

## NOTES ON MORAL THEOLOGY: FUNDAMENTAL MORAL THEOLOGY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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*The author's survey of the writings of moral theologians over the past five years shows a deep concern about both the nature of moral theology and the role of moral theologians. A certain urgency animates much contemporary reflection calling the moralist to be challenged by the vocation to serve the Church and to explore better the ways Westerners can learn from other cultures. In this regard, virtue ethics continues to serve as a helpful medium for such intercultural dialogue.*

### DEATH

MORAL THEOLOGIANS in France and the United States suffered the untimely loss of revered colleagues. On August 14, 2004, Xavier Thévenot died at the age of 65. His works spanning nearly four decades treated topics such as sexuality (among the young, the old, the celibate, the homosexual); morality and spirituality; an ethics of risk; and ethical discernment.<sup>1</sup> On August 3, 2005, William C. Spohn died at the age of 61. A frequent contributor to these pages, he set the agenda for discussions on Scripture and ethics, virtue ethics, spirituality and morality, and HIV/AIDS.<sup>2</sup> The beloved Bill matched depth with style.

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<sup>1</sup> See the tribute to him by the Institut Catholique, which includes a complete bibliography: [http://www.catho-theo.net/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=19](http://www.catho-theo.net/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=19) (accessed August 3, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> For these Moral Notes, William Spohn wrote: "The Reasoning Heart: An American Approach to Christian Discernment," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983) 30–52; "The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology," 47 (1985) 88–102; "Virtue and

The death of Josef Fuchs on March 9, 2005, marks the end of a period of revisioning the moral theological tradition. Along with Bernard Häring (d. 1998) of the Alfonsianum University and Louis Janssens (d. 2001) of the University of Leuven, the Gregorian University's Fuchs provided the foundations for the moral theology that developed in the light of Vatican II. Many of the issues he dedicated himself to are central to this issue's survey of fundamental moral theology: conscience, the Christian in the pluralistic world, the natural law, and moral reasoning by the Christian disciple.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the death of Pope John Paul II leaves us with images of a richly complex pontificate and no lack of commentary on those years. For an analysis of the late pontiff's moral teachings, Charles Curran considers his writings, especially moral truth, Christ as the source of truth, and the Church's role as guarantor and promoter of the truth. After examining how issues like natural law, human reason, and eschatology are woven into these writings, Curran describes the pope's different methods of moral argument that he employed depending on whether he addressed social issues or sexual and fundamental issues. Curran finds a fairly innovative and historical-mindedness in the former and a restraining classicist mentality in the latter. Having praised the pope's social contributions, Curran then argues, "My primary objection to John Paul II's approach, involving both ecclesiology and moral theology, is his failure to emphasize and at times even to recognize the Catholic approach as a living tradition. In my judgment, the glory of the Catholic self-understanding is its insistence on a living tradition."<sup>4</sup>

On the topic of death, several scholars made significant contributions. In

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American Culture," 48 (1986) 123–135; "The Moral Dimensions of AIDS," 48 (1988) 89–109; "Parable and Narrative in Christian Ethics," 51 (1990) 100–14; "Passions and Principles," 52 (1991) 69–87; "The Recovery of Virtue Ethics," 53 (1992) 60–75; "The Magisterium and Morality," 54 (1993) 95–111; "Jesus and Christian Ethics," 54 (1995) 92–107; "Spirituality and Ethics: Exploring the Connections," 58 (1997) 109–123; with William R. O'Neill, "Rights of Passage: The Ethics of Immigration and Refugee Policy," 59 (1998) 84–106; "Conscience and Moral Development," 61 (2000) 122–38. His books include *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist, 1995) and *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Fuchs's last collection of essays published in English was *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1993). On Fuchs, see Mark Graham, *Josef Fuchs on Natural Law* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002); James F. Keenan, "Champion of Conscience," *America* 192 (April 4, 2005) 6. Also, see Éric Gaziaux, *Morale de la foi et morale autonome: Confrontation entre P. Delhaye et J. Fuchs* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995); Cristina L. H. Traina, "Josef Fuchs and Individual Integrity," *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1999) 169–202.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2005).

*The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, Darlene Fozard Weaver begins her essay with the clear assertion, “Christian life is one of dying and rising with Christ.” She analyses the “natural,” “personal,” and “moral” dimensions of death by revisiting the contributions of Philippe Aries, Oliver O’Donovan, and Karl Rahner, among others. She speculates on how it is that we appropriate the death of Christ and so die with Christ. Echoing an insight by which the separate notions of final and fundamental options were once developed, Weaver speaks of death “as a wager of love.” She explains, “This confrontation of one’s own death entails an interpretation of the meaning and value of one’s life, and of what and whom [*sic*] is worthy in it. Thus, the person’s appropriation of his death is a wager, an act of faith whereby the person entrusts himself to some source of meaning and value. Hence we may rightly call this devotion of oneself a wager of love.”<sup>5</sup>

Christopher Vogt’s *Patience, Compassion, Hope, and the Christian Art of Dying Well* is based on the traditional premise that the art of learning to live well enables us to die well. Depicting the death of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel as an invitation into the dying of Christ, Vogt revisits some of the major texts of the *ars moriendi* tradition examining Erasmus’s *Preparing for Death* (1533), William Perkins’s *Salve for the Sicke Man* (1595), Robert Bellarmine’s *The Art of Dying Well* (1619), and Jeremy Taylor’s *Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying* (1651). To read these works and to work their insights into a constructive contemporary manual for the art of dying, Vogt uses the ethics of virtue, describing the patience of the sufferer, the compassion of the caregiver, and the hope that unites them.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Dolores Christie envisions the wholeness of Christian death practically by considering the personal, ethical, legal, and sacramental decisions and practices that one engages in facing death.<sup>7</sup> Like Vogt’s, hers is a contemporary manual for Christian dying.

