

G.1 MORAL AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY, SOCIAL TEACHINGS AND PRACTICE

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G.1 MORAL AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY, SOCIAL TEACHINGS AND PRACTICE

I. INTRODUCTION

DN 219 of the *Expanded Outline* suggests that *religion* might provide the sort of deep foundational grounding necessary if humanity is to realize a world of economic justice, ecological integrity and technological responsibility. DN 219 also notes, however, that religion is not firstly a means to secular ends, no matter how laudable those ends might be. Religion can't be understood without an understanding of its spiritual provenance and destination. And it can't be understood from the outside; to be understood it must be lived.¹

The three situational challenges which this working paper uses as an initial lens and focus are in fact symptoms of a profound alienation of humanity from ourselves, from the natural universe and from God. Religion at this time in human history speaks to this ultimate alienation and in so doing helps prepare the necessary foundation for addressing our three focal symptoms and others.

As used here, religion is that understanding and practice which reveals and participates in the fullness and unity of truth. By this definition religion necessarily acknowledges and includes a *metaphysics*, because metaphysical reality is necessarily part of what's true.² Further, religion reveals *purpose* and *meaning*, because these, too, are necessarily part of what's true.³

Our definition of religion doesn't necessarily require that religion be theistic. However, it is most commonly understood to be so. When people seek with an open heart and mind to fully understand being, meaning and purpose, a metaphysically transcendent/immanent/non-dual reality becomes almost self-evident. Further, if personhood exists in the world, as we know it does, then our transcendent/immanent/non-dual reality possesses, in some manner that we can't and don't need to understand, the quality of personhood.⁴

Theology is the study of God, and *moral theology* is the study of the ways in which God wants and invites us to lead our lives, individually and in community. Consideration of the teachings of a particular religious faith on such matters as economics, the environment or technology needs to begin with consideration of the fundamental moral theology of that faith.

The myriad religious traditions differ in their teachings and practice. In order that these notes on grounding might themselves be somewhat grounded, I'm using *Western Christianity*, and in particular *Roman Catholic Christianity*, as the religious faith of reference. Other faiths could have been chosen, and future extensions of this working paper should include at least several.

DN 5 sketches events in the history of the Catholic Church germane to our review of Catholic moral theology and its bearing on teachings and practice.^{5 6}

II. CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY

II.A. Major Elements

Moral theology as understood by the Catholic Church today draws on its over two thousand years of revelation, experience and reflection. A pivotal role was played by the scholastics of the High Middle Ages, notably the 13th century Italian Dominican friar St. Thomas Aquinas. He is noted for incorporating concepts from the then newly-translated works of Aristotle into the Christian theological corpus, and for ordering all Christian theology into a systematic whole.^{7 8 9}

The Church teaches that a loving God created the Universe and everything in it, including humanity. The *telos* (end or purpose) of human life is *eudaimonia* (flourishing, happiness, blessedness). Our *telos* is realized as we come to know, love and celebrate God, and our eudaimonia grows as our knowledge, love and celebration of God grows. Our highest and most complete eudaimonia is realized in union with God.

This divine teleological metaphysics is arguably the single greatest difference between a religious experience of being-in-the world and a secularist-materialist-reductionist experience of being-in-the-world. In the former, being, including human being, has purpose and meaning, and these are knowable. In the latter there is neither purpose nor meaning and thus nothing concerning either to be known.^{10 11}

Catholic moral theology further teaches that *moral* acts are human acts that contribute to the growth of eudaimonia – that is, to our flourishing, happiness and blessedness – while human acts that impede this growth are *immoral*. Humans are endowed by God with an *inclination to the good*, i.e., to eudaimonia, as well as with reason and with free will.¹²

Our explicit knowledge of what's good or bad and what's right or wrong, and thus of how we should best live our lives so as to flourish and be happy, is received from many sources and is mediated through family and community, including the church. Notable sources include the holy scriptures, the writings of the patriarchs, tradition affirmed over time, the teaching authority of the Church, and personal prayer and discernment. See **DN 13** for more on this.¹³

To act in a way that is seriously wrong, that is, seriously selfish and unloving, is to *sin*. The consequence of sin is to be in a state of separation or alienation from God. If we acknowledge and repent of our sins, ask forgiveness and resolve not to sin again, our sins will be forgiven.^{14 15 16 17}

II.B. The Natural Law

In Catholic moral theology the natural law is the *moral law* or *moral order* of Creation. This moral order is “natural” because it is grounded in the *objective nature* of the human person. That is to say, although the moral law is explicitly revealed to humanity through the holy scriptures and other sources as noted above, it is independently discernable through our rational intellect seeking to understand the true nature of the human person. As such it can be discerned by all people, everywhere, at all times.^{18 19 20 21 22 23}

Aquinas illustrates the workings of the natural law by naming several *primary precepts* that he believes can be ascertained by all people at all times and places as true, simply by virtue of our lived experience and rational insight into the nature of things. These primary precepts are:

- * Do good and avoid evil
- * Life is a good to be preserved and protected
- * Marriage, children, and the education of children are goods to be pursued
- * Knowledge of the truth, and especially truth about God, is a good to be pursued
- * We should love God and love our neighbor
- * Society is natural to the human person²⁴

Humans use reason to derive *secondary precepts* that fulfill the primary precepts. There can be many of these and they need not be identical across time and space, although many will be. Examples might include: respect the rule of law; don't lie, cheat, steal or murder; respect your elders; and attend Church regularly. Consistent with this understanding of secondary precepts we might reasonably add: work to reduce great inequalities of wealth and power; protect and nurture God's Creation; and don't alter the genes we pass to our children.²⁵

St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae* was prepared over the period 1265-1273 but was not officially promulgated until 1485. In the following centuries the natural law became central to Catholic moral theology. The emphasis on the use of reason to understand moral teachings and resolve moral questions gave Catholic moral theology a flexibility in dealing with the events of an increasingly complex world.^{26 27}

In a metaphysically teleological world actions that are directed at fulfilling their purpose are by definition in conformity with natural law and are thus morally good. However, complications can arise when the true purpose of a given action may be ambiguous. To cite the classic example, is the purpose of sexual intercourse to

experience and/or give physical pleasure, to express unitive love, to generate new life, or some or all of these, perhaps in some order of primacy?

The two decades following the 1962-1965 second Vatican Council were marked by new challenges to the Church's teachings on many aspects of moral theology and practice, natural law, internal dissent and ecclesial governance. However, beginning in 1968 with the release of *Humanae vitae* and continuing for another forty-five years, a series of papal encyclicals and other documents and decisions made it clear that the sorts of reevaluations called for by many committed liberal Catholics were not about to be considered further.^{28 29 30 31}

The status of the natural law today

The natural law as revived and revised in the late 19th century by Leo XIII (1878-1903) remains the official teaching of the Church today, and has been reaffirmed as such by Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis.^{32 33}

Some mostly liberal Catholics hold to the foundational role of natural law but add newly understood means of ascertaining what exactly is and isn't moral under varying circumstances. Such means include roles for the individual conscience, for the lessons of lived experience, for community discernment and for the "tentativeness of historical consciousness."³⁴

Some scholars affirm that while people who share appropriate religious sensibilities can use both revelation and reason to discern and strengthen their understanding of the moral order, it's unreasonable to hold that all people at all times and in all places, and secularists in particular, can be expected to do so using reason alone.³⁵

Many lay Catholics hold to what might be considered a minimalist version of natural law, in which the beauty and wonder of the natural world – majestic mountains, swirling galaxies, a happy human family - "points to God". This is certainly true, but by itself leaves out much of the natural law as historically understood by the Church.³⁶

Partly in response to the liberalizing tendencies in moral theology that blossomed after Vatican II, a network of mostly conservative Catholic legal scholars sought to refurbish Thomistic natural law for the modern era. They developed what became known as the **New Natural Law (NNL)** or New Natural Law Theory (NNLT). Among other revisions the NNL offered an updated roster of those incommensurable human goods constitutive of human flourishing, a new statement of the leading good which all deliberate human action should pursue, a statement of the political common good that human action should pursue, and a revision of Aquinas' formulation of the Ultimate End of humankind. The NNL plays down the association of final cause with Aristotelian biological teleonaturalism and acknowledges the communal nature of human life and fulfillment.^{37 38}

Partly in response to the New Natural Law, Notre Dame University moral theologian Jean Porter argued that natural law as understood and applied by the scholastics of the 12th-13th centuries is in fact significantly more flexible and nuanced than is the dogmatic natural law theory affirmed by the Church today.^{39 40 41}

Among conservative Catholic thinkers there is a split as to what the natural law points to regarding political economy. It's agreed that the natural law supports both private property and market institutions, and it's agreed that natural law condemns great concentrations of private property and the inevitable further inequities generated by unconstrained market institutions. The neo-Thomist natural law promulgated by Leo XIII supported potentially strong government action to address these inequities. Younger natural law scholars who came of age with the Reagan-Bush administrations, the papacy of John Paul II and the fall of Soviet socialism have been more skeptical of large-scale public sector intervention in the market. However, the still younger generation of conservative Catholics who have watched corporate America strip mine their working class communities of good-paying jobs while simultaneously endorsing and enforcing the rhetoric and the substance of secular cultural progressivism now call for strong, public sector action to preclude an otherwise seemingly inevitable hegemony of the upscale politico-cultural Left.⁴²

Many theologians and scholars hold that while natural law theory as such is valid, its interpretation has been flawed. Pickett (2004), for example, argues that the leading natural law account of the human good of marriage is culturally specific and historically inaccurate, and that application of the natural law in a non-biased and historically accurate manner would show that many currently proscribed practices, including e.g. same-sex marriage, are human goods that can and should be pursued.⁴³ Undercoffer (2013) proposes that although New Natural Law Theory is typically associated with market-friendly economic policy, it can equally well if not better be understood as supportive of socialism, and a strong version of socialism – *equal outcomes* – at that.⁴⁴

More recently, theologians working from within a stance of critical theory have called for a reconstruction of natural law that is “necessarily radically situated in a praxis of resistance and solidarity.”⁴⁵

It’s not exactly clear how the mass of lay Catholics understands the natural law today. Many Catholics would likely say that they agree with the general teaching but might differ as a matter of conscience regarding particular interpretations. Polls suggest that 89% of U.S. Catholics believe that artificial contraception is either morally acceptable or not a moral issue in the first place. Catholics who support the doctrinal prohibition of contraception reply that the teachings of the universal Church are not determined by public opinion polls.⁴⁶

Despite their disagreements and the many uncertainties, few if any Catholic theologians go so far as to suggest that the Church follow its Protestant siblings and decide to forego the natural law altogether.^{47 48 49 50}

Finally, there might be heterodox interpretations of natural law that put less emphasis on its historical claim to rationality and cast it rather as something closer to an intuitive or mystical understanding. Today’s materialist-reductionist naturalists and evolutionary biologists argue that religiously-grounded belief systems such as the natural law are the productions of unenlightened human minds. But a natural law perspective can embrace everything that scientific inquiry reveals and more besides, including the reality of consciousness and the soul, free will and good and evil, and God and God’s love. On this view, the physical, metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of Creation are all immediately and directly present for all people at all times, albeit differently understood given contingencies of history and culture. The metaphysical and spiritual dimensions are typically obscure to many of us, and notably to those of us in the West, who have been subject to several centuries of mis-education, desensitization, dis-enchantment and denial regarding their immediate presence in our lives.^{51 52 53 54 55}

II.C. The Virtues

Virtues are qualities of character that assist us in realizing happiness/*eudaimonia* and thus in moving towards God.

The four *cardinal virtues* are **prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude (courage)**. These are especially important in helping us move towards happiness in this life. The three *theological virtues* are **faith, hope and love (charity)**. These are especially important in helping us move ultimately towards union with God.

The four cardinal virtues are **acquired virtues**. A disposition to acquire and develop the cardinal virtues is part of our human nature but these virtues must be practiced to become fully internalized **habits**. As used in Catholic moral theology, habit or *habitus* (L.) doesn’t mean some mindlessly repeated, often questionable activity. It refers to a quality of character that is so fully internalized that it expresses itself effortlessly, with minimal deliberative forethought or planning, and in a manner appropriate to the occasion. A habit is “second nature.” It’s not a matter of simply doing the right thing, but of becoming the kind of person who can be relied upon to do the right thing.

The four acquired cardinal virtues are part of the natural moral order, i.e., they are part of the natural law and can be discerned by reason. The three theological virtues are **infused virtues**. These are inscribed on our hearts by God.⁵⁶ However, through intention and practice a person can strengthen, deepen and extend the faith, hope and love they initially find within themselves.

These seven virtues reinforce and complement one another, and their multifold development over time helps a person develop a more generally virtuous *character*. Widely acknowledged good character is a mark of a mature Christian.^{57 58}

There are many virtues beyond the seven just noted. Some theologians have held that all virtues are derivative of these seven; others differ. In any event these seven, sometimes called the *seven heavenly virtues*, have figured repeatedly in many systematic treatments of virtue over many centuries. See a comparative sample of virtues in **BOX G-1**.⁵⁹

Virtues are best developed within a *community of character*. We learn about the proper practice of the virtues from holy scripture, from affirmed tradition, from pastoral instruction, and from respected exemplars. Important exemplars include one's parents and extended family, the local and wider community, teachers, workplace associates, and clergy and religious.

Strongly developed moral integrity, virtue, and character will be integral to any community, society or civilization in which economic justice, ecological integrity and technological responsibility are to be deeply and widely affirmed and practiced. The more that a value such as, say, economic justice and its many manifestations in policy and practice is understood in moral terms, and the more that this understanding is reinforced in diverse ways in day-to-day community life, the easier it will be for more people not only to abide by particular rules – now primarily familiar as norms, practices and customs rather than as statutory law - but to do so effortlessly, by habit, and with little emotion of either resentment or pride. The more that such ethical, moral and virtuous behaviors can be internalized and become part of the core character of the members of a community, the less need there will be for enforcement of formal laws, and perhaps less need for many laws in the first place.⁶⁰

St. Thomas, following Aristotle, says that virtuous behaviors often reside near the midpoint along a behavioral continuum. Obsessive compliance with a moral teaching to such a degree that it causes harm rather than good – *scrupulosity* – is itself a sin. At the other extreme is the double sin of *hypocrisy*, in which a moral maxim is publicly affirmed with pomp and display, while in private it is willfully violated.^{61 62}

II.D. Virtue Ethics

II.D.1. Background

Where do morals, ethics and virtues come from? For most of human history most people have believed that these come from God.^{63 64 65} This theory of *divine command* held until the Enlightenment of the 18th century, when many educated thinkers found it to be no longer tenable and began a long effort to locate the source of normative rules in the material, empirical and rational realities of human life. By the first half of the 20th century two broad sorts of theories had come to dominate the scholarly discourse concerning ethics. One was *utilitarianism*, in which the objective was the greatest good for the greatest number and in which this end could justify the means. The other was *deontology*, which focused on the importance of clear, consistent, rational rules for people to live by as a matter of duty or obligation. Both can be problematic. Utilitarian principles can and have been used to justify, among other things, eugenics, euthanasia, infanticide and genocide. Deontology is predisposed to *casuistry*, used here in a pejorative sense to mean complex legalistic ethical reasoning that generates conclusions that may seem intuitively questionable or even patently wrong.⁶⁶

In 1958 British philosopher **G.E.M. Anscombe** published an essay in which she suggested that a moratorium be declared on any further philosophical discussion of ethics. She said that after 200 years this discussion had produced nothing useful and that there was no sign that it would ever be able to. She recommended that those interested in the topic revisit the largely forgotten 13th century ethical teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, with its emphasis on the virtues and the formation of virtuous character.⁶⁷

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BOX G-1. COMPARATIVE VIRTUES [in preparation]

Can the various named virtues be presumed to mean at least roughly the same thing across different traditions and over time? “Justice,” for example, appears in six of the seven lists below. How is it understood and expressed in each of them? Notes are in preparation.

A. Western Traditions: Greek, Hebrew, Christian

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (~ 350 BCE)

Courage	Magnificence	Good Temper	Justice
Temperance	Pride	Friendliness	Wit
Liberality	Honor	Trustfulness	Friends

2. Hebrew Bible, *Book of Wisdom* (~ 1st century BCE)

8:7 *And if a man loves righteousness her labors are virtues: for she teacheth temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude: which are such things, as one can have nothing more profitable in their life.*

3. Aurelias Clemens Prudentius, *the Seven Heavenly Virtues* (410 CE)

Chastity	Charity	Patience	Humility
Temperance	Diligence	Kindness	

4. St. Thomas Aquinas (1625-1674 CE), *Summa Theologiae*

The *four cardinal virtues*: Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude (Courage)

The *three theological virtues*: Faith, Hope and Love (Charity)

B. Other Traditions

1. Confucian Virtues (~ 500 BCE)

The Five Constants:

- Rén Benevolence, Humaneness
- Yì Righteousness or Justice
- Lǐ Proper Rituals
- Zhì Knowledge
- Xìn Integrity

The Four Classical *Sìzì* (virtues):

- Zhōng Loyalty
- Xiào Filial Piety
- Jié Contingency
- Yì Righteousness (also one of the Five Constants)

2. Islamic Virtues

Charity/Philanthropy	Kindness to animals	Patience
Forgiveness	Justice	Truthfulness
Tolerance	Fulfillment of Promise	Anger Management
Honesty	Modesty and Humility	Sincerity
Kindness and Leniency	Decent Speech	Respecting the Elders
	Trustworthiness	

Sources:

- Prudentius – *The Seven Heavenly Virtues*
- Confucianism
- Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues
- Morality in Islam

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II.D.2. MacIntyre: *After Virtue*

Scottish-American philosopher **Alasdair MacIntyre** took Anscombe's suggestion and wrote a series of influential books credited with establishing the new field of **Virtue Ethics**. The first and most noted of these – *After Virtue* (1981) – wove together insights from MacIntyre's reading of Aristotle and Plato, St. Thomas and other scholastics, the Enlightenment philosophers, Marx, Nietzsche, the existentialists and others. He argues for a recovery of virtue as a foundational element of any meaningfully moral and ethical civilization. He envisions a future in which moral and ethical commitment deeply informs all aspects of our personal, familial, vocational, political and community lives. He contends that such commitment and such lives function best when rooted in a **tradition**. He argues *contra* the postmodernists that our lives properly take shape as **narratives** embedded within multiple larger narratives. He says it is important that people commit themselves to one or more **practices** in the course of a full human life.⁶⁸

MacIntyre begins *After Virtue* by asking us to imagine a world in which science and technology has somehow suffered a cataclysmic disaster, such that generations later all that is left are torn pages from a few textbooks, some broken laboratory equipment, assorted sputtering engines, and portions of the Periodic Table memorized and recited as ritual without understanding. With these we attempt to recover and rebuild a new scientific and technological civilization. MacIntyre suggests that this is precisely the situation we face today with regard to morals and ethics. The Enlightenment and the modernity that has emerged in its wake have left us with a fragmented, disconnected, barely coherent understanding of what a truly morally and ethically grounded civilization might look and feel like. MacIntyre says that the task of re-building will not be an easy one. He suggests among other things that we give special attention to recovering community and civility at the most local and intimate levels. He famously concludes that "We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict."^{69 70 71 72 73}

II.D.3. Subsequent Developments

For at least twenty years following the publication of *After Virtue* a lively debate ensued, mostly among moral theologians and other academics, and in particular but not exclusively among Catholics, regarding its interpretation and possible application. Importantly, both liberal and conservative Catholics found something in virtue ethics that spoke to core concerns of theirs. Many liberals/reformists saw in virtue ethics a welcome alternative to what they considered to be the rigidly deontological, legalistic manualist ethical backwater from which the Post-Vatican II Church was hopefully but fitfully emerging. At the same time many conservatives, traditionalists, neo-Thomists and neo-neo-Thomists saw virtue ethics as a practice that was consistent with natural law and that emphasized the importance of both tradition and character-formation.^{74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81}

A common opinion was – and is – that attention to the virtues can support, augment or refine the manner in which a person or a community follows an explicit set of moral rules, but cannot substitute for that set of rules. But part of MacIntyre's point is that we in the West no longer have coherent sets of moral rules to follow and thus need to develop ways to live together under that circumstance, at least until new – doubtless very different – sets of rules are developed.

