

## THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN MORAL THEOLOGY

### I

On June 6, 1830, in Bardstown, Kentucky, a 34-year-old Irish-born priest of that diocese, Francis Patrick Kenrick, was consecrated titular bishop of Arath and coadjutor bishop and administrator of the diocese of Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> Kenrick had been a teacher in the seminary of Bardstown since 1821. The diocese of Bardstown was erected in 1808, and the seminary itself had been established in 1811 by the first bishop, Benedict Joseph Flaget, a Sulpician who had taught at St. Mary's, Baltimore (the first seminary in the United States, established in 1791) but its staff consisted almost entirely of one or two priests Flaget brought with him from Baltimore, plus the bishop himself.

Flaget had found Kenrick at the college of the *Propaganda Fide* in Rome, where Kenrick had acquired Hebrew and Greek as well as a knowledge of the Fathers and as good a theological education as one was likely to find in most of Europe in the years immediately following the Napoleonic Wars.

Philadelphia was hardly a thriving center of Catholicism when Kenrick arrived in 1830. There were four churches in the city, one in the suburbs, and ten priests. Seminarians for the diocese were being trained at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg. Like most American seminaries at the time, Emmitsburg, established in 1809 as the *petit séminaire* for St. Mary's, Baltimore, had become a "mixed" institution, with students not studying for the priesthood carrying on studies side by side with seminarians. That was the only way that most seminaries were able to survive. But Kenrick wanted a "Tridentine" seminary, i.e., an institution exclusively for the training of seminarians, and for that purpose he established the seminary of St. Charles Borromeo in 1832 in his own house in Philadelphia.

Naturally the bishop himself played an important role in the teaching of the seminarians, and it was for them that he published in 1841 the first volume of his *Theologia moralis*.<sup>2</sup> Kenrick explains in the preface to his first volume that he had not intended to publish a moral theology so soon after the publication of his dog-

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<sup>1</sup>On Kenrick, see John J. O'Shea in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1907-1912) 8:616-19; and J. J. Nolan in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 8:155-56.

<sup>2</sup>*Theologiae moralis [volumina] concinnatae a Francisco Patricio Kenrick*, 3 vols. (Philadelphiae apud Eugenium Cummiskey, 1841-1843; 2nd ed. Mechlin: Dessain, 1860-1861). References are to the first edition.

matics. But the number of seminarians had increased, and it had been impossible to obtain books for them in spite of repeated attempts. But beyond that, Kenrick notes the need for a text accommodated to the American situation, since unchanging moral principles need application to various circumstances. He cites some particular problems. One is the question of the applicability in the United States of certain church laws and penalties. One of the more important of these was the decree *Tametsi* of the Council of Trent, which imposed the requirement of ecclesiastical form for marriage under penalty of invalidity. But the decree was in force only in those countries where it had been promulgated and their colonies. In the United States it appeared that the decree applied only in the dioceses of New Orleans and St. Louis, so the potential for confusion was considerable.

Another issue was raised by the new American constitutional system based on the consent of the governed, and Kenrick had to discuss the basis for the obligation in conscience to obey the civil law. And another American question was slavery. Kenrick noted that European moral texts were silent on the subject, since slavery had long since disappeared on the continent. So he had to write a treatment of the duties of slaves and masters.

Kenrick's sources in writing his moral theology were several. He notes his use of St. Thomas Aquinas from the older school and St. Alphonsus from the more recent. And surprisingly, given the time, he frequently cites Anglican moralists "because it helps to show what sound moral principles are recognized by them, so that souls will be disposed to full agreement in everything."<sup>3</sup> He also cites English and American legal scholars often, so that the clergy will not be ignorant of civil law. And Kenrick notes his frequent use of the Church Fathers. Finally, Kenrick claims his nearly twenty years' experience in the ministry as the warrant for his opinions on various questions.

Francis Patrick Kenrick provides a useful introduction to the American experience of moral theology. He was a seminary teacher and bishop who attempted to carry on a discipline developed in Europe in the American setting, which was not always hospitable. "Moral theology" as Kenrick and other writers in the United States until very recently understood the term was a discipline taught in seminaries to future confessors. That was inevitable in the period when the seminaries decreed by Trent were established. Seminaries needed texts suited to their needs, and authors responded with the manuals of moral theology that followed a sketch laid out in the *Ratio Studiorum* of the Jesuits in 1586, included some questions from the *prima secundae* of Aquinas' *Summa* and then attended to a wide variety of cases of conscience ordered according to the commandments, the sacraments and censures.<sup>4</sup> The history of this development is beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that Kenrick wrote less than a century after the appearance of the *Theologia moralis* of St. Alphonsus Liguori, which was first published in 1748. It is also worth noting that the plan of the manuals of moral theology, de-

<sup>3</sup>Kenrick, *Theologiae moralis*, I:iv.

<sup>4</sup>See L. Vereecke, "Moral Theology, History of:" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 9:1121; and Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ* 3 vols. (Westminster: Newman, 1961) 1:16-20.

veloped in the 16th century, remained virtually unchanged until the middle of the 20th century. Universities contributed little to moral theology after 1600.

Alphonsus Liguori had helped quiet a long dispute between moral rigorists and those accused of being moral laxists. Part of that dispute was over the doctrine of probabilism and a variety of alternate positions on moral obligations. But one sees little of this dispute in Kenrick. He wrote, after all, in a place where the Latin textbooks of European seminaries could not be purchased. And he was writing for seminarians who were being trained for the most part as "missionaries," and who could expect to spend their years ministering to the needs of the immigrant masses who had begun to find their way to the United States, or on the frontier, where conditions were hardly conducive to high scholarship. American moral theology had a practical, not a speculative, bent.

Life in America had its problems for Catholics. Kenrick was bishop of Philadelphia in 1844 when 40 persons were killed in anti-Catholic rioting that resulted in the burning of churches and institutions, including the seminary. Writing moral theology in such a setting, in which Catholics were a small minority and one which enjoyed little social prestige, was something new. European moral theologians did not cite as Kenrick did the work of the Anglican moralists Jeremy Taylor and William Paley and the jurist Sir William Blackstone as well as Lutheran writers. His experience must have impressed upon Kenrick the importance of "agreement" with his neighbors. Catholics were not only a minority, they lived in a situation of unique religious pluralism, and Kenrick's volumes are full of references to various religious denominations in the United States and to the problems of conscience created by living in a religiously pluralistic society. The American situation also meant a changed relationship of church law to civil law, especially on matters relating to marriage and schools.

Kenrick states his view of his task as a moralist rather clearly in the preface to his first volume. The principles of moral theology remain unchanged, he writes, but they must be applied to new circumstances.<sup>5</sup> And Kenrick is emphatic in submitting his views to the correction of his theological peers as well as to the judgment of the Holy See. If the reader seeks in Kenrick's treatise *De Principiis* his views on the typical manual questions about human acts, conscience, sin, and law, the reader will find little that differs from other texts of the period. And of course the structure of the text itself is that of countless seminary manuals.

But having said that, I should also say that there is no mistaking the American origins of Kenrick's work. It is not only that the examples carry American names and places; the moralists and jurists cited and the nature of the problems addressed are clearly American—or at least Anglo-American.

