moral good and evil. The basic principles of practical reasoning make possible all human acts. Morality is in choices, in acts consequent upon choices, and in forms of voluntariness somehow conditioned by choices or by the failure to make them when one could and should make them. To determine questions of morality, a principle is needed which will refer to choices and indicate how they are to be made.

25 A final point is that the process of experience and insight by which we come to know the basic principles of practical reasoning is very different from the process by which we come to have and articulate wants for specific goods, which sometimes are adopted as objectives of freely chosen acts. The latter process (of having and articulating specific wants) presupposes and follows from the former process (that of understanding goods as fields of practical possibility and being disposed to them by simple willing).

30 One can have a want for a specific good merely in virtue of its appeal to sensory experience and feeling--for example, a sexually stimulating image can arouse sexual desire. Such a want can be articulated as an intelligible objective by putting the possible action under virtually any of the basic human goods. For example, one can think of the possible experience as an experiment which might satisfy curiosity, as a performance which might be carried on with more or less skill, as a way of lessening pain (sexual tension), as a way of having a feeling, at least, of self-integration (one gets rid of temptation by giving in to it), as a way of being true to oneself (a rationalization of perversion used by some), as a way of experiencing and celebrating an interpersonal relationship (one of the reasons for marital intercourse), or as a ritual act (such as temple prostitution). One can understand the same possible performance under two or more goods simultaneously, thus having multiple reasons which would make it a possible object of choice.

45 Consequentialism understands "good" and "bad" as antecedent ("pre-moral") principles of the morality of acts insofar as the basic goods are determined by reference to particular wants. In other words, what consequentialists urge is that one weigh the extent to which various possible choices would result in more or less frustration and satisfaction; they suggest that one act for the best possible ratio of satisfaction to frustration. 50 The weighing and balancing which the consequentialist needs and cannot carry out by any rational procedure is accomplished by an intuitive appraisal of the strength of one's various wants. In practice, consequentialism encourages one to do what one most wants to do--very often, simply to follow one's feelings after taking all of one's feelings into account.

55 The inclinations which are the data for understanding the basic human goods include but are not limited to emotions. For example, the understanding of knowledge of the truth as a good to be pursued partly depends upon the data of spontaneous acts of the intellect which in no way depend upon emotion or even upon volition. The experience of free choice itself is part of the data for the very understanding of the existential 60 goods such as justice and friendship. For this reason, the basic human goods grasped by the principles of practical reason are much broader and more open than would be an understanding of goods by means of any generalization from wants based upon the appeal of specific goods to sensory experience and feeling.

65 A sound, nonconsequentialist principle of morality will indicate how to make choices in such a way as to shape oneself in the light of the whole range and depth of the human possibilities opened up by the intelligible goods. The upright person will maintain openness to goods beyond his or her understanding of them as they are embodied in presently possible--or even presently thinkable--courses of action. This fact has two important implications for Christian morality.

70 First, the moral principle which shapes the life of every person of good will does not limit human fulfillment beforehand to a specific set of human satisfactions--for example, to the pattern of the "good life" taken for granted by the conventional morality of one's particular culture. An upright American is not limited to the ideal of prosperity and success which is proposed as the middle-class standard of the American 75 way of life. Hence, the moral principle adhered to by every person of good will maintains openness to goods beyond everything human persons can ask or imagine, including openness to the heavenly fulfillments which are promised by God, fulfillments both in human and in divine goods: life and more abundant life (cf. Jn 10.10).

80 Second, sound morality can make sense of choices which have the character of commitments (which I described in chapter nine, section I). By a commitment one determines oneself in reference to the basic human goods; by it one accepts a certain place in the community of persons striving together to realize and share in the whole range of human possibilities. But commitments go beyond any particular objective; indeed, they provide one with the power to creatively excogitate objectives of which one without commitment

would not even think.

Choice inevitably involves a certain self-limitation, because one actualizes one's possibilities through choice only by pursuing some and setting aside others. Choices made according to a principle which is logically independent of any particular objectives (any determinant set of wants) do not involve any self-limitation arising from the set of wants one happens to have at a given time. Choices made on a principle (such as consequentialists commend) which logically depends upon the specification of goods by particular objectives do involve self-limitation by the limits of the set of wants one happens to have at a given time. Thus, consequentialism leads to unnecessary self-limitation.

J. What is the primary principle of morality?

The basic principle of morality might be formulated in many different ways. The formulation I consider best is: In choosing, one should prefer possibilities compatible with integral human fulfillment.

