

R E V I E W E S S A Y

**Method in American
Catholic Moral Theology
*After Veritatis Splendor***

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OUR PURPOSE in this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology* is to reflect on the state of “method” in Catholic moral theology today. But rather than present a set of essays, each representing a different method or “school,” we chose to invite authors at institutions training American Catholic moral theologians to write essays reflecting on the influence of a diverse set of thinkers, thinkers who both immediately preceded and particularly influenced American Catholic moral theology today. We hope that presenting a set of essays *by* these current shapers of American Catholic moral theologians, *about* recent influential figures, will provide a lens into what characterizes Catholic moral theology today.

So, does this decision about how to reflect on methodology reveal that American Catholic moral theology today in fact has no “method”? Certainly as compared with pre-Vatican II Catholic theology of all subdisciplines, which Gerard McCool describes as marked by a “search for a unitary method,”¹ moral theology today does not present a straightforward unified methodology. Yet to say “there is no method” says too little. Such a claim could wrongly suggest that there

¹ Gerard McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

are no identifiable parameters in the discipline of Catholic moral theology today. It could also fan the flames of a reactionary trend seeking refuge in the perceived order of pre-Vatican II moral theology, a move that, moreover, has no real support in the work of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Thus, in this essay, we seek to outline the broad contours of Catholic moral theology after Vatican II, and in particular after Pope John Paul II's 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, to identify commonalities and differences of methodology in American Catholic moral theology today.

Such a task encounters two immediate challenges: first, how to contextualize the work of this era in light of continuing controversies over the proper "hermeneutic" for Vatican II; and second, how to sample the extremely diverse data set. As to the first challenge, it is uncontested that there has been a renewal or reform in Catholic moral theology underway since around the time of Vatican II.² The exact nature of this reform, however, is still highly contested.³ But what is affirmed by nearly all and testified to in Magisterial documents is both the need for change in moral theology after Vatican II (e.g., *Optatam totius* 16) and the evident differences in how moral theology is done before and after Vatican II (e.g., *Veritatis splendor* in comparison with the moral manuals).⁴ Our goal here is neither to present any comprehensive account of similarities and differences between pre- and post-conciliar Catholic moral theology nor to offer any account of the process of transformation. Rather, in the context of the aftermath of and ongoing process of reform, we offer an account of methodology in American Catholic moral theology today by surveying the commonalities and differences in how it is practiced.

The second challenge is the manageability of the task given the amount of work in the discipline in the period under examination.

² By using the terms "reform" (and "renewal"), we are following Pope Benedict XVI's characterization of the two hermeneutics applied to the Council and its writings, in his *Christmas Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roma Curia* (December 22, 2005), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html. In this speech, he distinguishes between a "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture" and a "hermeneutic of reform." "Reform" is further described as a "renewal within continuity;" it is in a "combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists."

³ For example, see John O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) and the collection *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, eds. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ In addition to the Magisterial documents cited in the text, see also various accounts of this reform in the context of moral theology treated in essays within this volume, including those by James F. Keenan, S.J. and Craig Steven Titus.

There are other well-known venues for a more exhaustive survey of contemporary Catholic moral theology which need not be repeated here.⁵ Our approach to surveying methodology in American Catholic moral theology is to focus on substantive works by a representative sample of figures as data to substantiate the general claims we make about commonalities and differences. When we first conceived the task of the volume, we constructed a list of potential contributors to the volume, not only for their ability to treat the appointed figures, but also because they are actively at work in Catholic doctoral programs, training the future generation of American Catholic moral theologians. Since we asked these contributors to review the work of influential earlier figures, we thought a review of the potential contributors' own work would be fitting.⁶ Obviously such an approach has limitations despite the evident importance of our contributors. Other works and moral theologians could surely be "placed" in the discussion that follows but are not. Therefore much further work will be required on this question, and this essay is intended to offer very broad claims to serve as a conversation starter rather than to present any parameters for that inquiry as settled or unreviseable.

CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY IN THE POST-*VERITATIS SPLENDOR* PARADIGM

Much work has been done in identifying the ways in which moral theology has changed as a discipline from its pre-Vatican II form.⁷ As

⁵ Perhaps the most obvious such venue is "Notes in Moral Theology" published regularly in *Theological Studies*.

⁶ As with any project, not all the potential contributors were able to accept the invitation and/or contribute, for various reasons. Yet we still think they constitute a representative sample of current work in moral theology, given their work in major doctoral programs training students. Thus, we have retained the set of authors since each one treated here was invited to contribute, even though not every author actually has an essay in this volume. The only exception to the parameter of "currently training doctoral students" is Craig Steven Titus, who agreed graciously to contribute under an extraordinary tight deadline. Though Titus' graduate faculty position at the Institute for Psychological Sciences in Arlington, VA involves training future psychologists rather than moral theologians, he was asked to contribute given his role at the Servais Pinckaers, O.P. archives in Fribourg, his status as Pinckaers' last doctoral student, and his instrumental role in making the work of Pinckaers available to American moral theologians through *The Pinckaers Reader* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), which he edited with John Berkman.

⁷ For just a sampling of the many overviews of changes in Catholic moral theology in the twentieth century, see: John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: a Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); John A. Gallagher, *Time Present, Time Future: A Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995); Paulinus Odozor,

noted above, that comparison is not the task of this essay. But in this essay's survey of commonalities and differences in contemporary American Catholic moral theology, the commonalities do provide evidence of reform from pre-conciliar moral theology. Yet before turning to those commonalities, one explanation is in order. Despite the important role of Vatican II in the renewal of Catholic moral theology, note that the titles of this section and this essay name American Catholic moral theology post-*Veritatis splendor*. Changes in Catholic moral theology were not immediate with the Second Vatican Council, as evidenced by the fact that the drafted document on moral theology (*De ordine morali*) was never promulgated by the Council.⁸ A thorough account remains to be written of the ways in which Catholic moral theology began to be reformed after 1965 but continued to be marked by pre-conciliar characteristics in certain methodologies and debates. For simplicity's sake, we take *Veritatis splendor* as a crucial marker and exemplification of *reformed* (though of course still being reformed) Catholic moral theology after Vatican II.

