CHAPTER 3: RENEWAL IN MORAL THEOLOGY AND THIS BOOK

A. Limitations of modern Catholic theology in general

In many respects the state of Catholic theology up to Vatican Council II was determined by the situation of the Church in the counterreformation shaped by the Council of Trent.[1] By 1700 several factors affected Catholic theology as a whole, and therefore moral theology in particular. I first indicate these factors and their general effects; then I indicate their specific impact on moral theology.

In the first place, the approach of St. Thomas Aquinas and the approaches of other Catholic theologians--some excellent and some less good--became institutionalized as rivaling schools of the various religious orders and universities. Much of the effort of Catholic theologians thus was spent in intramural debates which became more and more remote from the witnesses of faith and from the primary tasks of theology.

In the second place, Catholic theologians were forced to devote tremendous efforts to controversies with Protestants. These controversies were not always fruitless, but they led to an unbalanced emphasis on fundamental theology and on certain doctrines at the expense of a more integral systematic theology. Moreover, the use of witnesses of faith in controversy did not make for a wide and deep knowledge of the biblical and other materials taken as integral wholes.

In the third place, Catholic theologians were compelled to simplify and organize their theological heritage to make it available for the formation of priests in the seminary programs prescribed by the Council of Trent. In carrying out this task, they could not ignore the fact that pastoral work would be done in a world in which Christians were locked in doctrinal oppositions and Christian faith was under criticism by nonbelievers. These needs did not make for the flourishing of contemplative systematic theology; they tended rather to encourage emphasis on points of obvious practical importance and to discourage careful consideration of points which no one was challenging.

A fourth and very important factor in the situation in which Catholic theologians undertook their work in modern times--a factor already described in chapter two, section C--was the residue of the philosophical and theological approach called "nominalism" in the rationalism which was the modern offspring of nominalism. A nominalistic outlook is especially unsuited to systematic contemplative and moral theology; it comports less badly with work in fundamental theology. The various aspects of the situations of controversy already mentioned thus led to an increasing emphasis upon proving conclusions in theology--that is, to establishing the certainty of the Church's beliefs by the authority of the witnesses to faith. On matters not disputed outside the Catholic Church, it seemed sufficient to construct a proof which rested solely upon the authority of the clear, constant, and very firm teaching of the Church.

B. Limitations of modern moral theology

Cut off from dogma and yet subject to all the limitations of the rationalistic method, Catholic moral theology sought and found in criminal law a model for its own organization and formulation. The central task of moral theology became to give a clear and very detailed statement of the precepts which a Catholic should obey, especially those precepts binding under pain of mortal sin, where one's eternal salvation is at stake. Moral theologians ceased to engage in dialectic. They adopted the legal methods of careful definition, description, and classification. Their intellectual effort was not so much faith seeking understanding as it was legal competence seeking to guide behavior into a more precise performance of the duties of Christian life.

Since Christian moral norms were generally accepted by all decent people--believers and nonbelievers alike--until the nineteenth century, the moral theologians did very little to try to establish these norms apart from showing that they are requirements of the Church. Because of their use of legal methods, Catholic theologians did almost nothing to explain Christian moral norms by showing their intrinsic relationships to the fundamental dogmatic truths centered in the reality and the work of the Lord Jesus. As a consequence, Catholic moral theology became increasingly detached from sacred Scripture and from other witnesses of the faith of the Church--in particular, from the rich and integrated writings of the early Fathers of the Church.

The application of this moral system was conducted on the analogy of law; indeed, moral teaching and the Church's own positive legislation (canon law) were not only related, as they should be, but at times thoroughly confused. The individual was expected to look at the system of moral-legal precepts to learn what was forbidden and what was permitted. The concrete judgment of the forbidden and permitted was the work of conscience, which was aided and informed on legal points by the confessor. The seminarian studied moral theology primarily and at times almost exclusively as preparation for this lawyer-like, quasi-judicial role.

Cases in which the existing code provided no clear direction or seemed to provide conflicting guidance were referred by individual confessors to moral theologians, who thus functioned like appellate courts. The range of licit theological opinions was limited by the magisterium, ultimately by the supreme magisterium of the Holy See. Thus the Holy See came to be viewed in the moral domain less as an exponent of Christian truth and of the possibilities of the Christian vocation than as a supreme tribunal setting outer limits upon the liberty of the faithful.

In cases in which the magisterium of the Church set no definite limit, individuals and confessors often were perplexed by a multitude of diverse theological opinions. It became an urgent question to determine how one in doubt about what the law requires should select an opinion to follow. In the latter part of the seventeenth century different systems were proposed.

On one view, called "laxism," one might consistently adopt the most permissive and least well-grounded theological opinions; in 1679 the Holy See rejected this approach (cf. DS 2101-2167/1151-1216). In 1680 two widely supported approaches were allowed to stand, without definite insistence of the Holy See on either (cf. DS 2175-2177/1219).

According to one of these, called "probabilism," a solidly probable permissive theological opinion could be followed in practice; according to the other, called "probabiliorism," only a permissive opinion more likely than the restrictive alternative to be true might safely be followed.[2] Another system, called "rigorism," held that the strictest theological opinion was the only safe one to follow; in 1690 the Holy See rejected this view (cf. DS 2302/1293).