This principle differs from the very first principle of practical reasoning: Good is to be done and pursued. The first moral principle adds a reference to choice; it is neither fulfilled nor violated by acts done by spontaneous willing, in which choice plays no part. Moreover, the first moral principle refers to goods which are to be done not as to a set of diverse possible fields for every human act, but as to a single system in which the goods of persons are all to have a place in the fulfillment of the whole community of human persons.

"Integral human fulfillment" does not refer to a particular objective which can be pursued as the concrete goal of cooperative human effort. Apart from faith, humankind cannot know that integral human fulfillment is possible, and faith teaches that this possibility can be realized only by the divine act of recreating all things in Christ. However, reason does not exclude the possibility of integral human fulfillment, and a generous and reasonable love of human goods will lead one to act in a way compatible with this ideal. In so acting, some degree (and a concretely expanding degree) of human sharing in goods will be achieved and openness to integral fulfillment will be maintained; at the same time, unnecessary self-limitation will be avoided.

In general, as I explained in section C above, goodness is in fullness of being--that is, in a realization of potentialities by which one is open to a further and fuller realization of potentialities. This general notion of goodness also applies in the moral domain. By freely chosen human acts one determines oneself; in choosing one settles the thrust of one's own will. Moral goodness is in choices which not only lead to some participation in some particular human good--as all choices do--but which maintain a constant disposition toward all human possibilities. In other words, moral goodness is a characteristic of choices by which one in making them avoids unnecessary self-limitation.

Here and now one must pursue this or that, but one who chooses in an upright way cares no less for the goods which he or she might have shared in had the alternative been chosen. Constant openness to these goods will be important for one's future choices, for one's attitude toward the choices other people make, and for one's readiness to accept a chance to share in divine life, in which all human goods are included as in their principle.

Vatican II formulates the primary principle of morality in a somewhat less concise and more theological way than that stated above:

. . .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).

Thus the Council teaches that human activity should harmonize with the real good of the human race and permit pursuit of the complete fulfillment in Christ to which humankind is called. This norm, which benefits from the light of faith, entails the less specified norm which I formulated above: In choosing, one should prefer possibilities compatible with integral human fulfillment. This primary and general moral norm can be understood by anyone, even one without faith.

K. Further clarification of the primary principle of morality

Since the first principle of morality is at once so important and so difficult to grasp (when it is considered in and by itself), further reflection might be helpful to clarify its precise meaning and so to help make its truth comprehensible. To some extent this clarification will come about in later discussions, as the principle is shaped into general modes of responsibility and specified by the human condition understood in the light of faith. However, even at the present level of abstractness, some additional explanation of the first principle is possible, and such explanation will be helpful to anyone who can follow it.

Any ethical theory based upon the ordering of human actions to human fulfillment must account for the fact that not every choice is morally evil, yet every choice responds to the appeal of the human goods promised by one possible course of action and leaves unanswered the appeal of the equally basic and incommensurable goods promised by one or more other courses of action. That each of these goods is to be realized and protected is a starting point for deliberation about possibilities which would realize or protect it. Such a starting point is a (pre-moral) principle of practical reasoning. Corresponding to the whole set of basic human goods is the whole set of principles of practical reasoning.

The whole set of principles directs that all the goods be realized and protected. But even morally evil acts depend upon and respond to some of these principles. Therefore, none of the principles of practical reasoning is a moral norm merely by being a principle of practical reasoning. The underlying principle that human life is a good to be protected, for example, does not by itself dictate that killing is always wrong.

The distinction between moral good and evil is a distinction between ways in which proposed courses of action are related to the whole set of principles of practical thinking. Some proposals comport well with all of the human goods. Other proposals comport well with some of the principles of practical thinking--those which direct action to the goods promised by these proposals--but are inconsistent with or inadequately responsive to at least one principle of practical thinking. It is morally good to adopt proposals of the former sort and morally bad to adopt proposals of the latter sort.

One who is about to choose in a morally right way respects equally all of the basic human goods and listens equally to all of the appeals they make through the principles of practical thinking. Because of the incompatibility of concrete possibilities--since one cannot do everything at once--choice is necessary. No single good, nothing promised by any one possible course of action, exhausts human possibilities and realizes integral human fulfillment. But just as two propositions which have no common terms cannot be inconsistent with one another, so any proposed course of action is consistent with those principles of practical thinking to which it is merely irrelevant. Moreover, one who chooses cannot be inadequately responsive to a principle of practical thinking if the principle in question has played no role whatsoever in the deliberation leading to that choice.

Thus, one can choose in a morally upright way. One can choose one possibility which promises certain goods and is irrelevant to other goods promised by an alternative without violating the practical principle which directs action to these other goods. One does not adopt a restrictive standard of human fulfillment. One's understanding of all the human goods, one's appreciation of their special potential contributions to integral human fulfillment, remains the same after the choice as before.