How so? The encyclical confirms and reinforces two key aspects of the post-Vatican II renewal of moral theology. First, it avoids a return to an act-centered or law-centered approach. While law retains a place—indeed, an essential place—its place is within a much larger narrative. Even before the encyclical but especially since, moral theologians heeded the oft-quoted call of *Optatam totius* 16, endeavoring to be more thoroughly nourished by Scripture, as well as other resources from the Christian tradition. This includes a return to hitherto neglected sources (e.g., patristics) as well as new readings of sources (e.g., Thomas Aquinas) prevalent in preconciliar moral theology. This focus on recovering the full richness of both Scripture and tradition results in a renaissance of approaches—such as virtue ethics or narrative ethics—that transcend the act-centered, law-centered approach that dominated the age of the manuals. Traditional texts no longer simply provide sources for particular rules, but rather offer a fuller account of the acting person and of the scriptural worldview.

Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal: a Study of the Catholic Tradition Since Vatican II (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003); James F. Keenan, S.J., *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: from Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010); and Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States: A History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008).

⁸ On the initial document, see Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 1: 246-251.

Second and just as importantly, the encyclical seems to represent an end of Catholic moral theology done without reference to any specifically theological claims.⁹ Though discussion of the relationship between nature and grace was alive and well in the Catholic theologies of the decades preceding Vatican II, less attention was given at that time within moral theology to an account of the continuities and discontinuities between how moral issues can be faced by people of Christian faith and those without such faith. In the years after the Council there continued to be moral methodologies self-described as “autonomous” or not “distinctively Christian.” By the time of *Veritatis splendor* (as also in Pope John Paul II’s social encyclicals, which all include theological narrations of social realities¹⁰), the moral life of the Christian is addressed clearly within a theological narrative, as evident in the encyclical’s opening section on the encounter with Jesus Christ and in its concluding section on martyrdom.

Thus, while the renewal of moral theology was underway in the years after Vatican II, debates over acts and norms, as well as debates over “autonomy,” continued to reflect a pre-conciliar approach. By affirming the movement to a more thoroughly theological ethics, and by avoiding a return to legalism, *Veritatis splendor* serves as the most appropriate marker for examining Catholic moral theology characterized by the renewal initiated in no small part by Vatican II.

With this brief reference to the process of reform in mind, we can now turn to more detailed explication of the commonalities and differences in contemporary moral theology, using the lenses of two crucial documents of Vatican II, the constitutions on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) and on the Church’s relationship with the world (*Gaudium et spes*).¹¹ Though in Vatican II there was no promulgated document directly on moral theology, these two documents address questions that are at the heart of the renewal in moral theology: “who are we as Church?” and “how do Christians operate in the modern world?” The two topics are obviously closely related, as will be seen in

⁹ For a detailed engagement of this debate over “autonomous ethics,” versus a “faith-ethic position,” see Odzor, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal*, 108-134.

¹⁰ For examples see the discussion of the spirituality of work in *Laborem exercens* (nos. 24-27), the explanation of “structures of sin” in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (nos. 35-40), and the explanation of the role of religion in the fall of communism in *Centesimus annus* (nos. 24, 29).

¹¹ Of course there were four central constitutions of Vatican II, including one on revelation (*Dei verbum*) and one on liturgy (*Sacrosanctum consilium*). Without denying the importance of these for moral theology, the two chosen here serve as particularly helpful ways to map the continuity in and discontinuity among various research programs in American Catholic moral theology today. Of course *Nostra aetate* could serve a similar function for comparative ethics today, or *Dignitatis humanae* for certain issues in political life.

the overlap in the ensuing treatments. Nonetheless they serve as very helpful lenses for exploring the commonalities and differences in contemporary American Catholic moral theology.

The Church

The first topic is rooted in the crucial Vatican II document, *Lumen gentium*. Vatican II, and especially this Constitution, certainly signaled a rethinking of the Church's identity, or at least the Church's way of identifying and talking about herself. This can be seen simply by comparing the original form of the schema on the Church, which focused on understandings of the Church as a "society" ruled by certain orderings, and its final form, which integrated these elements within larger images, chief among these being the Church as a sacrament, as people of God, and as a community universally called to holiness.¹² *Lumen gentium* essentially addresses the question of who we are as Church. This concern is readily evident in post-*Veritatis splendor* American Catholic moral theology. Three ways in which that concern is evident are articulated here.

First, in contemporary Catholic moral theology we see a consistent emphasis on a more inclusive understanding of who we are as Church. This is especially evident in attention given to persons who have been disenfranchised in the Church. For example, the work of James Keenan, S.J. at the international gatherings of Padua and Trent, as well as Bryan Massingale's concerns about conceiving the Catholic tradition as "white," stem from an awareness that the Church is a worldwide, multicultural organism, and (implicitly) that its mission to be a "sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind... a sign and an instrument of such union and unity" is impeded by practices of exclusion.¹³ Massingale devastatingly relates conversations with pastors who respond to his concerns by saying "our people will get mad" or "our people won't understand

¹² On the development of the final set of chapters in comparison with the original set, see Gérard Philips, "History of the Constitution," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 1:105-137. On the importance of Church as sacrament, see Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church*, expanded edition (Garden City, NY: Image/Doubleday, 1987), ch. 4. The language of the "people of God" has sometimes been given a kind of anti-clerical or "democratic" interpretation, which is often contested, but as Joseph Ratzinger indicates, the problem is not the term itself, but rather the purely "politicized" use of the term, apart from seeing the Church ultimately as "the instrument of God for gathering men to him, so as to prepare for the moment when God shall be 'everything to everyone' (1 Cor 15:28)." See "The Ecclesiology of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*," in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 129.

