

INTUITION AND MORAL THEOLOGY

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Moral theologians grant that intuitions cannot supply all that is needed for their craft. It may be, however, that intuitions can and do play a bigger role than theologians have hitherto conceded. A glance at the history of slavery, torture, and the execution of alleged heretics, together with a consideration of the role of the Holy Spirit in the moral sphere, may help to cast some light on the subject.

An intuition is “the immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of any reasoning process.” A moral intuition is, accordingly, one that apprehends some moral object immediately, without there being any reasoning about it.¹

ALL PHILOSOPHICAL ENDEAVOR begins with something that is said to be self-evident. A particular enquiry might begin, for instance, with an intuition of being or existence. This intuition can itself be fairly described as knowledge. This being the case, it might be claimed that reasoning is indeed involved in intuition. However, reasoning in the sense of “working something out” is not involved. Progress beyond the intuition in our philosophical endeavors can be made by some form of inference. No inferring is required, however, for the original intuition.

For a number of decades during the 20th century the school of intuitionism attracted a good deal of attention and not a few adherents. Although its popularity has since waned, it is still far from unusual for moral philosophers (and, indeed, moral theologians) to make reference to the importance of intuition in moral decision-making. Take, for instance, the way in which many dismiss Bentham’s utilitarianism by pointing to the fact that it leads to conclusions that are counterintuitive. J. L. Mackie, moreover, goes so far as to claim that any objectivist view of values is committed to

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¹ William Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics* (London: Methuen, 1948) 131.

the central thesis of intuitionism: “Of course the suggestion that moral judgements are made or moral problems solved by just sitting down and having an ethical intuition is a travesty of actual moral thinking. But, however complex the real process, it will require (if it is to yield authoritatively prescriptive conclusions) some input of this distinctive sort, either premisses or forms of argument or both.”²

As for moral theologians, most seem to take it for granted that intuition plays some role in ethics. John Macquarrie, for instance, is inclined to the opinion that some fundamental moral knowledge is “given with human existence itself.”³ But is that knowledge very general and extremely vague? Or can it offer substantial aid to us in our reflections about particular issues? In what follows I shall attempt to shed some light on this most mysterious sector of inquiry.

IS “GOOD” KNOWN THROUGH INTUITION?

While I do not wish to confine my deliberations to the school of thought that came to be known as intuitionism, that would seem to be as good a starting point as any. As G. E. Moore sees things, the fundamental principles of ethics are self-evident. The expression “self evident,” he says, indicates that any proposition that is so called “is not an inference from some proposition other than *itself*.”⁴ Now “good,” he holds, “is the notion upon which all Ethics depends,”⁵ and “good” is self-evident, or, if you prefer, it is something we know through intuition. If we say that something is good or, indeed, that something else is bad, we are making “synthetic” propositions, all of which rest on a proposition that cannot be deduced from any other proposition. What is ethically right, for Moore, is what, on the whole, will produce the greatest amount of good. Our duty, then, is “to do what will produce the best effects *upon the whole*, no matter how bad the effects upon ourselves may be and no matter how much good we ourselves may lose by it.”⁶ This move into ideal utilitarianism takes us, of course, beyond the realm of the self-evident. Reasoning, or inferring, is needed. Moore himself, however, notes that we do indeed make some *immediate* judgments that certain acts are either right or wrong. In a psychological sense, he says, we are intuitively certain about what is our duty.

² J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977) 38. Mackie does not describe himself as an objectivist.

³ John Macquarrie, “Rethinking Natural Law,” in *Natural Law and Theology, Readings in Moral Theology 7*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1991) 221–46, at 240.

⁴ G. E. Moore, *Principia ethica* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 1954) 143 (emphasis original).

⁵ *Ibid.* 142. Moore tended to capitalize both “Ethics” and “Good.”

⁶ Moore, *Ethics* (London: Oxford University, 1958) 143 (emphasis original).

Nevertheless, it is not the case that these judgments of ours are self-evident. “It is, indeed, possible that some of our immediate intuitions are true; but since *what* we intuit, *what* conscience tells us, is that certain actions will always produce the greatest sum of good possible under the circumstances, it is plain that reasons can be given, which will shew the deliverances of conscience to be true or false.”⁷ Moore, in fact, is at pains to distinguish himself from those intuitionists who claim that the rightness of certain actions is self-evident and incapable of proof through inquiry into what results from such actions. His claims about intuition concern only “good.”

Ethical intuitionism has often been likened to mathematical intuitionism.⁸ In recent decades, however, the latter has been dismissed by many philosophers. It is argued that “no special intuition is required to establish that one plus one equals two—this is a logical truth, true by virtue of the meanings we give the integers ‘one’ and ‘two,’ as well as ‘plus’ and ‘equals.’” If this argument is accepted, says Peter Singer, ethical intuitionism loses its only analogue.⁹ The fact remains, however, that neither the existence nor the nonexistence of analogues settles the matter. In the passage under discussion, Singer seems to be referring only to intuitive knowledge about the rightness or wrongness of acts, about which Moore, as we have seen, makes no claims. We shall move on to that subject shortly. For the moment, however, it is worth noting that others talked of analogues or parallels to the intuition of “good” a long time before Moore appeared on the scene.

⁷ Ibid. 148–49 (emphases original). Carl Jung wrote about intuition in a psychological sense. “The peculiarity of intuition is that it is neither sense perception, nor feeling, nor intellectual inference, although it may also appear in these forms. In intuition a content presents itself whole and complete, without our being able to explain or discover how this content came into existence. Intuition is a kind of instinctive apprehension, no matter of what contents. Like *sensation*, it is an irrational function of perception. As with sensation, its contents have the character of being ‘given’, in contrast to the ‘derived’ or ‘produced’ character of *thinking* and *feeling* contents” (*The Collected Works*, vol. 6, *Psychological Types* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971] 453). A little further on he writes: “Although intuition is an irrational function, many intuitions can afterwards be broken down into their component elements and their origin thus brought into harmony with the laws of reason” (ibid. 454). Jung goes on to explain that he is not using the word “irrational” to denote something that is contrary to reason, “but something *beyond* reason, something, therefore, not grounded on reason” (ibid.). Jung, of course, wrote about intuitive types of personality, an implication being that, in this psychological sense, some people are more intuitive than others. What relevance, if any, this observation may have for debate about the role of intuition in ethics is not part of my present discussion.

⁸ See, for instance, W. D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen, 1935–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939) 320.

⁹ Peter Singer, *Ethics* (New York: Oxford University, 1994) 8.

