

## BOOK DISCUSSION:

### *The Way of the Lord Jesus* by Germain Grisez

The four panelists each addressed a different aspect of Grisez' book: Grisez as an interpreter of St. Thomas (James Reilly); the place of *The Way of the Lord Jesus* in the history of moral theology (Edwin Lisson); *The Way of the Lord Jesus* and the teaching of moral theology (Benedict Ashley); and the question of a distinctively Christian ethics and Grisez' use of the beatitudes (William E. May). This report on the panelists' remarks mainly summarizes written material each panelist employed in his remarks.

Reilly noted that Grisez' treatment of natural law in *The Way of the Lord Jesus* is a product of considerable study that reflects some of his earlier discussions of natural law theory. Two elements indicative of Grisez' reconstructed natural law ethics are a commitment to the incommensurability of basic human goods and an insistence on a distinction between substantive goods and existential goods. Reilly then noted two general difficulties in Grisez' treatment of natural law: first, a proper appraisal of Grisez' view of natural law will require a careful evaluation of all the many relationships that Grisez discusses in connection with natural law—e.g., natural law in relation to cultural relativism, to subjectivism, to love, to the magisterium, to Jesus; second, Grisez introduces, in his presentation of natural law, a new vocabulary that is obscure and verbose in contrast to St. Thomas' spare but precise Latin. Reilly then focused specifically on the seventh chapter of *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, "Natural Law and the Fundamental Principles of Morality," in which Grisez attempts to locate his own position within a Thomistic doctrine of natural law. He posed a number of questions about the relationship between St. Thomas' formulation of the first principle of morality and Grisez' reformulation of that principle: Is Grisez' reformulation—"In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose and otherwise will those and only those possibilities whose willing is compatible with a will toward integral human fulfillment"—merely an adumbration of Thomas' view that the first precept of the natural law—do good and avoid evil—is the source of the other commands or precepts of the natural law? Or does Grisez claim more for this reformulation by reason of his own interpretation that this rendering of the first moral principle adds "a reference to choice" to the first principle of practical reasoning? Reilly then mentioned a difficulty in Grisez' claim that basic human goods are incommensurable: though this claim is understandable in opposition to proportionism, it ignores the hierarchy of goods which Aquinas proposes. Reilly concluded by observing that considered responses to Grisez' interpretation of natural law, which challenges previously accepted ones, will contribute to a clearer understanding of natural law and its ethical implications.

Lisson placed his discussion of *The Way of the Lord Jesus* in the context of what he saw as two significant trends since 1917 in Roman Catholic moral theology and Protestant Christian ethics respectively. In Protestant Christian ethics, the catastrophe of World War I ended hope in human reason and engendered a vision of moral life as a response to revealed reality in the scriptures with emphasis upon individual moral responsibility in the face of moral challenge. The process of moral decision making in accord with this vision summarily dismissed the centuries of human moral wisdom accumulated in the natural law tradition. In Roman Catholic moral theology, the 1917 Code of Canon Law became the dominant influence on a discipline that previous papal documents had shielded from the influence of modernism. During and after World War II, however, two other influences had their impact on moral theology: the enfranchisement of biblical scholarship by the 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and the reflection that the comprehensive experience of evil so often found in the conflict situations of World War II engendered: almost every moral choice of one moral good involves the rejection of other goods or even involves choosing the lesser of two evils. This examination of human experience led to a reassessment, on the part of Roman Catholic moral theologians, of the realistic applicability in a sinful world of the clear, absolute, and compartmentalized principles, precepts, and definitions of traditional natural law moral theology. On the eve of Vatican II, European moralists had begun to understand moral decision making in terms of human goods and values and to analyze the conflicts among these values that take place in concrete situations of choice. A quarter of a century after Vatican II, the pastoral letters issued by the bishops of the United States on peace and on the economy exemplify a method of shedding the light of Scripture upon humanity's store of experience and insights into experience as these have been accumulated and articulated in the magisterium, philosophy, professional expertise, and the lives of the faithful. In the context of these trends, Lisson noted a number of assets and limitations in Grisez' book. Assets: It is a conscious attempt to implement Vatican II's call for a moral theology that is biblically inspired, that enlightens the nobility of the Christian vocation, that is christocentric and trinitarian. There is an appropriate and responsible critique of a static concept of natural law. While arguing that basic human nature cannot change, Grisez also holds that human nature of itself retains not-yet defined possibilities for fulfillment, which are yet to unfold through intelligent creativity and freedom. imitations: It suggests that practical, concrete moral decisions participate in the same degree of certitude and of universalizable and absolute truth as the truths of dogmatic (contemplative) theology. It is not clear how Grisez' formulation of the fundamental moral principle, the four existential and three substantial human goods, and the eight modes of responsibility assist in the actual weighing or analyzing of values in conflict in concrete moral choices. Lisson concluded by suggesting that echoes of the rationalism Grisez criticizes can still be heard in his own method and that it needs the corrective of a method more in keeping with G. Kelly's definition of moral theology as a "quest for beauty in human actions."