It is important to keep in mind the conditions under which probabilism and probabiliorism were approved. The moral theologians were regarded as if they were appellate courts, and their opinions as if they were legal decisions. No moral opinion had the slightest ground at all if it conflicted with a clear decision made by the supreme authority--the Holy See.

This view of moral teaching and this role for the moral theologian did not exist before the impact of rationalism. In St. Thomas, for example, one finds a much less legalistic conception of moral judgment, and conscience plays a far less important role than does the practical wisdom of the spiritual person whose mind and heart are conformed to the mind and heart of the Lord Jesus.[3]

Catholic moral theologians who developed the modern, legalistic approach naturally produced treatises on moral principles which reflect the limitations of the works which these treatises introduce. Jesus Christ ought to be the center of Christian life; He seldom was mentioned in these treatises. Heaven was considered mainly to make clear that nothing else will make one happy and that its loss is the penalty for persistent violators of the moral law. Human acts were treated only in those aspects required for legalistic distinctions. Acts were thought of much more as pieces of behavior than as self-determined aspects of the person acting. The treatises on law and conscience were central and very extensive. Prayer and the sacraments were studied as matters subject to regulation, not as principles of Christian living.

C. The soundness and dynamism of the Church

The preceding exposition and criticism of the moral theology which developed under the influence of rationalism must not be taken as an unqualified condemnation of it. This moral theology did not exist in a vacuum, but in the Catholic Church which always manages to provide her children with opportunities for full life in Christ. In many ways, provisions were made outside moral theology for what is important and was excluded from it.

Moreover, obedience and absolute faithfulness to the Church is essential for the Christian life of Catholics who believe that God's revelation lives and is expressed in the Church's teaching. And it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of avoiding mortal sin; if it is avoided, the love of God alive in one's heart by the gift of the Spirit will develop with its own inherent dynamism. The Holy Spirit always could provide the reasons which rationalistic moral theology had forgotten.

Nevertheless, by the middle of the nineteenth century the condition of Catholic theology was widely recognized to be unsatisfactory. Leo XIII encouraged a renewal in the study of Scripture and in other areas of positive theology; he also urged a return to the Christian philosophy of St. Thomas. Before Vatican II, much progress in all areas had been made, especially during the pontificate of Pius XII.[4] This work made possible the accomplishment and the vision of Vatican II.

There were many efforts to improve moral theology during the period of progress initiated by Pope Leo. Some of these efforts were essentially critical, but others included important constructive ideas. Most of the constructive ideas point in a common direction, a direction Vatican II prescribes and the present work attempts to take.[5]

D. Present opportunities which call for renewal

The need for renewal in Catholic moral theology is not only indicated by the limitations of the older moral theology. Substantial opportunities for ecumenism and evangelization also call for renewal in Catholic moral life and in the moral teaching which guides it.

Almost from the beginning, Christian moral thought has been impeded by an unresolved, underlying tension between the supernatural and the natural, between the sacred and the secular. Before Christianity, neither Jews nor pagans sharply distinguished these domains. The Gospel introduces a new and sharp distinction: Birth as a human person is distinguished from rebirth as a child of God, flesh is distinguished from Spirit, the things of Caesar are distinguished from the things of God.

In the Christian thought of the middle ages, this essential distinction--which in itself clearly is divinely revealed--tended to develop into a separation and even into an opposition between nature and grace. Catholic thought resisted this tendency in many ways--for example, by the doctrine and practice of the sacraments, which unite earthly to heavenly things. Also, the Catholic ideal of society was not one of separation and opposition between Church and state. Still, a strong tendency persisted to regard the pursuit of human goods in this world as an activity in itself pointless. St. Augustine and many others located the point of Christian life more or less exclusively in the vision of God after death.[6] On this view, the realization of human goods is of little importance in itself; it becomes significant only in cases in which one's eternal destiny is at stake.

St. Thomas attempts to integrate the natural and the supernatural aspects of Christian life. A leading maxim in his thought is that grace perfects or completes nature and does not nullify it.[7] Thus he firmly denies any opposition between the two, but he maintains their distinction and asserts their real relationship. Unfortunately, he is not able to clarify this relationship beyond a certain point; he leaves many unresolved difficulties as to how the fulfillment of human persons as such is related to their vocation to share in divine life.[8]

The residual tension between the natural and the supernatural becomes particularly acute when one considers things by means of the nominalist theological perspective,

which developed after the time of St. Thomas, for this perspective emphasizes certainty and sharply separates reason from faith. Certainty about human nature based on experience makes clear that human life is deeply marked by sin; faith offers assurance of salvation, but this certainty seems to be incompatible with experience. For many minds in the late middle ages, the tension between nature and grace degenerated into irresolvable opposition.

The renaissance and the reformation were--or at least became--opposite ways of cutting through this opposition. The humanist option of the renaissance, although initially not against Christian faith, developed into an ideal of humankind "uncontaminated" by grace, and ultimately into the secular humanism of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, which rejected the supernatural in favor of human nature and rejected faith in favor of autonomous human reason. The Christian option of the reformation, although initially not opposed to humanism, developed into an ideal of New Testament Christianity "uncontaminated" by human elements, and ultimately into various forms of fideistic supernaturalism. These rejected corrupt human nature in favor of an altogether passively received grace; they also rejected the use of human reason in matters of ultimate significance in favor of the autonomous faith of the individual soul before God.

