

Review Essay

by William E. May

Moral Theology after Humanae vitae: Fundamental Issues in Moral Theory and Sexual Ethics

by **D. Vincent Twomey, SVD**

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Moral Theology after Humanae vitae is highly recommended for everyone concerned with the state of moral theology in the Church today. Rev. Vincent Twomey, emeritus professor of moral theology at the Pontifical College of St. Patrick, Maynooth, Ireland, is a former student of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's and has been profoundly influenced by his thought.

The book has two parts, the first on moral theory and the second on sexual ethics.

Chapter 1: "The Cultural Background"

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the entire book, offering an overview of the cultural background to the contemporary moral crisis—a crisis that both deeply influences moral theology and contributes to the desacralization of sex in secular society. In developing the major ideas of this chapter, Twomey finds the work of Christopher Derrick, Christopher Dawson, and Oliver O'Donovan helpful in diagnosing what has gone wrong, and the work of Bertrand Russell and Isaiah Berlin helpful in illustrating it.

Derrick points out that the real significance of the difference between Catholic sexual ethics and modern permissiveness can be understood only if grasped on the level of religion, of what is sacred as opposed to what is profane. A hatred of procreation and of the flesh, in particular of the female body and its generative power, is at the heart of the sexual revolution and the political movement by the developed Western nations to impose "family planning" (contraception), including abortion, on other nations (21–22).¹

Dawson, writing in 1932, stresses that Western civilization was passing through a crisis essentially different from anything that had occurred previously.² In the past, European (i.e., Western) civilization rested on the institution of marriage understood as a permanent union, which made families possible as permanent social units. Marriage was thus supported by a network of strong moral and religious sanctions, which protected society from becoming mechanical and ensured that the state's economic organization could not absorb citizens' lives.

More recently, those seeking to reconstruct society regard marriage as a temporary arrangement to satisfy sexual desire and provide companionship. This, Dawson recognizes, was compounded by the "new morality" of Bertrand Russell and others, which was based on individualistic emotivism and relativism. As a result, Dawson observes, "we have to choose between two contradictory ideals—on the one hand, that of traditional Christian morality, which finds its most complete expression in Catholicism—and on the other, the ideal of a purely hedonist morality, which involves unrestricted freedom in sexual relations and the reorganization of marriage and the family" (25).

Because Dawson thinks that the greatest barrier to understanding the Church's teaching on marriage and sex is the technological mentality of modern civilization, Oliver O'Donovan's analysis of that mentality is particularly valuable.³ O'Donovan, an Anglican moral theologian, believes that the single most important characteristic of

contemporary culture is “not anything that it does, but what it thinks; it is not ‘technological’ because its instruments of making are extraordinarily sophisticated . . . but because it thinks of everything it does as a form of instrumental making” (28–29). The result is that we cannot understand that some human activity is “natural.”

As Twomey notes, “this has enormous repercussions for . . . moral theology,” which is based on the natural law that arises from our human nature as persons whose bodies are as integral to their being as are their souls, who are “communal in nature and destined for union with God” (29). In the practice of medicine today, for example, freedom is not limited even by our own bodies. O’Donovan observes that we have come to think that “medical technique ought to be used to overcome not only the necessities of disease but also the necessities of health (such as pregnancy)” (30). We must acknowledge, for example, the woman’s right to free herself from the slavery of procreation, her freedom of self-determination with respect to her own body. Such freedom—“the freedom of consumers . . . to be left alone to do, to think and choose as one wishes,” as Twomey describes it—in turn destroys public life and debate, for it gives rise to a freedom of conscience that is only private. One cannot exercise this freedom in public affairs, because that would be to force private convictions down other peoples’ throats (31).

Twomey concludes thus: “What concerns us is the existence of a criterion to measure [human] actions or decisions and feelings, . . . a measure that transcends all particularity of personal situation or cultural context” (39). This measure is the natural law.

Chapter 2: “Some Fundamental Considerations”

Twomey’s fundamental considerations are human nature, natural law and the role of passions, and conscience. He first shows the fallacious thinking of theologians who contrast a so-called static, or “classical,” worldview with the dynamic or “historical” one, according to which latter view human nature changes radically, and who, because

it does so, conclude that there are no intrinsically evil acts that are proscribed by absolute, exceptionless moral norms.⁴ This view is incompatible with both faith and reason.⁵ The denial of a common human nature is at the heart of the contemporary “crisis of truth.”⁶ A similar claim—that cultural changes require one to conclude that the moral teachings of Scripture are no longer true—is also incompatible with faith and reason. Against this relativistic skepticism, the Church affirms that truth is universal, “though it emerges in history under specific cultural conditions” (44). Thus, though it is expressed in different languages, in different cultures, and at different times, it “both transcends and forms history and culture; consequently, truth is, in principle, accessible to all and relevant at all times” (44).⁷

The anthropology that separates the “person,” understood as the consciously existing subject, from his or her own body is central in the thought of situation ethicist Joseph Fletcher as well as that of theologians like Louis Janssens, who claim that Church teaching is a form of physicalism, biologism, or naturalism (47).⁸ The Church’s teaching itself presupposes *the unity of the human person*, whose rational soul is *per se et essentialiter* the form of his body. The Church proposes the natural law, understood as “the rational order whereby man is called by his creator to direct and regulate his life and actions and in particular to make use of his own body” (48).⁹ This law is universally understood,¹⁰ but it is also deepened and clarified by “that faith which recognizes all creation (including the human body) as the work of the Logos, Divine Reason, and so carrying within itself . . . a set of meanings that man can discover and to which he must freely conform if he is to be reasonable, that is, true to himself and reality, and so true to God, but also free in the sense of experiencing genuine liberation” (49).