## THE THEOLOGICAL NATURE OF MORAL THEOLOGY

Five years into the new century we find several essays that invite us to look to the past in order to chart the future. One essay considers the pivotal role John Mahoney’s *The Making of Moral Theology* has had in casting

<sup>5</sup> Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Death,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (New York: Oxford University, 2005) 254–69, at 263.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Vogt, *Patience, Compassion, Hope and the Christian Art of Dying Well* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). In an uncommonly wise and tender book, theologian Paul Crowley meditates on *Unwanted Wisdom: Suffering, the Cross, and Hope* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Dolores Christie, *Last Rights: A Catholic Perspective on End of Life Issues* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

moral theology's history.<sup>8</sup> Another asks, "Where Have All the Proportion-ists Gone?" and notes that the transitional theory was a catalyst for an expanded interest in the connection between moral action and moral agency and engendered interest in casuistry, feminist and virtue ethics.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, India's Soosai Arokiasamy surveys the recent past and finds much to recommend it: the historical character of morality, an appreciation of the moral agent as relational, and an attentiveness to the challenge of globalization, coupled with a growing appreciation for solidarity.<sup>10</sup> With "a sense of weariness," Anthony LoPresti examines the polarizing discourse in contemporary moral theology and recommends an expanded and reconciling dialogue within the field.<sup>11</sup> Julia Fleming is less bothered by contemporary debates and offers wise counsel: "Anyone nonplussed by the recent 'method wars' can take comfort in the fact that moral dispute was not a twentieth-century invention, as the exchanges concerning Jansenism, laxism, probabilism, and probabiliorism copiously demonstrate. Although my research is still too preliminary to support a definite conclusion about what these early disagreements mean for us, it cannot be insignificant that we are part of a struggle between innovation and the retrieval of tradition, mercy and the emulation of martyrdom, that has shaped the history of Christian ethics over many centuries."<sup>12</sup> Representative of the many endeavors to cross cultural boundaries, Herbert Schögel and Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl published in Germany their survey of American contributions over the past forty years.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> James F. Keenan, "John Mahoney's *The Making of Moral Theology*," in *Oxford Handbook* 503–19. Mahoney recently wrote about how the significance of the doctrines on creation, sin, redemption, and eschatology affect our ethical consideration of genetics: "Christian Doctrines, Ethical Issues, and Human Genetics," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 719–49.

<sup>9</sup> Aline Kalbian, "Where Have All the Proportion-ists Gone?" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30 (2002) 3–22.

<sup>10</sup> Soosai Arokiasamy, "Moral Theology at the Turn of the Millennium: Challenges and Prospects in the Mission of the Church," in *Seeking New Horizons*, ed. Leonard Fernando (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002) 303–16.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony LoPresti, "Beyond the Family Feuds: The Future of Roman Catholic Moral Theology," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 10 (2003) 175–93. For an Australian read, see Brian Lewis, "Vatican II and Roman Catholic Moral Theology—Forty Years After," *Australasian Catholic Record* 80 (2003) 275–86.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Fleming, "Preserving, Investigating, and Learning from Our Past," *Josephinum* 10 (2003) 230–38, at 237. Fleming frequently invokes the past to chart the present: "The Right to Reputation and the Preferential Option for the Poor," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24.1 (2004) 73–88. We await her forthcoming study, *Defending Probabilism: The Moral Theology of Juan Caramuel* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Schögel and Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl, "Fundamentalmoral 40 Jahre nach dem II. Vatikanum," *Ethica* 13 (2005) 293–302.

This sense of taking stock of moral theology has yielded a wonderful collection of textbooks. Among the most accomplished is Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor's *Moral Theology in An Age of Renewal*. In the spirit of renewal, Odozor begins his work with a reflection on the historical, ecclesial, and theological contexts of the reception of both the Council and of *Humanae Vitae*. From there he explains the central debates that framed moral discourse from 1975–1995: the *proprium* of moral theology, the natural law, the use of Scripture, the magisterium, and the absoluteness of moral norms. Odozor takes pains not only to demarcate debates but also to illustrate consensus. He concludes by presenting a living tradition at the service of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Another significant work is James Bretzke's *A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology*.<sup>15</sup> Mapping a moral methodology, Bretzke describes the sources for moral theology as two spheres at the end of two axes. Along the rational claim axis he pivots human experience and a normatively human anthropology; on the sacred claim axis, he situates the sacred texts and the Church's tradition. The axes intersect in the sanctuary of the conscience, whose work is to guide us in this complex world where we rely on casuistry. He concludes by reminding us of sin and failure. At the heart of his argument is the mode of Christian discourse, and Bretzke, a skillful teacher, proposes six criteria for such discourse: comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, coherence, credibility, being convincing, and being Christian.<sup>16</sup>

Todd Salzman studies the way Scripture, nature, experience, reason, and tradition serve as the moral sources for two contemporary Catholic methods of moral argument: the basic goods theory of Joseph Boyle, John Finnis, and Germain Grisez and the revisionism of Fuchs, Janssens, and Curran.<sup>17</sup> In England Alban McCoy explores important philosophical concerns dealing with determinism, freedom, and relativism, then looks at the deontology of Kant, the consequentialism of Bentham and Mill, and the

<sup>14</sup> Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal: A Study of the Catholic Tradition since Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> James T. Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Bretzke develops these in "Life Matters: 6Cs of moral Discourse," *New Theology Review* 15 (May 2002) 48–59; see also "Scripture and Ethics: Core, Context, and Coherence," in *Moral Theology: New Directions and Fundamental Issues*, ed. James Keating (New York: Paulist, 2004) 88–107; "A New Pentecost for Moral Theology: The Challenge of Inculturation of Ethics," *Josephinum* 10 (2003) 250–60.

<sup>17</sup> Todd Salzman *What Are They Saying about Catholic Ethical Method?* (New York: Paulist, 2003).

virtue ethics of Aristotle, and concludes with a study of ethics in a Christian context with a specific nod to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>18</sup> Australia's Robert Gascoigne locates Christian ethics precisely in the pluralistic world in which we live. His responsibility ethics stresses the centrality of conscience and the need to envision the people we will become.<sup>19</sup> In a festschrift for James P. Hannigan, James Keating brings together more than a dozen moral theologians to reflect on Christian living, particularly, moral discernment, conversion, love, and the common good. In the first essay of that collection, Norbert Rigali notes the lasting influence of Bernard Häring and declares that the subject of moral theology's present incarnation is "unmistakably Christian: life in Christ. There can be no question that the new discipline is theology."<sup>20</sup>

Rigali's assertion rings true throughout the field of moral theology.<sup>21</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan forges a relationship between moral and sacramental theology through Häring's work on the virtue of religion. His understanding of virtue as not only interior and personal, but communal and public, prompted him to explore the ramifications of a virtue that moves an entire community of believers to respond collectively to the God who calls us: "We face the world with a moral task which flows from the virtue of religion. This assumption can have only one meaning in the light of the following principle: our entire activity in the world must have a religious formation, for all our acts must be ordered to the loving majesty of God. This means that all our moral tasks are at the same time religious tasks."<sup>22</sup> Cahalan's study helps us appreciate how we are formed morally by our virtuous stance of reverence before God.