Secular humanism can reject altogether humankind's calling to share in divine fellowship. Fideistic supernaturalism cannot reject altogether humankind's natural condition and duties. The latter fact elicited an effort to isolate the secular from the sacred and to insulate the two domains from each other as completely as possible. The result was increasing irrelevance of religion to the rest of human life. Catholic Christianity never accepted in principle the option of fideistic supernaturalism, but in practice even Catholics were deeply affected by this movement. Much popular teaching and preaching expressed hostility toward this world and its human goods and emphasized almost exclusively saving one's soul.

I stated at the beginning of this section that today the Church is confronted with substantial opportunities for ecumenism and evangelization. The reason for this is that history is making clear that the forced option between human fulfillment and intimacy with God, between flesh and Spirit, between reason and faith--which led to the dichotomy between secular humanism and fideistic supernaturalism--is a highly unsatisfactory option, no matter which alternative is chosen.

On the one hand, few Christians today actually hold the negative views of human nature and the powers of reason and free choice which generated the doctrines Trent was compelled to condemn. Moreover, Christians today can see clearly the result of allowing the world to go its way without the illumination of faith; few who are serious are satisfied with a disincarnate Christianity which isolates faith in the individual relationship of the soul before God. Rationalistic philosophy no longer shapes Protestant theology, and most Protestant theologians who believe in divine revelation realize the difficulty of sustaining the claim that it is enshrined in the Bible, to be found there by individuals without a community whose faith somehow transcends and sustains the individual's faith.

On the other hand, secular humanism is in deep trouble (cf. GS 21). In all its varieties, individual and society are set against one another. The memory of Christian hope haunts post-christian men, women, and societies; they wish to be more than merely human. Contemporary humankind yearns for perfect liberty and perfect justice, the liberty of the children of God in the fellowship of the divine family--but without God. As a result, societies invent grandiose schemes to try to implement this hope; in so doing, they become totalitarian, attack fundamental values of the person such as life itself, and increasingly incur upon individual liberty and privacy. Individuals experience the lack of a humane society, and so they suffer from identity crises--a sense of meaninglessness, boredom, alienation, and loneliness.

Post-christian humankind cannot find its way back to the naivete of paganism in which religion helped men, women, and societies to live tolerable lives in this broken world, where finite persons not only must face their finitude but also their personal guilt and the inevitability of their own death. Having driven out religion altogether in rejecting Christian faith, secular humanism condemns nonbelieving persons either to face reality and to live lives which are intolerable, or to evade reality by never adequate means, such as thin veils of individual escapism and rationalization or smothering blankets of social control and ideology. The option of post-christian humankind for secular humanism has been a choice of death. Individuals and societies kill their unborn to solve their problems; to defend their ideologies, societies and individuals concur in their readiness to kill and be killed in all-out war.

E. Integral Christian humanism as the Catholic ideal

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church never has accepted as necessary the forced option between secular humanism and fideistic supernaturalism. Reason and faith are not exclusive alternatives, as Vatican I definitively teaches (DS 3015-3020/1795-1800). Christ is both human and divine; therefore, Christian love of God must include love of human life and eternal life (cf. GS 22). A life conformed to that of the Lord Jesus must be conformed to His whole reality; such a life must be fully and perfectly human and also through and through divine. A Christian need not set aside anything of his or her human life to make room for divine life, and need not aim at a life of less than the highest holiness to live a fully human life (cf. LG 39-41; GS 1, 11, 21, 22, 34; AA 7). The illusion of inevitable conflict arises from two factors.

First, sin. Sin diminishes human nature and makes it seem incompatible with one's sharing in divine nature (cf. GS 37). The remedy is to make humanity whole, and Catholic faith teaches that men and women who accept the gifts of the Spirit can gradually overcome sin and grow in holiness in this life (cf. GS 38). By the redemptive work of Christ, God preserved the Virgin Mary from all sin; by the same redemptive work, He calls every human person to holiness (cf. LG 48 and 59-65). A good human life in which much effort must be spent in overcoming sin is concretely different from what a good human life would be if there were no sin to overcome. But a human life spent in

overcoming sin is devoted to the good fruits of human nature and effort; like the life of Jesus, such a life is not less but more fully and perfectly human than a human life lived in the illusion that there is no sin or in the false belief that sin is humanly insurmountable even by those who live in Christ.

Second, the illusion of inevitable conflict between the divine and human aspects of Christian life arises because of the mistake described in chapter one, section E, of supposing that the expressions used about God in the language of faith can have the same meaning these expressions would have in other contexts. If one makes this mistake, the divine and human aspects of Christian life are imagined to be on the same level. Then not only sin but even human good itself would have to diminish in order that grace might abound. The Catholic Church teaches the opposite: The call to intimacy with God who reveals Himself in a definitive way in the man, Jesus, is also a call to protect and promote the flourishing of human persons and societies in the goods which enrich human nature as such (cf. GS 34-35).