Twomey says that our “consciousness of the basic rudiments of natural law” can be understood as “primordial conscience,” because of which “we can distinguish between good and evil” (53).¹¹ In human persons, natural law is the work of “practical” reason and is understood by the Church as the interpreter of

the higher reason that is the Wisdom of God, “the eternal reason of the Creator and Ruler of the Universe” (54). Because of our fallen nature, practical reason, in discerning good and evil, needs to be aided by divine revelation and by faith.¹² The natural law is by no means individualistic but is common to all men because they share a common human nature and are social beings living together in society. Our moral sense is both “innate in our ‘primordial conscience’ and acquired (through social intercourse beginning at our mother’s knee)” (54). But sin, original and personal, at times hinders that awareness, and men frequently abuse their freedom by choosing to do what they know is wrong. Thus, an essential mission of the Church is to clarify the demands of the Decalogue and resist the false meanings mediated by human cultures affected by sin.¹³

Natural law is implicitly dynamic insofar as it is “open to that transcendent perfection which is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and which in turn reflects the dynamism of the moral life of each individual infused with grace, which perfects human freedom by making total self-giving possible” (55), as Jesus made clear in his teaching.¹⁴ But natural law and human passions are not opposed; most theologians after publication of *Humanae vitae* failed even to consider how human passions are related to virtue, a matter critically important for Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. C. S. Lewis, recovering the great insights of Augustine, emphasized how the acquisition of virtue puts order into our lives and enables us to integrate our passions and emotion¹⁵ into ourselves as rational beings, so that we can establish harmony between our reason and our feelings (emotions, passions) and judge whether we ought or ought not to “feel” as we do. This echoes the advice given centuries ago by Plato and Aristotle—that the goal of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. When our feelings and emotions run wild, morality becomes relative and moral objectivity is repudiated.

In some preliminary remarks on conscience, Twomey criticizes the legalistic and rationalistic understanding of conscience

common to the legalist moral tradition prior to the Second Vatican Council, which was preoccupied with “the rights of an erroneous conscience” (60). This understanding gave rise to the claim that personal conscience means we are free to choose our own moral principles, and led to a “theology of compromise” by which Church teaching is understood as an unattainable ideal.¹⁶ This understanding of conscience is at odds with Scripture and the teaching of Aquinas, and was repudiated by John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor* (n. 59). Twomey notes that Ratzinger identified “primordial conscience” with what Twomey describes as “our innate consciousness of the natural law which has to be ‘formed’ in dialogue with one’s religious tradition—in our case, that found in Church teaching” (63).¹⁷

In his conclusion to this chapter, Twomey affirms that the first chapter of *Veritatis splendor* provides the necessary background to natural law and conscience: “The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man. It is a response of love. Thus the moral life, caught up in the gratuitousness of God’s love, is called to reflect his glory” (64, quoting *Veritatis splendor* n. 10).

Chapter 3: “The Crisis in Moral Theology”

The current crisis in moral theology is a crisis of the Church’s authority in moral issues. It began about forty years ago and acutely sharpened after the publication of *Humanae vitae* in 1968, when “for the first time ever, the fundamental principles of moral theology were radically questioned by theologians” (67). This crisis reflected and deepened the crisis in Western civilization described in chapter 1. Twomey points out that the crisis began with the rise of nominalism in the fourteenth century and became radicalized under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism. More recently it has been embodied in the pseudoscientific technical mentality that confuses making with doing and reduces morality to personal preference, which has paralleled the emergence of contemporary atheism. All this has

led to contemporary emotivism, relativism, and utilitarianism in ethics in general, views that hold that a good-enough end can justify *any* means, including the destruction of tens of thousands of innocent noncombatants by atom bombs in order to “end” a war.

The magisterium and popes from Leo XIII to the present, including Pope Paul VI in *Humanae vitae*, have insisted that there are objective moral norms, including those that absolutely proscribe intrinsically evil acts, but their teaching has had little effect and has been widely ignored by dissenting theologians. Those theologians have posited a double magisterium, that of the hierarchy of pope and bishops united to him as opposed to that of theologians, and have affirmed the “right” of Catholics to dissent from the hierarchic magisterium’s teaching and put in its place a magisterium of the theological masters. Twomey shows that the appeal of these theologians to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council to support their claims is false and is contradicted both by the documents of the Council (e.g., *Lumen Gentium* n. 25) and by John Paul II’s *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Twomey thinks that one of the deepest roots in the current crisis in moral theology is the assumption “that submission to what the Church teaches must be based on acceptance of the *reasons* given for a particular teaching” (73, original emphasis). This reduces Church teaching to a theological opinion and confuses truth with knowledge.¹⁸ Moreover, “reasonableness” today has been reduced to a calculation of good and bad foreseen consequences (i.e., consequentialism, proportionalism) that serve to rationalize one’s behavior. Because of the personal and communal nature of human persons, there is need for an authority to settle disputes, and this need is made more acute because of the effects of sin—original, personal, and social.

Theologians, however, ought not simply repeat what they think the Church teaches. They have the difficult but indispensable tasks of developing and deepening the reasons for that teaching and addressing new challenges in its light. Too many have a legalistic mindset that limits Church

teaching to what is infallibly proposed, and dissenting theologians claim falsely that no specific moral teachings have ever been proposed infallibly.¹⁹ Most significantly, theologians who reject Church teaching reject the phrase “intrinsic evil,” denying that any human acts can be described as morally evil of their nature, irrespective of motivations or circumstances—a claim incompatible not only with Church teaching but also with the thought of Aquinas (77).

