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Christ, Moral Absolutes, and the Good: Recent Moral Theology

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

CHRIST, MORAL ABSOLUTES, AND THE GOOD: RECENT MORAL THEOLOGY* SERVAIS PINCKAERS, O.P. University of Fribourg Fribourg, Switzerland | CARLO CAFFARA'S Living in Christ (which appeared in Italian in 1981) was well worth the translating. It presents a fairly complete exposition of Christian moral teaching in a readable style and convenient format and provides principles needed to address the ethical problems most widely discussed today. It is a synthesis of traditional basic ethics which has been revised in the light of profound reflection on values and broadened to include the contributions of Christian revelation and tradition. Because of these factors, this book helps us to understand recent stances of the Magisterium towards moral problems by attempting to show the motivations behind these stances. Compared with ethics

manuals used in Catholic teaching during recent centuries, this work indicates considerable progress on both philosophical and theological levels and thus responds to the Council's express desire for a renewal of moral theology. The author's reflection focuses on the philosophy of values, *Books considered in this essay: Carlo Caffara, *Living in Christ: Fundamental Principles of Catholic Moral Teaching*, trans, Christopher Ruff (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); William E. May, *Moral Absolutes, Catholic Tradition, Current Trends and the Truth* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1989); Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Bonum Hominis: Die anthropologischen und theologischen Grundlagen der Tugendethik des Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1987). 117 118 SERVAIS PINCKAERS, O.P. which he directs to the consideration of the human person. Moral Value, the first 'given' of human experience, is specific to the person and can be defined as the development of man qua man according to his own nature. Values are reflected in the moral norms which manifest them and receive from them their universality and unchangeable character. They extend into the judgment of conscience, which applies them to a concrete person in the particular circumstances of his action. We thus have a personalistic view of morality, whose objectivity and truth are rooted in the exigencies of reason in conformity with the dignity of the free and responsible person. The natural law, written in the human heart and inscribed by the God of the Covenant on the two tables of the decalogue, brings out in relief the fundamental commandments. This exposition of morality is at the same time frankly Christian and reintroduces important dimensions into Catholic moral teaching. The neglect of these dimensions in classic manuals could legitimately be deplored; too great a separation was effected between moral and dogmatic theology, spirituality and Scripture. But here all you need do is look at the table of contents to realize the care with which the author has reopened the lines of communication, not only on the ideological level but also on the basis of Christian experience, which undergirds the entire study. This comes through notably at the end of each chapter, in lengthy quotations from spiritual authors entitled "Meditation of the Bride." To summarize briefly, the book is divided into three parts: I. The Foundation: the Fundamental Principle of Christian Ethics; II. The Mediation: Living in Christ in History; III. The Response: the Actualization of Life in Christ. Part I shows the Trinitarian dimension of Christian morality: it is a life in Christ, a development of union with His person begun in Baptism, growing under the ruction of the Holy Spirit and his Gifts, reaching to the glory of the Father who called him in creating him. Thus morality is itself explicitly Christian. The author RECENT MORAL THEOLOGY 119 brings things to a climax by showing how in God's historical design the moral life, which proceeds from the dignity of man, finds its fulfillment in man's consent to the creative action which has destined him to share in the divine life, freely offered in Christ. The act whereby God wills us to be persons is the same act by which He orders us to Himself. Our predestination in Christ is, therefore, the ultimate foundation of morality, the definitive guarantee of respect for the person and of the commandment that we should love others as God loves us. Part II treats of the "mediations" of the moral...

CHRIST, MORAL ABSOLUTES, AND THE GOOD:
RECENT MORAL THEOLOGY*

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I

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Compared with ethics manuals used in Catholic teaching during recent centuries, this work indicates considerable progress on both philosophical and theological levels and thus responds to the Council's express desire for a renewal of moral theology.

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