¹³ *Lumen gentium*, 1. In the eschatological section of the document, the Church is named "the universal sacrament of salvation" (48).

white privilege,” noting that “our Catholic people” is assumed here to mean “white people.”¹⁴

This concern for inclusion extends not only to who constitutes the Church in general, but also to who comprises the guild of Catholic moral theologians. The mission statement of Keenan’s first cross-cultural conference of moral theologians in Padua states the need for this “international exchange” in order “to appreciate the challenge of pluralism; to dialogue from and beyond local culture; and to interconnect within a world church not dominated solely by a northern paradigm.”¹⁵ He notes the conference attracted participants from 63 countries, and in particular, “in a field that only twenty-five years ago was practically completely clergy, women were strongly in evidence.”¹⁶

Other authors raise the concern for inclusion in different ways. Lisa Sowle Cahill’s *Theological Bioethics* is representative of efforts to include oft-neglected voices in moral analysis, as she continually points out the different ways that bioethical issues impact the poor in both developed and developing nations.¹⁷ Similarly, Jana Bennett draws on the thought of Augustine to articulate a Christian vision of family that is inclusive of single persons, who are often excluded in a church assumed to be made up of “families.” By adopting the term “households,” she points out that “the broader considerations of what it means to be domestic and to be part of a household (be it a familial household or a monastic household, to say nothing of the Household of God) call us to consider singleness...alongside marriage.”¹⁸ Subtly different rationales drive the concern for inclusion—authors like Massingale and Cahill combine broadly accessible justice claims with support from the Christian tradition (e.g., option for the poor), while Bennett articulates a vision of family life that is primarily dependent on distinctive elements of the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, there is a largely uncontested common concern for greater inclusivity in understanding who we are as Church.

Second, directly related to these “boundary” concerns about who constitutes the Church is a more teleological concern about the holi-

¹⁴Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 80-81.

¹⁵James F. Keenan, S.J., “Introduction,” in James Keenan (ed.) *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church: the plenary papers from the first cross-cultural conference on Catholic theological ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 3.

¹⁶Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, 6.

¹⁷ See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, Change* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 9, 197, 207, 217.

¹⁸ Jana Bennett, *Water is Thicker Than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26

ness toward which the Church is called. One of the most referenced phrases in *Lumen gentium* is the “universal call to holiness.” In articulating the universal call to holiness, it explicitly rejects the notion that only some Christians answer to a “higher call.” The Constitution maintains that Jesus “preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples, regardless of their situation” and that “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”¹⁹ This can be understood in two related ways. First the document affirms the commonality of vocation to holiness for the lay and religious. Second, there is greater emphasis on the continuity between more baseline and broadly accessible norms, and the goals toward which those norms lead. Both of these related concerns—the commonality of the call to holiness and the continuity between basic requirements and perfection—are evident in *Veritatis splendor*. It describes how the “commitment to respect all the moral demands of the commandments represents the absolutely essential ground in which the desire for perfection can take root and mature, the desire, that is, for the meaning of the commandments to be completely fulfilled in following Christ.”²⁰ It also states that the invitation to the rich young man to sell all and follow is “not restricted to a small group of individuals” but is “meant for everyone.”²¹

Thus, the key implication for contemporary moral theology is near total abandonment of any sort of two-level ethic within the Church. How is this developed? We might follow *Lumen gentium*’s lead and examine the universal call to holiness through the three evangelical counsels, and how their concerns are now expanded in the works under review.²² The universal call is perhaps most obvious with regard to chastity (understood to include celibacy) where a two-tier ethic used to predominate. Although John Grabowski’s *Sex and Virtue* and Cahill’s *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* both address celibacy, they are predominantly focused on chaste sexuality beyond ordained and religious life. Importantly, sexuality for the laity is not simply a matter of keeping to minimal natural law norms. Instead, Grabowski suggests that it is “the biblical understanding of covenant” that frames the proper treatment of sexuality, such that “redeemed”

¹⁹*Lumen gentium*, 40.

²⁰*Veritatis splendor*, 17.

²¹*Veritatis splendor*, 18. Italics in original.

²² See *Lumen gentium*, 44. Though the evangelical counsels appear in the chapter on religious life, the constitution states clearly that “The faithful of Christ bind themselves to the three aforesaid counsels either by vows, or by other sacred bonds, which are like vows in their purpose.”

sexuality is fundamental “liturgical” or “anamnetic” in character.²³ Cahill also goes beyond minimal norms, placing sexuality within “Jesus’ preaching of the reign or kingdom of God...which transforms human relationships” in ways “which enlarge our social capacities for compassion toward others and solidarity in the common good.”²⁴ In Grabowski and Cahill we find a common tendency toward a maximal ethic of holiness, one that includes those who are not ordained/religious.

With regard to poverty, solidarity with the poor is not a Franciscan-style counsel for the few, but is a demand which must, in different ways, be realized in the life of all Catholics. The language of “option for the poor,” as Kelly Johnson notes, now calls all Catholics “to choose...to stand with the poor and to judge every decision by how it will impact those who are most vulnerable.”²⁵ Johnson especially points out the personal way in which this option must be lived out in American Catholic parishes on the issue of immigration.²⁶ Massingale’s use of the notion of solidarity to combat racism invites not only an uncovering of systems of white privilege but a movement to “a commitment to share life with the other,” intentionally placing oneself in settings where one can experience for oneself the “racial rejection and exclusions” that African-Americans feel on a regular basis.²⁷ Again, in both these cases, the laity are called beyond minimal norms, into a potentially costly sacrificial solidarity. Thus *Lumen gentium*’s articulation of the universal call to holiness is particularly evident with regard to chastity and poverty.

It is, admittedly, less obvious with regard to obedience. This is perhaps unsurprising if obedience is reduced to conformity to Magisterial teaching on moral matters, given the vitriolic debates over *Humanae vitae* in American Catholic moral theology. This is surely an area that demands further development.²⁸

²³ John Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 24, 46.

²⁴ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 121, 164.

²⁵ Kelly Johnson, “Catholic Social Teaching,” in *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective*, eds. David Matzko McCarthy and Therese Lysaught (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 225-240, at 230.

²⁶ Kelly Johnson, “Catholic Social Teaching,” 236-239.

²⁷ Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 118.

