

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: NORMATIVE PRINCIPLES AND SPECIFIC MORAL NORMS--PART I

A. Introduction

5 The modes of responsibility, the human virtues which correspond to them, and the modes of Christian response which specify these modes and perfect the human virtues are morally normative principles--that is, they shape moral life toward integral human fulfillment. However, these principles are not specific moral norms as, for example, the Ten Commandments are. In this chapter and chapter twenty-three I will discuss a number  
10 of problems of procedure, in order to clarify the methods by which one can move from the normative principles to the clarification and defense of accepted and received specific norms of Christian morality, the criticism of specific normative proposals inconsistent with Christian principles, and the development of Christian norms on new issues.

15 An analogy will help to clarify the present task. One who undertakes a complicated mechanical job needs three things: tools, a general knowledge of how to use the tools, and the actual use of the tools. The preceding two chapters provided tools for Christian moral reflection, and this chapter and the next provide an instruction manual for putting the tools to work. The actual use of the tools will be in subsequent volumes, although the thoughtful student will be able to begin to practice with them by himself  
20 or herself.

25 Most of the topics to be discussed here are treated in some way in the older treatises on moral theology. However, they are almost wholly problems which arise in systematic theological reflection; there is practically nothing in Scripture, Catholic tradition, and the authoritative teaching of the Church to guide one's thinking on these matters. Since the present treatise is most unlike the older treatises of moral theology precisely in its ethical-theoretical method, my explanations here will differ in many ways from those a student might have received in previous instruction. Thus, except where I indicate otherwise, the content of this chapter and the next should be judged on its intrinsic understandability; there is no weight of authority which directly supports  
30 it.

35 However, the preceding two chapters do have the support of authority. They interpret the data of faith, and the interpretation fits the data quite closely. Logically, a hypothesis which fits the facts ought to be accepted. Anyone familiar with the older treatises on moral theology will realize that they never undertook to articulate normative principles by interpreting the data of faith on a comparable scale. Hence, to the extent that the normative principles I have articulated differ from those articulated in the older treatises, the ones articulated here have a better claim than those used in the older treatises upon anyone who accepts the data of faith and wishes to engage in systematic moral-theological reflection in the light of these data.

40 It follows that the instruction manual contained in this chapter and the next one, which is designed for the normative principles I have articulated, has indirect support from the data of faith covered by the theory of chapters twenty and twenty-one. Comparable treatments of similar topics in the older treatises on moral theology do not have the same degree of indirect support from the data of faith. Hence, one who approaches  
45 these issues in the light of Catholic faith, who grasps the plausibility of the theory articulated in chapters twenty and twenty-one, and who understands the relationship between the instruction manual and the tools will have a reasonable ground for accepting and trying to make use of the methodological suggestions I am now going to offer, even when they differ from methods learned in previous instruction.

50 B. Do all the modes of responsibility have normative force in the same way?

The answer is both yes and no. All the modes of responsibility exclude possible nonrational motives for acting. The basis on which they exclude--the source of their  
55 normative thrust--is the first principle of morality which they all specify. This first moral principle is unitary in making the demand that action be consistent with integral human fulfillment. Integral human fulfillment itself is the ultimate principle (under God) of the requirements of human morality. As a human ideal--and also as a future reality for which Christians hope--integral human fulfillment is unitary. Hence, all the  
60 modes of responsibility have normative force in the same way insofar as they derive their thrust from integral human fulfillment and shape human life to such fulfillment.

65 However, the modes of responsibility also differ in their normative force. They exclude somewhat different nonrational motives--for example, the motives of laziness (excluded by the first mode) and of prejudice (excluded by the fifth one) obviously are rather different. One who disregards a mode of responsibility determines himself or herself in a way which does not comport well with all the basic human goods; such a person is more or less unreasonable in not responding fully to all of the principles of practical reason which represent these goods. But there are somewhat different ways in which  
70 the disregard of different modes of responsibility comports badly with the basic human goods. In other words, unreasonable self-determination according to different modes of responsibility disposes one badly toward integral human fulfillment in somewhat different ways. However, the normative thrust of the modes of responsibility precisely consists in their direction to dispose oneself well toward integral human fulfillment. Therefore, the normativity of the different modes of responsibility is different.

75 That the disregard of different modes of responsibility comports badly in different ways with human goods can be seen by considering the modes and the disposition toward the goods in which one determines oneself when one disregards them. (I will illustrate this matter with an example in section C.) A person deterred from acting by emotional inertia lacks adequate commitment to the good, but is not determined against it. A person  
80 pressed by enthusiasm or impatience to act individualistically is committed to the good, but not committed sufficiently to respect the social conditions for integral human fulfillment. A person moved to act out of nonrational desire lacks adequate commitment to the goods to prefer a reasonable commitment to an intelligible good. A person deterred by fear from acting is committed to the good, but not committed sufficiently to

persist in acting for it. A person moved to act or deterred from acting by partiality is committed to the good, but more concerned about who shares in it than that the realization contribute to integral human fulfillment. A person moved to act or deterred from acting by apparent goods or evils is committed to the good, but more concerned about the enjoyment of it than about its full reality. A person who is moved to act destructively out of hostility is committed against the good, and there is no relevant commitment to a human good. A person who is moved to act for an emotionally qualified "greater good" or "lesser evil" is committed against the good, but there also is a commitment to some good. It is obvious that these relationships of unreasonable choices to goods are not all alike--for instance, that a choice which violates the seventh mode of responsibility is inconsistent with a disposition to integral human fulfillment in a way that a choice to violate the first mode of responsibility is not.

All of the modes of responsibility bear upon choices; in choosing, one can violate any of them (and often two or more at the same time). Two of them--the seventh and eighth--bear only upon choices. In chapter nine, sections J through N, I described several types of voluntariness distinct from that in choice itself. The fifth mode of responsibility--impartiality--bears on every type of voluntariness except simple and spontaneous willing. (I do not have a complete analysis of the bearing of the modes of responsibility upon the types of voluntariness, but such an analysis is not necessary. One can use tools without knowing beforehand every possible use of every tool in the kit.)

Even in their bearing upon choices, the different modes of responsibility set different sorts of requirements. Some demand appropriate action, others forbid inappropriate action, and still others both demand appropriate and forbid inappropriate actions. This difference becomes important, as I will explain in section D, when one derives specific norms, because no specific norm which demands an action will hold whenever one could choose that action (unless one builds in a reference to a mode of responsibility--for example, by saying: Always give God the worship which is due to Him) but some specific norms which forbid an action do hold without exception.

Because the normativity of different modes of responsibility is different and because they set different sorts of requirements for choices, specific moral norms are experienced by a sound conscience to have varying degrees of clarity and exigence. No doubt, there is a true moral obligation to help starving children just as there is one not to kill unwanted children. But the second of these obligations cuts more quickly and more cleanly than the first.

#### C. An example to illustrate difference in normative force

To show that modes of responsibility differ in normative force, I offer the following example comparing the guilt of a person who brings about three deaths by acts chosen in disregard of three different modes of responsibility. (One could construct an example comparing all eight modes, but it would be too lengthy and complicated.) In all three cases, there is responsibility for someone's death, which is foreseen as having the same degree of likelihood.

In the first instance, an individual--call him "Titus"--is driving along an expressway before the beginning of the morning rush. Driving in the left of the two lanes, as is his custom, Titus notes in passing a person lying in the middle of the right lane and waving frantically. Titus is too surprised to stop at once, and by the time he does stop he realizes he probably is more than a half-mile beyond the person who needs help. He could walk back or he could proceed to the next exit and drive back on the other side or he could get to the nearest phone to summon emergency help. He decides that the third course is safe and reasonable, and so he sets off for the next exit. But as he drives toward it, the thought occurs that summoning help will be a nuisance and is likely to lead to questions, which will waste more time. He did not come near the person on the road. If he does not summon help, someone else might take care of the situation, although the person on the road is likely to be wiped out soon if no one does anything. Titus is having a hard time making up his mind as the exit looms. He decides not to turn off. The next day he reads in the morning paper about the death on the expressway.

