

Servais Pinckaers and the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology

CRAIG STEVEN TITUS

SURVEYING THE INTELLECTUAL and spiritual heritage of Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, O.P. (1925-2008) and the contribution that he makes to the renewal of Catholic moral theology is no small task. He is trained in the spirit of the *ressourcement* movement that has contributed to the renewal in biblical, patristic, and liturgical theology, preparing for the renewal in Catholic moral theology. Moreover, he is a forerunner of the virtue revival that has drawn from a rich Dominican heritage. This movement and this revival are part and parcel of the renewal that prepared for the Second Vatican Council and that continues on to this day.

In particular, Pinckaers addresses the need to break out of the Enlightenment and modern molds of casuistry and moral manuals that have so affected the Church. He recognizes that the post-Tridentine narrowing of the vocation of moral theology to be simply at the service of auricular confessions followed a trend in philosophical ethics to focus on duty and obligation at the expense of the internalization of charity and the other virtues and of attention to the beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. While different sorts of casuistry continue in various forms of consequentialism and utilitarianism, Pinckaers offers a non-casuist approach to moral theory that acknowledges its roots in sacred Scripture and dogmatic theology, as well as in the philosophy of nature and metaphysics. It does not however deny the place for duty or for the study of cases within the pedagogy of virtue. His vision has been instrumental in bringing *ressourcement* to the

post-Vatican II renewal of Catholic moral theology, especially as it is epitomized in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis splendor*¹ and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²

First, I would like to treat some of the themes that indicate the importance of Pinckaers' influence for this renewal. In understanding his contributions, we can see better how he has been received on the contemporary scene. Second, by placing Pinckaers' work in historical context, I will demonstrate the parallel between his efforts and this renewal. Lastly, I will explore the influence in Catholic moral theology of his approach to the relationship between law and love, precept and virtue, which in Pinckaers' understanding are aimed primarily at beatitude with and friendship-love of God, and love of neighbor.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE RENEWAL

In comparing Father Pinckaers' work to that which preceded and followed the Council, we find that he not only exemplifies the development that led to the renewal in Catholic moral theology, but more interestingly, he actually nourishes it and prompts its growth. He treats the main themes of *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism* well in advance of their publication, in particular concerning the sources of moral theology, especially Christ and sacred Scripture, but also developing the key themes of virtue and the New Law of grace.

His concern for the sources of moral theology is evident in his first works. After his Sacred Theology Licentiate thesis (1952) on *Le "Surnaturel" du P. De Lubac*, directed by the future Cardinal, Jean Jerome Hamer,³ Pinckaers' first publication was his scriptural reflection on the virtue of hope. This essay involves a scriptural study, putting an Old Testament theology of hope in dialogue with a Christian approach to the Bible.⁴ In the preface of his first book *Le renouveau de la morale (The Renewal of Morality)*,⁵ Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., notes the importance of Pinckaers' use of a historical method in

¹ John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993).

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, second edition 1997).

³ In this work, Pinckaers is nuanced in his praise and critique of the famous work of Father de Lubac. Pinckaers holds that the natural inclination or desire to see God is completed through the work of grace in the form of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. It is thus that he avoids conflating the natural and supernatural.

⁴ "L'espérance de l'Ancien Testament est-elle la même que la nôtre?" *Nouveau Revue Théologique* 77 (1955): 785–99.

⁵ *Le renouveau de la morale: Etudes pour une morale fidèle à ses sources et à sa mission présente* (Paris: Tequi, 1979; orig. 1964). I will refer to his texts that have not been translated into English by their French title, after having given an English translation of the original title.

his work on Sacred Scripture and on the masters of the theological tradition, particularly on St. Thomas Aquinas. As one of the most notable French *ressourcement* theologians (along with Jean Daniélou, S.J.), Chenu was a forerunner in using historical methods in theology and thus suffered from the Roman sanctions in 1942.⁶ Some twenty years later, Chenu was well placed to appraise this movement and Pinckaers' use of it for moral theology. Chenu says that Pinckaers' employment "of the historical method, in its diverse levels, serves up a keen doctrinal understanding, producing the most up-to-date of studies." It is the result of "the education of a spiritual sensibility in analyses where the contexts enter into the framework of the text. ... Such recourse to the great masters of classical theology is certainly an instrument and a guarantee of *The Renewal of Morality*."⁷

The significance for moral theology of the return to the scriptural, patristic, medieval, and magisterial sources cannot be overestimated. Instead of taking his cue from the manuals that served the previous generation, Pinckaers takes up the primary texts for a dialogue that is not simply historical, but contemporary and properly theological in its intent. He there finds direction in order to escape from the impasse of the casuistic approach of the manuals. Pinckaers' first works are marked by a concern for sources. His first articles and *Le renouveau de la morale* already outlined in many ways his life's work. The latter's subtitle, "*Studies for a morality that is faithful to its sources and to its present mission*," announces his extensive study on the sources of Christian ethics and the efforts at renewing Catholic moral theology—especially as a theological virtue theory based on friendship-love. It is interesting to see how the themes tie the work together. His first critiques of the system of an ethics of obligation (*morale de l'obligation*) contrasted that system with scriptural, Magisterial, and Thomist approaches to a "morality of friendship" (*morale de l'amitié*).⁸ Afterward, he would call the latter a morality of happiness or beatitude.⁹

As a proponent of the importance of the virtues for moral theology, he has participated in the renewal of virtue theory that had al-

⁶ Concerning the use of the historical method in theology at the time of '*Humani generis*,' see: R. Guelluy, "Les antécédents de l'encyclique '*Humani generis*' dans les sanction romaines de 1942: Chenu, Charlier, Draguet," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 81 (1986): 421-97.

⁷ Pinckaers, *Le renouveau de la morale*, 8.

⁸ Pinckaers, *Le renouveau de la morale*, 26-43.

⁹ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995; original French 1985), and *Morality: The Catholic View*, preface by Alasdair MacIntyre, trans. Michael Sherwin (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001; original French 1991).

ready started in philosophy with the works of Josef Pieper¹⁰ and that would follow with Elizabeth Anscombe¹¹ and later with Alasdair MacIntyre.¹² British philosopher Fergus Kerr, O.P. has found in Servais Pinckaers “the greatest exponent” of the virtue tradition in theology, whose strength is to draw “on deep knowledge of the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas and on the whole Catholic Christian inheritance.”¹³ Pinckaers’ *theological* approach to virtue was already evident in *Le renouveau de la morale* as well as in his first four articles on virtue theory. Furthermore, this theological approach to virtue has been able to draw out new connections that are possible through experience (including that of mystics, such as St. John of the Cross),¹⁴ revelation (scriptural sources), and systematic and speculative theological reflection.¹⁵

¹⁰ Josef Pieper, *Zucht und Mass: Über die vierte Kardinaltugend* (Hegner: Leipzig, 1939). His works on the cardinal virtues were first translated and published in English as: *Fortitude and Temperance* (1954); *Justice* (1955); and *Prudence* (1959).

¹¹ See her *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957) and especially her “Modern Moral Philosophy,” in *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1-19.

¹² *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

¹³ Fergus Kerr, cover blurb for J. Berkman and C. S. Titus, *The Pinckaers Reader* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). It is not typical to quote cover blurbs, but a few are used here to fulfill the assigned task of the essay to convey Pinckaers’ influence and reception. Compare this with an earlier assessment by Kerr, in *After Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work, and Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 111, in which he was not convinced on the position that Pinckaers took on the question of natural law. He says: “It is tempting to agree with Servais Pinckaers, however, that abstracting Thomas’s questions on natural law from those on the Old Law and the New Law, and from the questions on Beatitude and virtue, produces nothing but confusion, and that, whatever happened before his day, he never saw natural law as functioning independently of the eternal law which is nothing other than the creator. But it would be premature to opt for one interpretation rather than one of the many others, in what is currently perhaps the most contested topic in Thomas’s work.” In the midst of his erudition, Kerr (*Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 33) however mistakenly identifies Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (who was one of Pinckaers’ teachers along with future cardinals Jean Jerome Hamer and Mario Luigi Ciapi, as well as Paul Philippe) as his dissertation director. It was Louis-Bertrand Gillon, however, who directed Pinckaers’ dissertation, entitled: *La Vertu d’espérance de Pierre Lombard à St. Thomas d’Aquin* (Rome: Angelicum S.T.D. Thesis, 1954). This error has been repeated in the “Introduction” to *The Pinckaers Reader* (2005).

