

MORAL THEOLOGY AT THE DAWN OF VATICAN II: A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF ARREGUI-ZALBA'S *COMPENDIO DE TEOLOGÍA MORAL*

Diego Alonso-Lasheras, SJ[♦]
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome

Abstract

The article offers an overview of the *Compendio de teología moral* by Arregui-Zalba, a very significant work of moral theology (particularly in the Spanish speaking world) in the years preceding Vatican II. The overview presents the structure of the book, some of the main characteristics of its way of doing moral theology and a few examples of particular topics. The article helps us understand the directions of pre-conciliar moral theology. 50 years after Vatican II, the aim of the article is to help to understand the significance and the effects of the Council in the renewal of moral theology, particularly the significance and timeliness of the call of *Optatam Totius*, 16 to give special care to the perfection of moral theology, which “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.”

Keywords: Pre-Conciliar moral theology, Second Vatican Council, Compendium of moral theology, Manuals of moral theology

[♦]**Diego Alonso-Lasheras, SJ:** Born in Madrid, Spain. BA/MA in Law and Business, from ICADE, Madrid and Doctor in Theology from Boston College. He teaches since 2008 at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. His two main fields of research are ethics and economics and religious freedom. On ethics and economics, his current research focus is how to help Christians to do social discernment in their working life. On religious freedom, he focuses on the ways the Catholic understanding of religious freedom can help in building peace. In his research he always pays attention to the history of Catholic moral theology as an important source for the renewal of the discipline.

1. Introduction

During the academic year 2012-13, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II, the Moral Theology Department of the Gregorian University, conducted a series of seminar presentations for STL students that would read the Council from the point of view of a moral theologian. The course was a very interesting experience, and it was appreciated by students and faculty alike. My sessions of the seminar were scheduled towards the end of the academic year, and I was invited to present how the common good was experienced during the Council and how it appeared in the Council's documents. I also presented the Council's teaching on religious freedom, and the challenge this teaching posed to the question of changes in doctrine. As I was presenting the topics and discussing them with the students who had read *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH), one of the students, a bright one, asked: "What is the big fuss about all this? What is new about it?" He was clearly not against the Council's teaching, he was just surprised that a council had to be conveyed to teach something that he perceived as common theological doctrine. He was born more than ten years after the end of the Council and grew up as a "son of Vatican II," therefore he could hardly understand the long import of the Council as an event and of the council documents. Fortunately for me, another great event had lately taken place in Rome in the previous weeks. Pope Benedict XVI had recently renounced the See of Saint Peter. On this account, as a good Jesuit, I answered my student's question with another question. I asked him: "Would you have said a few weeks ago that Popes could renounce their ministry at a certain age? Most likely, in 50 years you will be able to say that you were in Rome when Benedict XVI resigned. To this declaration, a young priest of those days will ask you: what is the big deal? What was so special about it?"

When we look back to past events, there is always the risk of not understanding how different the world of 50, 100 or more years ago really was. This article is an attempt to bridge the gap that separates us from the years previous to Vatican II in order to help us understand, in the field of moral theology, the reach of the Council as an event, and the influence of its teaching in changing and shaping what we now call moral theology. I will bridge this gap by presenting an overview of the *Compendio de teología moral* — a book known to many generations of priests in the Spanish speaking world as the Arregui-Zalba, because of the author Antonio M^a Arregui, SJ (1863-

1942) and the theologian who translated it into Spanish, and brought it up to date for over 20 years, Marcelino Zalba, SJ (1908-2009).

2. The Age of Manuals and Compendiums

In his book *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology*, John A. Gallagher concludes with a near tautology, affirming that moral theology is the discipline that was taught in the manuals of moral theology.¹ These manuals constituted a particular theological literary genre from 1600 onward.² Manuals were used to prepare seminarians for the task of hearing confessions and were intended for the study of moral theology. Along with manuals, compendiums were intended to review what had been studied and to be taken to the confessional for immediate consultation.³ The genre of manuals had great success, as Gallagher's works testifies. Its twin literary-genre, the compendium, also had a great success until the eve of Vatican II. Of these, the *Compendio* is a very good sample of how moral theology was conceived and practiced.