In the second instance, Titus is at work, doing his job as an assistant fire chief directing operations at a large warehouse fire. The fire is threatening to get out of hand, and it would be useful for one man to do an especially hazardous job. Titus cannot do it himself, but there are two men who can. As is his custom, Titus asks them if either will volunteer, but neither will, although both say they will do the job if ordered to do it. Titus recalls the morning when he did not summon help; the chances of the man who does this job are about the same as were the chances of the person on the road. "Decisions, decisions!" Titus thinks, "Who if anyone will I order to do this?" The one more likely to do the job successfully and survive--but more likely only by a slight margin in Titus' judgment--is a man Titus likes. If he were the only person available, Titus thinks he would not order the job to be done. The other is a man Titus does not know as well, but one who somehow gets under his skin. Titus orders this man to do the hazardous job. He does it successfully, but unfortunately does not survive.

In the third instance, Titus has been spending a night drinking with a group of relatives, including his father-in-law, whom Titus detests. The older man is a very unpleasant drunk, is quite strong, and also has a very bad heart. Father-in-law begins to try to pick a fight with Titus, who brushes him aside several times. But eventually Titus begins to think that he will teach the old so-and-so a lesson. Recalling the two previous incidents, Titus is aware that there is about the same likelihood that his father-in-law will not survive the strenuous exertion of a fist fight. However, Titus does not think he will have bad luck three times in a row, and he does relish the thought of pasting the old so-and-so. Finally, he says: "O.K. If you want to fight, come on outside." They fight; the older man is amazingly tough, but Titus gets the better of him. In the morning Titus receives a call; his father-in-law is dead of a heart attack.

In all three instances, the death for which Titus is responsible is a foreseen consequence of a choice Titus makes. In the first instance, his failure to help violates the first and fourth modes of responsibility; in the second instance, his choice of the

fellow he likes less violates the fifth mode of responsibility; in the third instance, his decision to fight violates the seventh mode of responsibility. In all three cases, there are various distractions and pressures; let us assume they even out. In all three there is the same chance of a death, which Titus is willing to take.

5 Intuitively, it seems to me clear that in the first instance Titus is not as guilty as in the second, and in the second he is not as guilty as in the third. In all three cases, Titus makes a choice which does not comport well with the principle of practical reason: Life is a good to be preserved. But in the first instance, Titus just does not care enough about life; in the second instance, he cares, but he cares more  
10 about someone's life than someone else's life; in the third instance, any concern about life is submerged by hostility, so that the destruction of life itself has some interest for him.

Someone might object that in the third instance, as in the first two, Titus does not choose to kill; the death is only a foreseen consequence of the fight. But there is  
15 a difference. Titus chooses to fight, to inflict damage, out of hostility to his father-in-law, whom he wishes to teach a lesson. He knows that the damage could extend as far as death itself, and is willing to accept this (quite unnecessary and rationally unjustifiable) chance. Moreover, once the fight is on, the issue of death is not any longer under anyone's control. In this case, I believe, Titus is choosing to kill. For if one  
20 is willing to harm someone gratuitously, and if one knows the harm might extend to death, then one is willing to kill the person. So in the third instance, Titus is a (moral, although probably not a legal) murderer. In the other two instances, he is not so much set against life as insufficiently concerned about it.

These three instances also can illustrate the point I made at the end of section B  
25 about differences in specific moral norms. If one tries to formulate a norm to exclude the sort of thing Titus did in the first instance, one will find the task quite difficult, if not impossible. Any plausible formulation will become too complex or will have to leave room for exceptions or will have to use expressions such as "reasonably" and "other things being equal" which will make implicit appeal to the modes of responsibility  
30 themselves. For the third instance, perhaps the following will do: "No one should try to teach another person a lesson by beating up on that person with a definite, foreseen risk to that person's life." (The student might try to formulate a suitable norm to cover the second instance.) Obviously, some moral obligations cut more quickly and more cleanly than others.

35 It is worth noticing that most ethical theories do not have the resources to begin to account for the differences in moral guilt any morally sensitive person is likely to think exist between the three instances in which Titus was responsible for someone's death. For a consequentialist, for instance, the only relevant question is what good or bad consequences might have been expected in each case had Titus chosen the alternative.  
40 Since there is no rational way to weigh good and bad consequences, I will not attempt to analyze the alternatives in the three instances from a consequentialist point of view. However, I have constructed the example so that there is little possibility to distinguish the bad consequences of Titus' choices in the three instances. I suspect that even a consequentialist will recognize that in the third instance there is a guilt not found  
45 in the first two. Only in the third instance could one call Titus "malicious" in the full sense.

#### D. How are specific moral norms derived from the modes of responsibility?

50 The example of the preceding section introduces the problem of this one. As I explained in chapter nineteen, sections C-D, the modes of responsibility are specifications of the first principle of morality; they are self-evident principles, and they are presupposed in all moral reasoning. But they do not mention any particular actions or any definite kind of basic human good. How can one derive from modes of responsibility  
55 specific moral norms which can be applied by a judgment of conscience to cases which fall under them?

Let us begin with the conclusion to be reached--namely, a specific moral norm. A specific moral norm is a proposition about a kind of action; the predicate determines the kind normatively as right, wrong, or permissible. Examples of specific moral norms  
60 are: "Keeping promises is right," "Trying to teach someone a lesson by beating him or her with a definite, foreseen risk to life is wrong," "Excluding all meat from one's diet is permissible." With a stock of specific moral norms, people reach judgments of conscience by identifying possibilities about which they are thinking as instances of one or more kinds of action about which they have a moral norm.

65 Since specific moral norms include kinds of action and moral determinants, one obviously needs something common to both of these as the middle term. What is common to both are the basic human goods, since the modes of responsibility refer to them and actions are morally significant insofar as they bear upon them. Thus, specific moral norms are derived by considering the way in which a certain kind of action involves or  
70 bears upon basic human goods, then considering the moral determination which the modes of responsibility indicate for the relationships involved, and deducing the moral determination of that kind of action.

For instance, promise-keeping is a kind of act that bears upon the good of interpersonal harmony. One sets up expectations in others by what one says (in making the  
75 promise) and then fulfills or disappoints these expectations (in keeping or breaking the promise). Creating and satisfying expectations mutually is a very important part of interpersonal harmony, for without it cooperation is virtually impossible. Among the various modes of responsibility, one of them certainly will be relevant to making and keeping promises, namely, the fifth. If one allows one's keeping and breaking of promises  
80 to be determined by one's own convenience, one violates the fifth mode. Keeping promises, once made, on the contrary, will not be dictated by differences in one's feelings toward different persons. Therefore, keeping promises is right; breaking them, wrong.

Beating someone to teach him or her a lesson with a definite risk to life is a kind of act which bears upon the good of life. "To teach a lesson" in the relevant

sense brings this kind of act under the seventh mode of responsibility, for one is acting out of hostility, and risking destruction of a basic human good. Therefore, this kind of act is wrong.

5 Excluding all meat from one's diet certainly is relevant to some of the basic human goods. But does it promote health or damage health? Is it an act of religious abstinence? The description of the act is adequate to specify certain behavior, but it is not sufficient to specify a human act, as "human act" is explained in chapter nine, section G. One needs to know what proposal is being considered; to know this would mean to be clear about the goods at stake. Only then could one say what modes of responsibility  
10 might be relevant and how they would determine the morality of the act. From this example, one can see that "permissible" is not a moral determinant on the same level as "right" and "wrong." To say of a kind of act that acts of that sort are permissible is merely to say that the kind is not specified sufficiently to settle whether such an act would be consistent with integral human fulfillment or not.