Kenrick's moral theology was reprinted in 1860-61 in Belgium, after he had become archbishop of Baltimore in 1851. The second edition contains a highly laudatory preface by the primate of Belgium, Cardinal Engelbert Sterckx, but after Kenrick's death in 1863 his books seem to have fallen into disuse, even in the United States. John Tracy Ellis cites Kenrick's own observation that his books were making slow progress in the United States despite the commendation they had re-

<sup>5</sup>Kenrick, *Theologiae moralis*, 1:iii.

ceived from the bishops of the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1843.<sup>6</sup> Kenrick attributed the slowness even of the seminary at Emmitsburg to adopt his books to a fear lest "they appear to hurt the majesty of the city (Rome) by introducing the work of a stranger."<sup>7</sup>

One textbook that was widely used was the *Compendium Theologiae Moralis* of Jean-Pierre Gury, S.J. Ellis<sup>8</sup> attributes the popularity of Gury to his teaching at Rome, but in fact Gury taught in Rome only for one year.<sup>9</sup> Gury wrote his books on moral theology while he was teaching at the seminary of Vals in France.

The first edition of the *Compendium* was published in 1850, and it had a truly remarkable career, especially after its definitive revision by Gury in 1865. In Rome Gury's text was revised and annotated by Antonio Ballerini, S.J., and it was this edition which then became the basis of the *Compendium theologiae moralis* of Luigi Sabetti, S.J., professor of moral theology at Woodstock College in Maryland. Sabetti's edition of Gury was abridged and "accommodated to the use of seminarians of this region" at the time of its publication in the United States. Sabetti's work was in turn continued by Timothy Barrett, S.J., and later by Daniel F. Creeden, S.J.

This remarkable series of editions continued from the original publication in 1850 to the time of the Second World War, and it should be noted that the series continued uninterrupted through the restoration of Thomism in 1879 and the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917. Sabetti could write in his edition, well after the restoration of Thomism, that he had expanded the discussion of probabilism and other theories in order to do justice to St. Alphonsus, "whose disciple I declare myself to be and glory in being."<sup>10</sup> In a note published in *Theological Studies* in 1950, Gerald Kelly, S.J., called attention to the centenary of Gury's work and pointed out that it was the basis not only for the Sabetti-Barrett-Creeden series in the United States, but for Tummulo-Iorio in Italy and for Ferreres in Spain and Latin America.<sup>11</sup> Such a record is truly remarkable, not only in itself, but because it exhibits an important channel through which the established

<sup>6</sup>John Tracy Ellis, "The Formation of the American Priest: An Historical Perspective," in *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Historical Investigations* (Collegeville: St. John's University Press, 1971) 32.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 31, citing reports that Gury was used in seminaries in Milwaukee and Louisville but apparently elsewhere as well. See also John Tracy Ellis, *Essays in Seminary Education* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1967) 144-46.

<sup>9</sup>On Gury, see J. Salsmans in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 7:89, and J. H. Campana in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 6:866.

<sup>10</sup>*Compendium Theologiae Moralis* a Joanne Petro Gury, S.J. conscriptum et ab Antonio Ballerini ejusdem societatis adnotationibus auctum . . . ad brevioram formam exaratum atque ad usum seminariorum hujus regionis accommodatum ab Aloysio Sabetti, S.J. . . . editio vicesima secunda recognita a Timotheo Barrett, S.J. (New York: Pustet, 1915) 6.

<sup>11</sup>Gerald Kelly, S.J., "Current Theology: Notes on Moral Theology, 1950," *TS* 12 (1950) 52.

tradition was transmitted at the same time that it was being adapted to some degree to the needs of quite different places over a period of more than a century.

Kenrick's books, published long before Sabetti's edition of Gury, were also an adaptation of the moral tradition to the United States to the extent that they took up new problems and were written for the use of "missionaries." Kenrick, like later authors in the United States, was not writing for theorists but for pastors and confessors. In his method, Kenrick followed very much the manual tradition. His use of Anglican moralists serves as important corroboration and certainly was a novelty at the time, but the Anglicans were still very much in the classic tradition of natural law based on right reason, and his use of them does not, therefore, represent great methodological innovation. It is, of course, also true that later generations of Catholic writers before Vatican II mention Protestants for more polemic reasons than Kenrick's.

If moral theology changed little in its new American context for generations, the historical and cultural context in which it was carried on changed a great deal. I turn now to some of those changes.

## II

First I want to call attention to two facets of the moral life of the Church in the United States which are not moral theology in the sense of a seminary or university discipline but which help to fill out the portrait I am sketching of the American Catholic experience. The first thing to which I want to draw attention is the importance of morals and morality to the developing American Church. The second is the importance of social problems and responses to those problems in the nineteenth-century Church.

There is no need to speak at length about the importance of morals and the moral life to the American Church. The overwhelming fact of the American Catholic experience in the past century was the arrival of immigrants—by the hundreds of thousands in many years and totaling millions.<sup>12</sup>

The immigrants, Irish and Germans and then others, came and many of them stayed in the cities, especially the Irish. A few were well educated, but the vast majority were not. They survived as laborers. The legendary love-affair between the Irish and alcohol created or exacerbated terrible social conditions. And it requires no great imagination to picture the social problems created by the disruption and separation of families in times of migration or the vice that flourished among a population that was largely uneducated and unemployed or seriously underemployed.

It is no surprise to read, therefore, that morality was a favorite topic of Catholic preachers both in the cities and on the frontier. The situation is described by Jay Dolan in his book on Catholic revivalism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience 1830-1900* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978) 1-24.

<sup>13</sup>Dolan, *Revivalism*, 109-11. See also Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985) 221-40.

The details of Dolan's account of Catholic revivalism are not our interest. What is of interest is to note the pervasive moralism of the Catholic revivalist movement<sup>14</sup> and the highly individualistic style of piety on which it was based and which it propagated.<sup>15</sup> The revival movement, as Dolan points out, both preached acceptance of the individual's lot in life and, with little concern for consistency, the very American possibility of self-improvement by the embracing of virtues like temperance. Dolan quotes Paulist Walter Elliott's paraphrase of the judgment scene in the gospel of Matthew and comments:

Since sin was viewed in such individualistic terms, holiness likewise became a personal quest. Through its ritual, preaching, and song the revival sought to make this quest emotionally convincing and rewarding. But after motivating people to follow the path of holiness, the revival did not abandon them to a sin-filled world where as spiritual orphans they would wander alone. It channeled them into "the arms of your loving mother the Holy Church" where they could find refuge during their earthly pilgrimage.<sup>16</sup>

The individualism already mentioned was fostered by the devotional style of piety encouraged by the Catholic revivalist movement. There were some important differences between Catholic revivalism and the revivals among American Protestants—though there were to be sure important similarities. Catholic revivalism had its origins not in American Protestantism but in European Catholicism and traditions of parish missions and a style of piety promoted by various religious orders, especially the Jesuits and Redemptorists, and later, the American Paulists—and by church authority as well. The Catholic heritage included an emphasis on religious instructions, on doctrine, that did not have the same importance in Protestant revivalism.<sup>17</sup> Yet the religious instruction of immigrant Catholics as part of a week-long parish mission was not the sort of thing that promoted scholarship. The purpose of the Catholic parish mission and the style of preaching that it encouraged of course did not deny the importance of doctrine, but clearly the intention was to change the lives of parishioners, not to encourage learning.