¹⁴ Among his many articles on spiritual theology, Pinckaers published works on prayer and the Carmelite mystics, notably on the works of St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Avila, and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. A complete bibliography is found on the Pinckaers archives website (<http://www.unifr.ch/tmf/-Archives-Pinckaers>) and an older one in *The Pinckaers Reader*.

¹⁵ Pinckaers, “Dominican Moral Theology in the 20th Century,” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 73-89, see especially pages 86-89.

As an expert in fundamental moral theology, his lifetime work was to establish a sure footing for special moral theology (though he lectured in special moral theology—focused on the virtues—as a young professor, he did not teach it during his long appointment at the University of Fribourg). Although his focus was on the nature of true happiness, finality in moral agency, and the nature of freedom, it would be incorrect to down play his contribution to studies on the natural law and action theory.¹⁶ Moreover, though Pinckaers did not write one systematic monograph on the particular virtues, one can find treatments of all of them somewhere in his 28 books and 300 articles.

A further, and perhaps most unique, contribution involves the retrieval of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the New Law of grace in moral theology and the spontaneity that there abides.¹⁷ A Trinitarian vision is very active in his works. Faith in Christ inspires the organism of the virtues. Christ is the very center.¹⁸ The evangelical law (as the grace of the Holy Spirit in those who have faith in Christ, working through love) is the keystone of the influence of Pinckaers' works, which revive neglected insights from the *Summa theologiae* (ST), such as the Christological dimension of the virtues.¹⁹

The connection between the believer's life of virtue and Christ is missed by some observers because of the influence of modern ethical theories and casuist approaches, and by others because of the division of the theological disciplines that separates moral theology from dogmatic and spiritual theology. Nonetheless, Pinckaers notes three

¹⁶ For example, William May and John Cuddeback minimize the place of law in Pinckaers' thought. Furthermore, Pinckaers' works that have been translated into English have not always been recognized for their treatment of the nature of acts and virtues. I would not endorse John Berkman's claim, in his otherwise fine introduction, when he says "Pinckaers was ultimately oriented neither to understanding the demands of the natural law, nor to elucidating the nature of acts and virtues, but to articulating an understanding of the *telos* of the human person" ("Introduction," *The Pinckaers Reader*, 16). In section three, I will treat differences concerning Pinckaers' thought on natural law and moral agency.

¹⁷ Elsewhere I have demonstrated the importance of a Christological and Spirit-centered vision in Pinckaers' works. See C. S. Titus, "Passions in Christ: Spontaneity, Development, and Virtue," *The Thomist*, 73.1 (2009): 53-87.

¹⁸ His article, "The Body of Christ: The Eucharistic and Ecclesial Context of Aquinas's Ethics," (*The Pinckaers Reader*, 26-45) shows the importance of Jesus Christ and the Church for Pinckaers' thought. See also: *L'Évangile et la morale* (Fribourg/Paris: Editions Universitaires/Cerf), 48ff.

¹⁹ His treatment of the New Law draws upon Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* (ST) I-II, questions 106-108. The second element of the New Law is the written Word of God, especially the Sermon on the Mount.

incisive insights, drawn from Aquinas,²⁰ that demonstrate the interconnection of virtue theory and the centrality of Christ in moral theology. First, as Pinckaers says, the “fullness of Christ’s grace, acting through the virtues, the gifts, and the charisms, constitutes the spiritual reserve that spreads over the Church’s members, through Christ who is its Head.”²¹ Second, Christ, through the Redemption he wrought for all people, provokes charity and informs morality.²² Third, the New Law, as the center of Christian ethics, “is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Spirit, which is given to those who believe in Christ”²³ and works through charity.²⁴ Christ, as the Head of the Church and wellspring of charity, serves to unite all of the virtues, which cannot be properly understood in an individualistic way. Moreover, the natural inclination toward social life develops through friendship-love, justice, and every virtue, inasmuch as they inform pro-social acts and relationships.

Another significant contribution to the renewal is Pinckaers’ work on the conception of the will, in which he finds the expression of “the true image of God within us, for it is in our mastery over our actions that we show forth his image.”²⁵ Pinckaers has focused many of his academic studies on the center point of moral agency and ethical theory, that is, its goal or finality. He has asked: what difference does it make whether moral theory aims primarily at obligation or beatitude? One of the primary differences is found in the conception of reason and will and in the freedom that flows from them. Even if a common notion of human nature is established, when construed primarily in terms of obligation, freedom is focused on the capacity to do what one wills (regardless of whether it be good or evil and regardless of one’s vocation to Christian beatitude). The result construes the human person as primarily seeking autonomy or freedom from constraint and from coercion.²⁶ On the contrary, when seen in terms of the capacity to do the good that one wills and to fulfill one’s Christian calling in life, a freedom for excellence and even for holi-

²⁰ Pinckaers identifies numerous other examples of this connection that come at the end of moral analyses (such as is found in the prologue to the *Tertia Pars*). See Pinckaers, “The Body of Christ,” *The Pinckaers Reader*.

²¹ In this text (“The Body of Christ,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 42), Pinckaers refers to the *Tertia Pars*, questions 7 and 8. He discusses the interconnection of the virtues and the Church. Each virtue, far from being isolated, has an ecclesial dimension that is linked to its personal dimension.

²² *ST III* q. 48, a. 4.

²³ *ST I-II* q. 106, a. 1.

²⁴ *ST I-II* q. 108.

²⁵ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 327.

²⁶ See Pinckaers, “Aquinas and Agency: Beyond Autonomy and Heteronomy,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 167-184; and Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 330-353.

ness, results. While not denying the need for freedom from constraints, the focus on “freedom for excellence” involves a life consciously seeking moral-spiritual flourishing.²⁷

Pinckaers realizes that the effort to recover a Gospel morality centered on ultimate happiness has been misunderstood from two different sides: libertarianism and legalism. First, a libertarian perspective misses the interrelation between human virtue and true happiness, on the one hand, and the commands and precepts that spell out the path of moral development, right action, and a good life, on the other. Such a morality based on the freedom of indifference bypasses or relativizes the larger pedagogical purposes of obligation, law, and commandments. Such moral libertarianism cuts itself off from the viable means (including grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as commands and precepts) to guide the person to the end of Christian moral life—to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48). Second, the legalist or duty-driven morality (that has outlived the moral manuals) expresses suspicion of happiness, confusedly believing it leads to utilitarian and hedonist ethics.²⁸ This duty ethic, which counts on the purity of intention and the sentiment of duty to determine moral acts, is a result of various forms of Kantianism or political utilitarianism. Without denying a significant place for duty, precepts, intention, or emotion in moral agency, Pinckaers recognizes that a morality of beatitude and a freedom for excellence—an evangelical freedom of the Spirit—takes imitation of Christ as its goal. Expounding on *Veritatis splendor* (n. 26), he writes:

Each Christian enters into the New Covenant through faith in the person of the Son of God; every Christian receives, from the living tradition entrusted to the apostles and to their successors, the moral prescriptions that need to be conserved faithfully and fulfilled permanently in different cultures, throughout history. These precepts are summed up as to follow and to imitate Christ, according to the words of St. Paul: “For me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21).²⁹

Because of his Trinitarian perspective Pinckaers can go on to affirm that “the moral life of the Christian is bound to the person of Christ forming his Body, the Church, by the work of the Holy Spirit.”³⁰

²⁷ Pinckaers, “Ethics in the Image of God,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 130-143; and Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 327-399.