Klaus Demmer turns to the mystery of the Trinity and finds there the unconditioned and unlimited reconciling nature of God, which we can understand only through our own practices of free decision-making. He asks: How do we discover at once the proper courses of action so as to cooperate with God who reconciles us to Godself? Here, Demmer reminds

<sup>18</sup> Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Gascoigne, *Freedom and Purpose: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Norbert Rigali, "On Theology of the Christian Life," *Moral Theology* 3–23, at 19.

<sup>21</sup> Along similar lines, see the collection of essays by the late Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love, Language* (New York: Continuum, 2003); also L. Roger Owens, "The Theological Ethics of Herbert McCabe, O.P.: A Review Essay," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (2005) 571–92.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ II* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963) 124, as quoted in Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Formed in the Image of Christ: The Sacramental-Moral Theology of Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R.* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2004) 161.

us, lies the problem of the hermeneutical mediation of revelation with morality.<sup>23</sup>

Jan Jans negotiates this hermeneutical mediation by reflecting on the God of moral theology. Following his mentor, Klaus Demmer's lead, Jans asserts that the kingdom of God cannot be thought of as "a pre-given idea but [as] a concrete assignment which intends to further the spirituality" of the Christian. This search is guided by the assumption that there is a deep consonance between obeying God and articulating good behavior. Jans helps us to see that our encounter with God informs and is informed by our idea and expression of right ethical conduct.<sup>24</sup>

Cataldo Zuccaro studies the relationship between Christology and morality by focusing on the Christ-event as constituting the foundation of moral theology. In Christ we understand ourselves as participating in the self-understanding of Christ, who knew himself to be the Son of God. Born to a new life as children of God, we see the entire foundation of the ethical life residing in the conscience; there, by identifying Christ with the fundamental option for the moral life, Zuccaro gives substance and sustenance to that often theologically remote concept. Moreover, while understanding ourselves as wounded by sin, it is precisely in our participatory self-understanding that we see ourselves as, in conscience, being reconciled to God and to one another and therein participating in the work of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

The centrality of conscience continues to be invoked as moral theology reasserts its unmistakably theological nature.<sup>26</sup> This is evidenced by an extraordinary exchange in Australia between Cardinal George Pell of Sydney and Jesuit Father Frank Brennan. It began in 1999 when Pell claimed, "Catholic teachers should stop talking about the primacy of conscience. This has never been a Catholic doctrine (although this point generally cuts little ice), but such language is not conducive to identifying what contributes to human development. It is a short cut, which often leads the uninitiated to feel even more complacent while 'doing their own thing.'"<sup>27</sup> In 2003, he amplified his position: "In the past I have been in trouble for

<sup>23</sup> Klaus Demmer, "Der dreifaltige Gott und die Moral," in *Christlicher Glaube, Theologie, und Ethik*, ed. Wilhelm Guggenberger and Gertraud Ladner (Münster: LIT, 2002) 111–28.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Jans, "Divine Command and/or Human Ethics? Exploring the Maieutical Dialectics between Christian Faith in God and Responsibility," in *Für die Freiheit verantwortlich*, ed. Jan Jans (Freiburg: Herder, 2004) 35–47, at 36.

<sup>25</sup> Cataldo Zuccaro, *Cristologia e morale* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Charles E. Curran, ed., *Conscience* (New York: Paulist, 2004); Jayne Hoose, *Conscience in World Religions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.cis.org.au/Events/acton/acton99.html> (accessed November 5, 2005).

stating that the so-called doctrine of the primacy of conscience should be quietly dropped. I would like to reconsider my position here and now state that I believe that this misleading doctrine of the primacy of conscience should be publicly rejected.”<sup>28</sup> In 2004, he defended his critique giving a twofold reason for excluding the “primacy” of conscience: “My object is twofold: firstly to explain that increasingly, even in Catholic circles, the appeal to the primacy of conscience is being used to justify what we would like to do rather than what God wants us to do. . . . My second claim is that conscience does not . . . enjoy primacy, because conscience always involves a human act of judgement which could be mistaken, innocently or otherwise, and the consequences of all decisions have to be played out in some ordered human community. Every human community has to limit the rights of its members to ‘err’ however error is defined.”<sup>29</sup> Finally, in 2005, we find Pell’s most distilled position: “While we should follow a well-formed conscience, a well-formed conscience is hard to achieve. And if we suspect—as surely we all sometimes must—that our conscience is underformed or malformed in some area, then we should follow a reliable authority until such time as we can correct our consciences. And for Catholics, the most reliable authority is the Church.”<sup>30</sup>

To the Pell initiative, which seems to be about responsibility and right regard for the primacy of the truth, Brennan responded in 2004. After an extended defense of the primacy of conscience invoking John Henry Newman, Vatican II, and Pope John Paul II, Brennan considered the social significance of the stances of specific Australian bishops speaking out, in conscience, against the war in Iraq.<sup>31</sup> Later, in an address to the National Conference of Catholic Health Australia, Brennan turned to another sector of church leadership, advocating the indispensable relevance of an informed conscience in carrying out that ministry.<sup>32</sup> Recently he examined another area of leadership, in the political arena, and, after invoking Pope Benedict XVI and others, demonstrated the necessity of conscience so as to find and determine the truth.<sup>33</sup> In short, Brennan’s responses always

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/Archbishop/Addresses/2003530\\_62.shtml](http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/Archbishop/Addresses/2003530_62.shtml) (accessed November 5, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/Archbishop/Addresses/200433\\_853.shtml](http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/Archbishop/Addresses/200433_853.shtml) (accessed November 5, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> George Pell, “The Inconvenient Conscience,” *First Things* (May 2005) 22–26, at 24.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.acmica.org/pub\\_brennan-conscience.html](http://www.acmica.org/pub_brennan-conscience.html) (accessed on November 5, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.uniya.org/talks/brennan\\_6sep04.html](http://www.uniya.org/talks/brennan_6sep04.html) (accessed on November 5, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.acu.edu.au/forms/mediastore/FBPublicLecture.pdf> (accessed on November 5, 2005).