Twomey presents and explains in some depth John Paul II’s 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, in particular its reaffirmation of the teaching that human acts are specified primarily by their “object,” that some actions so specified are intrinsically evil and can never be done no matter what further good end might be produced. He also examines the Pope’s reasons for rejecting consequentialism and proportionalism, and his rejection of the notion of a “fundamental option,” which repudiates Church teaching regarding the nature of mortal sin (86).

Twomey now devotes two most important sections to the recovery of the passions and the recovery of virtue in moral theology. He finds the work of C. S. Lewis most helpful. Lewis emphasizes that morality is not something we acquire by scholarly reflection, useful and necessary as that may be, for morality is rather “caught” than “taught.” When Lewis was writing, World War II was raging in Europe, but Lewis perceives a greater threat to humanity in the denial of objectivity in morals and aesthetics arising from utilitarianism and rationalism. He recognizes that morality, which is the quality of our actions *and* feelings, is primarily about what have been called “habits of the heart” (88). These are moral dispositions generated by social intercourse and education while a person is young, before he attains the “use of reason” and while he is motivated primarily by his feelings. In affirming this, Lewis echoes the thought of Aristotle, who held not only that the virtuous person acts rightly but that his feelings must be right. Lewis declared, “Without the aid of trained emotions, the intellect is powerless against the animal organism” (89).

This prepares the way for Twomey to consider the recovery of virtue in moral theology, using the writings of Alisdair MacIntyre in philosophy and Servais Pinckaers, OP, in theology to help in this consideration. Twomey emphasizes that the virtues are concerned not with any particular human excellence but with the excellence of being a human being, and points out that the Greeks, long before Christianity, recognized “four dimensions of human excellence which are the hinges on which our humanity hangs” (94). Called the cardinal virtues by St. Ambrose, they are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These virtues, and the human persons whom they perfect, presuppose institutions (especially the family and the religious community) for their flourishing (95).

*Chapter 4:
“Toward a Renewal of Moral Theology”*

According to Twomey, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ushered in an era when virtue as the context for moral discourse entered the mainstream of moral reflection, thus marking “the beginning of what . . . the Second Vatican Council originally intended when the Council Fathers challenged moral theologians to undertake a radical renewal of their subject” (97). After summarizing the way the *Catechism* sets forth its understanding of the Christian moral life, Twomey offers a definition of moral theology as “the systematic reflection in the light of revelation, carried out within the existential context of the Church, on the nature of human behavior and the specific moral demands arising from our human nature now transformed in Christ. . . . It is about virtue and vice” (99).

Twomey thinks that moral theology as such occupies a “peripheral” but indispensable position in Church and society. To discover the “essential, as distinct from the existential, ‘peripheral’ standing of moral theology within the Church and society, we must take a closer look at the nature of virtue” (99). Twomey observes that to develop any inherent human capacity or talent, we need institutions or communities where such capacities and talents can flourish; thus, the first step in the development of human

capacity is submission to the authority of the tradition or community to which we belong, a process culminating in the achievement of excellence in the performance of some actions, in what the Greeks called *areté* and the Romans *virtus*. Twomey believes that this applies, with appropriate changes, to virtue in the strict sense. From this it follows that moral theology or philosophy is by nature remote from moral behavior but is indispensable. Before attempting to show why this is so, Twomey thinks “enough has been said for us to draw some initial conclusions about the nature of moral theology as . . . the systematic analysis of human behavior in the light of faith” (102).

First of all, the root of all morality is anthropology, or a vision of what it is to be human, and Catholic faith provides us with one—the truth about human existence in all its fullness as revealed by God himself. He is our origin, our goal, and the means to acquire that goal; Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. “Good actions are those that lead us to our goal by transforming us from within so that we achieve the transcendent fullness of our humanity, thus satisfying our deepest desire for happiness or beatitude. Faith is handed on in that structured community . . . we call Church through the entire sacramental matrix of its life, within which theology has its own limited but indispensable role arising from the nature of faith as ever seeking understanding” (102).

Aquinas held that the distinguishing mark of virtue is doing good with promptitude and pleasure, and the more perfect the action the more perfect the pleasure.²⁰ Thus, any full account of virtue cannot ignore pleasure and other passions (feelings) of the soul. Virtue ethics deals with our character or integrity as human beings; the virtues (prescinding from infused virtues) are acquired dispositions to do what is upright and just and to respond to good and evil. Over time, virtuous actions and appropriate feelings become “second nature” to us. Emotions and feelings are the “raw material” for good or bad dispositions (virtues or vices) fashioned over a long period; through our emotions we learn from our human environment, beginning with our

parents and family when we are children and extending to other people and institutions over time. Only in a limited way can morals be “taught,” and that is by clarifying what has already been “caught” by a child in such interactions.

Moral theory—systematic reflection on morality, virtues, and passions—is, however, a necessary condition for the flourishing of morality. Moral theology is the systematic reflection in the light of the faith in divine revelation handed on to us by the Church. Beyond the task of clarifying specific issues, moral theology must examine the great exemplars of heroic virtue, the saints who are, in a sense, the living “authorities” of tradition, demonstrating the heroism “ordinary” Christians can and ought to achieve in their secular tasks.

To complete what he considers one of the most pressing tasks for moral theology today, Twomey takes up the nature of moral knowledge, or practical wisdom. We have, he notes, “some common pre-understanding of what morality might involve. . . . The source of this pre-understanding would seem to be *synderesis* as distinct from conscience as prudential judgment” (107).²¹ He goes on to point out that “Joseph Pieper called it *das Urgewissen* or primal conscience, a notion taken up by Ratzinger, who . . . calls it *anamnesis*, our primordial memory of the true and the good arising from our being created in the image and likeness of God” (107).²² But this primordial conscience needs “the external stimulus of articulated truth . . . above all in the Church’s authoritative tradition.”²³

After distinguishing between speculative and practical reason, Twomey argues that “practical knowledge itself, though ultimately rooted in speculative knowledge, is that unique kind of knowledge we have in a particular situation as to what we ought to do there and then” (115).²⁴ Practical knowledge is in fact a virtue—prudence, the first of the cardinal virtues—which enables us not only to know and judge what ought to be done and then do it but also to judge whether our emotional reactions are fitting or not; it can be more easily cultivated and exercised in a community where certain actions (such as

adultery and stealing) are ruled out in all circumstances, and that community is the Church.

