

Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology Part I: A Look into the Past

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Abstract: In this article the author argues that moral theologians must seek to overcome the separation between moral and ascetical theology. Such a distinction entered practical theology comparatively recently. The first part of the article consists chiefly of a historical survey, beginning with the writings of the twelfth century, pointing to the close connection between evangelical and spiritual activity that found in conscience the voice of God. By emphasising a scripture based, holistic, self-directed, embodied and relational practical theology, ascetical theology offers moral theology a way of exploring a broadened and positive agenda for examining the ethical life.

1. A GOOD QUOTE FROM A HUNDRED YEARS AGO ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTAL DUALISM IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, fundamental moral theology began with a major innovation: for the first time a manual of moral theology appeared in English. In *A Manual of Moral Theology*, (1906) the English Jesuit moralist Thomas Slater (1855-1928) acknowledged that his was the first book "to present the common teaching of the Catholic moral theologians in an English dress". After commenting that other vernacular versions in German, Italian, Spanish and French were successful, he then acknowledged that among Protestants,

the moral theology of the Catholic Church is little understood and constantly misrepresented and maligned. Of course it does not merit the bad reputation which has been fastened on it by Protestant and Jansenist slander.

The main purpose of his preface was, however, to justify moral theology's singular and exclusive preoccupation with sin. By focusing on sin, Slater affirmed that there was no need for moral theology to engage spiritual or ascetical theology, that is, a theology that promoted the spiritual betterment of oneself. That literature that referred to the

positive development or perfection of a person was not the domain of moral theology. Slater wrote:

[Moral theology] is the product of centuries of labor bestowed by able and holy men on the practical problems of Christian ethics. Here, however, we must ask the reader to bear in mind that the manuals of moral theology are technical works intended to help the confessor and the parish priest in the discharge of their duties. They are as technical as the text-books of the lawyer and the doctor. They are not intended for edification, nor do they hold up a high ideal of Christian perfection for the imitation of the faithful. They deal with what is of obligation under pain of sin; they are books of moral pathology. They are necessary for the Catholic priest to enable him to administer the sacrament of Penance and to fulfill other duties.

Slater noted the "very abundant" literature of ascetical theology, but added that "moral theology proposes to itself the much humbler but still necessary task of defining what is right and what wrong in all the practical relations of the Christian life.... The first step on the right road of conduct is to avoid evil."¹

Slater's opinions were shared by all his contemporary moral theologians. Thirty years later Henry Davis wrote: "it is precisely about the law that Moral Theology is concerned. It is not a mirror of perfection, showing man the way of perfection."² Spiritual or ascetical theology helped devout persons pursue Christian perfection; moral theology assisted priests in their role as confessors.³

1. Thomas Slater, *A Manual of Moral Theology*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1908) I: 5-6.

2. Henry Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1941) I, 4. Herbert Jone made the same point in his *Moral Theology*, distinguishing his work from what "is concerned with the attainment of Christian perfection". Herbert Jone, *Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959) 1.

3. Herbert Jone made the same point in his *Moral Theology* distinguishing his work from what "is concerned with the attainment of Christian perfection". Jone, *Moral Theology*, 1. In another work, Slater wrote that the object of moral theology "is not to place high ideals of virtue before the people and train them in Christian perfection...its primary object is to teach the priest how to distinguish what is sinful from what is lawful...it is not intended for edification nor for the building University Press of character." As quoted in Henry McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (London: Longmans, 1949) 10-11. For a discussion on the differences between English Protestant writings and Roman Catholics on this point, besides McAdoo, see Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity during the Seventeenth Century* (London: SPCK, 1952). On the overall impact of these manuals on moral theology see, John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 1-36; John Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990). More specifically, see the manualists as they worked in the United States in Charles Curran, *The Origins of Moral Theology in the United States: Three Different Approaches* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997). On the penitentials see *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* ed., John T. McNeill and Helen M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); James Dallen, *The Reconciling Community* (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1986); Bernard Poschman, *Penance and Anointing of the Sick* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964). On the confessional

2. A FUNDAMENTAL DUALISM IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

This fundamental dualism in practical theology has done enormous harm to the life of the church.⁴ In this article, I argue that moral theologians must seek to overcome this separation between moral and ascetical theology. As we stand facing the millennium, no task is more urgent for fundamental morals than the continuation of this project: the future of moral theology is found by situating it in spirituality. In the words of the French novelist, André Malraux, "le XXIème siècle sera spirituel ou ne sera pas.... The twenty-first century will be either spiritual or it will not be at all."⁵

To make my case, I first demonstrate the seriousness of the separation and then explore the contribution of ascetical theology.