²⁸ See Pinckaers, “Aquinas and Agency: Beyond Autonomy and Heteronomy,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 167-184, especially 177.

²⁹ Pinckaers, “The Body of Christ,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 26.

³⁰ Pinckaers, “The Body of Christ,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 25.

From the beginning of his Dominican life, he was struck by love for Christ present in Word and Sacrament. This source would serve to found and organize his life as a religious, priest, and moral theologian. It also would put him in the line of a *ressourcement* theology, in a Dominican vein, and constitute the foundation for his contribution to and influence on the renewal of Catholic moral theology.

He was influenced, during a novitiate retreat, by the renowned Dom Olivier Rousseau, Benedictine monk of the monastery of Chevetogne (founded to promote unity between Christian East and West), who impressed two points on the young Pinckaers: the significance of the sacred Scripture and the need to read it theologically. First, realizing that the Word of God was weightier than any human word, he focused his reading on the Bible.³¹ Second, following the theological prerogative of the Church Fathers, as communicated by the theological influence of Chevetogne, Pinckaers privileged a “spiritual” reading of sacred Scripture.³²

Pinckaers affirms that Aquinas was his mentor in regard to his use of sources and his principal focus on Scripture.³³ He understands Aquinas as a model of moral theology built principally upon Scripture, while integrating the human elements that are needed for a Christian life. This scriptural model, as Pinckaers affirms, “encourages and helps us to have recourse to the Gospel and to Sacred Scripture, from which we will find the light, inspiration, and materials to build a Christian ethics in the style that is fit for today, using the particular resources of which we dispose.”³⁴

A number of important Catholic writers, including Thomas O’Meara, O.P.,³⁵ Matthew Levering,³⁶ and Tracey Rowland³⁷ refer to Pinckaers as a “Biblical Thomist,” because of the importance he places on sacred Scripture in the Thomist revival of moral theology and

³¹ Pinckaers, “My Sources,” *Communio* 26 (1999): 913.

³² At the same time, he had a high regard for historical critical studies, as is seen in his article on the Word of God and morality: “La Parole de Dieu et la morale,” *Le Supplément de la vie spirituelle* 200 (March 1997): 21-38.

³³ See Pinckaers, “My Sources,” 913-15.

³⁴ *L’Evangile et la morale*, 10. He, furthermore, calls for the audacious confidence to believe that Christian thought can be creative at the level of expression, while remaining faithful to the Church’s rich patrimony.

³⁵ See the section entitled “A Biblical Thomist: Servais Pinckaers” (363-66) in Thomas F. O’Meara, O.P., “Interpreting Thomas Aquinas: Aspects of the Dominican School of Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century,” in Stephen J. Pope, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 355-73.

³⁶ Matthew Levering, *Biblical Natural Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), in which he compares Pinckaers’ teaching on natural law to that of Martin Rhonheimer and Graham McAleer. Levering also calls Pinckaers a *ressourcement* Thomist.

³⁷ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26.

in interpreting grace and the virtues. Thomas O'Meara explains that this appellation can be further justified due to the fact that Pinckaers published his first articles (1955 and 1956) on Biblical themes: one article involved a scriptural understanding of hope³⁸ and another prophetically called for the use of a *ressourcement* model to renew Catholic moral theology.³⁹ Pinckaers argues that the Word of God is an integral part of the Church's theological and moral project and that a renewal in moral theology needs to recover the use of Sacred Scripture. He recognizes that historical studies of the Bible are to help in this regard.⁴⁰ Avery Cardinal Dulles, for his part, has observed that Pinckaers emphasizes both the biblical and patristic grounding of Aquinas' moral theology, as a model for contemporary Christian ethics.⁴¹

Pinckaers has lived the liturgical renewal with a Catholic emphasis on Christ present not only in Word, but also in Sacrament, especially in the Eucharist. He defends the position that Christ builds up his Church through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.⁴² Employing St. Paul's reflections in his Letter to the Romans (12:1), Pinckaers says: "Morality appears as a kind of living sacrifice that directly recalls the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord."⁴³ Because of Christ's real presence therein, Pinckaers recognizes the Eucharist as the apex of the Sacraments and the beginning of the moral life. Following St. Paul, he speaks of a liturgical morality. Pinckaers writes: "There is a close bond [and] a vital contact between liturgical prayer and the moral life. Before all theory and doctrine, the moral life is first nourished by the body of Christ, his presence in the Eucharist."⁴⁴ He goes on to explain that "moral life thus becomes the prolongation and activation in our daily life of the

³⁸ "L'espérance de l'Ancien Testament est-elle la même que la nôtre?" *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 77 (1955): 785-99 (republished in his *Renouveau de la morale*, 1964).

³⁹ "Le renouveau de la théologie morale," *Vie intellectuelle* 27 (October 1956): 1-21.

⁴⁰ See especially the collection of articles found in *L'Évangile et la morale* (1990). It is hard to find one of his articles or books that does not concern itself with Sacred Scripture.

⁴¹ Avery Dulles, "John Paul II and the Renewal of Thomism," in *John Paul II and St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Ann Arbor, MI: Sapientia Press, 2006), 15-29, at 16.

⁴² Pinckaers, "The Body of Christ," *The Pinckaers Reader*. On the importance of the sacrament of the Eucharist for his moral theology, see his first essays in 1955, *Renouveau de la morale* (1964), *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (orig. 1985), *La vie selon l'Esprit: Essai de théologie spirituelle selon saint Paul et saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Luxembourg: Editions Saint-Paul, 1996), esp. 249-259, *Spiritualité du martyr* (2000), and "My Sources."

⁴³ "The Body of Christ," *The Pinckaers Reader*, 32, where Pinckaers also refers to 1 Cor. 10: 16-17.

⁴⁴ "Conscience and Christian Tradition," *The Pinckaers Reader*, 325.

Eucharistic liturgy where we communicate in the Body of Christ to which we have been united by baptism.”⁴⁵ Pinckaers also recognizes the correlation of the Eucharist and the faith of martyrs, who are the epitome of Christian courage.

His devotion to Christ in the Eucharist demonstrates that he was profoundly contemplative. He lived the Dominican motto as understood by St. Thomas “*contemplata aliis tradere*,” to share with others the fruit of contemplation.⁴⁶ His apostolic activities and university teaching grew out of his contemplative prayer and study. His writing grew out of all four. He was turned toward a prayerful and studious contemplation of all things philosophical and theological. His article on an eclipse demonstrates his admiration for nature, as did his regular walks in the Fribourg countryside that kept him in touch with the seasons and the elements.⁴⁷ But it must be said that he found communion with and adoration of Christ in the Eucharist to be the source of moral strength and virtue. In one of his last works published before his death, he says: “in the still attentiveness to the unique presence of the Lord, in silent faith, adoration discretely and surely arouses and animates the moral life of the Christian with its virtues.”⁴⁸ This devotion to Christ personally present in the Eucharist was his inspiration from his youth, as he testifies in “My Sources.”⁴⁹

As a Dominican priest and theologian, Pinckaers read the sources of the Christian tradition together: Scripture in its context, as part of the Christian tradition that also involves the Church Fathers’ interpretation of Scripture and the Church’s Magisterium.⁵⁰ Pinckaers consistently argues furthermore that Catholic moral theology can be separated neither from dogmatic theology (Trinitarian theology and Christology and grace), nor from spirituality, nor from the Magisterium. Neither can it be separated from historical investigations or

⁴⁵ “Conscience and Christian Tradition,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 325. In his article “The Body of Christ” (45), Pinckaers sums up the importance of the Eucharist for theology saying: “Thus, we would dare say that faith and devotion to the Body of Christ in the Eucharist and also in his ecclesial Body—in their strongest meaning—are a primary inspiration and source of St. Thomas’s theology. It is like a primary experience, hidden under the toil of reflection, which belongs to the realm of prayer and spiritual attraction, as the Holy Spirit forms them in us.”