²⁸ This is not to say there is no work being done on the relationship between theology and Magisterial authority. The work of Richard Gaillardetz comes immediately to mind. See his *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003) and *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical

But there is evidence of a more universal call to holiness with regard to obedience evident in the persistent contemporary emphasis on the *intelligibility* and persuasiveness of moral norms. Though far from a denial of the importance of Magisterial authority, this is a re-situating of attention to obedience. Often in the context of scholarship on particular moral issues, moral theologians present moral norms as not simply a series of (taboo-like, or even voluntaristically-imposed) prohibitions. Scholars such as Jean Porter situate practical reasoning with its concomitant moral norms within teleological discussions of human happiness.²⁹ Craig Steven Titus presents an empirically-corroborated account of moral development wherein law and rules function to aid formation in the virtues.³⁰ Keenan presents sin in general in the context of an impediment to love.³¹ Rules about sexuality are presented as guides toward achieving the goods of human sexuality.³² Rules about racism and life in society are presented as serving the further good of human justice and solidarity.³³ It could also be argued that official Church documents are more attuned to this approach to the universal call of holiness with regard to obedience. As John Paul II writes of the commandments in *Veritatis splendor*, they “are meant to safeguard the good of the person... by protecting his goods.”³⁴ They represent not simply acts of God’s authority, but more fundamentally of God’s love. The concern to situate moral norms and attendantly make them more persuasive is certainly an explicit objective in John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, and in theologians such as Grabowski who rely on that body of teaching.³⁵

Press, 1997). Yet Gaillardetz is not a moral theologian. And noticeably, this topic is not a focus of the sample of authors relied on in this essay.

²⁹ See Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), esp. 268-308.

³⁰ Titus, “Moral Development and Making All Things New in Christ,” *The Thomist* 72.2 (2008): 233-258, especially 250-252. See also his *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 119-132 for more on moral development, in conversation with psychological and neuroscientific sources.

³¹ See James F. Keenan, S.J., *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts for the Catholic Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2004), 47-65.

³² See Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 159-161.

³³ See Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 130-142 for the “vision” toward which norms like inclusivity within the Church lead. For more on how rules and virtues lead to the common good, see David Hollenbach, *The Global Face of Public Faith: Politics, Human Rights, and Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 50-52.

³⁴ *Veritatis splendor*, 13.

³⁵ The newer Michael Waldstein translation of John Paul II’s catecheses on the Theology of the Body has become the preferred edition; see *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). But for a

Further, we could include in this concern for greater persuasiveness a related concern for greater accessibility, not only in more “introductory” university texts but even in books directed beyond an academic setting to “ordinary” Christians.³⁶ Finally, we might point out that the distinction between two different types of freedom, implied in *Veritatis splendor*, and perhaps most extensively explained in the work of Servais Pinckaers, remains an area where “obedience” has an obvious analogue in lay life. Properly speaking, freedom is “a talent to be developed,” rather than simply a matter of unconstrained choice.³⁷ Freedom itself requires discipline and training. This is not a simply juridical form of obedience, and it is a kind of obedience that is rightly seen in the life of all Catholics, not just religious.

A third and final commonality among post-*Veritatis splendor* moral theologians in terms of “being Church” is broader attention to communal practices rather than a concentration on applying moral rules to individuals. One might say that today all issues are “social ethics.” One of the key themes of *Lumen gentium* is that God seeks to “save [humans] not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people.”³⁸ This distinctive social eschatology, seen in the frequent use of the term “solidarity” in Pope John Paul II, is most prominently developed by Henri de Lubac, whose work is then forcefully reiterated in Pope Benedict’s *Spe Salvi*.³⁹ What this has meant for moral theology is that issues once treated primarily in the context of individual action are now understood as having social, or interpersonal, dimensions.⁴⁰ *Gathered for the Journey* approaches all the issues of the moral life through an ecclesiology of persons gathered for a pilgrimage together, maintaining that “the very nature of moral inquiry” is not to direct the decision-

decade the only available English translation was John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), a volume for which John Grabowski wrote the “Foreword,” pp. 15-21.

³⁶ The obvious author to mention here is James Keenan, S.J. See especially his *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), *Commandments of Compassion* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1999) and *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

³⁷ For an example of the influence of Pinckaers’ notion of freedom in the authors surveyed here, see Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude*, 96. See also Titus, “Moral Development and Making All Things New in Christ,” 247-249.

³⁸ *Lumen gentium*, 9.

³⁹ See *Spe salvi*, nos. 10-15, where de Lubac’s work receives explicit endorsement. Ratzinger also wrote the forward to de Lubac’s *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988; orig. 1947), which is the fullest articulation of the social eschatology.

⁴⁰ Sacramentally these issues were treated mainly in the context of auricular confession, which accentuated the focus on individual action. See Mahoney, *Making of Moral Theology*, 1-36.

making of the detached, rational individual, but rather “to communicate a shared vision of life.”⁴¹ Additionally, Cahill’s work, on both sexual ethics and bioethics, has consistently emphasized that these issues are *social* issues, not merely a matter of individual decisions.⁴² Thus, to continue with these examples, both Cahill and *Gathered for the Journey* pay more extensive attention to institutions and groups (such as hospices or home-schooling associations) to flesh out the life of discipleship.⁴³ This need not function to suppress the importance of moral norms, but rather it situates them in an inherently communal context.

All three of these common characteristics of contemporary American Catholic moral theology continue *Lumen gentium*’s clarion call to understand more richly who we are as Church. Moral theologians are attentive to the boundaries of who is included as Church. They articulate how all those who are Church can understand and seek, with God’s grace, true holiness. And they articulate that as a communal endeavor. One effect of all these characteristics is to reinforce the “distinctiveness” of moral theology. As indicated above, the idea of an “autonomous ethic,” understood to mean there is nothing distinctively Christian how to live morally with regard to questions shared by Christians and non-Christians alike, cannot be sustained when the identity and actions of moral agents are situated as flowing from their membership in the Body of Christ. Although less attention has been given to identifying that distinctiveness in this section, these features suggest that the whole People of God aimed toward holiness in a communal fashion is distinct from, even if in continuity with, “the world.” But how is this to be worked out in terms of action in and for “the world”? We explore this question in the following section, taking up the vision and tasks of *Gaudium et spes*, which also provides the opportunity to highlight important differences in research programs that share the commonalities articulated here.

