

Superstitions were rife, from avoiding ladders to belief in baptism as a protective device. Attitudes towards moral as distinct from doctrinal issues were much more down-to-earth: only a tiny minority accepted official teaching on contraception, while a fifth explicitly challenged church teaching on divorce.

The extent to which Catholics accepted Church authority was a further focus of the research projects informing this book. It emerged that a large proportion of Catholics, and a majority among the young, rejected papal infallibility. Hornsby-Smith links this discussion to a study of attenders at the various papal celebrations conducted on Pope John-Paul II's visit in 1982. Their responses to a necessarily quick interview are perhaps the most absorbing of the rich and diverse data presented, revealing what motivated people's attendance; how they saw the role of the Pope; and the extent to which they thought they would obey him. In this last regard and on matters of personal morality, the majority appeared to reserve the right to make up their own minds. Hornsby-Smith attributes much of the change in moral attitudes (and perhaps of less deferential attitudes to popes and priests) to the decline in the fear of hell. He sees apathy and self-interest as having led many Catholics to welcome mindlessly and ignorantly changes which have made religion 'easier', such as the termination of Friday abstinence and relaxed rules pertaining to such matters as fasting and mixed marriages, since religion has salience for the everyday life of only a tiny minority, even of mass attenders. Yet he does not regard these changes as evidence of secularization. Scrupulously distinguishing interpretation from actual evidence, he none the less believes that new forms of religious association compensate for the decline in allegiance to existing institutions and their clerical agents. Such changes might, however, be seen as in various ways a type of protestantization of Catholicism, and that in itself might yet eventually open the door to similar processes of secularization to those to which Protestantism has long since fallen a victim.

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**THE MORAL VIRTUES AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS** by R. Cessario  
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Romanus Cessario's treatment of the virtues is the product of considerable scholarship. It is rooted in an appreciation of the Patristic and Scholastic treatises on virtue, their controversies and nuances about the nature of virtue and its role in the moral life, and is based upon an extensive use of original sources. However, it is very far from being a study in the history of moral theology. Cessario shows himself throughout to be alert to current issues in moral theology and, indeed, claims that the place of virtue in this sacred science has been seriously underestimated both by the previous tradition of casuistry and by most exponents of the recent renewal. The suspicion that a virtue ethic is

basically a pagan concept, that it promotes individualism and may be tainted with Pelagianism may, help to account for this misreading. In a work which complements the philosophical studies of Pieper, Geach and MacIntyre, but which is clearly theological, Cessario seeks to challenge such a view and at the same time to show that such an ethic can overcome the often false dichotomy between personal responsibility and obligation seen as constraint, between conscience and extrinsic norms, which still bedevils much moral theological discourse. Moreover, in harmony with Vatican II, his analysis integrates moral and dogmatic theology and highlights the vocation of the faithful in Christ.

Cessario examines the concepts of habitus and of moral virtue, the role of prudence in the moral life, the way the virtues develop and their characteristics. Taking habitus as neither mechanical repetition, nor mere disposition, but as deliberate, persistent moral activity for good or bad, making it increasingly easy and pleasurable to act in a particular way, he shows how a person's moral character is formed by it. The moral virtues build on such structures, but are orientated to the persistent pursuit of the good and make the person good. The cardinal moral virtue of prudence is not mere caution or just for special circumstances. It seeks full moral goodness, not only moral truth, directing the inclinations of the passions to good ends and commanding acts which lead to full human flourishing. All of this in the believer is open to the radically transforming action of grace. It can help to produce a person-centred moral theology which does not court the dangers of self-centredness or relativism.

Cessario persuasively argues the Thomist view that virtue transforms the very character of a person and goes far beyond conformity to external law. It is not the repressive domination of disordered passion by the will obeying reason, but it transforms the passions themselves so that they contribute to good living, truly focussing the person upon the ends of virtue. Reason can only partially control the emotions and emotions cannot check themselves. In the believer the rational and the sense appetites are penetrated by the theological virtues and enable the believer to choose God in spite of disordered passions or other serious difficulties. Thus, when passion seems too strong for someone to do what is morally right, these can help avoid compromises too readily sanctioned as involving only a pre-moral evil. God's triumph over fallen nature becomes a source of real hope even to the weak.

Infused moral virtues focus the believer not just on the good of right reason, but on beatitude, and render him capable of living a virtuous life not sporadically or partially, but fully and faithfully. Grace combines with his free, enduring cooperation to transform moral virtues so that he is orientated to God and made capable of attaining what is beyond creaturely power. There is not just a change in motivation or intention, but a change action itself and in the whole of a person's life. Of great pastoral and spiritual value is Cessario's insistence that, in contrast to

virtue rationally considered, infused virtue renders the weak and the repentant sinner capable of virtuous living, a possibility, then, for all and not just for a special few.

This valuable work contributes to the positive trends of recent moral theological renewal not least by indicating how a Christ-centred morality can be developed and how authentic values of personalism can be promoted in a virtue-based moral theology. The decidedly theological approach to virtue counters the still heavily rationalist focus of much moral theology, the preoccupation with norms and with disjointed acts. Cessario gives more weight than many to specificity in Christian ethics and to the place of moral Magisterium. As a self-proclaimed realist moral theologian, he holds for specific moral absolutes on the grounds that some acts are objectively incompatible with virtue and may never be justly realised.

The book covers a great deal in a short compass, but some points might have been developed further: the inter-connection between moral Magisterium and virtue, advice on conflicts and dilemmas. Perhaps, he is too dismissive of Fundamental Option, understood more precisely in the light of *Persona Humana*, 10, and *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 17; surely, free, persevering determination through vocational choices and through decisions of daily life, together with the real danger of weakening or reversal even though individual acts, provide points of contact with a theological ethic of virtue. The book does not entirely avoid the danger that the detailed classification of virtues and their parts can obscure inter-relationships. Thus, faith appears as *fides quae* relating the believer to God as *Prima Veritas*, the *fides qua* dimension of total self-giving adhesion to God as he reveals himself in Christ (*Dei Verbum*, 5) being reserved for hope. This original, careful and lucid analysis of a neglected theme in moral theology is very welcome. Its value is heightened by the appeal it will have for personal spiritual development. It successfully combines a scientific presentation of moral theology with encouraging guidance for all who seek to follow Christ.

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### Apology

Passages from Dr Peter Hodgson's article: 'The Energy Crisis and Nuclear Power' on pages 123–24 and page 130 of our February issue were inadvertently repeated in the course of the text. We apologise to Dr Hodgson and to our readers for this error.

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