⁴⁶ *ST II-II* q. 188, a. 6.

⁴⁷ Pinckaers, “L’éclipse ou le réveil de l’admiration,” *A l’école de l’admiration* (Versailles: Saint-Paul, 2001), 7-12.

⁴⁸ Pinckaers, *Plaidoyer pour la vertu* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2007), 56 (author’s translation).

⁴⁹ Pinckaers, “My Sources,” 913-15.

⁵⁰ Pinckaers also emphasizes the principal role that sacred Scripture must have in Catholic moral theology, in “The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Pope, ed., 17-29.

from philosophical studies (and the sciences).⁵¹ He has become known for demonstrating that a division of the sciences has become exaggerated, as a result of nominalist, Enlightenment, and Baroque influences. One of his major criticisms of modern theology is that it has lost vitality due to the specialization that compartmentalizes at the expense of synthesizing what has been analyzed.

In contrast, he has shown that the patristic and magisterial tradition, as well as the nearly eight century-old Dominican tradition, integrate systematic and spiritual theology and practical issues in moral considerations.⁵² Pinckaers is able to praise the contributions of diverse scriptural, theological and historical disciplines, while calling for a thorough-going integration of these theological disciplines in the work of Christian ethics. After the arid treatment found in the pre-Vatican II moral manuals, moral scholars and Church leaders today have found refreshing his conviction that moral theology cannot be simply separated from spirituality.⁵³ This insight, so much a part of *Veritatis splendor* and the new evangelization discussed therein,⁵⁴ recognizes the truly theological nature of moral theology, in par-

⁵¹ In “My Sources” (915), Pinckaers shows himself consistent with the encyclicals *Veritatis splendor* (1993) and *Fides et Ratio* (1998). After having a solid foundation in the Eucharist and in the study of sacred Scripture and the works of Aquinas, he moved on to the study of philosophy in order to make his studies current. He says: “Firm in my faith, I was able to undertake the study of ancient and modern philosophers ... a study that is necessary if one desires to be enriched by experience and to acquire a mind that is open to all that is human.”

⁵² Pinckaers, “L’enseignement de la théologie morale à Fribourg” (433). Father Benedict Ashley is a close ally in the River Forest school of Thomism that dialogues with the sciences with ease and competence. Pinckaers addresses modern philosophy, however, without an extensive treatment of modern science.

⁵³ For example, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I. has recognized that Pinckaers’ works make a “sound and substantial contribution ... to the renewal of moral theology called for by Vatican II” (cover blurb, *The Pinckaers Reader*). He affirms that Pinckaers “shows how the New Law of the Gospel is the necessary rediscovery—that once traditional and of the future—that gives fresh heart and insight to Christian morality.” Cardinal George, furthermore, notes that Pinckaers “integrates morality and spirituality in a way that will guide the teacher of moral theology and suggest new paths for the speculative theologian.”

⁵⁴ John Paul II, in *Veritatis splendor* (n. 21), states that the Christian’s “moral life has the value of a ‘spiritual worship (*Rom* 12:1; cf. *Phil* 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds.” See also *Veritatis splendor*, nos. 5, 26, and 107, the last of which connects the new evangelization with morality and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

particular the place that Christ plays in being its master and teacher in Word and Sacrament.⁵⁵

We can thus grasp something of the contribution that Pinckaers has made to the renewal of Catholic moral theology through a survey of major themes in his work, all of which are central to that renewal. The themes that have been especially influential include: the return to the sources of Catholic moral theology, the centrality of Jesus Christ and the virtues, the necessity of the New Law of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the distinction between freedom of indifference and the freedom for excellence, and the importance of Word and Sacrament for the practice of moral theology. Beyond these explained here, he has also addressed other themes that contribute to the renewal and that merit closer consideration, especially the *Imago Dei*, the human person and dignity, ultimate finality and beatitude, sanctification and the beatitudes, and the theme of love and law, the latter of which I treat in the third section of this essay.

HISTORICAL PLACEMENT

The above-mentioned themes and Pinckaers' contributions to them have been very important for the renewal of Catholic moral theology. In order to assess the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Servais Pinckaers and the import of his work for the renewal, not only preceding the Second Vatican Council, but also up to *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism*, I will demonstrate the parallel between his efforts and the renewal, by placing his work in historical context. I first survey some more general assessments of the influence of his work by prominent thinkers, and then track how his work has paralleled renewal in Catholic moral theology.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Pinckaers, for example, treats Christ as the master in *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 359-374, 120-122 and in "An Encyclical for the Future: *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology: Studies by Ten Outstanding Scholars*, ed. by J. A. DiNoia and R. Cessario (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publications, 1999), 11-71, especially 20-22.

⁵⁶ A major contribution to this task has been furnished by Romanus Cessario, O.P., in five very different publications: "On the Place of Servais Pinckaers († 7 April 2008) in the Renewal of Catholic Theology," *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 1-27; "Hommage au Père Pinckaers, OP: The Significance of His Work, *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 5.1 (2007): 1-15; the forward to the English edition of *Sources of Christian Ethics* (1995); "Theology at Fribourg," *The Thomist* 51 (1987): 325-66; and *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 78-79. The "Hommage au Père Pinckaers" was the keynote address at the Belgian theologian's eightieth birthday conference; the papers delivered at this event were published as a Festschrift in French, as: M. Sherwin and C. S. Titus, eds., *Renouveler toutes choses en Christ: Vers un nouveau thomiste de la théologie morale* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2009).

Numerous contemporary thinkers have attributed great importance to Pinckaers' works. George Weigel and Richard John Neuhaus have highlighted the timeliness of Pinckaers' construal of a freedom for excellence,⁵⁷ with the latter affirming that Pinckaers' "history of Christian ethics and other writings—and especially his acute distinction between the "freedom of indifference" and the "freedom for excellence"—has had a powerful influence in Christian circles, and not only among Catholics, and certainly not only among Thomists."⁵⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre has also described the continuing importance of Pinckaers' contribution to the renewal of moral theology, especially his resistance to modern oversimplifications and errors.⁵⁹ Romanus Cessario, O.P. highlights Pinckaers' role in freeing moral theology from being trapped in its pre-Vatican II form of religious jurisprudence.⁶⁰ This influence extends beyond Catholics, as evidenced by Stanley Hauerwas' interest in Pinckaers' work.⁶¹ As evidence of his international influence, Pinckaers' work has been translated into seven languages at this point, including Spanish, Italian, and Polish in addition to English.⁶² His work has been honored in two Festschriften as well as in volumes of *The Thomist* and the *Josephinum Journal of Theology*.⁶³ Such evidence of Pinckaers' influence suggests why his work will have a long standing legacy.

⁵⁷ See George Weigel, "A Better Concept of Freedom," *First Things* 121 (March 2002): 14-20.

⁵⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, "A Giant Moves On," *First Things* (April 7, 2008).

⁵⁹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Preface," in Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*. See also Michael Sherwin, O.P., "Eulogy for Fr. Servais Theodore Pinckaers, O.P.," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 7.1 (2009): 549-553.

⁶⁰ Cessario says: "Pinckaers has clearly shown that the rise of casuistry as a new form of moral theology constitutes a complete departure from the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas" (*A Short History of Thomism*, 78-79). In his "On the Place of Servais Pinckaers" article, Cessario contrasts Pinckaers' work and that of the major theologians selected by Fergus Kerr in his *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*.

⁶¹ Hauerwas states that "the work of Servais Pinckaers is essential for the renewal of moral theology [and] is as important for Protestant theological ethics as it is for Catholic moral theology" (cover blurb, *The Pinckaers Reader*). He also insightfully notes that "Pinckaers quite simply avoids the unhappy alternatives represented by recent debates in Catholic moral theology by a profound recovery of Aquinas' understanding of beatitude and the virtues." See also Hauerwas' review of *The Sources of Christian Ethics* in *First Things* (May 1996).

