



New Prospects for the Application of the Natural Moral Law

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1. Difficulty with question

I have been asked to speak today about new prospects for the application of the natural moral law. I have some difficulty with this question as it was proposed to me.

What is it that the organizers of today's conference are hoping for? Does the question maybe suggest a hidden deception caused by the widespread rejection of the concept of the natural moral law in the ethical culture of the Western world? Is the invitation to speak on this topic a desperate call to hope that the theory of the natural moral law will once more be universally recognized as valid and useful? Are we really seeing signs of a new renaissance in which the theory of the natural law is being excavated not as a mere archaeological artifact of a past metaphysical period of history, but as a useful tool enabling us to explain and justify the needed foundations of morality, and is it really my task to announce this rediscovery with joy?

The term "new prospects" may suggest that there are new fields of human activity that have not hitherto been viewed sufficiently, or at all, in the light of the natural moral law, and that now there is an occasion to do so. This of course is always true. As social life develops and becomes more complex, new moral questions appear, and they need to be analyzed in the light of moral principles.

The impressive development of the medical technologies raises ethical questions that have never been raised before, and this forces bioethicists to study these issues and elucidate them. Also, changes in social structures and economic processes raises ethical questions, although these are not necessarily studied with such precision and fervor as bioethical questions.

With the universal failure of Marxist ideologies that had tried to instill a temporal hope in the realm of politics and economics through extensive government action, now belief in the presence of the "hidden hand" of the laws of economics leading, supposedly naturally and automatically, to welfare and peace seems to prevail. Are there not serious moral questions to be raised however, concerning the globalized economy and its politics, with factories no longer being like pyramids offering stability, employment and hope for economic betterment, but being like tents in the desert, which one day are here and another day are moved to another continent, causing unemployment, migration and separation of families?

Decisions made in banks and governments of one country sometimes cause intense hardship and social and political crises in another country or continent. New issues of international politics, such as ecological problems, and old issues, such as peace in conflict areas, require the working out of procedures and agreements on international governance.

The increasing mobility of populations, having diverse social and moral traditions, raises questions of their social interaction. The working out of public policies particularly in such fields as social welfare, education and health care requires a common understanding of the nature of the person, of the family, of parental rights and responsibilities, as also an understanding of differing cultural habits.

This common intellectual basis, certainly in the Western world, is more and more difficult to attain as vociferous



nihilist and skeptic pressure groups refuse to accept any binding statements about moral truth, supposedly in the name of tolerance. The contemporary increasingly extensive social interaction is raising many new moral problems, and these certainly can be seen as a new prospect for the application of the natural moral law, or rather, as a new task for moralists, who can apply the eternal principles of the natural law to the new issues.

Are these new moral dilemmas in all possible fields of human activity, private, social and public, to be studied in the light of natural law with the same precision as casuist cases raised in the field of bioethics are studied? Or should more room be left for political prudence and the personal judgment of those directly responsible in these questions?

Certainly these are fields for ethical reflection, although the optimism of the authors of the old casuist manuals of moral theology, who imagined that all possible future moral situations could be analyzed, and final judgment could be passed on all of them, is now seen to have been tainted with a certain intellectual pride. The complexity of new moral issues, and the velocity in which they appear, may mean that many of them will cease to become dilemmas, and they will never be subjected to serious moral analysis.

The “new prospects” of the title of my conference may suggest that there is now a renewed interest in the natural moral law, and that in the face of moral dilemmas there is a fresh search for natural law thinking.

In his day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer(1) regretted that natural law reflection disappeared from Protestant ethics which limited itself to a static apology of divine grace, juxtaposed against a totally fallen nature. Since no meaningful distinctions could be made between the natural and unnatural, because both were equally condemned, the natural life, with its concrete decisions and relationships, ceased to be an area of responsibility before God.

This meant that Protestantism was unable to give a clear answer to burning moral questions of the natural life, and Bonhoeffer lamented this. Are there contemporary signs of a renewed interest for the natural law, offering “new prospects” for our societies?