FROM "GOOD" TO "RIGHT"

One such was Thomas Aquinas. Several centuries before the publication of *Principia ethica*, he saw a certain parallel between basic principles of natural law, of which practical reason makes use, and the basic principles that apply to speculative reason. Both are self-evident (*utraque enim sunt quaedam principia per se nota*). Thus, in the realm of speculative, or theoretical, thought, he says: "This first indemonstrable principle 'There is no affirming and denying the same simultaneously,' is based on the very nature of the real and the non-real: on this principle, as Aristotle notes, all other propositions are based."¹⁰

If we turn to the realm of practical reason, we see that the first principle is based on the meaning of good: good is what we all seek.

"And so this is the first command of law, 'that good is to be sought and done, evil is to be avoided'; all other commands of natural law are based on this."¹¹

In an earlier section of the *Summa*, Aquinas discusses that unquenchable spark of conscience, which, following Jerome, he refers to as *synderesis*. Now *synderesis*, he tells us, is a *habitus* that we have by nature. It urges us toward good and away from evil. This is a clear case in which the translation of the word *habitus* as "habit" could be misleading. Another much used translation is "disposition," and the definition of *habitus* that Aquinas takes up is: "that by virtue of which we hold ourselves well or ill in regard to passions or actions."¹² In the realm of virtue, it is possible to acquire a *habitus*. Indeed one should acquire several. Acquired virtues become a kind of second nature. *Synderesis*, however, is not acquired through human effort. We simply have it by nature. In other words, we have an intuitive awareness or knowledge of these first principles.¹³

There are, of course, differences between the approaches of Aquinas and Moore, but there are also some similarities. Although Moore refers to

¹⁰ *Summa theologiae* (hereafter cited as *ST*) 1–2, q. 94, a. 2; Blackfriars' translation, vol. 28, *Law and Political Theory*, trans. and scholarly apparatus by Thomas Gilby (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1964) 81. Some may wish to search for other analogues by pursuing, for instance, the implications of Kant's notion of an intuition about space, or the implications of others' comments about intuitions concerning personhood.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *ST* 1a, 83, 2; Blackfriars' translation, vol. 11, *Man*, trans. and scholarly apparatus by Timothy L. Suttor (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1970) 243. Aquinas attributes this definition to Aristotle. See *Nicomachean Ethics* II. 5.1105b25.

¹³ Taking up this theme, Bruno Schüller says that, at this level, conscience cannot mislead. It calls infallibly for moral goodness (*Die Begründung sittlicher Urteile: Typen ethischer Argumentation in der Moralthologie* [Dusseldorf, 1980] 139.)

Christian conscience, he does not present an analysis of *synderesis*. Some commentators might also feel that what Moore discusses is knowledge concerning self-evident propositions, whereas Aquinas is concerned with a faculty. Thomas, however, prefers not to see *synderesis* as a faculty or power (*potentia*). In his opinion, as we have seen, it is a *habitus*. We simply know that we should seek after and do good, while avoiding evil. In this scheme of things it seems there must be something about good that is self-evident, although, perhaps, that “something” does not amount to as much as Moore sees as being self-evident. Both men, then, speak of some kind of innate intuition. In moving on from there, however, they take different routes. Moore proceeds speedily toward ideal utilitarianism, whereas Aquinas tries to see if there is anything else in us that is innate and can be of use in the moral quest.

It seems to Thomas that, to be able to work out what is right and what is wrong activity, we need more than basic incitements toward good and away from evil. In his analysis of natural law, therefore, he endeavors to find a little more. As part of this effort he identifies what he sees to be natural tendencies or inclinations in humans toward good objectives. These he ranges in three sectors or levels. On the first level he sees an inclination that humans share with all substances: the inclination toward self-preservation.¹⁴ Without getting into complex discussions about whether or not it really is the case that *all* substances have a tendency toward self-preservation (at least in their present state), we can say that we have seen ample evidence of such a tendency in many *living* creatures. Now what exactly can our discussion of intuition gain from this first category in Aquinas’s list of natural tendencies? Some of the things we call intuitions might perhaps be described by some people as instincts of an intellectual nature, or, at least as instincts involving some kind of cognition. The instinct for self-preservation that humans share with other creatures, however, does not fit that description in any obvious way. It strikes us simply as a brute instinct.¹⁵ It is true that Thomas goes on to say that all our inclinations come under natural law, inasmuch as they can be ruled by reason. It is also true that, when Aquinas comes to discuss the legitimacy of defending oneself against violent attack, he says that the defender’s

¹⁴ *ST* 1–2, q. 94, a. 2.

¹⁵ It might be argued that we do have knowledge of the implications of attack and defense. We know that we could be injured or killed by the assailant, and we know that there is a possibility of this being prevented by the use of violence on our part. What we know through experience and through working things out, using our reasoning powers, however, is surely not something that Aquinas would see us sharing with all other substances in this basic inclination. And, of course, what we know through working things out is not intuition, although intuition could certainly be operative in the reasoning process.

intention (reason for acting) must be to preserve his or her own life and not to kill the attacker. Furthermore, one should not use any more force than is necessary for self-defense.¹⁶ All of this makes sense, given Aquinas's insistence that acting in accord with natural law involves acting in accord with right reason. These requirements concerning intention and moderation take Aquinas's discourse far beyond the level of a discussion of brute instincts. It is not clear, however, that this part of his thesis adds anything to our discussion of the role of intuition. The moderation and purity of intention to which Thomas refers do not seem to form part of the basic instinct (or inclination). In Aquinas's scheme of things, it appears, such things are part and parcel of acting in accordance with the demands of right reasoning. In other words, he seems not to be talking about things known through intuition.¹⁷

Second in Aquinas's list of tendencies toward the good are inclinations that he says we share with the animals. The example he gives is the coupling of male and female and the bringing up of children. Here again he seems to refer to what could be described as an instinct, although not one shared by all human beings. Much could be said about the differences among the sexualities of the different species. Our purpose here, however, is not to analyze Aquinas's conclusions about natural law in general. It is to see whether or not Aquinas has anything to add to our discussion about intuitions. Now, even if it were clear to everyone that all species do share certain inclinations (or instincts), it does not seem that we could claim any intuition concerning morality in what Aquinas says. Following one's instincts to defend oneself or to produce babies can result in either right or wrong activity. The instinctual aspects of our nature (involving, for example, the instincts to eat, indulge in sexual activity, seek comfort, and claim territory) are corrupted. Intuitions that could help us see beyond these brute (though necessary) urges would have to be of a different order. Aquinas, in fact, makes no exaggerated claims about intuitions at this level.