Some saw in virtue ethics the potential for a contemporary ethical grounding that was explicitly *non-religious*. These authors would reference Aristotle rather than Aquinas, and sought an audience among the growing numbers of professional-class "nones" who, although often conventionally successful, felt that an ethical or moral grounding of some sort was missing from their lives.⁸²

There was also interest from those among the non-religious radical left who had come to believe that socialist/Marxist social theory needed ethical foundations applicable to a deeper and more complex understanding of the human condition than had been provided by the workhorse virtues of justice and solidarity alone. They recognized in virtue ethics as associated with MacIntyre a shared moral intensity, an aversion to the crude

materialism of capitalist modernity, and an anthropology that affirmed human agency, purpose and freedom. MacIntyre's history both as a former comrade and as a still sympathetic critic was also germane.^{83 84 85}

Irrespective of political ideology, attempts to develop secular programs of virtue ethics encountered foreseeable difficulties. What virtues should be chosen as central, and on what grounds? Who would choose them? What specific behaviors would the cultivation of a particular virtue encourage or discourage? Were core virtues and virtuous behaviors universal or particular to differing societies and cultures? What is to be done when virtuous behaviors are in conflict? Questions of these sorts can be addressed more readily in a religious context in which a full set of internally consistent and reinforcing teachings, traditions and practices are already at hand.^{86 87}

At this writing the development of religious and secular virtue ethics alike appears to have mostly plateaued. Introductory college courses on ethics commonly include virtue ethics as one of three or four major prevailing schools of ethical thinking, along with deontology, utilitarianism/consequentialism and perhaps "situation ethics".^{88 89 90} Many parochial secondary school curricula give special attention to the virtues and character-building. But virtue ethics has not cohered as a distinct, recognizable, compelling body of teachings around which individuals and communities might choose to anchor their moral lives. Many liberals and progressives are reflexively skeptical of a philosophical approach having deep roots in 13th-century Christian scholasticism. And many traditionalists and conservatives are put off when they hear virtue ethics praised as a way to be ethical while discarding the outdated, rigid moral rules of traditional Christianity.⁹¹

Beyond virtue ethics *per se* there is continuing interest in MacIntyre's broader political-philosophical vision and project. Rhodes and Lysault (2020), for example, propose that MacIntyre's full body of work can be applied to strengthen the many grassroots community organizing and empowerment movements underway worldwide.⁹² The **International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry (ISME)** was established in 2007 and engages a wide range of philosophical, academic, theological, political and other thinkers and social movements.⁹³

The bottom line is that much is in flux and that little is certain. The yearning for a deeper moral grounding felt by many today, including many young people, is matched only by the intensity with which most proposed moral frameworks and rules are rejected. Meanwhile MacIntyre's biting critique of modernity reads as fresh and even more timely today as it did in 1981.⁹⁴

II.E. Selected Relevant Teachings of Catholic Moral Theology

Noted here are several teachings from Catholic moral theology that are relevant to the core concerns of this working paper. This is a partial list and these brief notes are placeholders for more careful discussion. Generations of scholars have spent entire lifetimes thinking and writing about each one of these topics.

1. Human Dignity. Genesis 1:27 teaches that human persons are made *Imago Dei*, "in the image of God." The language is figurative but not metaphorical; it says something substantively true about the human person. In part as a consequence of this favored connection with God all human life is *sacred*. Human life and the individual human person thus always and everywhere command respect and dignity of a high order. This dignity is inherent in the fact that we are human. Although dignity can be insulted, even violated, it can never be truly lost or forfeited. This dignity of the human person is equally and always with each of us, regardless of any and all particularities, including notably those of race, religion, sex and class. This moral human dignity is the ground and motivation for much of the understanding of and commitment to *human rights* as they evolved over many centuries in the West. It is also the ground for what are often called the social teachings of the Church, which we discuss further in Section G.III.^{95 96}

2. Moral Conscience. No textual moral teaching can cover every moral situation that any person might encounter in the course of their life. *Moral conscience* is that deep internal voice that a person must rely on to point them towards good and away from evil in ambiguous or conflicted situations. A mature moral conscience will leave a person with a full sense of resolution and closure when a morally correct action has been decided upon, and with a

sense of unresolved tension and psychic misalignment when a morally wrong action is about to be taken. The development of a mature moral conscience is one of the important ends of the process of general moral formation (see item 4 below). Catholics are *obligated* to act in accordance with their conscience; not to do so is itself to sin.⁹⁷

3. Mercy. Mercy is a nuanced and contextual concept. It operates at the nexus of compassion, kindness and forgiveness. The Latin *miser cordia* combines *miserere* (pity or misery) with *cor* (heart) to get “relief from a heart of misery.” Mercy is granted by a personal someone, usually an authority or superior, to someone else, usually a supplicant: A judge to a guilty person, God to a sinner. Mercy has been characterized as in some ways an *opposite* of justice: justice involves receiving what you deserve, whereas mercy involves receiving some relief that you *don’t* deserve. Acts of mercy can be very similar in form and content to acts of justice or of charity. In Christian tradition the *seven corporeal works of mercy* and the *seven spiritual works of mercy* are often given special attention; see DNs 98-100.^{98 99 100}

4. Moral Formation. The most penetrating moral theological text is for naught if it is not taken into the world and into our lives and those of our neighbors. Moral formation begins in infancy and is truly a life-long engagement. One learns how to act in the world from many sources, and the more that these reinforce a common moral commitment, the more deeply integrated that commitment will be in one’s heart, mind, body and soul. Our moral formation is the responsibility of our families, neighbors, religious community, civil society institutions, primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, workplace colleagues, social and political leaders and more. Formation is deepened and marked in the rituals and rhythms of a lifetime: baptism, the sacraments, coming-of-age into a community and a tradition, marriage and family, and dying. Moral formation is given further sharp focus in the course of vocation, community service and leadership.

5. Grace [in preparation]

6. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit [in preparation]

7. The Common Good [in preparation]

8. The Lived Moral Life [in preparation]

9. The Moral Teachings and Pastoral Ministry [in preparation]

10. [in preparation]

11. [in preparation]

12. [in preparation].

II.F. A Note on the Situation in Catholic Moral Theology Today

[This concluding section is in preparation.]

The tensions within the Catholic Church between liberal reformers and conservatives/traditionalists noted in DN 5 have over the past half-century evolved into what military strategists call a *frozen conflict*: armed battle has largely ceased but there is no peace treaty. The two sides in this Catholic cold civil war each have their own favored popular and scholarly journals, online forums, theologians, seminaries, liturgical practices, Vatican allies and fiefdoms, topics of social and political concern and so on. Public conflict has become rare but so has more than *pro forma* collegiality. These divides appear to be deepening rather than diminishing.^{101 102 103 104}

These divides are evident in the profession and practice of Catholic moral theology. The doctrinal moral teachings as outlined in these notes are not seriously challenged but their interpretation and pastoral application are. The conservative/traditionalist wing perceives itself as unceasingly on the defensive against a mostly Euro-American

secularizing cultural revolution, with the conservative papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI slowing but not reversing this movement. Over the last decade or so the liberal/reformist wing has begun passing its baton from those energized by the spirit of Vatican II to a new leadership energized by a commitment to social justice informed by critical theory and intersectionality. Some mostly conservative theologians, following e.g. Camosy (2019), fear that this particular ascendant sensibility could compromise the integrity of Catholic moral theology, as it draws on a secular post-modernist and frequently anti-religious worldview focused on relations of power rather than on the body of Catholic Christian thought and tradition.¹⁰⁵ Liberal theologians such as Reimer-Barry (2019) and Kaveny (2019) reply that their commitment to Catholicism is as deep as ever, and that their use of new analytic and interpretive tools is appropriate and necessary for ensuring the relevance of Catholic moral theology in a rapidly changing world.

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DISCUSSION NOTES

I. Introduction

¹ The phrase “to understand religion it must be lived” still doesn’t quite get it right. The verb “to understand” takes an object, in this case *religion*, as distinct and separate from the presumed subject, and moreover as something which stands passively in relation to the initiating, acquiring, understanding subject. But this separation and difference is antithetical to religion. A better formulation might be “to live religion you must live religion.” This reads nonsensical but it’s no more so than “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14) and has an analogous interpretation.

² Metaphysics can be thought to be the philosophical study of *first things*, aka *first principles*, aka *first causes*, including importantly the principle of and cause of *Being as such*. “First cause” in this context refers to the *uncaused cause* aka *unmoved mover* aka *unsustained sustainer*. The statement “there is no metaphysics” is a metaphysical statement. Physics, which seeks to describe regularities and correlations in the behaviors of observed phenomena, presumes and operates within a metaphysics. From within the framework of physics metaphysics is necessarily unobservable and thus unknowable. But metaphysical categories and principles are subjectively present to the human mind and metaphysical knowledge can be generated through intersubjective discourse and affirmation. See the fuller consideration of metaphysics in section G.2 of this working paper.

³ As just noted scientific inquiry can reveal and correlate regularities in the behavior of measurable or countable phenomena, but it can’t reveal the purpose or meaning of these regularities, that is, the end for which they exist and the significance of that end. Thus religion can acknowledge and incorporate science but science can neither acknowledge nor incorporate religion. Many scientists are believers, but they believe in their capacity as persons, not as scientists.

⁴ The term *religion* may have first been used as we most commonly use it today near the end of the 16th-17th century European wars of religion to make clear what the combatants had ostensibly been fighting about and what a peace might entail, i.e., *Cuius regio, eius religio* (“Whose realm, their religion”). The term “religion” does not translate well into the language of many cultures other than those of the Christian or Judeo-Christian West. For

Muslims, Islam is not so much a religion as it is a *din*, that is, an all-encompassing way of life in which political, economic, legal, social and other practices and institutions are as submissive to the will of Allah and as bound by the teachings of the Koran as are more narrowly understood religious beliefs, practices and institutions. See Khan (2009). For now we need only accept that our definition of religion makes sense in a Christian or Judeo-Christian context.

⁵ Christianity began in 1st century Palestine as an unorthodox Jewish sect. It grew slowly at first but more rapidly following the Edict of Milan issued by Roman Emperor Constantine in 313 CE. In 380 the Edict of Thessalonica proclaimed Christianity the state religion. With the decline and collapse of the Western Empire over the following century the Roman church assumed increasingly larger roles in civil affairs. In 800 Pope Leo III crowned the Frankish king Charlemagne as Emperor of a new and aspirational Holy Roman Empire. The Church, the Western and Byzantine Empires and adjacent Christian kingdoms and principalities (“Christendom”) expanded to encompass the European peninsula and flourished for 600-700 years. The Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Church split in 1054 over theological and governance differences. Beginning in the sixteenth century growing social and political tension between the Germanic North and the Latin South, fed by the first stirrings of national sentiment, sparked the Reformation and led to the separation of Protestant Christianity from previously universal (*Catholic*) Western Christianity. This in turn led to nascent nation-states independent of the Holy Roman Empire, and in short order to Enlightenment Modernity in all its diverse religious, political, economic, philosophical, scientific, technological, social, cultural and other regards. For over 300 years the Catholic Church firmly opposed and sought to roll back the Reformation and the changes it had set in motion, but was largely unsuccessful. The Church began to open itself to the modern world in the late 19th century under Pope Leo XIII, and then more fully and energetically in mid-twentieth century, notably following the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965. This renewal was enthusiastically welcomed by large sectors of the laity, clergy and religious worldwide. It soon became evident, however, that “renewal” was interpreted to mean different things by different people. By the mid-1970s an all-too-conventional liberal/reformist vs conservative/traditionalist fissure had solidified across the many sectors and levels of Catholicism. This fissure remains intact to this day. Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) supported economic and social justice policies applauded by liberal reformers and initiatives on family life and culture applauded by conservatives. He leaned strongly conservative in his ecclesial role, e.g., regarding internal dissent and when making important appointments. Benedict XVI (2005-2013) was considered a conservative who sought to repair the breach with traditionalists and Francis (2013-) is considered a somewhat liberal centrist who welcomes rather than discourages progressive dialogue. Meanwhile the Catholic population is static or declining in Europe, growing but only slowly in the Americas, growing somewhat more rapidly in parts of Asia and dramatically so in Africa. Catholicism is in transition from its history as a religion centered in Europe to a religion centered in the Global South. See CARA (2015).

⁶ Well-known general histories of Catholicism include those by Hitchcock (2012) and Jedin et al. (1994). For speculation on the future of Catholicism see Douthat (2021, 2019), Marion (2020), Elie (2020), Silk (2019), and Killen and Silk (2019). Recent noted books on the history of Christianity overall include Holland (2019), MacCulloch (2009) and Johnson (2004). For thoughts on Christianity’s future see May (2014), Jenkins (2011), Martin (2010) and McGrath (2002).

II. Catholic Moral Theology

II.A. Major Elements

⁷ Roman Catholic theology is often divided into two major branches. **Dogmatic Theology** addresses core beliefs about the nature of God and other truths of the faith, including those of the Trinity, the incarnation, the eucharist, the resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, the Church and eternal life. **Moral Theology** addresses human action: what’s right and wrong and good and bad, and how we should act in any situation. Moral theology is sometimes considered to have two major branches. **Fundamental Moral Theology** address the underlying concepts and principles that inform all moral theology, while the **Special Moral Theologies** address scores of particular and

applied topics such as, for example, liberation theology, feminist theology, Black theology, ascetic theology, contemplative theology, political theology, theology of the body and many more.

⁸ Brief note on the history of Thomism: 13th century – early/mid 20th century – Vatican II

St. Thomas Aquinas (1240-1289) was born of a wealthy Italian family of minor nobility. Early on he turned down a sinecure as abbot of a posh Benedictine abbey to join the ranks of the recently formed, intellectually rigorous, mendicant Dominican order of preachers. He taught at the University of Paris and elsewhere and prepared his massive *Summa Theologiae* as a reference for his students. Aquinas drew heavily on the then-newly available translations of Aristotle. This generated concern among established theologians, many of whom were Franciscans grounded in St. Augustine, who in turn had drawn heavily on Neoplatonism; see **DN 9** following. In 1277 Church officials condemned over two hundred “Aristotelian” doctrines taught by Aquinas. Aquinas had many defenders, however, and the Dominicans took promotion of Thomism as part of their mission. By the end of the 13th century Thomism was widely affirmed in Italy, Germany (e.g. among the Rhineland mystics including Meister Eckhart) and elsewhere. In 1323 Aquinas was canonized and the condemnations of 1277 lifted. During much of the 14th century Thomism stagnated and declined, in part as a result of the Black Death (1346-1353) that decimated the ranks of university scholars, and in part due to the rising interest in the Scotist philosophy of Franciscan scholastic William of Ockham; see **DN 171** of the *Expanded Outline*. However, by century’s end Thomism had regained much of its favor. In mid-16th century Thomism was challenged by growing ranks of humanists who judged scholasticism to be stale, abstract, formalistic and wrong, and in short order was further challenged by the Protestant Reformation. In response the Church launched the Counter-Reformation and at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) doubled down on Thomism as its theo-philosophical core. In the 18th century Thomism was challenged anew by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Seminaries and monasteries were closed and the University of Paris was secularized. By the mid-19th century Thomism had been thoroughly marginalized and nearly forgotten. Scattered Catholic theologians, now including Jesuits as well as Dominicans, kept the Thomist tradition alive in anticipation of a time when modernism might be overthrown. A bright young prelate out of favor with the Vatican, Bishop Vincenzo Pecci, was exiled for 32 years in the small, poor diocese of Perugia in the Umbrian mountains. Pecci used this period to immerse himself in the study of church organization, the church and the modern world, and Christian philosophy, in particular that of the forgotten St. Thomas. When Pecci assumed the papacy in 1878 as Leo XIII he moved quickly to begin opening the Church to the rapidly industrializing modern world and, at the same time, to challenge modernity itself. In 1879 he promulgated the encyclical *Aeternis Patris*, which called for both the revival of Thomism in general and its use to develop a fully-formed Catholic philosophical metaphysics that would demonstrate the compatibility of reason and faith while simultaneously countering the then-ascendant philosophies of scientism and modernism. The encyclical successfully initiated the movement now called *Neo-Thomism*. Unfortunately this period of revived Thomism coincided with the spread of what later came to be called *manualism*. Catholic moral catechesis increasingly emphasized the importance of abiding by strict rules and regulations rather than engaging any sort of mature discernment and judgment when faced with difficult moral choices. Thomist concepts such as natural law were central to the manualist mentality and came to be associated with rigid, dogmatic moral proscriptions. When Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and charged it with a mission of “renewal,” notably including renewal of moral theology, there was broad enthusiasm for exploring alternatives to the unpopular neo-scholastic/neo-Thomist moral theology. For more see Cessario (2005). See **DNs 74-81** below for note on Thomism as it developed after Vatican II.

⁹ As noted, the Franciscans, with roots in Augustine and Neoplatonism, distrusted Thomas’s heavy incorporation of Aristotle into Christian theology. Augustine was aware of humanity’s abject depravity and ignorance in the face of divine goodness and perfection, and taught that our proper stance should be one of humility and trust in God’s grace. Our God-given faculty of reason was certainly a blessing but by itself was hardly capable of ascertaining the true nature of Creation and of the moral law. For the Franciscans, reason was a “companion” to the primary motive force of “an upright will.” An over-emphasis on the abstract, technical methodology of reason, accessible only by a schooled elite, at the expense of a humble reliance on God’s grace which is available to all, runs the risk

of jeopardizing the revolutionary Christian teaching of the fundamental moral equivalency of all persons first proclaimed by the apostle Paul. The Thomists replied that because God is perfectly good it was unreasonable to imagine that he would give us a rational intellect capable of coming to conclusions that were in contradiction to the revealed truth. See Siedentop (2014) for a full account.

¹⁰ The natural world in all its richness, including the human world that is an integral part of it, is suffused throughout with meaning and purpose. Why should we expect it to be otherwise? Our lives are an ongoing, organic jumble of meaning and purpose – sometimes pointing in a clear direction and at other times obscure or even seemingly working at cross-purposes. It's true that many people believe their lives to be without meaning or purpose. This is a tragic consequence of a failing civilization that has forgotten how to nurture and socialize its succeeding generations such that meaning and purpose are as natural and immediately present for them as is the air they breathe.

¹¹ I first came across the word *teleology* in middle school when I began reading independently about evolution and the history of science. I had absolutely no idea what the word meant, but I quickly understood that it was a ridiculous superstition with roots in the Dark Ages, a vain illusion that no self-respecting aspiring scientist would be caught considering seriously.

¹² If there is no free will there is no morality or immorality.