For precisely this reason, the Catholic Church has insisted--especially during the last century--upon moral teaching which belongs both to natural and to Gospel law. The social teaching of the Church insists upon principles demanded both by human fairness and by Christian mercy. The Church's teaching on other subjects, such as marital morality, equally insists upon principles demanded both by the nature of human persons and their acts and by the eternal destiny to which each human person is called (cf. GS 51).

F. The renewal for which Vatican II calls

In its decree on Priestly Formation, Vatican II deals with the need for renewal of the studies which make up a seminary program. The Council teaches that theology should be taught "under the light of faith and with the guidance of the Church's teaching authority"--that is, the magisterium. Students should learn to draw Catholic doctrine from divine revelation, to understand this doctrine deeply, to nourish their own spiritual lives with it, and to be able to teach it to the faithful and to proclaim it to the world. Special training in sacred Scripture is fundamental.

Dogmatic theology should begin from Scripture, and then examine the tradition of doctrine, its history and development. Speculation under the guidance of St. Thomas will help students to understand the mysteries of faith. The Council gives directions about method:

> Students should learn too how these mysteries are interconnected, and be taught to recognize their presence and activity in liturgical actions and in the whole life of the Church. Let them learn to search for solutions to human problems with the light of revelation, to apply eternal truths to the changing conditions of human affairs, and to communicate such truths in a manner suited to contemporary man.
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> Other theological disciplines should also be renewed by livelier contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition should be thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility [celsitudinem] of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world (OT 16, notes omitted).

The studies of canon law, Church history, and the liturgy also are to be renewed in the light of the teaching of the Council.

The Council builds a bridge between dogmatic and moral theology by saying that even in the former students should learn to bring eternal truths to bear upon the human condition, and learn to communicate the results in a pastorally effective way. Moral theology, for its part, is to be tied closely to the central mysteries of faith, especially to the mystery of Christ, and provided with enrichment from sacred Scripture. The Council demands a treatment of Christian moral principles which will make clear how the Christian style of life is an essential part of the Christian worldview.

The Council also makes a special point of calling for renewal in moral theology. This discipline especially needs work, but the work should not proceed as if there were no Christian moral tradition. What is called for is development. Two things are to be emphasized equally (and here the Council's point is explained by what I said in sections D and E): the heavenly character of the vocation of Christians and their obligation to contribute to the world's life.

In providing guidance for the implementation of this decree of Vatican II, the Holy See has stressed that moral theology must include the dynamic aspect of Christian life. In other words, it is not enough to indicate what is expected of a Christian; moral theology also must consider the way Christians can do what is expected. The unfolding of individual vocation and the principles for fully developing the image of God which is perfectly realized in Jesus Christ are included in the concern of moral theology (cf. CCE 100).

The Holy See has recognized that at present any systematic work in theology involves serious difficulty. Still, the ideal of "unity and synthesis, although it seems difficult, should interest both professors and students." It is vital for the fruitfulness of theological studies. It includes: synthesis of doctrines, of levels of theology (positive and systematic), and of disciplines and spiritual formation with the preparation for pastoral work and priestly life as a whole (cf. CCE 69-70).

Holy Mother Church has realized that in a state of dyssnythesis--of separation from one another--the principles of Christian morality cannot be as fruitful as they should be in shaping Christian life. Hence, she prescribes a virtually impossible synthetic work. Yet there can be no doubt about the need for this work.

There has been and continues to be much excellent spiritual writing focusing upon the central mysteries of faith. But the faithful remain puzzled about how to put this wealth of insight to work in their lives. If guidance toward holiness cannot be followed fruitfully in daily life, it seems mere esoteric piety, which eventually is ignored. Again, renewal in the liturgy has made clear that it somehow should be the center of Christian life, yet for many Sunday Mass and daily life remain as unrelated to each other as ever. Then there is the moral teaching of the Church, especially the

specific prohibitions. This teaching clearly does have some pragmatic meaning--indeed, all too much! But is an attempt to live up to what the Church teaches really essential to Christian life? Is it not sufficient to believe and to love--to love somehow?

The state of dyssynthesis is deadly and it must be overcome. It is necessary to satisfy the legitimate demand that the pragmatic meaning, the cash value, of fundamental doctrines be made clear--of course, a spiritual cash value to be made clear in the light of faith, but still a real value for human persons and communities. It is necessary to show how personal and liturgical prayer, and the whole spiritual and sacramental life, really work and get the job of Christian life done. And it is necessary to show how the moral teaching of the Church is more than an accumulation of barnacles picked up by the barque of Peter in its journey through history.

G. The plan of this book and its moral point of view

This book is being written in an effort to fulfill the prescription of Vatican II for renewal in moral theology. No one is competent to carry out the synthetic work the Council prescribes. My intention is to make a beginning. I hope that others will complete more adequately what I here badly begin. If the Lord means to build, one who makes a rough sketch does not sketch in vain. Because the task is so worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

Moral theology studies the truth God has revealed in the Lord Jesus insofar as this truth can shape the lives of those who believe. Moral theology is not so much distinguished from other studies by the realities it examines as by the special approach it takes: the practical approach of persons who believe in Jesus and who wish to live in harmony with the only real world there is--the world seen in the light of faith.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the center of Christian moral life. This work centers on Him. In Him God is establishing permanent fellowship with created persons. The present world is the place where this fellowship is being built up; the present time is when the history of salvation is being made. As the authors of the books of Scripture helped God to reveal Himself, so all who live the Christian life help our Lord Jesus to make the history of salvation.