15 Of course, as a matter of historical fact, specific moral norms have not been derived by people who had clearly articulated the basic human goods and the modes of responsibility, and who then set about to formulate norms for various kinds of acts. Rather, the principles of practical reasoning and the normative principles were understood by direct insight, but not explicitly formulated. Consideration began from deliberation  
20 about possibilities for choice, and also (perhaps even more) from criticism of actions which in one or other way led to trouble and second thoughts. Reflection often refined previous formulations. (However, in the fallen human condition, criticism also encounters blocks which eventually confine the moral reflection of the vast majority of people within the limits of the conventional morality of their societies.)

25 A specific norm such as, "Keeping promises is right," is true and guides action as long as the action does not bear on goods other than the particular aspect of interpersonal harmony which underlies the practice of making promises and the norm that they should be kept. However, promises and the cooperation they further are concerned with something more than the bond between the parties. In case the keeping of the promise  
30 would affect other goods in ways which can (and perhaps should) be taken into account without partiality, then the act is more specified than simple promise-keeping. A more specific norm is needed, and by it one limits the (comparatively general) norm that keeping promises is right.

A norm like, "Keeping promises is right," can be called "prima facie." Unless  
35 there is something else which is morally relevant to be said, one must keep one's promises. But there can be something else morally relevant to be said. For example, one might make a promise not realizing that one cannot keep it without violating the eighth mode of responsibility. In that case, the promise is not to be kept. Again, if the choice one makes in breaking the promise is such that one can make it and break the promise  
40 with no partiality, then the foundation of promise-keeping's rightness is undercut. (In such a case, very often one can say honestly: The person I promised would not want me to keep this promise.)

Are all specific moral norms only prima facie? No. The norm I formulated for  
45 Titus' third instance expresses a relationship of incompatibility which is present in that sort of act. No further specifications will change this relationship. The same is true of the norm: "Deliberately choosing to kill unwanted children is wrong." In both these cases, the act cannot be done unless one determines oneself incompatibly with human life (and so with integral human fulfillment), so any choice to do the act will be wrong. Norms like these can be called "unexceptionable" to distinguish them from prima  
50 facie norms.

#### E. Further remarks on prima facie and unexceptionable moral norms

The distinction between prima facie and unexceptionable moral norms can be illustrated by analogy with the norms of diet. There are general principles of good diet,  
55 and the dietician applies these to a consideration of various menus. Many specific norms are formulated and most of them are prima facie. For instance, children should have milk--but not if they are allergic to it. Protein is necessary every day, but in certain unusual conditions it must be excluded for a time. However, there are some unexceptionable norms. For instance: A diet of pure strychnine is to be avoided. No matter  
60 what the special problem or condition, this norm will hold good. As the point of eating is health, so the point of acting is integral human fulfillment; as some kinds of diet can never be healthful, so some kinds of action can never be right; therefore, as some norms of dietetics are unexceptionable (although most are prima facie) so some norms of morality are unexceptionable (although most are prima facie).

Not only are specific affirmative norms prima facie, but most specific negative ones are too. For example, it is wrong to drink oneself into a stupor. The norm is based on the third and sixth modes of responsibility, and on the relationship between  
70 such drinking and various human goods it interferes with, beginning with one's true self-integration and one's health. However, one might choose quite reasonably to drink oneself into a stupor--for example, if one needed to have one's leg amputated and there were no other anesthetic available. In this case, one's choice would not fall under the third and sixth modes of responsibility. An analogous case in dietetics would be: Do not consume barium sulphate. Generally excellent advice, but one must make an exception  
75 when one needs an x-ray of one's stomach.

In chapter fourteen, section G, I explained that most moral norms are derivative. In the language I am using now, I should say that all specific moral norms are derivative, in the sense that they are derived from the modes of responsibility. What I meant  
80 by "derivative" in chapter fourteen is what I mean here by "prima facie." As I explained in chapter fourteen, consequentialists argue from the prima facie character of most moral norms to the claim that moral norms in general are subject to exception when there is a "proportionate reason."

Now the true situation should be clearer. Prima facie norms simply are not specified by the basic human goods and the modes of responsibility to such an extent (or in

such a way) that any instance of the kind of act they concern will be morally determined as they state. When instances arise which introduce further specifications, the moral determination can be changed. However, it is not changed by any impossible weighing of good and bad consequences, or by any intuition as to whether there is a "proportionate reason" to set the norm aside. Rather, it is changed by the very same principles: the basic human goods and the modes of responsibility.

Since the manner in which these principles generate specific norms now has been explained, one can see that the prima facie character of most of such norms should not lead one to conclude that all of them are prima facie. The last two modes of responsibility can generate specific norms which are unexceptionable.

Even so, norms derived from the last two modes will not appear to be unexceptionable if the actions which are morally determined are described behaviorally rather than as moral acts. For example, "Killing is wrong," does not express an unexceptionable moral norm if "killing" is taken to mean "behaving in any fashion which brings about someone's death." On this behavioral definition of "killing," Jesus killed Himself, for He did behave in a manner which brought about His death. The unexceptionable moral norms which are generated by the seventh and eighth modes of responsibility must be formulated with respect to the moral act: "Choosing to kill. . ." Jesus did not choose to kill Himself; He freely accepted death as a foreseen consequence of carrying on His mission.

Not only consequentialists but also intuitionists (discussed in chapter fourteen, section H) like to suggest that moral norms never can completely determine one's judgment of conscience. Their argument is that the possibilities about which one deliberates--with which conscience is concerned--always are unique, particular acts, which must be chosen and done in unique, unrepeatable situations. Moral norms, by contrast, no matter how extensively specified, always remain logically universal propositions. Therefore, they conclude, one always must allow that between the universal norm and the concrete case there is room and need for judgment, which might justify in a particular case what is excluded in general. I, of course, reject this conclusion.

Even if it were true that the possibilities about which one deliberates are unique moral acts, the conclusion would not follow. A universal negative proposition, if true, is true in every instance. If a strychnine diet is ruled out by the laws of human physiology, then it is ruled out for every human individual, for there are no human individuals not covered by these general laws (although some martians might not be).

However, the possibilities about which one deliberates are not unique as moral acts. The uniqueness comes from various features which are not morally relevant--for example, from the fact that it is a certain person, who lives in a certain time and place, who has the possibility of killing just this other individual, and who has these unique feelings of repugnance toward the individual. The morally relevant features are not unique--for example, that one person with a deep repugnance for another can kill that other.

The point I am making can be verified by anyone who cares to examine the arguments proposed by people who talk about the need to allow for exceptions in "unique situations." They always offer examples, and these examples lend their argument some plausibility.

But the examples are effective only because of some intelligible features which in principle can occur over and over. For instance, a woman in a concentration camp committed adultery with a guard in order to become pregnant, since pregnancy would gain her release and allow her to return in safety to her family. The action described is a specific kind, potentially repeatable ad infinitum. It is not a unique act in a unique situation. The example normally is proposed with the information that the woman's name was "Bergmeier," that the concentration camp was Russian, that the woman already had three children named "Ilse," "Paul," and "Hans," and so forth. None of this is relevant, nor does it do anything for the rational plausibility of the argument. (The particular details do help stir one's emotion of sympathy.)

What makes the argument plausible is nothing unique, but something specific. This woman was not committing adultery in violation of the third and/or sixth modes of responsibility (which probably usually is the case); one might plausibly argue she is not committing adultery in violation of the fifth mode of responsibility (fairness), since she rightly presumed that her husband would be pleased with her for acting as she did.

Usually adultery does violate fairness; it clearly is wrong to the extent that it does. The question is: In the very specific kind of case exemplified by Mrs. Bergmeier's act, do any of the modes of responsibility exclude what she did? If so, which human good is at stake here?