return to the pivotal question: could we ever find the objective truth were we not obliged by the primacy of conscience?<sup>34</sup>

Natural law, too, has been engaged again, but now precisely as a theological concept. Following Scholastic thinking, Jean Porter advocates for the universality of the natural law, specifically as it emerges from its theological context. She acknowledges that this approach might seem confused “if we assume that rational inquiry must be purified of all historical and cultural contingencies.” Later she explains that the theory provides “a way of thinking about the theological significance of human nature and the moralities stemming from that nature.”<sup>35</sup>

Like Porter, Eberhard Schockenhoff writes an apology for the natural law. Demmer’s influence can be seen again as Schockenhoff explains the effect of history on the natural law: “Historical thinking shattered the assumption that the human person had an essential nature which was the same, untouched by the passage of time.” He adds, “The totality of human nature in its whole richness, with its potential and capacities which are yet to be awakened, can be grasped only in history, not by an aprioristic affirmation about its essence or by a perception of its substance which remains limited to the consciousness.” Still Schockenhoff explains that since human nature is “so fortunately imperfect,” we need to understand human nature within the context of history, because its very nature is historical. Similarly, the anthropological meaning of history depends on an understanding of human nature in all its incompleteness.<sup>36</sup>

Schockenhoff later explains that the natural law cannot “embrace an integral ethos which comprehended every sphere of life,” but rather is “the indispensable basis of an international human-rights politics.” Recognizing that human dignity and human rights are founded on universally shared, fundamental assumptions of what the given task of being human is, Schockenhoff states that “natural law affirmations remain in a ‘preliminary sphere’ which points beyond itself to ‘the fullness of the basis of life.’”<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Demmer and Schockenhoff’s claims about history are relevant for our understanding of the moral tradition itself. Brian Johnstone argues

<sup>34</sup> Frank Brennan, S.J., “Conscience Perspectives: The Roman Catholic View,” *Gesher* 3 (2005) 76–79. See also Keenan, “Conscience,” *Moral Wisdom* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2004) 27–46.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) at 29, 327. See Stephen Pope, “Reason and Natural Law,” in *Oxford Handbook* 148–67.

<sup>36</sup> Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Natural Law and Human Dignity: Universal Ethics in an Historical World*, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003) 128–29. Likewise, Porter defends the teleological concept of nature (*Nature as Reason* 82–103).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 290–91. See also Porter’s remarks of the “underdetermination” of human morality by human nature (*Nature as Reason* 45–52).

that “tradition is not an object, an entity apart from the Church, but the structured life of the Church.” He elaborates: “The main task of moral theologians, within the Tradition, is not primarily that of securing the unchanging status of human values and norms by lining them to presumed unchanging essences or decrees. . . . Rather their role is to articulate the purposes of the moral Tradition, to show, through historical research, how and why moral teachings emerged in the tradition, and to critically evaluate such teachings with respect to those purposes.”<sup>38</sup>

### MORAL THEOLOGIANS

Johnstone’s insight that the nature of moral theology affects the vocation of the moral theologian is important. In a festschrift honoring Karl Wilhelm Merks, the German ethicist known for his work on autonomous ethics and responsible freedom, Joseph Selling reflects on moral theology as “an art, or perhaps more accurately as a skill.” Focusing on ethics rather than on moral theology per se, Selling writes: “Teachers of ethics, therefore, cannot ‘make’ people be ethical, or unethical for that matter. This is one of the mistaken presumptions of the hierarchical magisterium. What an ethicist might be able to do is to explain sufficiently the information that people need to make ethical decisions on their own.” He concludes, “The focus of an ethicist, therefore, should not be some personal quest to tell other people how to be ethical or some other utopian mission to make the world a better place. Rather, it should be a focus on the project of helping persons clarify their intentions and broadening their understanding of their options—all of which is built upon a fundamental respect for the autonomy of the human person.”<sup>39</sup>

Selling’s ideas appear to be very different from those held by younger American colleagues. For instance, David McCarthy reflects on an essay by William Portier, who notes that the end of an immigrant Catholic subculture “is the single most important fact in U.S. Catholic history” over the last fifty years.<sup>40</sup> McCarthy claims that earlier Catholics were members of identifiable communities in which they were enclosed, but in the postmod-

<sup>38</sup> Brian Johnstone, “The Argument from the Tradition in Catholic (Moral) Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004) 139–55, at 154–55. See also, James Keating, “Contemporary Epistemology and Theological Application of the Historical Jesus Quest,” *Josephinum* 10 (2003) 343–56.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Selling, “The Polarity of Act and Intention,” *Für die Freiheit* 76–84, at 78–79, 84.

<sup>40</sup> William L. Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” *Communio* 31 (2004) 35–66, at 46.

ern world, without such a subculture, the Catholic question is not how do we get to the table, but rather what do we bring to it.<sup>41</sup>

In *New Wine, New Wineskins*, we find new scholars reflecting on the vocation we share.<sup>42</sup> Christopher Vogt considers what it means to be a theologian in the Church and remarks that the “work of a lay theologian is not a typical lay vocation.” He adds this striking observation: “I find that there are no regularized, institutional, professional practices in place to develop my connection to what David Tracy has identified as the third crucial public that theologians should engage: the church.” As a corrective, Vogt proposes that the local bishop should extend an invitation to the lay theologians to preach regularly.<sup>43</sup>

Margaret Pfeil offers moral theologians a traditional identity, to be a disciple. She writes: “Transparent mediation of God’s love constitutes the essence of the theologian’s vocation as disciple because it is the way of Jesus.” She adds, “The theologian as disciple at once enters through the door that is Jesus Christ while also opening a way forward for others on the journey with and to God.”<sup>44</sup> William Mattison, in arguing that “disengaged theology” is more prevalent than we may think, writes: “While Catholic professors of theology generally do not reject the importance of faith in people’s lives, they frequently fail to engage their students’ faith convictions while doing theology.”<sup>45</sup> Assuredly his claim will warrant responses from many who teach in the field.