Being in (but not of) the World

Since any discussion of identity is naturally complemented by attention to the group’s relationship to those outside the body, it is not surprising that another of the four Constitutions of Vatican II addresses precisely this topic. *Gaudium et spes*, the constitution on the

⁴¹ David Matzko McCarthy and Therese Lysaught, “Introduction: The Course of Moral Thinking,” in their (eds.) *Gathered for the Journey*, 1-19, at 8.

⁴² See especially Cahill’s account of “decline and dying” in *Theological Bioethics*, 70-101.

⁴³ See, respectively, Cahill’s *Theological Bioethics*, 120-127, and Julie Hanlon Rubio’s “A Christian Ethic of Child-Rearing: Home School as a Case Study,” in *Gathered for the Journey*, 260-280.

Church in the modern world, serves as a helpful springboard for examining how contemporary American Catholic moral theology, in common and among its varying research programs, addresses how the Church is in but not of the world. This topic is particularly important for moral theology, since so many of the particular issues addressed by that sub-discipline concern activities engaged in by both those in the Church and those outside of it.

The novel "Schema 13" that became *Gaudium et spes* established the Church's relationship to the world as a key emphasis of the Council, an emphasis evident also in the important documents on other religions and religious freedom. These documents develop in the spirit of Pope Paul VI's favorite word, "dialogue."⁴⁴ While, as we will show, the contours of what is meant by "dialogue" are not universally agreed upon, moral theology has largely moved to the place where, as *Gaudium et spes* puts it, "we must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics."⁴⁵ The document itself sets a certain precedent, by beginning with several paragraphs that attempt a summary of the "changes" of the present age, and then returning to detailed engagements on a whole range of particular issues in its second half, reiterating traditional teachings in all areas, and yet framing them in ways contextualized in contemporary society. How has moral theology followed this lead?

We should first point out that all moral theologians today see it as necessary to do moral theology as situated in a broader context, "the world." The days of an insular moral theology that paid little attention to Christian moral issues as contextualized beyond the Church are past. As the editors of *Gathered for the Journey* forthrightly acknowledge in introducing the book's examination of moral reasoning, "[a]ll reasoning proceeds from a context."⁴⁶ Papal writings like *Familiaris consortio* and *Centesimus annus* also frame their teachings with attention to the distinctive cultural contexts—the "signs of the times" interpreted "in the light of the gospel."⁴⁷ A Catholic moral theology that is attentive to its context and its view of its worldly

⁴⁴ On the use of the term by Paul VI and its influence on *Gaudium et spes*, see John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 204. The book of Paul VI's own writings, collected and released in 1964, is simply entitled *Dialogues: Reflections on God and Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964).

⁴⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, 4. For an examination of *Gaudium et spes* in the context of ethics by one of this volume's authors, see David Hollenbach's *The Global Face of Public Faith*, 9-10.

⁴⁶ See McCarthy and Lysaught, *Gathered for the Journey*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 4.

“surroundings” faces novel challenges in the complexity of such a task. No longer is it simply a matter of deducing conclusions from timeless principles. Instead, analysis of society must be intertwined with principles in order to discern what Christians are called to do. But how does Catholic social analysis proceed?

Given the previous section’s discussion of the growing integration of fundamental and social ethics, it should be unsurprising that a common lament in our authors’ surveys of “the world” is a regnant individualism. Grabowski begins with a chapter characterizing our situation in terms of alienation, consumerism, and especially technology, which leads to “the disconnection of people from one another” and “a new search for intimacy to fill the void created by technology.”⁴⁸ Cahill’s treatment of sexuality begins by acknowledging the importance of feminism and gender equality, but expresses concern over the cultural tendency to “neglect the social meanings of the body” and rely on “an autonomous and decontextualized freedom” as “the only sexual guide.”⁴⁹ In her *Theological Bioethics*, she claims that bioethics often ignores the problems of market forces in health care, and promotes individualism through its emphasis on patient autonomy and consent.⁵⁰ *Gathered for the Journey* contrasts Catholic moral theology with the “modern moral theories” of Kantianism and utilitarianism, noting critically that both of these theories presuppose and reinforce Robert Bellah’s claim that “individualism is the ‘first language’ of American life.”⁵¹ Hollenbach worries about an “eclipse of the public” that discards “the good that can be achieved in the shared domain of public life.”⁵² Massingale views the complex issues of racism first in the context of an African-American president and the browning of America, but also of libertarian backlash and anxiety over feelings that “America is being morphed into something they don’t understand, and desire even less.”⁵³

On one assessment of the “signs of the times,” all seem to agree: our social order is characterized by an atomistic individualism that is contrary to Catholic beliefs, and this individualism is quite harmful to our ability to engage in right action. How so? Take just two examples. Hollenbach’s argument for the common good is framed by his description of the “eclipse” of this idea by the “reigning” public philosophy that “gives priority to protecting space for private, autono-

⁴⁸ Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, 10-11.

⁵⁰ Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 8.

⁵¹ McCarthy and Lysaught, “Introduction,” in *Gathered for the Journey*, 18.

⁵² Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10.

⁵³ Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 12.

mous choice.”⁵⁴ While this prioritization of tolerance certainly has attractive features, he questions whether it leads to a “couch-potato politics” which cannot handle substantive social questions. His book moves toward naming those “pressing social problems emerging today [that] will require a considerably stronger commitment to the common good than we already have.”⁵⁵ Bennett begins her argument about our cultural “frenzy” over marriage by identifying the “societal ideal” that “I could not be a complete person (especially as a woman in this patriarchal culture) unless I was an individual, free to do whatever seemed right and good to me within the bounds of state laws and common decency.”⁵⁶ Her book elaborates an alternative to this atomistic individualism by rooting a theology of marriage within the baptismal identity that initiates us into the genuine “household” of God, the Church. From this place, cultural dichotomies generated by individualism—especially married/single—look different. Thus, in two very different arguments, we see the critique of excessive individualism as a crucial frame.⁵⁷

But we also begin to see telling differences, perhaps best described as competing research programs within the renewal of Catholic moral theology. The most obvious difference is between those who characterize the societal situation in starkly negative terms and those who are more ambivalent in their descriptions.