We can find the origins of the *Compendio* in the private edition of the *Summarium Theologiae Moralis* published in 1915 in Oña (Spain). The author, Antonio M^a Arregui, had been professor of moral theology in the Jesuit School of Theology of Oña since 1904 and this text was the result of his teaching and his research. It is interesting to note (because it allows us to understand some of the characteristics of the text) that Arregui had been formed in Cannon Law in Rome and that when he first arrived in Oña, in 1901, he was asked to teach Cannon Law. Only three years later was he asked to teach moral theology.⁴

The promulgation of the Code of Cannon law in 1917 forced the revision of the book, which was published again in 1918 (5000 copies). The new revised version added a tag to the original title *Summarium Theologiae Moralis ad recentem codicem Juris Canonici accommodatu*. A second edition followed in November of that same year (7000), a third in May of 1919 (9600), a fourth in December of the

¹John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology*, New York: Paulist Press, 1990.

²It is usually pointed to Juan Azor's *Institutionum moralium*, printed in Rome in 1600, as the first of the manuals. Stefano Cavallotto, "La riforma tridentina e il nuovo assetto della Teologia Morale," in *Storia della Teologia. 2: Da Pietro Lombardo a Roberto Bellarmino*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, s.d., 437.

³Marcelino Zalba, "Un moralista español de nuestros días. El Padre Antonio Arregui, S.J. (1864-1942)," *Estudios Eclesiásticos*, 1945, 250.

⁴Zalba, "Un moralista español de nuestros días..." 247-8.

same year (14000 copies). By 1942, the year of Arregui's death, there was a 14th edition, which brought the number of copies published to 150000. The book received excellent reviews. *The Irish Theological Quarterly* in 1918 compared it to the pebbles of David, which, being small, accomplished great things. *Theologie und Glaube* in 1924 recommended it to the German clergy as an excellent review of subjects and a good orientation in any given moral subject.⁵

An update translated into Spanish by Marcelino Zalba appeared in 1945. Zalba was by training a moral theologian. He completed his doctorate in moral theology at the Gregorian University in 1941. He had a self-taught proficiency in canon law. He taught moral theology in Oña until 1962. That year he was assigned to teach at the Gregorian University, where he taught until 1984. He is particularly known as a member of the Commission appointed by Paul VI to study the question of birth control. He was one of the four who wrote the vote of the minority, which the Pope would follow in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968).⁶

Zalba justified the translation into Spanish in order to satisfy the wish of doctors, judges, lawyers, merchants and members of other professions who sought a guide for many difficult moral problems.⁷ The idea of translating the *Compendio* into Spanish was a great success. If by 1942 there had been 14 editions and 150000 copies printed, the translated edition was printed and reprinted for 20 years. The last edition of the book was printed, significantly, in 1965. The number of copies printed by then had skyrocketed, to 236000, in the 24th and last edition. Although an extremely popular book, the conclusion of the Council with its request for a renewed moral theology signalled the end of books like the *Compendio*. The book in itself, the structure and the content, did not respond to the demands for moral theology that *Optatam Totius*, 16, and that the entire Council requested.

The background and competence of the authors of the *Compendio* is a sign of one of the main characteristics of the book and of moral theology as it was understood and practised at the time; the most significant component of moral theology was canon law. We will see

⁵Zalba, "Un moralista español de nuestros días...", 251–252.

⁶Alfonso Llano Escobar, "Probable origen de la encíclica *Humanae Vitae*," *Theologica Xaveriana* (December 2013); Julio Luis Martínez e José Manuel Caamaño, "Noventa años de teología moral en la revista *Estudios Eclesiásticos* (1922-2012)," *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 87 (2012) 485–510.

⁷Zalba, "Un moralista español de nuestros días...", 254.

more traces and manifestations of this characteristic as we present the structure and content of the book.

3. An Overview of the *Compendio de Teología Moral*

3.1. The Table of Contents

The *Compendio's* table of contents was as follows:

First part

Treatise I: Human Acts (20 pages)

Treatise II: Conscience (8 pages)

Treatise III: The Law (53 pages)

Treatise IV: Sin (12 pages)

Treatise V: Virtue (4 pages)

Second Part

Treatise I: Theological Virtues (42 pages)

Treatise II: The Ten Commandments (201)

Treatise III: The Commandments of the Church (19 pages)

Treatise IV: Particular States of Life (66 pages)

- Lay people
- Clerical status
- Religious status

Third Part

Treatise I: Sacraments (318 pages)