Is there anything of use to our discussion, then, in Thomas's third category of inclinations? At this level he does not talk of anything that he sees as being shared with other creatures. He discusses an inclination toward the good of our nature as rational. It leads us to avoid ignorance and seek not to offend others with whom we have to associate. On the face of it, this inclination does not look very promising. Aquinas is talking, after all, about a reasoning process, not immediate apprehension. Moreover, it seems to have been long accepted in Thomistic circles that it is easier to make mistakes in regard to matters that concern only our rational nature. The

¹⁶ *ST* 2–2, q. 64, a. 7.

¹⁷ On the other hand, that Aquinas saw things in that way does not rule out other people's seeing a role for intuition in all this.

morality of sexual matters is clearer, it is claimed, because of what is written into our bodies. In short, Aquinas himself seems to have seen nothing that could be of use to a discussion about intuition at the level of exclusively human (or personal) inclinations with regard, for example, to interpersonal relationships. Centuries after Aquinas, however, W. D. Ross wrote about self-evident *prima facie* rightness. There is a notable difference between this and Aquinas's claim that we simply know we should do good and avoid evil. Aquinas writes of a general intuition that is simply given. Ross, however, indicates a process of development arising out of intuitions about particulars:

We see the *prima facie* rightness of an act which would be the fulfilment of a particular promise, and of another which would be the fulfilment of another promise, and when we have reached sufficient maturity to think in general terms, we apprehend *prima facie* rightness to belong to the nature of any fulfilment of promise. What comes first in time is the apprehension of the self-evident *prima facie* rightness of an individual act of a particular type. From this we come by reflection to apprehend the self-evident general principle of *prima facie* duty.¹⁸

This reflection, it would seem, is not a process of inferring or working out. It amounts to becoming aware of what is self-evident. Sticking with the example of noncoerced promises: "When a plain man fulfils a promise because he thinks he ought to do so, it seems clear that he does so with no thought of its total consequences, still less with any opinion that these are likely to be the best possible. He thinks in fact much more of the past than of the future. What makes him think it right to act in a certain way is the fact that he has promised to do so—that and, usually, nothing more."¹⁹

Any intuitive knowledge that may be here, however, concerns only a *prima facie* obligation. In other words, "we cannot, in general, claim intuitive or any other kind of certainty as to the actual (or resultant) rightness of particular acts." When we try to balance a *prima facie* obligation to produce a particular good against a *prima facie* obligation to keep a par-

¹⁸ W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1930) 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 17. Others have argued differently. R. M. Hare, for instance, writes: "My reason for thinking that I ought not to take parasitic advantage of this institution (promising), but ought to obey its rules, is the following. If I ask myself whether I am willing that I myself should be deceived in this way, I answer unhesitatingly that I am not. I therefore cannot subscribe to any moral principle which permits people to deceive other people in this way (any general principle which says 'It is all right to break promises'). There may be more specific principles that I could accept, of the form 'It is all right to break promises in situations of type S'" ("The Promising Game," in *Essays in Ethical Theory* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1989] 144). Others, however, could say that they know breaking promises is usually wrong without having to ask themselves Hare's question.

ticular promise, “we move in a region of uncertainty.”²⁰ Different schools of thought have different opinions about how we should proceed in our moral reasoning in such regions of uncertainty. That, however, is not our concern here. If Ross is correct in his claims, it would seem that, although intuitions are unlikely to supply us with full answers to all of our ethical dilemmas, they can give us a good deal of what we need for our deliberations.

As we have seen, some have argued that he is not correct. In addition to the claimed loss of the mathematical analogue, Singer, for instance, argues that our judgments about ethics are supposed to lead us to action. If our intuited knowledge does not bring with it some tendency to motivate us toward right conduct, ethics, he says, seems to lose its point. “Those who hold that ethical judgements are a special kind of intuition do not intend to relegate ethics to the status of etiquette. They want to say that if I know that something is wrong, I have a reason for not doing it, whether I happen to care about ethics or not. So they must show how the knowledge that we gain through intuition provides us with a reason that can motivate us to do what we see to be right.”²¹

An important word in this quotation is “reason.” Its use here indicates a need for argument. Where intuition is concerned we have knowledge without any need for reasoned argument. Surely, however, if we have knowledge, that knowledge can be a basis for action, a factor that can have a role in moving us toward action.

DOES EVERYONE HAVE THESE INTUITIONS?

Some Thomistic scholars may, at this point, feel inclined to warn against confusing the thoughts of Aquinas, Moore, and Ross. Thomas’s worldview, they may say, was very different from that of the other two scholars. That may well be true. The fact remains, however, that, if something is self-evident, it does not have to be inferred from a worldview. A particular way of looking at things may indeed prevent a person from seeing what would otherwise be blatantly obvious. This is a matter that we will soon investigate. However, it is not necessarily the case that, when two people have different worldviews, one of them will be blind to the moral intuitions that the other sees. Moreover, it is possible for a reader of works by three different authors with different worldviews to see the validity of the intuitions that all three claim. Many readers of Ross, Moore, and Aquinas do indeed sympathize with at least some of what each has to say about intuition. One assumes, however, that most, if not all those readers, will have experienced a pretty adequate upbringing. Could it not reasonably be

²⁰ Ross, *Foundations* 320–21.

²¹ Singer, *Ethics* 8–9.

claimed, then, that most of what has thus far been described as intuition is simply the result of nurture in particular communities in which some sort of agreement about ethics has been reached through reasoning processes? Suppose we were to accept Aquinas's claim that all who are not insane know that they should do good and avoid evil. We might still wonder if someone who had been brought up in a very bad family and in a very bad neighborhood would see promise-keeping in the same light as more fortunate people.

Most moral theologians, it seems, have a built-in resistance to any kind of "love is all you need" response to questions that arise in their own discipline. The fact remains, however, that God's love is the only adequate source of full human development. One of the most common channels of this agape, it seems, is human love, an example being the love that parents give their children. Suppose that, in a particular case, this love is absent or is dreadfully inadequate. It seems not impossible, in such circumstances, that certain aspects of humanity, through no fault of the person concerned, will be impaired or in some way clouded. The ability to pick up, for example, some social skills, sensitivities, and, most importantly for our purposes, intuitions may simply not be "switched on."²² If this is the case, we can still speak about the importance of intuitions in ethics while accepting that, because of inadequate nurturing, some people do not have access to at least some of these intuitions.

