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FROM MORAL THEOLOGY TO ECCLESIAL ETHICS

The Roman Catholic moral tradition has been shaped by many shifts and turns. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the history of moral thinking in this tradition, reflect on the current status of moral theology and identify areas for future developments. ‚Ecclesial ethics' will be proposed as one of such areas. We shall claim that for moral theology to be relevant today, some fundamental questions (including the purpose of the discipline) must be revisited. We shall argue that practical realities in the lives of individuals, communities and the Church as well as the Planet must be at the forefront of moral theological considerations. We shall note that contemporary moral theologians and/or theological ethicists (the paper considers this distinction) are a diverse and, we dare to add, divided group. Building bridges in a polarised world (including the world of moral theology) needs to be a priority. The overall aim of this study is to respond positively to the call for the renewal of moral theology as voiced in the 'Decree on Priestly Formation' of the Second Vatican Council and in several statements made by Pope Francis.

1. HISTORY OF INSTRUCTING ON MORAL MATTERS IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

Why is the historical perspective important for the reflection on the state of moral theology today? Timothy O'Connell in his *Principles for a Catholic Morality* reminds us that if we 'do not understand our past, we really do not understand our present, and we are less prepared to intelligently construct our future'[1]. Historical scrutiny of moral theology can help us appreciate the richness and complexity of the Catholic tradition as well as identifying gaps for future developments. It is worth noting that the history of the moral teaching of the Church is characterised by

[1] *Principles for a Catholic Morality*. New York: Seabury Press 1978, p.10

multiplicity of moral approaches and statements, changes and adaptations. From the very beginning of the Christian era, followers of Christ have been preoccupied with the behavioural implications of the Gospel message. The New Testament is filled with instructions on morality. The call to conversion (both moral as well as religious) is one of the predominant themes, the theme which is also present in the works of the Patristic era. There is no 'moral theology' as such as there is no clear moral system. Different authors emphasise different moral issues. The *Didache* ('The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations, first century AD)[2], which is considered as the first text instructing on Christian moral living, portrays 'two ways' (the way of virtue and the way of evil) and serves as an encouragement to a deep Christian conversion. The interaction of faith and the demands of daily life are handled differently by different thinkers of the first centuries of Christian era but, broadly speaking, the main concern is what it means to live authentically as a Christian. Church historians suggest that, for example, St. Clement of Alexandria, who seems to have a rather optimistic vision of life, is keen to integrate the truth of the Gospel with the insights of the pagan world. For him and for others, including St Augustine of Hippo, our current distinction between the sacred and the secular would not be logical. Origen is also open to interacting with the pagan world. As someone who first used the classic concept of the cardinal virtues in Christian theology, Origen clearly had access to a variety of resources which enhanced his moral understanding. His perspective on humanity is, however, more pessimistic than that of other patristic thinkers.

It is thought that it was St Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, who, in line with other patristic Fathers, also engaged with pagan thinkers. He introduced a legalistic way of thinking about morality. Influenced by Cicero, the Ambrosian notion of 'Christian duties'[3] begins a new trend, which formally develops in the seventeenth century and is known as casuistry (looking at moral issues on the basis of individual cases and extending theoretical rules from a particular case by applying them to new scenarios). However, it is St Augustine who, for the majority of moral theologians, is considered the greatest resource of the patristic period. His rather rigorist views on moral issues related to sexuality (and its connection with sin) and his extraordinary understanding of the world ('City of God'[4]), the human condition and the centrality of love ('Confessions'[5]) as well as his explorations of such major themes as the relationship of faith and works, grace and freedom, vice and virtue have nourished, challenged and provoked probably every moral theologian over

[2] See the text and commentaries: http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html [accessed: 6 II 2020].

[3] See Ambrose, *On the Duties of Clergy*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0339–0397,_Ambrosius,_De_Officiis_Ministrorum_Libri_Tres_[Schaff],_EN.pdf [accessed: 6 II 2020].

[4] See in J.E. Rotelle et al. (eds.), *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, 46 vols., New York: New City Press 1991–2019.

[5] See *Augustine's Confessions* in: *The Works of Saint Augustine.*

the centuries. Still it is worth noting that St Augustine did not invent any clear moral system. The beginning of such a system dates back to the sixth century when a growing Christianity needed a more clearly defined and pastorally useful theological vision.

Historians of moral theology point out that one of the most significant responses to the pastoral need was the introduction of a more frequent and private practice of confessing sins. Until then, the Sacrament of Reconciliation was limited to the confession of major sins. Doing penance was a condition of absolution. The frequency of using the Sacrament was low. From the sixth century, the discourse of sin and frequent practice of confessing a variety of sins required the development of the whole new discourse of penance. To help with these matters, a new genre of Penitential Books was developed. According to O'Connell, 'these books exercised a far-reaching influence on the future of moral theology'[6]. They were not intellectual treatises on moral ideas or ideals. They were practical guides for the priest as the confessor. O'Connell claims that this single development began the 'rather unhealthy identification of moral theology both with the Sacrament of Penance and with priests'[7]. Moreover, he suggests that the 'presumption that moral theology is primarily for priests has survived to our own time, and only recently has it been challenged'[8]. The practice of confessing sins as wrong acts and specifying their quantity without referring to deeper realities such as motivation, intention and consequences, was bound to create a rather narrow view of Christian behaviour. It seems that from this historical development, moral instruction started to be associated with Christian minimalism. Avoidance of sin rather than a positive striving for virtue became the central theme. Henry Lea, a nineteenth-century Church historian, points out that the introduction by Pope Innocent III in 1215 of the obligation to confess one's sins annually in order to receive communion at Easter was the most influential legislative act in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, which altered the function of penance so that it was 'no longer a matter of spiritual election but a required practice'[9].