For many of our authors, the situation is quite bleak, not only because of the depth of the problems in the world, but even more so because those problems have infiltrated the Church’s own discourse and experience. Far from painting a picture of a pure community in the midst of a fallen world, these authors are alarmed at the failures within the Church that mirror and accentuate the broader cultural deficiencies. Bennett not only diagnoses a vision of family life in “the world” that is discordant with the Christian household, but also worries about how frequently Christians adopt such models as their own.⁵⁸ Grabowski speaks not only of the “alienation” experienced in today’s sexual culture, but also of the “twofold alienation” brought on by the Church’s history of “legalism” that has hampered attempts to engage pastorally on sexuality.⁵⁹ Similarly, *Gathered for the Journey* characterizes modern modes of moral philosophy as barren, but also

⁵⁴ Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 10.

⁵⁵ Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 31.

⁵⁶ Bennett, *Water is Thicker Than Blood*, vii.

⁵⁷ Most, but not all, of the authors connect this concern about liberal individualism to a concern about consumerism and the dominance of economic ways of thinking, which are also individualistic.

⁵⁸ Bennett, *Water is Thicker Than Blood*, 8.

⁵⁹ Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 19.

castigates individualistic conceptions of faith and belief that are prevalent within the Church. William Cavanaugh's chapter on ecclesiology exemplifies this by beginning with the problem of the dichotomy of spirituality and "organized religion," which leads to a consumerist ethos of the Church's "service" to individual "spiritual needs."⁶⁰ What is crucial to note is that none of these texts suggest that the contemporary cultural context offers us hopeful signs of negotiation; it is overwhelmingly "the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age" that predominate.⁶¹

On the other hand, other authors show more appreciation of certain "joys" and "hopes" of the modern world⁶²—for example, gender equality and human rights—while still offering cautionary interpretations of the moral blindness (or perhaps we might say half-sightedness) that arises if these ideas are not placed within a "thicker," more comprehensive framework. Rather than emphasizing how elements of "the world" are even corroding "the Church," these authors recognize more positive resources evident in the world, mixed with ailments that can then be treated with resources from the Church.

Each of these evaluations then corresponds to a different characterization of the urgent task at hand for the Church in relationship to the world. Those who identify more "joys and hopes" focus on how the Church's resources can be of service to the world, while those who sense more acutely the "griefs and anxieties" attend first and foremost to matters of the Church's own identity in order to serve the world truly. Both are interested in the Church serving the world, carrying on "the work of Christ" who "came into the world... to serve and not to be served."⁶³ But the pressing theological work to be done to this end is understood somewhat differently. One seeks to enhance the availability of the resources; the other is more concerned about the sustainability of the resources.

Let us turn to some specific examples of each. For Cahill and Hollenbach, the task is to commend Christian resources to the ailing public square. In *Theological Bioethics*, Cahill suggests that, in response to the question of "[h]as the Christian message or worldview made any difference," one should look for evidence in "the meshing of faith-inspired ventures with other invested groups and communi-

⁶⁰ William Cavanaugh, "Pilgrim People," in *Gathered for the Journey*, 88-105, here 88-89.

⁶¹ *Gaudium et spes*, 1.

⁶² Again, see *Gaudium et spes*, 1: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

⁶³ *Gaudium et spes*, 3.

ties in the public sphere.”⁶⁴ Specifically Christian themes, such as “a transcendent horizon of meaning, solidarity, and special attention to the most vulnerable,” are not thereby exclusively Christian themes.⁶⁵ Hollenbach argues that “social ethics should be based neither on theology and ecclesiology in an unmediated way, nor purely on a rational, natural law foundation.” Instead, “Catholic social ethics needs to be grounded in the particularity and distinctiveness of Christian belief, while it is simultaneously engaged in wide-ranging dialogue and interaction with the diverse modes of thinking and cultures in which it is immersed.”⁶⁶ Catholics must insist in the public square that “a free society” need not mean “a thoroughly secularized society,” while at the same time insisting that a commitment to the common good need not mean “reorganizing all of society around a single, integrating value scheme” which one group possesses.⁶⁷

By contrast, Grabowski and the authors of *Gathered for the Journey* seek to thicken and deepen the Christian character of moral language. They are less interested in making it accessible in the “public square,” but rather more concerned to keep it vital and alive in forming Catholics in their own tradition. While not denying service to the world, they are admittedly more skeptical about the world “receiving” such resources, and so this endeavor should not happen without the more urgent task: formation in a distinctive identity, especially in the face of alien ideas and practices. Grabowski’s final chapter is entitled “Teaching Sex: Education, Sexuality, and Character,” urging that “prohibitions” be seen as “but one aspect of a larger vision of the dignity and value of the life of every human person created in the image of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and called to share in the communion of the Trinity.”⁶⁸ This is thickly theological language, which seeks to form the Christian’s understanding of sexual dignity as rooted in the most fundamental theological claims of the tradition. His work on natural family planning also exemplifies this, narrating it as a practice that best achieves the goods of covenantal marriage evident in sources from Scripture through Aquinas and to Pope John Paul II. *Gathered for the Journey*’s programmatic introduction adopts the language of “hospitality” as key, “sharing a way of life with others

⁶⁴ Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 120.

⁶⁵ Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 130.

⁶⁶ Hollenbach, “Catholic Ethics in a World Church,” in *Catholic Theological Ethics*, ed. Keenan, 145.

⁶⁷ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 114-115. See also *The Global Face of Public Faith*, 4-6, where Hollenbach relies on the work of sociologist Jose Casanova to offer a far less dire diagnosis of broader society concerning secularism, including therefore the amenability of broader society to Christian influence.