Richard Hofstadter called attention to the roots of anti-intellectualism in American life,<sup>18</sup> and among those roots were some forms of American religion. Hofstadter gave most of his attention to the dissenters and anti-establishment types among American Protestants, and it is one of the contributions of Dolan's book to point to similar religious phenomena among American Catholics. The emphasis on personal religious conversion, indeed upon the *experience* of conversion often left a profound suspicion of the life of the mind among religious people, both Catholic and Protestant. That did not encourage the development of an American Catholic tradition of theological learning.

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<sup>14</sup>See the comments of Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Richard D. Heffner, ed. (1835-1840; New American Library, 1956) pt. II, bk. 2, nn. 27-28, pp. 192-98 on individualism in the United States as a distinctive trait of a democratic society.

<sup>15</sup>Dolan, *Revivalism*, 178-79.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 111-12.

<sup>18</sup>Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

The moralism and individualism fostered by the revivalists also tended to deflect attention from reconstruction of the social order.<sup>19</sup> Thomas O'Dea<sup>20</sup> has suggested that American Catholics tended to divorce the sacred and secular and to view the world as a place of moral danger and life as a series of moral problems.

The "ghetto mentality" of much nineteenth-century Catholicism, however, was not confined to the United States and had its roots in the reaction of church leaders to the revolutionary social, political and intellectual changes that confronted the Church from the beginnings of the Enlightenment to the French Revolution and its aftermath.<sup>21</sup> American immigrant Catholicism in the nineteenth century did develop in a kind of ghetto, even if the ghetto was clearly an American one and its inhabitants exhibited many characteristics in common with other Americans who were not Catholics.

I mentioned Dolan's observation that the revivalist style of piety did not foster concern for social reconstruction. That is true, but it is also true that there was much charitable activity among Catholics on behalf of the needy. I turn now briefly to the Catholic social movements which Aaron Abell has described in his book *American Catholicism and Social Action*.<sup>22</sup>

That American Catholics developed a host of institutions to respond to the needs of the destitute in the Catholic community in particular is well known. I wish only to ask what the motivations, in particular what the theological motivations of this response were and how Catholics understood themselves and what they were doing. Whether those involved would have named their thinking "moral theology" or not is not the issue. Whatever was being taught in seminaries at the time, it is clear that something significant was happening in the moral life of the Catholic people.

We can begin by noting with Abell that the motivations of Catholic social action in the first half of the nineteenth century were mixed: in part a concern for those in need (a demand of charity), in part a concern to put the Church's house in order to make Catholicism more attractive to non-Catholic Americans, who were viewed as potential converts. The conversion of native-born Americans was a concern of that famous Yankee convert, Orestes Brownson. But it was also Brownson who wrote: "All that is in any sense good or worth having, the individual can always, under any political or social order, secure by a simple act of his will."<sup>23</sup> Abell suggests that this social individualism expressed by Brownson and, among others, by Martin J. Spalding, the archbishop of Baltimore, stemmed from their religious conviction that poverty and self-denial, not riches, were the Christian ideal, a position revivalist piety would support too. As a result, little criticism of the existing *laissez-faire* social system came from American Catholics

<sup>19</sup>Dolan, *Revivalism*, 191.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas F. O'Dea, *American Catholic Dilemma* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), cited *passim* in Dolan, *Revivalism*, 185-203.

<sup>21</sup>See Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Catholic Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); and R. Aubert et al., *The Church in the Age of Liberalism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), vol. 8 of H. Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*.

<sup>22</sup>(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.)

<sup>23</sup>Abell, *Social Action*, 26.

prior to the Civil War, though some, including Brownson, were fearful that the urban masses would be lured to socialism.

Fear of socialism underlay such controversies as that over the proposals of Henry George for land taxes. One pastor's disagreement with his bishop grew so fierce that it led to the excommunication in 1887 of the pastor of St. Stephen's parish in New York, Dr. Edward McGlynn. And leading members of the American hierarchy agitated in Rome for and against a formal condemnation of George's book, *Progress and Poverty*. The issue of taxes can illustrate one of the items of controversy among American Catholics: the role of the state in addressing social problems. But the role of the church as a private institution in American society in relieving the needs of the poor was important. Initiatives from the organization of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in American parishes to largely unsuccessful attempts to resettle immigrants from urban slums to rural areas under church auspices multiplied. Institutions of all sorts were organized by the church, especially in urban areas, to relieve human needs. But conditions for the immigrant poor in major cities remained wretched nonetheless. Working people began to organize unions.

So these same years were those in which controversy over the Knights of Labor also divided Catholic opinion. Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore intervened with the Holy See while he was in Rome to receive the red hat; Gibbons managed to avert the condemnation of the Knights of Labor and thus earned the church hierarchy a reputation as supporters of working people.<sup>24</sup>

The issue of state intervention on behalf of "social justice" remained much debated both in the United States and in Europe until the publication in 1891 of Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which authoritatively affirmed a role for the state in providing for the needs of people while rejecting both economic liberalism and socialism. I can note in passing that the 1891 encyclical reflected strongly the Thomism which Leo had restored in 1879. The principles which undergird *Rerum novarum* are principles of the natural law.

But it is clear that the encyclical largely reflected a European discussion. The dispute between *laissez-faire* capitalism and socialism was not an exclusively European concern, however; my point is rather that the Catholic debate about appropriate responses to the social problems engendered by the Industrial Revolution was carried on in Europe and it was the European discussion which framed the questions and developed the responses which Leo gave.<sup>25</sup> Americans, both Catholic and non-Catholic, debated warmly whether Pope Leo had been excessively influenced by socialism, but no American Catholic social ethic, no coherent statement of moral principles which might guide action for social justice, resulted to parallel the European discussion. American Catholicism lacked a theological tradition of distinction in which such a development might take place. Before the opening of The Catholic University of America in 1889, there was no post-graduate theological education in this country under Catholic auspices.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Dolan, *Experience*, 332; Abell, *Social Action*, 67-71.

<sup>25</sup>See Abell, *Social Action*, 72-76.

<sup>26</sup>See James Hennesey, S.J., *American Catholics* (New York: Oxford, 1981) 187; John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) 118.



The American experience of the Catholic tradition of moral theology was therefore strongly conditioned by the immigrant experience and the moralism and individualism which played so strong a role in the piety of the American Church. The preaching which encouraged temperance in a society in which the abuse of alcohol was widespread did not require great theological acumen, and it was more inclined to focus on intemperance than on its roots in urban poverty or the stresses experienced by families on the frontier.

Similarly, the Catholic approach to the great social evils of nineteenth-century life focused on the individual and the needs of the individuals and families more than on the broader questions of social justice and the role of the state or other social agencies in achieving social reform. The great themes of Pope Leo's social teaching were slow to reach the moral theology manuals.

It should also be noted that throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, the United States was racked by outbursts of Nativism. Small wonder, then, that the Catholic population felt itself a minority both religiously and culturally long after Catholics had become the largest single religious group in the country. In the lingering Counter-Reformation atmosphere, anyone who was not a Catholic was a potential convert, and cooperation between Catholics and non-Catholics was not easy. For example, the treatment of the Bible and religion in the public schools was a constant irritant. The sense of Catholic isolation was exacerbated among German Catholics who worked mightily to preserve a cultural and linguistic as well as a religious identity. Italians, Poles and other Slavs, and Hispanics faced the same problems, and in some cases schismatic groups resulted.<sup>27</sup>

There is little evidence of change in the moral theology taught during this period. The life of the Catholic people was not reflected in new ways of teaching moral theology or of formulating moral problems. The first great social encyclical had been published, but it was absorbed only slowly in the traditional discipline.