This notwithstanding, a glance at history might raise a few doubts about intuitive knowledge of *prima facie* rightness even among those who have had a good upbringing. Consider, for instance, burning people at the stake because they were judged to be heretics and refused to recant. It would surely not be an exaggeration to say that, for us, such activity is obviously wrong. Some might even be inclined to say that it is self-evidently wrong. We may indeed be able to think of arguments to explain why nobody should indulge in such a practice, but we are certain that we do not need to begin developing such arguments. We simply know that it is wrong. And yet that seems not to have been the case for many of our forebears—not all of whom, one imagines, were the victims of very bad upbringing. Indeed, when Martin Luther dared to suggest that burning heretics at the stake was against the will of the Holy Spirit, Pope Leo X condemned the statement.²³ Consider too the question of slavery. Why were the Christian churches so

²² It is worth noting, however, that none of this is totally predictable. Joseph Merrick, who bore the appalling title "The Elephant Man," was treated very badly in childhood and throughout much of his adult life, and yet many people found him to be a remarkably virtuous person.

²³ Leo X, *Exsurge Domine*, bull of June 15, 1520. See also Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 32nd ed. (Barcelona: Herder, 1963) no. 1483. This particular propo-

slow in condemning it when it was so obviously wrong? The widespread use of torture on people suspected of heresy also raises problems.

In spite of the fact that so much is obvious to us, some try to explain the difference between our vision of things and that of so many of our forebears without making any reference to intuition. Some years ago Germain Grisez wrote: "The development of moral doctrine with respect to slavery was from condoning it to forbidding it. The change concerning slavery can be seen as possible because of the unfolding understanding of the human good; now that the development has occurred, we find it hard to see why it did not occur much sooner."²⁴

But what brings about this unfolding of understanding? It is easy to suggest that, where slavery was concerned, certain individuals somehow eventually gained new knowledge about some aspect of human dignity, and slowly managed to win over most other people to their point of view, partly through honing sensitivities. But whence came the new knowledge? In discussions about such matters many people convey the impression that they believe there is some sort of continuing progress in discovery and argument about moral issues. It is understandable, they say, that our ancestors could not see the wrongness (or indeed the rightness) of certain activities. Knowledge that we have was not available to them. Experience, social experimentation, and scientific advances have taught us a great deal that they simply did not know. Now it is clear that these three factors have played their part in changing attitudes toward the roles that women play in the family and in society, toward advising people to suppress or not to suppress their sexuality, and toward democracy. Other examples abound. It is not clear, however, that any one of those factors was needed to bring about changes in attitude toward torture, slavery, and burning people at the stake. No doubt some will argue that developments in those spheres occurred as a result of debates about human rights that began to exert a notable degree of influence in the 18th century. But was it not possible at earlier stages for people who were accustomed to looking at things from

sition was one among many in a list condemned by the pope. Luther's original statement appeared in the "Explanations." Franco Molinari, however, points out that Luther did not know how to maintain consistency with the initial, genuine inspiration, and, pressed by the need for defense, underwent regression ("*non seppe conservare la coerenza colla genuina ispirazione iniziale e, pressato dalle necessità della difesa, subì un'involuzione*"). He fell back on certain rigorist aspects of the Old Testament and called for very grave sanctions against blasphemers, Jews, and witches ("*tornò a certi aspetti rigoristici del VT e chiese sanzioni gravissime contro bestemmiatori, ebrei, streghe*") ("*Tolleranza*," *Dizionario enciclopedico di teologia morale* [Paoline, 1976] 1123–41, at 1132).

²⁴ *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1983) 902.

the viewpoint of duty to see the wrongness of those activities? A lack of discussion in the language of rights had not prevented them from having convictions about distributive and commutative justice long before the 18th century, and they did know that killing people was usually wrong. Why, then, could they not see the wrongness of slavery and of burning people at the stake?

When the Nürnberg Trials were being held after the end of World War II, the defense of “obeying orders” was not accepted. It was apparently taken for granted that anyone perpetrating such atrocities knew that he or she was doing something that was terribly wrong. The same sort of approach seems to have been taken, after the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, at the trials of former East German border guards who had acted within the law when shooting people attempting to escape from East Berlin. The thinking in both cases was apparently that, although the guards had obeyed orders, and although both they and their commanders had acted within the law, *lex iniusta non est lex*. Now, in order to judge that a particular positive law is not justifiable and therefore not a law to be obeyed, appeal can be, and has been made to natural law. Where that is the case, it seems to be claimed that certain (though not all) demands of natural law are obvious to everyone of sound mind. Why then was it not obvious to people in authority in both church and state in earlier times that burning so-called heretics and witches was wrong? Again, some may persist in pointing out that human rights thinking had not appeared on the scene in those earlier times. Leaving aside what we have already said on this matter, if we push that argument to its logical conclusions, we have to admit, that human rights thinking did not really take hold in a big way until after World War II, that is, until after the Nazi atrocities had taken place. That, however, does not seem to have provided an excuse for the gassing of people in concentration camps. Indeed, there would appear to be grounds for arguing that intuitive awareness of the wrongness of much that had been done by the Nazis was the major impetus toward the new interest in human rights. Obvious injustice seems often to be the impetus that drives theorizing about justice.

Admittedly, the scale of what the Nazis did over the course of a few years was greater than anything we read about concerning the earlier burning of supposed heretics and witches over any similar time scale during the centuries of persecution. Leaving the number of killings per year aside, however, is gassing people really worse than burning them to death?²⁵ If the wrongness of systematically killing people merely because they were Jews

²⁵ The less violent practice of making Jews wear something that identified them as Jews was not new. Lateran IV (1215) decreed that Jews and Muslims (“Saracens”) should wear distinctive clothing.

should have been obvious to 20th-century German soldiers, politicians, and government officials, why should it not have been obvious to a large number of bishops and others over the course of several hundred years that killing people because you did not like their theology was also wrong? To us the wrongness of all these killings is obvious. We see no need to indulge in complex arguments about natural law, rights, or duties. Is it possible, though, that, sometimes, normal, sane human beings simply cannot see the obvious, that even the self-evident is not always evident to them?

HIDING THE SELF-EVIDENT

In spite of what has been said thus far, some will continue to insist that humanity is slowly persuaded through a process of reasoning to leave barbaric ways. They believe that development of this kind has really taken place, and that we simply cannot usefully compare our attitudes to those of earlier generations—well, earlier than the 1940s—except to show that such development has occurred. Anybody who does so will be seen by them to be guilty of anachronisms. There are, however, reasons for looking at matters rather differently.