¹³ This fuller list of sources of moral teachings is compiled from Pinckaers (2001), Porter (2005) and Curran (1985):

- a) The Hebrew Bible (*The Decalogue, The Wisdom Literature*)
- b) The Gospel (*The Beatitudes, The Sermon on the Mount; Paul's Letter to the Romans*)
- c) The Greek and Latin Patristic Tradition, 100-750 CE
- d) The High Medieval Moral Teachers (Dominicans, Franciscans, St. Thomas, other scholastics et al.)
- e) The instructions of the magisterium, i.e., the global episcopal teaching authority, including the Holy Father
- f) The "conscience of the human person, in harmony with the Gospel"
- g) The "experience of living the moral teachings themselves, in a spirit of faith"
- h) The "signs of the times" and the "eschatological pull of the future."

The last three sources, f-g-h, are interpreted by many liberal reformist theologians to allow, under particular circumstances, some acts that might otherwise appear to be disallowed by the Church. Traditionalists differ. They understand conscience, for example, to be that inner voice which, if listened to carefully and wisely, will lead a person to act in a manner that turns out to be aligned with the teachings of the Church.

¹⁴ Sin is the topic of Part 3, Section 1, Chapter 1, Article 8 in the *Catechism* [U.S. Catholic Church (2003)]. For an act to be sinful it must be an intentional grave violation of a law of God, committed with impure intent. The degree to which an act is sinful depends in part on the degree to which these four conditions are present in the act. We share responsibility for sins committed by others when we participate directly and voluntarily in them; order, praise or approve them; and fail to discourage them or to otherwise intervene when we have an opportunity to do so.

¹⁵ The traditional seven deadly sins are **pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth**. In themselves these are hardly the worst of all sins, but they are deadly because they are among the most common sins and can easily lead to far greater sins. For many generations these were widely recognized at a popular level in the Christian West and taught and reinforced from childhood on. Today these read like musty medieval relics. On reflection, however, their relevance with respect to the focal topics of this working paper should be evident.

¹⁶ The doctrine of **original sin** was first most fully developed by Augustine based on his readings of *Genesis* and a mistranslation of *Paul's Letter to the Romans 5:12*. The phrase *original sin* covers both the decision by Adam and Eve to act in a selfish way contrary to God's wishes, and the transmission of the consequences of that decision, i.e., lives of much suffering, to all humanity. The Catholic faith teaches that original sin itself is erased upon baptism,

but that the fallen condition of humanity continues and inclines us to sin anew. However, relief from this fallen condition has been made possible through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of original sin is unique to Western Christianity; it is not found in Eastern Christian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam or other major religions. Some scholars associate the doctrine of original sin as further developed by Calvinist and other emerging Protestant tendencies of the 16th century with the subsequent rise of capitalism and colonialism. See Greenblatt (2017) and Boyce (2016).

¹⁷ In the Catholic Church sin has historically most commonly been understood to involve a sinful act committed by a specific individual. Over the last half-century a deeper awareness and understanding of **social sin**, **collective sin** and **structural sin** has developed. As understood today, it is possible for the structures and institutions of a society to be such that members of that society who benefit from these arrangements are participating in sinful acts, even if they never decided explicitly and knowingly to be part of that society or institution. Racial discrimination, slavery, colonialist oppression, exploitation of the poor and despoliation of the earth's environment are among the conditions that qualify as socially or structurally sinful. A member of a dominating race born into a racist society is not immediately guilty of the sin of racism simply by virtue of their place and time of birth. But as they mature and benefit more from discriminatory structures, and as they become more aware of the situation in which they live, and as they come to have more opportunities to act in ways that either encourage or discourage racism, the extent of their personal culpability may grow; or, if appropriate actions are taken, lessen. For discussion of social sin see Massero (2016), Massingale (2014, 2000), Bretzke (2004), O'Keefe (1993) and Gula (1989). See also **Section III.C** of this Attachment.

II.B. The Natural Law

¹⁸ Aquinas defines *law* as "an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by one who has care of the community, and is made known and promulgated." (STA, ST I-II.90.4). Under this definition laws can be formulated by God, monarchs and parliaments, and by many of their hierarchically subsidiary designees.

¹⁹ Aquinas identifies four types of law. **Eternal Law** is God's plan for all Creation. It's *eternal* because God is eternal. Any object or creature that is fulfilling its *telos* is participating in the Eternal Law. **Natural Law** is the moral law for humanity, as revealed in the holy scriptures and elsewhere as noted above (see **DN 13**), and discernable by all people through reason. Natural law includes the *Primary Precepts* noted on p G.1-3. All persons should always strive to follow the natural law. The *Secondary Precepts* comprise the **Human Law** or **Positive Law**. These vary across time and space and are developed, promulgated and enforced by human authorities. They can't be ascertained by reason alone, but rather must be taught and learned. Any positive law that conflicts with the natural law need not be obeyed. Finally, **Divine Law** is law created by God for humans and shared with us explicitly through revelation. A commonly cited instance is the Decalogue as revealed to Moses. Some but not all elements of Divine Law can be ascertained by use of reason e.g., "Thou shalt not kill." See Dimmock and Fisher (2017).

²⁰ Note that the theological natural law has nothing to do with the scientific "laws of nature," e.g. Newton's law of gravitation or the three laws of thermodynamics. According to Aquinas, however, these two sets of laws do share the qualities of being objective and being knowable through rational inquiry. The scientific laws of nature are part of God's Eternal Law.

²¹ Note too that the descriptor "natural law theory" applies to two related but logically separable fields of inquiry. One entails the moral law and the other entails the relation of morality to jurisprudence and positive law. Many but not all natural law moral theorists are also natural law legal theorists, and vice-versa. These notes address only the moral natural law.

²² The idea that a moral value can be *objective* will strike many contemporary educated ears as daft. We've been taught since Hume that one can't get from "is" to "ought". More recently we've been taught that norms and

values are socially constructed and are quite the antithesis of anything objective, that is, anything empirically verifiable using generally accepted methods of scientific inquiry. Even if we reject or bracket the dogma of social construction and believe with Aquinas that primary values are gifts of God, we still don't consider them *objective* in the modern sense. They are, rather, *spiritual* gifts that our hearts and minds can receive, perceive and understand. This notion of "objective" and "subjective" as radically antithetical qualities has solidified only recently. Prior to the scientific revolution of the 17th century the unity of all things – whether called Nature or the Universe or Creation – was self-evidently the way things *are*, and did indeed include all things, whether spiritual or material or objective, normative or phenomenological. Thus for Aristotle it was trivially obvious that "The purpose of the tongue is to speak the truth." [Cite needed.] A modern cringes at such a formulation and points out that the tongue as such has no, and can have no, normative purpose. Rather, the objective mechanical *function* of the tongue is indeed (among other things) *to help articulate speech*, but the truth or falsity of that speech is decided by a network of rational intersubjective human minds.

²³ The one case in which modernist sensibilities might appear to be able to affirm an objective moral order is the case grounded in evolutionary biology/psychology. In that case brains that generate behaviors that give those who possess them an inclusive reproductive advantage will be naturally selected for and thus over time come to characterize a given population. Behaviors of the sort codified in the ethical teachings of the world religions are precisely the sorts of behaviors that generate this result. However, such materialist-reductionist/naturalist theories rule out the existence of moral agency, that is, a conscious self with free will able to choose right and wrong courses of action, in the first place. So this evolutionary psychological case is ultimately incoherent. See the related discussion in DN 222.12 of the *Expanded Outline*.

²⁴ See STA, ST I-II.94.2.

²⁵ Pinckaers (2001) notes that modern individualist ideology assumes a primal antagonism between the desires of the individual and what's best for society, viz., the tragedy of the commons. But, he says, "In the natural law frame... this antagonism... is understood to be a mistake. We are fulfilled in relationship to others, in friendship, justice and love; therefore, our desires for fulfillment as individuals are well ordered when we seek to attain the 'excellence' required of family, friendship, citizenship and religion." (p161)

²⁶ Over time this flexibility also came to be seen by many, in particular those on the losing end of ecclesial edicts, as a source of error and possibly even of heresy. This was in fact the experience of those who in the early 1600s went on to lead the Protestant Reformation. As a consequence Protestantism adopted the core proposition that moral teachings be based strictly on the holy scriptures alone ("*sola scriptura*") rather than on anything that the corrupt and debased human mind might dream up. In the Catholic Counter-Reformation that began in the mid-16th century the Church held to its convictions regarding the fundamentals of natural law and the moral order, yet simultaneously strengthened the role of the Vatican and reigned in many of the lax interpretations and practices that had sparked the earlier rebellion. Protestants, for their part, doubled down on *sola scriptura*. As a consequence Protestants faced with differing scriptural interpretations were able to respectfully (or not) part ways rather than compromise their consciences. This set in motion the proliferation of Protestant denominations that has continued to the present time. Thus Catholicism and Protestantism came to their differing ways of handling the tensions of unity and diversity.

²⁷ The World Encyclopedia of Religion (Barrett et al, 2001) shows all Christians grouped into one of six "major ecclesiastico-cultural mega-blocs," of which the "Protestant" mega-bloc shows 9000 denominations and the "Roman Catholic" bloc shows 242. These are high estimates. Many of the Protestant denominations listed are formally autonomous national churches that do, however, affirm the same denominational confession and think of themselves as a single denomination, and most of the Roman Catholic bloc are very small Eastern and Mediterranean churches in communion with Latin-rite Rome. Still, the relative proportion between the two blocs of 37:1 feels about right.

²⁸ Natural law theory has figured notoriously in these controversies. As part of its call for an opening up and renewal of the Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) called for a renewal of moral theology. Liberal theologians and laity enthusiastically took up this call and began questioning broad areas of traditional Catholic doctrine. This included many teachings on marriage, family, sexuality, the role of women in the Church, ecclesial governance and the boundaries of dissent within the Church. In 1968, however, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, which disallowed the use of contraception by married couples. Natural law lay at the center of Paul's reasoning. The purpose of sexual activity, he argued, is to generate new life, and anything that interferes with the accomplishment of this purpose is contrary to natural law, will thus impede our attainment of *eudaimonia*, and is thus immoral. The encyclical was greatly unpopular, especially in the West and among educated Catholics. For the next thirty years liberal theologians searched for interpretations of Church doctrine, including a more nuanced understanding of natural law, that would open a space for more pastoral, i.e. flexible, guidance for the devout but conflicted laity. In 1993, however, Pope John Paul II released the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, which reaffirmed in strong language the foundational position of neo-Thomistic natural law with respect to the moral teachings of the Church. This was followed in 1995 by *Evangelium vitae*, which doubled down on the primacy of natural law and used it to reinforce the Church's traditional positions on murder, abortion, contraception, sterilization, euthanasia and capital punishment. In other documents John Paul made clear that dissent from official Church teachings was prohibited, not only regarding moral theology but regarding ecclesial practices such as priestly celibacy and the possibility of women's ordination.

²⁹ Many books by Catholic theologians and scholars challenging Vatican policy appeared over the several decades following Vatican II. As it became clear that liberal reform was not in the cards new works on this theme appeared less frequently. Representative examples of liberal critique include Mahoney (1987), Curran and McCormick (1999) and Keenan (2007, 2006).

³⁰ During the post-Vatican II decades the moral theologian Fr. Charles E. Curran was among the most visibly outspoken critics of official Catholic teaching on many aspects of moral theology and ecclesial practice. In 1967 Catholic University of America denied Curran's tenure application, only to reverse itself following faculty and student protests. In 1986 the Vatican declared that Curran was no longer eligible to teach Catholic theology at a Catholic university. He left CUA and since 1991 has been teaching theology as a tenured faculty member at Southern Methodist University.

³¹ Although official Church doctrine on matters of moral theology has effectively remained unchanged in the decades since Vatican II, sentiment and practice at national and local levels have continued to develop in both traditionalist and revisionist modes. Traditionalists have worked to build community around celebration of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass. Liberalizing bishops, priests and parishioners in many regions have actively organized in support of full inclusion of gay Catholics in the life of the Church. See Section II.F. below for comment on additional developments.

The status of the natural law today

³² See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [U.S. Catholic Church (2003)], Part Three, Section One, Chapter Three, Article 1, Section I: *The Natural Moral Law*. The natural moral law is explained in seven short paragraphs. For affirmations by Paul VI and John Paul II see **DN 28**. For affirmation by Benedict see Benedict (2007), but also see **DN 33** following. For affirmation by Francis see Gregg (2013).

³³ While Pope Benedict XVI is considered by many to have been the most conservative of recent popes, he is the one whose commitment to the natural law has been the most ambiguous. As a young priest assigned as consulting theologian at the Second Vatican Council, then-Fr. Ratzinger was part of the *Nouvelle Théologie* tendency whose key objective was to rebalance or even replace the Church's neo-scholastic theological foundations problematically grounded in reason and the natural law with new foundations grounded in Scripture and history. In this he worked closely with such radical theologians as Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx. See Strand and Conedera (2020).

³⁴ A liberal interpretation of natural law theory is given by Gula (1989) following O'Connell (1978). Gula argues that a liberal/contemporary understanding of natural law would be characteristically:

1. **Real** - A moral position is "an expression of what the moral community discovers in its experience to be most contributing to the full actualization of human potential to attain human wholeness."
2. **Experiential** – "We discover moral values through our experience of living in relationship with self, others, God and the world. A moral position of the community ought to reflect... what it means to live this relational life."
3. **Consequential** – Consequences alone can't determine right or wrong, but they "are important if we are going to pay attention to the accumulation of human experience."
4. **Historical** – Natural law should accept that human nature and moral values change over time, and "reflect the tentativeness of historical consciousness and the provisional character of moral knowledge."
5. **Proportional** - Because nobody's perfect, there is some good and some evil in most everything we do. Thus "we are doing the morally right thing when we achieve the greatest possible proportion of good over evil."
6. **Personal** – Natural law morality should focus on the behavior and state of a person as a whole rather than on the behavior and state of particular parts or aspects of a person.

Liberals propose that such a more realistic, experiential, consequentialist, historical, proportional and personalist understanding of natural law is more suited to today's complex, ever-changing world than is the older, static understanding of natural law. Traditionalists argue that this liberal approach is thinly disguised subjectivism, fails to offer the guidance people want and need, borders on New Age gibberish, and eventually ends in nihilism.

³⁵ [Citation needed].

³⁶ Personal communication.

³⁷ The first efforts at what grew to become New Natural Law were by Germain Grisez (1965). He was joined in its early development by Joseph Boyle and John Finnis, among others. See especially Finnis (1980) and Grisez, Boyle and Finnis (1987). Later Robert George (see DN 38 following) became a prominent proponent of NNL. Innovations for which NNL is noted include:

1. It proposed a new roster of human goods that are self-evidently desirable and are constitutive of human flourishing. Finnis (1980) named these as **Life, Knowledge, Play, Aesthetic Experience, Sociability/Friendship, Practical Reasonableness, and Religion**. These goods are *incommensurable*; they can't substitute for one another nor can more of one balance less of another. Some decades later Tollefsen (2012) offered a further revised list, naming **life and health; knowledge and aesthetic experience; skilled work and play; friendship; marriage; harmony with God, and harmony among a person's judgments, choices, feelings and behavior**.
2. It suggested that the selection of these goods and decisions to pursue them are not yet *moral* actions but are rather *pre-moral* actions. Morality *per se* comes into play when a person deliberates and chooses to pursue one rather than another of these and in some particular manner and degree. The NNL theorists sought to identify a **first principle of morality**, that is, a single common good towards which all choices could be oriented. Grisez (2008) identified this leading good as "[making] a contribution to integral communal well-being and flourishing, and... avoid[ing] intentionally impeding or detracting from integral communal fulfillment."
3. It offered an account of the **political common good**, which Finnis (1996) defined as: "The whole ensemble of material and other conditions, including forms of collaboration, that end to favor, facilitate and foster the realization by each individual in that community of his or her personal development".

4. Grisez (2008) also modified Aquinas' formulation of the **Ultimate End** of humankind. For Aquinas it is simply union with God, whereas for Grisez it is "integral communal fulfillment, understood as including a relationship between all persons capable of cooperation, human, angelic and divine."

³⁸ Princeton law professor **Robert George** is a high-profile and prolific proponent of New Natural Law theory and of conservative Catholic thought more generally. He has authored scores of books and journal articles, sits on the boards of numerous conservative policy advocacy organizations, and has been a member of several U.S. presidential commissions, notably including the President's Council on Bioethics during the George Bush administration. The indented text following shows heavily edited, condensed and re-ordered text from George (2016) which includes his account of the fundamentals of natural law theory (*bold italics mine*):

Natural law theory is a critical reflective account of the constitutive aspects of the well-being and fulfillment of human persons and the communities they form. It identifies principles of right action—moral principles—including the first and most general principle of morality, namely, that one should choose to act in ways that are compatible with a will towards *integral human fulfillment*. Natural law understands human fulfillment—the human good—to include our bodily, intellectual, social, moral, and spiritual well-being.

Principles of practical reason—moral norms—that direct us to act or abstain from acting in certain ways out of respect for the well-being and the *human dignity* of persons whose legitimate interests may be affected by what we do allow us to formulate principles of justice, including those principles we call *human rights*. These principles direct us to treat human beings always as ends and never as means only.

Fundamental to human dignity and human rights are the natural human capacities for *reason and freedom*, which allow us to exercise deliberation, judgment and choice. Human beings thus possess a power traditionally ascribed to divinity – namely, the power to act as an *uncaused cause*. We can envision a state of affairs, grasp the value of bringing it into being, and then act by choice to bring it into being. Further, we can envision and choose ends that are intrinsically valuable rather than merely instrumentally valuable. Further still, by our choices and action we not only alter states of affairs in the world external to us, but also at the same time determine and constitute ourselves as persons possessing certain *virtues* born of mature, informed choice that dispose us to further mature, informed choice.

Some believe that beings capable of such extraordinary powers cannot exist apart from a divine source or ground of being; others believe otherwise. Regardless, it is difficult to claim that beings whose nature it is to exercise such powers are lacking in dignity and human rights and may therefore be treated as mere objects, instruments or property.

George is a long-time advocate for pro-life causes. He argues that natural law readily establishes that innocent human beings cannot, for any reason, be intentionally killed. He asserts his belief that unborn children are, in fact, human beings. However, he bases this last belief on reasons *other than* those motivated by natural law. In this he differs from the greater number of natural law theorists for whom natural law establishes that human personhood is established at the moment of conception. See George (2001, 1999) for more on his conception of natural law. See Joyce (2019) and Kirkpatrick (2009) for further background on George.

³⁹ Porter (2010, 2005, 1999) argues that natural law as developed by Thomas and the many other theologians, canon lawyers and lay jurists and scholars of the 12th-13th centuries is more open to multiple and nuanced findings than is the neo-Thomist natural law of the early modern period held to dogmatically by the Church today. She notes that scholastic natural law arose in response to a dramatic increase in societal complexity following the cessation of the northern invasions in the 11th century and the subsequent growth in travel, communication, trade and prosperity of the High Middle Ages. Kings and bishops alike needed an overarching set of norms that would help them rightly order a realm rapidly transforming from largely autonomous feudal estates to one dominated by large mercantile cities. The scholastics tasked to provide these norms drew upon a more diverse set of texts than is now often appreciated. These included numerous texts recovered from antiquity other than those of Aristotle,

many secular, Muslim, Jewish and other non-Christian sources, and new compendia of both local and exotic natural history. Thus what Porter calls “the scholastic concept of the natural law” draws deeply on the three streams of Scripture, reason and nature. As she tells it, much of our current morass of conflicting moral interpretation lies in the fact that beginning in the 15th century and continuing with *Aeternis Patris* (1879) and *Humanae vitae* (1968), the Church chose to ground its defense of the natural law almost entirely in reason and in nature, and only secondarily in Scripture. Lacking the rich theological resources for interpretation that Scripture provides, the Church locked itself into an approach to natural law that many people today find insufficiently compelling.