By the 1880s other intellectual forces had come into play which affected moral theology, and we turn now to some of them.

### III

American higher education from the beginning had moral formation as its goal. The college curriculum was so arranged that the course of study culminated in moral philosophy, often taught by the college president.<sup>28</sup> The moral vision was, of course, Protestant. In the post-Civil War period, however, a very different view of higher education gained ascendancy in the United States. One obvious reason for the change was the loss of a single, dominant moral view of the world which could integrate a course in moral philosophy. But another important influence was the rise of the German university, with its emphasis not on moral formation but

<sup>27</sup>See Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 193-96.

<sup>28</sup>For what follows, see Susan Ross, "The Development of the Social Sciences," in Alexandra Oleson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1979) 107-38.

on research. What we have come to know as the social sciences began to emerge in the United States from the breakup of the disciplines of moral philosophy and mental philosophy.

This is not the place to rehearse the history of the social sciences, but it is useful to recall some of the intentions of the founders of the social sciences, because many of them were quite explicitly moral. What the founders had in mind was the reconstruction of society—a moral vision, and not a surprising one, given the religious backgrounds of prominent late nineteenth-century American scholars. But in the place of religion, which was declining in prestige, the early social scientists proposed to put the prestige of science, of disciplinary competence, of the university, in which they quickly established both themselves and their disciplines. Empirical psychology, built on the model of biology and physiology, replaced mental philosophy; anthropology, economics, sociology, some schools of history, and political science found models in the physical sciences or in the statistical analysis of data which promised control or at least reliable prediction of phenomena and events.

The new social sciences rapidly professionalized, with organizations and journals. Their entrance into the American university was eased by the establishment of new, well-endowed universities like Johns Hopkins, Chicago, Clark, and Stanford, which were unburdened by tradition. The universities also adopted the elective system first used at Harvard in the 1860s, and the new social sciences rather rapidly achieved a status in the curriculum akin to that of the natural sciences. But they had the special problem of dealing with values, and for all the attempts to insist, as behaviorists did in psychology, for example, that the social sciences were "value free," the reformist tendencies of leaders in the disciplines clashed with their attempts at achieving recognition as "sciences." They had exchanged the prestige of moral guides for the prestige of the expert, the acknowledged professional in a new branch of learning. But the intentions of the leaders were still reformist, still fundamentally moral in character.<sup>29</sup>

The Catholic University of America opened in 1889, the first Catholic post-graduate theological faculty in the United States. Like Johns Hopkins, it opened as an exclusively graduate-level university, modeled on the German research university, or at least on the Catholic University of Louvain. Its first professor of moral theology was Thomas Bouquillon (1840-1902), a native of Belgium and an 1867 graduate of the Gregorian University. In his entry on Bouquillon in the 1910 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, William J. Kerby calls attention to Bouquillon's desire to keep moral theology in touch with the social sciences:

He emphasized strongly the historical and sociological aspects of principles and problems in the science, neglecting no results of modern research which contributed to clearness and solidity in his exposition of them. To him is due much credit for the improved methods seen in the recent history of moral theology.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>That this impulse still lives is apparent in many places, but especially in the closing essay, "Social Science as Public Philosophy," in Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 297-307.

<sup>30</sup>*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2:715

Bouquillon is not widely remembered today except perhaps in the work of his best known pupils, John Augustine Ryan and Kerby himself.<sup>31</sup> But it might be remembered that Kerby published in *The Catholic University Bulletin* in 1900 an article entitled "The Priesthood and the Social Movement" in which he argued the importance of having training in the social sciences in seminaries. And he predicted:

Then there will gradually arise among them those with peculiar talent for this work; men who may become thinkers of the first rank in Economics, Political Science, Sociology. . . . It is the brilliant few we need—the dozen great minds which shall furnish a safe leadership in uncertain social conditions, and show to the world what the Gospel means to society.<sup>32</sup>

Kerby himself was a leader in the professionalization of social service work, but his vision did not materialize in the broader field of social ethics, though a few leaders like Kerby and John A. Ryan surely exercised considerable influence in social policy as a result of their professional competence. But other forces were at work in American Catholicism which limited the implementation of Kerby's proposal.

Earlier the development of moral theology was influenced by other events: the establishment of Thomism as *the* official theology and philosophy of the Catholic Church by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Aeterni patris* in 1879, the Americanism controversy in the 1890s, and the suppression of Modernism beginning in 1907. A brief word about each can suffice for this study.

The establishment of Thomism was, of course, one side of a struggle which Catholicism had waged with European thought for much of the nineteenth century. Most of the alternatives to Thomism had been systematically proscribed during the long pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878).<sup>33</sup> The rejection by the Church in the nineteenth century of one after another of the systems of Enlightenment thought in effect left the field to Thomism. But the origins of the restoration are older. Recall that Francis Patrick Kenrick had declared St. Thomas one of his principal sources as early as 1840, and Kenrick had started studies in Rome in 1815, the very year of the restoration of Pius VII.

But it must be said that the restoration of scholasticism and of St. Thomas in particular had curiously little impact on manual moral theology. Sabetti-Barrett in 1915 surely cite St. Thomas more than Gury-Ballerini did in 1872, but it is hard

<sup>31</sup>See Francis L. Broderick, *Right Reverend New Dealer: John A. Ryan* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); on Ryan and Bouquillon, see 31-32.

<sup>32</sup>Text in Aaron Abell, ed., *American Catholic Thought on Social Questions* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968) 275. See also Paul Hanley Furfey, "Kerby," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 8:164-65.

<sup>33</sup>See Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977); and Robert D. Cross, *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America* (1958; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968). Joseph A. Komonchak provides much useful background for nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in his "The Ecclesial and Cultural Roles of Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985) 15-32.

to escape the impression that Gury's 1850 text has been adorned with appropriate notes from St. Thomas that affected the structure of the text very little. Even the much later text of Callen and McHugh,<sup>34</sup> clearly structured on the lines of the *secunda pars* of the *Summa*, still bears a strong family resemblance to the older moral theology manuals in both its method and the matters with which it deals.

The Americanism controversy,<sup>35</sup> which occasioned the papal letter *Testem Benevolentiae* in 1899, was an argument about a "heresy" whose very existence was resolutely denied by leading bishops of the United States. It is of interest to this study largely for the chilling effect the papal letter and subsequent Roman actions had on scholars, in particular those at The Catholic University. The bishop-rector, John J. Keane, was dismissed and packed off to oblivion in Dubuque. Though Bouquillon was suspect, because he had ties to some of the leading Americanists, especially Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, he continued at Catholic University; but his influence died with him in 1902.

The fierce suppression of Modernism directly affected only a few persons in the United States, but its effects lingered for more than a generation in what Michael Gannon has aptly labeled a *grande peur* which afflicted theological endeavors, especially among the clergy.<sup>36</sup>

For a fleeting moment in the last decade of the long pontificate of Leo XIII (+ 1903), it appeared that critical and historical methods might find a place in the study of the Bible among Catholics, notwithstanding the problems of Alfred Loisy and the wary approach of the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893). Critical historical inquiry also started to make its mark in the work of Louis Duchesne and his pupils, and it reached even into the history of doctrine.