When we read about attitudes, opinions, and convictions of people in earlier centuries (particularly those earlier than the 19th century) we do not have much access to the opinions of the masses. We learn what some literate people thought, along with the opinions of a number of people who were illiterate but held positions of power. As for the not so powerful (and usually largely illiterate), we see some hints of dissatisfaction and disquiet in the rise of many popular movements (some quite rebellious) within the church and the state in various parts of the world at various stages in history. These hints, however, do not suffice to give us clear information about majority opinion concerning the morality of torture, slavery, and burning at the stake. On the other hand, we do see indications that moral intuitions about the wrongness of these practices were available to people long before and during the time that church and state authorities encouraged them. We can say this because we can see from writings of the time that some people appear to have had such intuitions.

SLAVERY

As far as we know, the only one of the fathers to speak out against slavery in any really noticeable way was Gregory of Nyssa.²⁶ Others, however, while permitting it, seem to have been intuitively aware that it was far from an ethical ideal. Augustine, for instance, deemed it a consequence of

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes, Migne, PG 44.665.

sin.²⁷ The passing of the centuries, moreover, did not succeed in blocking out the sense of moral discomfort. “There is some evidence that between the sixth and twelfth centuries there was a growing tradition amongst Christians that slavery was an institution which could not be reconciled with Christian charity and justice; changes in social conditions provided opportunities to modify the institution of slavery into serfdom.”²⁸

Indeed, in this period, some Christians argued in favor of abolition, at least in their own countries. In the eleventh century, for instance, Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester preached often in Bristol against the practice of buying people and sending them to Ireland to be sold as slaves. In 1102 trading in slaves was forbidden at a council in Westminster, presided over by Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury.²⁹ David Pelteret, moreover, notes that, compared with other parts of Western Europe, “the disappearance of slavery in England appears to have been somewhat retarded.”³⁰ Nevertheless, such developments do not seem to have had the effect of obliterating old habits throughout the whole of Christendom. At later stages, moreover, a number of popes granted permission to sovereigns of Portugal and Spain to enslave non-Christians who were seen as enemies of Christ. Included among these were Saracens, American Indians, and Africans.³¹ In the same period, it seems that there were some people who viewed many non-Europeans as subhuman—Black Africans and American Indians, for example. Again, however, there were those whose intuitive capacities were not blocked—at least, not entirely. During the 16th century, Bartolomé de las Casas and a number of other people opposed the enslavement and other maltreatment of those Indians.³² Eventually, Las Casas also opposed the enslavement of Africans who, like the Indians, had been *unjustly* enslaved. Even he, it seems, had not noticed the wrongness of enslaving people who had been captured during a war that was considered just.

²⁷ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 19.15.

²⁸ John F. Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church: The History of Catholic Teaching concerning the Moral Legitimacy of the Institution of Slavery* (Chichester: Barry Rose, 1975) 18–19.

²⁹ David A. E. Pelteret notes, however, that “enslavement abroad remained a hazard of English life” for some time after 1102. “It was as late as 1170 that the synod of Armagh ordered that any Englishman enslaved in Ireland was to receive his freedom” (*Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* [Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995] 78–79).

³⁰ *Ibid.* 258.

³¹ See, for instance, Nicholas V’s briefs *Dum diversas* (1452) and *Romanus pontifex* (1454), as well as Calixtus III’s *Inter caetera* (1456), Sixtus IV’s *Aeterni regis* (1481), and Leo X’s *Praeelsae devotionis* (1514).

³² In his *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, Bartolomé de las Casas describes atrocities he saw—e.g., babies being dragged from their mothers’ breasts and dashed against rocks.

Interestingly, in commenting on the anti-slavery writings of Paul III and Gregory XIV, Maxwell observes that “neither of these Popes intended to contradict the common Catholic Teaching concerning the moral legitimacy of the title of enslavement by capture in just warfare.”³³ For the sake of fairness, it should be noted that papal teaching seems never to have openly condoned chattel slavery, where the slave has practically no rights and is little more than a thing possessed. Many popes, however, appear to have permitted other forms of slavery. In a letter addressed to the bishops of the world, Leo XIII listed twelve of his predecessors, who “applied every effort to eliminate slavery wherever it existed.”³⁴ Maxwell, however, points out that all the popes named had condemned only what they deemed to be unjust methods of enslavement or unjust titles of slave ownership. Five of them, moreover, had written documents authorizing enslavement, as an institution, as a consequence of war, or as a penalty for ecclesiastical crimes.³⁵ Even as late as 1866, the Holy Office of the Inquisition wrote to the vicar apostolic of the Galla tribe in Ethiopia, stating that slavery was not against natural law, and that slaves could therefore be bought and sold, provided that certain conditions were fulfilled. The first condition was that the slave should not have been unjustly enslaved.³⁶ Here we appear to have examples of access to a moral intuition being partially, but not totally, blocked. Other examples are probably easy to find. It might be argued, for instance, that serfdom was the least bad system that could be arranged at a certain stage in the Middle Ages, and that it was much less problematic than the forms of slavery preceding it. The way the system operated in particular places, however, might strike us as obviously indicating insufficient respect for human dignity, although the nobles displaying such lack of respect might have been sincere in their disapproval of slavery.³⁷ The most that can be claimed, it seems, is that, in sin-filled situations,³⁸ some among us may be better attuned to our moral intuitions concerning certain matters than are most others, although those same people may not be among the ranks of the free where certain other matters are concerned.

In spite of what was said above on the subject of rights, it seems likely that reasoning about human rights and human dignity did indeed play some

³³ Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church* 72.

³⁴ Leo XIII, *Catholicae ecclesiae* (encyclical of November 12, 1890) no.1.

³⁵ Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church* 117–18.

³⁶ Holy Office, Instruction 1293, June 20, 1866.

³⁷ The fact that the system lasted into the 19th century in some places may, perhaps, indicate something worse.