Thankfully, the second millennium of Christianity brought shifts that had impact on the way Christian moral life was viewed. The Middle Ages witnessed many changes in Europe, including the rise of great universities and improvement in education. Theology and other sciences flourished and were mutually supportive and influential. Philosophy was at the heart of those who composed 'Summas'

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[6] T. O'Connell, *Principles*, p. 13.

[7] T. O'Connell, *Principles*, p.13.

[8] T. O'Connell, *Principles*, p.13. It's worth pointing out that although the preoccupation with sin and penance played a big part in the moral life of Catholics, there were other influences that formed moral consciousness of ordinary people. For the discussion of these influences see J.F. Keenan*, Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, NY: A Sheed & Ward Book 2004.

[9] See J.F. Keenan, *'Notes on Moral Theology: Moral Theology and History'*, "Theological Studies" 62 (2002), p. 86–104.

(the great compendia that attempted to capture knowledge and understanding in a systematic way). The works most relevant to moral theology included Peter Lombard's *Books of Sentences*[10] and St Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*[11]. Albert the Great and Bonaventure also had enormous influence on those who discussed matters of moral theology. Although Bonaventure did not follow the style of the summas and, unlike Aquinas, was a follower of the Platonic and not Aristotelian philosophy, he developed a unique synthesis of Christian theology and morality with less emphasis on practical reason and more on holiness. His focus on holiness is worth noting here especially that a few centuries later moral theology became disassociated from the rest of theology (especially, spirituality) and themes such as 'holiness' or 'spirituality' did not feature much in the vocabulary of moral theology.

The development of moral theology as a discipline started around the time of the Reformation, more specifically, at the Council of Trent with its Counter-Reformation formulations. Since much of Europe was lost to the Roman Catholic Church, it was not surprising that the Church had to establish a clear theological vision which was translatable to practical behavioural realities. There was an urgency to act and define matters plainly and simply so that everyone could agree and act in the same way. The sixteenth century was the time of establishing seminaries and developing a formal system for the education and formation of clergy. The main question for the formators and those being formed was: 'what does being a Catholic involve?' Philosophical discussions presented in the summas and theological treaties of past centuries were not of great use for those who, often in fear, had to improvise while protecting Catholic identity. This is the time when moral theology becomes a separate discipline. Its profile is less theological as the discipline is paired with canon law. A new genre of moral theological textbooks appears under the label of *Theologia moralis ad normam juris canonici* (Moral theology according to the norm of canon law)[12]. There are attempts to link moral theology with the rest of theology but the vocabulary of moral theology resembles more a legal discourse than a theological reflection. St. Alphonsus Liguori is a good example of this approach. His 'Treatise on Conscience' (the opening treaty of his eight-volume Moral Theology) shows how, in the midst of the heated debates of his time, he is looking for a prudent middle course, understood not as a 'compromise that reduced tensions to the lowest common denominator' but as what is reasonable

[10] See P. Lombard, *The Sentences*, trans. G. Silano, 4 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies 2007–2010.

[11] See *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation*, Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries. London, New York: New Blackfriars 1963.

[12] See S. da Loiano, G. da Guarcino, M. da Grizzana, *Institutiones theologiae moralis ad normam iuris canonici*, Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti 1935.

and practically possible[13]. While he is a casuist who is able to operate smoothly between jurisprudence and theology, he emphasises freedom as the essential factor in decision making[14]. Decision making, sin evaluation, penance distribution, acting in freedom, describing duties and obligations are the key concerns of the growing discourse of moral theology. For some, the above content of moral theology does not seem adequate. There is a conviction that some renewal is needed. The University of Tubingen (Germany) becomes the centre of the renewal. Michael Sailer and John Baptist Hirscher are key figures in the attempt to (re)connect moral theology with the Holy Scripture (and biblical scholarship) and disconnect it from canon law. This attempt to renew moral theology is, however, hindered by suspicion towards anything new and different, as expressed in *The Syllabus of Errors* issued by Pope Pius IX in 1864.[15] There is one area, namely social ethics, which receives the attention of Pope Leo XIII. His encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ('On Capital and Labour')[16] is the best example thereof. However, statements on social morality are not seen as part of the mainstream moral theology. Later, the upheavals of the First and Second World Wars are not the times for creative explorations in moral theology. Eventually, despite the renewal of theology (scriptural, liturgical, inter-religious) and a wave of openness to the world that takes place at the Second Vatican Council, the renewal of moral theology falls behind. The instruction issued in the 'Decree on Priestly Formation' admits this incomplete task of the Council. It gives the following directive: 'special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world'[17]. Has this directive of paying 'special attention' to the development of moral theology been taken on? If so, by whom? What has been achieved? Has the Scripture been nourishing the discipline in a more significant way? What is the 'fruit' that moral theology brings to the 'life of the world'? What is its purpose today? We will turn to some of these questions in the next section while reflecting on the current state of the discipline.

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[13] *Conscience: Writings from "Moral Theology" by Saint Alphonsus*, trans. R. Gallagher, Missouiri: Liguori 2019, p. xviii.

[14] *Conscience*,trans. R. Gallagher, p. xviii. For Liguori, 'nothing predates that freedom, not even the law' (p. 222).