Ashley referred participants in the workshop to his published reviews of *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, particularly the one in *The Thomist* (1984), for his general assessment of Grisez' book. His remarks to the workshop focused, first, on an overview of the situation that faces the teaching of moral theology today and then,

on three particular observations about Grisez' book. Ashley noted that the current sources available for teaching what is distinct about Christian living are fragmentary; this situation stems from the fact that the real problem facing the teaching of moral theology is getting out of the legalism that has been dominant since the fourteenth century and presenting a view of morality that goes to the forming of character. In this context, Grisez' work has the advantage of being an overall view of Christian life that does not focus merely on conflict issues. Although Grisez does offer a new systematic way of thinking about moral theology, Ashley found three limitations in this work: first, it does not yet provide the kind of scriptural foundation that is still needed for moral theology; second, Grisez' views that there is no single goal of human life, and that the ordinary layperson cannot seek contemplation as the single good of life, do not pay attention to the hierarchy of goods and deny contemplation its place as a higher good; third, Grisez' treatment of the duties of the ordinary Christian stands in need of tempering by consultation of the experience of the clergy in confession and counseling. The crucial question here is: how do we go from principles to practical conclusions without falling into legalism?

May summarized Grisez' principal claims about Christian ethics as follows: Human persons are endowed with free choice, viz., the capacity for self-determination; it is thus most important for us to make morally good choices, if we are to be fully the beings we are meant to be. The first principle of practical reasoning—good is to be done and evil is to be avoided—is operative in the reasoning of all persons; it is specified by the intelligent grasp of those real goods to which human persons are naturally, dynamically inclined and which are constitutive of human flourishing and fullness of being. Such goods are not themselves moral norms: they do not enable us to distinguish morally good from morally evil alternatives of action. The basic principle of moral choice is identified, in the Catholic tradition, with the command to love God and neighbor. This basic norm is given further determinations by the modes of responsibility; these modes specify ways in which human choices and willing are opposed to a will compatible with integral human fulfillment. This common morality, based on natural law, is integral to Christian ethics, but because of sin, the ideal of integral human fulfillment is, in fact, realizable only in union with Christ. The choice central to Christian life is the act of faith made in baptism; through this act Christians commit themselves to integral human fulfillment, an ideal now realizable through their union with Jesus. This unity requires Christians to cooperate in Jesus' redemptive act through Christian love; this love transforms the first principle of morality by further specifying it. Grisez thus sees the beatitudes as modes of response that specify the first principle of Christian morality more in terms of blessings rather than demands: the modes characteristic of the life of persons who, by reason of living faith, are called "blessed." May concluded by noting that these responses constitute a personal vocation for each Christian and by affirming the variety of Christian styles of life that are possible within the framework of charity as the principle of Christian life.

Among the topics mentioned in the brief time for discussion were: the role of preaching in the formation of Christian moral life; the status of claims about self-evident principles; the importance of a hierarchy of values; and the status of biological human life as a value.

PHILIP ROSSI, S.J.  
*Marquette University*