If there are, they are not yet visible. In fact, in the Western world, at least in the public sphere, there is bleeding atrophy of understanding what is natural and what is not, leading to changes in ethical mores that are amounting to a profound revolution of the foundations of civilization. These changes are not taking place in the name of some forceful ideology, capable of mustering the support of crowds — as was the case with nationalism and communism, both of which had an altruist element within them — but in the name of pure hedonism and anti-rationalist skepticism, hidden under the mask of tolerance.

There is a rapid decline of appreciation of basic moral truths and of the capacity of seeing what is obvious, in the name of that which is fleeting, ephemeral, and therefore not intrinsically binding. Will the social and political approval of gay marriages, of the adoption of children by gays and lesbians, of divorce, of contraception, abortion, euthanasia, the manipulation of embryos and laissez-faire theories of education finally arrive at the point of total absurdity, causing as a backlash a desperate return to rationality in ethics? We may certainly hope so in our wishful thinking, but for a few generations, the return to moral sanity may turn out to be too late.

The present close interaction of differing civilizations, (which) hopefully (...) will not end in violent clashes, may generate a new interest in the ethical foundations of civilizations. Today, contrary to what the Krakow-based Polish historian and theorist of civilizations, Feliks Koneczny, wrote in the early part of the 20th century, there is a belief and hope that full integration of people belonging to differing civilizations is possible and even welcome.

Koneczny claimed that it is not possible to be civilized in two differing ways at the same time, because it is common ethical convictions that generate social cohesiveness and condition civilizations. Ethical standards are more decisive for a civilization than dogmatic subtleties.



In the past, when people belonging to different civilizations lived geographically close to each other, they had to live in separate social groups according to the mores of the entity to which they belonged, without mixing, because mixtures of differing civilizations cannot function in the long run. The transfer from one civilization to another would entail the embracing of a completely new set of ethical values that would require social uprooting.

“Will a monogamist sell his daughter to a polygamist?” Koneczny asked. If he would, for whatever reason, he would have crossed the threshold of a new civilization, leaving the one to which he had belonged. When civilizations mix, Koneczny claimed, it is normally the less morally demanding civilization that wins, because the maintaining of a demanding ethos requires effort and perseverance.

Among the civilizations that he had studied, Koneczny specified the Latin civilization as the most demanding, because it requires that all dimensions of life, including the social and political, be bound by ethical norms.⁽²⁾ Today, however, Western Europe is rapidly losing, or totally transforming, its age-old Christian ethical convictions, and in this it is drifting away from the moral foundations in which for centuries it was anchored.

At the same time, it is facing more and more directly a foreign Islamic civilization. Will this encounter finally force Western Europe to seriously wonder about what is the real source of its specificity, and to an urgent defense of its own traditional moral fiber? Will it lead to a re-appreciation of the inherited anthropological and ethical foundations that made democracy work, or will the washing away of these foundations cause the crash of Western civilization, just as the crash of communism was caused by its anthropological catastrophe?

Pope John Paul II, as he elevated St. Edith Stein to the rank of co-patroness of Europe, warned: “A Europe, that would change the value of tolerance and universal respect into ethical indifferentism and skepticism about values that cannot be forsaken, would open itself to most risky ventures and sooner or later it would see appearing in new forms the most dreadful phantoms of its own history.”⁽³⁾ Will the urgency of these questions lead to a new rediscovery of the importance of the natural law? We may hope so.

Finally, the invitation to search for “new prospects” for the application of the natural moral law maybe suggests a renewed interest for the natural law within moral theology, in particular after the papal encyclicals “Veritatis Splendor” and “Fides et Ratio.”

Certainly, a purely kerygmatic and biblical approach to moral formation is not sufficient if it is not coupled with a sound anthropology and metaphysically grounded thinking. The invitation to do what Jesus would have done had he been in our position cannot function as a basic intuitive moral rule if rational thinking will be discarded.