⁶² We should also note that, in the year 2000, Pinckaers was granted an honorary doctorate (*Honoris causa*) in "Theology of Marriage and Family" from the Pontifical Lateran University (Rome), in the presence of Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Grand Chancellor of the University, and Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State for the Vatican.

⁶³ See the Festschriften for his 65th birthday, *Novitas et Veritas Vitae: Aux sources du renouveau de la morale chrétienne*, ed. by Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg/Paris: Ed. Universitaires/Cerf, 1991) and for his 80th birthday, *Renouveler*

Pinckaers tells something of his historical place in the renewal of moral theology, through his two semi-autobiographical articles, in which he identifies his mentors and his intellectual and spiritual sources: “Dominican Moral Theology in the 20th Century”⁶⁴ and “My Sources.”⁶⁵ Pinckaers was relatively young when the Council opened in 1961, only 36 years old, but already solidly situated in his home province’s seminary (house of studies), the Dominican College of Theology at La Sarte, Huy, Belgium. Although too young to participate as a *peritus* (invited expert), he was consulted on the draft Constitution on Morality (*De re morali*).⁶⁶ It is indicative of the situation of moral theology at the time of the Council and of the type of renewal that was afoot beforehand that the Council fathers could not finalize the Constitution on moral matters. Pinckaers tells the heart of this story that he followed from a distance.⁶⁷ It is particularly interesting to see the failure of *De re morali* in the optic of the return of the New Law to moral theology. Pinckaers astutely recognizes that the work of overcoming a certain static post-Tridentine conception of morality was advanced—but not sufficiently so—in the deliberations of the Council fathers. The importance of fundamental and special moral theology was too great to promulgate a document that was not mature. The influence of the Council and other efforts at renewal⁶⁸ would come to fruition only more than twenty five years later, in the two magisterial documents that authoritatively treat moral matters, namely *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism*.

Pinckaers’ eventual influence on these latter documents comes in no small part from the manner his work is marked by three ways the Council addressed the need for renewal in moral theology. First, he finds in *The Constitution on Divine Revelation* a call to make sacred

toutes choses en Christ: Vers un renouveau thomiste de la théologie morale, Sherwin and Titus, eds., as well as the volumes of *The Thomist* 73.1 (2009) and *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, 17.2 (2010), which are both dedicated to Pinckaers’ work.

⁶⁴ This article was originally delivered in Fribourg on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the *Revue Thomiste (RTh)* and then published under the title “L’Enseignement de la théologie morale à Fribourg.” *RTh* 93 (1993): 430–42.

⁶⁵ Pinckaers, “My Sources,” 913–15.

⁶⁶ Records of his commentary on the *Constitutio de re morali* are found in the Pinckaers archives at the University of Fribourg.

⁶⁷ Pinckaers, “The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology,” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 369–84. Mgr. Pierre D’Ornellas provides a fuller history of the events around drafting and debating the failed schema *De re morali*, in his *Liberté, que dis-tu de toi-même? Une lecture des travaux du Concile Vatican II, 25 janvier 1959 – 8 décembre 1965* (Saint Maur: Paroles et silence, 1999).

⁶⁸ These examples include the failed meeting that brought together major moral theologians from different perspectives in 1981, under the direction of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, with Jean Jerome Hamer as secretary. See Pinckaers, “Un symposium de moral inconnu,” *Nova et Vetera* 76 (2001): 19–34.

Scripture fully accessible to all Christians.⁶⁹ This call recognizes that Scripture, together with the tradition, is the primary source of knowledge of Christ.⁷⁰ Second, Pinckaers takes as a guide the *Decree on Priestly Training*, whose text marks out three themes in moral theology that had already guided Pinckaers' academic work and would do so until his last word: faith in Christ, love for Sacred Scripture, and fruitful charity, all in the service of "perfecting" moral theology.⁷¹ Third, he finds in the Council's two constitutions on the Church further indications for the renewal of moral theology. On the one hand, *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes the tradition's teaching on conscience—as the law God sets in the human heart—that informs Pinckaers' understanding of the virtue of prudence, so important for the normative understanding of virtue theory and agency.⁷² On the other hand, *Lumen Gentium* provides direction about keeping moral theology and spirituality of one piece. Pinckaers finds support to overcome the post-Tridentine separation of morality from asceticism and mysticism, in *Lumen Gentium's* (n. 40) observation that: "The call to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of love is addressed to all those who believe in Christ, whatever their class or status may be."⁷³ Although other teachings of the Magisterium found in *Humanae vitae* and the encyclicals on Catholic social teaching, since Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*, have succeeded each other with renewed pertinence to the social issues at hand, Pinckaers recognized that it was not until *Veritatis splendor* in 1993 that fundamental moral theology had clear direction from magisterial teaching.

Those who have studied the works of Pinckaers and who know the history of the documents realize that Pinckaers was intimately involved in shaping the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism*.⁷⁴ For example, the first section of the third part of the *Cate-*

⁶⁹ *Dei Verbum*, nos. 21, 24, 25.

⁷⁰ *Dei Verbum* (no. 25) calls for a greater use of Sacred Scripture in moral theology and the formation of priests and seminarians. See Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 292-293.

⁷¹ Pinckaers repeatedly finds inspiration in *Optatam Totius* (1965, no. 16): "Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world." For examples of his use of this text, see *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 293 and 302; "The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology," *The Pinckaers Reader*, 372.

⁷² On conscience, see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 16, and Pinckaers, "Conscience and the Virtue of Prudence," *The Pinckaers Reader*, 347.

⁷³ Pinckaers, "The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology," *The Pinckaers Reader*, 381.

⁷⁴ In his *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), Weigel (691) identifies the influence of Pinckaers on the encyclical

chism (Part III: Life in Christ, Section I: Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit) bears the structure of the fundamental moral theology perceived in the structure of Pinckaers' own courses and publications.⁷⁵ Moreover, the main themes found in *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism* are found published in Pinckaers' books well in advance of the magisterial documents. In addition to the particular studies found in his articles, three of Pinckaers' books serve as complete presentations of his thought on fundamental moral theology and a clear indication that his work preceded and contributed to the teaching found in *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism*. First, his opus magnum *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, originally published in 1985, propelled him onto the American scene with its English translation in 1995, because it spoke of Catholic moral theology's sapiential character in terms of the power of Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit to lead the moral agent to God the Father, as man's complete beatitude and final end. Second, *L'Évangile et la morale (Gospel and Morality)*, originally published in 1990, presents the content of the Gospel in terms of ethics, the law, especially the New Law of the Holy Spirit, the Sermon on the Mount, beatitude, love, the Church, and conscience. Third, the masterful short overview found in *Morality: The Catholic View*, originally published in 1991, gives his thought on Catholic moral theology in a more popular form. Furthermore, *The Pinckaers Reader* collects his contributions to the renewal and his mature reflections on fundamental moral theology that he published after his *Sources* book. These works give us a sense of the breadth and depth and import of his thought. Another particular aspect of his influence on *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism* is found in his treatment of law and love, precept and virtue, which at the same time raises certain questions that I will treat presently.

Veritatis splendor. Articles that address details concerning Pinckaers' part in *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism* include: John Corbett, "Pinckaers et le nouveau catéchisme," in *Renouveler toutes choses en Christ* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2009), 173-189; John Berkman, "Introduction," *The Pinckaers Reader*; and Romanus Cessario (see footnote 56). The *Catechism* was drafted in part in Fribourg. Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, O.P. was then Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Fribourg and the Secretary of the commission responsible for drafting the *Catechism*. It cannot be doubted that the proximity of the two professors and the respect for Pinckaers' works both inside the Church and at large (as is evident in his being invited to join the International Theological Commission in 1990 and his growing international influence) were instrumental in allying Pinckaers to these projects of the Magisterium.