[15] See *Syllabus of Errors*, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm [accessed: 6 II 2020].

[16] See Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html [accessed: 6 II 2020].

[17] Second Vatican Council, '*Decree on Priestly Formation' Optatam Totius* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html, no. 16 [accessed: 6 II 2020].

2. MORAL THEOLOGY TODAY

Moral theology is at the crossroads. The question is which way to turn in order to ensure that the renewal continues and takes the discipline into a more fruitful place. While there have been interesting developments in the discipline since the Second Vatican Council, there have also been drawbacks and difficulties. Contemporary moral theology is divided along the same lines as the rest of the Church and society: between the right and the liberal 'wing' or between traditionalists and revisionists. Admittedly, not everyone is comfortable with these labels and the divisions are not always clear cut. Still, using these distinctions can be helpful in systematising our thinking, for example, when we look at the reactions to Pope Francis's statements on controversial issues such as celibacy of priests, homosexuality and LGBTQ+, ordination of women, economic progress or climate change. In moral theology, more than in any other branch of theology, the consequences of being associated with a particular faction (usually with the revisionist wing) can have severe consequences. No other theological discourse is treated with the same watchfulness by the Church leaders as moral theology. Sometimes it is enough to simply start a debate on something that might *appear* as dissenting from the official position of the Magisterium for someone to lose an academic post or have a publication withdrawn from the reading list. Suspicion and fear have been characterising moral theological climate for some time. Even when the official teaching of the Church is questioned in good faith and out of academic duty to foster a debate and promote academic freedom – in other words, even if the motivation is good – in moral theology this is not always perceived as such. Disagreements are never easy to handle but there is no way forward without learning from how to handle them. There are two other difficulties that require attention so that the progress can be made.

The first difficulty is intra-disciplinary and concerns methodological disagreement between traditionalists and revisionists. The difference is subtle as both methodologies refer to the same sources of moral knowledge (Scripture, tradition, reason and experience). However, the sources are used differently by each methodology. Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, in their book *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology,* capture well the difference between traditionalist and revisionist methodologies:

> *Traditionalists use a hierarchical approach to the sources of moral knowledge [scripture, "tradition" and "Tradition," reason, and experience] and tend to interpret Tradition in the narrow sense of magisterial teaching, especially as this teaching pertains to moral absolutes. Scripture, reason, and experience, in that order, are all subject to the Magisterium's interpretation. One could say that traditionalists espouse an apologetical ethical method defending the moral absolutes of the Magisterium. Revisionists, while assigning a very important role to Tradition, understanding it in a broad sense to*

include the Magisterium and the other aspects that make up a universal, ecclesiastical Tradition, use a dialectical approach between the four sources of moral knowledge.[18]

In discussing particular moral issues, especially in the area of sexual ethics, the methodological difference is quite sharp. The use and prioritisation of sources is not uniform and there are bound to be disagreements amongst moral theologians on how to interpret the sources, whatthe content of specific moral norms should be, especially of the norms considered as absolute and unchanging. Handling conflict and promoting dialogue are the hardest tasks to achieve, especially if our commitments are on the extreme sides of apologetical and dialectical methods.

The second difficulty is connected with the position of moral theology in the Church. What is exactly the role of moral theology in the Church? What is the relationship between moral theology and ecclesiology? Margaret Farley in her essay 'Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self-Doubt' suggests that there is no meaningful relationship between moral theology and ecclesiology[19]. She claims that 'moral theology (or ethics) is seldom brought to bear on our understandings of the church. […] Ecclesiology and ethics share a common context, the church, but they seldom if ever interact'[20]. She notes that the nature and the function of the Church have rarely played part in ethical debates. Also rarely have there been proper interactions between ecclesiologists, Church leaders and moral theologians. In her view, the 'most dramatic interactions are adversarial, and the debates turn less often on issues of morality than on issues of church authority'[21].

Moral theologians today increasingly engage with the difficulties noted above. For example, Joseph Selling's *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*[22] is dedicated solely to the question of methodology. Aware of the divisions between traditionalists and revisionists, Selling argues for proper attention to the goals of ethical living and a view of the human person as 'integrally and adequately considered'. Several moral theologians respond to Selling's proposal in the 2018 issue of *Religions* entitled 'The Future of Catholic Theological Ethics'[23]. Lisa Cahill, for example, challenges the idea that a person is an integral and adequate starting point as this is a typical Western tendency. She proposes a more social, inductive, and global

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[18] T.A. Salzman, M.G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology*, Georgetown: University Press 2008, p. 214. This book has been the subject of censure by the US Bishops conference, 2 years after the publication of the book. See T.A. Salzman, M.G. Lawler, *'Inadequacies in the Theological Methodology and Conclusions of The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology*, http://www.usccb.org/about/doctrine/publications/upload/Sexual_Person_2010–09–15.pdf [accessed: 2 II 2020].

[19] See M. Farley, *Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self-Doubt*, in: M. Farley (ed.), *Changing the Questions: Explorations in Christian Ethics*, New York: Maryknoll, p. 110–121.

[20] M. Farley, *Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self-Doubt*, p.110.

[21] M. Farley, *Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self-Doubt*, p.110.

[22] J. Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016.