⁴⁰ Porter (2010, 2005, 1999) applies the broader pallet of Scripture, reason and nature as developed and used by the 13th century natural law scholastics to a range of contemporary moral topics. Regarding contraception she notes that *Humanae vitae* justifies its prohibition by reference to the mechanics of sexual intercourse and to intercourse’s “intrinsic finality towards reproduction,” the frustration of which would thereby be contrary to natural law and thus to the greatest human fulfillment. Porter suggests that this attempt at reliance on reason and nature was chosen in the belief that the credibility of the argument would thereby be evident to all persons, whereas if the case drew too heavily on doctrinal theology people who don’t share those theological commitments would have reason, and perhaps even be compelled, to reject it. Porter notes that the argument presented in *Humanae vitae* has been widely unpersuasive. She says that invoking the scholastics’ understanding of Christian marriage and sexuality would “preserve the central insight in the official Catholic view while avoiding its problematic formulation.” For the scholastics, she says, the instruction to marry and procreate follows from the Christian doctrine of the goodness of Creation, and that the Catholic community should clearly have marriage and family formation among its most celebrated human ends. Yet, she says, this does not require that use of contraceptives is at all times morally unacceptable. Porter cites risks to a woman’s health or life that a pregnancy might entail, and “economic or social conditions [that]... rule out the possibility that [the couple] could properly raise any children of the marriage.” She suggests that the Christian community should encourage such couples to perhaps care for foster children or “commit... themselves as a couple to fostering the life of the wider society.”

⁴¹ In analogous but varying ways - the details are important - Porter (2010, 2005, 1999) further suggests that a scholastic concept of the natural law would 1) argue *against* the use of IVF by infertile couples; 2) argue *in favor of* therapeutic germ-line genetic modification of children; 3) argue both *against* the condemnation of homosexual acts and *for* the affirmation of committed gay relationships, including gay marriage. She says, however, that some forms of gay relationships might be “in tension” with Christian belief and practice.

⁴² See e.g. Dougherty (2015), “The Conservative Case Against Capitalism.”

⁴³ Pickett’s position is atypical because he personally subscribes to much of the natural law framing. He affirms that he cares about virtue and the need to cultivate civic virtue, that he believes in genuine and at least partially universal human goods, and that he’s convinced that those goods give reasons for action. He says, however, that the account of human goods which he defends is more open to cultural variation than is the account held to by most natural law theorists today. He notes the prevalence of socially legitimate homosexual relationships across cultures and throughout history, including among the Greeks who first explicated the natural law. He notes the deep love that is the foundation of many of these relationships. He establishes that marriage is a genuine human good and that the greater the share of persons who marry, the better for all. He establishes that while procreation is a major good of marriage it is not its sole good, for committed love and companionship are goods as well. Nor is procreation a necessary good, as infertile couples can and do have loving, companionate marriages. Given these factors and others, Pickett says, it makes sense to recognize same-sex marriage as consistent with natural law.

⁴⁴ Undercoffer (2013) proposes to show that socialism is compatible with natural law. He raises the bar at the outset by setting as his task the reconciliation of a strong form of socialism, that proposed by G.A. Cohen in *Why Not Socialism?* (2009), with a contemporary theory of natural law conventionally identified with free-market advocacy, that proposed by John Finnis in *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980). Cohen says that equality of

opportunity is a foundational principle of liberal, left-liberal and socialist political-economic systems alike, but that this principle takes different forms in each of these ideological systems. Liberal systems affirm *bourgeois equality of opportunity*, the core of which involves the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices, e.g. barriers to voting and bank lending restrictions. *Left-liberal or progressive equality of opportunity* goes further and commits resources to affirmatively reducing injustice, e.g. via special education and training programs, low-cost housing and affirmative action in employment. Cohen says that left-liberal equality of opportunity, as helpful as it is, fails to address “inborn (but clearly still unchosen) disadvantages” (p 24). He then proposes *socialist equality of opportunity*, which he says calls for removal of these “inborn obstacles to equality” (p 25). This means provision of resources so as to guarantee effectively equal social and economic *outcomes*, because only with such equality is true equality of opportunity possible. Such socialist equality of opportunity points to practices such as guaranteed equality of income and wealth; under these conditions, Undercoffer says, any remaining inequality would be a function of free choice. Undercoffer then notes a second requirement for a successful socialist system, that of *community*. He says community is present when people a) care about and care for one another, and care that they care about one another; and b) serve one another not because of anticipated reciprocity but because someone needs and wants their services. Undercoffer then turns to Finnis and focuses on his account of the seven forms of human good as listed in **DN 37.1** above: Life, Knowledge, Play, etc. He argues that Cohen’s theory of socialism fits into the schema of Finnis’s goods and the practical principles needed to realize them. He says further that the use of authority to enforce Cohen’s socialist schema “can reasonably be considered justified by Finnis’s set of values and practical principles” (p 27). By way of example he says that Cohen’s socialist equality of opportunity requires “exactly the view of other human beings that one would expect in Finnis’s conception of the “friendship” relationship” (p 28).

⁴⁵ Jaycock (2017) offers what might be called a tough-love critique of Catholic natural law, charging that:

“... it conflates descriptive and normative ethical claims; it presupposes a universal concept of practical reason that cannot accommodate real global and cross-cultural pluralism in terms of use, thought and practice; it presupposes a concept of “nature” that eludes a precise and consistent definition; it has historically privileged forms of knowledge that reflect the epistemological standpoints and political interests of those who occupy dominant social locations, to the detriment of socially subjugated groups; it has often, if not usually, been applied to particular issues in a deductive fashion; and it tends to promote, in the interest of maintaining an illusion of universality, a certain amount of historical amnesia about the fact that the content of morality develops.”

Jaycock continues, “Yet, the need for something like natural law persists.” He acknowledges the need for “... a universal moral reference point, such as basic human dignity and freedom” to empower emancipatory struggle.

⁴⁶ See O’Loughlin (2016), “Poll finds many U.S. Catholics breaking with church over contraception, abortion and L.G.B.T. rights.”

⁴⁷ Most mainstream Protestants argue that the natural law is an unnecessary hold-over from a pre-scientific era and should be let go of entirely. They suggest that the natural law might have been a helpful aid to understanding at one time but can no longer be credibly defended, especially as the divine revelation is available to all via holy scriptures. But this opinion is not unanimous; see **DN 50** below.

⁴⁸ Liberal (actually, democratic socialist) religious philosopher and Eastern Orthodox theologian **David Bentley Hart** (2013) made a strong case somewhat along these lines in *First Things* and sparked a lengthy exchange. He fully acknowledged the “... harmony between cosmic and moral order, sustained by the divine goodness in which both participate.” But he affirmed the enduring validity of Hume’s naturalistic fallacy and concluded that only persons who already share a supportive religious sensibility are able to extract moral meaning from the objective push-and-pull of the natural world. Hart’s article was motivated by his discomfort with “self-described Thomists” who were attempting to “import this tradition into public policy debates.” Hart felt that this effort “is a hopeless

cause,” precisely because the requisite religious sensibility is hardly widely shared in the public square. Many mostly conservative, Catholic and evangelical commentators responded, some in agreement with Hart but most in strong disagreement. A summary account of these exchanges was prepared by theology blogger Brad Littlejohn (2013). See also **DN 49** following.

⁴⁹ Herdt (2019) nicely summarizes the mid-to-late twentieth century Protestant assessment of natural law as a Catholic tradition which appears to “... constrain divine freedom, deny the radical character of the Fall, render scripture secondary and interfere with the intimacy of the divine–human relation.” She says that “**Karl Barth** repudiated natural law as insufficiently Christocentric. **Reinhold Niebuhr** criticized natural law thinking for absolutizing the relative. **Stanley Hauerwas** argued that ‘natural law functions ideologically to justify the assumption that Christians have a responsibility to fulfil the demands of the state and institutions associated with it’, thereby compromising loyalty to Christ.”

⁵⁰ Despite the historical aversion on the part of mainstream Protestantism to natural law some Protestant authors, generally but not exclusively theologically and politically conservative, now advocate “reclaiming the natural law for Protestantism”. They note a resurgence of interest in the natural law among Protestants in the early 21st century. They argue that the earliest Protestants correctly rejected the scholastic metaphysics of Roman Catholic natural law but implicitly held to an “**order of Creation**” framework that supported their otherwise exclusively biblical moral and ethical teachings. They note that for numerous Protestant thought leaders, including e.g. Hobbes, Locke, Luther, Calvin, Kant, Hegel and the American Founding Fathers, natural law provided the grounding for social morality, political philosophy and legal theory. They look to natural law as part of a needed bulwark against the continuing and growing inability of mainstream Protestantism to advance moral claims of any sort. They look approvingly at the ways in which the natural law helps Catholicism proclaim that its moral teachings apply to all humanity. For advocacy of a natural law framework by Lutheran, Calvinist and Orthodox Presbyterian authors see respectively Braaten (2007), Grabill (2006) and Vandrunen (2015).

⁵¹ We have been instructed that there is no place in Creation for purpose and meaning, much less God, except insofar as some might choose to pretend there is as a means of solace and/or of exerting power over others. This is a tragedy, and worse. The fact that so many have been educated from childhood to believe this impoverished story might well be considered a form of societal child abuse. We are taught that in the final analysis ours is a world without purpose, meaning or value; that understanding the world to be meaningless is a marker of educated enlightenment; and that human progress entails more and more people coming to this understanding.

⁵² The metaphysical claims that existence is without meaning and that humans must therefore create their own meaning, and that we are thereby “condemned to freedom” and are ennobled by accepting this fate unflinchingly, was a leading theme of the mid-20th century existentialists, e.g. Sartre (1946) and Camus (1947, 1942). Half-a-century on this same metaphysical *a priori* meaninglessness was declared to be a constitutional right when U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy (1992) found that the U.S. Constitution guarantees “the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

⁵³ Accounts of the intuitive, mystical apprehension of the truths of Christianity, including the truth of the natural law, have a long pedigree. The phrase *Credo quia absurdum* (“I believe because it is absurd”), commonly though inaccurately associated with the early Roman Christian author Tertullian (c. 155-220 CE), makes the point. It has been repeated in different forms by mystics and others ever since, e.g. by Kierkegaard when proclaiming his early 19th century *leap of faith*. This leap is not a rejection of logic and rationality but rather a recognition, after having applied these tools intensively and at length, of how little logic and rationality actually gets us in the end. For starters, it gets us neither the good, the true nor the beautiful without some *pre*-rational premises that allow us to ground the rational machinery before we kick it into motion.

⁵⁴ The opinion that we must rely on faith alone for knowledge of God and God's natural law is most generally referred to as *fideism*. The many flavors of fideism range from aggressive anti-rationalism to those that give faith

the final (or initial) say while welcoming support and assistance from reason. Fideism has historically been associated with traditionalist or even reactionary Catholic sensibilities, e.g. those of DeMaistre and Hamann noted in DN 115.5 of the *Expanded Outline*. Non-Catholic thinkers as diverse as Kant, William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein have espoused elements of fideism. The official position of the Church today condemns fideism and reaffirms the teaching that both faith and reason, properly understood and used, will lead us to the same truth and the full truth regarding the moral order.

⁵⁵ Loyola University New Orleans ethicist Nicholas Capaldi (2011) suggests that both the Augustinian Catholic metaphysics grounded in Neoplatonism and the Thomist metaphysics grounded in Aristotle dampen and distort the truly radical meaning and message of Catholic Christianity. Platonism locates ultimate reality in the abstract realm of the Forms or Ideas, while Aristotelianism denies transcendence and locates ultimate reality in the objects and substances of everyday experience. Both systems thus mistakenly try to conceptualize the pre-conceptual ground of conceptualization, which is logically impossible and which Capaldi, following Catholic metaphysician Fernando Rielo, calls “the original sin of metaphysics”. Capaldi calls instead for the retrieval of a richer metaphysical tradition grounded in *phenomenology*, one that would better serve Catholicism in filling the vacuum created by the collapse of the Enlightenment Project and the consequent spread of postmodern scientific nihilism. In phenomenological metaphysics ultimate reality is encountered in the everyday pre-theoretic world constituted by the interaction of human persons with one another. Following MacIntyre, Capaldi emphasizes the importance of *practice* and *narrative*. The practice of Christian community reveals the existence of the pre-conceptual domain without seeking to conceptualize it, and the Christian narrative – the story of Jesus Christ – connects the metaphysical to the moral practice. Capaldi argues that the repeated doctrinal assertion of Neo-Aristotelian Thomism as the sole foundation of Catholic metaphysics has closed off the possibility of exploring the contributions that other philosophical perspectives might be able to offer. Capaldi cites William James, Rudolf Otto, Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and John Macquarrie as thinkers whose works bear directly on the alternative Catholic metaphysics that he suggests.

II.C. The Virtues

⁵⁶ Romans 2:14-15.

⁵⁷ The Greek *phronesis* is often translated as “*practical wisdom*” and taken as a further and exemplary development of mature virtuous character. *Phronesis* has sometimes been taken as a complement to *sophia*, the latter connoting divine, holy or mystical forms of wisdom. At other times *phronesis* is treated as a straightforward translation for *prudence* and thus doesn’t seem to add much to our catalogue of virtues.

⁵⁸ Beyond the development of exemplary mature virtuous character is the option of *discipleship*: “Come, follow me.” (Matt 4:18-19). Christian discipleship is part of the vocation of clergy and religious, and is an option for laypeople as well.

⁵⁹ Keenan (1995) says that the four classical cardinal virtues as named and described no longer helpfully identify virtuous behaviors that people most need to cultivate so as to live happy and fulfilling lives in today’s world. He argues that conventional moral theology is flawed in that it places the center of moral reflection on the moral action or its consequences rather than on the **moral agent**; and further, that as agents we are always **relational**. He proposes in place of **Prudence, Justice, Temperance** and **Fortitude** (hierarchically following Aquinas) four successor cardinal virtues that center the moral agent and incorporate relationality: **Justice, Fidelity, Self-Care** and **Prudence** (now non-hierarchical). He says that we are called to relationality in three modes, each of which “demands a cardinal virtue”: 1) as a relational being *in general*, we are called to *justice* (i.e. for all humanity); as a relational being *specifically*, we are called to *fidelity* (i.e., to those we are bonded to by blood, marriage, love and sacrament); and 3) as a relational being *uniquely*, we are called to *self-care* (i.e., of ourselves). *Prudence*, for its part, “determines what constitutes the just, faithful, and self-caring way of life for an individual.”

⁶⁰ To clarify: widespread virtuous character might allow less need for the presence and enforcement of formal laws and sanctions *than otherwise*. It is still highly likely that any world of meaningful economic justice, ecological integrity and technological responsibility would entail *more* laws and sanctions than is the case in any of today's industrial democracies. But widespread virtuous character would mean fewer laws, fewer infractions of those laws and less need for enforcement and punishment than would be needed in a less virtuous world.

⁶¹ See Aristotle's original formulation of the Doctrine of the Mean in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 2 Ch 8, in which he contrasts the virtuous mean of *bravery* with the two extremes of *cowardice* and *rashness*. The Hebrew Bible has an even earlier formulation (600-700 BCE?) in *Proverbs 30:8-9*: "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread".

⁶² Much of the language of virtue will strike many 21st-century readers as anachronistic and insufferably twee. Canonical lists of virtues play little if any role in the socialization of our children today. The influence of mass and social media in shaping understanding and behavior may be orders of magnitude greater than that played by many of the community members noted in the text. Indeed, extended formal instruction in the virtues might strike many raised in modern liberal democracies as bordering on indoctrination, perhaps evoking remembered images of stadiums full of cheering Chinese adolescents waving copies of Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book* before heading out to accuse, try, torture and execute their secondary school teachers. See Wang (2001). Concerns regarding the distinction between appropriately strong socialization and toxic indoctrination are completely legitimate and need to be foregrounded as we construct a path for the coming century and beyond.

II.D. Virtue Ethics

II.D.1. Background

⁶³ It would be helpful at this point to have simple, clear definitions of what we mean by the terms *moral* and *ethical* and their cognates. Unfortunately their usage is inconsistent. They both deal with right and wrong and good and bad human behavior. In many contexts the terms *moral* and *ethical* are interchangeable. Catholics favor *Moral Theology* and Protestants favor *Christian Ethics* to mean the same thing (but see DN 64 following). The term *theological ethics* has been used to mean the scholarly study of ethical systems in the light of Catholic, or Christian, theology. Codes of proper behavior for routine professional interactions are typically considered to be codes of *ethics*, say for business, law or medicine, whereas social norms regarding intimate relationships constitute *moral* codes. An *immoral* act is usually sinful; an *unethical* act may or may not be. Murder is a grave moral offense; a reference to murder as being *unethical* is itself offensive. *Ethics* is the name of a familiar topic of philosophical study, but *Morals* are something else. An *ethicist* is different from a *moralist*. Some distinguish *moral theology* and *social ethics*: the former elucidates right and wrong behavior as taught by a specific religious tradition and the latter considers rules for behavior in the generally pluralist, secular larger society. In these notes we'll use the terms in ways we hope are unambiguous given the context.

⁶⁴ Long (2007) distinguishes *Moral Theology* from *Christian Ethics*, saying that the former entails Christian dogma and speaks to members of a particular Christian denomination, whereas Christian ethics speaks more pragmatically to the broad community and is intended to be of relevance even for those not necessarily religious.

⁶⁵ *The Decalogue* and the rest of the law of Moses are based on oral traditions that may have originated as early as 15th-13th c BCE and were committed to writing in 5th-6th c BCE. The Vedic texts date from as early as 16th c BCE, the *Code of Hammurabi* from ~ 18th c BCE, and the oral traditions which the Confucian *Analects* draw upon may date from ~ 20th c BCE. All attribute the ultimate source of their moral codes to one or more deities or a transcendental realm.

⁶⁶ *Casuistry* has a perfectly fine non-pejorative meaning as well. It refers to the practice in moral theology of applying established moral principles to particular cases (L. *casus*) so as to extract proper moral judgments about right and wrong behavior. The cases often present new or unusual situations and may involve matters of

conscience. Casuistry became a major pedagogical method among moral theologians in 18th century, particularly in Jesuit institutions. The use of casuistry coincided with the manualist era in Catholic moral instruction and its emphasis on fine gradations of sin and penance. This helps account for the pejorative connotations of the word today.

⁶⁷ See Anscombe (1958) "Modern Moral Philosophy." Anscombe was a noted 20th century British analytic philosopher who did important work in metaphysics, logic, ethics, the philosophy of mind and other topics. She was a favored student of and eventually literary executor for Ludwig Wittgenstein. While a teenager Anscombe converted to Roman Catholicism, and throughout her life participated in protests against war, nuclear weapons, capital punishment, abortion and contraception.

II.D.2 MacIntyre: *After Virtue*

⁶⁸ MacIntyre's definitions of *tradition* and *narrative* are fairly intuitive but his definition of *practice* is more involved:

"By a practice I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended". [*After Virtue* p 187]

In the quote MacIntyre references *goods internal to a practice*, here defined as goods realized (only) in the act of the practice itself. These stand in contrast to *goods external to a practice*, the iconic examples being fortune and fame. Practical wisdom orients a person towards internal goods and away from external goods.

⁶⁹ See MacIntyre (1981) p 263. For a very helpful chapter-by-chapter summary see Schulman (2012).

⁷⁰ St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547) was the founder of Western Christian monasticism. The monasticism of the preceding Desert Fathers emphasized isolation and asceticism. Benedict developed a monastic model that called for communal living, productive work and being of service to the wider Christian community. By the time of Charlemagne the Benedictines were the largest monastic network in Christendom. Charlemagne enlisted them in his imperial campaign to educate the often semi-literate Catholic clergy so that they might in turn eventually educate the laity, starting with the nobility.