⁶⁸ Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 167.

in such a way that God's offer of grace in Jesus Christ is visible and God's love for the world is acted out."⁶⁹ "Hospitality" is particularized as an imitation of Christ. Bennett's work on marriage and singleness is driven mainly by a refusal to let a contemporary American vision of "natural marriage" be determinative of the shape of Christian households. Her work on ensuring a proper place for single believers in the life of the Church culminates similarly in a final chapter, "At Home in Christ," which suggests "alternate views of households" that display "how the liturgical life of the Household of God spills over to daily households."⁷⁰

One could (wrongly) fall into a Troeltschian dichotomizing of church-type/sect-type here. Yet *Gathered for the Journey* does not neglect "the world," nor does Cahill, for example, neglect the Church and the task of formation. How then ought we to characterize this divergence? We would propose that the difference here, while partially based on different pragmatic evaluations of "the signs of the times," also involves a subtly different answer to the prior question of "What is the Church?" Put simply, one group sees the Church as offering distinctive resources for a pluralist body ("the world"), whereas the other group sees the Church *as* a distinctive body, which by its existence as distinctive thereby also offers resources to the pluralist body of "the world." Again, one must be careful not to overstate the difference here. Neither group denies what the other affirms. Still, we think the bodies of theological ethics generated by the groups display significant enough differences to suggest that they might be identified as different research programs, which is to say that, while they are both marked by the commonalities of method described in American Catholic moral theology here, they proceed with differing questions, assumptions, and priorities, which then affect the visions offered as ways forward. We will return, at the end of the essay, to the question of the extent to which they are in competition.

The two research programs above share in common a very vivid concern for the Church's context in the contemporary world. However, here we might suggest a third research program that would perhaps be perplexed and a bit cautious about both of the prior programs, fearing that "the tail is wagging the dog." That is, attention to context in a more political sense has become so important that an invaluable resource of the Catholic theological tradition (i.e., the intellectual resources enabling a subtle and rich analysis of the complexities of human action and motivation) is being neglected. Put in an intentionally exaggerated way, the concern here is the disappear-

⁶⁹ McCarthy and Lysaught, "Introduction," *Gathered for the Journey*, 14.

⁷⁰ Bennett, *Water is Thicker Than Blood*, 159.

ance of the agent and the agent's soul, lost in a consideration of the dynamics of structures, whether ecclesial or societal. This loss entails inadequate attention to the dynamics of human action.

It might seem this program is somehow a retreat from the Church and Church/world themes, but not so. For example, the renaissance in the study of Thomas and of virtue may seem less overtly political but its concern to "get it right" with regard to human action has enormous import for inquiry into the Church / world relationship. This latter issue is addressed more explicitly in the context of discussion of the relationship between nature and grace, between faith and reason. Porter's work exemplifies this research program. Her work on natural law addresses both those who contest the moral importance (or even existence) of the "natural" from the perspective of secular thought, and those Christians who are wary of any robust articulation of the natural lest it threaten the necessity and distinctiveness of grace.⁷¹ Porter's subtle response on both fronts is in effect a defense of a natural order with its own integrity that nonetheless neither precludes nor demands the transformation that occurs in the graced (ecclesial) life. She adjudicates contemporary debates in practical reasoning in a manner that can remain philosophical and yet is completed without distortion by attention to humanity's supernatural end.

In Titus we also see this technical attention to the relationship between nature and grace.⁷² His work on resilience and the virtue of fortitude with attention to social scientific research is attuned to differences between the infused (i.e., graced) and acquired virtues.⁷³ His research on the status of the passions (i.e., emotions) in Jesus Christ demonstrates not only a commitment to the importance of Christology for moral theology, but also a concern to carefully delineate the intersection of human nature and divine life within an agent. Finally, a comparable approach is seen in the work of Michael Sherwin, O.P. His *By Knowledge and By Love* is not only an examination of the importance of faith for charity, but is more broadly an argument about the relationship between intellect and will in human reasoning, a relationship evident in "natural" practical reasoning as well

⁷¹ See her *Nature as Reason*, 53-139 for the former audience and 378-400 for the latter audience. See also her *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁷² In addition to the work described presently, Titus' current position as professor at the Arlington, VA Institute for Psychological Sciences, an institution training clinical psychologists in a manner attuned to Catholic anthropology and moral theology, is further evidence of this careful attention to the intersection between nature and grace.

⁷³ Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude*, 143-187 and 267-299.

as in the interplay of faith and charity in the life of grace.⁷⁴ More recently he has analyzed the persistent commonalities as well as discontinuities between the virtues of those whose activities are or are not transformed by grace.⁷⁵

As with Porter, the technical precision of these latter inquiries reveals a conviction that “getting right” the relationship between nature and grace not only enables us to more accurately describe how the Christian life is (and is not) distinctive, but also enables the Christian to better understand how the graced life properly informs and is informed by nature as created by God and ultimately to be renewed by God. In both these ways, the work here illuminates the Church/world relationship, based as it must be on the activity of the one God in the transformation of persons, and not simply in the structural relations of church and society. It is true that this research program seems less contextual, less driven by the events of the world. Put another way, this third program resists what might be called “the turn to politics” in Catholic moral theology. By “politics,” we do not mean only larger governmental structures, but the fact that both of the programs addressed above insist that the moral life is inherently a “political” enterprise—an enterprise involving the formation and action of social groups. Joseph Ratzinger, in his *Introduction to Christianity*, suggests that the modern age is marked by a shift away from a concern for “what is true” to a concern for “what can be done or made.”⁷⁶ As is evidenced in his encyclicals and other statements, this should not be read as a rejection of political action of any sort, but instead a recognition that the primary concern should be to root action in truth.⁷⁷ The pope’s caution here is not a call to quietism; however, it is a warning that our urgent concerns for effective practical change ought not quickly dash past the hidden, powerful work of

⁷⁴ Michael Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ Michael Sherwin, O.P., “Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: A Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of the Infused Cardinal Virtues,” *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 29-52

⁷⁶ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004; orig. 1968), 57-69.

⁷⁷ The pope’s complex argument in *Caritas in veritate* is meant to display exactly this connection—that charity detached from truth eventually becomes subject to sentimentality and/or expediency: “Truth needs to be sought, found, and expressed within the ‘economy’ of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed, and practiced in the light of truth. ... Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way” (nos. 2-3).