[23] See A. Abram (ed.), *The Future of Catholic Theological Ethics*, „Religions", I 2018, https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/ethics [accessed: 22 II 2020].

approach in which greater attention is given to the social and political aspects of sex and gender and to the intersection of gender, race, class and economic inequality. Cahill is interested in the way in which non-Western perspectives might inform and alter Western methods and conclusions. She makes a case for cross-communal and dialogic ethics, which appreciates what human beings share and how they differ. Mathew Illathuparampil also draws attention to non-Western riches of moral theology. Other contributors to the journal issue deal with conceptual issues such as conscience, mercy and virtue, drawing from Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Karl Barth[24].

Directly and indirectly, the renewal of moral theology is carried out by scholars all over the world, but most notably by the largest network of moral theologians under the name 'Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church'[25]. The network connects moral theologians from eighty countries and is built on the recognition of the 'need to dialogue from and beyond local culture and interconnect within a world church'[26]. At the time of writing this paper (February/March 2020) the following issues have been discussed on the network's online forum: 'French Bishops, Integral Ecology and A Synodal Church' by Grégoire Catta (France); 'Nuevas fronteras en la teología de la paz: desarme nuclear y ecología integral' [….] by Jorge José Ferrer (United States and Puerto Rico); 'The Central European Pentecost in Olomouc' by Gusztáv Kovács (Hungary); 'Where is Home?: Displacements and Disqualifications' by Agnes M. Brazal (Philippines); 'Some Reflections of the Pan-African Congress on Theology, Society, and Pastoral life gathered in Enugu, Nigeria, (5–8 December, 2019)' by Toussaint Kafarhire (Democratic Republic of the Congo); and 'In sickness and in health: HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ+ folks in/and the Church' by Mary M. Doyle (USA). This sample of topics suggests that issues of ecology and natural environment, society and politics, healthcare and sexuality are high on the moral theological agenda. These issues are also high on Pope Francis' agenda[27].

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[24] See L. Sowle Cahill in her „Reframing Catholic Ethics: Is the Person an Integral and Adequate Starting Point?"; Mathew Illathuparampil, „Goal-Oriented Ethics: Framing the Goal-Setting Concretely" presents 'four supportive pillars'; Marie Catherine O'Reilly-Gindhard, „Pope Francis and Joseph Selling: A New Approach to Mercy in Catholic Sexual Ethics"; Nicholas Austin, „Normative Virtue Theory in Theological Ethics"; Nenad Polgar, „Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics from a Scotistic Perspective"; Jacqueline Stewart, „Hermeneutic and teleology in ethics across denominations – Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth"; Peter Sedgwick, "Anglican moral theology and ecumenical dialogue"; Marian Machinek, "My conscience is clear" (1 Cor 4:4)'; Edward Vacek in his „Theocentric Love Ethics" in „Religions" (I 2018). https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/ethics [accessed: 22 II 2020].

[25] See https://catholicethics.com/ [accessed: 22 II 2020].

[26] See https://catholicethics.com/ [accessed: 22 II 2020].

[27] See https://catholicethics.com/ [accessed: 22 II 2020].

POPE FRANCIS ON MORAL THEOLOGY

Is there anything specific that Francis wants from moral theology and moral theologians? There are three points that are worth mentioning here. First, the generic ecclesiological point - on the role of the teaching Church, which is well articulated by Nicholas Austin SJ in his commentary on the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: 'the teaching Church, like all good teachers, is asked to step back a little to create a *breathing space* for an individual to do his or her own discernment'[28]. While still operating with the traditional notion of the teaching Church, Francis puts discernment at the center of his ecclesiology. Discernment for him (as someone shaped by the Ignatian tradition of discerning) is something that comes naturally. For him, the Church must be a discerning Church. In *Amoris Laetitia* he talks about 'discerning the body'[29] by which he means overcoming 'scandalous distinctions and divisions'[30].

Secondly, Francis states clearly that teaching is not reserved for the office of the Magisterium and by this he implies that the whole Church (including moral theologians) must share the responsibility: 'I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium'[31]. Thirdly, Francis wants moral theologians to put charity and mercy at the heart of moral theology: 'The teaching of moral theology should not fail to incorporate these considerations [as presented in *Amoris Laetitia*], for although it is quite true that concern must be shown for the integrity of the Church's moral teaching, special care should always be shown to emphasize and encourage the highest and most central values of the Gospel, particularly the primacy of charity as a response to the completely gratuitous offer of God's love. At times we find it hard to make room for God's unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance'[32].

The above message is echoed in Francis' historical meeting with the faculty of the Alphonsian Academy in Rome. Founded in the tradition of Alphonsus Liguori, the academy is known for its long tradition of research and training in moral theology. In his address to the Faculty, Francis emphasises the need to 'guard against excessive idealization' by 'being close to the everyday situations of individuals

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[28] N. Austin, *„Discernment charged with merciful love": Pope Francis' Amoris Laetitia, on Love in the Family'*, "Thinking Faith", 8 VIII 2016, https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/discernment-charged-merciful-love-pope-francis%E2%80%99-amoris-laetitia-love-family-0 [accessed: 21 V 2020].

[29] Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 185 https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf [accessed: 21 V 2020].

[30] Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 185.

[31] Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 3.

[32] Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 311.

and families'[33]. He insists that this world is not to be condemned but 'to be healed and liberated' with mercy. As in *Amoris Laetitia*, here too, he stresses that the 'teaching of moral theology must encourage the highest values of the Gospel, such as charity. It must also look to liberation from the law of sin and death; a freedom that can never be indifferent to those most in need'[34]. He insists, in line with the argument he developed in his encyclical *Laudato Si',* that moral theology 'must take on board the urgency of each nation in a convincing way in a mutual effort to care for our common home through viable ways of integral development'[35]. He encourages moral theologians to get their '"hands dirty"' with concrete problems, especially with the fragility and suffering of those who see their future threatened, bearing real witness to Christ "the way, the truth and the life"'[36].