⁷⁵ See especially, two of his articles, "Conscience and the Christian Tradition" and "Conscience and the Virtue of Prudence" both in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 321-341 and 342-355 respectively.

LAW AND LOVE, PRECEPT AND VIRTUE

It may seem odd to posit *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism* as the epitome of renewal in Catholic moral theology and exemplary of the work and influence of Pinckaers, especially when some people who have followed the virtue revival and Pinckaers' works from afar have been taken aback by the structure of both *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism*. They have seemed to find an unresolved tension therein. In regard to the encyclical, its first chapter on "The moral good for the life of the Church and of the World" seems disconnected from the second one on "The Church and the discernment of certain tendencies in present-day moral theology." The emphasis on freedom and truth in the first chapter seems distant from that on rules and commandments in the second, so the argument goes. In regard to the *Catechism*, its two sections of Part III on Christian morality (entitled "Life in Christ"), which treat "Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit" (Section One) and "The Ten Commandments" (Section Two), seem to exhibit a similar tension. If Pinckaers were to have some influence on the first section ("Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit"), why did the second section follow the structure of the Decalogue, as was so common in the manualist tradition decried by Pinckaers? Why didn't it follow the structure of the second part of the moral section of Aquinas' mature moral treatise in the *Summa theologiae*, which starts with the theological virtues and then the cardinal ones, only putting the precepts at the end of the treatment of the major virtues?⁷⁶ This is a vexing point for those who have read Pinckaers as a virtue theorist who simply focuses on character at the expense of moral obligation and obedience.⁷⁷ Do the structures of these texts reveal an incoherence, or an incomplete stage of the renewal evident in Pinckaers' work, or even a repudiation of that work? There are two related assumptions behind these objections: first, there is no significant place for law and the commandments in virtue ethics; and second, moral theology should be more a question of law than of virtue.

⁷⁶ Janet Smith states this tension—and perhaps a defeat of Pinckaers' influence on the *Catechism*—in her book review of *The Pinckaers Reader*, where she says (p. 641): "He reluctantly allows that the use of the commandments to provide the structure of the bulk of the moral portion of the *Catechism* has merit but he never ceases to insist that beatitude, virtue, grace, spirituality, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit define Christian morality more than laws and obligations." Janet E. Smith, "The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80.4 (2006): 638-641.

⁷⁷ This perspective, for example, is found in Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.

There is a related common assumption among philosophers and theologians regarding virtue ethics in general. They see it as tending toward relativism, without sure footing in normative theory and as inimical to a significant role of precepts and the natural law in moral theology. This attenuated approach to morality has led to a misunderstanding of Pinckaers' theological approach to law and love, precept and virtue, for reasons recognized by Elizabeth Anscombe over fifty years ago.⁷⁸ Pinckaers, as is seen in his work on intrinsically evil acts,⁷⁹ seeks to rectify the tendency to focus either on concepts of 'obligation' and 'right' or on the agent and his character at the expense of his acts. Pinckaers is known for his insistence on the primacy of charity-friendship and on freedom for excellence as an efficacious moral-spiritual motivation and the center of the Christian vocation to beatitude, though not without faith, knowledge, natural law, and the prudent judgment giving form to charity.⁸⁰ In his view, strict obligation-based moral systems are true neither to the message of the Gospel (especially the Sermon on the Mount and the beatitudes) nor to the human psyche. Unlike Pinckaers, the thinkers who hold that there is an inherent conflict between moral obligation and virtue see a divide separating the Decalogue and moral precepts, on the one hand, and the Sermon on the Mount and New Testament *paraclesis* on the other.⁸¹ Such a construal pitting natural law against virtue theory is often rooted in modern anti-teleological approaches to morality.⁸² In particular, some natural law advocates have thought to

⁷⁸ See her "Modern Moral Philosophy," 1-19. The modern moral philosophy that Anscombe faced in the 1950s lacked an adequate philosophy of psychology. In particular, she rejected the tendency to construe morality as the analysis of concepts such as "obligation," "right," and "wrong," apart of human acts and the real world. These concepts do not exist exclusively in the mind as phenomena or psychological facts. She notes, in part thanks to Wittgenstein, that psychology cannot be reduced to thoughts and feelings, but must consider the transversal relationships between human psychology, agency and dispositions in the interrelation of intentional acts and moral virtues. See also Kevin Flannery, "Anscombe's Philosophy of Psychology," in *Philosophical Psychology: Psychology, Emotions, and Freedom*, ed. by C. S. Titus (Arlington, VA: The Institute for the Psychological Sciences Press, 2009), 38-54.

⁷⁹ Two major sections of his book on intrinsically evil acts are found in *The Pinckaers Reader*, namely "A Historical Perspective on Intrinsically Evil Acts" (185-235) and "Revisionist Understandings of Actions in the Wake of Vatican II" (236-270).

⁸⁰ *ST II-II* q. 23, a. 1. See also: Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁸¹ Pinckaers, "An Encyclical for the Future," 27.

⁸² Russell Hittinger argues that in ancient and classic teleological theories, natural law analysis illuminates the goods involved in human acts and their completion in the virtues. The rejection of classic teleological thinking limits consideration of right reason to concern natural goods and values, without reflection on the virtues. See his, "Natural Law and Virtue: Theories at Cross Purposes," in *Natural Law Theory*:

find in the works of Pinckaers a soft version of moral theology, a virtue theory unable to confront moral relativism.⁸³ Likewise, others have misunderstood the attention that Pinckaers pays to the virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and the New Law of grace as a rejection, or at least neglect, of the natural law.⁸⁴ These positions have missed important elements of Pinckaers' thought needed in order to understand the normative character of virtue and to explain both why *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism* are structured the way they are, and why they are not at all in tension with Pinckaers' vision of moral theology.

First, we will focus on the encyclical. Pinckaers has argued that the most basic question of morality, "What is good in life?", opens up horizons that outstrip a limited casuist approach that focuses on what is permitted or forbidden.⁸⁵ As found in the Sermon on the Mount and the works of the Fathers of the Church, St. Thomas, Pope John Paul II, and the *Catechism* (CCC 1716-29), this question of the good finds its origin in God, who creates man and woman in God's image, while calling us to the beatitude that Jesus epitomizes in the gospel beatitudes (Mt. 5 & Lk. 6). On this foundation, Pinckaers audaciously claims that acting morally by rules alone will not adequately answer the question about "what is good" and about true happiness. Considering God and the love of God and even the call to give

Contemporary Essays, ed. by Robert P. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42-70. Matthew Levering has identified the compatibility and interdependence of natural law and virtue, in his *Biblical Natural Law* (43).

⁸³ Several critics have ventured the idea that Pinckaers does not have a way to integrate moral norms and duty into his vision of Catholic moral theology that critiques nominalism and legalism. In particular, William May's book review of Pinckaers' *The Sources of Christian Ethics* ("Recent Moral Theology: Servais Pinckaers and Benedict Ashley," *The Thomist* 62.1 (1998): 117-131) is sympathetic and respectful to the Belgian moral theologian's work, while criticizing the moral robustness of his *Sources*. However, May's review does not directly address Pinckaers' thought on natural law.

⁸⁴ John Cuddeback's "Law, Pinckaers, and the Definition of Christian Ethics" (*Nova et Vetera* 7.2 [2009]: 301-326) points out that, in *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Pinckaers does not mention law in his "short definition" of moral theology. However, Pinckaers does extensively treat natural law (*The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 327-456) and explicitly recognizes the importance of law in his longer definition of moral theology, which ends with these words: "Christian ethics ... is implemented by laws of behavior and commandments, which reveal God's way to us" (44). As the original French ("la loi morale") makes clear, Pinckaers teaches that these "laws of behavior" are divine in origin and moral in their application to what people do. Matthew Levering's *Biblical Natural Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), which directly addresses Pinckaers' treatment of natural law, serves as a gentle corrective both to the review of William May and to the article of John Cuddeback.