The suppression of Modernism with its committees of vigilance and the anti-modernist oath put an end to all that. Moral theology continued untroubled in the familiar paths it had been following for generations, untouched for the most part even by the concerns of *Rerum novarum*. That was left to specialists like John A. Ryan, who authored the 1920 American bishops' "Program of Social Reconstruction."<sup>37</sup> Ryan's theological methodology was very much in the natural law tradition of Leo XIII.<sup>38</sup>

The budding intellectual life of the American Church, visible among the clergy in such places as the seminaries at New York, Philadelphia, and Rochester, as well as at The Catholic University, was ended for more than a generation. With the

<sup>34</sup>John J. McHugh, O.P., and Charles J. Callan, O.P., *Moral Theology: A Complete Course Based on St. Thomas Aquinas and the Best Modern Authorities*, rev. ed., Edward P. Farrell, O.P., ed., 2 vols. (first ed., 1929; New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1958).

<sup>35</sup>On Americanism and the suppression of Modernism, see Thomas J. McAvoy, C.S.C., *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 303-55.

<sup>36</sup>Michael V. Gannon, "Before and After Modernism: The Intellectual Isolation of the American Priest," in Ellis, *The Catholic Priest*, 293-383; on *grande peur* see 341.

<sup>37</sup>Text in Abell, *American Catholic Thought*, 325-48.

<sup>38</sup>See Charles E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 84-91.

proscription of historical methodology in biblical studies and doctrine, the intellectual isolation of American Catholic scholarship deepened, but with curious results.<sup>39</sup>

Each of the actions just reviewed represented a significant intervention by Roman authority in the life of the Church in the United States. Such interventions had been rare in earlier American experience, when decisions about the government of the church were made by the bishops in a series of provincial and plenary councils held in Baltimore. The third plenary council was held in 1884, but it did not succeed in ending dissension among the bishops. In 1893 an apostolic delegate was named, after a series of appeals to Rome on various matters. The American Church was divided along ethnic lines as well as over matters of policy and doctrine. What ended in the 1890s was a tradition of government of the church through regular meetings of the bishops of the country carried on with a substantial measure of independence, though of course in communication with Rome. Attempts to create national institutions for the American Church, in the beginning a seminary or seminaries and later a university, were largely unsuccessful, but before the 1890s direct interventions by Rome were rare in the United States. Increased Roman activity was in part a response to numerous appeals to Rome against actions and decisions of American bishops.

But let me turn now to Catholicism and its moral theology in the United States for roughly the first half of the twentieth century.

#### IV

In 1980 William Halsey published a study of American Catholic intellectual life between the two World Wars.<sup>40</sup> The previous year Philip Gleason of Notre Dame published his 1978 presidential address to the Catholic Historical Association, which looked into the causes of the disappearance of much pre-conciliar American Catholic thought.<sup>41</sup> These studies emphasize the remarkable unity and coherence that American Catholic thinkers sought and often obtained, a unity and coherence that they communicated to their students in seminaries, colleges and universities. In the face of the disillusionment produced by the fragmentation of traditional culture in the early twentieth century, the trauma of the First World War, and the declining influence of Protestantism on American culture, Catholics confidently asserted and actively cultivated a unified world view.

George Santayana called the older order of things "the genteel tradition." Its three distinctive qualities were: first, a belief in progress; second, the belief that reality was objective and composed of inherent moral and physical laws which man could know and was to follow; and third, the belief that culture was the expression of these beliefs in useful and artistic forms. Art and literature, for ex-

<sup>39</sup>On Dunwoodie and other American seminaries on the eve of the Modernist crisis, see the Gannon essay cited in note 36.

<sup>40</sup>William M. Halsey, *The Survival of Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980.)

<sup>41</sup>Philip Gleason, "In Search of Unity: American Catholic Thought, 1920-1960," *The Catholic Historical Review* 65 (1979) 185-205.

ample, were judged by how well they contributed to the moral fibre of the nation.<sup>42</sup> It was these assumptions that came under attack, and it was American Catholics who undertook their defense in the first half of this century. Halsey remarks:

The condemnation of Americanism in 1899 effectively put an end to the ecclesiastical controversy but it did little to stop the increasing Catholic absorption in the assumptions of American innocence. The condemnation of Modernism in 1907 and the repression which followed had a more substantial effect. It did not so much cut off Catholics from American culture as it locked them into those nineteenth-century assumptions which Modernism (not simply the theological, but the philosophical and cultural dimensions as well) proceeded to smash. Unable, then unwilling, to challenge their own assumptions, Catholics proceeded after World War I to defend them, using patterns of thought they believed were at once American and Catholic. What they were alienated from was the compound of shattered ideals, approaches to reality, and profound skepticism that twentieth-century men and women have come to recognize as the pivot of their experience and the source of their unease.<sup>43</sup>

This is the period in which Catholics established separate cultural organizations, ranging from the National Catholic Educational Association in 1904 to the American Catholic Psychological Association in 1947. But one of the remarkable characteristics of the period is the confidence with which Catholics asserted the perennial truth of their positions as the positions of America's Founding Fathers. Some attempts to find Catholic sources for the convictions of Jefferson, for example, were manifestly naive, but later, American political theory played a large role in John Courtney Murray's ability to retrieve a doctrine of religious liberty from the older Catholic tradition.

The intellectual bulwark of this confident spirit was American Thomism, which Halsey describes as "the road to safety, sanity and salvation."<sup>44</sup> Thomism strengthened the sense of Catholic unity and coherence and was seen as a strong defense against the violent extremes of modern life. Halsey remarks:

By defining Scholasticism as a way of life in between the extremes of thought and experience, Catholics hoped to keep certain truths out of the laboratory where uncertainty provided the impulse to move onward. The catechism was the Catholic countersymbol to the laboratory; in it truths were not tested but memorized. The Baltimore catechism, though not used in philosophy seminars, was in many ways a popularized condensation of more complex Scholastic arguments. Thus the close proximity of the intellectual, the student, and the common man kept alive an essential myth for the Catholic community that truth was the possession of all men and not of an elite. Catholic intellectuals therefore merely elucidated the more developed argumentation for beliefs all men were supposed to hold instinctively. They were remarkably successful in keeping the intellectual and the community in tune with each other at a time in American Culture when intellectuals like H. L. Mencken derided the commonplace and the great "booboisie," and, in turn, the common man mistrusted the learned man. In Catholicism, the intellectual's role was defined in

<sup>42</sup>Halsey, *Survival*, 38.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

the more traditional pattern of spokesman for the eternal generalities which held the group together.<sup>45</sup>

One facet of American Thomism, therefore, was its insistence on the eternal and immutable character of philosophical principles, which immunized them against the contingencies of modern science. An instance can be found in the polemic of Fulton Sheen against much modern psychology and the notion of the unconscious which seemed to threaten the stature of human beings as free moral agents.<sup>46</sup> And James Collins noted that the fascination with the static made it difficult for some Thomists to approach modern philosophy "with genuine philosophical seriousness."<sup>47</sup> The emphasis fell instead on the conviction that reality was intelligible and therefore manageable, a point of view welcome in an upwardly mobile society. But by the mid-1950s, critical voices like John Tracy Ellis and Thomas O'Dea were making themselves heard. By 1968 the Thomistic synthesis had died, and Halsey suggests, "For many, the Thomistic synthesis died from weariness. The constant struggle to adapt it to new insights and new worlds absorbed too much energy. It seemed better just to accept the new world."<sup>48</sup>

But even that acceptance was soured by the disillusionments of the 60s, including the wave of political assassinations and the Vietnam war. The slowness or the rapidity of change in the Church after the council alienated many. Philip Gleason tries to account for what happened.