Francis is interested in big questions that deal with ethics, such as 'what does morality require from us?' He reflects on this particular question in all his major statements, such as *Amoris Laetitia*, *Laudato Si* and *Evengelii Gaudium*. He does not engage with particular issues in a detailed way. Instead, he offers generic insights related to the nature of moral teaching and learning, discernment, the primacy of charity, the importance of reclaiming mercy, and the imperative to accept and respond to God's unconditional love. This way of engaging with morality is meant to stir hearts and minds of his listeners: to get them motivated and make them see what matters most. The rules, concepts and methods for accomplishing what we understand as morally demanding are important but secondary to the first-rate questions about the meaning of life, the role of the Church, the importance of responding to God's love and getting 'hands dirty'.

It is not easy to translate Francis' instructions and moral ideas to specific principles or norms as he does not rely on a specific moral theory. One can detect a variety of philosophical, theological and socio-psychological influences on his thinking. Ethna Regan in 'The Bergoglian Principles: Pope Francis' Dialectical Approach to Political Theology' attempts to sift through Franciscan statements and behaviours in order to get an account of his approach to politics. She finds that there are four such principles:[37] 'time is greater than space'; 'unity prevails over conflict'; 'realities are more important than ideas'; and 'the whole is greater than the part'. Regan argues that papal writings, including *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*, contain numerous references to the four principles. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore them in detail.

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[33] Vatican News, *Pope: moral theology must get "hands dirty" with concrete issues*, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019–02/pope-moral-theology-must-get-hands-dirty-with-concrete--issues.html [accessed: 20 II 2020].

[34] Vatican News, *Pope: moral theology.*

[35] Vatican News, *Pope: moral theology.*

[36] Vatican News, *Pope: moral theology.*

[37] E. Regan, *The Bergoglian Principles: Pope Francis' Dialectical Approach to Political Theology*, https://www.mdpi.com/2077–1444/10/12/670/htm [accessed: 21 II 2020].

One additional point to be added here is Francis' emphasis on the importance of networking in moral theology. In the letter addressed to the participants of the CTEWC international conference in Sarajevo in 2018, Francis applauds the network for its effort to build bridges and encourages to build more. He says, 'build bridges among yourselves' (intra-disciplinary bridges). He wants more theologians to 'share ideas and programmes, and to develop forms of closeness'. Importantly, he recognises that building bridges and closeness 'does not mean striving for uniformity of viewpoints, but rather seeking with sincerity and good will a convergence of purposes, in dialogical openness and the discussion of differing perspectives'[38]. He encourages 'networking' between institutions worldwide. He speaks to both men and women working in the field of moral theology and wants them 'to be passionate for such dialogue and networking'[39]. Francis wants moral theologians 'to show solidarity with the world, which you are not called to judge but rather to offer new paths, accompany journeys, bind hurts and shore up weakness'[40]. Offering new paths, accompanying others on their moral journeys, helping people to bind hurts and shore up weakness, are the directives that Francis wants moral theologians to implement.

It seems that the Church, bruised by sexual, financial and other types of scandals as well as the effects of a growing polarisation within and outside, needs not only a fresh and more constructive approach to moral thinking. It needs to return to big questions and explore new paths as suggested above. Simply issuing disapprovals, silencing scholars/members of the faithful or invoking a law are not adequate for dealing with moral complexities of life. So, encouraged by the turn to big questions while attending to particular issues, what should moral theology or theological ethics do next? Before we turn to this question, it is time for us to clarify the use of terms employed here. Until now, the terms 'moral theology' and 'theological ethics' have been used interchangeably. There are other terms that appear regularly in the discourse, such as 'Catholic ethics', 'Catholic morality' and 'Christian ethics'. Let us turn to the meanings of these terms.

MORAL THEOLOGY OR THEOLOGICAL ETHICS?

Charles Curran provides a clear and succinct definition of moral theology: it is the 'name the Roman Catholic tradition gives to the theological discipline that deals with Christian life and action. […] In one sense all theology is one, but to facilitate

[38] America Staff, *Letter from Pope Francis to moral theologians gathered in Sarajevo*, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/07/26/letter-pope-francis-moral-theologians-gathered-sarajevo, [accessed: 21 II 2020].

[39] America Staff, *Letter from Pope Francis.*

[40] America Staff, *Letter from Pope Francis.*

the study of the various aspects of theology, separate disciplines have come into existence. […] The boundaries of moral theology are quite porous because Christian life and action are clearly connected with faith as well as with spiritual, pastoral, historical, liturgical, and biblical theologies'[41]. So, moral theology is a branch of theology that deals with life and action of a Christian as understood and interpreted by the Catholic tradition. This tradition includes the tradition of reason (philosophy), revelation (Bible), the tradition of teaching and learning (official Church teaching as well as scholarly engagements and interpretations), and experience (individual as well as collective). 'Life' and 'action' are understood broadly as encompassing the whole of life (personal and communal). Curran gives a further explanation of moral theology by focusing on its branches: '[w]ithin moral theology different divisions exist to facilitate the study of the subject matter of the discipline itself: fundamental moral theology, sexual, bioethical, and social moral theology. Fundamental moral theology considers those aspects of the discipline such as the person as moral agent and subject, virtues, principles, conscience, and human actions in general that come into play in all the different areas and issues of human moral activity. The division among sexual, bioethical, and social moral theology derives from the areas and subjects considered. These divisions are certainly helpful, but there is the danger that some aspects of personal morality tend to be overlooked by this tripartite division'[42]. Curran claims that 'moral theology, especially after Vatican II, has learned much from ecumenical dialogue especially with Protestant thought'[43]. Many Catholic moral theologians write from the general Christian perspective and address a broad Christian audience rather than from a specifically Catholic perspective and for a specifically Catholic audience. It is for this reason that, in some contexts, the term 'Christian Ethics' is used in order to emphasise this ecumenical character of engagements. This shows that confessional boundaries are not as sharp as they have been in the past. It is probably fair to say that the most significant volumes or textbooks dedicated to moral thinking are ecumenical and increasingly interreligious in character. Also, increasingly, Catholic moral theology is conscious of social location and the effect that this has on moral thinking.