Treatise II: Ecclesiastical Penalties (39 pages)

Bull of the Crusade⁸ (8 pages)

Some appendixes (27 pages)

Indexes

- Alphabetical Index (52 pages)
- Index of canons mentioned in the *Compendio* (10 pages)

⁸The appearance of Bull of the Crusade in the *Compendio*, is one of the major signs of the need of a renovation in the teaching of Moral theology. The first Bull of the Crusade went back to 1089 and granted indulgences to those fighting the Muslims in Spain. For almost a thousand years there were many renewals of it. By the 1960's for Spanish Catholics, it basically meant the permission to eat meat during Lent and other days of abstinence, except Ash Wednesday, Fridays of Lent, the last four days of Holy Week and some vigils during the year, in exchange of a payment. For a brief information of the Bull in English: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04543b.htm>

The resemblance of this structure in comparison with Juan Azor's *Institutionum Moraliū* of 1600 is striking. Stefano Cavallotto affirms that the *Institutionum* had been published as a middle way between the erudite moral theology taught in universities and the all too succinct repertoires for rural pastors. The book, considered to be the first of the manuals,⁹ was divided into four parts. The first part contained the fundamentals about human action, taken from Aquinas' *Summa*, while leaving out the more speculative parts. The second part followed the Decalogue instead of the list of virtues that the *Summa* followed. Only after the Decalogue were the three theological virtues dealt with, because it was impossible to find a corresponding commandment in the Decalogue. The third part presented the Sacraments and the fourth, the ecclesiastical penalties.¹⁰ Although the *Compendio* is formally structured in three parts, the four parts of the *Institutionum*'s underlying outline are easy to detect. It is a clear sign that the presentation of moral theology had remained almost unaltered for about 350 years.

3.2. Certain Intellectual Tendencies

Whereas Medieval and Early Modern theologians such as Aquinas, Vitoria, Suarez, Vazquez and Liguori had written texts of moral theology that took into account some of the intellectual pinnacles of their time, the *Compendio* did not. The *Compendio*, as many other relevant moral theological texts of the time, was not following the example of the great Catholic theologians of the past. It was, certainly, following them in particular doctrinal issues (for example an upright use of probabilism¹¹), but was not following their theological method: the engagement with the important intellectuals of their time, and the deepness of their research and discussion of topics.

Another feature of the *Compendio* which reveals a clear tendency of Catholic moral theology in the years preceding Vatican II is its disproportionate attention to the question of the law, to the detriment

⁹Louis Vereecke, "Il Concilio di Trento e l'insegnamento della Teologia morale," in *Da Guglielmo d'Ockham a Sant'Alfonso de Liguori*, Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 1990, 643-56.

¹⁰Cavallotto, "La riforma tridentina e il nuovo assetto della Teologia Morale," 437. It is also interesting that a cursory reading of the *Institutionum*'s table of content can be found in many digitalized versions on line.

¹¹Zalba defends a "recto uso del probabilismo," an upright use of probabilism. We can certainly trace a genealogy of this to Liguori's *Dell'uso moderato dell'opinione probabile*, published in Naples in 1765.

of other important elements of moral theology, such as the use of Scripture, conscience or virtue. The law, the Decalogue and the Commandments of the Church, occupy 308 pages — over a third of the entire book. In Aquinas' *Summa*, the *quaestiones* dedicated to the Law are 18 out of 303, about 6% of the total *Secunda* and, of these, ten questions are dedicated to the Old and the New Law, that is, to the Bible. The *Compendio* shows a moral theology too dependent on positive law, whether ecclesiastical or civil, in which conscience is defined in a very narrow way; it is just a mechanism that applies the law to the case the person confronts. Conscience is defined as the proximate practical judgment about the morality of our own actions.¹² The way in which the topic is confronted does not reveal the role of the Holy Scriptures, the ecclesial community, or family in the formation of conscience. It is a very individualistic conception of conscience, which presents conscience performing the task of Medieval scholastic dialectics, giving conscience's role an excessive dependence in formal logic and a legalistic smack.

Gaudium et spes, 16 portrays conscience in a deeply theological way. It is in the depths of his conscience that "man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself," a law always "summoning him to love good and avoid evil," a law written by God. "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man" in which "he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths." None of this theological intensity, that is referring to God, can be found in the *Compendio*.