Gleason begins his study by recounting the tremendous impact that changes in the 1960s had on many Catholics. And he writes:

... Catholics who had absorbed the mentality predominant in the generation before the Council had about the worst possible preparation for the sixties because the main thrust in those years was toward an organically unified Catholic culture in which religious faith constituted the integrating principle that brought all the dimensions of life and thought together in comprehensive and tightly articulated synthesis.<sup>49</sup>

Gleason argues that this stress exacerbated the impact of change on Catholics formed from the 1920s to the 1950s. His evidence includes many of the developments already noted. I want to call attention to the role which Gleason gives to philosophy and the theology of the mystical body as formative of the Catholic world view in the period between the wars. Gleason notes the primary role of scholastic philosophy and the relatively late arrival of theology as a force even in Catholic higher education. And even there he notes that "many [Catholic educators] were impressed with the work of Father John O'Hara of Notre Dame, who eschewed the academic approach in favor of a high-pressure campaign to promote frequent reception of Holy Communion and a general intensification of piety and devotion."<sup>50</sup> Once again the role of religious and moral formation in education, was

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 155-56.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>49</sup>Gleason, "In Search," 189.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 195.

uppermost in the minds of many. Catholic education set its face against materialism and secular education from which God and morality had been excluded.<sup>51</sup> Catholicism was to be presented as an all-encompassing culture. How this was to be done became a subject of much controversy on the eve of World War II, but in the end strict Thomism carried the day.<sup>52</sup>

Little that has been written of this period deals with moral theology as it was taught in the United States. But I have already indicated that if the textbooks are a fair indication of what was taught, seminary moral theology had changed little, and texts for other levels of education were modeled on seminary manuals. The absence of change is especially conspicuous in the first part of the traditional manuals *de principiis*. The second and often much longer part dealt with the casuistry of particular moral problems, and these did of course change over time.

The range of problems with which moral theologians dealt can be seen not only from the textbooks of moral theology but also in such records as the "Notes on Moral Theology" that have been a part of *Theological Studies* since the journal was established in 1941. The "Notes" for many years and under several authors reported on developments in general moral theology, method in moral theology, and a series of issues grouped usually under the commandments, including the precepts of the Church, and the sacraments. The skill and judgment with which moralists dealt with an array of issues from nuclear war to the details of the eucharistic fast command respect.

American moralists approached their work with confidence in the validity of the natural moral law as a moral guide. In this they were strongly encouraged by the papal magisterium in the encyclical letters of Pius XI and especially in the indefatigable teaching activity of Pius XII. The pope's teaching in the field of moral theology alone is astonishing both for its quantity and for the range and complexity of current issues which it touched.

A literature arose discussing the authority of papal teaching not only in papal encyclicals, which Pius XII described as vehicles of what he called the "ordinary papal magisterium," but also of papal allocutions and less formal letters which the pope had published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.<sup>53</sup> The volume and impact of such papal teaching activity was unprecedented, if for no other reason than that the rapid diffusion of papal teaching to the United States had become so much easier with improvements in communication after the Second World War.

The papal teaching set out the meaning of moral principles like toleration in church-state relations or the principle of totality much used in medical-ethical problems. The allocutions of Pius XII to various groups often dealt with moral

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 197, citing a statement of the College and University Department of the Catholic Educational Association.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>53</sup>Much of the literature followed the publication of very strong claims for the authority of the "ordinary" papal magisterium in the encyclical *Humani generis* in 1950. There is a brief example in Gerald Kelly, S.J., "Current Theology: Notes on Moral Theology" in *Theological Studies* 14 (1953) 33, where Kelly discusses an article by Francis Hürth, S.J., on the authority of papal allocutions, radio addresses and the like.



problems in considerable detail. The pope thus gave strong theological as well as doctrinal leadership in the exposition of Catholic moral teaching, usually based on natural law, even in new and unfamiliar areas of technology (in medicine, for example) or human endeavor (e.g., film), and theologians were expected to follow. On the whole they did follow; certainly they did in the United States. In moral theology as in other areas of Catholic life, the unity and coherence of the discipline seemed as firm as its principles were immutable.

But moral theology had its critics. In the "Notes on Moral Theology" there are recorded a number of complaints about the state of moral theology, and in 1958 two longtime authors of the "Notes," John C. Ford, S.J., and Gerald Kelly, S.J., devoted much of the first volume of a projected series on contemporary moral theology to assessing them.<sup>54</sup>

In their discussion, Ford and Kelly group various criticisms under three headings: impatience with mediocrity, impatience with "obligationism," and impatience with the seminary course. The first criticizes the absence of a quest for Christian perfection in the presentation of moral theology and argues for the primacy of love in moral theology. Ford and Kelly have some sympathy for the point being made, but point out that basic distinctions between counsel and precept and between mortal and venial sins seem blurred in some of the authors they review.

"Obligationism" is a broader problem ranging from a general impatience with authority to a desire to replace moral obligation with a motive of love. *Ama et fac quod vis* was a slogan often heard from opponents of "obligationism." The legalism of much moral theology and its multiplication of rules was also a target. Ford and Kelly are critical of a false dichotomy between freedom and love and sanctity on the one hand and obligation on the other.

Finally, they concede that criticism of the seminary course has much justification, especially in its rejection of minimalism, though they recognize that the course has been developed principally for confessors. But they point out that the confessor is also a moral guide who needs training that goes well beyond the moral minimum, and they note attempts underway in many places to improve the seminary course.

It is clear that these two skilled practitioners of moral theology are persuaded of its fundamental soundness, though they acknowledge the need for improvement. Their book defends the basic methodology of the traditional manuals, especially those in the period since the restoration of Thomism. They did deal with some problems of human freedom and moral agency raised by psychology and psychiatric theory. But there is little sense that an era in the history of moral theology was about to end abruptly.

Though Ford and Kelly do not say much about it, the period of the 1950s and early 60s is also that in which Catholic biblical studies, which were enjoying a renaissance begun with the publication of *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943), begin to exert an influence for reexamination of the manual tradition. It is also the period

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<sup>54</sup>*Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, vol. 1 of *Contemporary Moral Theology* (Westminster: Newman: 1958).

in which important historical work is begun in moral theology, e.g., John Noonan's studies of the teaching on usury and contraception.

## V

If the first half of the twentieth century was devoted to a quest for unity and coherence by American Catholics, the period since 1960 has been a time of rapid change, which demonstrated that the unity and coherence were more apparent than real.

John XXIII (1958-63) was important for the American experience of moral theology. His program of renewal announced in January, 1959, was decisive. That program had three parts: a synod for the diocese of Rome, an ecumenical council, and the reform of canon law. The chief goals were *aggiornamento* of the Church and the promotion of Christian unity.