⁷¹ MacIntyre's two subsequent books, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (1988) and *Three Rival Visions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (1990), together with *After Virtue*, might be considered the foundational trilogy of virtue ethics. MacIntyre further developed the themes introduced in these books in *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999) and *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016). See Heubner (2012) for a summary and review of MacIntyre's most noted books.

⁷² *After Virtue* and its closing imagery informed Rod Dreher in developing *The Benedict Option* (2017), discussed in Section IV.C.1 of this Attachment G.1. However, in a conference keynote address at University of Notre Dame MacIntyre (2017) distanced himself from Dreher's proposal. He said that while Dreher appears to be proposing a reactionary inward-focused retreat from mainstream society, St. Benedict did the opposite; he created an outward-focused community of monks in a symbiotic relationship with the neighboring society. The monks were farmers, as were the neighboring villagers, and together they were part of a new local economic network. Further, the monks provided education and the villagers supplied novices. Over time a new networked community evolved that was somewhat independent of the feudal order as such but not necessarily oppositional. MacIntyre added that most proponents of the Benedict Option are politically conservative, and that "I'm well-known for holding that conservatism and liberalism are mirror images of one another, and one should have nothing to do with either of them." See too DN 73 following.

⁷³ MacIntyre's personal trajectory is of interest. He began his academic career in the early 1950s as a Marxist philosopher, became disillusioned and found fresh insight as a neo-Aristotelian, became dissatisfied and then gravitated to the scholastic philosophers and in particular Aquinas, in which company he found the grounding he had been looking for. He published *After Virtue* in 1981. That same year, at age 52, he was received into the Catholic Church. In Summer 2018 I heard MacIntyre give the featured address at a conference at University of Notre Dame, several months after he had celebrated his 90th birthday. See also **DN 83** below.

II.D.3. Subsequent Developments

Brief notes on the history of Thomism: early/mid 20th century, Vatican II and after

⁷⁴ As noted, Leo XIII and *Aeternis Patris* successfully initiated a Thomist revival that continued well into the 20th century. A number of schools developed (see **DNs 79-80** following.) that might loosely be grouped under the two general categories of **Neo-Thomism** and **Transcendental Thomism**. Neo-Thomism affirmed Aristotelian **metaphysical realism**, i.e., that rock we see *really is* that rock and our senses and our minds accurately perceive it as such. Transcendental Thomism, for its part, draws on **metaphysical anti-realism** and phenomenology: we see that rock but what we see is a dynamic process of our human minds. We have no idea what might *really* be there; what lies "behind" the phenomena (the Kantian *noumena*) is unconceptualizable.

⁷⁵ According to Knasas (2000) Neo-Thomism came in two flavors, **Aristotelian Thomism** and **Existential Thomism**. Roughly put, in the former *being* is rooted in the substantive nature of a thing and is caused by matter, which is ultimately caused by an uncaused cause identifiable as God. Existential Thomism accepts all this but adds that being also involves a necessary *existential act* analogous to physical movement or motion, and like all motion eventually reveals an unmoved mover, again identifiable as God. The several varieties of Thomism were represented in the lead up to Vatican II, which had as part of its call the renewal of moral theology and the foundations of Catholic Christian philosophy.

⁷⁶ As it turned out, the Spirit of Vatican II was not friendly to Thomism. The two decades following the Council indeed saw a renewal of attention to moral theology and philosophical foundations, but these took new and unexpectedly modernist turns, while manualism, the natural law and Thomism in general all but disappeared from Catholic pedagogy, catechesis and practice. Only the least Thomistic of the Thomisms, Transcendental Thomism, maintained some traction.

⁷⁷ It soon became clear, however, that attempts to institutionalize a moral theology explicitly grounded in more liberal, personalist, dialogical, consequentialist and proportionalist approaches were having mixed success and were generating considerable discomfort, even backlash. Steps were taken to restore order. In his apostolic letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* Paul VI (1974) stressed the foundational importance of Thomism to Catholic theology; in 1993 John Paul II promulgated the major encyclical *Veritatis splendor* which reaffirmed Thomism and the natural law (see **DN 28**), and in 1998 he released the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, which reiterated the necessary role of Thomist metaphysical realism in all Catholic thinking.

⁷⁸ Still, Thomism did not regain the central role it had previously played. In addition to the uncooperative Spirit of Vatican II, several decades of ground-breaking biblical scholarship had cast new light on the writings of the very early Church and allowed these to be used to legitimize core moral teachings with clear claims to priority and precedence over the scholastics. Further, an independent movement that held that theology should be *preachable*, that is, readily understandable by contemporary lay Catholics, had emerged and was growing, with predicable implications for the use of texts written for 13th-century Dominican seminarians. On the other hand, Thomism continued to resonate with smaller, more intense networks of often younger theologians, scholars and active Catholic laity, and many of these took on the teaching and further development of virtue ethics.

⁷⁹ As noted in DNs 74-75 above, a variety of Thomisms sprouted in the decades before Vatican II. As taxonomized by Geisler (2021) these included: **1) Neo-Scholastic Thomism**, which seeks to present a Thomism as close as possible to that originally presented by St. Thomas and his close colleagues; **2) Cracow Circle Thomism**, which sought to improve and enrich neo-scholastic Thomistic analysis with techniques of modern formal logic; **3) Existential Thomism**, which was initially formulated by Etienne Gilson to emphasize Thomas' treatment of God as Being and was extended by Jacques Maritain to include elements of personalism; **4) Analytic Thomism**, in which mostly British philosophers, including notably Elizabeth Anscombe, sought reinforcements for Thomism from within the edifice of analytic philosophy; **5) Lublin Thomism (aka Phenomenological Thomism)**, which introduces elements of phenomenology and personalism, and among whose early proponents was the young Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II; and **6) Transcendental Thomism**, which like Lubin Thomism seeks to combine Thomism with aspects of modern phenomenology and personalism, but which also tries to incorporate Cartesian and Kantian elements.

⁸⁰ We should add **7) River Forest Thomism** (named after the Chicago-area site of the **Albertus Magnus Lyceum**) which drew upon Thomism's Aristotelian foundations and proposed that 1) a solid grounding in the natural sciences is necessary before one can usefully seek to understand and explicate a metaphysics; and 2) that modern science, for its part, needed an Aristotelian rather than a materialist or idealist foundation. The Lyceum was supported by the Dominican province of St. Joseph and opened its doors in 1951. Unfortunately the attempt to build this sort of deep bridge between science and philosophy, including religious philosophy, at that time in history in this place, was a bridge too far and the Lyceum closed in 1969. See full accounts by Binzley (2007) and Klenk (undated). See also White (2014), who suggests that conditions may now be auspicious for "a younger generation of Thomists" to take up anew "the spirit of River Forest Thomism..."

⁸¹ For more on the efflorescence of Thomisms see Geisler (2021), Capaldi (2011), Knasas (2000), Feser (2009), Cessario (2007) and Rowland (2003).

⁸² For examples of this genre of largely secular virtue ethics writing see Athanassoulis (2013), van Zyl (2019) and Carr et al. (2017).

⁸³ MacIntyre's engagement with Marxism was more than an adolescent fling. He joined the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) as an undergraduate in the late 1940s, left in 1956 to join the Socialist Labour League, and then left the SLP to join the Trotskyist International Socialism group (later the Socialist Workers Party), serving as editor and editorial board member of the latter's journal *International Socialism* until his resignation in 1968. Interestingly, contemporary Marxists such as Leeds Beckett University political theorist Paul Blackledge (2014, 2012, 2011, 2009), find inspiration both in MacIntyre's very early writings, when he identified publicly as a Marxist, and in his later and current work, in which he works within a neo-Aristotelian/neo-Thomist ethical framing.

⁸⁴ In a jacket blurb praising Blackledge's 2012 *Marxism and Ethics*, MacIntyre says, "... Critics of Marx and Marxism, including sympathetic critics such as myself, will have to take this book very seriously."

⁸⁵ Duke University Divinity School moral and political theologian Luke Bretherton (2021) argues that concern for virtue and tradition along MacIntyrean lines is necessary for the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness and emancipatory politics able to overcome the oppressions of racial and extractive capitalism and enable a more just and generous form of creaturely flourishing. He identifies three deficiencies of current Left political theory and practice which he believes MacIntyre's political philosophy and theological grounding can help address. One is the priority given to politics *over* ethics, when in fact the two are of equally critical importance. Another involves a lack of recognition of the importance of personal virtue as an element of any truly successful form of collective liberation. The third concerns the need to develop a non-statist, non-property-based conception of political agency that sustains popular forces even as we negotiate the eventual proper role of the state and of property.

⁸⁶ **Problems with virtue ethics.** The literature on virtue ethics gives due attention to its shortcomings, contradictions, inadequacies and other problematic aspects. I've compiled some of these here. I've discussed a few of these elsewhere in these notes and won't attempt a more complete review at this time.

1. Virtue ethics is **arbitrary** and thus **morally irrelevant**, because no accepted standard exists of what constitutes human flourishing and of which dispositions lead to it.
2. It's **relativistic**: lists of virtues appropriate for one culture may be inappropriate for other cultures.
3. It doesn't offer a plausible criteria of **rightness**.
4. It's of **no practical use**: it does not produce **codifiable principles** and **provides few guides to action**.
5. It's of **no practical use**: it offers no guidance about what to do when virtues conflict, which they often do.
6. It's **utopian**: ethics cannot dispense with building rules around acts.
7. It's **antiquarian**: it relies on teleological conceptions of human nature which are now obsolete.
8. It's **circular**: it defines right action in terms of virtues while defining virtues in term of right action.
9. It's **egoistic and self-centered**: it directs the subject's moral attention to oneself rather than to others.
10. Kant: Aristotle's virtue ethics is **inconsistent**, and really **isn't a moral theory** at all.
11. Kant: Virtue ethics doesn't sufficiently support the importance of the role of **duty**.
12. Kant: The "**doctrine of the mean**" is not a useful general doctrine as it only applies in selected cases.
13. Nussbaum: Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and other works already adequately address the virtues.
14. Nussbaum: Sidgwick, Bentham, Mill and other **utilitarians** already usefully address the virtues.
15. It can trap you in a **self-referential false modesty loop**: it is virtuous to say, truthfully, "I am not virtuous."
16. Like any ethical system, it requires a **meta-ethics**, which in turn requires a **meta-meta-ethics, ad infinitum**. Without some explicit shared ungrounded grounding it falls apart.
17. It's **elitist and classist**: affluent persons can more readily cultivate, afford and display behaviors widely interpreted as virtuous than can poor persons, who face material challenges that can make virtuous behavior costlier.

Sources: Athanassoulis (2021), Marcella (2019), Svensson and Johansson (2018), Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2018), Dimmock and Fisher (2017), Besser-Jones (2016) and Svensson (2008).

⁸⁷ Practitioners of both secular and religious virtue ethics need to guard against **virtue-signaling** and **fetishization**. *Virtue signaling* occurs when the display of virtuous behavior in order to generate public admiration becomes a dominant motivation of being virtuous in the first place. In the extreme, virtue displays may come to be performed in order to mask explicitly *unvirtuous* real behaviors. Some display of virtue is appropriate and in fact necessary for the development of a shared virtuous culture. What we need is *virtuous* virtue display. *Virtue fetishization* occurs when the practice of virtuous behavior, even if sincere and non-self-aggrandizing, becomes a compulsive, unbalanced end-in-itself, such that it generates anxiety, discomfort and even disruption rather than happiness and well-being.

⁸⁸ "Situation Ethics" generated controversy in the decades after Vatican II with its proposal that ethical decisions need to take into account the context of a situation and the particularities of the persons involved rather than be bound by rigid authoritatively imposed rules. This view resonated with many people during this period in which long-standing societal conventions were being challenged by a heightened felt desire for personal autonomy. A version of situation ethics that appealed to many Christians was put forward by Joseph Fletcher, an academic ethicist and ordained Episcopal priest, who argued that ethical decisions need only be grounded in *love*. He said that the rightness or wrongness of an act should be gauged by, and only by, the degree to which it is motivated by love and results in greater love for and among more people. Those uncomfortable with situation ethics argued that it was a relativist, subjectivist, antinomian doctrine that could be used to justify almost any behavior. This assessment gained some credibility in the years following, when Fletcher went on to find defensible reasons not only extra-marital sex and elective abortion, but infanticide (of babies with disabilities), euthanasia (of those

clearly in great distress), assisted suicide, eugenics and human cloning. In 1967, after many years teaching Christian Ethics at Harvard Divinity School and other noted institutions, Fletcher declared himself to be an atheist. See Fletcher's celebrated text *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (1966). See also Fletcher's *The Ethics of Genetic Control: Ending Reproductive Roulette* (1974). For the case against situation ethics see Barclay (1971) and Kovach (1970).

⁸⁹ Recent efforts have been made to develop what's variously been called "Technomorals", "Techno-ethics", "Cyberethics" and the like, i.e., the application of moral and ethical analysis to concerns involving powerful new technologies, notably including information technologies and artificial intelligence. To date these efforts largely reprise the sorry history of "bioethics". They identify a host of important challenges that these technologies raise and then fail to say anything particularly useful about what should be done about them. This may be intentional, as in "my intent is to just raise the questions, not answer them," or it may be a function of professional *sloth*, or a failure of professional *courage*, as in "Companies should set up ethical review boards to advise them regarding... (socially pernicious technology X)." The techno-ethical literature to date rarely concludes that the development or use of any particular technology is ethically or morally impermissible; rather, it suggests ethical principles which, if followed, would allow a corporation to claim that its technology is being *used ethically*. Unsurprisingly, noted techno-ethicists populate the corporate advisory boards that they recommend be established. See an example at **DN 90** following.

⁹⁰ Dr. Shannon Vallor is the Baillie Gifford Chair in the Ethics of Data and Artificial Intelligence at the University of Edinburgh's Edinburgh Futures Institute. She has a PhD in philosophy from Boston College. Her current research involves the impact of "... artificial intelligence, robotics, new social media, surveillance, and biomedical technologies" on "the moral and intellectual habits, skills and virtues of human beings." She served as "Consulting Ethicist for AI" at Google. In 2015 she was awarded the World Technology Award in Ethics by the Worth Technology Network, a public relations front for the global tech community with a membership that includes AT&T, 23&Me, DARPA, Dow Chemical, Mitsubishi, Uber, Virgin Galactic, Richard Dawkins, Elon Musk, Peter Thiel and Mark Zuckerberg. In her book, *Technology and the Virtues* (2016) Vallor identifies twelve virtues that she believes should be cultivated and brought to bear as we proceed to build our technocentric world: honesty, self-control, humility, justice, courage, empathy, care, civility, flexibility, perspective, magnanimity, and technomoral wisdom. At no point in her definition and discussion of these virtues and how they might apply in real situations is there anything that the aforementioned Messrs. Dawkins, Musk, Thiel and Zuckerberg would not be able to wholeheartedly applaud.

⁹¹ I'm compiling a short inventory of key authors, texts, university programs and other resources that focus on the development and teaching of virtue ethics today. It's not yet ready to include in this attachment. The leading academic center for virtue ethics in the United States is University of Notre Dame. The textbook *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* by William C. Mattison III (2008), is a representative example of a college-level moral theology text using virtue ethics as its foundational framework.

⁹² Rhodes and Lysaught (2020) say that while many people take MacIntyre's thought to be inherently conservative, in truth MacIntyre remains deeply informed by Marx and indeed is committed to "...a radical pedagogy dedicated to the creation of thickly-engaged communities of virtue capable of resisting the fragmenting, isolating and vicious forces of capital." Rhodes and Lysaught recount the sorry history of neoliberalism and its impact on indigenous, poor and working class communities, as well as its degrading, oppressive culture of superficial consumption and competition across all sectors. They report that in his most recent book, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016), MacIntyre argues that the possessive individualism of capitalism has left modernized societies unable to ground moral theory in anything other than *utility* and *human rights*. Such a depauperate grounding generates a morality of what MacIntyre calls *expressivism*, in which individual self-expression is understood to be the highest human good, and which, of course, leaves the core moral questions of human life unanswered and thus eventually ends in nihilism. Rhodes and Lysaught note that MacIntyre opposes the bureaucratic, state-centric political order that real existing Marxist regimes have historically affirmed, and that he insists, rather, on the Catholic social principles of

subsidiarity, distributism and solidarism. Rhodes and Lysaught conclude that MacIntyre's full body of thought complements, integrates well with and can strengthen efforts such as those inspired by Paulo Freire's radical pedagogy (1970) and the many grassroots community organizing movements worldwide, including both the *comunidades de base* initiatives in Latin America, Africa and Asia and what the authors call more generally "communities of practice" – e.g., congregations, neighborhood associations and local chapters of state and national movements - in North America, the Eurosphere and other more developed regions.

⁹³ In the years since its founding in 2007 the International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry (ISME) has compiled and maintained an extensive bibliography of works by and about Alasdair MacIntyre and his work, supported and publicized books and other texts on MacIntyrean themes by its own members, and has held an annual conference. Founder and current general secretary Kelvin Knight is Director of the Centre for Contemporary Aristotelian Studies in Ethics and Politics (CASEP) at London Metropolitan University. The ISME describes its membership as a cross-fertilizing mix of Aristotelians, Thomists and Marxists. As of 2021 the ISME bibliography listed 20 books, nearly 300 journal articles and over 220 reviews by MacIntyre, and over 1400 publications and 31 dissertations on MacIntyre and his work by others.

⁹⁴ Over the past decade many young people and others in the United States and other countries in the West have undergone what might properly be called a moral conversion or transformation in which such virtues as the commitment to *diversity, equity, inclusion* and *justice* have become strongly embraced, espoused and lived. To these might be added virtues of *prudence* and *temperance*, or, more contemporaneously, *precaution*, with regard to the use and exploitation of the natural world. A young person was recently quoted in the *New York Times* saying that "We regard ourselves as the first moral generation." [Citation needed.] This might strike many older persons as presumptuous but it's indicative of the intensity of the desire for moral clarity and commitment felt by many young people and others today. The intense moral commitment of these young people would seem to be compatible with much of virtue ethics, for example in their concern for character formation and habituation. A difficulty is that a significant portion the current diversity/equity/inclusion/justice constituency appears to be disaffected concerning both religious belief and institutional religion. For many young people religion is at best another failed belief system half-heartedly left to them by the Boomers. And for some sectors of the movement the institutions of religion are past and continuing vehicles of racism, sexism, homophobia and colonialism.

II.E. Selected Relevant Teachings in Catholic Moral Theology

⁹⁵ The concept of human dignity motivates much of the Roman Catholic commitment to social justice and human rights, including its opposition to poverty, hunger, racism, torture, sex trafficking, capital punishment and more, as well as its opposition regarding the "life issues" of abortion, euthanasia, embryo and fetal tissue research, heritable human gene-editing, human cloning and the like. Catholic moral theology understands these concerns to be part of a consistent *ethic of life*, the metaphorical "seamless garment" suggested by Joseph Cardinal Bernadin (1984).

⁹⁶ For several decades bioethicists committed to both a pro-choice position on abortion and research and applications involving the destructive use of human embryos have sought to portray the concept of human dignity as vague, subjective, "mercurial" and otherwise unsuitable as a ground for ethical judgment. To an important extent they've succeeded, as the phrase "human dignity" is now largely understood among bioethicists and their adjacent communities, including many in the media, as a marker of anti-choice values. This is unfortunate for at least two reasons. First, it erodes a widely shared moral concept that serves as a foundation of universal human rights, among secularists and well as believers; and second, it plays into the hands of those working to promote an objectivist and instrumentalized understanding of human life, as part of a transhumanist socio-political agenda.