³⁸ Defining sin can be problematic. Suffice it to say here that I am discussing moral deformation which acts as a barrier to communication with the Spirit. Multiplied sin has multiple effects, producing situations in which it can be hard for the people involved to see where the Way, Truth, and Life are to be found.

role in helping to open the eyes of some to what should have been obvious concerning the immorality of slavery. In other people, however, the blindness was overcome in other ways. In Maxwell's opinion, one of the reasons for the long delay in the correction of Catholic teaching on slavery seems to have been "that the use of charismatic gifts by the Catholic laity has normally not been accepted as a means of putting right social injustices and providing a remedy for unjust pharisaism and legalism." He notes, however, that, in the early 18th century, a few members of the Society of Friends appear to have been open to the direction of the Holy Spirit on the matter of slavery. They then had enormous influence on other Quakers and on Protestants. "On the other hand, the graces received by most of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Catholic laity from the traditional Latin prayer and liturgy were apparently insufficient to awaken their consciences to the unjust slavery-legislation in Latin America, North America, West Africa, etc., and insufficient to overcome the baneful influence of Roman civil law concerning slavery on Catholic moral theology and canon law."³⁹

Important to note here, for our purposes, is the implied claim that enlightenment came in some way from the Holy Spirit. In regard to *synderesis*, it is generally assumed in Christian tradition that this inextinguishable spark of conscience is implanted by God. Our basic intuition that we should do good and avoid evil is a gift from God. It seems not unreasonable, then, to link other moral intuitions we may have with inspiration that comes, in some way, from the Holy Spirit. It seems also not unreasonable to suggest that, by various means (all perhaps resulting from the presence of sin in the world), we may lose contact with those inspirations, and thus lose touch with our moral intuitions. This could explain the lack of condemnation of slavery over long periods in the history of Christianity. It is interesting to note, moreover, that Protestants who were open to the inspiration of the Spirit on the matter were not swayed by other Protestants who argued that Scripture indicates God's approval of slavery—or at least certain forms of slavery in certain sets of circumstances.⁴⁰ It is also interesting to note that, over the course of the last few decades, moral theologians have indulged in a great deal of reasoning about how our intuitions might not really be in total conflict with Scripture on such issues as slavery, war, and the roles of women. Few argue, however, that, if Scripture is shown to be in disagreement with our moral intuitions, we should abandon those intuitions.

³⁹ *Slavery and the Catholic Church* 20–21.

⁴⁰ For more information about the "biblical war" concerning the justification of slavery see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1975) 531–44. For an interesting Catholic discussion of acknowledgement of the faults of church members in earlier times concerning matters such as those considered in this article see Avery Dulles, "Should the Church Repent?" *First Things* 88 (December 1998) 36–41.

THE TORTURE AND EXECUTION OF HERETICS

When we turn to the subject of torture, we find that a pope argued against it long before the institution of the Inquisition. In a letter to the Bulgars in 866, Nicholas I described beating people to extract confessions from them as being against divine (and, indeed, human) law.⁴¹ His attitude toward torture accords so well with modern thinking that, in 1953, Pius XII saw fit to quote from Nicholas's letter when making his own address to the Sixth Congress of International Penal Law, in which he said that physical and psychic torture must be excluded from judicial investigations. It seems, however, that, between the ninth and the twentieth centuries, even papal teaching against torture did not prevent the highest authorities in the Catholic Church from contradicting the teaching. In the bull *Ad extirpanda*, for example, we find Innocent IV permitting the torture of heretics (although not to the point of amputation or death) to persuade them to reveal their own and others' wrongdoing. This, he notes, was already being done with thieves and marauders. *Ad extirpanda* represents a strange move in the wrong direction for those who believe in the steady progress of human moral wisdom. A comment by Francesco Compagnoni, when discussing a lengthy period of history during which the torture of heretics was officially accepted by the highest church authorities, serves to recall what was said above concerning the link between intuition and the Holy Spirit: "It is the eternal struggle between inspiration and institution."⁴²

A similar loss of contact with moral intuitions seems to have led to large numbers of executions of alleged heretics and witches. Although the main charge on which Priscillian was eventually found guilty was sorcery (*maleficium*), he is usually listed as the first person in Christian history to be executed for heresy.⁴³ This resulted from Priscillian's own appeal to the secular authorities. Bishops, however, participated in his trial, and his ex-

⁴¹ Augustine wrote about torture much earlier in chapter 19 of *The City of God*. He mentioned that, under torture, innocent people confessed to crimes they had not committed. Nevertheless, he does not appear to have clearly condemned the practice or called for its abolition. Henry Chadwick, however, claims that: "The use of torture to uncover heresy from Innocent IV (1242) onwards was a sharp break with past tradition" (*Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* [Oxford, Clarendon, 1976] 139 n. 3).

⁴² Francesco Compagnoni, "Capital Punishment and Torture in the Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church," *Concilium* 120 (1979) 39–53, at 43.

⁴³ Others, however, were condemned to death at the same trial. In stating that two of those executed with him were *also* beheaded, Sulpitius Severus appears to indicate that the method of execution employed in Priscillian's case was decapitation. See his *Historia sacra* 2.51.

ecution became a matter of controversy. Both Ambrose⁴⁴ and Martin of Tours⁴⁵ disapproved of the killing.

The seeds of change, however, had already been planted. As John T. Noonan observes, the emperors having become Christian, the idea of separating the church and the empire “was too countercultural to be comprehensible. The idea that Catholicism be established by law became irresistible.”⁴⁶ In 409 Augustine wrote to Donatus, proconsul of North Africa, beseeching him not to act against the Donatists with a severity that would correspond to their crimes. When dealing with cases affecting the church, Donatus was asked to forget that he had the power of capital punishment. It is clear, however, that Augustine approved of coercion. He sought the deliverance of the heretics, he wrote, with the help of the terror of laws and judges.⁴⁷ The close association between church and state, it seems, was causing situations of sin, sinful structures, and sinful systems to arise. The rot had set in, and, over the centuries that followed, more and more people lost contact with important intuitions. In the 13th century we find those intuitions being opposed not by sound reasoning but by rationalizations on the part of no less a figure than Thomas Aquinas. If money forgers are condemned to death by the secular authorities, he says, so much more reason is there for putting condemned heretics to death. Turning to the subject of heretics who have lapsed again after having been received back into the fold, Aquinas observes that God always receives those who return because God can see into our hearts and knows who returns in sincerity. The church, however, cannot imitate God in this respect, and so presumes that those who have lapsed a second time are not sincere in wanting to return. The church does not obstruct their salvation, but neither does it protect them from the death sentence.⁴⁸

The tendency of influential churchmen to link the church too closely to the empire and to later structures of states caused, it seems, serious contamination. Instability and unrest within the church were too easily identified with instability and unrest within the state. Jesus’ instruction that his disciples should not lord it over one another (Mk 10:42–45; Matt 20:24–28;

⁴⁴ Ambrose, letter 26, Migne, PL 16.1086.