Moral theology, although peripheral to the exercise of the virtues, has an indispensable role in the Church and in the public realm (the state): “Within the Church, moral theology has the task of renewing the vision of what it means to be fully human and of clarifying specific moral demands that arise from . . . contemporary culture, including those actions that are intrinsically at enmity with our basic humanity and our final end . . . and which cannot even be entertained by a virtuous person” (120). Within the political community, or state, it has “the task of entering public debate and of witnessing . . . to the truth that alone makes people free” (121). In so doing, moral theology obviously reminds the state of its obligation to ensure the flourishing of its citizens and to respect the culture that gave rise to most of the laws of modern liberal democratic states, which “recognized God as the ultimate end of all human endeavor and Christianity as the authoritative witness to that end” (119).

In his epilogue to this chapter (122–124), Twomey describes the unity of the moral and spiritual life in the ultimate object of morality, which is holiness or sanctity: “Moral theology . . . will cease to be *existentially* peripheral to the inner life of the Church once moral theologians realize that what is truly ‘specific’ to moral theology is its humble (but daunting) role in helping to define . . . what constitute the moral conditions for the acquisition of holiness. All morality is finally measured by that goal” (122). And in a footnote there, he points to encouraging signs that this truth is being more widely recognized. In some concluding reflections on conscience, he returns to Ratzinger’s notion of conscience as *anamnesis* and to the need for the Church’s authoritative teaching to awaken this “remembering.”

*Chapter 5:
“New Attitudes to Human Sexuality”*

This first chapter of part 2 begins with the “Kosnik report,” which was commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society

of America in 1977 and published as *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* in 1978.²⁵ Twomey points out that in our critique of this work, Rev. John Harvey, OSFS, and I show that the understanding of human sexuality in the Kosnik report is rooted in a dualistic concept of the human person that separates the person, or conscious subject, from his own body, which is itself considered extrinsic to the human person's being.²⁶ The self, the person, is in fact seen as asexual; sexuality is equated with sexual activity that helps persons fulfill themselves, while procreation is considered accidental, a mere biological fact. This view is rooted in the ancient Gnostic-Manichaean understanding of sexuality and, as Twomey has shown in chapter 1, in the instrumental-rationalist approach to morality.

In his critique of the view that sex is a mere desire, Twomey effectively makes use of the work of Roger Scruton, Karol Wojtyła, and Dietrich von Hildebrand to show that human sexuality is essentially interpersonal: it is neither an appetite nor a need but a *mode or way of being* either male or female that, when awakened, reveals the other in his masculinity or her femininity. Sex or gender is thus not a mere biological fact but a personal attribute. It is a dynamic tendency orienting us to a person of the opposite sex, fulfilled in self-giving and rooted ultimately in the drive to continue the human species.

Turning his attention to the relationship between love and procreation, Twomey first refers to Wojtyła's philosophical analysis of the sexual urge, which Wojtyła describes in *Love and Responsibility* (1981) as more basic than our psychological and physiological attributes. With its dynamic toward completion in a person of the other sex, it tends naturally to develop, through acts of free choice, into a love in which the other is affirmed and valued for his or her own sake. But its final end, its existential significance, Wojtyła declares, is "something suprapersonal, the existence of the [human] species, the constant prolongation of its existence" (141). This is the existential significance of the sexual urge. And it obviously links the sexual urge to God, the source of existence.

After reviewing briefly Derrick's insightful analysis of the "demonic" aspect of sex—the linking of sex and violence—Twomey shows how insightful Scruton is in his excellent work *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (1986). Here Scruton considers a subject largely ignored by contemporaries, namely, "the question posed by human experience and answered by the doctrine of Original Sin," and refutes the notion that sex is a mere desire. Discussing the particular place of the body in sexual excitement, Scruton writes, "In this excitement I am in some sense *vanquished* by my body, which is in turn vanquished by yours (or by you *in* yours). . . . Only in desire am I exposed to the humiliation by the body. It is in some such way, I believe, that one should account for the traditional Pauline and Augustinian horror of 'concupiscence'" (145). This leads Scruton to recognize that "desire is haunted, if not by the consciousness of original sin, at least by . . . the 'fear of the obscene': the fear that the experience of embodiment may be overcome and eclipsed by the experience of the body," a fear expressed by such modern writers as Sartre and Leopardi (146).²⁷ Summarizing, Twomey writes, "All perversion consists in the transferral of sexual desire from the face (the true self or 'person') to the body, with the resultant primacy of the body of the other person and so the exploitation of the other primarily on the basis of his or her sexual values" (146).

In an appendix to the chapter, Twomey reflects on the "threefold end of marriage"—*proles, fides, sacramentum*—and on von Hildebrand's emphasis on love "not as an 'end' of marriage but its primary 'significance'" (148). I will not summarize this, but I want to note that both in the new *Code of Canon Law* and in the *Catechism's* section on marriage, we are informed that by its very nature marriage is ordered to the *good of the spouses* (*bonum coniugum*) and to the *procreation and education of children*, and the "good of the spouses" is named first. There is no opposition between these goods, precisely because the good of the spouses, which ultimately consists in their helping each other to become holy, to become saints, embraces procreation and the education of children.