⁹⁷ The nature and proper use of conscience is contested. For traditionalists, one's conscience will gently but firmly point the way to actions that accord with the good, and with which the magisterial teachings of the Church are by definition always aligned. Liberals mostly concur, but leave room for situations in which a deeply, faithfully and prayerfully informed conscience could counsel a person to act in ways that might seem to be at odds with at least

some interpretations of Church teachings. See May (2003) and Mattison (2008) for mostly traditionalist interpretations and Bretzke (2004) and Gula (1989) for mostly reform interpretations. An interpretation by Grisez (1989), although grounded in traditionalism, incorporates elements that might be expected to appeal to liberals.

⁹⁸ The traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy are:

The seven corporeal works of mercy

1. To feed the hungry.
2. To give water to the thirsty.
3. To clothe the naked.
4. To shelter the homeless.
5. To visit the sick.
6. To visit the imprisoned & ransom the captive.
7. To bury the dead.

The seven spiritual works of mercy

1. To instruct the ignorant.
2. To counsel the doubtful.
3. To admonish the sinner.
4. To bear patiently those who wrong us.
5. To forgive offenses.
6. To comfort the afflicted.
7. To pray for the living and the dead.

The corporal works of mercy are taken from Isaiah 58, Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew and Tobit 1:16-22. The spiritual works of mercy are taken from throughout the New Testament and Psalms. These lists were first compiled and represented in works of art in early medieval times. Such reasonably short lists, taught to children, referenced in homilies, and made graphically compelling, played an important role in largely pre-literate communities.

⁹⁹ The injunction to perform the corporeal works of mercy has been among the strongest motivators of the immense Roman Catholic domestic and international charitable enterprise.

¹⁰⁰ In the decades since Vatican II the spiritual works of mercy have come to be commonly invoked as motivation for liberalizing a wide range of Church practices. For example, pastors who allow communion under circumstances that might otherwise be regarded as contrary to Church teaching might understand their actions as acts of mercy.

II.F. A Note on the Situation in Catholic Moral Theology Today

¹⁰¹ For an account of the state of Catholic fundamental moral theology at the recent turn of the century see Keenan (2006). He surveys major interests, developments and trends, as well as divisions and the attempts to heal them. As an illustration of continuing division he cites the “extraordinary exchange” between influential Cardinal George Pell and Jesuit Father Frank Brennan, both of Australia. In 1999 Pell said that “Catholic teachers should stop talking about the primacy of conscience. This has never been a Catholic doctrine...”. Brennan responded by asking how we could ever expect to find the objective truth were we not obligated to do so by the primacy of conscience. Other exchanges followed. In 2003 Pell raised the ante: “In the past I have been in trouble for stating that the so-called doctrine of the primacy of conscience should be quietly dropped. I would like to reconsider my position here and now state that I believe that this misleading doctrine... should be publicly rejected.” The exchange escalated at least through 2005.

[NB: In 2018 Cardinal Pell was convicted in Victoria Australia country court on charges of sexual offence, but the conviction was overturned in 2020 by the Australian High Court. An independent investigation by the Vatican into

the allegations was terminated upon the High Court's ruling. For sympathetic accounts of Pell's case see this [compilation of articles from *First Things*](#). For critical accounts see [Collins \(2019\)](#).]

¹⁰² Continuing intra-Church tensions surfaced visibly in the 2014-2017 controversy over liberalizing the Church's rules concerning communion for the divorced and remarried. Second marriages are not recognized by the Church, and because of this a remarried Catholic is considered to be living in a state of adultery and is not permitted to receive Holy Communion. This prohibition is unpopular in the United States and in much of the rest of the global North, and elsewhere. Lipka (2015) found that 62% of U.S. Catholics believe communion should be available to remarried Catholics. Shortly after his election in 2013, Pope Francis initiated a process to review this and other Church practices regarding marriage and the family. Two Synods of Bishops, each one month long, were held at the Vatican in 2014 and 2015, and at the conclusion of the second a report was released. This report informed the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* promulgated by Pope Francis in March 2016. From beginning to end this process was marked by controversy. A set of liberal bishops wanted blanket allowance for the divorced and remarried to receive communion, and a somewhat larger set of conservative bishops wanted no liberalization at all. Of the remaining bishops a significant majority were open to limited liberalization. Situations like this are typically resolved through informal negotiations and eventual agreement on a mildly revised policy that can be affirmed with near unanimity. In this case that didn't happen. The Church's teachings on the indissolubility of marriage were first propounded not by theologians or by the pope or even by a Vatican Council, but by Jesus: "What God has joined together let no man pull asunder." (Matt 19:6). Authoritative teaching at this level does not obtain with regard to a great many other highly contentious practices. Priests were not formally prohibited from marrying until 1139 CE at the Second Lateran Council, and the papal decision of 1968 to prohibit artificial contraception in marriage is for all intents contemporary. There is nothing in the Gospels, much less from the lips of Christ Jesus, that explicitly addresses such practices. But for marriage and divorce there most certainly is. For many conservatives, then, changing the practice regarding communion for divorced and remarried Catholics would not only open the door to the entire liberal reform agenda (see **DN 103** following), it would be an unprecedented strike at the heart of the legitimacy and authority that has sustained the Church for over 2000 years. In the ensuing controversy, complete with charges that the Pope was committing heresy, all sides were left dissatisfied. *Amoris Laetitia* addressed the question of communion for divorced and remarried Catholics from multiple perspectives and ended with language that could be interpreted by different bishops in different countries in different ways. Core questions were left unresolved and significant sectors of the Church leadership and laity were left feeling defensive, on edge and wary. For more see Dulle (2021), Douthat (2019), Biliniewicz (2018), *National Catholic Reporter* (2018), and Buttiglione (2016).

¹⁰³ Douthat (2019) argues that the controversy over the 2014-2015 Synod on the Family and *Amoris Laetitia* was important not only in itself but even more so for what it portends regarding the future of the liberal/reformist vs. conservative/traditionalist split within Catholicism. He suggests that when initially queried, reformers profess desires for no more than limited exceptions to Church practice so as to allow faithful Catholics who find themselves in extreme situations a way to participate fully in the life of the Church. But if queried a bit further, Douthat says, these same reformers gladly share their full wish list: divorce and remarriage within the Church, approval of same-sex marriage, approval of last rites for suicides, intercommunion with Protestants, and welcoming new interpretations regarding such topics as the Nicene Creed, the nature of the sacraments, and the divinity of Jesus. Douthat is charging the reformers with bad faith.

¹⁰⁴ Douthat (2021) notes that while the conventional conservative/traditionalist vs liberal/reformist framing roughly maps the terrain of the top strata of the political landscape of Catholicism today, there exist several emerging schools of Catholic thought, currently motivating debate mainly among the lower-strata intelligentsia, which could come to drive the development of Church politics over the rest of this century. He names and describes these emerging schools as the **1) Populists**, who support the welfare state and traditional religious and family values, who are of mixed opinion regarding immigration, and who see no problem in affirming both their American nationalism and their Catholic faith; **2) Integralists**, who are *anti*-nationalist, see Christendom as our

proper political destination, and are strongly traditionalist regarding Church doctrine and practice; **3) Neo-benedictines**, who advocate the creation of small communities of the faithful with minimal links to the dominant secular society so that we can raise children ready and able to spread the Good News after the dominant society has collapsed; and **4) Tradinistas**, who combine devout 19th century Catholic triumphalism with radical left-wing political-economic distributism and selected elements of left identity politics, including gender identity politics. Douthat notes that these four schools of thought are permeable, unstable and in flux. All four emerging schools hold mostly conservative positions on marriage and the family and are mostly skeptical of the net merit of global free-market capitalism. They tend to differ most dramatically on issues of social and political structure and governance, of both the nation and of the Church. See Addenda IV.A.2 of this Attachment for more.

¹⁰⁵ Fordham University moral theologian Charles Camosy describes himself as strongly pro-life but makes clear that he does not identify as politically conservative and is not a Republican.

#

III. CATHOLIC POLITICAL THEOLOGY, THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS AND PRACTICE

[These sections are in preparation]

III.A. Key Concepts and Brief History [in preparation]

BOX G-2. SELECTED KEY POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DOCUMENTS

The development of what is now called Catholic social teaching can be understood through study of noted encyclicals and other key papal and magisterial documents promulgated over the past 150 or so years. Some particularly key documents are shown here.

Before 1891

Social teachings are grounded in the moral teachings, which in turn are grounded as discussed in XXX above, reading back to sources in the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, the Fathers of the Church, and the Scholastics.

Leo XIII [1878-1903]

1891 - *Rerum novarum* (Of the New Things)

Pius XI [1922-1939]

1931 – *Quadragesimo anno* (In the 40th Year)

John XXIII [1958-1963]

1961 – *Mater et magistra* (Mother and teacher)

1963 – *Pacem in terris* (Peace on earth)

Second Vatican Council [1962-1965]

Paul VI [1963-1978]

Second Vatican Council [1962-1965]

1965 – *Gaudium et spes* (Joy and Hope) - *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*

1967 – *Populorum progressio* (The Development of Peoples)

1968 – *Humanae vitae* (Human life)

* 1968 - Bishops Council of Latin America (CELAM): Medallin

* 1971 - Justice in the World – World Synod of Bishops

1971 – *Octogesima adveniens* (The 80th Anniversary)

1975 – *Evangelii nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World)

John Paul II [1978-2005]

1981 – *Laborum exercens* (Through Work)

1991- *Centesimus annus* (The 100th Year, i.e., after Rerum Novarum)

2004 - *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*

[prepared by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP)]

Benedict XVI [2005-2013]

2009 - *Caritas in veritate* (Charity in Truth)

2011 – “Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of World Political Authority” [Prepared by the PCJP].

Francis [2013-present]

2013 – *Evangelii Gaudium*: (The Joy of the Gospel)

2015 – *Laudato Si*: (Praise Be to You)

III.B. Distributism and Solidarism

III.B.1. Distributism

Distributism was a political-economic school of thought that arose in the late 19th century and sought to offer an alternative to both *laissez-faire* capitalism and bureaucratic state socialism for the growing industrial world. It was grounded in Catholic social teachings, notably those promulgated by **Pope Leo XIII** in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Distributism attracted considerable attention in the first two decades of the 20th century, mostly in the United Kingdom. Interest faded with the onset of the Great Depression and Second World War. From the post-war period to the present date Distributism has been largely forgotten. A fair assessment might judge it to have been an idealistic but completely impractical proposal, out-of-step with the real, existing felt needs of labor, industry, and the general public at the turn of the century and after, a time of intense economic growth and development.

Distributism is worth a brief review for two reasons. The working paper suggests that a world of economic justice, ecological integrity and technological responsibility will likely require a religious or religio-philosophical foundation, and Distributism is an example of such a religiously-grounded socio-economic system. Secondly, although it was impractical at the time of its formulation, it could arguably be more suitable for a world of little or no economic growth. The point here isn't that early 20th century Distributism as such serve as a model, but that elements of it might have something to contribute.

The core tenet of Distributism is that the means of production should be owned and operated by as large a proportion of the workforce and populace as possible. This would take the form of producer and consumer cooperatives, small proprietorships, professional and artisanal guilds, employee stock ownership plans, employee profit-sharing agreements and the like. Credit unions would be favored over commercial banks. Industrial organization could take a variety of forms, but a common element would be that appropriate syndicates, collectivities and councils made up of representatives of the leading productive sectors would be responsible for ensuring the efficient and fair running of the economy. In some proposals these collectivities would in addition have a role in general governance as well.

An important principle that informs Distributism is the principle of **Subsidiarity**. It holds that social, political, economic and other tasks and decision-making should be handled at the most local level possible, and should be taken over by higher levels of hierarchy only when a lower level cannot carry out a task, or make a decision, effectively. Here is Pearce's (2014) conservative version of the principle of subsidiarity: "... a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good." A liberal or communitarian version might emphasize the welfare gains that could be realized if authoritative decision-making by a higher level of a given hierarchy was able to coordinate and allocate a larger stock of resources more efficiently, while maintaining accountability.

Brief History

The first hints of distributist thinking arose almost in tandem with the rise of industrial capitalism, the emergence of an industrial labor force, and the formal understanding capitalism and socialism as political-economic ideologies. An early thinker was the early 19th century French Catholic scholar **Frederic Ozanam**, who anticipated many of Karl Marx's insights into the dynamics of labor and capital by almost a decade. A second was **Baron Wilhelm von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz**, an indefatigable public intellectual, social reformer and elected parliamentarian, who early on articulated a Catholic case against capitalism. A third was **Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster Henry Edward Manning**, an early and lifelong proponent of Catholic social action in Great Britain.

These and others advocated working in collaboration with the emerging progressive forces of the period in support of economic and social justice, thus putting them at odds with the reactionary Catholic "integralists" present in much of the Church hierarchy.

This progressive Catholic presence throughout the early and mid-19th century laid the foundation on which **Pope Leo XIII** later based his move to re-integrate Catholicism into the modern world as it had developed since the Enlightenment. His encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, promulgated in 1891, affirmed a full program of progressive labor measures addressing wages, hours and working conditions; supported private property but said that it needed to be widely distributed; declared that firms deserved a fair profit but that consumers deserved fair prices; and said that workers were justified in forming unions to balance the bargaining power already possessed by firm owners, and, importantly, that workers had the right to strike if all other attempts to reach agreement failed. It placed the dignity of the individual, and individual conscience, at the core of social justice, and affirmed that the proper purpose of the State to be that of promoting the Common Good.

Beginning at the turn of the century, and for the next two decades, the noted British authors **G.K. Chesterton** and **Hillaire Belloc** took the social teachings of *Rerum Novarum*, along with other encyclicals and papal documents, and prepared the coherent political-economic narrative of Distributism. They formed the Distributist League, which eventually had chapters throughout the United Kingdom, began a journal, advocated for social and labor reform legislation, and published a stream of commentary, opinion, books and more over this period.

Distributism gained new support with the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, but a major campaign to have the Labour Party adopt the distributist philosophy failed. From that point Distributism as a movement became an eddy in the far larger and turbulent flow of Twentieth Century history.

Distributism was taken to the United States in the 1930s by the French Catholic radical **Peter Maurin**, who presented it to **Dorothy Day** as consistent with both her radical economic values and her traditional Catholic faith, and it became the founding political-economic ideology of the **Catholic Worker** movement. In the mid-1950s the Basque Catholic priest **José María Arizmendiarieta** used distributist ideas in establishing the cooperative **Mondragon Corporation**, which today has nearly 75,000 owner-employees. The economist and Catholic convert **E.F. Schumacher** showed the influence of distributist thinking in *Small is Beautiful* (1972) and other writing. More recently, **Ross Douthat** and **Reihan Salam** acknowledge that their book *Grand New Party* (2015) was written “in the distributist tradition.”

Distributism has been criticized as a romantic, impractical scheme strongly influenced by Anglo-Catholic nostalgia for an imaginary organic, peaceable and pre-Reformation Middle Ages. It has been criticized by socialists for accepting the institution of private property and commercial markets, by capitalists for its call that these be strongly regulated in the interests of an ill-defined Common Good, and by both socialists and capitalists for its grounding in pre-Enlightenment values and ideals.

A major criticism is that a distributist political economy would be a static one. Incentives for technological innovation and economic growth would be strongly constrained. It was proposed at a time when previously unimaginable economic growth and beneficent technology was for the first time understood by mass populations as being within the grasp of them or of their children.

If at some future date economic growth and technological innovation are no longer either possible or desirable, or both, approaches to political economy of the sort advanced by the Distributism might find ready new audiences.

Sources: For sympathetic accounts of Distributism see Pearce (2014) and Matthews (1999). For accounts that emphasize the compatibility of Distributism with current business-conservative interests see Callahan (2016) and Mulford (1924). For a critical account of Distributism from the political right see Woods (2002). For other resources and current developments see the website [The Distributist Review](#). For an engrossing and meticulous account of the engagement of Catholic intellectuals with the political tumult of the 19th and early 20th centuries see Corrin (2002). For source texts see Hillaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (1912) and *An Essay on the Restoration of Property* (1936), and G. K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity* (1925) and “Relections on a Rotten Apple” (1935).

III.B.2. Solidarism

Solidarism refers most generally to a political-economic perspective that emphasizes the organic complementarity of societal groupings rather than the differences that set them against one another. Like Distributism, Solidarism derived from the social teachings of the Catholic Church in the late 19th century. Also like Distributism, it captured the attention of those looking for an alternative to both laissez-faire capitalism and collectivist/statist socialism. However, Distributism seeks to minimize or eliminate the objective *existence* of “Labor” and “Capital” as oppositional forces, by ensuring that productive resources are distributed, and owned, as widely and as equally as possible. Solidarism, by contrast, accepts the existence of Labor and Capital, but calls for a mix of social, political and economic innovations that would enable/compel them to consult, coordinate and bargain in ways that would leave everyone feeling that justice has been done and the common good well served. Further, in Solidarism the State plays a crucial role in mediating between Labor and Capital and helping in other ways to ensure the Common Good. Distributism, on the other hand, is just as wary of State power as it is of Corporate power and looks to free and empowered individuals to craft their associational lives as free of State interference as possible. Many of the Distributist innovations, along with the tenets and principles that justify them, are shown in **BOX G.2b-1** below.

The leading theorist of Solidarism was the German Catholic priest and economist Fr. Heinrich Pesch S.J. (1854-1926), whose 13-volume *Lehrbuch Der Nationalökonomie* (1926) is a *tour-de-force* of distributist political economics grounded in Catholic social teachings and Natural Law. Solidarism did not develop into a movement, even a small one, as Distributism did. But Pesch’s work is widely believed to have closely informed Pope Pius XI’s important encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), and the work of other Catholic thinkers, mostly in France.

BOX G-3. SOLIDARISM – SELECTED PRINCIPLES

- 1) Solidarism rejects both naked individualism and brute collectivism in favor of the common good.
- 2) An inherent and general solidarity extends to all persons by virtue of their common humanity.
- 3) Workers and employers in the same economic enterprises share a particular solidarity, and thus have many interests in common.
- 4) Workers and employers have competing interests as well; unions are necessary to represent workers.
- 5) If solidarity is nurtured, employers and workers will engage in a spirit of enlightened self-regulation.
- 6) If such self-regulation breaks down, the state will serve as final guarantor of fair and just agreements.
- 7) Markets are natural institutions for facilitating beneficial exchange; however, their operation needs to be consistent with overriding values of human dignity.
- 8) Economic solidarity depends upon the proper shaping of the human soul and the virtues of justice and charity. These, in turn, require serious religious commitment and sound family life.
- 9) Hyper-competitive economic capitalism serves to degrade rather than support sound family life.
- 10) Solidarism strongly affirms the institution of private property, but such property can never be separated from the obligation of its social use. Property rights are not absolute.
- 11) Large economic institutions take on a semi-public character, and are thus properly subject to special state regulatory oversight.
- 12) Solidarism rejects socialism (i.e., state ownership of the means of production). Rather, it aims for *economic socialization* (i.e., an economy that works to the benefit of all).
- 13) Solidarism affirms the *universal destination of created goods*, i.e., the belief that God has given humanity the bounty of the earth’s resources for all to partake of and for the benefit of all.