In the *Compendio* the cardinal virtues and theological virtues occupy a mere 50 pages. Less than 5% of the total extension of the work; in Aquinas' *Summa* vice and virtues in general take up 13% of the *Secunda*, but most important, theological virtues and cardinal virtues are the hinge upon which revolves the entire *Secunda Secundae*. The *Compendio* is more interested in avoiding evil and determining the nature of a sin, whereas Aquinas' distribution seems more focused on shedding "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" (OT, 16).

The layout of the *Compendio* reveals a moral theology that had not kept pace with its times, a moral theology that did not engage in deep intellectual debate, a moral theology that lacked theological

¹²Antonio María Arregui SJ e Marcelino Zalba, SJ, *Compendio de teología moral*, 24a ed., Bilbao: El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús, 1965, 23.

substance, a moral theology more concentrated on avoiding evil than in fostering good.

4. Some Examples of the Way of Discussing Topics

Let me offer some examples of different topics that are dealt with in the *Compendio* and how they are discussed.

4.1. The Theological Virtue of Charity

The *Compendio* deals with charity as a theological virtue in three articles. One article is dedicated to the love of God and a second article to the love of ourselves, clarifying that the divine precept of charity that we find in Mathew 22:39 binds us to love ourselves while not forgetting our supernatural end. The longest part of the section dedicated to charity is that of love of neighbour.

Love of neighbour is declared to be not only a divine precept but also a natural precept that binds us all, however it does not explain from whence this natural obligation arises. It specifies that we are not bound by this precept to love all in the same way. With love of pleasure we rejoice in the good of the beloved; with love of benevolence we secure goods for our neighbours and, of these, we should prefer relatives and friends; with beneficent love we help those in need. In discussing the different types of need to which we are bound to come to the aid of, the *Compendio* deals at some length with the apostolate of Catholic Action, the love of enemies, and works of mercy. In the works of mercy it only develops two: alms giving and fraternal correction.

Alms giving is dealt with almost in minute detail, distinguishing between extreme need, serious need and common need. The superfluous wealth — according to a person's status — should be given as alms. The *Compendio* affirms that the modern increase in need and the decrease of charitable institutions demands an increase in alms giving. This section even contains a table of what percentage of a person's remaining income should be given in alms depending on the number of children a person has. This table is taken from Vermeersch's *Theologia Moralis principia, response, consilia*,¹³ and for high incomes, with no children, it suggests that 25% or a 30% of

¹³Arthur Vermeersch, SJ (1858-1936) — moral theologian and canonist; he first taught moral theology in Leuven's Jesuit School of Theology and afterwards at the Gregorian University from 1918 to 1932. His *Theologia Moralis* saw 59 editions between 1922 and 1954.

remaining income should be given in alms. It certainly advises Christians to be generous.¹⁴

After the obligation of charity, the *Compendio* presents the sins against charity. The first to be presented is scandal — as something that is said or done that incites one to sin. After a very scholastic classification of the types of scandal, it affirms the obligation of the state to prevent and to repress scandal. Scandalous deeds can be of many kinds and here there is a very interesting casuistry. Women should avoid excessive care in dress and make up. Ornamentation is sinful when it intends to excite passions, but it is admissible when it seeks to hide some physical defect, or when it is done with the purpose of finding a husband, or even, of keeping him. Artisans and merchants should avoid making and selling of objects that can only have an evil use, such as idols or instruments of superstition. A painter should never paint, at the request of an adulterer, the picture of his accomplice. There are important restrictions on renting a house that would be used as a brothel, or a masonic lodge, although it is not absolutely forbidden. Dancing is not itself considered dishonest, but the contemporary way of doing it makes the authors think that dancing is infested with danger. Interestingly mazurka, waltz, polka or tango, are considered less dangerous than samba, cha-cha-cha, rock-and-roll or twist, because the attention that should be given to movements in the first ones, seems to mitigate the dangers of being so close.¹⁵

The examples given are humorous, partly because they depict a very hierarchical and traditional society in which every social practicality seems to be minutely determined. However, it must be conceded that the *Compendio* is very attentive to the different social dimensions of the infused virtue of charity, it exhorts social responsibility towards others, and it demands generosity from the affluent.