Chapter 6: "The Passion of Love"

Reviewing literature on human passions and divine love, Twomey first shows how wrong is the claim, popularized by such works as A. Nygren's *Eros and Agape*, that *eros*, the desire for what is beautiful, is opposed to *agape*, a completely unselfish love and the kind the New Testament extols. Drawing on the work of Biblical scholar James Barr and on Innocent XII's 1699 condemnation of Fénelon, Twomey writes, "The opposition between *erôs* and *agapê*, i.e., between human love or loves and divine love, is not to be found in Scripture. It is a modern theological notion based on an essentially dualist, more precisely Gnostic, understanding of creation" (152).²⁸

He gives an excellent in-depth presentation of C. S. Lewis's fascinating and wonderful book *The Four Loves*. Lewis's purpose was to explore the complex relationship between human loves and God's love. Lewis recognizes not only how love in one very real sense is a passion or emotion but also how our human loves are a reflection of divine love. Although they need purification and come into conflict with the demands of God's love, they keep their force and goodness as human loves, and while they can become selfish, they are indispensable for supernatural love. One major point Lewis makes is that while human loves are *emotions* (passions)—"givens," Twomey says, that we literally *suffer*—they are at the same time the material shaped by our free choices to determine our moral character.

Since they are loves, they are related to God. Lewis stresses that it is their very likeness to God that can be the greatest threat, because they can be mistaken for God. As emotional states or passions, at times very powerful, they must be kept in order by "common sense"—by which Lewis means a moral sense of right and wrong—and need to be inwardly transformed by divine love or charity. Divine love is, Lewis says, "gift-love" as distinct from "need-love," which is based on the difference between God and man. But need-love is not the same as selfish love, because "man's love for God," Lewis

says, "from the very nature of the case, must always be very largely . . . a need-love," arising from our need for forgiveness of sin, our need to see God, our complete dependence on God (156).

Lewis also, and most importantly, recognizes that "man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God. For what can be more unlike than fullness and need?" (156). But there is another and more important nearness found in those who are close to God in friendship and sanctity. This leads Lewis to distinguish between "nearness-by-likeness" and "nearness-of-approach," and they do not always coincide. At times we may *feel* near to God but may *be* in fact far from him. Human "gift-love" might seem godlike, but we at times give "our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God" (157). Gift-loves can set themselves up as gods, but need-loves are not tempted to do so. Thus, human loves can be glorious images of divine love but no more than that, and at times they keep us from God.

Lewis calls another form of love "appreciative love," which includes such human loves as love of nature, love of good food, and the like. This leads him to distinguish "need pleasures," such as a cup of cold water on a hot day, and "pleasures of appreciation," such as a beautiful landscape. Appreciative pleasures we enjoy for their own sakes, as God enjoyed his work of creation. Appreciative love is the ultimate expression of our love for God.

After making these distinctions, Lewis examines the four human loves, which Twomey describes as love for the subhuman, love of affection, love of friendship, and *eros*, since divine love is a different category (158). These are the emotional states or passions that must be kept in order by reason, i.e., by objective norms of morality. They are inwardly transformed by God's divine love.

Twomey's focus now moves to the passions and morality. The human loves, or passions, are the medium through which human flourishing, individual and social, can be achieved, but this achievement requires the virtues, above all the virtue of practical wisdom, or prudence, gratuitously given to

us by God himself through his grace. As a result, Twomey says with Paul Quay, “the ultimate end of human sexuality is . . . to raise the person and, through him, other persons to the most pure and exalted love of God. Insofar as this can be achieved without sexual activity, sexual activity is unnecessary for a person. But in the ordinary case sexual activity is one of the most powerful aids available to lift one to such love of God” (164), because human sexuality’s subordinate but real ends include faithful marriage until death, the family, and children.

In exploring the moral dimension of love, Twomey relies on Pieper’s *Über die Liebe* (1972). In every conceivable case, love entails the affirmation that it is good for the beloved to exist. It means “I want you to be.” It is thus a willing, not in the sense of choosing this or that here and now, but as a primal act that permeates particular choices to do this or that here and now. The most marvelous of all the things a being can do is *to be*. The ultimate expression of this willing is God’s act of creation. According to Pieper, belief in creation, if allowed to penetrate our consciousness, helps us see and accept all reality, including ourselves, as creatively willed and affirmed, as existing only because we are affirmed and willed by a creator God. Wanting to be loved, far from being selfish, is man’s true nature. Moreover, in answering the question “Does love mean taking the other as he or she is, with all his or her weaknesses and failures?” Pieper cautions that our yes is conditioned by two important considerations: (1) that the weaknesses are simply tendencies, and (2) that if a weakness results in guilt, it is not excused but only forgiven (167). This means that love is demanding; it is what we mean when we speak of “tough” love.

The relationship between love and marriage shows that conjugal or marital love is unique and is the most pronounced form of an “I–Thou” relationship. In discussing this relationship, Twomey draws on the work of von Hildebrand, Wojtyła, and Scruton.²⁹ A major point is that the obligations spouses have toward one another, and this includes their obligation to *love one another with*

spousal love until death, are not at the whim of the spouses but arise from the nature of marriage itself.

An excursus on Benedict’s *Deus caritas est* ends the chapter.

Chapter 7:
“*The Virtue of Chastity Revisited*”

In his discussion of chastity, Twomey examines the thought of Josef Pieper in *Fortitude and Temperance*. He first briefly examines the virtue of fortitude and Pieper’s trenchant critique of the modern liberal idea that the power of evil not gravely dangerous. This moral liberalism dominated moral theologians who, after *Humanae vitae*, rejected moral absolutes and denied that any human actions are “intrinsically evil.” Sadly they failed to realize that Christian living is a vital struggle that demands the courage, or fortitude, to persevere to reach the *bonum arduum*, the steep good (180–181).