But even while preparations for the council were underway, Pope John observed the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum* in 1961 by publishing another in the important series of papal documents on the social order, the encyclical *Mater et magistra*.<sup>55</sup> Here I wish to recall not the teaching of the encyclical, important as that was, but only the reception it received in the United States. *Mater et magistra* was welcomed by many as the further development of a doctrinal tradition inaugurated by Leo XIII. But not everyone was receptive; the negative view was summed up in the epigram "Mater, si; Magistra, no!"<sup>56</sup>

Earlier, other facets of social doctrine encountered opposition. The efforts of bishops to teach racial justice and implement that teaching by desegregating Catholic schools after World War II met stiff resistance in places. It was overcome in St. Louis only by threats of excommunication against those who undertook legal action against their bishop, and in New Orleans only by the interdicting of parishes which would not accept Black clergy and the formal excommunication of the leaders opposing desegregation of church schools. Of course there was a disciplinary problem here, but the underlying issue was a moral teaching of the Church which some Catholics adamantly rejected.

At the end of his life, in 1963, Pope John signed his valedictory, the encyclical *Pacem in terris*.<sup>57</sup> I know of no purer example of classic natural law doctrine in the corpus of Catholic teaching, and I call attention to it here because the encyclical met some harsh criticism both from Protestants and from Catholics, even though they applauded Pope John's efforts for peace. The critics found the encyclical unrealistically optimistic in its estimates of human possibilities and neglectful of the human inclination to sin.

<sup>55</sup>Text in AAS 53 (1961) 401-64.

<sup>56</sup>The epigram appeared in an unsigned column in *National Review* 11 (1961) 77, and was described as "going the rounds in Catholic conservative circles." In a later "open letter" responding to criticism, (*Ibid.*, 187-88) the editor, William F. Buckley, attributed the "flippancy" to "a Catholic scholar and journalist in Virginia."

<sup>57</sup>Text in AAS 55 (1963) 257-304.

Finally, it was Pope John who created a small commission to review church teaching on contraception, a subject that had grown in prominence with the development of the anovulant pills in the 1950s and their active promotion as a remedy for overpopulation. The commission, of course, did its work in secret.<sup>58</sup>

The Second Vatican Council, in its decree on the training of priests, *Optatam totius*, published in 1965 under Pope Paul VI, called for the renewal of moral theology:

Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.<sup>59</sup>

Pope Paul also continued the development of the Church's social teaching with the encyclical *Populorum progressio*.<sup>60</sup> The presentation of natural law in the encyclical is rather different from that of *Pacem in terris* and lays much greater stress on the human person rather than natural order as its source.

Pope Paul reconstituted and enlarged the commission set up by Pope John to review church teaching on contraception. Paul VI reserved to himself decisions on this matter, and on July 25, 1968, the pope issued his decision in the encyclical *Humanae vitae*,<sup>61</sup> which reaffirmed the traditional teaching enunciated by Pius XI and Pius XII. The encyclical received a decidedly mixed reception, and the issues of method in moral theology and of the authority of church teaching which that mixed reception raised in the United States and elsewhere continue to vex the Church.

As a result of the council new organs of church teaching also began to function, especially the Synod of Bishops and the various bishops conferences, both national and regional. The Synod of 1967 issued a document on justice, but subsequent synods, except for that of 1985, have formulated position statements from which the pope has issued a document in the form of an apostolic exhortation. One such document, the exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, touched on many moral issues related to the family.<sup>62</sup>

But bishops conferences, including the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, have also exercised a teaching role, issuing two pastorals in the 1960s, on the Church and on human life (in the wake of *Humanae vitae*), and more recently taking an important initiative in 1983 with a pastoral on issues of war and peace. The

<sup>58</sup>See documents in R. Hoyt, ed., *The Birth Control Debate* (Kansas City: National Catholic Reporter, 1968).

<sup>59</sup>Text in AAS 58 (1966) 713-27, citation at p. 724. ET: A. Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, L.I., N.Y.: Costello, 1975) 720.

<sup>60</sup>Text in AAS 59 (1967) 257-99.

<sup>61</sup>Text in AAS 60 (1968) 481-503; ET in A. Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: More Postconciliar Documents* (Northport: Costello, 1982) 397-416. On the reaction, see Hennessey, 328-29.

<sup>62</sup>Text in AAS 74 (1982) 81-190. ET in Flannery, *More*, 815-98.

third draft of another pastoral, this one on the economy, has just been released. These letters are remarkable as examples of a "decentralized" magisterium, but they are also remarkable for the process of consultation which attended their preparation and which has contributed to their acceptance by American Catholics.

By any measure, the impact of the council and events since 1965 on the life of the Church in the United States has been immense. The unity and coherence which were hallmarks of American Catholicism for decades collapsed with stunning speed. Moral consensus on a variety of issues disappeared.

Halsey, Gleason and others have pointed to some reasons. In addition, some of the characteristics of American Catholicism since the days of Bishop Kenrick have changed. Catholics are no longer a struggling immigrant minority; in large numbers the children of immigrants have moved into the American middle class, into American higher education both public and private, and, with some exceptions, into every area of American life and culture. The devotional piety which characterized American Catholicism for generations and underpinned its equally characteristic moralism was swept away in the reforms following the council, leaving a troublesome vacuum. The Thomism which dominated American Catholic thought and was the basis for its confident spirit in the pre-conciliar period struggles to find new expression in competition with other currents of twentieth-century thought. Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are a part of Catholic thinking about moral theology. Moral theology is no longer a discipline for seminarians, the clergy or for males.

## VI CONCLUSION

Except for the period since 1960, this review of the American experience of moral theology has dealt with a discipline that James Hennesey has described as "curiously immune to the influence of Christian history and dogma and heavily influenced by the legalistic approach of canonists and the abstractions of scholastic philosophers."<sup>63</sup> I have been describing what was a fixed object against a changing background. But since Vatican II, historical consciousness has become a mark of Catholic theology.

Much has changed in twenty-five years, but the changes have left some questions. I want to conclude by attempting to formulate some of them. I will make use of criteria of adequacy for moral theology which James Gustafson uses in his

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<sup>63</sup>See the observation of James Hennesey, "Moral theology, curiously immune to the influence of Christian history and dogma and heavily influenced by the legalistic approach of canonists and the abstractions of scholastic philosophers, dominated the scene. On the popular level, long lines at Saturday afternoon and evening confessions gave impressive witness to the phenomenon. Legalism, too, loomed large, reflected in and assisted by the willingness of churchmen (Pius XII in the van) to legislate the tiniest minutiae of church observance. Moralism was confused with religiousness, ethics with theology. Efforts at promoting specifically community worship were inspired by the liturgical periodical *Orate Fratres* (it became *Worship* in 1951), but individualistic Christianity still predominated among American Catholics." In *American Catholics*, 288.

book on Protestant and Roman Catholic ethics, which depend in turn on the work of David Tracy.<sup>64</sup> I propose to use the criteria as an organizational tool rather than a critical one. The criteria are familiar: adequacy to the sources of Christian thought in the Bible and tradition; and adequacy to science, to philosophy, and to experience. Catholic moral theology would certainly include consideration of the role of church teaching authority in its considerations of adequacy to the sources of Christian thought.