In chapter sixteen, section L, I explained one text in which St. Thomas follows Aristotle too closely and takes the view that prima facie norms are such because the general norms admit of exception in particular cases.[1] The general theory of St. Thomas, who realizes that morality is concerned with intelligible goods and acts, ought to have prevented this mistake. But he lacked an explicit understanding of the modes of responsibility, and so he was unable to provide an adequate account of the way in which the principles of practical reasoning come to bear on specific kinds of acts, to determine their morality.

#### F. What exactly is the close relationship among the Christian modes of response?

Anyone who compares the common human modes of responsibility with the specifically Christian modes of response will notice that while the distinction of the former among themselves is clear, the distinction of the latter among themselves is less clear. The Christian modes of response include the human modes of responsibility and specify them. Why, then, do the Christian modes of response form so tight a unity that they seem almost to merge together, like the double images which fuse when one adjusts a lens into focus?

Logically, the Christian modes of response remain distinct. From a conceptual point of view, each requires something different from the others. But in fact, all of these modes come to bear upon every act of one's Christian life. What one demands, they



all demand; what one excludes, they all exclude.

The modes of Christian response all express the impact of the same divine love upon human life. They all are fulfilled in the same redemptive act of Jesus. This redemptive act is an ingenious way of living in the fallen world, doing good, and managing not to violate any of the human modes of responsibility in the process. As things really are, there is no other way of living a good human life in this fallen world.

Hence, the modes of Christian response merge--like so many images of human goodness coming into focus in this one man, Jesus. In all of their distinctness, the human modes of responsibility point us to this single model of human goodness, for in Him alone are they all fulfilled. All the human modes of responsibility, after all, do nothing but preserve openness to integral human fulfillment. The earthly life of Jesus is the beginning of such fulfillment and the plan for other men and women to follow in contributing to it.

The human modes of responsibility are logically negative. They tell one how to avoid being an immoral person. They do not specify how to be a good person. Hence, they provide no solution to the problem of how to be a good person in this fallen world. The redemptive act which is central to the human, morally responsible life of Jesus provides a solution. His living out of this act demonstrates by example that it is a formula for human fulfillment in this fallen world. Moreover, the act remains as a social act in which we are invited to join, as I explained in chapter twelve.

The modes of Christian response embody the Christian virtues, and the core of any moral virtue is the relevant, good commitment which constitutes one's personal, moral identity. Hence, the modes of Christian response revolve around the notion of personal vocation.

One must be predisposed to one's vocation by humility, must accept it with dedication and resignation, must detach oneself from what would hold one back from it, must remain faithful in it despite obstacles, must carry it out for the redemption of others, must strive for perfection in it, must overcome evil by doing good through it, and must undergo evil in perfecting it as a gift of oneself to God on behalf of one's enemies.

One's every act in life should fit into one's personal vocation; therefore, one's every act will be shaped by all these modes of Christian response. At the vital center of oneself, where one's heart conforms to the sacred heart of Jesus in a single act of redemptive commitment, one's whole life, no matter how great its complexity, will come down to doing always and only one thing. Particular deeds will only be ways in which one creatively carries out this single, central act.

Nevertheless, the modes of Christian response, since they remain conceptually distinct, provide distinct principles for reflection. One can proceed from each of them to formulate norms, just as one can generate specific norms from each of the common, human modes of responsibility.

Various approaches in moral and spiritual formation have emphasized one or another of the modes of Christian response. There is nothing wrong with such an emphasis, provided that the true model of Christian life--the character of Jesus--is not distorted. Whether one begins by emphasizing humility or mercy, detachment or conciliation, one will rejoin all of the other aspects, since all the dispositions of Christian life are rooted in the same, central redemptive act.

Of course, a form of spirituality will run into trouble if it is nourished by personal idiosyncracies or by ideology drawn from extra-Gospel sources. In such a case, humility, for example, sometimes has been mistaken for a sort of servility which is alien to Christian dignity; again, mercy sometimes has been reduced to a secular humanistic beneficence, ready to use violence to liberate the oppressed.

#### G. How are Christian norms related to common human norms?

I have dealt with questions about the relationship between Christian morality and common human morality in chapter seventeen, section M, chapter eighteen, section G, and chapter nineteen, section I. In chapters twenty and twenty-one, this relationship was clarified by the detailed explanations of the ways in which modes of responsibility are deepened and transformed into the modes of Christian response. Now the question concerns this same relationship, but at the level of specific norms.

As I have explained previously, the relationship is one of specification. The modes of Christian response do not add something extrinsic to the common human modes of responsibility; rather, they specify a way of fulfilling them. A Christian understanding of human goods does not add new goods to the list which would make independent demands; rather, a Christian understanding of human goods clarifies the richness of human possibilities. This is so especially in the sphere of the good of religion, for faith teaches a great deal about God and about how humankind can and should act in its relationship with Him. Although a Christian understanding of the world and of human powers does not remove one from this world or provide one with a different set of capacities, it does provide insight into the state of the world and of humankind, and so makes clear what kinds of actions are possible and compatible with integral human fulfillment.

Hence, at the level of specific norms, the Christian thinks about kinds of action which one who is not a Christian does not even think about. And the Christian can specify further the already specific norms of common human morality. For example, it is a norm of common human morality that it is right to be faithful to one's spouse. Christian morality further specifies this norm, for it makes clear that for Christians marriage necessarily is a vocational commitment, that Christ is a party to this relationship, and therefore that the fourth mode of Christian response applies to marital fidelity. The result is that in a relationship of Christian marriage, one must willingly endure everything necessary to maintain faithfulness. (If Mrs. Bergmeier were a Christian, it seems clear to me, her adultery would clearly have been excluded, even if it is not excluded by the norms of common marital morality.)

As I explained in sections D-E, above, prima facie norms when further specified sometimes lead to a different moral determination of a kind of act considered more specifically--for example, promise breaking can be right when the human goods and modes of

responsibility have normative implications in addition to those they have when one considers only the good and mode of responsibility involved in promise keeping as such. Christian norms further specify the specific norms of common human morality. Does this further specification sometimes generate a Christian norm with a moral determination opposite to that of the norm of common human morality? The answer is affirmative. Different cases must be distinguished.

First, if the norm of common morality is unexceptionable, any further Christian specification of it cannot alter this fact. If it could, Christian morality would be inhuman. Of course, one must keep in mind that an unexceptionable moral norm must determine the morality of a kind of action morally described, not of a kind of action behaviorally described.

Blasphemy, for example, is wrong; understanding "blasphemy" as the choice to demean what one believes to be divine, the common norm of morality already is unexceptionable. The more specific Christian norm of morality cannot change this moral determination, although the norm is more specific insofar as God and humankind's relation to Him is better understood. However, in a culture which is not Christian, certain patterns of behavior will be counted "blasphemy" which in the light of Christian beliefs about the facts of God, humankind, and their relation really are not such. For example, the Jews considered blasphemy what Jesus did not (cf. Jn 10.36; Mt 26.65). Therefore, what is considered blasphemy by the standards of conventional morality can be obligatory for a Christian, even though the specifically Christian norm on this matter cannot change the negative moral determination of the norm of common morality.

Second, a prima facie norm of common morality which approves or enjoins a kind of action easily is reversed by the Christian specification. For example, common morality enjoins that family members compose differences in religious practice in a way which is likely to promote the family's solidarity. The norm is prima facie, but I think sound at its level of specification, since apart from revelation religion is not superior to essential social solidarity, and the good of religion in general does not generate any specific requirement of exclusive worship in one form. Christian revelation, however, is divisive (cf. Lk 12.52), for it puts the claims of Christ above those of family solidarity, it demands that any form of religious practice incompatible with the Gospel be avoided, and it even demands a profession of faith when failure to make such a profession would be equivalent to denial by silence. Thus, the specifically Christian norm about religious differences and family solidarity sometimes requires what the prima facie norm of common morality correctly excludes. Similarly, claiming one's fair share of any good which is being divided is permissible according to a prima facie norm of common morality, but according to a prima facie norm of Christian morality claiming one's own fair share is wrong. (I will have more to say about this point in chapter twenty-three, when I consider the Christian way of dealing with rights.)