According to Pieper, temperance, or moderation, is in essence “selfless self-preservation,” because eating, drinking, and sex, the activities associated with this virtue, refer to the preservation of our own personal existence and that of society as well as the human species. Pieper gives the primary meaning of temperance as “to dispose of the various parts [appetites] into one unified ordered whole, . . . what we would today possibly describe as the harmonious integration of the self”; this is what Aquinas called “serenity of spirit” or what we might call “inner tranquility and peace” (183). Because of our loss of preternatural gifts as a result of original sin, this inner order is not something given; rather, it must be achieved by judging and choosing well with the help of God’s grace. Twomey thinks the key to understanding this virtue is clear when Pieper says, “The natural urge towards sensual enjoyment, manifested in delight in food, drink, and sexual pleasure, is the echo and mirror of man’s strongest natural forces of self-preservation” (184), and these forces are harmoniously ordered and prevented from leading one morally astray by moderation in food and drink and by chastity in the area of sexual behavior.

Thus chastity as a virtue, Pieper says, realizes the order of reason in the area of sexuality; by “order of reason” is understood our truthful grasp of reality, of reality with respect to our lives as sexual beings, a knowledge that for Christians is mediated through faith and illustrated by St. Paul’s teaching that to sin against the body is to sin against Christ. This order or reason, Pieper concludes, implies above all that the purpose of our sexual power must not be perverted but fulfilled in marriage and its goods. Every unchaste act, as Aquinas showed, is both intemperate (harmful to the agent) and unjust (harmful to others). Unchastity corrupts the virtue of prudence, or practical wisdom (186).

There are two modes of chastity—chastity as continence and chastity as temperance—and two ways of being unchaste—unchastity as incontinence and unchastity as intemperance. Continence is marked by strenuous self-control; the continent person knows what is right and good in sexual behavior, but it is a struggle for him to be continent. Temperance, on the other hand, “might be called a natural inclination of being,” says Pieper; the temperate chaste person not only knows what is right and good but spontaneously does it, as if by second nature (187).³⁰ Chastity enhances sexual pleasure, enabling persons to enjoy what is beautiful, like the human body, for what it really is, and protects them from regarding the body as separate from the person, as an object to be consumed. Pieper’s account, that of a philosopher admittedly working within the context of revelation, does not, as does Aquinas’s account, show how grace perfects and fulfills nature. Grace inwardly transforms us and, to paraphrase Twomey, makes chastity in Christians a virtue that so enables us to come into possession of our sexual desires that we can, like Christ and at the leading of the Spirit, give ourselves away in love.

*Chapter 8:
“The Theological Vision
of Humanae vitae”*

The encyclical teaches that contraception is opposed to chastity as expressed in the self-control needed for periodic abstinence

when there are serious reasons to space children or perhaps not have any more (192). *Humanae vitae* begins its “doctrinal section” (nn. 7–18) by sketching “a theological vision of conjugal love both as a natural (or created) reality and as a supernatural (or sacramental) reality” (193). After “teasing out” this dense text, Twomey examines its significance and then sets forth his own profound grasp of the encyclical’s teaching. In doing so he emphasizes certain key truths that Paul VI affirmed in this document and presents his own trenchant observations regarding them.

Among these truths, the most significant are the following: First, when the encyclical teaches that God has entrusted to husbands and wives the mission of cooperating with God in his work of creating new human persons, the term “cooperation” is significant: “The spouses do not generate . . . of themselves; they cooperate with God. More precisely, they provide the necessary conditions, or rather they initiate the process in which God may (or may not) bring new life into being” (195). Second, within the order of redemption, conjugal love is not only an image of the God who is love but a sign and instrument of the divine love revealed and realized in Christ’s love for his bride the Church. The Church’s teaching on conjugal morality is thus based on the natural law as “illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation” (196). Third, Paul VI properly poses the critical question to which his encyclical was a reply when he asks “whether . . . the time has come when the transmission of life should be regulated by [man’s] intelligence and will rather than through the specific rhythms of their own bodies” (n. 3).

Commenting on this question, Twomey observes that it concerns contemporary man’s self-understanding. In modern culture (and dissenting theology), man is regarded primarily as *homo faber*, the maker or producer of things. For modern man, new human persons are thus not “begotten” in the marital act but “made” when men and women make love. Morality thus becomes something that is not determined by our common humanity (the natural law), because man has himself become raw material to be fashioned by

man according to his present needs and desires. Morality becomes utilitarian. But this wrongheaded view makes irrelevant the Church's teaching authority on moral issues. The Church welcomes and praises, as Paul VI said in *Humanae vitae* n. 16, the use of intelligence in human procreation, but affirms that this must be done within the limits of "the order of reality established by God." From this Twomey concludes that the central text of the encyclical is n. 13: "To experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not to be the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather minister of the design established by the Creator." Thus, in rejecting contraception as a morally acceptable way of limiting family size, the Church "rejects contemporary man's implicit claim to unlimited dominion over reality, a claim to divine status" (199).

Epilogue

After reflecting on the post-*Humanae vitae* situation in the Church, theology, and society, Twomey is convinced that "at the root of the moral crisis common to all three is lack of faith in God" (200). He notes that too many bishops (and priests) fail in their responsibility to teach the truth about contraception not because they do not accept the truth but because they are suffering from the *acedia of heart* (sloth or laziness, one of the capital sins) that Cardinal Ratzinger identified with what St. Paul describes as the "sorrow of the world" that results in death (see 2 Cor. 7:10).³¹ This, Ratzinger holds, is rooted in a lack of hope and in failure to attain genuine love; it arises ultimately because man does not believe that God is really interested in him (201). The medicine to cure this *acedia* is to accept God's love and the greatness of our Christian calling, which in turn rekindles joy.

