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Raising Expectations on Sin

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Abstract
Since Vatican II, moral theologians have revisted the topic sin time and again. After considering the treatment by the manualists of moral theology of sin, and especially sins in violation of the sixth and ninth commandments, this article proposes four strands of theological argument since the Second Vatican Council that lead to a more robust, pervasive, and social understanding of sin than previously held. As these strands of argument converge we see the possibility of a better appreciation of human capacity and freedom as well as a summons to love and solidarity.

Keywords
culpability, goodness, intrinsic evil, moral manuals, parvity of matter, rightness, sin, structural evil

In an excellent essay, Jean Porter has recently remarked that the "the concept of sin . . . continues to be relatively neglected among theologians."[1] In this article, we will see what exactly has been the work of theologians on sin. We will do it realizing that we are on the verge of seeing a newer, more robust, and definitely more social understanding of sin emerging that, while attentive to questions related to the voluntary and therefore to culpability, seems more interested in the fact and pervasiveness of sin as well as its roots in both the human condition and our social structures.

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[1] Jean Porter, "Sin, Sickness, and Transgression: Medieval Perspectives on Sin and Their Significance Today," in *Virtue and the Moral Life: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kathryn Getek Soltis and William Werpehowski (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014) 3–18, 115–31, at 115.

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Before we look to the more immediate work of our colleagues, we do well to consider how sin functioned in the church for the years before Vatican II. Then we will follow four strands of development on sin from the Council to today.[2] These are sinning out of strength; sinning against our relational nature; the relationship among goodness, rightness, and objective and subjective sin; and structural sin.

Sin Before Vatican II

The English Jesuit Thomas Slater (1855–1928) described the manuals of moral theology as "books of moral pathology."[3] From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, moral theology was solely in these textbooks designed for the priest confessor to be an effective minister of the sacrament of penance.[4]

Rightly Raphael Gallagher warns us against reducing the manualist era to a monolithic period without any of its own developments.[5] One development that spans from Slater's own manual in 1906 to other manuals 40 years later concerns the understanding of the lay Catholic penitent. With a growing dependence on the developing field of psychology, manualists progressively found more and more psychological conditions to diminish penitents' culpability. In 1943, the Jesuit Henry Davis (1866–1952) gave a startlingly long list of categorically problematic consciences (the false, doubting, perplexed, scrupulous, and laxed conscience), allowing us to see just how easily and frequently the average Catholic veered from the true conscience.[6] In his extraordinarily popular pocketbook, *Moral Theology* (1951), the German Capuchin Heribert Jone developed "the obstacles to the human act" far more than ever. In Slater, the obstacles were simply ignorance, concupiscence, fear and violence,[7] and Davis added habitual obstacles as in vices that have not yet been checked.[8] Jone provided a host of nervous conditions that diminished the agent's moral responsibility: neurasthenia, hysteria, compulsive disorders, melancholia, hypochondria, inferiority, and so forth.[9] While we see in Davis a tendency to find the conscience of the agent more ignorant, confused, and incompetent than in Slater, in Jone we find the penitent more prone to psychological disorders. In both cases, while compassion for the sinner probably motivated them, the newer writers found more occasions to view the ordinary penitent as less capable, less responsible, and less mature. In a similar way we find the same turn to incapacity in the American moralists John Ford and Gerald Kelly. In their *Contemporary Moral Theology* they devoted more than half their treatment of fundamental moral theology to subjective imputability and its relationship to stress, unconscious motivation, alcoholism, and psychiatric problems.[10] For all of them, the average layperson was less able to discern and execute morally right conduct and therefore less able to sin.

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[2] Here I am taking the notion of strands from Charles Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology: Five Strands* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 2013).

[3] Thomas Slater, *A Manual of Moral Theology for English-speaking Countries* (London: Benziger Brothers, 1906) 5–6.

[4] James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010) 9–34.

[5] Raphael Gallagher, "The Fate of the Moral Manuals since Saint Alphonsus," in *The Irish Reader in Moral Theology: The Legacy of the Last Fifty Years*, ed. Edna McDonagh and Vincent MacNamara (Dublin: Columba, 2009) 59–79.

[6] Henry Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology in Four Volumes*, 4th ed. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943) 1: 67–78.

[7] Slater, *A Manual of Moral Theology* 30–40.

[8] Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology* 1: 16–33.

[9] Heribert Jone, *Moral Theology*, 8th ed., trans. Urban Adelman (Westminster: Newman, 1951) 29–37.