One who helps to write a story must know the climax to which it is leading. So Christians must know the outcome projected by God's plan. Therefore, in part two of this book, Completion in Christ and Human Fulfillment, I shall treat this outcome: the gathering together of all things into Christ (cf. Eph 1.9-10) in whom the fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form (cf. Col 2.9), so that absolute fullness is His (cf. Col 1.19-20). In the accomplishment of God's plan, divine and human persons will dwell in perfect fellowship. Human actions and the goods in which we are fulfilled by these actions will not be left behind; through Christ these goods will be perfected by being returned to the Father. At the same time, the divine Persons will give most perfectly the love which is their communion and very being to those human persons who love Them.

This completion, the climax of the history of salvation, is not in all respects a future state. Present Christian life in this world is a pilgrimage, a journey toward the divine homeland. Yet that homeland is not so much a reality distant in space and time as it is a reality present but too real to appear and be experienced in space and time. Thus Christians who by their actions help our Lord make the history of salvation even now make lasting contributions to the completion of God's plan in Christ. As the word of God will never pass away, so the works of His children will last forever.

One who helps to write a story should know what already has happened; so Christians should know where they are in the history of salvation, at what point they are called upon to take up the work of our Lord. By the sin of one person at its beginning, sin and death entered the history of humankind; by the obedience of another man, Jesus, the history of disaster was transformed into the history of salvation (cf. Rm 5.12-19). These crucial human acts are free choices, and all the acts of Christian life are significant because they are connected with these history-making choices. For this reason, in the third part, Christ's Redemptive Act and Christian Life, I not only will treat original sin and the redemptive act of Jesus, but also freedom and human acts. The living of the Christian life will be seen as following Jesus, as cooperation with Him in doing the will and the work of God.

One who helps to write a story must know how to join with others in executing the common plan; so Christians must know how to cooperate with one another in their common effort to help our Lord write the history of salvation. They know how to do this by faith, shared and handed on in the Church. In the fourth part, The Church of Christ as Moral Teacher, I shall treat the Church as our mother who constantly forms and nourishes us within the new covenant, the new unity of divine and human life which is centered in Jesus Christ, the God-man. Many of the topics already mentioned in the introductory chapters will be considered once more in part four, but from a slightly different point of view: the point of view of Christian life, shaped by the Church's teaching into the personal response due to divine revelation from one who accepts in faith God's effort to communicate Himself to us.

One who helps to write a story must understand the main character, not only superficially but in depth; so Christians must know the character of our Lord Jesus and understand how His contribution to the history of salvation expresses His human heart. In part five, Forming a Christlike Character, I shall consider our Lord as the model of Christians. He is a model not impersonal and of alien kind, but alive and of our own kind. By His Spirit He works within us like a genetic code which generates new life true to type. The character of Jesus is that of a good man; we also must see what manner of good man He is inasmuch as His life is redemptive. The heart of Jesus is the "pledge of all that man is called to be."[9] Part four will conclude with a consideration of the realism of undertaking to fulfill this pledge--to live in communion with Christ--and with a consideration of various kinds of norms which help one to fulfill it.

One who writes a story must understand the complicating factors which make the plot possible and the story interesting. To help our Lord make the history of salvation is to work with Him to overcome evil, so Christians must know about sin and death, and

their consequences. Part six, Obstacles to Full Life in Christ, will be concerned with these evils. The work of Christians in this world, a work which will last forever, is their struggle and their victory over sin and death in and with Christ.

Finally, one who writes a story must understand the ways in which complications are resolved and the plot carried through to its planned fulfillment. So Christains must know how to live their lives in Christ, how to undertake and carry out their personal contributions to the history of salvation. The way is Christ Himself, known in prayer and experienced in the sacraments. To live in Christ is to weave the whole of one's life into the fabric of His story, by tying all of one's acts to the sacraments. Thus prayer and the sacraments are the subject of part seven: Christ's Way to Completion in Him. This part will return to the point at which this reflection begins: fulfillment of ourselves in the fullness of Christ.

Anyone who reads this work must keep in mind that the mysteries of faith are treated here from a moral-theological point of view--that is, from the point of view of human acts. This point of view is limited, and the truth of faith must not be reduced to the limits of this perspective. Thus when I treat the redemptive work of Jesus, the functioning of the Church, the Christian life itself, the sacraments, and so on I shall be focusing on the human acts involved--the human acts of Jesus and of human persons. This emphasis by no means conflicts with the truth that everything good is the work of God.

Nor do I mean to suggest that the viewpoint of contemplative theological reflection is inferior to that of moral theology, or that the former should be reduced to the latter. Quite the contrary. If it were necessary to choose one viewpoint to the exclusion of the other, that of contemplative theology ought to be preferred, since God's reality and work always is primary. But such an exclusive choice is unnecessary, and the present work will treat everything from the point of view of Christ's and our human acts, without in the least suggesting that the mysteries of faith are reducible to their relevance for Christian moral life.