Final Comments

Twomey's important and helpful work in some ways could have been made even stronger. I give two examples. The first is the chapter on revisiting chastity. I was surprised by his choice of Pieper's work on

the virtue of chastity in that Karol Wojtyła's marvelous chapter on this virtue in *Love and Responsibility* seems to me more helpful than Pieper's. But this is my opinion, and Twomey, not I, is the author of this study. I also think Twomey's final chapter on the reasons why *Humanae vitae* is true could have been made even stronger if he had also brought out the anti-life nature of contraception, for there is a long Catholic tradition (found also in reformers like Calvin) which holds that contraception is an act analogous to homicide.³² Directly relevant to the chapter on the teaching of *Humanae vitae* is the fact that in note 16 of *Humanae vitae* (n. 14), Paul VI explicitly referred to the teaching in the *Roman Catechism*: "Whoever in marriage artificially prevents conception, or procures an abortion, commits a most serious sin: the sin of premeditated murder."

With Germain Grisez, John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, Patrick Lee, and others, I think the understanding of the natural law that Twomey and many excellent moral theologians share is based on an understanding of relevant Thomistic texts that is different from ours.³³ We call their understanding the "conventional natural law theory," which in our opinion is based in large measure on reading Aquinas through the eyes of Suárez. But this is mainly an issue of interpreting Thomistic texts and in no way affects the great value of Twomey's work.

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¹See Christopher Derrick's *Sex and Sacredness: A Catholic Homage to Venus* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982).

²See Dawson's essay, "Christianity and Sex," in his *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), 259–289. Twomey says that, on reading Dawson's essay almost seventy years later, "one is struck by its almost prophetic character, even if one must disagree

with some of his presuppositions and . . . his historical prognosis” (26).

³See the first two chapters of O’Donovan’s *Begotten or Made?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1–30.

⁴This view was made popular by Bernard Lonergan, SJ, in his essay, “Historical Consciousness versus a Classical Mentality,” in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 13, *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan, SJ, and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). The most devastating critique of this position I have read is John Finnis’s magnificent “*Historical Consciousness*” and *Theological Foundations*, Etienne Gilson Lecture 15 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992).

⁵On faith, see *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 10, 22, and 41, and *Veritatis splendor*, n. 53; on reason, see *Fides et ratio*, nn. 90–91.

⁶See *Fides et ratio*, n. 98.

⁷See *Gaudium et spes*, n. 42; and *Fides et ratio*, nn. 94–96. Most helpful here, I believe, is a point made by Germain Grisez when he noted that “sentences” are *linguistic* entities and change continually, whereas “propositions,” or what Aquinas called “*enuntiationes*,” are *mental constructs*, the articulation of true judgments. See his *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983; reprinted New York: Alba House, 2006), 477–480.

⁸Twomey makes use of Martin Rhonheimer’s work to criticize Janssens (47). A brilliant critique of Fletcher (and many Catholic authors) on this matter is found in Germain Grisez, “Dualism and the ‘New Morality,’” in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale (Roma-Napoli, 12–17 aprile 1974): Tommaso d’Aquino nel suo Settimo Centenario*, vol. 5: *L’Agire Morale* (Naples: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 323–330. The finest criticism of this understanding of the human person is that of Robert George and Patrick Lee, *Mind–Body Dualism in Contemporary Ethics and Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

⁹*Donum vitae*, Introduction, 3, cited in *Veritatis splendor*, n. 50.

¹⁰Twomey points out (48–49), for example, that the Stoics recognized this law centuries ago, and Václav Havel, a dissident in Communist-controlled Czechoslovakia, affirmed it in his speech before the U.S. Congress in 1990.

¹¹In a footnote here, Twomey refers to *Veritatis splendor*, n. 42. This paragraph of *VS* does not, however, use the expression “primordial conscience.”

¹²See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

I-II, q. 100, a.11, where he speaks of two “editions” of the precepts of natural law, the first given at creation; the second, needed after the Fall, given through the Decalogue.

¹³Helpful here is the notion of “enabling” and “disabling” factors affecting our knowledge of the truth about what we are to do and our free choice to do what we come to know we ought to do. John Macquarrie introduced this terminology in his thoughtful book *Three Issues in Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 119–125. Sin—original, personal, and social—is a “disabling” factor both in our *cognitive* endeavor to come to know what we are to do if we are to be the beings God wills us to be, and in our *conative* endeavor to do what we come to know we are to do if we are to be the beings God wills us to be.

¹⁴See John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, n. 17.

¹⁵In *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyła called the passions of sensuality and tenderness (affectivity) the “raw material of love.”

¹⁶In the United States, although Twomey does not point this out, Charles E. Curran is the principal advocate of the theology of compromise.

¹⁷See also Twomey’s discussion of practical reason on pages 107–118. On page 63, in note 79, Twomey cites Ratzinger’s *On Conscience*; later, in note 21 on page 107, he refers to Ratzinger’s *Conscience and Truth*. These are almost certainly references to the same essay, “Conscience and Truth,” which was first presented by Cardinal Ratzinger at the National Catholic Bioethics Center’s Tenth Annual Workshop for Bishops in 1991. The essay was published by the Center (then known as the Pope John Center) in the Workshop proceedings that year and reprinted in 2007 in *On Conscience: Two Essays by Cardinal Ratzinger* (NCBC and Ignatius Press).