I begin by mentioning three effects of the dualism. First, too many in Church leadership phrase moral theology in the language of moral pathology. *Veritatis Splendor*, for example, went to great pains to argue the necessity of intrinsic evil in order to preserve the objectivity of moral truth.⁶ The Dominican Herbert McCabe noted that that claim rooted the encyclical firmly in the tradition of the moral manuals and not in the spirit of Vatican II. Moreover, he added, as others also have claimed, the concept of intrinsic evil is a fundamentally anti-Thomistic one.⁷

manuals see Kilian McDonnell, "The *Summae Confessorum* on the Integrity of Confession as Prolegomena for Luther and Trent", *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 405-26. On casuistry see Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and J. Keenan and T. Shannon (eds.), *The Context of Casuistry* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995).

4. See the argument in Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology*. See also, Richard McCormick, "Self-Assessment and Self-Indictment", *Religious Studies Review* 13 (1987) 37-44.

5. Quoted in Johann Verstraeten, "Perspectives for a Spirituality of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century and the Rediscovery of the Meaning of Professional Life", (unpublished paper) at 13.

6. Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1993).

7. Herbert McCabe, "Manuals and rule books", John Wilkins, *Considering Veritatis Splendor* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994) 61-8. On the historical development of the concept "intrinsically evil", see John Dedek, "Intrinsically Evil Acts: The Emergence of a Doctrine", *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 50 (1983) 191-226; "Intrinsically Evil Acts: An Historical Study of the Mind of St. Thomas", *The Thomist* 43 (1979) 385-413; "Moral Absolutes in the Predecessors of St. Thomas", *Theological Studies* 38 (1977) 654-680. Dedek argues that the fourteenth century opponent of Thomas Aquinas' writings Durandus of St Pourcain fathered the concept. In many ways *Evangelium vitae* was a striking improvement over *Veritatis Splendor's* insistence on pathological language. See Kevin Wildes (ed.), *Choosing Life: A Dialogue on Evangelium vitae* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997); Reinhard Hutter and Theodor Dieter (eds.), *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

Years ago, Catholic identity was known for what it promoted: its devotional life, its mass, its sacramental integrity, its faithful membership, its celebration of the saints and the life of holiness, and its practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Instead, today, many bishops, priests and lay leaders define Catholic identity by listing those actions which the church opposes: capital punishment, abortion, birth control, homosexual activity, divorce and remarriage. The contemporary public stance of church leaders defining Catholicism by what it avoids as opposed to what it loves and pursues reflects Catholic moral theology's fifteen hundred year history of only reflecting on sin. But it also reflects the contemporary abandonment both of any real ascetical theology and of the centrality of the sacramental life in ecclesiastical consciousness.

Second, even though the first ethical principle for all persons is to do good and avoid evil, as a matter of fact, the fundamental dualism left moral theology to consider solely the evil to be avoided. In this economy, ordinary Christians are not charged with becoming better disciples; rather, we are warned against becoming worse: avoid sin, and if we can't, we can confess.

For this reason, many Catholics look at critically complex issues one-sidedly: a direct abortion of an already doomed foetus to save a woman's life is considered wrong because we only look at the evil (killing the foetus) instead of promoting the good (rescuing a woman's life). Likewise, many fear giving adequate pain relief (a good) lest it cause death (an evil). Similarly we hesitate to promote HIV prevention because avoiding evil (compromising our teaching on birth control) is always more important than doing the good (halting the spread of a pandemic).

This dualism had a third effect, that is, it promoted a distorted understanding of sin. When moral theology is integrated with spiritual theology, sin is simply defined as not bothering to love. For instance, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37), sin appears in the priest and the Levite who pass by the wounded man. In that parable, those who actually do harm are not even mentioned, because the issue of goodness and sin is not whether one harms or not, but whether one loves or not. Likewise in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16: 19-31), the rich man is damned to hell for not taking care of his fellow human being who hungers at the rich man's door steps. This same insight about sin reappears in Matthew 25 (25:31-46); in the Last Judgment those cast into hell fire are those who do not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit the imprisoned.

In the first centuries of Christianity, sin was not bothering to love. The early church recognised that the first movement of salvation was from God who through Christ invited Christians to walk with him along

his way by his Grace. Moral goodness, then, was the human response to God's first movement. Contrariwise, sin or moral badness was not bothering to respond.