A Christian moral formation needs to refer to the permanent structure of human nature and to its finality that can be perceived also rationally, although with difficulty, because reason has been wounded, but not destroyed, by original sin. Is the role of the natural law within the synthesis of moral theology the “new prospect” that I have been asked to reflect upon? Or are there maybe some other “new prospects” that I have failed to notice?

2. Birth of a new ethics

Certainly a new prospect that we are facing, which is demanding a response, is the contemporary birth of a new ethics.⁽⁴⁾ In the last 20 years, in many countries of the Western world, a whole new series of ethical concepts has appeared, expressing a certain moral awareness and a perception of moral dilemmas, but at the same manifesting a fundamental epistemological flaw.

Crossing boundaries of nations and states, the media are using the same new concepts which express attitudes and preconceptions that are assessed either positively or negatively. We read about a global ethics, about



cultural liberty, dialogue between civilizations, the quality of life, informed choice, gender equality, single-parenting, sexual orientation, bodily integrity, same-sex marriage, right of choice, reproductive rights, women's rights, children's rights, the right to die, transparency, holism, inclusiveness, nondiscrimination, ecological awareness, solidarity, openness and tolerance, and we read also about new vices such as exclusiveness, apartheid, homophobia, sexual molestation, populism, ultra-Catholicism.

At the same time traditional moral concepts such as truth, conscience, moral law, reason, moral virtue, perseverance, fidelity, parents, spouses, virginity, chastity, authority, commandments, sin, and nature are disappearing.

This is coupled with profound social and moral changes. The number of those who in their lives will never have the chance to use such words like father, brother, sister, aunt or uncle is increasing, while new terms like partner, or former wife are becoming more common.

The appearance of these new moral concepts is coupled with an immediate normative qualification, the foundations of which are not philosophical, but political and ideological.

No serious ethical reflection has attempted to define precisely the new terms, which remain, as if purposely vague, while their application or the rejection of previous terms is decided by politicians and by media empires. It is they who decide about the meaning or the change of meaning of such words as marriage, or family, which tragic events may be described as genocide and which may not, what is an expression of a justified liberty of interpretation and what is unacceptable dogmatism, or that homosexual activity may not be defined as a psychic disorder or as a sin.

The new ethical terms are interconnected and mutually supportive, while at the same time they are blurred. Some of them can be interpreted in a traditional way, but they are mostly used in a deconstructive manner, weakening the attachment to moral values and replacing it with an approval of blatantly immoral behavior, caused by the underlying cognitive skepticism of the new ethic.

This new ethic is at the same time individualistic and global, but never personalistic or universal. It witnesses the screening out of the family and of the nation-state, and the growth of supranational, global institutions, pressure groups and ideologies. The new ethic has a direct impact on education, on social welfare and health care, on taxation systems, on codes of behavior in institutions and enterprises, and on public, national and global policies. This new global ethic has appeared in a silent way, with no revolution and no social upheavals. It is engineered in a soft way, and it has succeeded in influencing not only policies, but above all the mentalities of people.

In itself, the appearance of new virtues is not anything new. The names of virtues express a moral awareness, which is always culturally conditioned. St. Thomas Aquinas, in his magisterial study of the virtues, came across some moral sensibilities for which he did not have an appropriate Latin term, and so he held on to their Greek terms, writing about the virtues of "epikeia," "synesis" and "gnome." (5)

The modern appearance of positive terms such as solidarity or tolerance, or of negative terms such as egoism, which do not appear in the classical catalogue of virtues and vices, manifests the development of moral awareness and the formulation of terms to describe it. The understanding of how to live out a virtuous life is always socially conditioned, and cultural expectations and their verbal formulations have an impact on moral sensibility.

The present greater social interaction of a globalized world accounts for the migration of moral perceptions. What in one period of history or culture was seen as shocking, in another culture is marginalized, while



attentiveness to other injustices is sharpened. The present problem lies however, not in the fact that new moral concepts have been formulated that express new virtues, but in the fact that these concepts are not clear and precise, even as they function, and so this presents a challenge for ethicists to study them in the light of the objective, nature-based moral order, and to ensure that their meaning will become clear and purified of moral relativism.