⁸⁵ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 327-353.

one's life in martyrdom are also necessary.⁸⁶ Addressing *Veritatis splendor*, Pinckaers says:

In fact, God is the only one who can answer the question about what is good, since he is Goodness itself, according to Jesus' word, 'No one is good but God alone.' Thus the encyclical restores its religious dimension to morality by relating it to the love of God, who is 'the source of man's happiness and ... the final end of human activity' (VS 8-9).⁸⁷

Because of the interrelationship between the good and charity, the question about "what is good" sets that context for the whole of Christian ethics, including law.

Pinckaers' treatment of the natural law, as a "participation of the eternal law in the rational creature," is dependent upon natural inclinations and the virtue of prudence, involving (1) deliberation and taking-counsel, (2) decision, and (3) the practical command to move into action.⁸⁸ However, theological agency cannot be understood apart from charity or fidelity to the Magisterium, as well.⁸⁹ Pinckaers thus holds that moral adjudication cannot be completely understood unless it involve a treatment, not only of the natural inclinations, reason, and the natural law, but also of the divine law (including the Decalogue and the rest of the moral teaching of the Bible), the New Law (of grace), the virtues (including prudence, justice, and charity), and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (especially counsel).

According to Pinckaers, *Veritatis splendor* invites "us to correct our idea of morality so as to assure the definitive primacy of charity, thanks to a rereading of the Ten Commandments."⁹⁰ This interpretation of the Decalogue takes charity as the starting point. Instead of

⁸⁶ See Pinckaers' book on the spirituality of martyrdom, *La Spiritualité du martyre* (Versailles: Editions Saint-Paul, 2000). Concerning his treatment of the interconnection of the eighth Beatitude and martyrdom, see Patrick Mahaney Clark, "Servais Pinckaers's Retrieval of Martyrdom as the Culmination of the Christian Life," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 17.2 (2010): 1-27.

⁸⁷ Pinckaers, "An Encyclical for the Future," 21-22.

⁸⁸ Pinckaers builds upon this quote from Aquinas (*ST I-II* q. 91, a. 2) as well as upon q. 94, a. 2 in his numerous treatments of the natural law and natural inclinations, e.g.: *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (327-456); "Conscience and the Virtue of Prudence" (*The Pinckaers Reader*, 342-55; where he cites *Veritatis splendor*, no. 51); "The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas" (*The Pinckaers Reader*, 10-11, where he cites *Veritatis splendor*, no. 43.2); and "Esquisse d'une morale chrétienne. Ses bases: la Loi évangélique et la loi naturelle," *Nova et Vetera* 55 (1980): 102-125.

⁸⁹ Pinckaers, "An Encyclical for the Future," 60-67.

⁹⁰ "An Encyclical for the Future," 23, where Pinckaers refers to *Veritatis splendor*, no. 22.3 and says that "The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does the same thing"—that is, it corrects our idea of morality.

being ultimately grounded in rules and precepts, this charity is rooted in the Bible and especially the Gospel, at the heart of which stands the person of Christ. It seeks to hold “fast to the very person of Jesus ... sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father.” Pinckaers supports John Paul II’s affirmation that “following Christ is the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality.”⁹¹ The rich young man in Matthew’s Gospel (19:16) asks the primordial moral question to Jesus: “What good must I do to have eternal life?” The story of the rich young man’s account of the human desire for ultimate good leads us to understand that the Decalogue is crucial to the moral life, but does not exhaust its intrinsic dynamic. Christ’s way of perfection leads to the love of God and neighbor that continues toward a further detachment from possessions and the following of Christ. The full meaning of life, therefore, is not found in the rules per se, but in the love of God, “who is the origin and goal of man’s life.”⁹²

Pinckaers claims that a corrective to legalistic voluntarism is found in the encyclical’s use of St. Thomas’ definition of the natural law as “a light of the intelligence infused in us by God.”⁹³ Pinckaers seeks to put law back in the biblical setting of God’s covenant with his people. The Commandments thus provide both a sure barrier against evil and a pointer toward the Kingdom of God. Instead of servile obedience, the perspective of filial obedience reverses the outlook that would have put obligation at the heart of obedience. Sacred Scripture provides the way, on the one hand, to understand the commandments as anchored in love instead of fear and, on the other, to understand the New Law as a law of freedom that produces spontaneous action of friends instead of servants. The double commandment of love is mapped out by the two tablets that Jesus summarizes in love of God and neighbor, so dear to the teaching of St. John and the synoptic gospels.⁹⁴ Moreover, *Veritatis splendor* takes a pedagogical approach to law, as Pinckaers says:

the encyclical explains how necessary the role of the Decalogue is during the first stage of the development of the moral personality on its journey toward spiritual freedom. As St. August-

⁹¹ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 19.

⁹² *Veritatis splendor*, no. 7.

⁹³ Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future”, 22.

⁹⁴ See: Dt. 6: 4-5; John 13:34; Mt 22:37-40; Mk 20-39-40; Lk 20:39-40; and Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future,” 23-25. In this context, Pinckaers takes special note of the personalist themes that John Paul II employs in the encyclical (see *Veritatis splendor* no. 13.2; Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future,” 24). See also *Veritatis splendor* nos. 10 and 14.2; *Catechism* 1965-74.

tine affirms, avoidance of the serious sins forbidden by the Commandments form in us ‘an initial freedom... but this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom’ (*In Ioannis evangelium tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363; cf. VS 13.4).⁹⁵

Pinckaers explains that moral theology will achieve renewal inasmuch as it reintegrates the Decalogue with the Sermon on the Mount and the New Law of grace, which is fundamentally an interior law. The secondary and material elements through which the Holy Spirit communicates the grace of Christ include the sacraments and the biblical texts. In addition to the Decalogue, the basic scriptural sources for moral theology include especially the Sermon of the Lord (Mt. 5-7; Lk. 6) and St. Paul’s letters (Romans 12-15, 1 Corinthians, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4-5, Philippians 2-3, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 4-5). Pinckaers explains that the New Testament provides exhortation (*paraclesis*) that has moral authority and further complements the Decalogue and the primary precepts of the natural law.⁹⁶ In the words of Pinckaers, “the New, or Gospel, Law ... is *the very grace of the Holy Spirit, received through faith in Christ who justifies and operating through charity which sanctifies.*”⁹⁷ Fulfilling and perfecting the Decalogue, the New Law “regulates man’s interior acts at the level of the ‘heart,’ where faith and charity operate with the other virtues, while the Decalogue bears directly on external actions.”⁹⁸ This level of the “heart” involves a complete and Thomist anthropology, in which knowledge and love are interdependent and necessary for moral adjudication and agency, as Pinckaers has demonstrated in his works on moral agency and the virtue of prudence and conscience.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ “An Encyclical for the Future,” 24.

⁹⁶ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 164-67; and “An Encyclical for the Future,” 27. See Aquinas, *ST I-II* q. 97, a. 4 ad 3 and q. 100, a. 8. See also John Corbett, O.P., “The Functions of Paraclesis,” *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 89-107. Patristic teaching, such as that of St. Augustine in his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, also provides important sources for this moral reading of Sacred Scripture.

⁹⁷ “An Encyclical for the Future,” 25-26. He focuses on the Holy Spirit as the source of sanctification, for: “All the energy of this law comes from the Holy Spirit. Thus the active principle of justification and of sanctification, of forgiveness and of perfection, is within us” (Pinckaers, “The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 378).

⁹⁸ Pinckaers (“An Encyclical for the Future,” 26) here draws upon St. Thomas’ treatment of the New Law found in *ST I-II* q. 106, a. 1; q. 107; and q. 108, a. 1 and 3.