The patristic tradition using journey imagery appreciated the importance of this responsive movement. Failing to move ahead on the way of the Lord or simply standing on that way was considered sin or badness. Gregory the Great wrote: "Certainly, in this world, the human spirit is like a boat foolishly fighting against the river's rush: one is never allowed to stay still, because unless one forges ahead, one will slide back downstream."⁸

Later, from the ascetical tradition of the twelfth century, Bernard wrote: "To not progress on the way of Life is to regress."⁹ As we shall see later in this paper, Thomas Aquinas was evidently influenced by this ascetical theology and rejected in his *Summa* the idea of separating moral theology from ascetical theology. Thus he took the insights of Gregory, Bernard and others and offered his own motto regarding sin: "To stand on the way of God is to withdraw."¹⁰ Sin or badness was not bothering to respond to the Lord who calls us to move forward.

Sin was not fundamentally choosing the wrong or even the failure to choose the right; it was antecedent to choice. Sin was not bothering to love.¹¹ This notion of sin, absent in most moral theology from the fifth to the twentieth century, remained alive wherever ascetical theology was in place. For instance, *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius* proposed the famous colloquy with Jesus on the cross. We are invited to entertain three questions: "What have I done for Christ?", "What am I doing for Christ?", "What ought I to do for Christ?" The questions were not between what right things ought we to do versus what wrong actions we ought to avoid. Rather, the questions concerned whether we were bothering to do anything at all for Christ.

As we now examine ascetical theology, I offer two preliminary comments. First, I am more interested in the ascetical texts from the twelfth through the sixteenth century. I find the later ascetical manuals from the seventeenth to the twentieth century as unimaginative at best. They were, after all, authored by the same people who gave us the

8. "In hoc quippe mundo humana anima quasi more navis est contra ictum fluminis conscendentis: uno in loco nequaquam stare permittitur, quia ad ima relabatur, nisi ad summa conetur." Gregory, *Reg. Past.* p. III, c. 34: ML 77, 118c.

9. "In via vitae non progredi regredi est", Bernard, *Serm II in festo Purif.*, n. 3: ML 183, 369 C.

10. "In via Dei stare retrocedere est." Thomas attributes the quote to Bernard in *In III Sen d29,a8,qla2,1a*, and to Gregory in *ST II-II,24,6 ob3*.

11. Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*", *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) 82-98, argue that unlike the other Nazi leaders, Speer's wickedness was most ordinary. While leading a fine family life, he made certain he was not bothered with knowledge of the concentration camps.

moral manuals! Second, I will use the terms spiritual and ascetical theology interchangeably, since the distinction between them was not made until the eighteenth century.¹²

3. A LOOK BACK INTO HISTORY

When we think of the history of ascetical theology,¹³ we should start with the twelfth century. "The twelfth century has long been seen as a turning point in the history of Latin spirituality," claims Bernard McGinn. "[T]here can be no argument that the twelfth century was fascinated with the mystery of the human person as *imago Dei* and brought to the study of this mystery a systematic ordering mentality not seen before." Through Aelred of Rievaulx's spiritual friendship, Abelard's insistence on the conscience, Bernard of Clairvaux's location of the image of God in human freedom, Hildegard of Bingen's knowledge of the way of the Lord and her appreciation of the goodness of the human body and the delight of the passions, and Richard of St Victor's understanding of the interpersonal human subject as an image of the three-personed God, the theologians of the twelfth century developed a powerful relational anthropology as a base for their spirituality.¹⁴

Caroline Walker Bynum agrees with McGinn: "No period was ever busier creating structures for its piety than the twelfth century."¹⁵ Like McGinn she too examines Bernard of Clairvaux, who with "other 'new monks' stressed discovery of self – and of self-love – as the first step in a long process of returning to the love and likeness of God, a love and likeness in which the individual is not dissolved into God but rather becomes God's partner and friend".¹⁶ Bernard's spirituality as well as his contemporaries drew deeply from the scriptures and cultivated in a particular way a devotion to the humanity of Jesus, which moved readers into greater intimacy with Jesus and with those who shared the

12. The distinction seems to have appeared first in the writings of G. B. Scaramelli (1687- 1752); thus, after the period I am interested in. See T. A. Porter, "Spiritual Theology," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (San Francisco: McGraw Hill, 1967) XIII 588-590.

13. Joseph de Guibert, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953); Jean Leclercq, Francois Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer, *History of Christian Spirituality* (London: Burns and Oates, 1968); Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (eds.), *Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

14. Bernard McGinn, "The Human Person as Image of God", *Christian Spirituality*, 312-330, at 323. While the twelfth century marks the enormous systematic development of ascetical texts, a few appear earlier, e.g., Dhuoda's *Manual for My Son* (843) and Jonas of Orleans' treatise *Instruction of the Laity* (c. 828), see Jacques Fontaine, "The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the Laity", *Christian Spirituality*, 453-491.

15. Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" *Jesus as Mother* 82-109, at 109.

16. Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?", 86.

devotion.¹⁷ In developing a highly relational anthropology, then, the twelfth century never compromised the person and in fact discovered, “the self, the inner mystery, the inner man, the inner landscape”.