God in the depths of the person, and the careful, precise delineation of those dynamics.

Needless to say, the importance of Thomas, the revitalization of virtue, and a concern to “get it right” are hardly limited to the research program presented here through this third group of thinkers. Like those above who have a more positive assessment of the amenability of the world to contributions of Christian tradition, the third group describes continuities between natural life and graced supernatural life. Like those above who emphasize the distinctiveness of Christian life and concomitantly focus on thoroughgoing formation as Church, the third group is careful to maintain the gratuitousness of grace and important differences between nature and grace. Nonetheless, this third research program focuses primarily on the (communally-situated) dynamics of the human agent in relation to God as the arena for what is described in this section as the Church/world relationship.

By identifying these three research programs, we highlight the different questions and assumptions each makes, but we should again note that these questions and assumptions arise in response to a common attention to the Church/world theme of *Gaudium et spes*. Further, all three affirm the distinctiveness of Christian ethics, and therefore the prior concern with the ecclesial character of moral theology, in attending to the relationship between that graced ecclesial life and the world. Their emphases in doing so do, as described here, differ.

CONCLUSION

In pointing out some of the differences among contemporary American moral theologians, we conclude with some caveats and questions for the future of the discipline. The most obvious caveat here is that this review does not purport to characterize the entire scene of global Catholicism. We noted Keenan’s work in developing a more worldwide conversation, and certainly our ideas and themes here (say, of inclusion or of the dangers of individualism or of nature and grace) are relevant to any moral theology, in any context. But the attention to context characteristic of contemporary moral theology means that we should reiterate that the focus of this essay is *American* Catholic moral theology.

Further, in recognizing the “research programs” above, we might also point out that they are significantly, though not absolutely, correlated with institutions of doctoral formation. This should not be surprising, for reasons both sociological and genealogical. Sociologically, the formative impact of a doctoral program is worth noting, especially as the field becomes more populated by lay scholars, whose

primary formation is not, say, in a religious order but in a doctoral program. Of course thinkers throughout history have always evidenced the influence of their mentors in their thought. And it would be utterly false to suggest that people from doctoral programs today merely “mimic a program.” Yet it is reasonable to assume that the character of doctoral programs will continue to be particularly influential on Catholic moral theology as a discipline in light of the sociological fact of the increasingly lay demographics of the field.⁷⁸

The correlation between different research programs and different doctoral institutions is also unsurprising in the context of the “genealogical” method of this volume. This volume attempts to present methodology in American Catholic moral theology today by having current mentors in the field reflect on people who have been influential on them. Some of our authors were literal students of these figures, but all were influenced by the persons about whom they write. Awareness of that influence is helpful in understanding our authors’ own thought. Similarly, then, this essay’s survey of distinct research programs among our authors is intended to be helpful in understanding these authors’ work, especially given the enormous influences these authors have in shaping the future of Catholic moral theology in the United States.

We therefore think it would be a mistake to avoid identifying differences among research programs, and correlatively among doctoral programs producing current and future Catholic moral theologians. We are aware of the sad fact that this could short circuit rather than prompt and nourish engagement with individual thinkers and their work. It is not our intention to identify these differences so as to pigeon-hole groups of thinkers, enabling some to summarily dismiss, or unreflectively endorse, their work. Indeed, quite the opposite: our hope is that naming differences allows for further constructive inquiry into the nature of, significance of, and compatibility of those differences. In the fragmented state of the postmodern academy, it is all too easy for different conversations to remain separated, or to come into contact in trivial ways. We believe that moral theology as a whole will be stronger if we confront these difficult questions on which there are differences. It should also be kept in mind that, as we have shown throughout this essay, commonalities abound. Indeed, it may not be a matter of “which research program is right.” Presumably each program can be seen to have a place in the life of the Church

⁷⁸ For reflections on how changes in the life of the Church impact American Catholic moral theology through its practitioners, see David Cloutier and William C. Mattison III’s “Introducing New Wineskins,” in *New Wine. New Wineskins: A Next Generation in Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2005), ed. William C. Mattison III, 1-23.

(and the discipline) as a whole. To the extent that the Church neglects service to the world, it is failing in its identity; to the extent that the Church neglects the importance of communal identity formation in a manner driven by the primary language of the Gospels, it is failing in its identity; to the extent that the Church neglects its profound intellectual resources in carefully delineating the continuity and difference between nature and grace in the agent, it neglects the truth that grounds charity and sets us free, and thus fails in its identity. Elsewhere, we have considered how the younger generation of moral theologians has worked to both engage these differences and grow from the potential mutual correction in charity that can come from their differences.⁷⁹ In this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology*, we hope this overview can spur further discussion of these differences.

As we noted at the outset, there is no “search for a unitary method” here. In delineating some of the differences among research programs, with all the usual caveats about the limitations of typologies, our hope is that distinct conversations in the discipline can become more mutually enriching, so that the resources of all the work being done in various research programs can better serve the life of the Church. Identifying these distinctive emphases allows for conversation and for further work on these important questions. Moreover, we must not overlook all the ways we have identified commonality in Catholic moral theology in this age of renewal. By employing two important lenses from Vatican II, we have sought to highlight key questions which bring out these shared assumptions about who we are as Church and how we characterize the Church’s mission and stance in the modern world. Ultimately, all involved in the work of reform in Catholic moral theology are pursuing a vocation of service to Church and world. In the course of the last century, the scope of that service has widened considerably. But we hope such a widening, while inevitably messy, has also (re)opened many possibilities for envisioning the Christian life in all its fullness and “splendor.” Much good work is ahead of us, especially in “translating” these possibilities into the everyday life of Catholic parishes and households. Let us hope, as the Gospel indicates, that the harvest might be abundant (Matt. 9:37).⁸⁰ **M**

⁷⁹ See Cloutier and Mattison, “Introducing New Wineskins.”

⁸⁰ The authors would like to thank David McCarthy, Joseph Capizzi, and John Berkman for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.