⁹⁹ In addition to the two articles on prudence and conscience in *The Pinckaers Reader*, Pinckaers addresses moral agency in his extensive notes in his translation of the *Summa theologiae* in French: *Les actes humains. Somme théologique*, Ia-IIae, qq. 6-17; vol. I. (Paris: Cerf, 1961) and qq. 18-21, vol. II (Paris: Cerf, 1965).

Second, in addition to this treatment of the encyclical, the same question about the relationship between law and love, precept and virtue has been posed in the context of the structure and pedagogy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The fact that the Decalogue has regularly served as a fruitful core of the Church's ancient tradition of catechesis gives one reason for the Decalogue serving as the central structure for the recent *Catechism*.¹⁰⁰ We find another reason for continuing this tradition, when examining the *Catechism* in the light of Pinckaers' work on moral development. The reason is that, as I explained in the treatment of *Veritatis splendor*, Pinckaers holds that obligation and obedience have a positive role in moral theology.¹⁰¹ He observes that divine pedagogy has set an order between the Ten Commandments, the beatitudes, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the virtues in the moral-spiritual growth of the Christian. This ordering is apparent in his treatment of the growth of charity, which progresses through three stages.¹⁰² First, the beginners must through discipline and purification fight against sin and the inclinations that undercut charity. Pinckaers explains that: "The negative precepts of the Decalogue are especially appropriate during this early stage of the moral life, when the seed of love of God and neighbor implanted in our hearts needs protection for future growth."¹⁰³ Second, progressives advance in virtue under the guidance of the Sermon on the Mount. Finally, the mature reach a type of spiritual spontaneity that is guided by the New Law of the Holy Spirit. The stage of maturity involves the continuing reliance on the Decalogue (which has been internalized) and the virtues, which are perfected in a deeper love for and union with God.

Pinckaers thus affirms the positive role of the precepts. He repeatedly states, first, that the precepts and obligations are needed from the beginning (and throughout) to assure the strength of virtue and the truth of freedom. Second, attempting to construct a Christian morality without obligation or without recognizing sin would be an illusion. Third, precepts, following Aquinas, have the full force of obligation—as an act of the reason and then as an act of the will.

¹⁰⁰ The extended tradition, in addition to the Decalogue, has included the Beatitudes, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the petitions of the Our Father, and the virtues. See John Corbett, "Pinckaers et le nouveau catechisme," 188.

¹⁰¹ He discusses the positive role of obedience and obligation in development of virtues in the following places: *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 354–378; *L'Évangile et la morale*, 30–34. See also C. S. Titus "Moral Development and Making All Things New in Christ" *The Thomist* 72.2 (2008): 233–258.

¹⁰² Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 362–368. He finds his inspiration in Aquinas' treatment of growth in the virtue of charity, in *ST II-II* q. 24, a. 9.

¹⁰³ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 363.

Nonetheless, obligation is subordinated to virtue, inasmuch as it plays a vital role in the first step of education in the moral life.¹⁰⁴ Its purpose is to help the person to fight against disordering tendencies (social and personal) and to develop positive moral and theological virtues that respond to the question of love and happiness, but not without the help of grace, that is, the evangelical law or the New Law of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the ordering of the *Catechism* not only finds support in the larger Catholic tradition, but also in Pinckaers' vision of the moral-spiritual pedagogy involved in continuing fidelity to the Decalogue, while acknowledging the primacy of faith, hope, and love and the movement of the Holy Spirit in following Christ, who leads us to the Father.¹⁰⁶

In sum, through a Catholic moral theology that is faithful to these spiritual and theological sources and its ecclesial mission, Pinckaers has sought to correct the tendencies that pit commands, obligation, and obedience against beatitude, charity and the virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this context, there is permanent and pedagogical importance for the natural law, as inscribed by God on the human heart (Rom 2:15) and the Decalogue, as God's gift that shows "the path of life and leads to it."¹⁰⁷ Both have their origin in God. The natural law is established in the continual relationship of creature and Creator (and relates to the ordering of the human person toward God and others). The Decalogue is God's gift of the covenant that brought into existence the people Israel as "a holy nation." God's promises to the people are not limited to the Promised Land, which symbolizes eternal life. The commandments, however, not only protect the people from extremes, but even more so exercise the positive role of indicating the way to the Kingdom of God. Thus the Decalogue is no longer seen as a summary of obligations, commands, and

¹⁰⁴ Pinckaers, *L'Évangile et la morale*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ See also Pinckaers *L'Évangile et la morale* (chapter 5) concerning Christian ethics and moral precepts. He notes the difference between Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* and that of the Franciscan, Alexander of Hales, who put a priority on the commandments instead of the virtues (66).

¹⁰⁶ Pinckaers ("The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology," 381-2) says: "I feel that the solution that was adopted, conserving the divisions according to the Commandments, was the best one for a *Catechism* ultimately destined for the Universal Church, and which therefore had to take into account different traditions. Above all, the *Catechism* could not give the impression that the Church was abandoning the Decalogue, which for so long has constituted the cornerstone of Christian moral teaching; it was necessary, moreover, to revitalize the understanding of the Commandments, which had become too static and negative. The *Catechism* thus attempted to infuse a new dynamism into its account of the Commandments by putting them once more in contact with their corresponding virtues."

¹⁰⁷ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 12.2.

prohibitions, as was the case in pre-Vatican II textbooks and catechisms. In this context, we can understand that Pinckaers' resistance to casuistry should *not* be understood as resistance to the study of cases or precepts in the training of the virtue of prudence and conscience.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, Pinckaers' magnum opus, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, "shed new light on the controversies of the preceding forty years within Catholic communities and provided an alternative way of understanding Christian ethics that overcame the misunderstandings of those controversies."¹⁰⁹ MacIntyre observes that Pinckaers has not fallen into the current

false choices between inadequately characterized alternatives: Is the moral life about rules or consequences. Which has priority, authority or autonomy? Is our language to be scholastic or patristic? Should we make use neither of the scholastics nor the Fathers, but return to the New Testament? Are we to look to the Second Vatican Council or to its predecessors? What Father Pinckaers provided was a historical perspective in which later Christian writers, whether patristic or scholastic or modern, are understood as contributing to and enriching our reading of scripture. The culmination of his argument is a wonderfully illuminating enquiry into the relationship of human freedom to the natural law.¹¹⁰

It is precisely for this reason that Pinckaers' work is so helpfully examined as exemplary of, and an impetus for, renewal in Catholic moral theology after the Second Vatican Council. It is also why his work has been so well-received, especially in the English speaking world.

Servais Pinckaers was thrust onto the English-speaking scene of Catholic moral theology because of his contributions to a theological approach to virtue theory that is centered in Christ, the law, and the Church. His treatment of law has focused on the New Law of grace,

¹⁰⁸ Pinckaers, "An Encyclical for the Future," 17. Pinckaers focuses his writings primarily on fundamental moral theology (because of his teaching position). The use of cases is called for especially, but not exclusively, in special or applied moral theology. As with his affirmation of the importance of law and obedience, he affirms the need to use the virtue of prudence not simply in theory, but in practice concerning real issues—peace or war, fidelity or adultery, birth or abortion, life or death. For an appeal to a renewed vision of cases, see Edward T. Oakes "A Return to Casuistry?" *Nova et Vetera* (English edition) 2.1 (2004): 182-204.

¹⁰⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Preface," in Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, vii-viii.

¹¹⁰ MacIntyre, "Preface," vii-viii.

though without exclusion of the natural law or the Magisterium. His work is exemplary of the *ressourcement* renewal that helped to prepare the Second Vatican Council and that finds its epitome in *Veritatis splendor* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Lastly, Pinckaers' *ressourcement* method for reading the biblical, patristic, magisterial, and philosophical sources offers a vigorous example of a Catholic approach for fundamental moral theology and Christian virtue ethics that integrates sapiential and personal and social dimensions of human agency in a Trinitarian perspective. **M**