The discovery of the self did not mean, however, the endorsement of individualism; as Bynum argues, the twelfth century “also discovered the group in two very precise senses: it discovered that many separate ‘callings’ or ‘lives’ were possible in the church, and it elaborated a language for talking about how individuals became a part of them (the language of ‘conforming to a model’).”¹⁸

After the twelfth century we can turn to the writings of Jean Gerson (1363-1429) or Julian of Norwich’s (1382-1416) *Showings*. The sixteenth century, however, marked the birth of modern spiritual theology. Here we can think of: Desiderius Erasmus’ *Enchiridion militis christiani* (1503) and *De praeparatione ad mortem* (1534); Ignatius of Loyola’s *Exercitia Spiritualia* (1548); Johannes Justus Lanspergius’, *Epistola Salvatoris ad quandam animam fidelem* (1554); Luis de Granada’s *Libro de la oración y meditación* (1544) and *Doctrina espiritual* (1587); Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), *Camino de perfeccion*; Robert Persons’ *Christian Directory* (1583); Lorenzo di oli’s *Il combattimento spirituale* (1588); and Francis de Sales *Introduction à la Vie dévôte* (1609).

I believe that most contemporary moral theologians would find more congruency between their contemporary thoughts and these works than with any moral manuals written over the past four hundred years. I believe this because these texts appealed to people’s experience and challenged persons not only to avoid the wrong, but also to pursue the good. I believe this because they offered Christians a way of becoming a disciple of Christ.

In their own time these figures were enormously successful. Erasmus’ *Enchiridion*, for instance, underwent more than one hundred editions in its first hundred years and innumerable translations as well. Granada’s more accessible approach to the life of perfection made him attractive to Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. Furthermore, by providing a daily order he gave individual readers a way to proceed toward God privately and daily even when, in the throes of the Reformation, readers’ communities were in upheaval. Granada’s guidelines were a source of stability for readers in turbulent times. To give you an idea of his popularity, we can consider his book *Libro de la oración y meditación* (1544), translated into English in 1582 and reprinted again in 1584 and 1612.¹⁹ In 1592 a Puritan bookseller adapted it for a Protestant

17. Francois Vandembroucke, “Lay Spirituality in the Twelfth Century,” *History of Christian Spirituality*, 243-282.

18. Bynum, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?,” 106.

19. Luis de Granada, *Of Prayer, and Meditation*, (Paris: Thomas Brumeau, 1582) reprint in *English Recusant Literature* series vol 64 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1971). Allison and Rogers, 88. See also, Alvaro Huerga, “Louis de Grenade,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite* IX.

readership, by rearranging the treatises. The Puritan edition was more successful than the Roman Catholic one and sold more copies, being reissued in 1596, 1599, 1601, 1602, and 1611.²⁰

Gaspar Loarte's *Esercizio della vita cristiana* (1557) was the first Jesuit manual of spirituality. It was aimed at simple lay folk who, even if they were illiterate, could listen to a reader describe the directions for the exercises he provided.²¹ The popular work was the first text by a Jesuit for spiritual direction. It went through nine Italian, two Spanish, one Catalan, and three French editions before the end of the century. *Esercizio della vita cristiana* was translated into English in 1579, 1584, 1596 and again in 1610. In 1594, the Puritans again adapted it.

The oddest story is about Robert Persons. Persons was the Jesuit companion of Edmund Campion who escaped England after the failed mission in which Campion was caught, tried, and executed. After witnessing a pervasive lethargy among English Christians, Persons wrote *A Christian Directory* as a text designed to wake up Catholics to become ardent Christians. Persons' own unaltered text went through eight editions by Catholic printers²² and was translated into French, German, Latin and Italian; the Italian version itself ran through nine editions.²³ The German editions were extraordinarily successful among Lutheran Pietists. A Puritan preacher adapted Persons' work for a Protestant audience and his text went through forty-seven editions between 1584 and 1640. It was the most popular book of English devotional literature from 1580-1630.

The fact that this Catholic text became puritanised is drenched with irony. It was penned by a Jesuit who sought to reclaim Catholics conforming to the institutional Church of England. It was pirated by a Puritan preacher who used it not only to answer the needs of his listeners, but also to convince Catholic readers that the differences between Catholics and Reformers were minor. That is, the Puritan was trying to get Catholics to conform to the institutional Church!²⁴

1043-1054; Alvaro Huerga, *Fray Luis de Granada: una vida al servicio de la Iglesia* (Madrid: Editorial Catolica, 1988); also, J. R. Fernandez, *Fray Luis de Granada en Inglaterra: repercusiones en los sermones de John Donne* Valladolid, 1974***.

