

Introduction

A Note on the English Edition

This book is the English translation of the volume: Colom, Enrique, and Angel Rodríguez Luño, *Scelti in Cristo per essere santi. I. Morale fondamentale*. 1st reprint of the 3rd edition, Rome: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2008. It is the first volume of four which make up the moral theology manual developed by the professors of the Department of Moral Theology of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome).

The translation into English of the Introduction and Chapter I was done by Gerald Malsbary. The rest of the book and the final revision of the entire text is the work of our collaborator Thomas Daniel Howes. To him goes our recognition for the dedication and competence with which he accomplished his task.

The Authors

A Note on the Italian Edition

This book is designed as a manual for the study of fundamental moral theology. It is addressed primarily to those who are undertaking a required course of study in Catholic theology at seminaries or ecclesiastical colleges. The editorial and typographical style, the choice of topics, and the extent of material covered are intended to meet the needs of such students. Nevertheless, we trust that the book will likewise be of interest for those who pursue theological and moral studies at a non specialist, though nonetheless serious level.

The didactic purpose of our work calls for a clear presentation of the principles provided by Revelation and Catholic doctrine for the understanding of Christian life, distinguishing such principles from our own precise philosophical and

theological formulation of them. Theologians are well aware that the distinction between doctrine and theological reflection is not always kept, since at times it is not easy to formulate doctrine in terminology that is not to some degree already theological or even philosophical. Such a distinction nonetheless exists, and is necessary in order to adequately reflect both the necessary fidelity to Catholic doctrinal identity and the desired freedom of theological research. This interest in clearly tracing the boundary between Catholic doctrine and our personal reflection is what motivates our frequent references to biblical foundations, to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council—especially its doctrine of the universal call to holiness—as well as to more recent interventions of the magisterium with regard to moral questions, such as *Veritatis Splendor*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The reader will soon discover that although this book is founded on Catholic doctrine, it is not simply a kind of “theologically neutral” exposition of that doctrine. In fact, our intention has been to carry out for the first time an exposition of Catholic moral theology on the basis of the most recent developments in what is referred to today as “virtue ethics,” following a line of moral research that has been strongly represented in English speaking countries as well as in Italy and Germany for the past fifteen to twenty years. In the course of reading this book, the reader will come to understand its nature and motivations, but for now we would like to offer the following provisional sketch.

Virtue ethics, as we understand it, is not simply a method for articulating a special moral theology; on the contrary, just *how* moral theology should be articulated remains an unsolved problem, that we hope to confront as we go along. Nor do we conceive of it as a “weak” or “light” version of a non-cognitivist ethics which (accepting the impossibility of any true moral theory) retreats to the study of character, or to a psychology of the virtues. To put it in simpler terms, we do not conceive of virtue ethics as “an ethics without norms” that will only remain at the level of vague exhortations. Virtue ethics, as we understand it is a line of research that takes up the quandaries (*aporiai*, in Greek philosophical language) of modern normative ethics, that is to say, of an ethics that is completely focused on obligation, on norms, and on acts as analyzed from the point of view of an external observer (i.e., an “ethics of the third person”), and proposes instead an ethics that in its structure recalls classical ethics and presents itself as an alternative (in structure, at least, if not

necessarily in content) to an ethics of obligation or “casuistic” ethics. This line of research provides, among other advantages, for a rediscovery of the scientific validity of what was the mature moral theory of Thomas Aquinas—namely that contained in the *Summa Theologiae*—which nevertheless needs to be brought up to date on some particular points.

The fundamental characteristic of our approach is that the center of ethical theory consists in the practical (and not merely theoretical) consideration of the good of human life considered in its totality, the good that had traditionally been referred to as the *finis ultimus*. The most basic task of moral philosophy would consequently consist in helping persons locate themselves on a plane of reflection that contemplates human life as a whole, and, starting from this perspective, might then be in a position to distinguish the priorities to be assigned to the various activities that make up one’s life as a whole and to clarify the criteria according to which one should govern the use and actualization of human goods; this ordering of priorities and these criteria of rational governance form the essential content of the moral virtues. To enter into the concrete problems of normative ethics without having first undertaken this preliminary clarification about the type of life we wish to lead would be equivalent to building the second floor of a building before building its foundations and first floor. Our approach therefore presupposes that the human good can be rationally investigated and *a fortiori* theologically investigated. Theological research, on the basis of Revelation, can avail itself of a more precise and complete answer to the question about what is the ultimate meaning of human life, in whose light fundamental concepts of morality acquire a sharper image and a more exact contextualization.

The pedagogical purpose of this book has encouraged us to proceed cautiously (for some perhaps too cautiously, for others, not cautiously enough). Before the new building is completed, it is better not to demolish the old one and then say we should not have torn it down completely after all. In other words, many concepts and distinctions of casuistic morality are still very useful for students and theologians, and perhaps always will be, provided they be updated and duly placed into a new framework. We are aware that some passages of this book will strike the reader as being rather eclectic. This is a risk that we consider worth taking for the reason that, as just explained, this is a first attempt that is necessarily imperfect, which puts a priority on the didactic purpose as well

as the radical development of the theological approach we have assumed, but without giving up on a significantly coherent methodology and thematization which seems to us to be adequate, at least in terms of the current state of research.

We would like to conclude by explaining our ordering of the material. The first chapter constitutes our introduction to moral theology, explaining its object and its sources. In this chapter is conveyed our precise position on the epistemological status of moral theology as a practical wisdom. The First Part studies the universal call to holiness, the ultimate end of Christian morality, consisting in the fullness of divine filiation and which is realized in the following of Christ (Chapter II); next, the discussion moves to a panoramic vision of the fundamental lines of conduct whereby the believer seeks union with Christ through his own actions and according to his conditions and circumstances (Chapter III). This part is articulated according to the biblical notion of “call and response,” which in any case cannot be absolutized if the nature of the moral life is to be described precisely as a human and moral phenomenon. It is true that the Christian discovers a definite divine call behind ethical imperatives, but it is also true that the Christian moral life does not consist in replying “yes” or “no” to a question expressed in terms of a definite and unambiguous context. If the moral life is not to be reduced to a struggle to avoid serious sins, it is also, and above all, an active seeking, the power of individually determining one’s mode of living with imagination and courage, such that all our actions become a means of attaining union with Christ.

The Second Part, more analytical in character, treats of moral anthropology, that is, the sum total of natural structures and active principles infused by God that make it possible for the human being—as the image of God—to be an acting moral subject who works out a plan of life that is coherent with his own well-being as a human being and a Christian. In this third edition we have modified both the structure and contents of this part. The themes we study are the following: the freedom of the children of God (Ch. IV), the inclinations, feelings, and emotions (Ch. V), the nature and evaluation of moral action (Ch. VI), and the moral virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Ch. VII).

The Third Part analyzes the normative dimension of the moral activity of the human being. Both the internal cognitive principles and the external aids come under consideration, permitting the believer to identify and refine the conduct

suitable for realizing the end to which he is destined. Also to be examined are: the moral law (Ch. VIII), human laws that make it explicit and more ultimately determine its context (Ch. IX), and conscience (Ch. X). Finally, detailed consideration is given to sin, the act by which the human being distances himself from Christ, and conversion, which entails a return to Him (Ch. XI).

We hope that our labors will prove to be of some utility for the reader, and that the suggestions and just criticisms of our colleagues have helped us improve the quality of the service we hope to render in this work: it is thanks to them, in fact, that we have introduced notable changes in this third edition.

The Authors