H. The problem of language and its importance

In this work I also will be wrestling with severe difficulties in choosing and using appropriate language. The language of sacred Scripture must be employed very extensively; in a way, this language must be basic, since the Council demands that Scripture nourish the theological effort. This demand is most reasonable, not only because Scripture contains the universal and most rich witness to faith, but also because the language of Scripture is the language of prayer, and part of the project is to integrate prayer and moral reflection. The language of traditional moral theology cannot be neglected, however, since this language expresses the wisdom of many able and faithful persons, and because much of the authoritative teaching of the Church is expressed in this language. This teaching will remain valid and cannot be allowed to be lost by forgetting the language in which it is expressed.

But neither the language of Scripture nor that of traditional moral theology is adequate to fulfill the Council's mandate. Both preaching and catechesis are impeded by technical expressions, not less by the language of Scripture than by the language of scholastic theology. Religious language must meet and mingle with the language of daily life. It is not enough to find words and phrases which are rough English equivalents for those in the Greek New Testament to make the Gospel intelligible to people today. "Paschal mystery" is as dense as "natural law" to someone who has not gained access to the idea by the medium of nontechnical language.

Thus the Holy See insists that theology be sensitive to the modern world. Paul VI says:

> We must look ahead so as to confirm the integrity of the whole of our doctrine--without any instability due to passing fashions--in the forms of new language, which must not be precluded except for reasons of absolute loyalty to Revelation and the infallible Magisterium of the Church, with respect for the sensus fidelium and for edification in charity (CCE 77).

Not least among the purposes of the present work is that of clarifying such new forms of language.

I. The provisional character of this work

In providing guidance for the implementation of Vatican II's plan for the renewal of theology, the Holy See recognizes legitimate pluralism in theology, which can arise from differences in philosophies used, methods employed, terminologies adopted, purposes pursued, plans of organization followed, and so forth. The Church favors such pluralism "provided always that such pluralism is a further enrichment of the doctrine of faith already well and clearly determined and in constant reference to it" (CCE 66). But continuity with past theological tradition is important in seminary training (CCE 66-67). Even more important, "unity of faith must be safeguarded":

> In the area of theological opinion, the common doctrine of the Church and the sensus fidelium must be respected. In theology there is a nucleus of affirmations that are certain, common, and which cannot be given up, constituting the basis of all Catholic dogmatic teaching.
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> These cannot be questioned but only clarified, studied in depth, and better explained in their historical and theological context (CCE 68).

Thus it is essential to distinguish matters of faith from matters in which a choice of opinions is legitimate.

The Holy See also recognizes that at the present time there are inherent difficulties in any attempt at theological synthesis:

> The theology of today in its search for new arrangement and new formulae is marked by a transitory and provisional character. Always in search of a new synthesis, it is like a huge construction-site in which the building is only partly completed, while within there is an accumulation of material which must be used in

the building.

Consequently, the teaching of theology has in many cases lost its unity and compactness, and presents an incomplete fragmentary aspect so that it is often said that theological knowledge has become "atomized". When order and completeness are lacking, the central truths of faith are easily lost to sight. Therefore, it is not at all to be wondered at, if, in such a climate, various fashionable "theologies", which are in great part one sided, partial, and sometimes unfounded, gain ground (CCE 69).

As a partial remedy for all these difficulties, a more intense collaboration among persons in various fields is urged (CCE 125). And despite the difficulties, for the sake of effective seminary formation with a preparation in systematic theology which will be sound and complete, "up-to-date textbooks for each of the disciplines are highly to be recommended as the basis of both lectures and private study" (CCE 126). The present book is being prepared in response to this last recommendation.

In attempting to carry out this project, I see as a chief obstacle the transitory and provisional character of current theology, which the Holy See notes. The present flux in thinking about central doctrines on Christ, original sin, the last things, grace, and so on is especially disconcerting, for I must touch on all of these matters, but can hardly become expert in every one of these fields.

To try to overcome this obstacle, I undertake throughout this book--as already in this introduction--to expound doctrinal points not so much in a subtle as in an accurate way, for the most part taking for granted positions commonly held by Catholic theologians until recent years. This procedure will appear somewhat unsophisticated to those who are expert in contemplative systematic theology. But fresh reflection upon the implications of faith for living the Christian life cannot wait for the settling of all other theological questions.

Also, because this work is intended as an essay at fulfilling the mandate of Vatican II, I must make extensive use of sacred Scripture and other witnesses of faith. Much of what I have just said about the present situation in systematic theology applies analogously to the situation in Scripture scholarship and positive theology in general. But here it is even more likely that one who lacks expertise is going to be severely limited, and even will blunder, through lack of sophistication. While I shall do my best not to abuse Scripture and other witnesses of faith by distorting their meanings, I cannot pretend to handle these materials with the competence of a scholar using literary-critical and historical methods. With whatever help I can obtain from experts, I shall strive only to use Scripture and other witnesses as the Church uses them in her teaching --for example, as they are used in the documents of Vatican II.