⁴⁵ According to Sulpitius Severus, Martin thought it sufficient that Priscillian and his companions be expelled from the churches (*Historia sacra* 12.50).

⁴⁶ John T. Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005) 150–51.

⁴⁷ Augustine, Letter 100. Molinari, however, points out that Augustine was not the first to call for intervention by secular forces. What is usually judged to be the first such appeal is the *De errore profanarum religionum* of Firmicus Maternus, ca. 346 (“Tolleranza” 1125).

⁴⁸ *ST* 2–2, q. 11, a. 4. Augustine too appears to have indulged in rationalization in claiming that the church persecuted the impious in a spirit of love, whereas the impious persecuted the church in a spirit of wrath (Letter 185.2).

Lk 22:24–27) apparently went unheeded as the corrupting and intoxicating effects of power cut off access to important moral intuitions.

Even during the worst excesses of the Reformation period, however, some intuited the wrongfulness of all the violence. One was Erasmus. Another was the French Protestant Sebastian Castellio, who was greatly troubled when, with Calvin's approval, Michael Servetus was executed as a heretic. In response Castellio produced his *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, a collection of ancient and contemporary writings that opposed capital punishment in matters of religion. He was also the author of *Contra libellum Calvinii*, in which he wrote: "To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man."⁴⁹ Castellio was far from being alone in his views. Hans Guggisberg writes: "Quite obviously, the Basle circle of Castellio's friends and acquaintances was much wider than that of the more or less official protectors just mentioned. It consisted of foreign students and scholars, but also of academic and non-academic townspeople. Many of these can be identified; most of them openly agreed with his views and particularly with his criticism of doctrinal hairsplitting, dogmatic authority and intolerance."⁵⁰

It seems likely that, in other parts of Europe, many other people clearly saw the wrongfulness of all this violence among Christians who had conflicting ideas about theology. More general access to intuitions concerning the immorality of torturing and executing heretics, however, appears to have come about only when the tendency to confuse the state and the institutional church had lessened considerably.

Before that happened, a diabolical insanity spread among Catholics and Protestants as the flames and gibbets of the witch-hunt claimed the lives of an enormous number of people—mainly women—over the course of some 300 years. Factors other than plain old sin that may have contributed to a loss of contact with moral intuitions (or promptings of the Spirit) concerning this matter were fear of magic and the devil, ignorance, misogyny, overly fertile imaginations, disease, and poverty.⁵¹ Despite these factors, however, some people maintained or reestablished contact with those intuitions. One such was the Jesuit Friedrich von Spee, who, in his *Cautio criminalis*, launched a fierce attack on witch trials.⁵² A more widespread reestablishment of contact with the aforementioned intuitions only came

⁴⁹ "Hominem occidere, non est doctrinam tueri, sed est hominem occidere" (Sebastian Castellio, *Contra libellum Calvinii* 77). This book, however, was not published until 1612, by which time Castellio had died.

⁵⁰ Hans R. Guggisberg, "Tolerance and Intolerance in Sixteenth-Century Basle," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (New York: Cambridge University, 1996) 152.

⁵¹ Sin, of course, may have played a hand in all these "other" factors.

⁵² It might be claimed, of course, that Spee was moved to write by his conviction

about, it seems, when at least some factors listed above were no longer present. In some places, however, new brainwashing propaganda closed off those intuitions once again as Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and certain other groups came to be identified as enemies of the state. With the end of World War II came a major change in circumstances. Once again the fog lifted, the clamor ceased, and contact was reestablished with essential intuitions. Unfortunately, there is always a certain fragility to such contact. In the decades that have followed the Second World War, people have suffered in various places on account of being members of one or more of those groups just named. Sin, fear, and various other factors can unleash their effects at any time and in any place. Witch-hunts have many forms, many faces, and have not been consigned to past centuries.

SOME COMMENTS

This inquiry has included, among other things, a presentation of the thought of some philosophers. Others may wish to pursue that route and search for wisdom in schools of thought that have not been analyzed here.⁵³ It seems to me, however, that much might be gained by pursuing the theme of the links between the Holy Spirit and moral intuition. Some readers may feel inclined to say simply that the instances of moral blindness to which I have referred were a consequence of sin. They may also feel inclined to add that corrupt systems, structures, cultures, and mentalities that developed over time, as a consequence of sin, made it difficult for people to see the demarcation line between right and wrong in many spheres of life. Such an explanation, however, seems not irreconcilable with the possibility that, for many people at the time, the fog produced by those corrupt items in some way impeded reception of moral knowledge that the Spirit made immediately available to them.

Sometimes, it seems, the problem of such impeding of intuitions was solved simply by people being physically removed from the situation that caused it. Thus, in the early days of the United States, removed to some extent from the effects of certain restrictive thought processes rampant in Europe, some colonists, it seems, gained clarity of vision, at least in regard to some matters. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."⁵⁴

that the alleged witches he had met were innocent. See *Cautio criminalis* q. 29. In his preface to this book, however, Spee notes that those who most needed to read it were unlikely to do so. Blindness to moral intuitions, we might suggest, then, can close the mind even to consideration of arguments about innocence.

⁵³ They may, of course, find pearls of wisdom of quite a different order.

⁵⁴ U.S. Declaration of Independence.

It would perhaps be odd to deny the influence of Locke's work on natural rights on this statement, and it would therefore seem reasonable to say that this American declaration of rights is based on natural law thinking. What is interesting for our purposes, however, is the fact that the truths referred to are held to be self-evident. This claim to self-evidence or intuition in no way rules out natural law thinking. Scholars who appeal to natural law vary in what they take for granted. Some hold very little to be self-evident and argue that everything else we need must come from reflection on the experience of being human (as well as reflection on the nature of everything else around us). Others hold a little more to be self-evident. The founding fathers appear to be in this second group. Of course, we may need to add nuances to "unalienable" before accepting their statement as valid. We know that there can be, and are, conflicts between the rights of one person and those of another. A certain amount of "give and take," therefore, becomes necessary. It seems that, as is the case with Ross's duties, there is something *prima facie* about these self-evident rights. The Declaration's reference to self-evident truths, however, loses none of its importance. Intuitions act as guiding lights. They do not always supply all the information we need for all our moral deliberations, but they do help us to look in the right direction.