- 14) Solidarity affirms the *principle of subsidiarity*: care of the needy should be the responsibility of those closest to those in need, i.e., family, church and local community. If these are truly unable to provide the help needed, successively more resourceful religious, charitable and public sector institutions – state, national and international - must ensure that the needy receive the help they need.
- 15) Great disparities of income and wealth are inconsistent with justice and human dignity. Decisions and agreements made throughout the economy and society should ensure that such disparities are kept below levels that would undermine economic and social solidarity.
- 16) Solidarity affirms the need for a just wage, i.e., one sufficient for a family to live in dignity. If neither market forces, nor employer-union agreements, can generate and ensure such wages, the state is responsible to serve as final guarantor.
- 17) Solidarity affirms the need for just pricing, i.e., prices that cover costs (including just wages) and provide the entrepreneur, merchant or trader a reasonable profit.
- 18) Taxes should be levied in accordance with ability-to-pay; public expenditures should be made only for purposes that serve the common good.
- 19) Trade policies often impose great suffering on some parties while others experience great benefits. Solidarity rejects the claim that such policies are desirable because the *total* income generated is greater. Trade policies should allow affected parties to adjust over time and without great hardship.

Sources: Krason (2014), Williams (1981), Corrin (2002).

III.B.3. Selected Readings on Distributism and Solidarity

Belloc, Hillaire. 1912. *The Servile State*.

Belloc, Hillaire. 1936. *An Essay on the Restoration of Property*.

Callahan, Gene. 2016. "Distributism is the Future." *The American Conservative*. 11 April.

Chesterton, G. K. 1925. *The Outline of Sanity*.

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Corrin, Jay P. 2002. *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Krason, Stephen M. 2014. "Rediscovering Heinrich Pesch and Solidarity." *Crisis Magazine*. January 1.

Matthews, Race. 1999. *Jobs of our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society: Alternatives to the Market and the State*. Irving, Texas: The Distributist Review Press.

Mulford, James. 2014. "Distributism isn't outdated." *The American Conservative*. 13 November.

Pearce, Joseph. 2014. "What is Distributism?" *The imaginative Conservative*. 12 June.

Williams, Rosalind H. 1981. "Solidarity, an Answer to Reagan Darwinism." *New York Times*. 2 July.

Woods, Jr., Thomas E. 2002. "What's Wrong with Distributism." *Mises Daily Articles*. 6 October.

III.C. CURRENT FOCUS, ACTION AND CHALLENGES [in preparation]

III.C.1. The Social Teachings of the Church today [in preparation]

BOX G-4. FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

There is no branch of Catholic theology or teaching dedicated uniquely to social, economic and political concerns. All of Catholic moral theology might be regarded in some sense as “social,” as it involves how God wants and invites people to act, both individually and collectively. But particular documents, notably including those shown in **BOX G-2**, are recognized as providing guidance concerning social issues, in the broadest sense. The topics addressed in these documents can be associated with selected foundational principles or themes. Three sets of such principles and themes are shown here.

Seven Principles – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – 1996

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family, Community and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God’s Creation

Ten Principles – Fr. William J. Byron, past President, Catholic University of America – 1998

1. Human Dignity
2. Respect for Human Life
3. Association
4. Participation
5. Preferential Protection for the Poor
6. Solidarity
7. Stewardship
8. Subsidiarity
9. Human Equality
10. Common Good

Byron says all the myriad positions, endorsements, etc. of the USCCB can be fit within these 10 principles. (Which in turn can be traced back to biblical, patriarchal, traditional and/or magisterial sources.)

Nine Themes – Thomas Massaro, SJ. *In Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*. 2016.

1. The Dignity of Every Person and Human Rights
2. Solidarity, Common Good and Participation
3. Family Life
4. Subsidiarity and the Proper Role of Government
5. Property Ownership in Modern Society: Rights and Responsibilities
6. The Dignity of Work, Rights of Workers, and Support for Labor Unions
7. Economic Development and the Legacy of Colonialism
8. Peace and Disarmament
9. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

III.C.2 Committed Action and Challenges [in preparation]

IV. ADDENDA TO ATTACHMENT G.1

IV.A. Summary Outlines

IV.A.1 Meador's "Six Strategies for Christianity and Culture."

The young Christian writer Jake Meador (2017) describes six strategies, grounded in distinguishable political theologies, that believers might adopt vis-à-vis political commitment in the United States today.

Catholic Integralists reject the idea of the separation of Church and State, holding that although the two have separate and distinguishable domains and responsibilities, the temporal power is ultimately subservient to the spiritual power. This holds because the purpose of temporal political life is to best order and prepare humankind for eternal spiritual life. Catholic Integralism is thus associated with the anti-liberal and anti-modernist papal teachings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is not inconsistent, of course, with its strong support for economic justice, the rights of workers, minorities, immigrants and refugees, national health care, social security and anti-militarism. In the U.S. the Catholic Church strongly downplayed Integralism as part of its 20th century push to be accepted as a loyal participant in the American democratic way of life. Networks of reactionary integralists are among those actively opposing Pope Francis. There are also much smaller networks of left-wing integralists, including those associated with *Tradinista!*

Post-Liberal Protestants agree with Integralists that the temporal is subservient to the spiritual, but don't support a single centralized papal ecclesial structure. Post-Liberal Protestants see the mission of the institutional church as one of assisting individuals in developing their own personal relation with Christ and in living in accord with God's plan. The temporal order plays its own larger role in the securing of material goods and more generally material well-being. It does so through decentralized overlapping structures: the family, the neighborhood, the municipality and so on, and the farms, the small firms, the professions, the corporations and the market itself.

Post-Liberal Retreatists differ from the Post-Liberal Protestants in that they don't have much enthusiasm for, or confidence in, the affairs of civil society or of temporal/political work in general. They have no serious objection to *participating* in the temporal world – indeed, it's necessary to do so on some minimal level, if only to ensure that religious freedoms are not constrained – but the goods of most importance are spiritual goods accessed through religious practice with the assistance of the institutional church. Most advocates of **the Benedict Option** would be considered post-liberal retreatists.

Radical Anabaptists go the distance and seek to formally withdraw, as much as possible, from secular, temporal society, which they see as degraded and doomed. They believe that the institutional church is, in fact, the true and only *polis*, and will someday prevail as such. Noted American Anabaptist communities include those of the **Amish**, the **Mennonites**, the **Hutterites** and the **Bruderhof**. To varying degrees they live in community at some geographic remove from the outside world, hold some or all property in common, refrain from voting or running for public office, refuse military service, seek to lead materially frugal, egalitarian lives, and live without modern technologies that they believe are unnecessary and distracting.

Liberal Protestants differ from their Post-Liberal Protestant colleagues in remaining convinced that a pluralist social order and civil society is not only possible but desirable. Liberal Protestants see civil society, informed by faith but not directed by it, as a necessary part of God's plan. Christians, non-Christians and non-believers are all welcome, as are, very importantly, those of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Liberal Protestants also emphasize the important role of personal conscience and individual freedom in a way that many Post-Liberals, Anabaptists and Integralists tend not to. The risk, of course, is that such emphasis on conscience and freedom can be a slippery slope to relativism and eventually indifferentism, at which point continuity becomes problematic. Liberal Protestantism is the predominant political theology of the leadership of the mainstream protestant denominations today, e.g., many of those affiliated with the **National Council of Churches**.

Liberal Revanchists are in part what remains of the 1980s-90s activist religious right as well as newer thinkers, constituencies and political leaders who believe deeply in the American Project and in their ability to reclaim and revive it. They share with Liberal Protestants a commitment to conscience and individual freedom, but argue that without a commitment to core Christian beliefs and practice, conscience and freedom will be rootless and subject to drift and dissipation, which in turn could be occasion for the State to step in and squelch conscience and freedom wholesale. Although their leadership was divided Liberal Revanchists at the congregation level played a key role in the presidential election victory of Donald Trump.

IV.A.2. Summary of Douthat's four emergent schools of Catholic Intellectual enquiry

Douthat (2021) recognizes that most American Catholics understand current internal struggles within Catholicism through a conventional conservative/traditionalist vs liberal/reformer framework. However, he says, just to the side are four emergent schools of Catholic intellectual thought that cut across existing divides and over the coming decades have the potential to reshape the map of contention. They are:

Populists welcome the Trump-era shift of conservatism as a corrective against libertarian republicanism, even as they differ concerning Trump as an individual. They support strong federal government programs and industrial, trade and immigration policies that bolster the working classes and the traditional family. They support antitrust action and sanctions against economically exploitive and culturally libertarian Big Tech. They favor an aggressive culture war that takes on such targets as transgender ideology and internet pornography. Although often considered post- or anti-liberal, their populism is best seen as “a solidaristic and religious correction *within* the liberal order.” They have been supporters of Catholic Marco Rubio, Protestant John Hawley and Mormon Mitt Romney.

Integralists see liberalism as inherently flawed and they emphatically reject the liberal order. They harken back to an age of Catholic throne-and-altar triumphalism, dominion and empire. They are calling Catholics back to the true and only Catholic politics, no longer distracted by the errors of nationalism, including Americanism, and ecumenism. They support nationalist politicians like Trump and Viktor Orban as part of a short-term strategy, preferring illiberal nationalism to liberal internationalism. They align with Populists on pro-family economics but are divided on immigration; and with Francis on saving God's Creation e.g. *Laudato Si'*. Current program includes defending the Church's legal rights and judicial power over the faithful. They believe in strong state power and revolution from above. Favored figures include The Josiahs, Francisco Franco, Saint King Louis IX.

Neo-benedictines are those attracted to Rod Dreher's program outlined in *The Benedict Option*: Small, localist, cooperating communities of believers, somewhat to markedly separate from the corrupting dominant liberal secularist society and culture, growing the strong family, community and religious roots ready to flourish when the current order collapses. They have little faith in today's public sector or national secular institutions, and only marginally more in national religious institutions, which have presided over their own marginalization and dismantling. There is frequent overlap on doctrinal topics with populists and integralists. But they are comfortable ecumenically, reaching out to e.g., Brandon McGinley, Leah Libresco Sargeant, Stanley Hauerwas, The Bruderhof, Wendell Berry and Stanley Hauerwas. For the *Benedict Option* see 4.C.1. below and for Deneen see DN ____.

Tradinistas join strongly conservative positions on the life issues, church governance and liturgy with strong left-wing positions on economics, the environment, foreign policy and secular politics in general. They oppose both nationalism and the nation-state. They applaud the recent revival of socialism and the campaigns against white supremacy, homophobia and transphobia. At the same time, they are “not interested in the Boomer-liberal project of accommodating Catholic teaching to the sexual revolution.” They are sometimes allied with populists and others on economic issues. Favored figures include Dorothy Day, Alisdair MacIntyre, Herbert McCabe and Elizabeth Bruenig. See the *Tradinista Manifesto* at IV.C.3 below.

IV.A.3 Dreher's Account of the 700-year Decline of Western Christianity

Dreher (2017) says that the Western medieval world was “wracked with suffering but pregnant with meaning,” while the present West is “a place of once unimaginable comfort but emptied of significance and connections.” He gives an account of this 700-year transition, here summarized/edited/modified:

14th c: The long-standing theological doctrine of *metaphysical realism*, in which God interpenetrates and gives meaning to all Creation, is replaced by *nominalism*, in which God created and reigns over Creation, but in which the *meanings* of objects and actions in the material world depend on what humanity assigns to them. Although the theologians understood this shift as one that *exalts* God, leaving Him less tied-down to base, mundane matter, it set in motion the modern philosophical separation of the transcendent world from the material world.

15th c: The Renaissance dawns with a new, optimistic outlook on human potential and begins shifting the West's vision and social imagination from God to man.

16th c: The Reformation breaks the religious unity of Europe. In Protestant lands it generates an unresolvable crisis in religious authority, which over the coming centuries allows repeated schisms.

17th c: The Wars of Religion end with creation of the Westphalian nation-state system, in which sovereign states take the religion of their prince. Thinkers and leaders exhausted by the 125+ years of war, and impressed by the success of the Scientific Revolution in using reason and empiricism to identify law-like relationships in the natural world, wonder if reason and empiricism might be applied to political, social and religious quandaries as well, and with better results than the princes, generals and religious leaders have had. Adoption of Cartesian body/mind dualism further alienates humankind from the natural world.

18th c: The Enlightenment moves from a worldview in which the spiritual and the material are mutually present and empowering, to one in which the material predominates, to one in which only the material exists. Reason, science, technology, individualism, materialism, democracy and capitalism capture the minds of many of the most talented. Religion is confined to a back-water and often turns reactionary.

19th c: The Industrial Revolution uproots rural masses and throws them into cities and factories. Cash transactions increasingly mediate relationships. “All that is solid melts into air.” The Romantic movement rebels against this alienation, but does so under banners of individualism and passion. Atheism spreads among elites. Support for Marxist-influenced progressive social reform spreads among the educated upper middle classes and many others.

20th c: Horrific back-to-back world wars damage faith in the gods of reason and progress and in the God of Christianity. Technology and mass consumption play larger and defining roles in life, as do liberalized norms of sexual and expressive behavior. The satisfaction of individual desire becomes the core of an emerging new social order.

IV.B. John Milbank: Radical Orthodoxy, Post-Liberalism, Governance, Policy and Politics

IV.B.1. Edited Summary of What is Radical Orthodoxy?

1. It denies that there is a sharp division between reason and faith or reason and revelation, and regards such notion as a deviation from earlier views. It believes that human nature can only be fully understood with reference to our supernatural destiny, and human knowledge with reference to divine illumination.
2. It considers that the world can only be fully understood as a participation in divine being, truth, goodness and unity. Inversely it believes that the world as partially restored through grace gradually discloses to us the nature of the Godhead, without ever allowing us to comprehend it.
3. The realm of culture, language, history and our technological interactions with nature also belongs to this participatory ascent. The realm created by human beings is not incidental to the truth, nor is it a barrier against it. Human *poesis* participates in the divine *verbum*, the Son of God. Likewise human social exchanges participate in the divine *donum*, the Holy Spirit. Through these processes nature also comes more fully to herself.
4. Theology issues in theurgy, a co-operation between human and divine work, which is nonetheless entirely the work of God. Attempts to think about God are superseded in the supreme work of human making and exchange which is the liturgy. Here a collective human action invites the divine descent.
5. Radical Orthodoxy is influenced by Postmodern thought, but at the same time contests it. Postmodernity discloses a nullity at the heart of things. Radical Orthodoxy accepts that there are no foundations and that there can be no finite certainty, but reads this as an invitation to refer time to eternity. Truth is possible for us because we participate by an act of faith in this infinite truth.
6. Without God people see only nullity, they regard death as more real than life. Body gets hollowed out and abstraction becomes the true permanent reality. Only a belief in transcendence and participation in transcendence actually secures the reality of matter and the body. Radical Orthodoxy affirms both the body and rising to the source of body.
7. Participation in God implies a participation between humans and nature and between humans and humans. Salvation is both cosmic and communal. It aims at a liberation of nature from distress and at a fully harmonious interaction between humans and the natural world. It encourages democratic participation and socialist sharing based on a common recognition of true virtue. It regards the Church as foreshadowing the Kingdom.

[A summary of criticism of Radical Orthodoxy is in preparation.]

IV.B.2. Section Summaries of *The Politics of Virtue* (Milbank & Pabst)

Millbank and others have offered analyses and suggestions concerning the shape of politics, policy and governance informed by the perspectives of Radical Orthodoxy, Post-Liberalism, Virtue Ethics and the Common Good. Key texts include:

Theology and the Political: The New Debate by Creston Davis, John Millbank, Slavoj Zizek, eds. (2005)
Beyond Secular Order by John Millbank (2013)
The Politics of Virtue by John Millbank and Adrian Pabst (2016)

These books together contain both critique (“The Metacrisis”) and concrete policy proposals. In this note I summarize the policy proposals; I hope to summarize the critique later. For convenience I use the chapter topics used in *The Politics of Virtue*. They are:

- A. POLITICS: a) The Metacrisis of Liberalism b) The Post-Liberal Alternative
- B. ECONOMY: a) The Metacrisis of Capitalism b) The Civil Economy Alternative
- C. POLITY: a) The Metacrisis of Democracy b) The Mixed Constitution Alternative
- D. CULTURE: a) The Metacrisis of Culture b) Culture as Formation
- E. WORLD: a) The Metacrisis of Nations b) Commonwealth, Culture and Covenant
- F. Conclusion

SUMMARY STATEMENT: The triumph of the economic liberalism of the right and the social liberalism of the left has left the developed world bereft, adrift and dangerously unstable. To recover we now need to draw upon “two older and nobler traditions: a combination of honorable, virtuous elites with greater popular participation, a greater sense of cultural duty and hierarchy of value and honor, alongside much more real equality and genuine creative freedom in the economic and political realms,” along with “a newly mutualist approach to both domestic and foreign affairs that substitutes for the dominance of market, state and technocracy the primacy of society, culture and interpersonal relationships.”

A. POLITICS: THE POST-LIBERAL ALTERNATIVE

1. Post-liberalism and the Common Good – “[P]ost-liberalism suggests that a more universal flourishing for all can be obtained when we continuously seek to define the goals of human society as a whole and then to discern the variously different and in themselves worthwhile roles that are required for the mutual achievement of these shared aims.” Contemporary liberalism has only a thin, rhetorical commitment to the common good (e.g., as the sum of individual utilities), but a deeper “faith in the common good promotes the plural search for shared ends.” The process and results of this search are not obvious, which is why it is “precisely the inherited wisdom of tradition that gives us some intimation of their nature.” The Common Good entails concern for: “(a) a culture of honor, (b) community as the combination of virtue with gift; (c) true socialism; (d) political pluralism; and (e) genuine corporatism.

2. Honor and Ethos – Under liberal capitalism political and ethical power is increasingly being used in ways that are *socially criminal*, even if technically within the law. We need “... a business ethos that eschews financial gain as the sole motivation” for business and commercial activity.

3. Virtue, Gift, Community – In contrast to liberal exchange that relies largely on market, contract and right, virtuous post-liberal exchange would expand use of *the gift*, e.g. between individuals, families and communities. Some gifts would be part of ritual exchanges associated with long-standing relationships.

4. *Socialism and Common Decency* - Liberalism adopts a pessimistic and cynical view of human nature and seeks to control, manipulate and channel it towards acceptable ends. Post-liberalism emphasizes the common decency of humans and our desire to work in cooperation with others when encouraged by right socialization and lifelong community-wide, mostly non-governmental, institutional support.

5. *Political Pluralism and Constitutionalism* – Constitutionally protected corporate bodies (e.g., manufacturing and trading guilds, coops, unions, ecological groups, free cities, profit-sharing businesses, universities, village colleges, NGOs) mediate between the individual and the sovereign center.

6. *Person, Corporation, Distribution* – The inherent dignity of the person is upheld in extra-legalistic ways, via personalism, corporatism, subsidiarity and distributism, which all reinforce one another. Together with (5) above, these establish *Megalopolis*, an “interlocking, nested union of cities, regions, nations and commonwealths.” *Megalopolis* is distinguished from left-liberal *Cosmopolis*.

B. ECONOMY: THE CIVIL ECONOMY ALTERNATIVE –

1. *The Civil Economy Tradition* - We must re-visit the 18th century “civil economists,” e.g. philosopher-priest Antonio Genovesi, who rejected the foundational self-interest of Anglo-Saxon and French economics and stood “in a more classically humanist and Christian tradition,” with a richer model of human nature, e.g. giving a central role to our inclination to *reciprocity*.

2. *Civil Economy and Catholic Social Thought (CST)* – Combines “Renaissance exaltation of the creativity of human labor with a neo-medieval sense of constitutional corporatism that is...*mutualist* in character.” Labor is the dynamic factor in the economy: Worker participation, worker control, worker well-being.