One who is about to choose in a morally wrong way does not respect and respond equally to all of the basic human goods; one does not listen equally to all of the appeals they make through the principles of practical thinking. The proposal which one is about to adopt involves detriment to some human good, or at least it involves slighting some good. One is tempted to adopt this detriment to or slighting of a good for the sake of another good which will thereby be possible. Such a proposed course of action is responsive to at least one principle of practical thinking, and it might be irrelevant to--and so consistent with--some others. But it is both relevant to and inconsistent with (or, at least, inadequately responsive to) the principle which directs to the good with which the choice comports less well. Yet the goods represented by these different principles are equally basic and equally essential to the ideal of integral human fulfillment.

Thus, one can choose in a morally wrong way. One is wholly or partly unresponsive to the appeal of some of the basic human goods. In making such a wrong choice--a procedure which might be called "exclusivistic choice"--one's understanding of the various goods is itself affected. The good which is violated or downrated is no longer considered equally basic and incommensurable with the good which is preferred. The preferred good is considered a "greater good" while the other becomes a "lesser good." The choice, which is partly irrational insofar as it is inadequately responsive to some principle of practical thinking, is rationalized by reappraising the value of the good one has rejected or whose appeal one has partly ignored.

Although the fair treatment of persons is itself a question within morality, one can understand the preceding explanation by analogy with fairness and unfairness. The principles of practical reason which are in play during deliberation are like the appeals for consideration made by a number of different persons. When one is confronted with many different and incompatible requests, one cannot satisfy all of them. One must choose. An upright person will be impartial in making this choice. One appeal will not be preferred and another set aside out of motives which have nothing to do with the content of the various appeals. If one were to do this, one would have to ignore or even deny part of the intrinsic force of the appeal one rejected. After making such a choice, one could not continue to regard all of the persons involved as equal. One would have to pretend the person one treated unfairly was of less worth, thus to justify the unfair treatment. In making immoral choices, we deal in such a way with the various basic human goods and the principles of practical reason which represent them in deliberation.

This explanation makes clear why the standard of morality can be said to be "right reason" about action and can be formulated: "One ought to be reasonable." Even the immoral person in making wrong choices proceeds with human awareness; one cannot violate conscience without reasoning to form it and rationalizing to violate it. But a morally upright person is reasonable in a way that an immoral person is not. The morally upright person follows reason consistently. The immoral person must curb reason and turn it from its proper path to the service of arbitrary self-limitation--willful and exclusivistic choice. Thus "right reason" does not refer exclusively to the reason of a person who is already morally good. It refers as well to the uninhibited reason which directs a child who has never made a choice to his or her first, morally good choice.

70 L. The first principle of morality and various concepts of immorality

The correctness of what has been said about the first principle of morality can be confirmed by considering its relationship to several conceptions of immorality. When people try to explain immorality, they often urge that it involves a kind of self-mutilation, that it is a form of unreasonableness in action, that it is a violation (at least incipient) of community, and that it is sin--that is, alienation from God.

First, self-mutilation. When we are confronted with a choice, each possibility expresses something in us reaching out for realization. In any choice, something inevitably goes unrealized. But in case one chooses a possibility which is not compatible with integral human fulfillment, some aspect of the self is suppressed and denied. It is told in effect not only that it is not going to be satisfied here and now, but that it is in principle not entitled to the satisfaction of a part of the self sharing in the dignity of the whole. When one chooses thus, part of one's personality is alienated--is cut off and left to die.

Second, unreasonableness in action. This point has been explained at length in the preceding section. If one chooses a possibility which is not compatible with integral human fulfillment, one deafens oneself to an appeal to which no one can possibly be deaf, because it comes from within oneself. It is necessary to deny the reality of that of which one is perhaps all too aware--since it is part of oneself. To put the point abstractly: In choosing immorally, one treats as non-good (or as less good than it seemed) what is not chosen, but what is not chosen had a chance to be chosen only because one recognized in it the good it offered. Here there is a kind of inconsistency which is not logical contradiction, but which is unreasonableness in action. (It is as if a teacher changed the grading system in order to pass favorite students and to fail certain others.)