As for the people who are not physically removed from the sinful situations,⁵⁵ some of them may not be as impeded as others. During the Reformation period, for example, it seems that Erasmus saw clearly that the route of coercion was the wrong one for the church to take. We might say, then, that he remained in contact with intuitions no longer within the grasp of so many of his contemporaries. "Erasmus must stand as one of those 'great minds,' recognized by John Paul II, as 'truly free and full of God,' who were in some way able to withdraw from the climate of intolerance. Two of his greatest contemporaries, Thomas More and Bartolomé de las Casas, did not abandon the idea that heresy should be suppressed by force. Erasmus' lone voice was lost in the storm. The folly of force in the service of Christ was the law and order of the day."⁵⁶

In practice, Erasmus's voice seems not to have been the only one crying into the storm. We must beware, moreover, of giving the impression that the Spirit's inspiration comes only to isolated individuals. The importance of human relationships and the action of the Spirit therein must never be overlooked. The Quakers, to whom Maxwell refers, gathered in groups. Castellio, as we have seen, was not alone. Nor was Las Casas. Von Spee,

⁵⁵ Needless to say, even when we are physically removed from a particular sinful situation, we always find ourselves in another one, which may or may not be as bad.

⁵⁶ Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* 153.

moreover, met large numbers of alleged witches, some, perhaps, in the intimacy of the confessional. In spite of such evidence of inspiration, however, it would seem that it is not possible for any of us to be totally free from the effects of all that can inhibit our ability to intuit in the moral sphere. In regard to people who deny God, blaspheme, revile the teachings of Scripture, and detest the holy lives of good people, even Castellio wrote that he left such as these to be punished by magistrates on account of their irreligion. If a magistrate imprisoned them and correction resulted from it, the magistrate would have demonstrated Christian clemency.⁵⁷

The person who is “truly free and full of God” (inasmuch as that is possible in this life) is such because she or he is open to the Spirit, the Spirit of love. All the gifts of that Spirit are aspects of love. It could be argued, of course, that love is more easily discussed in the context of the moral goodness of persons than in the context of seeking out moral rightness. After all, it is often pointed out, a truly loving person can make a genuine mistake in judging the rightness or wrongness of an act. I do not wish to argue against that assertion. It seems, however, that, for a variety of reasons, some of which are beyond their control, all people lack some aspects of love or some attributes that can only result from being loved. Imperfect love in sin-filled situations impairs the ability to intuit in the moral sphere. The Spirit, however, blows where the Spirit wills, and love can overcome anything, even deeply held convictions in favor of slavery, torturing heretics, and burning alleged witches.

Despite all the ways in which we train ourselves out of it by selfishness and busyness, love is essentially the most natural thing for us. And because it is rooted in God’s action and doesn’t depend on the way things happen to turn out in the universe, it will be battered and hurt, crucified and abused—but not finally destroyed.

“What will survive of us is love,” because what is most real and active at the very roots of our existence is the unceasing action of God.⁵⁸

It would seem, then, that what I have termed “moral intuition” has something to do with keeping in contact with one’s true humanity, and that this means keeping in touch with the Spirit of love, life, and truth. When discussing issues concerning morality, theologians occasionally refer to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to our need to cooperate with the Spirit. But what is involved in such cooperation? One part of it, no doubt, is the journey within that each of us has to make. In discovering ourselves we

⁵⁷ *Contra libellum Calvinii* 129. Questions can also be raised about Erasmus. Scholars disagree, for instance, about his attitude toward Jews.

⁵⁸ Archbishop Rowan Williams, A Service of Remembrance for the Victims of the Asian Tsunami in 2004, at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, May 11, 2005, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org> (accessed May 25, 2006).

discover the Spirit who lives within us. This claim calls to mind Teresa of Avila's description of the human soul as a castle and her discussion of how to enter it. "This appears incongruous: if this castle is the soul, clearly no one can have to enter it, for it is the person himself: one might as well tell some one to go into a room he is already in! There are, however, very different ways of being in this castle; many souls live in the courtyard of the building where the sentinels stand, neither caring to enter farther, nor to know who dwells in that most delightful place, what is in it and what rooms it contains."⁵⁹

As far as Teresa is given to understand, the entrance door is prayer and meditation,⁶⁰ but, of course, sin persists even after one has made considerable progress on the prayerful journey.⁶¹ So too, no doubt, does a tendency toward at least partial moral blindness in the midst of sinful situations, sinful structures, and sinful systems. For this reason alone, I might suggest that, in addition to following Teresa's advice concerning the journey within, it could be wise for one to strive for enlightenment on moral matters in the prayerful company of others who have embarked on a similar journey. Their weak points and blind spots are unlikely to coincide exactly with one's own. In other words, the Holy Spirit can speak to the impeded through others who are not so impeded. Such an endeavor seems doomed to failure, however, unless there is true openness. If, for instance, one is slavishly bound to the utterances of authority figures whose teachings on the matter under review are wrong, those authority figures become part of the fog that prevents sight of the truth, or, if you like, prevents intuition.⁶² Maxwell's comments above concerning the long delay in the correction of Catholic teaching on slavery, coupled with his observations about Quakers on the same matter, provide a poignant example.

It should be clear by now that to say this is not to suggest that, in any situation, we merely have to wait for Love to tell us what to do. Such matters as the existence of institutionalized, structured, and systematized evil, as well as our own personal defects and our ignorance of the nature of things, cast more than a little doubt on the sufficiency of such a claim. It does seem, however, that the moral intuitions available to us may be more wide-ranging than most of us have thought to be the case. Perhaps future generations will look back and be astounded that most of us could not see that certain things we now do are obviously wrong. Perhaps the sin-filled

⁵⁹ Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, The First Mansions, chap. 1, para. 7. (London: Fount, 1995) 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 1, para. 9.

⁶¹ See, for instance, *ibid.*, The Seventh Mansions, chap. 4, para. 3.

⁶² Keeping closely to the definition set out at the beginning of this article, we can say that we are still talking about immediate apprehension of a moral object by the mind, this being accomplished through the action of the Holy Spirit.

situations in which we live make it extremely difficult for us to maintain contact with certain aspects of our humanity, and thereby impede our communication with the Spirit. In spite of that, there are, very likely, some among us who are in those same sin-filled situations but who are open to the Spirit concerning such matters. They, perhaps, can already see how *obviously* wrong those activities are. In our blindness and deafness, we do not heed their pleas any more than so many of our forebears in earlier times heeded the prophets who called for the abolition of slavery, the torture of heretics, and the burning of witches.⁶³

⁶³ I am grateful to my colleagues in the Association of Teachers of Moral Theology and to other readers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. No doubt, some readers will feel that certain matters I have discussed under the heading of intuition could be explained in some other way. I hope they will agree with me, however, that discussion of this subject is worthwhile.