20. Pollard and Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue*, II, 122.

21. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 120, 267.

22. Pollard and Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue*, II 217-218.

23. L. Hicks (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Father Robert Parsons* (London: John Whitehead and Son, 1942) xlv.

24. Appending his Treatise toward Pacification to *The First Booke* Bunny wrote:

I have added this other Treatise withal; so to bring before their eies, how the case for that matter doth stand betwixt us, and how little cause there is for them to be afraid of our profession as som hav born them in hand that they ought: trusting withal, that as they do already agree with us in manie points of great importance; so they can be content to condescend unto us in the rest likewise, if it may appeer unto them, that in so doing they shal do no otherwise, than as of conscience, and dutie they ought. (A3a).

Moreover, the Jesuit author Robert Persons who had been tried for treason *in absentia* against the crown, and was convicted and sentenced to death, later organised along with Dr William Allen (1532-1594) the missionary effort to England and lastly urged the Spanish invasion of England. No man sought with more passion, conviction, intelligence and cunning to wrestle the authority of the Reformers away from the crown than Robert Persons; yet his most successful writing achievement not only gave succour to his opponents, it also was used to help devout Catholics in good conscience to accommodate conformity to the established Church of England. As one commentator writes, "Persons' strategy seriously backfired."²⁵ (Imagine, if you will, that Sadaam Hussein penned a book of spiritual guidance and it became, after a little editing, a best seller for the religious right in the United States.)

Though these authors were popular they were not universally approved. In fact they represented divides within Roman Catholic ranks and even within particular religious orders, like the Dominicans. Some theologians and Church leaders understood good Christian pedagogy to be based on clear, objective, ordered claims: for these, scholastic theology and the confessional manuals were evident examples. One particular exponent of this group was the Dominican Melchior Cano (1509-1560) who opposed both theological claims that included subjective experiences and internal dispositions, and pastoral practices that focused on interior development and spiritual discernment. He became a tireless critic of Ignatius for having offered the *Exercises* to anyone and for having emphasised both affective spiritual experiences and a prayerful indifference in discerning one's vocation.²⁶

In the midst of these attacks, Ignatius and the Jesuits did not stand alone; they were defended by many, including, the popular Luis de Granada. Cano with others, like Fernando de Valdés, the inquisitor general of the Spanish Inquisition, eventually coalesced their opposition against those promoting spiritual devotion and persecuted among others, the primate of all Spain, Bartolomé Carranza (1503-1576), the

Bunny sought to exhort those that are not yet persuaded, to join with us likewise in the truth of Religion. (A2a) Edmund Bunny, *A Booke of Christian exercise appertaining to Resolution, that is shewing how that we should resolv our selves to become Christians in deed: by R.P. Perused, and accompanied now with a Treatise tending to Pacification* (London: N. Newton, 1585). See Bunny, Edmund, *The Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) III. 271-272; Nancy Lee Beaty, *Parsons, Bunny, and the Counter-Reformation*; Crafte, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 157-96.

25. Gregory, "The True and Zealous Service of God", 267.

26. Terence O'Reilly, "Melchor Cano and the Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola", Juan Plazaola (ed.), *Ignacio de Loyola y su tiempo* ed (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 1992) 369-380; "Melchor Cano's *Censura y parecer contra et Instituto de los Padres Jesuitas*: a transcription of the British Library manuscript *From Ignatius to John of the Cross* (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995) 1-22.

Dominican archbishop of Toledo.²⁷ As John O'Malley notes, "Few cases reveal so clearly the overheated religious atmosphere of Spain and Rome in the middle of the sixteenth century or illustrate so dramatically the confusing and overlapping networks of jurisdictions, loyalties, and ecclesio-political policies and antagonisms within Catholicism."²⁸

In England, Carranza wrote his *Catechismo* which was promoted by the famous English Cardinal Reginald Pole. The reigning pope, Paul IV, was the famed Theatine, Giampietro Carafa, a long-standing enemy of the popular Pole. As cardinal, Carafa denounced in 1536 the young Ignatius of Loyola to the Inquisition for promoting the *Exercises* and as pope, he blessed in 1559 the initial investigations into archbishop Carranza. Carranza, however, had his supporters. In Spain, he was defended by Martín de Azpilcueta (1492-1586) the casuist whom Jesuit moralists emulated and whose *Enchiridion* (1556) scholars have used to mark the dawn of high casuistry.²⁹ In Rome, the Roman Inquisition turned to the Jesuit Francisco de Toledo to evaluate the *Catechismo*; Toledo found it orthodox but neither his nor Azpilcueta's testimonies were sufficient to prevent Cano from having the archbishop, his brother Dominican, imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition. In that same year, 1559, the Spanish Inquisition put on the Index of Prohibited Books, some Dominican works, like Carranza's, Luis de Granada's *Libro de la oración y meditación* and other works of devotion for Spanish readers. Fortunately, Granada's reputation was restored in 1566, in part through the assistance of the Jesuits themselves. But Carranza was left in prison, and later transferred to the papal prison in Rome in 1567. After nearly seventeen years of detention, a papal verdict was finally rendered in 1576 and the dying Cardinal Carranza was released from prison.