¹⁸This in no way implies that Church teaching is not true: it is, and there are very good reasons why it is true, but a central truth of Catholic faith is that Christ himself has given the Church (magisterium) authority to teach the truth about God and man and the way man must lead his moral life.

¹⁹I call attention here to the exceptionally important article by Germain Grisez and John Ford, SJ, “Contraception and the Infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium,” in *Theological Studies* 39.2 (1978): 258–312, reprinted in Germain Grisez, John Ford, Joseph A. Boyle, et al., *The Teaching of Humanae vitae: A Defense* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

²⁰*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 107, a. 4; and q. 31, a. 6. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, I, ch. 90.

²¹On synderesis, see *Summa theologiae* I-II,

q. 92, a. 2. Synderesis was closely linked by the medieval schoolmen, including SS. Bonaventure and Thomas, to natural law. On natural law as our active participation in God's eternal law, see *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 91, a. 2; q. 92, all articles, especially a. 1, a. 2, and a. 8; q. 100, a. 1, a. 3, and a. 8; q. 106; and q. 108. In q. 92, a. 2, Aquinas considers synderesis and its place in natural law. In *Veritatis splendor*, Pope John Paul II treats natural law at some depth; he likewise contrasts the contemporary elevation of *autonomy* with its relativism and utilitarianism with what he calls a *participated theonomy*, or participation in God's law, which is precisely natural law. See also my *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, 2nd ed. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003), 71–86.

²²See Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth.”

²³In *Veritatis splendor* n. 64, John Paul II has this to say: “The Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it; rather it brings to light the truths which it ought already to possess, developing them from the starting point of the primordial act of faith” (emphasis added). For Catholics, this is the “external stimulus of articulated truth . . . in the Church's authoritative tradition.”

²⁴In a footnote on page 115, Twomey refers to Pieper's treatment of the relationship between speculative and practical reason in *Die Wirklichkeit und das Gute [Reality and the Good]* (1949).

²⁵Anthony Kosnik et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (London: Search Press, 1977). In a footnote (129n1), Twomey notes that a similar kind of book was published a year later by Philip Keane, *Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980). Two rare errors occur on page 129. The author refers to the CTSA as the “American Theological Society” and identifies the principal co-author of the book as “Robert,” not Anthony, Kosnick.

²⁶Twomey refers to our critique but does not identify it; the critique is titled *On Understanding Human Sexuality* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979).

²⁷Scruton's reflections on concupiscence seem analogous to what John Paul II refers to as the experience of shame over the nakedness of the body which results from the “concupiscence” that entered the human heart as a result of original sin. Prior to the Fall, our first parents were “naked without shame.” But after the Fall, this “conjugal” or “nuptial” meaning of the body was “veiled by concupiscence,” and can be recovered

only through a sharing in Christ's redemption and “re-creation” of the human body. On this see catecheses 17–29 in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006), 238–237.

²⁸In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI wishes “to speak of the love [*amor*] which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others” (n. 1). Noting the “vast semantic range of the word ‘love’ [*amor*],” he says that amid the multiplicity of its meanings, “one in particular stands out: love [*amor*] between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love [*amoris per excellentiam imago perfecta*]: all other kinds of love [*cetera universa amoris genera*] seem to fade in comparison. So we need to ask: are all these forms of love [*omnesne amoris hae formae*] basically one, so that love [*amor*], in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?” (n. 2). I have inserted the Latin text in brackets here where it uses *amor*, because the Latin text of the encyclical uses several different words for love: the title uses *caritas*, the word used in the Vulgate to translate the Greek *agape*; and in citing Scripture, it uses *diligo* to translate the Greek *agapao*, as in “*Sic enim dilexit Deus mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret*” (John 3:16) (n. 1). But—and it is most important to note this—the Latin text of the encyclical more frequently uses the Latin noun *amor* and the Latin verb *amo* to speak of God's love for man, as in “*in his Nostris primis Encyclicis Litteris de amore cupimus loqui quo Deus nos replet quique a nobis cum aliis communicari debet*” (n.1), “*Dei amor nobis quaestio est de vita principalis*” (n. 2), and elsewhere. In Latin, consequently, the word *amor* is the more universal word for love, and is so used in the official Latin text of Benedict's encyclical. In the first part of the document, Benedict argues that *amor* integrates into one the different kinds of love identified by the Greek words *eros* and *agape*.

²⁹Twomey affirms that Wojtyla's analysis of conjugal love is more profound than von Hildebrand's. According to von Hildebrand, “conjugal love is not yet marriage.” I have serious problems with his understanding of “conjugal love” in his famous book on marriage, *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* (1929). He there, it seems to me, considers conjugal love not as a love willed by one person to another but as the emotional experience of “being in love.” His notion

is far different from that developed by John Paul II in his theology of the body. Compared with *Marriage*, von Hildebrand's *Das Wesen der Liebe* (1971), which has only recently been translated into English (*The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby, St. Augustine's Press, 2010), offers a more mature and in my judgment far superior treatment of conjugal love.

³⁰Aquinas notes that the virtues of our appetites (fortitude and temperance) are "seated" in the appetites themselves. See *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 61, a. 2.

³¹Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *To Look on Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love* (Slough, UK: St. Paul Publications, 1991).

³²See, for example, St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on the Epistle to the Romans*, PG 60, 626–627; Aquinas, *Summa contra gentes* III, 122; the *Si aliquis* canon, which was part of the Church's canon law from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries; the *Roman Catechism* (1566), pt. 2, ch. 7, n. 13; and John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, ch. 38, 9 and 10).

³³Twomey calls attention to the school of thought of Grisez et al. in note 59 on page 55, where he also cites John Murray's *The Role of Religion as a Basic Human Good in the Moral Theology of Germain Grisez* (doctoral dissertation, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 2008).

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