Third, violation of community. When one chooses a possibility which is not compatible with integral human fulfillment, one in effect makes a statement not only about the value inherent in the alternatives for oneself but about one's determination as to what value they are to have in themselves. If, then, someone confronted with similar alternatives makes a different choice, it follows that he or she has chosen wrongly. Presumably an individual who chooses wrongly is either stupid or immoral. Thus when one makes an immoral choice one inherently creates conflict between oneself and others who make different (morally right or wrong) choices. One who chooses rightly, because he or she maintains a constant will toward integral human fulfillment, is also able to acknowledge the reasonableness and decency of others who make other choices consistent with the same basic moral standard. Morally upright people appreciate the value of diversity; they rejoice in the richer community it brings about, since this richer community is a better image of the ideal: integral human fulfillment.

Fourth, and finally, rejection of God. Immoral action is considered sinful. A genuinely religious attitude acknowledges that human purposes and possibilities have meaning which transcends the particular significance they have for the individual--meaning related in some way to the goodness of God. However, when one chooses in a way incompatible with integral human fulfillment, one asserts in effect that the good is simply what one chooses, and that "goodness" means no more than what one causes it to mean by one's choices. By contrast, choices which conform to the primary principle of morality--compatibility with integral human fulfillment--leave open the possibility that the meaning of human life is not limited to what persons choose and attain, but derives at least in part from the relationship of humankind to God.

Even without faith one could see that immoral choice denies that goods not chosen have any higher principle which sustains them even when they are not chosen; morally upright choice, guided by the principle of openness to integral human fulfillment, affirms (at least, in an implicit way) the reality of a more-than-human ground of human possibilities.

M. How does divine revelation deepen and transform morality?

The Old Testament makes clear that divine revelation deepens and transforms the moral insight which is possible to men and women even without faith. It is worth noticing how revelation affects morality in the Old Testament context, for clarity about this matter will help make clear precisely what Christian morality is, since Christian morality presupposes and fulfills the moral transformation begun in the Old Testament.

The first effect of divine revelation is that it draws all human life into the context of the relationship to God. Apart from revelation, harmony with God--with the transcendent "other" grasped in some way by every people--is recognized as one of the basic human goods. It is an important good in the existential domain, closely related to the harmony of persons with one another in human community. However, apart from revelation, religion need not be considered the most basic of the forms of harmony. As I explained in chapter five, section G, the various levels of harmony are interrelated, and one cannot violate one of them without incipiently violating all of them.

Revelation--that is, the revelation recorded in the Old Testament--makes clear that the relationship with God has primacy. If it is pursued in a consistent and dedicated way, every other human good will be served. If harmony with God is not put in first place, then nothing in human life will go well. This point is stated explicitly and clearly in the deuteronomist's summary of the law and demand for love of God above all (cf. Dt 6.1-9).

The second effect of divine revelation upon human morality is that it makes clear that God is personal and that He chooses to behave toward humankind not only in conformity with sound human standards of morality but in a way which goes beyond the fulfillment of the demands of these standards. The primary characteristics displayed by God throughout the Old Testament are loving-kindness and faithfulness. Yahweh is a God of mercy and truth. The religious relationship into which Israel is drawn by Yahweh transforms human morality by making God's People share in some way in His more than human qualities: "'Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy'" (Lv 19.2). The remainder of the chapter which opens with this injunction shows the practical import of the character of Yahweh for the morality of Israel.

The third effect of divine revelation is that it deepens the moral insights available to humankind even without faith. The richness of almost all of the basic human goods is unfolded in many ways as human possibilities are opened up. The dignity of human persons, the sanctity of life, the pricelessness of wisdom, and so on are shown ever more clearly in the Old Testament as all of the implications of the teaching that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God are unfolded (cf. Gn 1.26-27; 9.6; Ps 8.5-6; Wis 7.13-8.8; Sir 15.11-20).

Finally, divine revelation provides a fresh standpoint from which all conventional morality can be criticized. The criticism is accomplished only gradually in the Old Testament, and is pressed farthest by the prophets, who even call into question the pervasive pessimism about the possibility of a profound improvement in the whole human condition (cf. Is 65.17-25). The accepted moral standards of no society, not even those of Israel, are beyond question. God judges all the ways of humankind and finds them wanting.

N. How are the commandments of love related to the first principle of morality?

In the Gospels, Jesus is reported to have been asked by a friendly scribe which is the first commandment (cf. Mk 12.28-34), or by a hostile Pharisee which is the great commandment (cf. Mt 22.34-40), or by a minimalist lawyer what one must do to gain eternal life (cf. Lk 10.25-29). To the question, Jesus replied by citing the familiar injunction to love God, which the pious Jew recited (and still recites) in daily prayer (cf. Dt 6.5), and by adding to it a command to love one's neighbor, which also belongs to the Old Testament (cf. Lv 19.18).