3. A comparison with classical virtue theory

St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa* of theology studied over 50 moral virtues, clearly defining their nature, their location in the human psyche, their mutual interconnection, their dependence upon the supernatural order of grace, granted through the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and their correlation with the commandments. He did not however, attempt to deduce all the virtues directly and logically from the commandments or from the basic principles of the natural law, because he primarily saw the virtues as manifestations of the moral responsibility and creativity of the individual acting agent, as he faces the truth, and not as a catalogue of externally imposed moral obligations.

The commandments play an important pedagogical role in excluding evil action, but good acts flow more directly from the generosity of the mature individual, who perceives directly the true goodness or the evil of an action, irrespectively of whether it has been commanded or forbidden.⁽⁶⁾ The prime function in moral education consists therefore in enabling the individual to grasp the “*verum bonum*,” the true good in the heart of the moral dilemma, toward which his nature has a natural inclination, and to respond to it freely, generously and creatively.

And when Aquinas discussed the opposite vices, he saw them primarily as a subtraction, as the lack of that good which could have come about through the virtue. The entire ethos, precisely analyzed by Aquinas is a theological attempt to present for pedagogical reasons, the fecundity of grace manifesting itself in the mature, virtuous person, who becomes an icon of God.

To appropriately interpret Aquinas’s virtue theory, it has to be viewed in unison with other studies of Aquinas. Within the structure of the *Summa*, Aquinas included an important treatise on the moral law that instructs the acting agent about the good.

The moral law was viewed by Aquinas primarily from the angle of the history of salvation, focusing on different relationships of God with humanity. The natural law, the law of the old dispensation, and the new law of grace, speak of different states of humanity, but they combine in offering the multifarious ways of divine guidance for moral action. The economy of the old law or of the new law of grace does not therefore dispense from the profiting from the light, which is available in the natural moral law.

Within the life of grace, in which openness to the grace of the Holy Spirit is primary, there is also room for rational reflection. Faith does not blind reason. It makes it more lucid, and so the inherent finality of beings, that reason alone can perceive, although with difficulty, supplies a helpful guiding light in the perception of the “*verum bonum*” in virtuous action. Since both creation and redemption are acts of the same, coherent God, there is no basic contradiction between the revealed law, the law of grace, and the natural law.

The grasping of the fundamental precepts of the natural moral law, whether undertaken theologically within the realm of faith, or outside it, comes about through the intuition of the “*instinctus rationis*” that perceives the ordering of nature toward that which is most appropriate to it. It is through the fundamental orientations of the reason and the will, ordering that good is to be pursued and evil avoided, followed by the perception of the metaphysical natural inclinations of being, that tends to preserve existence, of animality that tends to transmit



life and educate offspring, and of rationality that strives for supreme truth — which includes the truth about God — and for community life based upon that truth, that conclusions about the true good in moral action can be arrived at.

The fundamental precepts of the natural law are perceived through the metaphysical intuition of the finality of being, and not through a sociological observation of moral sensibilities that may be deformed by customs or depraved habits, although the fundamental moral precepts are corroborated by theological arguments. Obviously, the theological conviction, confirmed by the dogmatic truth of creation, that human nature is stable with an inbuilt orientation coming from the Creator, contributes to the perception of an objective moral order.

A theory of being that would exclude the possibility of a dependence on the Creator would jeopardize the stability of nature and its capacity to offer a binding light, illuminating human behavior. Aquinas' theory of the natural law was not purely philosophical, but it referred also to theological arguments. His reference to nature, reason and Scripture in the working out of the theory of natural law may appear to be circular, but this was not a vicious circle; it was a presentation of the overall harmony of all the sources of moral orientation.⁽⁷⁾

A full appreciation of Aquinas' virtue theory and of his interpretation of the natural law has also to take into account the fruits of his serious academic study, reported in the "Quaestiones disputatae," and entitled "De veritate," although this work should really be split into two parts, with the second named "De bonitate."

