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Editorial

After 50 Years: Ongoing Renewal of Moral Theology

Though Vatican II has not promulgated a separate document on moral theology, we find a tremendous development in moral theology since Vatican II. The groundwork for the renewal of moral theology was begun in the first half of the twentieth century by moral theologians like Dom Odon Lottin, Fritz Tillmann, Gérard Gillemann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Herbert Doms, Bernard Häring, Josef Fuchs and so on. The Council gave a definitive direction to its further development. *Optatum Totius*, 16 gives Vatican II's basic guidelines for the renewal of moral theology:

Likewise let the other theological disciplines be renewed through a more living contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific exposition, nourished more on the teaching of the Bible, should shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world.

There are also pertinent sections in many other documents, for example, GS, 16 (conscience) and GS, 47-52 (marriage and family). Without any doubt we can say that moral theology has enthusiastically responded to the Council's call for 'aggiornamento' and 'ressourcement', learning from the 'signs of the times'. This renewal and development can be found in different branches of moral theology. The tremendous development that moral theology has made depends not only on the specific passages referring to moral theology in the various documents, but on the whole approach that the Council adopted. The Council's willingness to enter into dialogue with cultures and religions, its acceptance of a more biblically-oriented theology than the insistence on Neo-Thomism,

greater openness to plurality in theology, the wisdom in considering human experience as a valid basis for theological reflection, etc. contributed to the development of moral theology.

However, many controversies and tensions also have been there. The debate over contraception and the tensions over *Humanae Vitae*, Faith Ethics – Autonomous Ethics debate, conflicts regarding situation ethics, probabilism, homosexuality, etc. are only some of them. On the one hand disciplinary measures against many moral theologians have caused confusion and concern, but on the other hand it has also given greater commitment to many to search for truth in fidelity to the Word.

Rather than making a detailed analysis of the Council's documents, articles in this attempt to reflect on the progress that moral theology made in the decades following the Council and its ongoing renewal. Diego Alonso-Lasheras, based on the *Compendio de teología moral* of Arregui-Zalba, gives an overview of pre-Vatican II moral theology. Thus he invites the readers to understand the significance and the effects of the Council in the renewal of moral theology. Christina A. Astorga discusses how the concept of natural law has evolved in moral theology, and how the new understanding of natural law has broken the impasse of the debate between the views of natural law according to nature and natural law according to reason. She also shows the impact of feminist perspectives and pluralism on the natural law concept.

Making the lack of attention given to conscience in the final report of the extraordinary synod of 2014 as the point of departure, James F. Keenan proposes a notion of socially oriented and accountable conscience as opposed to the contemporary use of conscience among US Catholics, that is, as dissenting from the law. He shows that conscience requires us to enter into solidarity with others and to be vigilant of the threats to our own humanity. In his usual remarkable style, he refers to a number of contemporary authors who have dealt with the concept of conscience from various perspectives. Antonio Autiero explains the changes that the category of *sensus fidelium* has undergone in the conciliar and post-conciliar thought. Based on ecclesiological and anthropological hermeneutics of the issue, his main attempt is to present the developments in the understanding of *sensus fidelium*, especially regarding moral theology. He concludes by depicting the profile of a moral theologian and points out that the "moral theologian accompanies the path of permanent questioning about meaning."

Ojo Anthonia Bolanle argues that though globalization has many positive aspects, it has increased inequality and poverty. She presents Nigeria as an example for this, and in light of the Catholic Social Teaching that is rooted in solidarity, she proposes pro-active measures in confronting poverty and empowerment of the poor in order to enjoy the benefits of globalisation. That is, globalization becomes really humanising, only when all people can enjoy its benefits. Biju Michael deals with the increased attention given by moral theology to ecological issues. According to him, this increased focus is an integral part of the ongoing renewal of moral theology. Referring to biblical and official Church teachings, Biju Michael identifies the root cause of the ecological crisis as a moral problem and proposes solutions in light of faith.

Cherdchai Lertjitlekha and Supaporn Daodee explore the common ground for Buddhist and Catholic ethics in bioethics, especially with regard to the concept of the dignity of life. They point out how this study can help healthcare personnel to assist Buddhist and Catholic dying patients. This study is an example for the much needed comparative study in the multi-religious Asian context. In the context of the attempts to legalize euthanasia in India, Dominic Vechoor evaluates it in light of the Christian understanding of the dignity of life and of human person. This paper inspires us to 'read the signs of the times' and respond to them critically. This is an example for the dialogue that should take place between Christian approach and the wider society.

In the context of the spiralling incidences of violence against women in India, Prem Xalxo argues for a greater emphasis given to gender justice in moral theology. Xalxo underscores that, "Without a radical change in traditional socio-cultural and religious point of view of treating women as inferior to men, any talk of gender justice will be futile." Vimal Tirimanna considers the development of the doctrine in the Church as a sign of the presence of the Spirit. In this light he evaluates the developments in the teaching on marriage a related issues. According to him, such changes are "*aggiornamento*" responding to the signs of the times, indicating that the Church is a living organism. Pointing out that the public discussion on the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy and the question of communion to the divorced and the remarried have decisively contributed to the debate over Catholic sexual morality in contemporary times, Hilpert Konrad proposes relationality as a key concept in approaching issues in sexual morality.

Don Bosco Darsi discusses the emerging trends in moral theology in light of the 'Ethics of Compassion'. This denotes a shift from the traditional top-down paradigm to from below paradigm of compassion, to be more inclusive of persons with limited possibilities, and who are living in various imperfect situations. Thus the focus shifts to a realistic ethics of attainable. Don Bosco Darsi points out how this ethics was influential in the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Family. Shaji George Kochuthara outlines the need of ongoing renewal of moral theology in India. He points out how moral theologian should engage in a more active dialogue with the civil society and with the cultures and religions. Besides, a preferential option for the poor, attention to justice within the structures of the Church, gender justice, etc. are necessary for further development of moral theology in India.

Following the articles on the ongoing renewal of moral theology, we have two other articles: John Moolan deals with the early Christianisation of Jewish days; In the context of the new English translation of the Roman Missal, Michael Demetrius H. Asis discusses the issues involved in liturgical reform and renewal in the Philippines.

The movement of history is not often in a straight line and the pace of this movement may vary from time to time; going forward and sometimes backward is part of this dynamic movement. However, history is always on the move. Even setbacks, pauses, fatigue, anxieties, uncertainties and hopes are part of this journey. The history of the ongoing renewal of moral theology following the Council has been an example, but, with determination and enthusiasm moral theologians have persisted in the renewal of moral theology and the new generation of moral theologians is continuing this journey 'reading the signs of the times' and responding to them, both globally and locally. As James F. Keenan says, "As we move through the early years of the twenty-first century, we ought to expect the next generation to reflect even more specifically on the concrete ethical and theological needs of their local contexts while forging trans-cultural consensus on matters of faith, conscience, justice and solidarity."¹

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¹James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century. From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2011 [originally published by Continuum, 2010], 221.