Third, a prima facie norm of common morality according to which a kind of action is wrong also can be specified in Christian morality in a way which reverses the determination. For example, according to a prima facie norm of common morality, divorce is wrong, for although marriage is not in itself sacramental and absolutely indissoluble, the relationship is morally unbreakable in virtue of the interests of others (and especially of children) in it. However, according to a more specific norm of Christian morality--the so-called "Pauline privilege" (cf. 1 Cor 7.15)--a Christian can accept as definitive the refusal of a nonbelieving partner to live in the context of a marriage compatible with the carrying out of the duties of Christian life. (Thus Christian norms specify the common requirements of marital faithfulness in two ways, seemingly opposite, but both understandable if one bears in mind the distinction between marriage as such and specifically Christian marriage.)

#### H. An additional note on specifically Christian norms

In section E, above, I explained that human action is morally determined only according to its intelligible aspects. For this reason, there are no moral problems about unique cases. A sufficiently specified norm will precisely fit the possibility about which one is deliberating and concerning which one needs to make a judgment of conscience. People who think they are making exceptions to general moral rules to adapt them to particular cases really are further specifying prima facie norms. (Of course, when one does not know what one is doing, one is likely to do it badly. So the specifications made by such people often amount to no more than allowing a nonrational motive such as sympathy to override a reasonably formed judgment of conscience. Such exceptions become precedents, which are soon erected into norms, and in this way new false norms of conventional morality develop.)

Someone might raise a very plausible objection. If moral norms always are about kinds of action (and so are logically universal propositions, although more or less specified), how can specifically Christian norms make reference to one's personal vocation, which is a share in the redemptive act of Jesus? Here is determination to something unique. Does not Christian morality in this way really go beyond the boundaries of reason and become personal in a sense that no other human morality is? In other words, is it really true that Christian morality specifies common moral requirements? Or does it not add something concrete which understanding cannot grasp? Is this not the point at which each Christian is personally led by the Spirit through the murkiness of the concrete which reason never penetrates?

The answer to this objection is that Christian life does center upon Jesus, who is a unique individual, yet Christian morality does not go beyond the intelligible--that is, what is intelligible in the light of faith--into the murkiness of the concrete.

The modes of Christian response already proceed from the level of normative principles to that of norms, although they are very general norms. This is so because the modes of Christian response are determined by factual considerations about the human condition and the real possibility of realizing integral human fulfillment by making human action into a cooperation in the work of God.

God and integral human fulfillment are both unique entities, not classes with many

members. However, neither is a particular thing, a singular item. When normative principles or specific norms make reference to them, the reference is based upon something intelligible--for example, the intelligibility of the good of religion and the reasonability of acting in a way consistent with integral human fulfillment. So references such as these to what is unique do not go outside the domain of the intelligible. Of course, faith adds to rational knowledge, and so the factual considerations which transform the modes of responsibility into modes of Christian response go beyond reason in the sense that they are contributed by the light of faith. But they do not go beyond reason by adding something concrete and purely intuitive. The truth about God and the human condition which Christian faith teaches is intelligible in the light of faith.

But it will be objected that when the modes of Christian response make reference to the redemptive act, the reference is to a particular act by a particular individual, namely, Jesus of Nazareth. Christian religion is not simply a question of living in a certain kind of way; it is a matter of living with and in Jesus, of sharing His life and death and resurrection, of cooperating in living toward His ultimate fulfillment. All this is true and very important. But it does not mean that Christian morality goes beyond the intelligible in the sense suggested by the original argument.

As I explained in chapter eleven, Jesus Himself had to understand what He was humanly doing in order to commit Himself to it. He understood the human condition and the divinely offered solution to it. He knew Himself to have an opportunity to live a good human life in the sinful world, and in doing so to constitute a new human community in friendship with God. This opportunity was in fact unique, because Jesus alone is a man who (being the only Son of the Father) is in perfect communion with God. But as a commitment He had to make, His redemptive act was an intelligible possibility whose moral determinant--its rightness--followed from its perfect consistency with integral human fulfillment.

In the light of faith, Christians also understand the rightness of what Jesus does. Moreover, the determination of one's personal vocation is a consequence of applying normative principles to the intelligible possibilities. The possibilities are limited by one's factual situation, but the rightness of one's commitments is not determined by nonintelligible factors.

If the situation were as the original objection suggests, the Christian could not explain to the nonbeliever why it is reasonable to become a Christian. Nor could the Christian make sense of his or her own life. However, such accounts can be given. Normative principles are invoked and applied to the facts, which both generate and limit possibilities. Nonbelievers come to see the reasonableness of being a Christian when they become convinced that the facts about Christ (made present in Christian lives according to the Gospel) show that in communion with Him they can find perfect friendship with God and integral human fulfillment. Similarly, Christians make sense of their lives by understanding what they are doing (always, of course, in the light of faith) in terms of the very intelligible factors which made sense for Jesus of His own life. For this reason, each Christian really can share humanly and in a morally responsible way in what Jesus does.

Of course, one's communion with Jesus does go beyond what understanding can grasp even in the light of faith. One's communion with Him is not only cooperation in human action. It also is sharing in His divine fullness and being joined with Him in bodily solidarity. Both of these are immensely important in the total personal relationship Christians have with Jesus--and with one another. In the obscurity of divine love and creaturely materiality the reality of Christian life is completed in ways which no moral norm can affect.

However, precisely for this reason, these other dimensions of Christian life do not add something concrete to Christian moral requirements. Communion in the Spirit and in the sacramental Flesh leave Christian moral life in its own order. When human action is transcended, so are moral requirements; but when human action is in question, Christian moral norms (which always remain intelligible in the light of faith) never are transcended.

#### I. Are all specifically Christian norms supererogatory?

An act is called "supererogatory" if it is done above and beyond the call of duty. Similarly, a norm can be called "supererogatory" if it commends a kind of act as good without specifying that the omission of such an act would be wrong. In the Catholic tradition, certain norms have been considered supererogatory in this sense--namely, those called "counsels of perfection," which are fulfilled in a special way by the vows distinctive of the religious life. I will discuss the counsels in section J. The present question is whether all specifically Christian norms share in the general character of the counsels--that is, constitute an ideal which is not in itself obligatory.

There are at least two reasons why it might be thought that all specific norms of Christian life are supererogatory.

First, in specifying the norms of common morality, the Christian norms propose a higher ideal of life. Those who lack faith are unaware of this ideal, and so they cannot fulfill it. Still, with the help of God's grace such persons can make good use of freedom and live morally upright lives, although not specifically Christian lives. Hence, the Christian ideal seems to be beyond what is morally obligatory.

Second, in Catholic tradition, apart from matters which pertain to express divine precepts and the law of the Church, the norms which have been insisted upon are those which pertain to natural law, such as the Ten Commandments. For this very reason, the older treatises in moral theology left everything specifically Christian to ascetical and spiritual theology, and concentrated attention on the moral minimum without which one cannot be a good person--for example, the norms of justice and of sexual morality which could be derived even without the light of faith. Now, if specifically Christian norms also were obligatory, it seems that moral theology would have treated them, rather than left them to treatises on the life of perfection. Therefore, it seems that all specifically Christian norms are supererogatory.