One particular theme emerges here: the moral theologian as summoning a call to holiness. Echoing a claim by Vincent Twomey, “Holiness is the ultimate object of morality,”<sup>46</sup> Christopher Steck writes, “Christian moral theology is not simply a deductive or rationalistic science. It requires that its practitioner have a well-formed heart that is attuned to the Gospel and the values at its core. In an ideal world, Catholic moral theologians would be saints and scholars. However, Catholic ethicists now perform their trade in a context that often does not sustain the kind of Gospel vision associated

<sup>41</sup> David McCarthy, “Shifting Settings from Subculture to Pluralism: Catholic Moral Theology in an Evangelical Key,” *Communio* 31 (2004) 85–110.

<sup>42</sup> William Mattison III, ed., *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Vogt, “Finding a Place at the Heart of the Church,” in Mattison, *New Wine* 45–65, at 52, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Pfeil, “Transparent Mediation: The Vocation of the Theologian as Disciple,” *ibid.* 67–76, at 73; also, “The Interpretive Task of Moral Theology: Cultural and Epistemological Considerations,” *Josephinum* 10 (2003) 261–70.

<sup>45</sup> William Mattison III, “Dare We Hope Our Students Believe,” in Mattison, *New Wine* 77–102.

<sup>46</sup> D. Vincent Twomey, “Moral Renewal through Renewed Moral Reasoning,” *Josephinum* 10 (2003) 210–29, at 228.

with a saintly existence.” For this reason, he proposes a “discipleship ca-suistry” based on saintliness.<sup>47</sup>

Elsewhere, vulnerability is the word that allows Ireland’s Enda McDonagh to consider the holy. He pauses to reflect on where we are most vulnerable, that is, in our sexuality. Here McDonagh weaves in an element of an ethics of risk that allows us to accept, love, and contend.<sup>48</sup> McDonagh explores that element of risk in the context of the work of artists, the lives of priests, and the challenge of aging.

The incompleteness of humanity, which leaves us limited and contingent, is the starting point of Joyce Kloc McClure’s investigations. This insight does not lead us into a frustrated existence, but rather into the uncertain world of possibility and freedom. In this light, McClure examines the notion of moral luck and captures the sense of human vulnerability that makes our situations in life so fraught with possibility for relationality and therein for good and evil. She concludes with a wonderful proposal for an ethics of active acceptance.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, Mark Graham and Darlene Fozard Weaver explore the issues of the fundamental option and its relationship to moral goodness and badness, as opposed to moral rightness and wrongness. In the light of the writings of Josef Fuchs, Graham proposes that moral goodness should be more than simply the fundamental option. He suggests identifying goodness with consistent patterns of striving to realize morally right activity.<sup>50</sup> In one of the most thoughtful essays of the year, Weaver underlines the reflexive character of acting and notes that, while many revisionists describe how “actions ferry the fundamental option into the categorical realm . . . [t]he ferry ride, as it were, does not appear to make a return trip.” She invites us to reflect on the intimacy with us that God wants, so as to enrich “our understanding of the person’s innermost, fundamental response to God.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Steck, S.J., “Saintly Voyeurism: A Methodological Necessity for the Christian Ethicist?” in Mattison, *New Wine* 25–44, at 40. Richard Gula offers an integration of morality and spirituality in his *The Call to Holiness: Embracing a Fully Christian Life* (New York: Paulist, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Enda McDonagh, *Vulnerable to the Holy: In Faith, Morality, and Art* (Dublin: Columba, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> Joyce Kloc McClure, *Finite, Contingent, and Free: A New Ethics of Acceptance* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Mark Graham, “Rethinking Morality’s Relationship to Salvation: Josef Fuchs, S.J., on Moral Goodness,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 750–72.

<sup>51</sup> Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Intimacy with God and Self-Relation in the World: The Fundamental Option and Categorical Activity,” in Mattison, *New Wine* 143–63, at 155, 160. These essays inevitably lead us to consider sin; see Ronald A. Mercier reflecting on the writings of James Alison in “What Are We to Make of

## VIRTUE ETHICS

Already in this note we have seen the frequency with which moral theologians turn to the virtues. By its renewing influence, virtue is becoming once again the language of ethics.<sup>52</sup> For instance, in his final contribution to the field of moral theology, Bill Spohn writes in the *Oxford Handbook* about the future agenda of the relationship between Scripture and ethics: “The most adequate ethical approach to Scripture is that of character and virtue ethics. While the ethics of principles and the ethics of consequences are also represented in the texts, they are subordinate to the ethics of character.”<sup>53</sup>

In that same *Handbook*, Jean Porter considers virtue and teases out the tension between “the tempered pessimism” of Augustine and the “sober optimism” of Aquinas. She explains that “the language of virtue builds in a kind of flexibility, even ambiguity, that is not so evident in the languages of law and duty.”<sup>54</sup> That ambiguity is what allows virtue to be the medium for comparative ethics.

James Bretzke, for his part, looks to virtue to engage cross-cultural dialogue about ethical issues. He focuses on the discussion of human rights, considering the Confucian understanding of them as human rituals whose sacred claim is based on the Confucian Five Relationships and the virtues of *li* (propriety) and *hsin* (fidelity). He proposes the virtues of Confucianism as a positive resource for both interreligious dialogue and cross-cultural ethics.<sup>55</sup>

Arguing that the emerging interest in practices of personal formation stem from virtue ethics, Aaron Stalnaker offers a comparative study on the way the early Confucian figure Xun Kuang (ca. 310–ca. 220 B.C.E.), commonly known as Xunzi, and Augustine of Hippo developed sophisticated accounts of transformative spiritual exercises to help us overcome our evil and change for the better. He discovers that “the most arresting and significant commonality” between the two writers “is their shared stress on

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Sin?” *Josephinum* 10 (2003) 271–84; Kenneth R. Himes, “Human Failing: The Meanings and Metaphors of Sin,” in Keating, *Moral Theology* 145–61; James F. Keenan, “Sin,” in Keenan, *Moral Wisdom* 47–66.

<sup>52</sup> See Twomey, “Moral Renewal.” Christine Swanton argues that virtue ethics is not limited to Aristotelianism but has a plethora of expressions: *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach* (New York: Oxford University, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Spohn, “Scripture,” in *Oxford Handbook* 93–111. See also Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Jean Porter, “Virtue,” in *Oxford Handbook* 205–19, at 219 and 206.