Doctrine develops and theologians must work to probe received teachings, so that the refinement and better expression which are needed can be achieved by the Church. But as I have already explained, one must not think of the witnesses of faith in Scripture and in other aspects of the life of the Church as if they were merely past realities. By the service of the magisterium, these witnesses of faith remain present and effective. The unfolding of faith is a living and creative process; the Church as a whole and every one of her active members contributes to this process as the Spirit expands and extends the Body of Christ through spaces and times.

This Body remains one Eucharistic fellowship, the communion of those united with one another by being united in Jesus. What we say of Him does not come from ourselves; it is the Spirit of His Father speaking in us (cf. Jn 14.26). In the Lord Jesus, the identity and self-consistency of the Church is assured. What the Church as such proposes as an essential part of Christ's teaching is affirmed by the Spirit always and everywhere; He does not say yes and no to the same proposition. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching" (Heb 13.8-9).

For this reason, I am confident that the more radical proposals for revision of Catholic teaching never will receive the acceptance of the Church as a whole. But undoubtedly many less radical proposals, including some which appear at first glance to be unacceptable, will turn out with proper clarification, qualification, and expression to be important contributions to the Church's knowledge of her Lord. By ignoring these proposals, I lose here the advantage of such eventual developments. However, since they will not contradict what the Church has hitherto accepted as saving truth, I am confident that future developments will not undermine the main outlines of the theology of Christian life presented here, although they will demand improvements and make it possible for others to do better what I am attempting here.

J. Prayer and theological work

Prayer, both personal and liturgical, is essential for one who undertakes theological reflection. The Holy See points out:

> Since theology has for its object truths which are principles of life and personal commitment, both for the individual and for the community of which he is part, it has a spiritual dimension and, therefore, the theologian cannot be purely intellectual in his research and study, but must always follow the requirements of faith, always deepening his existential union with God and his lively participation in the Church (CCE 22; cf. 73).

The Council similarly teaches that seminarians must live the mystery of Christ and of human salvation which they will find present in the liturgy (AG 16).

The fundamental reason for this need for prayer is that theology reflects on revelation, and revelation is not merely a collection of words, not even merely a collection of statements expressing propositional truths. Rather, as I explained in chapter one, section F, revelation is a total personal communication. The realities and not merely the words which pertain to this communication are made present to us in the Church. The divine communication passed down from the apostles and received by us grows in us:

> This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2.19, 51), through the intimate understanding

of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth (DV 8).

Theology without prayer is dreaming and idle chatter, for it is cut off from its real subject of study: our Lord Jesus. Theology without prayer turns Him, His Father, and Their Spirit into objects, and it turns our personal relationship with Them into an interesting, magnificent, but ultimately unreal idea.

Theology only leads to growth in understanding when one who undertakes it attends with full openness to the presence of Christ in the Church: to His presence in the word of God and especially in the liturgy, to His presence in the successors of the apostles teaching in His name, and to His presence in those for whose service through pastoral activity or other work the study of theology is undertaken.

In the liturgy one experiences bodily and sensible aspects of God's revelation in the Lord Jesus which are not captured--which cannot be captured--in propositions or expressed in language. Moreover, liturgical prayer, because it is interpersonal and public, eliminates the merely subjective and private biases of one who undertakes theological reflection. The Liturgy of the Hours, for example, often does not fit one's individual mood and disposition; for this very reason, such prayer is invaluable to keep one thinking with the Church at large about God and humankind's friendship with Him.

Private prayer also is essential. One can assent to all the truths of faith and wish to hold them firmly, just as the Church believes and teaches them, yet not have a lively sense of the reality grasped in these truths. If one lacks a lively sense of the reality, one also will have an inadequate sense of the importance of each particular truth. One who engages in theological reflection must focus on parts of the truth of faith, one by one, and sometimes must study some single point with great intensity for a long time. This necessity can lead to a dangerous fascination if one does not have a vivid sense of the importance of every other article of faith.

Only by private prayer can one engaged in theological reflection keep this sense alive, maintain the resolution to respect fully even the most minor truth of faith, never to compromise any such truth even in the least. For only in private prayer can one constantly and systematically ponder all the truths of faith in one's heart, and so keep real for oneself every truth which must be clung to as an indispensable aspect of one's clinging to Christ.

If theological reflection is to be fully fruitful, one's clinging to Christ and to all the truths of faith must be confident, not nervous. Only the confidence and easy familiarity with the Lord Jesus which prayer gives enable one to face every question with fearless faith. The failure to explore difficulties, the refusal to face objections straightforwardly, and the evasion of situations in which one's faith is likely to be challenged are sins against one's vocation if one undertakes theological work. Because there is no growth without struggle, no creativity without the overcoming of obstacles, these sins will block that deeper understanding of faith which a theologian should always seek. One who has a vivid sense of the reality grasped in the truths of faith is less likely to be tempted to commit these sins and is more able to resist the temptation should it arise.

To do theology well calls for both faithfulness and creativity. To attempt to do theology while neglecting prayer is to risk either infidelity or sterile repetition--or, in the present state of theology, <u>both</u> infidelity and sterile repetition.