In this extensive and intensive intellectual endeavor, Aquinas studied the nature and the functioning of the intellect in its adherence to truth as its appropriate object and the nature and the functioning of the will as it is captivated by goodness. The first part of the study analyzes truth itself, God's knowledge of it, the ideas of God, the word of God, divine providence and the knowledge of God in predestination. This is followed by a reflection on the cognition of angels, followed by a study of the human mind, which is an image of the Trinity. This includes an analysis of the transmission of knowledge by a teacher, of the working of the mind in prophecy and spiritual rapture, of the intellect conditioned by the virtue of faith, of practical knowledge in the synderesis and in conscience, and finally a particular reflection on the cognition of the first parents before original sin and of the cognition of the soul after death.

This extensive theological epistemology ends in a reflection on the knowledge of the unique soul of Christ. In the second part of the study, a similar procedure is followed with a study of goodness and its appetition by the will. As with the cognitive faculties, Aquinas looks into the will of God, into the free choice in which the will and reason combine in freely choosing goodness, and then into factors which in humans condition the willing from without, such as the sensuality, the emotions and finally grace which leads to the justification of the impious. The study terminates with a reflection on the working of grace in the unique human soul of Christ.

This extensive analysis of the nature and the functioning of the spiritual faculties as they move toward the "verum bonum," focused on their inherent finality, and viewed also from the specific angles that are their presence in God, in the angels, in humans before and after the fall as also after receiving the redemptive power of grace, and in the unique person of Jesus Christ, God and man, offers a profound and optimistic context for the elucidation and formation of virtuous action.

Only if there is a deep conviction that the truth about goodness can be known, and that in the spiritual appetitive power there is inherent attraction to it, can the personal choice of virtuous action be grounded. Furthermore, when the spiritual faculties are enriched by the grace of faith and charity, their fundamental orientations to truth and goodness are strengthened.

The metaphysical structure of the transcendentals and of the spiritual faculties as they correspond to them, supplies therefore the background for the virtuous response to moral dilemmas as they appear. If this



metaphysical grounding of being were to be questioned or even denied, both anthropology and ethics would be hanging in the air.

Returning therefore to contemporary questions, it has to be said that the fact that with the globalization of human interaction and with the wider spectrum of moral challenges, new concepts of new virtues are being formulated to which correspond real responses, is not in itself perplexing. This is a normal development of moral awareness as it is facing new challenges, to which it tries to respond.

What is perplexing, however, is that these new concepts of new virtues are nebulous or ambivalent, and deprived of any rooting in coherent and certain knowledge about the human person, about human nature and its finality. If in the name of tolerance, no certain knowledge may be had about anything, if no one is entitled to declare that he holds any truths as true and therefore universally binding, there is no place for any virtue at all, and all supposedly value-charged statements are in fact empty.

The contemporary exertion of political pressure to change the meaning of words — as is happening in the case of the word marriage — or the demanding of special privileges in the name of a moral condition that has been expanded so widely and confusingly that it encompasses blatantly contradictory values — as is happening in the case of the term reproductive rights, which is to include at the same time concern for maternity and paternity, and the right to free access to contraception, abortion and the artificial production of parentless babies — voids the new moral language of any instinctive obviousness, which means that the new ethic if it is to be maintained, will have to be enforced by brute political pressure with no rational justification.

No longer finding support in human nature and in the “*instinctus rationis*,” the new ethic is condemned to the status of a devastating ideology that in time will be rejected once its catastrophic effects will become unashamedly visible. The question is, will it be replaced by another, equally nefarious and nihilist ideology, lay or even religious (Puritan or fundamentalist), or will it be replaced by a return to the respect of the cognitive capacities of the human mind, of the intelligibility of human nature, its finality and its basic goodness, and to a confidence in the basic goodness of the reason and will as they are attracted by supreme goodness?