<sup>55</sup> James T. Bretzke, “Human Rights or Human Rites?: A Confucian Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41 (2003) 44–67.

the need for study, learning, and reflection as the backbone of their respective programs of spiritual exercises.” This “intellectualism” within their programs of spiritual exercises is a chastened one, argues Stalnaker, because while they affirm the value of intellectual apprehension and reflection, they question “the neutrality and absolute sovereignty of thinking.” He adds, “Being a chastened intellectual means that one views the task of learning not merely as gaining new information, but primarily as the task of assimilating transformative knowledge into one’s mode of existence.”<sup>56</sup>

Stalnaker begins his work with the simple question: “Does anyone ever really change?” This interest in personal transformation permeates much of the contemporary writings on virtue ethics and resonates with the earlier claims of Häring and Cahalan as well as Pfeil, Vogt, Weaver, Graham, and others.<sup>57</sup> Herein we find the summons to become better people. This call might seem, on the face of it, self-evident, but further consideration of recent works lets us see that virtue ethics has an aggressive agenda: its proponents believe that we need to be awakened from a slumber of moral complacency.

Describing contemporary culture as comatose, the Irish philosopher, Thomas Casey, tries to awaken humanity by inviting us to consider the virtue of humility: “Humility is of the utmost importance for a comatose culture. First of all, it takes humility to recognize that we are in a quagmire; secondly, it takes humility to realize that we only sink deeper into the quicksand the more we try to get out through our own unaided efforts. The only way to rise from the morass is by accepting help. Being humble means recognizing that we cannot do it on our own, but we can do everything with God’s help.”<sup>58</sup>

The most sustained and substantive apology for virtue ethics argues that we must reenvision what it means to be moral. Andrew Michael Flescher revisits the well-known and accepted claims of J. O. Urmson and David

<sup>56</sup> Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2006) 386, 391. See his, “Comparative Religious Ethics and the Problem of Human Nature,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (2005) 187–224.

<sup>57</sup> Besides my book with Harrington (noted above), my recent works on virtue include “The Cardinal Virtues,” in *Moral Wisdom* 139–57; *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2005); “L’Etica delle virtù: Per una sua promozione fra i teologi moralisti italiani,” *Rassegna di teologia* 44 (2003) 569–90; “What Does Virtue Ethics Bring to Genetics?” in *Genetics, Theology, and Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Conversation*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill (New York: Crossroad, 2005) 97–113; “Sexual Ethics and Virtue Ethics,” *Louvain Studies* 30.3 (2005) 183–203.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas G. Casey, *Humble and Awake: Coping with Our Comatose Culture* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 2004) 13.

Heyd on works of “supererogation,” that is, those deeds beyond the call of duty. Flescher asks the pertinent question, Does such a category make sense once one leaves a duty- based ethics? By turning to a virtue-based ethics, Flescher asks what might be required of the ordinary person. Are so-called supererogatory works beyond the call of morality?

Flescher proposes the self-understanding of Dorothy Day who believed that her moral task was to combat poverty by assuming poverty and challenged us to live and act likewise. Flescher asks: Is her invitation an ideal to be admired or a real explication of our call to be moral? He makes a case for the latter: “The virtue ethic that I will endorse maintains that if we do not work on our character development, and thereby fail to dispose ourselves to love the neighbor and subsequently act on behalf of the neighbor to a much larger degree than we currently do, then we can be found to be morally blameworthy.” He adds: “While living virtuously is not synonymous with living altruistically, living altruistically is the kernel of living virtuously.”<sup>59</sup>

In a similar vein, Maria Cimperman asks the question about the signs of the times: With over twenty-five million dead from the infection and forty-two million people infected, why is there such a universal hesitancy to recognize the moral summons with which HIV/AIDS confronts us? In *When God’s People Have HIV/AIDS*, Cimperman develops a basic profile for the type of people we must become if we are to be disciples in a time of AIDS. After reflecting on the need to be historical realists, she proposes five virtues as constitutive of contemporary discipleship: justice, prudence, fidelity, self-care, and mercy. Like Casey and Flescher, Cimperman calls us to change now and offers us the virtues as the medium for such transformation.<sup>60</sup>

This need for reading the signs of the times is made more immediate and personal in Bertrand Leboché and Anne Lécu’s work, which asks the question, “Where are you when I am Sick?” They look to the virtue of hospitality as providing a readiness to appreciate the urgency of another’s need.<sup>61</sup>

This sense of the impending moment, of the *kairos*, the fullness of time present in the moment, stands as a moral challenge. Being able to discern

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Michael Flescher, *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2003) 11.

<sup>60</sup> Maria Cimperman, *When God’s People Have HIV/AIDS: An Approach to Ethics*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Bertrand Leboché and Anne Lécu, *Où es-tu quand j’ai mal?* (Paris: Cerf, 2005). On hospitality, Patrick T. McCormick proposes the virtue for sojourners traveling to the third world: “The Good Sojourner: Third World Tourism and the Call to Hospitality,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24.1 (2004) 89–104.

when we are in such times is the theme of some recent retrospective work. For instance, Jon Vickery provides a gracious investigation into “the philosopher of virtue” Josef Pieper’s cooperation with National Socialism. Vickery uses the virtues (and vices) to understand how Pieper allowed himself to be compromised. He names covetousness as the vice that inhibited Pieper from seeing prudently where he was called to stand.<sup>62</sup>

A more positive discovery is described in the tribute to the late Rosa Parks. Randall Bush asks, what were the character traits that enabled Rosa Parks to refuse to move from her seat on Montgomery bus? Bush signals that the virtue of faith is what convinced Parks of what she had to do. As Parks wrote, “Since I have always been a strong believer in God, I knew that He was with me, and only He could get me through the next step. . . . I had no idea that history was being made. I was just tired of giving in. Somehow, I felt that what I did was right by standing up to that bus driver. . . . I chose not to move because I was right. When I made that decision, I knew that I had the strength of God and my ancestors with me.”<sup>63</sup> Bush quotes Parks’s biographer: “Faith in God was never the question for Rosa Parks, it was the answer.”<sup>64</sup>

Virtue, being transformative, leads inevitably to action. Timothy Jackson makes this case in his study of the Christian virtue of *agape*. In arguing that love is antecedent both to other virtues and goods (as “the necessary condition of their full enjoyment”) and to our becoming caring persons, Jackson describes three basic features of *agape*: “(1) unconditional willing of the good for the other, (2) equal regard for the other, and (3) passionate service open to self-sacrifice for the sake of the other.” He adds, “the third puts an explicit premium on a specific action: bearing one another’s burdens.”<sup>65</sup>

Finally two other works argue that by realizing the here and now as the moment for transformative change and action, we actually become happier. Studying research on altruism and its relation to mental and physical health, Stephen Post maintains that altruistic “emotions and behaviors are

<sup>62</sup> Jon Vickery, “Searching for Josef Pieper,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 622–37. The same “complacency with a corrupt institution” appears in Joseph E. Capizzi study, “For What Shall We Repent? Reflections on the American Bishops, Their Teaching, and Slavery in the United States, 1839–1861,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2003) 767–91.