However, the specifically Christian norms follow from the Christian modes of response, and these are nothing other than the implications and requirements of human life lived in accordance with the love of God and in union with the redemptive act of Jesus, as the explanations of chapters twenty and twenty-one showed. But life in accord with charity and the redemptive act is not optional for Christians (cf. Lk 10.25-29; Mt 25.31-46; 1 Jn 3.16-17). Indeed, every Christian is bound to pursue holiness, which primarily consists in perfect charity (cf. LG 42). Moreover, being a Christian is not optional for human beings, since Christian faith is the truth which every person is obliged to seek, to embrace when it is found, and to live when it is accepted (cf. DH 1). Therefore, specifically Christian moral norms are not supererogatory.

The understanding of this matter requires a distinction between what is supererogatory absolutely--that is, for one who is fully informed about the human condition and his or her own possibilities and responsibilities--and what is supererogatory subjectively in comparison with an individual's blamelessly limited and inadequate understanding of the human condition and his or her own possibilities and responsibilities in it. Absolutely, specifically Christian moral norms are not supererogatory, although many of them are only prima facie. Subjectively, however, specifically Christian moral norms are supererogatory in comparison with the limited and inadequate understanding of moral responsibility which can be present blamelessly both in nonbelievers and in Christians, although in different ways.

As has been explained throughout this part, specifically Christian moral norms are not an imposition added to human moral responsibilities, but are an expression of the normative implications of human moral possibility in the human condition as it now is, namely, fallen but redeemed and called to fulfillment in Christ. As things are, the requirements of human moral uprightness as such can be fulfilled adequately only by life in Christ. Therefore, absolutely speaking, it is the moral duty of every man and woman to live a fully Christian life.

The living of such a life, as has been shown in chapters twenty and twenty-one, includes the modes of Christian response, by which the specifically Christian norms are generated. Therefore, absolutely speaking, specifically Christian norms are not supererogatory. The Gospel does not propose an optional ideal, but an obligatory standard. This conclusion is confirmed by very many indications in the New Testament itself that only those who live up to its specific norms can hope to enter the kingdom of heaven (in the Sermon on the Mount alone, for example, cf. Mt 5.3-10, 20, 22, 30, 32, 37, 48; 6.2, 5, 15, 24; 7.1, 13, 21, 23, 26-27).

Subjectively, however, those who blamelessly lack faith in general do not perceive specifically Christian moral norms as obligatory. (In some cases nonbelievers do perceive them, since these norms can be understood as necessary in the light of that understanding of the human condition and its possibilities which can be gained with God's grace even without explicit knowledge of the Gospel--for example, by a person such as Socrates or the Buddha, and also by persons living in post-Christian cultures where certain aspects of Christian morality continue to be widely respected as ideals.) Since nonbelievers do not recognize these norms as obligatory, if they perceive Christian norms at all, these are considered to be supererogatory.

For believers, also, the obligation to live the Christian life is limited by blameless limitations in their understanding of its responsibilities. Such limitations occur not only in the case of children and persons who are inadequately instructed, but also in a greater or less degree in the life of every Christian. The reason for this limitation is that the modes of Christian response are affirmative, and so they become binding upon conscience only when an individual can recognize a possibility before choice as an instance of a kind of act which a specifically Christian norm enjoins.

The capacity for such recognition, in turn, depends upon two factors. First, one must be living one's life as a Christian vocation and must be conscious of doing so. There is an obligation so to live, as St. Paul says: "Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3.17). However, this obligation can be fulfilled only gradually as one lives one's Christian life, since the forming of one's self by commitments and the integration of oneself with living faith continues throughout life. Second, one will not recognize possible courses of action as instances of kinds of acts enjoined by Christian norms if one innocently limits prima facie Christian norms by other genuine (although not yet Christianly specified) norms which one considers to be controlling. As I will explain in chapter twenty-four, such limitation is inevitable in the life of a Christian who has not reached perfection.

Hence, even for Christians, a more or less extensive part of the whole body of specifically Christian norms is subjectively supererogatory. Because this situation depends upon conditions which are not blameworthy and which cannot be removed by general instruction, but rather and only by individual moral and spiritual development, the Church has taught about sin and mortal sin in her general moral instruction only in the case of the common, minimal moral responsibilities of every Christian. Yet the specifically Christian moral norms never have been neglected, since they have been proposed constantly by the reading of the New Testament in the liturgy, and also by personalized modes of instruction which have permitted individuals to grow simultaneously in their understanding of the responsibilities of Christian life and in their fulfillment of these responsibilities.

#### 75 J. Is anything in Christian life supererogatory?

If specific Christian moral norms are obligatory, not supererogatory (absolutely speaking), there remains the question whether there are any acts which are supererogatory for Christians. It might be argued that there are none. For the Christian is called to perfection. It seems to follow that if any act is conducive to perfection, it becomes obligatory; if it is not, then it is excluded as inappropriate. But if this is so, there are no acts which a Christian can undertake voluntarily which would be good--and, indeed, better than the acts required by specific Christian moral norms.

Some have argued along these lines and also have suggested that the view that there

can be something supererogatory for a Christian is based on legalism. The point of the suggestion is that "duty" has been defined narrowly by what can be required of everyone by general precepts. In this context, it is argued, obligations incumbent upon individuals but not upon everyone have been regarded as supererogatory, although they are not. The conclusion is drawn that nothing is absolutely speaking supererogatory for a Christian.

However, this conclusion is not acceptable. The Catholic Church has taught constantly that virginity or celibacy dedicated to God, poverty, and obedience are recommended as counsels of perfection; that life in accord with these counsels is a special, divine gift; and that those who commit themselves to life in accord with these counsels by vows or similar promises act with a freedom and generosity which exceeds duty (cf. LG 42-44; PC 1, 12-14). There is a foundation in Scripture for this position, since St. Paul clearly favors Christians remaining unmarried, but in no case insists upon this as a definite obligation (cf. 1 Cor 7.1, 7, 8, 26, 28, 32-35, 38, 40).

In terms of the account of Christian norms I have provided, one can understand why the counsels are not obligatory norms. The obligatory norms follow from modes of Christian response, and so nothing can be an obligatory norm which cannot be reduced to these modes. Life according to the counsels clearly cannot be obligatory for all Christians; therefore, it could be normative only through that which specifies the modes of Christian response to the diverse conditions of Christians. But these are specified only by reference to one's personal vocation and its implications. The question with which the counsels are concerned, however, precisely is one which very profoundly affects the whole of one's personal vocation. One must answer this question before one can make many other commitments. Hence, this question cannot be normatively settled for any Christian in such a way that a commitment to life according to the counsels would be a Christian obligation--that is, that in itself it would be objectively wrong to choose not to make this commitment.

If this analysis is correct, in what sense can one say that life according to the counsels is better for those who have the gift for it? In chapter twelve, section H, I explained certain respects in which Vatican II teaches the religious state of life to be special--namely, its clearer representation of the already-realized character of the heavenly community and its closer conformity to the earthly life of Jesus. But neither of these respects shows that the religious life is morally superior for those who have a gift for it, since these respects do not touch upon the quality of the commitment itself.

What does touch on the quality of the commitment itself is that life according to the counsels in a special way fosters charity (cf. LG 42). Herein lies its moral superiority as a framework for personal vocation. But the question remains: If life according to the counsels truly fosters charity in a special way, how can it be the case that the choice of such a life is supererogatory, rather than strictly obligatory, at least for those capable of this commitment?

The answer to this question which St. Thomas provides seems to me to be correct. According to St. Thomas, the counsels are only counsels, not precepts, because they are concerned with means to perfection, not with perfection itself. Everyone is called to complete integration of self with divine love, and so the precept of charity is obligatory, as I explained in chapter eighteen, section L. But the counsels are only one way of fulfilling this precept. Therefore, they are not obligatory. Yet, for those who can accept them, they are an easier and more apt way than a personal vocation outside their framework. Therefore, the counsels are indicative of a better way, and a commitment to fulfill them is supererogatory.[2]

The argument stated at the beginning of this section which concluded that every possibility before a Christian either is obligatory or forbidden is fallacious. A Christian who is making a fundamental commitment of personal vocation often faces alternatives both (or all) of which are conducive to perfection; therefore, the obligation is to make a commitment to one or another of these possibilities, not to make a commitment to the possibility which seems easier and more apt.