Clearly the ascetical works were not innocent fare in the minds of many Church leaders. In fact, fault lines within the church and the Dominican order were so remarkable that one commentator notes it divided "between two different ways of understanding Catholicism itself".³⁰ Cano, Carafa, and Valdés proposed a theology diametrically opposed to Carranza, Granada, Pole and Toledo. The former pursued a notion of truth that was known for its precision, consistency, and universality. The form of their considered texts had a scientific feel to them: they had their own language (Latin) and specific concepts that only "professionals" understood; they appealed to a variety of authorities, who like the reading professionals, belonged to the same guild; and, they considered usually any innovation as an unwarranted

27. See O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 292-3, 215-20.

28. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* 317.

29. Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, 142-44.

30. José Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras, "Censura inédita del padre Francisco Toledo, S.J. sobre el catecismo del arzobispo Carranza: Cotejo con le de Melchor Cano", *Revista Española de Teología* 29 (1969) 3-35, at 15, as quoted in O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 320.

departure from earlier positions. In a word, this theology's form was a classic textbook. The latter preferred not textbooks but "handbooks." Written in the vernacular, they had no glossary, no professional concepts, no set literary genre, and no established authorities (excepting the Scriptures). Rather than having all the answers, they provided guidelines instead of intractable laws. These guidelines depended, moreover, on the readers' "responses." These handbooks were meant not to be in the professional's desk, but rather in readers' pockets or purses. This latter group of bishops and theologians had their scientific textbooks, but they also endorsed these handbooks that were known both for their accessibility and for their considered respect of human experience. The former group, however, found intolerable the very idea that subjective experience could fit into the equation for determining the truth of religious insight.

4. THE CONTRIBUTION OF ASCETICAL THEOLOGY TO THE REFORM OF MORAL THEOLOGY

In light of these ascetical works, I want to propose ten ways that ascetical theology enhances moral theology.³¹ First, the ascetical texts were decidedly *based on Scripture* and the moral manuals were not. When Vatican II admonished moral theologians to draw more fully on the Scriptures, they had nothing in their own tradition of four hundred years to turn to as a reference point. In practical theology, only ascetical theology grew out of a Scriptural foundation.

Second, the ascetical texts *animated* readers' devotional and moral practices. Without these texts, moral practices were animated by fear of damnation; with them, they were animated by the pursuit of Christ. Moreover, by their Christological focus, they provided a relational context for the motivation of moral practices. In turn, the moral life became considered by devout Christians as a response to the initiative from God in their spiritual relationship with Christ. Here then the theological framework of "Call and response" so important in post-Vatican II writings found its practical application: Being moral meant being a grateful disciple.

This animation was commonly called "a conversion". Conversion for ascetical writers was not turning away from an earlier held belief and a subsequent turning toward Christianity. Rather, the one undergoing conversion was already baptized; conversion was a process of both deeply interiorising what one had already confessed and making those confessional claims the integrating force of one's life. Robert Person's

31. I develop this elsewhere, "Spirituality and Morality: What's The Difference?", Todd Salzman (ed.s), *Method and Catholic Moral Theology: The On-going Reconstruction* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, forthcoming).

famous *Christian Directory* was a clear example of ascetical literature leading readers to conversion.³²

Third, the moral life was, therefore, no longer understood by the devout Christian as the simple avoidance of sin. Whenever ascetical theology amplified moral theology, the latter defined itself as primarily interested in *the increase of charity*. Just as the ascetical texts fostered *union with Jesus Christ*, devout Christians could also interpret their moral lives as disciples who seek union with the Lord. The intimacy that the ascetical theology proposed was consistently evident in their texts, whether Julian of Norwich's *Showings*, Johannes Lanspergius' *Epistola Salvatoris ad quandam animam fidelem* or Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercitia Spiritualia*. The end of ascetical theology eventually became also *the end of moral theology*, as Gerard Gilleman and Rene Carpentier argued four hundred years later in *The Primacy of Charity*.³³

Fourth, ascetical theology introduced *moral effort or striving* as a key concept for capturing the moral goodness of the agent. This notion of striving was rooted in ascetical theology's overriding interest in charity³⁴ and later occasioned recognition of the distinction between goodness and rightness.³⁵ Striving particularly manifested itself in the ascetical theology that accentuated the metaphor of the struggling soldier as found in Erasmus' *Enchiridion* or Lorenzo Scupoli's *Il combattimento spirituale*.³⁶ When moral theology also appropriated the

32. See my "How Casuistic Is Early British Puritan Casuistry? Or, What Are the Roots of Early British Puritan Practical Divinity?" John O'Malley et al. (eds.), *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, forthcoming).