<sup>63</sup> Rosa Parks, *Dear Mrs. Parks* (New York: Lee and Low Books, 1996) 42, as quoted in Randal K. Bush, “Remembering Rosa Parks,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 838–49, at 846.

<sup>64</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Viking, 2000) 14, as quoted in Bush, *op. cit.* 847.

<sup>65</sup> Timothy P. Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2003) 10.

associated with greater well-being, health and longevity.”<sup>66</sup> In a riveting chapter on near death experiences, John Gibbs notes that these narratives share the same three common experiences: the original encounter is deeply consoling, filled with light and love, but it is accompanied by a flashback of one’s life, marked by regret over events with loved ones; this leads to a reform of one’s life, in which one more vigilantly pursues love and eschews selfish misery.<sup>67</sup>

### THE CHURCH AND CULTURE

In *What Is and What Ought to Be: The Dialectic of Experience, Theology, and Church*, Michael Lawler considers what the ethicist can bring to the Church. Using Karl Rahner’s definition of practical theology as the “theological discipline which is concerned with the church’s self-actualization in the here and now—both that which is and that which *ought to be*,” Lawler explains the scope of his project: “Practical theology is the *theological* reflection provoked by and in response to the church’s actual situation. It does not explain from deductive theological principles the church’s actual situation, but reflects critically on the actual situation to test it for relevance and significance in light of both the gospel and the socio-historical conditions of the time.”<sup>68</sup> After exploring the “mutual mediations” of theology and sociology, Lawler turns to the sociology of reception of the magisterial teachings on artificial contraception and divorce and remarriage.

Lawler’s work could be read alongside one by East Africa’s major moral theologian, Laurenti Magesa, who argues that the key to the African Church’s future is inculturation, and that its leadership must account for present relations between Africa and Rome and between clergy and laity. Needing to move beyond a fear of making mistakes, African church leaders must rethink ecclesial structures and reexamine the apostolic conception of the Church as the people of God.<sup>69</sup> But before doing any of that, Magesa wants the Church of Africa to remember its past, act as a social and political conscience, restore health, defend the oppressed, and, in particu-

<sup>66</sup> Stephen G. Post, “Altruism, Happiness, and Health: It’s Good to be Good,” *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 12 (2005) 66–77, at 66.

<sup>67</sup> John C. Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality: Beyond the Theories of Kohlberg and Hoffman* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003) 195–226.

<sup>68</sup> Karl Rahner, “Practical Theology within the Totality of Theological Disciplines,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9 (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1972) 102 as quoted in Michael G. Lawler, *What Is and What Ought to Be: The Dialectic of Experience, Theology, and Church* (New York: Continuum, 2005) xii.

<sup>69</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Le Catholicisme africain en mutation: Modèles d’églises pour un siècle nouveau* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Clé, 2001).

lar, liberate women in Africa.<sup>70</sup> Magesa has advanced his argument with another work that explores the actual attempts by the Church to inculturate in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda and to explore the resulting religious, moral, and social practices. Those interested in moral theology's possible relationships with faith, liturgy, sacramental theology, and spirituality, will find in this evaluation a concrete expression of what theology in context can be.<sup>71</sup>

The works of Lawler and Magesa reflect the claims of Bernd Wannewetsch in his essay "Ecclesiology and Ethics." He argues that "Christian ethics should be concerned with what the Church has to say, but more so with the word that the Church has to hear." He explains the latter as precisely the word that the Church proclaims. The Church, therefore, must receive, incarnate, and embody the word that it receives, and the ethicist must explore not only what the Church teaches but how it practices what it preaches.<sup>72</sup>

In Germany, Herbert Schlögel also arrived at a similar position. Studying the Church as the universal sacrament of holiness that sustains a community of reconciliation, while providing the space for spiritual and moral growth, Schlögel urges ethicists to take seriously the task of reflecting on the Church not only in its teachings but also in its practices.<sup>73</sup> Brian Johnstone agrees with this agenda: "The communication of the moral Tradition is not primarily a matter of legislation and enforcement in a juridic mode, but one of manifesting the goodness of the life that is being commended."<sup>74</sup>

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, explored this task brilliantly as he faced divisions at the Anglican Consultative Council on June 20, 2005. Reflecting on how and why the Church needs to reflect on what it teaches, Williams suggests that "at the end of things," God will ask us: "Did you so live in the experience of the Church, the Body of my Son, that a tormented world saw the possibility of hope and of joy?" "Did you focus afresh on the one task the Church has to perform—living Christ in such a way that his news, his call, is compelling?"<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> On the function of memory for African church life, see Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, trans. Brian McNeil (Nairobi: Paulines, 2003) 56–100; and Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua, *Panorama de la théologie négro-africaine contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Bernd Wannewetsch, "Ecclesiology and Ethics," *Oxford Handbook* 57–73, at 62.

<sup>73</sup> Herbert Schlögel, "Kirche und theologische Ethik—Mehr als Lehramt und Moralthologie," in *Christlicher Glaube* 175–86.

<sup>74</sup> Johnstone, "The Argument from Tradition" 154.

<sup>75</sup> [http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons\\_speeches/050620.htm](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/050620.htm) (accessed on November 3, 2005).