#### K. Further subtleties on this matter

I am sure that someone will object that if one really wants the end, one will take the easier and more apt way to it if one can. And so a person who can commit himself or herself to a personal vocation within the framework of the counsels but fails to do so shows that he or she really does not want the end. But the end is holiness, the core of which is charity. Thus such a person does not really want to love God above all things. Yet this is required by precept. So such a person violates a precept.

If this argument were sound, no progress would have been made. But the argument is not sound. It is based upon a confusion between one's personal sanctity and divine goodness itself. Divine goodness itself is the primary and proper object of charity; the whole of Christian life is directed to this goodness in itself and in all its participations. Personal sanctity is the integration of one's whole mind and heart and soul and strength with charity. Charity is purely a divine gift; in itself, as I explained in chapter eighteen, section L, it is not a human act; and in no way is charity a human achievement. But holiness does consist (in part) in human acts and it is a human achievement (given by God's grace).

If one loves God with charity, one will desire and strive for holiness--this is the sixth mode of Christian response, expressed in the beatitude concerning the pure of heart, who know their imperfection and constantly strive to repair their lives and prepare to see God. Nevertheless, one's own holiness is not the be-all and end-all of Christian life. It is one human good among others, although the most vital of all from a Christian point of view. No other good may rightly be preferred to it or even chosen without regard to it. Still, other goods can and must be loved. There is no holy Christian life which is not a life with other human content, whether that content is working and praying like a monk or is working and praying and doing many other things like a married person with a family.

What the sixth mode of Christian response demands is that the whole of a Christian's

life become the carrying out of living faith. The less complicated one's life is, the easier this demand is fulfilled. However, one who undertakes a more complicated life out of love of the human goods it promises does not violate the precept of charity provided that these goods themselves are loved uprightly, that is, for their intelligible goodness and their potential contribution to fulfillment in Christ, the work of redemption, and so on.

Some light can be thrown on the counsels by a passage in which Paul generalizes and holds that every new Christian ought to stay in the condition in which he or she is at the time of conversion--the married are to stay so, the single so, the slaves so, the uncircumcised so (cf. 1 Cor 7.17-24). The vital thing is to make the most of one's condition, not to be in this or that state of life. With little time before one leaves this world, one does well to simplify, not complicate, the job one must do.

If one is sufficiently uncommitted to be able to consider the framework of the counsels as a possible basis for one's personal vocation, one is in a position such that commitment to the counsels will follow Paul's advice, whereas commitment to a personal vocation in a different framework will not. A young person who chooses the religious life keeps the comparative simplicity of childhood and avoids most of the complexity of adult, secular life. For like the life of a child, the life of a religious is celibate (and so unburdened with the responsibilities and distractions of spouse and family), is without personal property (and so unburdened with the responsibilities and temptations of ownership), and is without individual autonomy (and so unburdened with the responsibilities and temptations of setting and striving for one's own goals in life).

At this point, someone is likely to object that if life according to the counsels really is an easier way to live a Christian life, then it is not morally superior. One would do better to accept the greater burdens of a more complex life, thus to contribute their goods to fulfillment in Christ, and to worry less about one's personal sanctity.

This objection is plausible but it is fallacious. It presupposes that the choice of what is harder is better, and it takes for granted that the easier way to lead a fully Christian life is an easier life in merely human terms. Neither assumption is correct. To work out one's salvation within the framework of the counsels is not easy by human standards. It is especially difficult at the outset, whereas other forms of Christian life are easy at the beginning and become harder as they unfold.

More important, the more difficult is not necessarily morally superior. The fulfilling of the law of Christ is both better and easier than the fulfilling of the law of Moses (cf. Mt 11.28; Rom 7.1-6; Gal 4.21-5.6). Christian morality presupposes a ranking of human goods in the light of faith. In this light, holiness is incomparably superior to all the rest. For this reason, to simplify one's life as much as possible in order to expedite growth in holiness is morally superior, by Christian standards. Even if by all standards this life were very easy for some individuals, it still would remain excellent for them.

Furthermore, in formulating one's personal vocational commitment, one surely ought to be very much concerned that the goods to which one commits oneself will make a contribution to the fulfillment of all things in Christ. However, one cannot treat this ultimate end as if it were a human project to which one could rationally direct one's acts in each specific choice. Only God knows what human acts are needed to complete His divine plan. If a person who chooses today to be a religious does not contribute certain of these goods, God surely knows how to give someone else the gift of contributing them.

In chapter twelve, section G, I described the process by which one reaches a judgment of conscience concerning his or her personal vocation. When one undertakes and carries out this process, one's understanding of the worth of the possibilities is greatly illuminated by the counsels of perfection. However, precisely because they are counsels, not specific moral norms of Christian life, they do not determine one's judgment.

As an individual reflects, he or she is likely to be distracted by the question: Can I live my life according to the counsels? This question is likely to seem important, because Jesus said (with respect to celibacy or virginity): "Let him accept this teaching who can" (Mt 19.12), and this saying often is taken to mean that if one has the ability to fulfill the counsels, they are obligatory, and so one must judge one's ability in this matter.

Actually, however, ability in this matter cannot be ascertained in any direct way, because one is concerned with one's future development and with God's grace. Therefore, one ought not to read the saying as if it expressed a condition which, if fulfilled, makes the counsels into precepts.

Instead, one ought simply to appraise the possibilities in the way I described in chapter twelve, section G, without undue worry about one's ability to do (with God's grace) whatever He wills. When a single possibility remains as an appealing life for oneself, one knows by this very fact both that this life is one's vocation and that one can (with God's grace) live up to every responsibility it entails.

At this point, one has a judgment of conscience which is obligatory; an individual would sin who reached this judgment and refused to act on it. But the judgment is determined by the norm, "One ought to commit oneself to whatever one discerns to be one's personal vocation." It is not determined, although it might have been assisted by, the counsels of perfection. (It is worth noting that the Church never has taught that those who deliberately refuse to make a commitment to what they believe to be their personal vocation sin mortally by this act of refusal. Nevertheless, such a refusal surely would not be an act of little significance for one's Christian life as a whole.)

#### L. What is the basis of one's moral obligation to fulfill divine precepts?

Most of the norms which we know by divine revelation God wishes us to fulfill can be seen (more or less clearly) to flow from the principles of practical reason and the normative principles of morality (that is, from the basic human goods together with the modes of responsibility) when these are understood in the light of faith. The basis of the moral obligation to fulfill these norms can be said to be God's will, but it also

can be said to be integral human fulfillment, which God wishes us to will. In other words, here there is a possibility of reducing the obligation directly to the principles of morality which are proper to us as human persons.

5 However, there are certain norms which we know by divine revelation God wishes us to fulfill, but which we cannot reduce to the sources of goodness proper to us. For example, we are to participate in the liturgy, which includes administering and receiving the various sacraments; we also are to preserve and live within and hand on the constitution of the Church, which includes its hierarchical order; moreover, we are to carry on and extend the redemptive work of Jesus to all nations and peoples. Had these norms  
10 not been specifically given us in revelation, then even with all the rest of what God revealed in Christ we never should have been able to derive them. These are the norms which sometimes are called "divine positive law."<sup>[3]</sup> What is the basis of our moral obligation to fulfill these norms?

15 It will not do to reject this question by saying that one obviously ought to do whatever God expressly tells one to do. That divinely given norms are to be obeyed is itself a specific moral norm. What is needed is an account of the foundation of this norm in the human goods and modes of responsibility.