Resistance to natural law ethics

Why is it that the natural law ethics meets today with such a wide resistance?

Is this caused by the weakness of the mind, which has been conditioned excessively by ideologies and philosophical assumptions that have impaired its capacity to see the truth, or are there other causes?

In the Enlightenment, reason was elevated above faith that was treated as superstition and myth in the conviction that reason alone, freed from prejudices and any external sentimental interferences may arrive at true cognition with accuracy and precision. This intellectual pride of reason, which set itself its own method and sphere of activity ended finally in the self-limitation of positivism, in which reason arbitrarily limits not only its own possibility of knowing, but even the existence of that reality which it cannot ascertain and measure according to its own arbitrarily chosen methods.

The refusal to view the metaphysical ground of reality is a form of enslavement of the reason that locks itself in its own self-defined prison. As such this refusal becomes an ideology that blocks the mind and disenables it from seeing what to another more open mind is obvious. Skepticism about the cognitive possibilities of the mind ends in shortsightedness that is ultimately nihilist.

In a paradoxical historical development, today it is the Church that is defending the dignity of reason, and inviting the minds of thinkers not to stop short and to reach out to the fullness of reality that can be known.(8)



The reductive self-limitations of the mind however contribute to the nihilist and relativist moral climate, which denies the existence of the natural moral order and leaves the new moral virtues reacting to new moral challenges suspended in a nebulous groundless atmosphere, prone to whatever ideological winds, fashions and political manipulations, may appear.

Is the contemporary resistance to the natural law caused primarily by epistemological weaknesses, or are there maybe other reasons, which cause the rejection of an objective, rationally cognizable moral order? While it is true that anti-intellectual fundamentalisms, whether of a religious or secular nature, may generate a psychological paralysis of the mind, are there not also other factors causing the shirking away from truth, even if the mind is naturally inclined toward it? Should we not look into factors that have constrained the will, both from within and from without, and disenabled it from persevering in the truth once it has been known?

It is not only philosophical assumptions and the weak mind that generate a resistance to the light of the natural law, but also the deformations or rather the lack of formation and of support of the will, which generate this resistance. The reason may see, even clearly, the truth of a moral challenge, and yet the person may refrain from adhering to it, precisely because what is missing is the moral stamina that would permit the creative and mature free choice of the “verum bonum,” as it has been truly seen. And when moral truth has been rejected, primarily due to moral weakness, the intellect then easily succumbs to the temptation of retreating from truth and to the espousing of confused relativist and skeptic theories that would justify the previously made decision to escape from the known truth.

In this context, it is good to remember the words of St. Paul who wrote about the depravity of men who keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness. For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them since God himself has made it plain. Ever since God created the world, his everlasting power and deity — however invisible — have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made. That is why such people are without excuse: They knew God, and yet refused to honor him as God or to thank him; instead, they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened. The more they called themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew (Romans 1:18-22).

Paul’s acerbic language did not aim uniquely at ridiculing the intellectual pride of the philosophers, nor did it intend to throw moralizing accusations at those culpable for the moral depravation of the society of his times. It was a preliminary step toward his preaching of Christ and the annunciation of justification through faith.

It is through faith in Christ that the grace of the Holy Spirit is received, which infused in the reason and the will enables growth in charity and moral responsibility. In wondering about the reservations about the natural moral law in contemporary Western culture, should we not also note the insufficient initiation into the life of grace in the past and maybe even present Christian moral teaching, depriving those who have engraved in their consciences and hearts the moral intuitions coming from their instinct of nature (Romans 2:15) of the only available power making the adherence to the verum bonum truly possible?

Both the quoted text of St. Paul and the teaching of Aquinas on the natural law are presented within a vision of faith. It is of course true that a rational discourse on the moral order should be able to stand on its own without the support of faith, but this does not mean that the practical living out of the ethos presented by the natural law is possible without the life of grace. Even Adam, according to Aquinas,(9) in the state of original justice needed the support of grace, although he did not need to apply that grace to so many wounded spheres of human existence as we do.