The superiority of love to every ritual act is asserted and commended by Jesus in one account (cf. Mk 12.33-34); in another, Jesus is reported to assert that the whole law (the Old Law) and the prophets as well are based on these two commandments (cf. Mt 22.40). All of the accounts make clear that the commandments to love God and neighbor are so closely linked by Jesus that they can be taken as a single, complex norm. Insofar as they express the foundation for the whole law and prophets, they must be considered a formulation in religious terms of the first principle of morality.

In the context of the covenant, faith is acceptance of and commitment to the covenant relationship, hope is confidence that God will carry out His part of the covenant faithfully and fulfill all of His promises, and love is the genuine and effective readiness to carry out one's own part in the covenant. Thus, the demand of love is not a demand for sentiment; it is the demand to keep the commandments, to do the will of God. There is no special and separate act of loving God; love is a disposition to the goods shared in the covenant community with God, including both His honor (by exclusive worship of Him) and the well-being of the community (which is ensured partly by human effort and respect for the goods protected by the commandments regarding one's neighbor and partly by divine care and intervention).

In the Old Testament, under the impetus of the belief that Yahweh is the God of all creation and so of all nations and peoples, the love of neighbor tended to expand beyond any set boundaries. By the parable of the Good Samaritan, appended to one version of the account of the question about the first commandment (cf. Lk 10.30-37), Jesus teaches that the neighbor is one who is prepared to do good to others, and implies that the commandment of love enjoins an unrestricted concern with human fulfillment.

In view of what I explained in section M, above, about the manner in which divine revelation in the Old Testament deepens and transforms morality, it seems clear that the commandments of love stated in the passages cited are equivalent to the first principle of morality specified by the primacy of the religious relationship in the actual covenant established by God. These passages do not seem to me to go beyond the insights of the Old Testament. In chapter eighteen, I shall begin to explain how specifically Christian love does transcend and fulfill the love which summarizes the law and the prophets.

It is worth noticing a point which one must always bear in mind. In both the Old Testament and the Gospel, the claims which love makes upon human persons always presuppose the merciful and faithful love of God for sinful men and women. God loves first; He offers the covenant. This fact creates a new situation for human moral life. The new situation is what transforms the principle, Prefer possibilities compatible with integral human fulfillment, into the commandments of love of God and neighbor. For all human hope of fulfillment depends upon God's mercy and faithfulness, and the human contribution to this fulfillment is to do good--or, at least, to avoid harm--to one's human fellows. Out of the respect one bears them as fellow creatures and at least potential servants of God, all men and women become one's neighbors--ultimately, brothers and sisters in the family of the same heavenly Father.

O. Some misunderstandings of the commandment of love

Sometimes it is argued that since love by its very nature is selective, universal love is impossible. Love of neighbor is thus thought to be limited to concern about particular persons whose needs come to one's attention and claim one's sympathy.

The selectiveness of love is a property of emotional love. The love which is commanded is a disposition to fulfill and exceed the demands of morality toward others. One cannot be emotionally involved with everyone. One can try to be fair and generous to everyone, although it is morally difficult to fulfill the universal demand consistently--for example, with respect to enemies. The universality of the requirement of love does not preclude concern about particular persons whose needs come to one's attention and elicit one's sympathy. Usually it is reasonable to respond to such claims, since one is in a position to help. Of course, love as a moral requirement excludes partiality based on sympathy just as it excludes selfishness in one's own interest.

Many proponents of the so-called "new morality" have opposed the love commandments to specific moral norms and have invoked the text of the gospels as a premise in their argument for consequentialism. However, in the context of the Law and the Gospel, the commandments of love by no means suggest that one might rightly override specific moral norms to pursue what intuitive sympathies might lead one to identify as a greater good or lesser evil in particular cases. Indeed, virtually the same question about the way to heaven which introduces the commandment of love in one context (cf. Lk 10.25) in another context (cf. Mt 19.16) introduces the discussion of voluntary poverty which presupposes the keeping of the commandments.

In general, misunderstandings of the commandment of love are generated by misunderstandings of human love. Human love is more a disposition to goods which fulfill than it is a focusing upon persons. The command to love one's neighbor realistically assumes that selfishness skews love in one's own direction, and redirects it toward integral human fulfillment. The command to love God likewise assumes that one might by immorality arbitrarily limit oneself in a way which would interfere with one's friendship with God, who loves all human goods. Together, the two commands form one demand that one choose what is compatible with integral human fulfillment in the context of the covenant established and maintained by God's mercy and faithfulness.

How Jesus further deepens and transforms this conception of love is the subject of chapter eighteen.

Note to chapter seventeen

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1. 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. In this article I examine and criticize alternative interpretations of this text, which have been dominant in Catholic moral theology.