Some might suggest that 'theological ethics' is a branch of philosophy rather than theology. It offers a philosophical theistic perspective on life and action. It often starts with reflection on the way Christians embody their beliefs, norms, virtues, values, attitudes and habits in discussing individual and group decisions and choices, social patterns and structures. Theological ethics is concerned with questions of responsibility and accountability for these choices and actions. It seems to be concerned with spheres of activities, which traditionally have not been part of moral theological reflection. Let us briefly look at sample publications that came out

[41] C. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in the US: A History*, Georgetown: UP 2008, p. xi.
[42] C. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology*, p.xi
[43] C. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology*, p.xii

recently within the series 'Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church': *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction*, edited by Christiana Z. Peppard and Andrea Vinci; *Living with(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples*, edited by Agnes M. Brazal and Maria Teresa Dávila; *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics*, edited by Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan, James F. Keenan, and Ronaldo Zacharias; *Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics*, edited by James F. Keenan and Mark McGreevy[44]. These publications are edited volumes. They express a variety of approaches and perspectives on a particular issue. The issues themselves and the way they are examined are not often considered by a 'standard' moral theology. For example, the last volume in the series (*Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics*) engages in the global conversation on the issue of street homelessness. In the 'Introduction' James Keenan writes: '[n]ot only are those living in the streets "overlooked" by passersby, but we in the church and the academy have done the same as others in ignoring their situation'[45]. Contributors to the volume from countries such as Philippines, Jamaica, India, USA, Ireland, UK, Kenya and others, respond to this failure to engage by appealing to sociological research and stories, designing strategies for action and ministry in the area of homelessness. 'Hospitality', 'solidarity', 'poverty', 'works of mercy' and 'human rights' are used as conceptual tools for formulating a theological-ethical framework. This work represents a different way of doing moral theology, in a manner that is collaborative, self-critical, creative, and open to pluralistic moral thinking.

It might seem that moral theology emphasises more 'theology' while theological ethics focuses more on 'ethics'. While this might be true, the majority of Catholic moral theologians and theological ethicists, including the author of this paper, use the two terms interchangeably and feel comfortable with both. Perhaps theological ethics is just a name for a different way of doing moral theology. 'Moral theology' still tends to be taught as a subject in Catholic seminaries; therefore, lecturers in the subject are naturally moral theologians, usually ordained clergy. 'Theological ethics' is increasingly used in academic and applied contexts. Whether the terms should be used more carefully and the two discourses treated as separate fields is a matter for further discussion, something that this paper will not undertake.

There is one other term employed in moral theological debates, namely 'catholic ethics'. *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics since Vatican II* by Andrew Kim is a good

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[44] *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction*, eds. C.Z. Peppard, A. Vinci, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2015; *Living with(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples, eds.* A.M. Brazal, M.T. Dávila, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 2016; *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017; James F. Keenan and Mark McGreevy (eds), *Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics*, eds. Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan, J.F. Keenan, R. Zacharias, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 2019.

[45] *Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics*, eds. J.F. Keenan, M. McGreevy, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 2019, p. xviii.

example of what the term encompasses[46]. The work claims to respond to questions of moral theology in four principal areas: Catholic social teaching, natural law, virtue ethics, and bioethics. It discusses contemporary controversies surrounding abortion, contraception, labour rights, exploitation of the poor, and just war theory as well as historical sources of the Catholic worldview. So, can't this publication be called 'Catholic moral theology' or 'Catholic theological ethics'? It probably can. By calling it 'Catholic ethics', the authors seem keen to emphasise a Catholic perspective on philosophical ethical themes, such as natural law. Incidentally, while new publications with 'theological ethics' or 'Catholic ethics' in their titles abound, publications on 'moral theology' seem to be fewer in number.

We shall now turn to the questions posed earlier: 'what should be the next step for moral theology or theological ethics? What should be the direction of its renewal? We have suggested earlier that addressing difficulties such as the relationship between moral theology and ecclesiology and intra-disciplinary divisions should be part of the renewal of moral theology. Pope Francis encourages moral theologians to 'develop forms of closeness', 'build bridges' within and outside the discipline and be prepared to get 'hands dirty'. The language he uses is certainly different from the language we have been accustomed to when instructing on moral matters. For example, we have never been instructed to 'develop forms of closeness'. What Francis really wants moral theologians to do is to talk to each other more. Without rehearsing all that has been said above, it seems fair to say that a pluralistic (and not uniform) voice of moral theology needs to be welcome in the discussions on moral teaching and leadership in the Church. The role of moral theologians in these debates has to be reconsidered. The vocation of a moral theologian also needs to be revisited. As academics and 'faithful in the Church' we need to ask ourselves: 'whom do we serve and for what purpose?' There are many areas in our ecclesial moral thinking that have been neglected or not been considered at all. The next section will introduce an area in which moral theology/theological ethics could find itself renewed and be of a greater service to the Church.