4.2. The Seventh Commandment

Of all the Ten Commandments, the one that receives, by far, the greatest and most detailed attention is the seventh commandment. Of the 210 pages dedicated to the Decalogue, 129 pages, more than half, are dedicated to the seventh and the tenth commandments, to the questions of justice and law. Contrary to the stereotype that attributes

¹⁴Arregui e Zalba, *Compendio de teología moral*, 123–136.

¹⁵Arregui e Zalba, *Compendio de teología moral*, 146–158.

to pre-conciliar moral theology a fixation with sexual issues, the sixth and ninth commandments are dealt with in mere 17 pages.

The way in which issues are dealt with is the same as that which was established in the middle of the 16th century by the *De Iustitia et Iure* treatises.¹⁶ It first dealt with *dominium*, that is private property, but also the *potestas* over children and wife. After that, it approached the ways of gaining ownership, which took the exposition to a very detailed account of contract and hereditary law. There is a clear concern for justice. It can be appreciated not only in the detailed analysis of different types of contracts (the contract of gratuitous bail, the agreement of sale or purchase, the insurance contract, a renting agreement), but also in the way it treats the duties of some professions such as judges, members of a jury, lawyers, notaries or medical doctors. However, the preoccupation for justice refers to justice understood as an individual virtue. There is almost no reference to the Social Encyclicals that, beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, are one of the most important features of Papal teaching in the 20th Century. The social justice spoken of in *Quadragesimo Anno* is hardly taken into account¹⁷ and neither is taken into account the “social character of ownership” that was taught in QA when it dealt with private property.

4.3. Sacraments: The Eucharist¹⁸

As we have said, the *Compendio* dealt at length with the sacraments. The first treatise of the Third Part, which represents over a third of the entire book, is dedicated to them. The attention granted to each of the sacraments shows that the idea of *sacramenta maiora* and *sacramenta minora* is not taken into account. The two sacraments that receive the most attention are the sacrament of the Eucharist (49 pages) and the sacrament of penance (80 pages). There is a minimal dogmatic foundation in approaching the sacraments and an extensive exposition of disciplinary norms about the sacraments.

¹⁶The first *De Iustitia et Iure* Treatise was published by Domingo de Soto, OP (1494-1560) because he realized that the way in which the Summa dealt with problems of justice was insufficient with the new problems arising from the European expansion throughout the world of the 16th century. For more information about this moral theology literary genre see: Alonso-Lasheras, *Luis de Molina's "De Iustitiae et Iure": Justice as Virtue in an Economic Context*.

Zalba himself had written his doctoral dissertation on the question of legal price.

¹⁷QA deals with commutative justice, but also deals with social justice in numbers 57, 58, 71, 74, 88, 110, 126.

¹⁸Arregui e Zalba, *Compendio de teologia moral*, 505–555.

Dealing with the Eucharist the *Compendio* goes into a long casuistry. Laws on fasting had been changed by Pius XII in 1957. Therefore the last edition of the book, (that we are currently presenting) presented a more mitigated discipline of fasting, but it still went into many petty casuistry questions; for example, fast was not broken by the ingestion of nails, hair, blood bleeding from ones gums or tongue, food that had remained between the teeth or a subcutaneous injection. More space was granted to the precept of Paschal communion, than to the recommendation of frequent communion.

It is striking that there is only a serious obligation of celebrating the Eucharist three or four times a year! Bishops and Religious superiors are, however, requested to exhort secular and religious priests to celebrate mass at least on Sundays and other days of obligation. Stricter are the obligations of Bishops and Pastors. A great deal of attention is given to Mass stipends, the duties they create, the way of passing them to others, and the necessity to keep a good accounting of them.

The general way of reasoning about the Eucharist, is minimalistic, that is, what is the minimum that should be done in order to fulfil some precept. The idea that there is an abundance of graces derived from the Sacred Liturgy, as *Sacramentum Concilium*, 21 affirms, is almost alien to the way of reasoning of the text.

The instructions about celebrating the Mass are so detailed that they became a nightmare for scrupulous consciences. Many tales about this are still told among religious and priests. There were innumerable occasions to sin during the celebration of the mass. A private celebration could not last more than thirty minutes, nor less than twenty, under the penalty of a venial sin, but if the mass lasted less than fifteen minutes the celebrant could not be excused of grave sin. It was declared to be a mortal sin to celebrate the mass without the maniple, to celebrate the mass alone, or to use a corporal that had not been properly blessed. After all these severe declarations, it was said that it could be done when there was a very urgent necessity or if the priest was menaced with death. A reading of the entire section reveals certain fixation with not breaking the innumerable amount of liturgical rules. It does not transpire a godly attention for a devout celebration of the sacraments. The mystical dimension of the sacraments is thoroughly ignored.