The archbishop's call to unity within his own communion is echoed in an important work by Schlögel, in which he compares the basic ethical concepts of both Lutherans and Roman Catholics so as to foster greater ecumenical dialogue. He divides his treatment into four parts: faith and conscience; human dignity and the person; guilt and sin; and overlaps and differences. In each part, he examines the theological traditions and the relevant issues of application and repeatedly underlines where the two traditions are especially congruent or moving in that direction.<sup>76</sup> I do not know of anyone who has offered to the churches such a study in the hope of a real unity since James Gustafson's ground-breaking *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement*.<sup>77</sup>

These works at the service of the Church are in fact explorations of the ethical culture of the Church, a topic that is getting greater attention, as last year's note in *Theological Studies* reported.<sup>78</sup> Those investigations prompt others to look at the cultures within which we live.<sup>79</sup> For instance, in a festschrift celebrating Hans Rotter's 70th birthday, Josef Römelt faces yet again the question of promoting theological ethics in contemporary pluralist cultures.<sup>80</sup> There we face the tension between pluralism and the need for political consensus: What happens to one's own world vision in the face of a deeply urgent political culture? If there is a range of ethical viewpoints that already exists, what happens when we fold theology into the discussion? Do the very fundamental values that guarantee democratic secular society stand as threats to a theological vision, and vice versa?<sup>81</sup> In the face of that question, Alfons Riedl proposes tolerance as the virtue for the future of a pluralistic humanity.<sup>82</sup>

Tanzania's Richard Rwiza's recent book on the connection of conscience with virtue ethics and with inculturation argues that the acting person is called to self-development as both critic and member of her or his culture.<sup>83</sup> France's Paul Valadier analyses the secularization of contemporary

<sup>76</sup> Herbert Schlögel, *Wie weit trägt Einheit? Ethische Begriffe im evangelisch-katholischen Dialog* (Münster: Lit, 2004).

<sup>77</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978).

<sup>78</sup> James F. Keenan, "Ethics and the Crisis in the Church," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 117–36.

<sup>79</sup> Richard B. Miller, "On Making A Cultural Turn in Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (2005) 409–43.

<sup>80</sup> Josef Römelt, *Christliche Ethik im pluralistischen Kontext: Eine Diskussion der Methode ethischer Reflexion in der Theologie* (Münster: LIT, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> Josef Römelt, "Theologische Ethik in der Postmoderne: Das Problem des Pluralismus in Gesellschaft, Kirchen, und Theologie," in *Christlicher Glaube* 27–40.

<sup>82</sup> Alfons Riedl, "Toleranz—eine Tugend für morgen," *Für die Freiheit* 238–50.

<sup>83</sup> Richard N. Rwiza, *Formation of Christian Conscience in Modern Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2001).

northern cultures and asks whether the claims of believers finding themselves marginalized is an altogether valid one. He finds instead that the human person cannot live without the transcendent and that this need will never be eradicated.<sup>84</sup>

Other theological ethicists examine their own cultures. Charles Curran reflects on the challenges that Catholic ethicists and the broader Church face in contemporary American culture, especially in terms of absolutizing personal and political freedom. He writes, "Even among Catholics, we sometimes hear overly simplistic comments about the freedom and the rights of conscience. Morality cannot simplistically be reduced merely to following one's conscience."<sup>85</sup> Slovenia's Anton Mlinar reflects on the moral necessity of conflict negotiation and reconciliation in his homeland.<sup>86</sup> Japan's Haruko Okano invokes a feminist understanding of moral responsibility to critique her own culture. Among the specific problems in her culture she considers "the potentially dangerous side of homogeneity or nationalistic togetherness, that is, the crass distinction between 'us and others'" and the "principle of harmony" that "not just ignores those who are different or strange" but excludes them. Like the others, Okano acknowledges the good of fundamental national principles but brings to them an ethical critique.<sup>87</sup>

Sometimes the ethicist is not simply a critic of culture but seeks to sustain an endangered value within it. Mark Graham breaks new ground by cultivating a spirit of gratitude so as to develop a sustainable agricultural ethics. Surveying the ways we till the earth, plant our fields, raise and consume our food, care for our livestock, and treat our farmers and laborers, Graham argues that only by appreciating once again the giftedness of our land from God can we responsibly renew our farms, our heartland, and ourselves. While most of contemporary theological ethics is driven to examine our urban experiences, Graham calls us to recognize how essential rural life is for the world.<sup>88</sup>

What, though, is culture? John O'Malley argues that culture is not only a particular geographical and historical context, but often is defined by a style of proceeding. By "culture," he means "four large, self-validating

<sup>84</sup> Paul Valadier, "La sécularisation en question," *Für die Freiheit* 85–93.

<sup>85</sup> Charles E. Curran, "Moral Theology and American Culture," *Chicago Studies* 42 (2003) 44–55, at 53.

<sup>86</sup> Anton Mlinar, "Theologische Ethik und die Notwendigkeit von Konfliktbearbeitung am Beispiel Sloweniens," in *Christlicher Glaube* 89–108.

<sup>87</sup> Haruko K. Okano, "Moral Responsibility in the Japanese Context," *Für die Freiheit* 162–69, at 167, 168.

<sup>88</sup> Mark E. Graham, *Sustainable Agriculture: A Christian Ethics of Gratitude* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005).

configurations of symbols, values, temperaments, patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving, and patterns of discourse. I mean especially configurations of patterns of discourse and thus expressions of *style* in the profoundest sense of the word.”<sup>89</sup> O’Malley identifies four cultures that originated in the ancient Western world, were subsequently expressed in Christian forms, and are manifest today: the prophetic culture that proclaims the need to reform social structures (Jeremiah, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr.); the academic, professional culture that seeks to understand those structures (Aristotle, Aquinas, the university); the humanistic culture that through rhetoric and poetry tries to persuade its hearers about issues facing humanity and the common good (Cicero, Erasmus, Eleanor Roosevelt); and finally, the culture of art and performance that witnesses to and celebrates the mystery of the human condition (Phidias, Michelangelo, Bill T. Davis).

O’Malley’s magisterial work needs to be engaged by moralists not only to further fathom the meaning of culture and its varied expressions but also to employ these four cultures as modes for advancing our own critical agenda.

## CONCLUSION

Moral theologians are looking to the future to critically engage their work, their vocation, their Church, and their local cultures in a spirit of dialogue and growing respect. Clearly, this review, which acknowledges the passing of many, also demonstrates a considerable rebirth in the field. We have begun the century mindful of the many tasks that lie ahead, and mindful of the virtues needed for those tasks.

<sup>89</sup> John W. O’Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2004) 11.