3. ECCLESIAL ETHICS – AN AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT WITHIN MORAL THEOLOGY

'Ecclesial ethics' can be seen as a branch of moral theology, theological ethics or Catholic ethics which -- while drawing from the usual sources of moral knowledge (Scripture, reason, tradition and experience) -- is prepared to engage

[46] A. Kim, *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics since Vatican II*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015.

with professional ethics. Its aim would be to help the church overcome divisions (build bridges in accordance with Pope Francis' invitation), cultivate the right relationships, help individuals to grow, enhance communal practices and articulate moral guidance. Ecclesial ethics could undertake the following tasks: 'get hands dirty' by looking into the dysfunctional parts of Church life; develop areas of good practice; serve as a platform for handling tensions and disagreements; and be ready to test and apply the Church's own teaching, such as Catholic social teaching, to the structures of the Church. The objective of ecclesial ethics would be to facilitate the development of a more participatory Church. This paper does not intend to present the full agenda of ecclesial ethics. Although the term has been used by several moral theologians or theological ethicists, the branch does not really exist. The main purpose of this final section of the paper is to pose some questions and suggest some themes for ecclesial ethics.

The questions that ecclesial ethics would do well to address are: If we agree that the Church has a rich tradition of articulating moral values, what does the application of these values to Church bodies and organisations mean in practice? How does one ensure that moral values and norms apply to any and all aspects of ecclesial conduct from 'boardroom' strategies (Vatican, Bishops Conferences, Dioceses, Deaneries, Parishes, etc) to processes and practices at all levels (appointments of bishops, parish priests, catechists, leaders, etc). How can all members of the Church feel more empowered to make decisions and contribute to the better functioning of the Church? Addressing these questions requires a considerable amount of thinking, rethinking and consultation. It raises another set of questions related to moral formation in the Church, especially the teaching of moral theology in seminaries, revising the content of moral theological curricula, being open to introduce professional ethical training similar to the training that students in medical or law schools receive. A well formulated ecclesial ethics could help in bridging a number of differences: between canon law and moral theology; between conservatives and liberals; between the black and the white approaches to moral matters.

CONCLUSION

This brief journey from moral theology to ecclesial ethics was intended to show that the moral tradition of the Church has been dynamic and open to change. For some, the changes that have taken place have not been enough, for others the changes have gone too far. Some cling to the version of moral theology whose content is timeless. Their approach is apologetical. Others see moral theology as a jigsaw puzzle with some missing pieces but still they can imagine the overall picture. The tension between continuity and change has always been present in theological reflections.

Negotiating between the two phenomena is not easy. We must neither idealise and idolise the past, nor see it as totally alien and irrelevant. The whole point of starting this paper with a historical reflection was to learn something from the selected developments in the discipline, such as the era of sin-and-penance-preoccupation (the sixth century onwards). We did not mean to dismiss this era as unimportant but rather the intention was to show how this particular development shaped the understanding of morality later. We are not implying that we must do away with the theology of sin or praise it as the best development in the history of moral theology. If anything, we need to develop a better approach to sin than the one we currently have. We ought to move away from the ethic of sin-preoccupation as well as sin-trivialisation to a more balanced view of wrong-doing, vice and failure. The Catholic moral teaching has never been flawless, but we must presume that the motivation behind that teaching has been to follow Christ and proclaim the Good News. Not always did that news turn out to be good for everyone. Preoccupation with certain ideas and the neglect of others resulted in a less than favourable treatment of groups and individuals (women, races, people of different orientation, whether sexual, intellectual or political). The Church is both holy and sinful, and so are all the faithful within her. Moral theologians get things right but also get things wrong. As we have alluded earlier, contemporary moral theologians are an increasingly mixed group, but all together we are called to address issues that prevent us as scholars and as members of the Church from being at our best. The renewal of moral theology is really a must. Without it, there is a danger that the discipline will become less relevant, the Church will remain less credible and the root of the current crisis will never go away. This is not to suggest that ecclesial ethics is the only way forward – it is merely one of the ways. There are other areas that need attention – some have been discussed by moral theologians for a while, as for example, Farley's insistence on bringing moral theology into conversation with ecclesiology. There are other possibilities for fruitful engagements and addressing neglected areas. We mentioned earlier the recent publication on street homelessness, a topic neglected for too long. But, the topics of race, gender/trans-gender, refugee crisis, migration, policing, human trafficking, detention centres, prisons, media, artificial intelligence, healthcare (including dealing with global pandemic as the current Covid-19 crisis), and ageing are only a sample of areas that require moral theologians and the Church to get their hands dirty with. The renewal of moral theology is bound to take us out of our academic and personal comfort zones into the unknown. We shouldn't be afraid of the process. If the renewal is done well, in line with our dynamic tradition, it will take us to a better place. Moral theologians cannot be complacent about their discourse and need to take advantage of developments in other disciplines. Our published ideas and moral practices need to be better connected. And, finally, let us remember that our 'talk' is pointless without God and Jesus Christ at its centre and without accepting the truth that the Holy Spirit acted in the past, is at work today and will be so tomorrow. This truth is the beating heart of moral theology and gives direction for the future.