The first point to note in answer to this question is that the good of religion--harmony with God--is itself one of the basic human goods. Once God reveals Himself as  
20 personal and expresses His wishes, there is some moral basis for responding to them in the simple fact that interpersonal harmony and the development of a relationship always depends upon compliance with the other person's wishes. Moreover, it is a standard part of human experience that people cannot develop any relationship very far unless there is willingness to comply with wishes which are not at once (and in the human sphere, perhaps  
25 never will be) intelligible.

The next point is that there are reasonable grounds for accepting the divine proposal of an intimate personal relationship. The proposed covenant is offered only after a showing that the relationship will really be conducive to human fulfillment. Thus there is adequate ground for a morally responsible act of faith, as I explained in chapter  
30 thirteen, section E.

When one makes an act of faith, one accepts a relationship, part of the content of which is the set of divine precepts called "divine positive law." To make an act of faith is to accept God's love, to agree to share His life and activity. The share He assigns at this moment is one's own human life, lived in a way which one can see in Jesus  
35 to be humanly fulfilling. As to the content of one's life, God specifies very little which one cannot see (in the light of faith) to be necessary for integral human fulfillment--only the norms concerning the sacraments, and the life and work of the Church.

One notices that the fulfillment of these norms does not infringe upon any human good. We are not asked to offer human sacrifice, to tell lies, or anything of that sort.  
40 Therefore, the precepts of divine, positive law ought to be obeyed both because God wants us to, and because we are in a relationship with God such that it is quite reasonable to do as He wishes. Precisely the point of doing as He wishes remains to be seen, but we have every reason to believe that there is a point and that we will fully understand it in due time. Meanwhile, even now, if we take into account all that we know by faith concerning the redemptive act of Jesus and our role in it, we can see that the precepts of  
45 divine, positive law which we must obey as Catholics seem fitting; obedience to them does seem to contribute in some ways to the completion of the work of the redemption in our own lives and in humankind at large.

Compared with the situation of God's people in the Old Testament, we Christians  
50 are asked to do very little which we cannot see (in the light of faith) to be necessary for our own fulfillment in and with Christ. The old law was full of detailed requirements and yet not altogether effective as a help to friendship with God, and so it was very burdensome; the law of Christ is less burdensome, and by the power of the Spirit it is effective, for with the new hearts He gives us we can and will to fulfill it (cf. Gal  
55 4.21-5.6; Rom 7.1-6; Mt 11.28). The Jews were treated by God with loving care, but only as trusted servants; we are treated as friends and members of God's own family (cf. Rom 8.14-17; Jn 14.15-16, 15.15-15).<sup>[4]</sup>

#### 60 M. Will the present theology square perfectly with received Catholic teaching?

In chapters twenty and twenty-one I articulated normative principles for Christian moral-theological reflection. The principles are based upon the data of revelation, but as an interpretation they go beyond the data. In the present chapter I have indicated  
65 how these normative principles are related to specific norms (although several particularly difficult and important aspects of this relationship are still to be considered in chapter twenty-three). The Catholic conscience, however, is bound by the Church's moral teaching, not by the outcome of theological reflection, as I explained at length in part four, especially chapter fourteen, section O, and chapter sixteen, section I. The perceptive student will wonder to what extent the system I have articulated is likely to  
70 yield normative conclusions in line with the Church's moral teaching on matters such as sexual activity, social justice, and so forth.

In general, there is likely to be agreement but not perfect identity between the normative conclusions one will reach by systematic reflection from the principles articulated here and the specific norms proposed by the Church.

75 There is likely to be agreement, because the principles articulated here are not the result of autonomous philosophical reflection; I have tried to understand the Gospel, not simply to impose on it my preconceived ideas. (Although I engaged in philosophical reflection on moral questions for twenty years before undertaking the present theological work, my philosophical reflection also was conducted in the light of faith.) Likewise,  
80 the Church's moral teaching is very closely based upon divine revelation, for it either is drawn directly from revelation or has been developed by the reflection of twenty centuries of Christians (and more centuries of faithful Jews), who were striving with God's grace to live their lives in the light of faith.

There also is not likely to be perfect identity between the normative conclusions

one will reach by systematic reflection and the specific norms received in the Church. To a great extent, the nonidentity will not be discrepancy; there will be a difference but no conflict. The systematic treatment provides a means for dealing with every possible question about individual and social morality; the Church's teaching is limited to some actual questions which have seemed important to Christians up to the present. Thus the normative implications of the system will extend immeasurably beyond the boundaries of received teaching, without conflicting with it.

To some extent, however, there are going to be inconsistencies, and for two quite different reasons. First, no theological system is perfect. I am certain that errors will be found in the system I have articulated, and that some of these errors will lead to false normative conclusions. In case there appears to be an inconsistency between the implications of the system I have articulated, on the one hand, and, on the other, received Catholic moral teaching, it is clear that anyone would be prudent to assume the error is mine. Any theologian or group of theologians is far more likely to be wrong about any question than are bishops and popes speaking officially, as history amply demonstrates.

Still, the teaching of the Church is one thing, and teaching received in the Church is another, as I explained in chapter fifteen, section L. Not all received teaching has been proposed infallibly, and teaching which has not been proposed infallibly might possibly require refinement and correction in its details. I have explained the possibility of legitimate development in the moral domain in chapter sixteen, section S. One purpose of theological reflection is to assist such legitimate development. As I explained in chapter twenty-one, section N, I believe such development is possible and appropriate with respect to capital punishment and (in a slightly different way) war.[5]

As I explained in chapter fifteen, section N, dissent from a moral norm proposed authoritatively, although not infallibly, within the Church cannot be justified unless one can appeal to a superior theological source. Insofar as the normative principles for moral-theological reflection which I have outlined are an interpretation of the data of revelation contained in Scripture, they provide some basis for justifying careful and respectful dissent from some moral teachings received in the Church. No consequentialist theologian has offered any such basis for the dissenting views based upon that approach.

Finally, students who try to experiment with the normative principles I propose by seeing whether they can develop from them arguments in defense of received moral teachings--for example, the unexceptionable condemnation of fornication--will discover that it is not always easy to carry such an attempt through to a successful conclusion. In part, the difficulty is that the system is complex and subtle; one needs a good deal of insight and ingenuity to work with it. In part, however, the difficulty probably is that the system is incomplete. Very likely there are more or tighter normative principles than those which I have been able to articulate, and some of these additional principles could be required to defend certain points of the Church's moral teaching which surely are infallibly proposed.[6]

#### Notes to chapter twenty-two

1. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 94, art. 4.
2. Ibid., qu. 108, art. 4; 2-2, qu. 184, art. 3; qu. 186, art. 7.
3. See ibid., 1-2, qu. 108, art. 2, where St. Thomas limits the positive precepts of the law of Christ to those pertaining to the sacraments. One might argue that the other matters I mention pertain to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and orders. Or one might say that St. Thomas is thinking only about the precepts which are fulfilled by individuals in their private capacities, and not mentioning those which direct the life of the Church as a whole.
4. See ibid., qu. 107, art. 4, and in general qu. 98-108.
5. No doubt the mass of detailed social teaching of the last hundred years contains some points which require correction, although the common and constant principles of this body of teaching very likely is proposed infallibly by the ordinary magisterium.
6. I do not think there is any doubt at all that the unexceptionable norm prohibiting fornication has been proposed infallibly; it is explicit in Scripture and firmly proposed as unconditionally binding through the whole Catholic tradition (and the whole common, Jewish and Christian tradition up to the last century or so). But I find it hard to show why fornication is always wrong. Part of the difficulty might be that from a moral point of view, there are different kinds of fornication, although behaviorally there is only one. Sometimes the moral act is mutual masturbation, but at other times the moral act is lack of faithfulness--the marital good is chosen, but there is fear of permanent commitment to marriage.