33. Gerard Gilleman, *Le primat de la charité en théologie morale : essai méthodologique* (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1952); *The Primacy of Charity* (Westminster MD: Newman Press, 1959).

34. I have done some work on this in *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992); "Distinguishing Charity As Goodness and Prudence As Rightness: A Key to Thomas' *Pars Secunda*", *The Thomist* 56 (1992) 407-26; "A New Distinction in Moral Theology: Being Good and Living Rightly", *Church* 5 (1989) 22-28; see Conrad van Ouwerkerk, *Caritas et Ratio: Etude sur le double principe de la vie morale chretienne d'apres S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Nijmegen: Drukkerij Gebr. Janssen, 1956).

35. The distinction has been extensively used by Europeans, especially by Bruno Schueller, *Die Begründung sittlicher Urteile* (Duesseldorf: Patmos, 1980); "Neuere Beiträge zum Thema 'Begründung sittlicher Normen'," Franz Furger (ed.), *Theologische Berichte* 4 (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1974) 109-81; "Various Types of Grounding Ethical Norms", Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, (eds.), *Readings in Moral Theology No. 1* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1979) 184-98; "The Debate on the Specific Character of Christian Ethics", *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2*, 207-233. See also Josef Fuchs, *Christian Morality: The Word Becomes Flesh*; Klaus Demmer, *Deuten und Handeln* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1985); Louis Janssens, "Ontic Good and Evil" in Bernard Hoose, *Proportionalism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1987). In the US, see Richard McCormick, "Bishops as Teachers, Scholars as Listeners", *The Critical Calling* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989) 95-110; *Notes in Moral Theology* 1981-1984 (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1984).

36. See Constable, 146-9; also Philip Sheldrake, *Images of Holiness: Explorations in Contemporary Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987) who discusses the

concept of striving, it located the cause of striving, charity, in the heart of the disciple. This turn to the heart conveyed the goodness of deep human desire, captured human aspiration and longing, and finally prompted moral theology once again to talk about love.³⁷

Fifth, likewise ascetical theology presented the *passions positively*, not as sources of sinful inclinations, but as forces that when properly trained would assist the devout Christian in the way of the Lord. Hildegard of Bingen celebrated the wisdom of the passions and Ignatius taught Christians to discern God's will through their affections. This appreciation of the passions occurred in ascetical theology when a positive anthropology (*imago Dei*), a positive goal (union with Christ), and a positive way (*imitatio Christi*) coupled with a respect for the importance of a person's experience of God. This appreciation of the passions was emblematic of the appreciation that ascetical writers had of the entirety of the readers' experience. Unlike the moral manuals, ascetical manuals asked their readers to reflect on their own experiences to see whether they validated the truth claims that ascetical writers made.

Sixth, the ascetical works also prompted *an attentiveness to the ordinariness of life*. Though ascetical works began as little more than prayer manuals, in time they became meditations that pursued union with Christ in our ordinary existence.³⁸ The engagement of ordinariness demonstrated the comprehensiveness of the scope of ascetical theology; in ordinariness ascetical theology encountered humanity completely, as Julian shows us. For that reason, the *imitatio Christi* aimed to depict the ordinariness of Jesus' human life. That ordinariness is elsewhere well captured in the very successful *The Christian Man's Guide* by Alfonso Rodriguez (1538-1616), which went through fifty editions and was translated into twenty-three languages: each of the two treatises are entitled "The Perfection of Our Ordinary Actions". Aquinas, too, captured the inclusiveness of the ordinary and applied it to the moral life when he insisted that every human action is a moral action.³⁹ The ordinary rescues moral theology from its restricting tendency to study only sinful or controversial actions.

"spirituality of struggle". Also see Jean Leclercq's discussion of the "Christian Hero", in *History of Christian Spirituality*, 60-62

37. Stephen Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994); Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: the Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994.) See also James Keating, "Listening to Christ's Heart: Moral Theology and Spirituality in Dialogue", *Milltown Studies* 39 (1997) 48-65; and "The Good Life", *Church* 11.2 (1995) 15-20; Mark O'Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995).

38. In particular the ordinary was caught in domestic life, see Thornton, *English Spirituality*, 215-17.

39. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I. II. 1. 3c; see my discussion of this claim in "Ten Reasons Why Thomas Aquinas is Important for Ethics Today", *New Blackfriars* 75 (1994) 354-363.