Moral teaching needs to be coupled with an initiation into the spiritual life grounded in Christ, as without it, reduced to a Pelagian rigorism, it generates an instinctive defensive reaction. It should come as no surprise that



non-Christians, when told about the possibility of living out the ethos of the Sermon of the Mount on the basis of a personal relationship with Christ are intrigued and fascinated, while argumentation based on metaphysical principles and the natural law does not seem to convince them.⁽¹⁰⁾

The purpose of the natural law reflection is to show that the high ethos, made possible through faith in Christ, is not a deformation of nature, but an eliciting of the profoundest inclinations already existing within nature. That is why the graced person is pleasing in his or her naturalness.

This does not however mean that the preaching of Christ within the moral order is optional, and that moral propriety may be socially guaranteed uniquely on the basis of a natural law morality. The suggestion that one may successfully engage in moral discourses exclusively on the level of ratio — “etsi Deus non daretur” (as if God didn’t exist) — in view of convincing intellectually nonbelievers may be a noble cause, but it is condemned to failure.

Too much is expected then from the rational discourse, which cannot in itself supply such a force of conviction that would move the heart, influence the will and enable perseverance in moral truth. Whereas, an introduction into the spiritual life illuminates the mind, opening it to the mysterious perspective of encountering God and it strengthens the will enabling it to persevere in its attachment to the true good, without in any way, denying the value of the clarity of natural law reflection.

Conclusion

In response therefore to the question that was addressed to me, I conclude that as new moral challenges are facing the world and as new moral sensibilities are being noted and expressed, they require the intellectual support of ethicists, who will work out the clear metaphysical foundations of the new moral perceptions.

This endeavor in itself, however, while desirable, is insufficient. What is primarily needed is the proclamation of the new law of grace, exactly within the moral challenges and dilemmas. Reflection on moral responsibilities needs to be undertaken, “etsi Deus daretur,” believing in the fullness of God’s gift that includes not only the creation of the cosmos with its inherent recognizable order, but also the redemption given through Jesus Christ and the accompanying grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is in the light of this renewing gift of grace that not only the functioning of the intellect, but also the functioning of the will and the dynamism of the affectivity, as also the practical responses to concrete moral challenges need to be viewed. Not only “fides et ratio,” a study of reason in the light of faith, but also “fides et liberum arbitrium” (free will), and “fides et passio” (passion) are needed.

Notes

(1) Ethics (New York, 1955), p. 143-144.

(2) Feliks Koneczny, “Prawa Dziejowe” (Laws of History), (London, 1982), p. 174-236.

(3) Motu Proprio Spes Aedificandi, 10: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, XXII, 2 (1999), p. 513.

(4) Marguerite A. Peeters, “La nouvelle éthique mondiale: défis pour l’Église,” (Institut pour une Dynamique de Dialogue Interculturel, 2006).

(5) Epikeia is the virtue of applying to law according to the true mind of the legislator in situations not specified by the letter of the law. Synesis is the virtue of good judgment about acts according to the common law. Gnome is the virtue of good judgment according to higher principles.

(6) St. Thomas Aquinas, Super II ad Cor., I. 3, c. 3: “Ille ergo, qui vitat mala, non quia mala, sed propter mandatum Domini, non est liber; sed qui vitat mala, quia mala, est liber.”

(7) Jean Porter, “Natural and Divine Law. Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics,” (Ottawa: Novalis; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 140-141.



(8) John Paul II, "Fides et Ratio," 56.

(9) St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 95, art. 4, ad 1: "Homo post peccatum ad plura indiget gratia quam ante peccatum, sed non magis."

(10) Servais Pinckaers, O.P., "Les sources de la morale chrétienne. Sa méthode, son contenu, son histoire," (Fribourg : Éditions Universitaires, Paris: Cerf, 1985), p. 171.