3. *Building a ‘Civil Economy’ today* - Many policies and reforms have been urged by religious, labor and civic leaders for decades. These include measures addressing a) just wages, just prices, just distribution of assets; b) anti-usury and equitable risk-sharing reforms; c) stronger unions, free guilds, vocational training, apprenticeship programs; d) stronger political-economic corporatism (e.g. stronger co-determination *a la* the German practice); e) the primacy of land, locality and craft; and f) fostering virtuous enterprise (in the long run via deep cultural change and in the short term through tax and similar incentives). See also the notes on *Distributism* and *Solidarism* in Attachment G.1.

4. *Dealing with Debt* - Adopt a combination of debt forgiveness, fiscal discipline, creative restructuring and debt/equity swap programs.

5. *Fair Wages, Just Prices, and the Distribution of Assets* – Wages, prices, and profit-sharing among workers, shareholders and consumers should be arrived at via ethical negotiations; all should have opportunities to be stakeholders in all enterprises. Ownership of capital must be more widely distributed. Establish a living wage and similar income support and equity policies.

6. *Mutualizing Welfare* - Universal adoption of national healthcare following German, French and Scandinavian models, jobs for long-term jobless, retirement benefits, education, parental leave, etc.

7. *Achieving Vocational, Academic and Artistic Excellences* - Reorient education to provide life-long learning. Increase status and prestige for vocational and certificate study.

8. *Professional Associations and Competition* – Take stronger action against monopolistic and other practices that restrain trade or give some members inappropriately larger profit shares than others.

9. *Shared Value and Good Business* – Encourage/require businesses to consider the wider set of values that their products impact, and to incorporate these into all deliberations on products or prices. Firms should be discouraged from moving their operations overseas.

C. POLITY: THE MIXED CONSTITUTION ALTERNATIVE

1. *Renewing Mixed Government* - We need a proper mix of “the one” (*executive*: monarch/president), “the few” (*virtuous elites*: aristocracy/civic leaders) and “the many” (the people/proletariat). Liberal Western democracies today “oscillate between debased popular will” and self-serving alliances of the executive and the oligarchy against the people.

2. *A New Federal Settlement* - Devolution and subsidiarity are key; local government, including at the neighborhood level, should be strengthened. In the UK the central government should devolve many powers to the regional level of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: Mercia, Northumbria, Wessex, Sussex, etc.

3. *Crown and Polity* – Of today’s top 20 countries rated by quality-of-life, 16 are monarchies. In most countries with monarchies the Crown is held in high regard. The monarch can uniquely help uphold the Common Good; can help prevent oligarchy; and can reinforce the sanctity of labor, land and life.

4. *The Political Role of Aristocracy* – Aristocracy should follow virtue, not descent, but parental influence can be among the greatest forces for imparting virtue (and evil, if wrongly used). The tie of aristocracy to the land, and to preserving and protecting it for the Common Good, is key. The aristocracy should be democratized to include smaller landholders at the local level.

5. *The Political Role on Monarchy* – Monarchs can help ensure a high-quality civil service as both are usually life-long roles, whereas elected executives and legislators have fleeting terms. The role of the Privy Council and Royal Commissions should be enhanced, but should include members from all walks of life.

6. *Restoring Parliament* - The upper house (Lords/Senate) should be an *associative* body, including representatives of faith communities; towns/cities/counties; professions (e.g. physicians, nurses, teachers); notables from e.g. the arts, sciences, armed forces, business and hereditary peers, focused on ecological guardianship.

7. *Restoring the State as also the Church* – [In the UK] “... Church and state represent distinct polities in their own right and... both co-constitute the public realm to which all citizens belong.” An established Church unites and strengthens both. A strengthened local parish structure and a larger public role for the Church on e.g. social and economic concerns helps the entire society to flourish.

8. *Defending Democracy Non-Democratically* - The corporatist and associative reforms suggested above are needed because “Under the guise of representative democracy that sees no legitimacy in anything but itself, an unrepresentative and *non-virtuous* oligarchy tends to be established in power.”

D. CULTURE: CULTURE AS FORMATION

1. *Politics as Formation* - “Liberal education is profoundly de-humanizing because it does not integrate the spiritual and the material [and makes] the accumulation and alteration of the latter the default point of reference...” We need education & culture, *formation*, that integrates & reunites the spiritual & the material.

2. *Eudaimonia and Paideia* – The Enlightenment derived economic and political order from “the benign blending of rival self-interest.” We need to revive the more optimistic view of both Platonic-Aristotelian antiquity and of the Christian Middle Ages of all nature, human and otherwise, as oriented towards harmony.

3. *Education into Virtue* – “Both educators and governors need to be primarily seekers after *virtue*... Authentic education would both pass on a tradition *and* encourage individual expressivity from the outset... Our natural desire to know the transcendent Good ensures that we can to some degree realize it.”

4. *Beyond Liberal Boredom* – The cultural materialism of liberalism, in league with the materialism of financiers, generates a spiral of cheap variety followed by boredom followed by cheaper variety and so on.

Post-liberal culture “is at once subtly intellectual and practical, a fusing of art with craft and linked to every sort of daily, weekly, seasonal and religious ritual”.

5. *Ethos and Equity* – “...the promotion of justifiable hierarchy... can ensure that an egalitarian politics... pursues an overall leveling up rather than a dumbing down... Rather than imposing centralized control, a more ‘personalized’ government would grant under license the performance of public functions to bodies of persons or to collective persons.”

6. *Re-forming Formation* – Liberal education today serves the needs of the market economy and its tenders. We need reforms that will restore and expand the dimension of guidance in virtue. The authors offer 18 proposals, involving devolution of authority from higher levels to lower levels, restoration of classical educational forms, reducing use of digital technology, increasing education in the trades, and more. The authors also propose increasing the autonomy, budgets, faculty salaries, adult educational programs and more of faith schools established by the various religious denominations.

7. *Against Secular Barbarism* – To sustain “the genuine Western legacy” we need to “revive, more democratically, its archaic idiom.” “We need both the mysticism of the individual soul and the spiritual and liturgical community of souls...” We also need “... a new and dynamic re-induction into virtue in order to save humanity from the post-humanist nightmare of bio-robotic rule and help to restore the cultural primacy of the living, yet always technically supplemented and, thereby, rational human person.”

E. WORLD: COMMONWEALTH, CULTURE AND COVENANT

1. *Europe: Death and Resurrections* – Europe has declined under globalization. The alternative to chauvinist nationalism or abstract cosmopolitanism is *commonwealth, culture and covenant*. Formal covenants of reciprocal support and sharing could unite the UK, the EU, the British Commonwealth, the US, other former colonial possessions, Russia and elsewhere. London is the intersecting hub of these circles.

2. *Empire as Commonwealth: The Primacy of Association* – Kant thought that nationalism and warfare were inevitable until humanity had matured and build “cosmopolitan commonwealths.” But people are united by more than nationality; they share language, culture, religion and more. These could ground a world of *associational* commonwealths, more functional and more realistic than Kant’s cosmopolitan vision.

3. *Re-Injecting Christian Realism into IR* – Prior to WW2 European and US international relations had a strong Christian component, at first explicit and then implicit. After WW2 our IR work was strictly secular and focused on security and economic development. This has failed, and many countries are seeking stronger spiritual grounding. Re-introducing elements of Christian Common Good theory into IR will help build stronger associational ties among both Christian and non-Christian countries.

4. *Western Foreign Policy in a World of Resurgent Empires* – There is still an important global role for Britain to play. Britain *knows how to govern*, at all levels from the parish to the empire, and has avoided both “the liberal tyranny of democratic despotism and the reactionary tyranny of authoritarian state capitalism.” This knowledge can help the world build “a shared and beautiful *Megalopolis*.”

5. *Covenant and Commonwealth* – Security for Europe requires a) a greater, more effective role for the EU to ensure internal security; and b) the security and well-being of those outside the EU. This latter will require long-term agreements, including military agreements, among Europeans, the US and others.

F. CONCLUSION: Pabst and Millbank suggest that the latent support for post-liberalism is very broad but acknowledge that it has not yet developed an organizational activist or political presence. They conclude that “...post-liberalism needs to become a broader cross-class and cross-cultural movement promoted by the churches, other faith traditions and civic groups such as Citizens UK or Occupy.”

IV.C. Communities

[introductory notes]

IV.C.1. The Benedict Option

Writer Rod Dreher came to public attention in 2006 with his book on “crunchy conservatives,” whom he described as mostly religiously traditionalist and politically conservative, but laid-back, anti-consumerist and otherwise almost counter-cultural in lifestyle, more aligned with, say, environmentalists and the Grateful Dead than with Pat Buchanan or George W. Bush. Dreher and his family are practicing Eastern Orthodox Christians, having converted from Roman Catholicism after disillusionment with the institutional Church following the pedophile and cover-up scandals of the 1990s.

In *The Benedict Option* (2017a) Dreher argues that the culture wars of the last 4-5 decades are over and that the religious conservatives have lost and the secular liberals have won. He says that instead of fruitlessly trying to hold back the on-rushing flood of materialist, anti-Christian secularism with tattered sandbags, faithful Christians should make a strategic retreat. They should gather together to build sturdy arks able to float high above the rising waste waters of Western liberalism. This period of retreat should be used to deepen the religious understanding and commitment of the faithful and their children. When the waters recede, their descendants – how many generations removed we can’t say - will be ready and able to re-engage the world and serve as seeds of integrity, humility and strength in helping revive a distraught and battered humanity. As iconic inspiration, Dreher looks to St. Benedict of Nursia, the aristocrat-turned-monk who in the 6th century established the network of monasteries throughout Europe that served as safe harbors of light and learning during the period of barbarian kingdoms and general economic and social collapse.

The nuts and bolts of Dreher’s proposal are mostly fairly modest. He calls on committed traditionalist Christians to worship and socialize together, and to provide mutual assistance in raising and educating their children. He suggests that families come together in community at least once a week in addition to Sunday worship. He recognizes that this sort of community-building is easier if families live in geographic proximity, but he doesn’t call for the establishment of isolated communal living along the lines of, say, the Amish, Bruderhof or some Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. The families he introduces as committed to a Benedict Option vocation appear to be mostly young, educated, middle-class suburban professionals. Dreher strongly urges that less attention be given to partisan politics, but he doesn’t advocate a complete withdrawal from civic life, and in fact encourages it on the local community level. He recommends restricting the time spent in front of screens and on social media. His strongest suggestions concern catechesis and education overall. He says that if a group of Christian families can’t find a suitable traditionalist parochial school within geographic reach, they should consider either starting one or committing to home-schooling. Finally, he says that traditionalist Christian families will need to be prepared to suffer for their convictions. As religious belief and practice become increasingly socially constrained, these families will suffer in the job market, be unable to attend many institutions of higher education, and perhaps find aspects of their religious belief newly in violation of local, state or federal statutes.

Reaction to Dreher’s proposal has been mixed at best. Many church leaders, and especially liberal ones, simply don’t share Dreher’s sense of crisis. Others, especially conservatives, share Dreher’s sense of crisis but not his strong claim that the culture wars have been lost. Some say that faithful Christians have an *obligation* to remain active in public affairs, no matter how challenging that might be. See **BOX G.1-2** for additional criticisms.

The families that Dreher presents as seeking to live along the lines he suggests seem to have come to their vocations prior to and independently of Dreher’s writing on the topic. It remains to be seen if publication of the book, and the considerable interest that Dreher has generated, inspires more families to choose this path.

The Benedict Option is relevant to this working paper outline because the degree of commitment called for, and many of the particulars of the lifeways that Dreher sketches, may be what are needed for a world of economic justice, ecological integrity and technological responsibility to be achieved. It would need to happen in a manner that both non-Christians and non-believers would find compelling as well.

BOX G-5. CRITICISMS OF *THE BENEDICT OPTION*

- Dreher neglected to mention the African-American religious tradition in the U.S. and the many traditionalist/conservative values it shares.
- Dreher seems to suggest that traditionalist Christians should neither participate in nor support the immense national and international network of Christian charities, and should focus instead on nurturing themselves and helping their immediate neighbors. But this is short-sighted, as Christianity is widely admired for its extensive domestic and global charitable commitments.
- David Brooks (2017) says that although he admires much in Dreher's *Benedict Option*, a better alternative would be *Orthodox Pluralism*.
- Many religious liberals criticize the lack of attention given by Dreher to the importance of challenging war, poverty and racism. They also criticize the particular attention he gives to the issue of same-sex marriage.
- Dreher argues that the Church and American society were mutually supportive from the Colonial period until the 1970s, but that since then American society has become secular and in fact *anti-Church*. Some on the Christian left respond that America has *never* been fully aligned with Christian values, and cite slavery, economic injustice and Hiroshima as examples.
- Although Dreher draws heavily on MacIntyre's criticism of American secularism and materialism, he ignores MacIntyre's Marxist-informed critique of capitalism.
- The Benedictines and other monastic orders of the early Middle Ages didn't simply withdraw from the world; rather, they skillfully *resisted* and helped shape the emerging order of feudal Christianity.
- Dreher neglected any mention of the religiously traditional but politically radical activist Dorothy Day, herself a Benedictine oblate.

Sources: see selected commentary below.

A Note on Classical Christian Education, and on home-schooling:

The Benedict Option as presented by Dreher puts great emphasis on childhood and young adult religious and general education, for all the obvious reasons. Traditionalist Christian families have recognized this for some time. Many new schools are offering "Classical Christian Education," and long-established schools are offering tracks that are partly or wholly classical Christian. Curricula vary. Many are roughly structured on the three Biblical themes of *Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. *Truth* is approached using the tools of the classic Trivium: grammar, logic and rhetoric. *Goodness* is taught on-the-job, so to speak: students are responsible for helping one another with assignments, maintaining the school grounds, serving and eating lunch with attention to the full meaning and experience of healthy eating, including saying grace. And *Beauty* might be taught through performance, e.g., *a capella* participation by all at the beginning and close of the day.

[Notes on the growth of Christian and other religious home-schooling and traditional schooling are in preparation.]

The Benedict Option (cont)

Selected Commentary on *The Benedict Option*

By conservatives:

Brooks, David. 2017. "[The Benedict Option.](#)" *The New York Times Opinion*. 14 March.

Doak, Emile. A. 2017. "[Christian Thinkers Gather to Denounce Benedict Option.](#)" *The American Conservative*. 17 July.

Prior, Kay Swallow. 2017. "[The Benedict Option: What it is and isn't.](#)" *Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention*. 14 March.

Reno, R. R. 2017. "[Benedict Option.](#)" *First Things*. May.

By liberals:

Beaty, Katelyn. 2017. "[Christians have lost the culture wars. Should they withdraw from the mainstream?](#)" *Washington Post*. 3 March.

Breunig, Elizabeth Stoker. 2017. "[City of Rod.](#)" *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*. 1 March.

Camosy, Charles C. 2017. "[The 'Benedict Option' is Not Enough.](#)" *Crux*. 26 April.

Williams, Rowan. 2017. "[The Benedict Option: a new monasticism for the 21st century.](#)" *New Statesman*. 30 May.

Responses from Dreher to commentary:

Dreher, Rod. 2017b. "[On Not Understanding the Benedict Option.](#)" *The American Conservative*. 14 March.

Dreher, Rod. 2017c. "[Why Christians need to embrace the Benedict Option.](#)" *Catholic Herald*. 28 April.

Dreher, Rod. 2017d. "[Do We Need the Benedict Option? Yes, says Bishop.](#)" *The American Conservative*. 19 April.

New Yorker profile of Dreher:

Rothman, Joshua. 2017. "[Rod Dreher's Monastic Vision.](#)" *The New Yorker*. 1 May.

IV.C.2. People of Praise

[Brief description – further discussion in preparation]

People of Praise is a Christian “base community” organization that provides community support, fellowship, spiritual direction and service opportunities to its members. It’s ecumenical, although the great majority of members are Roman Catholic. Established in the early 1970s, its roots are in the Pentecostal-influenced Catholic charismatic renewal of that period. In 2018 it had 21 chapters in the US, Canada and other countries, and ~ 3000 members world-wide.

Those interested in joining People of Praise begin as “underway” members. After 3-6 years those who wish to make a lifetime commitment can become “covenanted” members, and pledge to “...serve one another and the community as a whole in all needs: spiritual, material, financial.” Members and member families typically live in proximity. Single members often share residences. Members participate together in regular programs of religious study, witness, prayer and acts of community service. People of Praise has established the non-denominational Trinity Schools, which offer full middle and high-school education for grades 7-12 and draw on elements of classical Christian education. Members participate in a wide range of international activities largely through international Catholic charismatic institutions.

People of Praise is run by an 11-person board of governors, the members of which select one of their number as Director. Directors cannot serve more than two consecutive six-year terms.

All People of Praise members have a special relation with a person designated as their “head.” Members consult with their heads on any and all matters of concern, including personal, spiritual, vocational and more. Members are expected to follow the guidance of their head, although the organization emphasizes the importance of freedom of conscience and explicitly eschews authoritarianism.

People of Praise appears to encourage a number of patriarchal practices. Members are taught that husbands are the head to their families, and women cannot serve as Director.

People of Praise would appear to be a striking instance of a Benedict Option community as advocated by Rod Dreher.

People of Praise came to national attention in late 2017 when one of its members, Notre Dame law professor Amy Coney Barrett, was nominated by President Trump and confirmed by the US Senate to the Federal Court of Appeals, and again in summer 2018 when Barrett was mentioned as a possible candidate for appointment to the US Supreme Court.

For more on People of Praise see [their website](#) and the [many resources](#) included on their Wikipedia entry. See also [Graham \(2018\)](#).

IV.C.3. A *Tradinista!* Manifesto (2016)

Tradinista! brings together a form of radical devolutionary distributivist socialism, strongly traditionalist Catholic moral and ethical teachings and ecclesial structure, and strongly integralist Catholic political theory.

A headline summary of the *Tradinista!* manifesto, *In Nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, dated 23 September 2016, is shown below. For the full text and commentary see [here](#).

“We believe that all human institutions ought to render to every person what they are due: this is the meaning of justice. Since the end of mankind is holiness, it follows that he is due by nature the ability to move towards this end as easily as possible. A just society, then, is one in which mankind can easily advance towards the True, Good, and Beautiful and receive aid on his quest for holiness. Similarly, an unjust society inhibits the development of holiness and persecutes those who seek it. We are a small party of young Christian socialists committed to traditional orthodoxy, to a politics of virtue and the common good, and to the destruction of capitalism and its replacement by a truly social political economy. Our program is summarized in the following 20 points.”

1. Jesus Christ is the way, and the truth, and the life, who became man for the salvation of all.
2. Political authority ought to promote the teachings of the Church.
3. The goal of political authority is to create a good and virtuous people.
4. Political authority must be decentralized as far as possible.
5. Economic life should be ordered to the common good.
6. Capitalism must be abolished.
7. Class society must be erased.
8. Livelihood should not depend on the market.
9. Every person has a right to property.
10. Worker cooperatives should be strongly encouraged.
11. Racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and similar forms of oppression must be eradicated.
12. Marriage and family life should be specially supported by the polity to promote the common good.
13. Abortion is a horrifying crime which must be eradicated immediately.
14. Anthropogenic climate change threatens the common good of all mankind, and must be fought.
15. We reject nationalism and the nation-state.
16. Warfare is justified only by careful moral analysis.
17. All societies should generously welcome migrants fleeing hardship.
18. In everything possible, we stand with the poor and the marginalized.
19. We strive toward a genuine polity animated by Christian socialist principles.
20. Liberalism is failed, and we must move beyond it.

Amen.

The *Tradinista!* Collective

IV.C.4 Tradistae

<https://tradistae.com/about/>

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