Seventh, as they developed, the ascetical manuals specifically *addressed the occupations and vocations* of their readers. This specificity is well conveyed, for instance, in a recent essay that investigates the prayers for midwives at the time of childbirth.⁴⁰ Nowhere was the particular vocation of readers more specifically treated, however, than in the lives of the saints. In ascetical literature the saint became an exemplar for readers trying to live out their vocations.⁴¹ One pair of saints who became incredibly comprehensive were Martha and Mary who, until recently, were often depicted together so as to uphold the necessity of both active and contemplative vocations.⁴²

Eighth, ascetical theology's powerful interest in anthropology, therefore, prompted moral theology finally in this century to be concerned not simply with negative external actions that were to be avoided, but more importantly with *a interior character to be positively developed*. Thus, Thomas Aquinas' interest in the virtues in the thirteenth century was not simply due to the retrieval of Aristotle. Rather the virtues emerged earlier in the ascetical theology of the twelfth century that conceived and nourished the religious movements that developed at the end of that century. That theology guided the new religious orders into their relationships with Christ. Thomas, like others in the newly established Franciscan and Dominican orders, grew up in a culture that promoted the virtues as the proper vehicles for growth as a devout disciple and he like others introduced them into his moral theology. Not surprisingly, then, he concluded his treatment of the virtues in the *Pars Secunda* with questions concerning the devout and the religious life.⁴³

Ninth, the ascetical texts also introduced *exercises* not only for devotional practices but also for acquiring those virtues. While the moral manuals directed persons away from (sinful) actions, the ascetical texts directed readers to the practice of actual consistent, concrete positive actions. As de Guibert notes, asceticism meant, "to make someone adept by exercises".⁴⁴ Exercise became key, then, for understanding the development of the ascetical and virtuous personality. In fact, Aquinas used the word "exercise" basically to convey growth in two areas of life: in the ascetical schools of perfection and in the ac-

40. Colin Atkinson and William Stoneman, "'These griping greefes and pinching pangs': Attitudes of Childbirth in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones* (1582)", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990) 193-203.

41. See Vandenbroucke, "Lay Spirituality in the Twelfth Century," 254-57.

42. See Constable, "The Interpretation of Martha and Mary", *Three Studies*, 1-142.

43. See the interest Aquinas had in the formation of young Dominicans in Leonard Boyle, *The Setting of the Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); see also Simon Tugwell's lengthy introduction to Aquinas in *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 201-352. There too we see Thomas' "spiritual writings". See also, Simon Tugwell (ed.), *Early Dominicans selected writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

44. de Guibert, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, 5.

quisition of the cardinal virtues.⁴⁵ Clearly, the insights about the virtues derived from the insights about asceticism.

Implicit in this notion of exercise was a profound regard for the person as embodied. Persons did not become virtuous by intentionality alone or by simple wishful thinking, but only by the habitual practice of particular kinds of action that could eventually become for the practitioner a second nature. In fact, the virtues were basically strengths resulting from the right exercise of the passions. In ascetical literature, at least from the twelfth through sixteenth century, the passions and the body were not suppressed but engaged.

Tenth, the ascetical manuals strongly advocated the primacy of the conscience. While the moral manuals' writings on conscience developed a sin taxonomy where confessors scrutinised a penitent's conscience as some *thing* subject to examination, in the ascetical texts, the conscience was that by which the Christian grew in union with Christ. Written in the vernacular for lay persons, the ascetical texts addressed readers who were striving to take care of their souls and of their neighbour. They were self-directed, a virtue that Lottin recognised and developed in this century.

It is not coincidental, then, that while Peter Lombard preferred Church teaching to the human conscience, Thomas Aquinas was able to insist, on three occasions, that on this point the Master of the Sentences had erred: it was better to die excommunicated than to violate one's conscience.⁴⁶ Thomas had what Peter did not, the experience of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' extraordinary evangelical and spiritual activity that found in the conscience, what *Gaudium et Spes* 16 accurately described seven hundred years later as the voice of God.

In each of these ways then ascetical theology can amplify the scope, competency and subject of moral theology. By emphasising a scripture based, holistic, self-directed, embodied and relational practical theology, ascetical theology offers moral theology a way of exploring a broadened and positive agenda for examining the ethical life.

45. See my discussion on the word "exercise" in Thomas' writings in *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992) 50-52.

46. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum sUniversity Presser libros Sententiarum*, IV, 38. 2. 4 q.a 3; see also IV. 27. 1. 2. q.a. 4 ad3; IV. 27. 3. 3 expositio.