OD TEOLOGII MORALNEJ DO ETYKI EKLEZJALNEJ

Streszczenie

Autorka artykułu podejmuje próbę zidentyfikowania z perspektywy historycznej wybranych wpływów i wydarzeń, które warunkowały rozwój myślenia etycznego i nauczania moralnego w tradycji rzymskokatolickiej. Owa identyfikacja ma służyć lepszemu zrozumieniu obecnego stanu dyskursu moralnego i wskazaniu kierunków jego dalszego rozwój. Jednym z nich jest właśnie etyka eklezjalna. Teologia moralna została tu przedstawiona jako nauka dynamiczna, kształtowana przez presję, możliwości i wymagania czasu. Niemniej, zgodnie z przedstawioną argumentacją, aby pozostała dyscypliną mającą istotny wpływ na obecną rzeczywistość, musimy na nowo postawić pewne fundamentalne pytania (włącznie z pytaniem o cel teologii moralnej). Autorka artykułu sugeruje, że praktyczna rzeczywistość jednostek, społeczeństw, Kościoła i planety powinna stanowić podstawę współczesnych dociekań teologiczno-moralnych. Współcześni teologowie moralni i etycy teologiczni (artykuł bada różnice pomiędzy tymi kategoriami) tworzą grupę zróżnicowaną i (należy dodać) podzieloną. Niniejsze studium, dotyczące potencjału etyki eklezjalnej, stanowi zachętę do „budowania mostów" i jednocześnie ćwiczenie w doskonaleniu tej zdolności, co jest odpowiedzią na potrzeby współczesnego świata (włącznie ze światem teologii moralnej). Analiza przeprowadzona w tym rozdziale ma na celu podjęcie próby pozytywnego ustosunkowania się do apelu o odnowę teologii moralnej zawartego w Dekrecie o Formacji Kapłańskiej II Soboru Watykańskiego i w nauczaniu papieża Franciszka.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: teologia moralna, eklezjologia, etyka eklezjalna, historia nauczania moralnego w Kościele rzymskokatolickim.

FROM MORAL THEOLOGY TO ECCLESIAL ETHICS

Summary

The paper explores shifts and turns that over the centuries have influenced moral thinking and instructing on moral matters within the Roman Catholic tradition. The purpose of this exploration is to shed light on the current status of moral theology and identify areas for future developments. The paper proposes 'ecclesial ethics' as one of such areas. It views moral theology as a dynamic discipline, shaped by the pressures, invitations and demands of the day. It claims that for moral theology to be relevant today, some fundamental questions (including the purpose of the discipline) must be revisited. It argues that practical realities in the lives of individuals, communities and the Church as well as the Planet must be at the forefront of moral theological considerations. Contemporary moral theologians and/or theological ethicists (the paper considers this distinction) are a diverse and, we dare to add, divided group. The paper argues that building bridges in a polarised world (including the world of moral theology) needs to be a priority. The overall aim of this study is to respond positively to the call for the renewal of moral theology as voiced in the 'Decree on Priestly Formation' of the Second Vatican Council and in several statements made by Pope Francis.

K e y w o r d s: moral theology, ecclesiology, ecclesial ethics, history of moral teaching in the Roman Catholic Church.

VON DER MORALTHEOLOGIE ZUR EKKLESIALEN ETHIK

Zusammenfassung

Die Autorin des Artikels unternimmt den Versuch, ausgewählte Einflüsse und Ereignisse aus der historischen Perspektive zu identifizieren, welche die Entwicklung des ethischen Denkens und der moralischen Lehre in der römisch-katholischen Tradition bedingten. Diese Identifizierung soll einem besseren Verständnis des gegenwärtigen Stands des moralischen Diskurses dienen und die Richtungen seiner weiteren Entwicklung aufzeigen. Die ekklesiale Ethik ist eine der vorgeschlagenen Richtungen. Die Moraltheologie wird hier als eine dynamische Wissenschaft dargestellt, die vom Druck, den Möglichkeiten und Herausforderungen der Zeiten geprägt ist. Dennoch müssen nach der hier vorgetragenen Argumentation bestimmte grundlegende Fragen (einschließlich der Frage nach dem Ziel der Moraltheologie) bekräftigt werden, damit sie eine Disziplin mit einem signifikanten Einfluss auf die gegenwärtige Realität bleiben kann. Die Autorin des Artikels schlägt vor, dass die Grundlage für zeitgenössische theologisch-moralische Untersuchungen die praktische Realität von Individuen, Gesellschaften, der Kirche und des Planeten bilden sollte. Zeitgenössische Moraltheologen und theologische Ethiker (der Artikel untersucht die Unterschiede zwischen diesen Kategorien) sind eine vielfältige und (es sollte hinzugefügt werden) in sich gespaltene Gruppe. Diese Studie, die sich auf das Potenzial der ekklesialen Ethik konzentriert, ist eine Ermutigung und ein Aufruf zum „Brückenbauen", das die moderne Welt (einschließlich der Welt der Moraltheologie) braucht. Der Hauptzweck dieser Studie ist der Versuch, positiv auf den Appell für eine Erneuerung der Moraltheologie zu reagieren, der im Dekret über die Priesterausbildung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils und in der Lehre von Papst Franziskus enthalten ist.

S c h l ü s s e l w ö r t e r: Moraltheologie, Ekklesiologie, ekklesiale Ethik, Geschichte der moralischen Lehre in der römisch-katholischen Kirche.

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