The point is not that one ought to pray in order to improve one's theological work. This would be to turn everything upside down. The point is that theological work without prayer is certain to be fruitless and is likely to be dangerous to oneself and destructive to others. However, theological study conducted with prayer can and should help one attain, even in some way in this present life, the very purpose of faith and assent to its truths: a more intimate communion with God who reveals Himself, not ultimately so that we might believe Him, but so that we might know Him even as He knows us.

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Throughout this introduction I have stressed the standard of the present, living belief and teaching of the Church. A theologian who does not wholeheartedly submit to this standard is not a Catholic theologian. Even one who loves the Church and wishes to serve her--for example, one studying and preparing for her priesthood--can tire of constant reminders that faith is a matter of obedience. One thinks: "Of course, I must submit my mind to God. But the Church is men and women, not God. Perhaps we are making too much of the Church." Even if one does not <u>think</u> this wayward thought, one cannot always avoid at least <u>feeling</u> the wayward impulse it expresses. Indeed, at times I myself feel it.

But then I remind myself that the neat distinction between God and humankind oversimplifies reality, since the Word became flesh, sharing the nature of us fleshly persons so that we might share the nature of the divine Persons. Our faith is in God, not in the Church, but we meet God in our Lord Jesus and we learn Him at the knee and from the lips of our Mother, the Church. To submit to the Church is to submit to men and women, and <u>thereby</u> to submit to God, because the Church cannot be separated from her Lord, Jesus Christ, who is her head, as St. Augustine explains:

> Our Lord Jesus Christ is, as it were, a whole and perfect man, both head and body. We recognize the Head in that Man who was born of the Virgin Mary. . . . He is the Head of the Church. The Body belonging to this Head is the Church: not the local Church here, but both the local Church and the Church throughout the whole world; not the Church which belongs to the present time, but that which exists from the time of Abel himself even to all those who will ever be born, even to the end, and who will believe in Christ, the whole population of the saints who belong to but one city, which city is the Body of Christ, and of which Body Christ is the Head. There the angels too are our fellow citizens; but because we are yet on pilgrimage, we labor; they however await our arrival in that city (FEF 1479).

This heavenly fulfillment of the Lord Jesus, in which we hope to share, is the subject of part two, to which I now proceed.

Notes to chapter three

1. See Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., A History of Theology (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1968), pp. 144-199. On moral theology, see L. Vereecke, "Moral Theology, History of (700 to Vatican Council I)," New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 9, pp. 1120-1122; J. J. Farraher, S.J., "Moral Theology, History of (Contemporary Trends)," loc. cit., pp. 1122-1123.

2. See Henry Davis, S.J., Moral and Pastoral Theology, vol. 1, Human Acts, Law, Sin, and Virtue, ed. L. W. Geddes, S.J., 7th ed. (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), pp. 64-115, for a clear statement of the problem of conscience and the moral systems, as conceived by the classic moralists.

3. See Th. Deman, O.P., La prudence, in S. Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, 2a-2ae, Questions 47-56, 2nd ed. (Paris, Tournai, Rome: Desclée & Cie., 1949), pp. 478-523 (section V of appendix II: "Prudence et conscience").

4. See P. de Letter, S.J., "Theology, History of," New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 14, pp. 56-58, for a brief summary with bibliography.

5. See John C. Ford, S.J., and Gerald Kelly, S.J., Contemporary Moral Theology, volume 1, Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1959), for an introduction to some of the modern criticisms and suggested new approaches (pp. 42-79), with evaluation by the authors (pp. 80-103) from the point of view of the received moral theology. For a useful survey of developments in Catholic moral, with particular reference to principles, from 1918 to the post-Vatican II period, see Domenico Capone, C.Ss.R., "Per un manuale di teologia morale," Seminarium, 16 n.s. (1976), pp. 462-483. A particularly noteworthy work, with references to others, which was published before Vatican II and which pointed toward genuine renewal, is the book of Gérard Gilleman, S.J., The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology (London: Burns & Oates, 1959). An earlier work to which I owe a considerable debt is that of E. Mersch, S.J., Morality and the Mystical Body (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1939).

6. St. Augustine was strongly influenced by the neoplatonic philosophy which he used as an instrument for his theological work. See Robert J. O'Connell, St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 1-22 and 177-190; John Burnaby, Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), pp. 25-42.

7. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1, question 1, a. 8, ad 2; question 2, a. 2, ad 1; question 62, a. 5.

8. See Germain Grisez, "Man, the Natural End of," New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 9, pp. 134-135.

9. From the alternative opening prayer, Feast of the Sacred Heart, The Roman Missal: The Sacramentary, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI (April 3, 1969).

Questions for study and review

1. Summarize the main limitations on the work of modern Catholic theology in general and modern Catholic moral theology in particular.

2. Discuss--if you can, criticize--the account given here of the significance of the renaissance and the reformation.

3. Carefully explain why it seems that there is inevitable conflict between specifically human fulfillment and Christian holiness.

4. Summarize the prescription which Vatican II and the Holy See have written for renewal in moral theology.

5. Why and to what extent must any work done today in the area of principles of moral theology be provisional?

6. To what extent can you verify from your own experience what is said in the text about the relationship between prayer and theological study?