How then is Catholic moral theology in the United States to be adequate to the sources of Christian thought in the Bible and tradition as those sources are understood and interpreted in the Church?

In this long review which began with Kenrick and passed by Gury, Sabetti, Callen and McHugh, John A. Ryan and John Courtney Murray, we observed that many writers served largely as conduits of an established way of doing moral theology. But some have been much more: they have been interpreters and vivifiers of the sources in a way that is both faithful and original.

There is a problem here with biblical studies. Most moralists are not expert in biblical exegesis and few biblical scholars are trained in ethics. Frankly, there has been surprisingly little collaboration in the United States between moralists and biblical scholars in a time when an understanding of the sources is badly needed. Of course there are some fine things by biblical scholars: the volume *Christian Biblical Ethics*<sup>65</sup> edited by Robert Daly comes to mind. And some moralists have worked hard to stay abreast of contemporary studies of the Bible. Lisa Cahill certainly has in her book *Between the Sexes*.<sup>66</sup> But surely more needs to be done if the council's desire for a renewal of moral theology is to be realized.

Related to the biblical source of moral theology is the development of the moral self, the agent, whose self-understanding is informed by the biblical story, and who is part of the community of believers whose identity is also formed by its appropriation of the biblical narrative. Here moral theology is related to the proclamation of the scriptures in the liturgy of the community of belief. That suggests a dimension of the Catholic moral tradition which is especially inhospitable to the individualism which Robert Bellah and his collaborators<sup>67</sup> have pointed to as still typical of American culture. Experiencing the biblical source in the liturgical context should be an important way in which the moral self is called again and again to a commitment to holiness and the rejection of sin. *Lex orandi est lex agendi*.

Adequacy to the biblical sources is an important criterion, and it is one explicitly mentioned by the council. But surely the "classics" of moral theology include much other literature on the Christian life, not all of which fits neat distinctions which have grown up since Trent among moral theology, ascetic and spiritual theology, and pastoral theology. I wonder whether there is a real danger that American moral theology may be afflicted with amnesia about its own past.

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<sup>64</sup>James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 142.

<sup>65</sup>(New York: Paulist, 1984).

<sup>66</sup>(Philadelphia/New York: Fortress/Paulist, 1985).

<sup>67</sup>See Bellah et al. cited in note 29.

Adequacy to the sources is not likely if the sources and the history of the use of the sources are unknown.

But the classics need more than just repetition, and an example may be helpful. There is broad agreement that John Courtney Murray is the most important theologian the United States has produced and that his development of the theology of church-state relations is the principal contribution American theology has made to the Church.

Murray was an exceptional student of the Catholic tradition. His studies of the encyclicals of Leo XIII, his knowledge of the medieval tradition and of the Fathers, his grasp of American political theory, his consciousness of the historicity of the formulation of Catholic teaching: all these things together made his contribution possible. Murray has shown that fidelity to the sources of the Catholic tradition is at its highest in the work of the careful, informed interpreter. His classic texts were not biblical, but he offers a splendid example of the kind of interpreter needed by the classic sources of moral theology.

Murray's work also illustrates the tensions and the fruitful possibilities of the services that hierarchical teaching authority and theologians render to the Word of God in the Church. No one today questions Murray's commitment to the Christian faith that is taught and believed in the Church. Nor does anyone question the value of his contribution to the "development" and correction of a body of teaching of long-standing by his retrieval of neglected elements of Catholic tradition and his ability to articulate a new synthesis of tradition with American political theory.

Not every such effort at new formulations of beliefs and values will be successful. But Murray's case shows at least that not every questioning of received teaching betrays disloyalty to church teaching authority or to the Word of God.

The second test is adequacy to scientific information and methods, where those are relevant. Can it be said that Catholic moral theology in the United States has made its peace with the natural and social sciences? There are efforts to use the social sciences, e.g., in the preparation of the pastoral on the economy, which moves from general moral principles to concrete problems and solutions. But the effort revealed some glaring gaps in scholarly work, in the moral analysis of agricultural policy, for example.

There are also lingering questions about the uses of psychological and psychiatric theory in questions ranging from the freedom of the moral agent to specific matters such as homosexuality. But if these are unsettled, questions in the natural sciences, in genetics, for example, are virtually untouched in discussions of fundamental moral theology. And surely no discussion of the role of women in society and the Church can be carried on without careful social scientific study, including, of course, the numerous revisionist studies done by women scholars.

The third test is adequacy to philosophical insights, methods and principles. It is a test which, it seems to me, gets curiously little attention in much American Catholic moral theology. There is something peculiar here. Moral theologians talk of teleology and deontology, argue whether proportionalism is just consequentialism (or worse, crass utilitarianism) in disguise, dispute the possibility and

grounds of exceptionless moral norms, worry whether natural law is Christian enough to be useful in moral theology, differ over such questions as whether basic human goods are incommensurable, concern themselves about the nature of moral agency, the nature and importance of virtue and its relationship to the notion of human personhood—and a host of other questions. Moralists use categories developed in many instances by philosophers past and present, including William Frankena, John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre. But it seems to me that Catholic moral theologians rarely discuss these matters with philosophers. Was there a parting of the ways when Thomism lost its hegemony, with Catholic philosophers going one way and moral theologians another? Is it possible that questions of truth so important to philosophy have not been attended to adequately in recent controversies among moral theologians, because disputed questions have been prematurely reduced to issues of church authority?

Adequacy to philosophical principles and methods is important to theology if attempts to explore the Christian mysteries are not to produce just mystification. Yet it is anything but clear that American moral theology has overcome a traditional antipathy to philosophical traditions other than Thomism. Whatever became of the effort begun some two decades ago by Robert Johann to explore points of contact between Catholic moral theology and American philosophy—John Dewey in particular?<sup>68</sup> Or is it more important that Catholic moral theology come to terms with thinkers critically exploring the relationship of theory and praxis? Would a bracing encounter with rigorous philosophical analysis be an antidote to the softheadedness of moral theologians that critics complain about?

Finally, there is adequacy to human experience broadly conceived. What, for example, is the moral theologian to make of the persistent data which indicate massive non-reception of some church moral teaching by American Catholics? What is the *theological* significance of such non-reception of points of sexual and of social ethics because, people say, the teaching they hear is in their experience unreal and mistaken? And what is moral theology to do when women insist that their experience shows that some of the classics of the Catholic moral tradition are in need of radical reinterpretation because they now enshrine unjust social structures?

*Gaudium et spes* (n. 62) points to the role that theologians play in mediating between faith and culture. From the days of Francis Patrick Kenrick American moral theologians have faced the task of mediating between Catholic faith and an American culture unprecedented in its diversity. It should occasion no surprise that the effort is controversial now, when the generation of unity and coherence in American Catholicism is over. But the work must continue. We should have learned from the Americanism and Modernism controversies that the Church suffers when freedom of theological research is lost, no less than it suffers when theology is cut from its roots in the faith of the Church. There are risks in maintaining a dynamic

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<sup>68</sup>Robert Johann offered a series of reflections based on the work of Dewey in a column, "The Philosopher's Notebook," in *America* magazine in the 1960s and early 1970s. See also his *Building the Human* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968).

and creative tension between fidelity to the sources of Christian belief and the need for rethinking and new expression. American moral theology must take that risk.

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