5. Conclusion

This rapid tour through the *Compendio de teología moral* gives us a few insights into the way moral theology was conceived and practiced in the years preceding Vatican II. As Yves Congar warned, cut short of its contact with other theological disciplines, moral theology ran the risk of being just a discipline of rules and just a human discipline that forgot its theo-logical character, that is, a discipline that ought to be a word (λόγος) about God (Θεός) who has revealed himself to us in Christ, sanctifying us, and calling us to live as People of the Covenant.¹⁹

Christian life is presented in the *Compendio* as a very human work. It is not affirmed in a clear way that true Christian spirit finds its primary and indispensable source in the Sacred Liturgy (SC, 14), nor that it “is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation” (LG, 11). A great deal of space is given to the sacraments in the *Compendio*, but they are presented more in a bureaucratic way than in a mystic one. Rubrics seem to be turned into canons, — somehow canon law and liturgy are wrongly identified—, and demystifying the Divine. We could affirm that moral theology had a theo-logical deficit.

The Hierarchical dimension of the Church was over accentuated, to the detriment of the Church as people of God, as a “people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG, 4).²⁰ This led moral theology to a legalistic positivism, to an excess in the normative authority of the hierarchy, that ended up concentrating on acts that were declared to be mortal sins by the breaking of a certain ecclesial positive rule. This came at the detriment of paying greater attention to the Scriptures, to human reason and experience, and to Natural Law.

More attention was given to avoiding sin than to promoting virtue and the fruits of charity that Christian life should produce. We should note that this was basically due to an over-compartmentalization of theological disciplines. Arregui had been Master of Novices and wrote a book on Jesuit Spirituality, the *Annotationes adeptomen Instituti Societatis Iesu*,²¹ so he knew about the ways of virtue. Zalba

¹⁹Yves Marie Joseph Congar, *La foi et la théologie*, Le mystère chrétien, Théologie dogmatique 001, Tournai: Desclée, 1962, 181.

²⁰It is a quote from Ef, 1.

²¹Arregui, *Annotationes ad epitomen Instituti Societatis Iesu*, Romae: apud Oeconomum Generalem, 1934.

was known to be a pious man of great compassion.²² Undoubtedly, both of them understood that their knowledge and their abilities in promoting good and virtue were part of spiritual theology and that they should not make use of them in a treatise of moral theology. Moral theology had been cornered as the science of confessors, as a discipline of confessing and forgiving sins, and not so much as a discipline to encourage virtue and fruits of charity. This analysis of the *Compendio* does not justify, however, the stereotype that moral theology before the Council had an obsession with sex and the sixth and ninth commandments. Actually, what comes out of our analysis is a sense of fixation on questions of justice and rightness, albeit, understood in a rather individualistic way.

The science of confessors at the dawn of Vatican II had become too deductive and too metaphysical, forgetting to use as a theological locus the “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted,” forgetting that “nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in” the heart of Christians (GS, 1).

What is surprising after reading the *Compendio*, and taking into account that it was a widely used book, is that the same priests and theologians who had been formed with this style of moral theology, were the same men who were able to bring about the Council’s renewal. Prior to the Council there had been an excessive compartmentalization of the discipline that led to some of the deficits and excesses that we have pointed out. To understand why the same men who studied with books like the *Compendio* were the ones who brought about the Council’s renovation, we should take into account that moral theology was practiced by men who were also spiritual directors, pastors, teachers and men of prayer. What can be read in manuals and other books like the *Compendio* gives us a very narrow and limited picture of a much greater personal, spiritual and ecclesial life. It’s as if the plant was sound, but had been improperly pruned. However, the sap was still in the plant, a plant which was waiting to blossom, as it showed most fully when the spring of the Spirit that was Vatican II came along.

²²Among the students of Moral theology at the Gregorian University the word went around that for Fr. Zalba everything was in theory a sin, but that in the concrete cases he would always find ways of exculpating the penitent. This story was referred to me by a former Gregorian University student of the early ‘70s.