When manualism comes effectively to an end at Vatican II, one of the causes for its eventual disuse was its singular focus on sin;[11] at the same time, however, there was the added criticism that in fact, the later books of moral pathology were light on sinners![12] While John Mahoney remarks that moral theology "almost domesticated and trivialized sin,"[13] Seán Fagan reflects on the twentieth-century pastoral practice of "sin-grids" by which moralists placed sin into categories and then numbered the occasions penitents violated the grid.[14]

No one was more critical of the moral manuals than the Belgian Benedictine Odon Lottin (1880–1965).[15] In *Moral Fondamentale* (1954) he criticized the wretched past of moral theology blaming the priest confessor as the principal cause for the failure to look to the good, but to focus singularly on avoiding evil. He also attacked recent developments in the church wherein canon law had greater influence over moral theology, forcing it to focus exclusively on external acts, when in fact, historically speaking, moral theology had been primarily interested in the internal life. Moreover, by its insistence on avoiding wrong external acts, not only had moral theology lost its purpose, that is, to pursue Christian discipleship, but it lost its deep connection to ascetical and mystical theology.[16] Finally he argued that the moralists only taught what sins were to be avoided and never proposed the virtuous actions that a true Christian should practice.[17]

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[10] John Ford and Gerald Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology Volume I: Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963).

[11] Curran, "Sin, Reconciliation, and the Manuals of Moral Theology," *The Development of Moral Theology* 1–30.

[12] Looking at pastoral practices being offered today in the wake of the two synods, we might ask if our episcopacies are familiar with this history. See Thomas Reese, "Five Reasons the Synod is Doomed to Fail," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 15, 2015, http://ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/five-reasons-synod-doomed-fail. (This and all other URLs herein were accessed November 10, 2015.)

[13] John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 32.

[14] Seán Fagan, "What Happened to Sin?" in McDonagh and MacNamara, *The Irish Reader* 401–8.

[15] See Mary Jo Iozzio, *Self-Determination and the Moral Act: A Study of the Contributions of Odon Lottin, O.S.B.* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995).

[16] Odon Lottin, *Morale Fondamentale* (Tournai, Belgium: 1954) 23–25. He entitles this section, "Causes de l'inferiorité actuelle de la théologie morale."

[17] Ibid. 331.

Later in *Au Coeur de la Morale Chrétienne* (1957), he noted that the responsibility for these manuals came not from their authors, but from the very numerous mediocre Christians who asked their confessors to give them minimalist expectations for the moral life. Instead of pursuing the greatness of Christian discipleship, the laity negotiated their salvation, seeking pastoral pity and probable excuses in the confessional.[18]

Lottin's criticisms highlight how manualists, confessors, and the laity conspired to diminish guilt by infantilizing the moral consciences of all. While the manualist and the confessor pitied the beleaguered challenges of the laity, the laity cooperated by proposing extenuating circumstances that made their sins less culpable and, therefore, their personal freedom less mature. No one sinned because they could; they sinned because they could not do otherwise.

To get moral theology to its proper home, Lottin argued that morality needed to return to its relationship with dogmatic (systematic) theology: "Dogmatics, in a word, presents us God's part in the work of our salvation, morals organize our part."[19] Lottin saw the end of morality as the right realization of the person and the community in and according to God's salvific plan.

Sex and Sin

Lottin overlooks an issue essential to most of this compromise: the so-called moral matter. In the aftermath of *Humanae vitae*, we learned from priests in a variety of contexts about the centrality of sins against the sixth and ninth commandment as confessional matter. Apart from whether many of the sins confessed concerned these two commandments, they were the sins that penitents were most anxious about, because since the beginning of the seventeenth century, all sins against the sixth and the ninth commandments were defined as mortal and therefore damnable. Because of this, confessors and manualists labored to ease the stress of anxious Christians.[20] As James Brundage claims, "the Christian horror of sex has for centuries placed enormous strain on individual consciences and self-esteem in the Western world."[21]

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[18] Lottin, *Au Coeur de la Morale Chrétienne* (Tournai: Declees, 1957) 6. On the confessional as the place to work out one's salvation, see Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2015).

[19] Lottin, *Morale Fondamentale* 13.

[20] It is worth noting that in their two-volume *Contemporary Moral Problems*, Ford and Kelly dedicate the entire second volume to marriage questions, mostly about conjugal intimacy and contraception. That marriage is singularly reduced to sex and reproduction gives us an idea of the central anxiety Catholics have had about sex and salvation. See Ford and Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology, Volume II: Marriage Questions* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963).

[21] James Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 9. Regarding the matter of sex and sin see also Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984), and *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993). In many ways, John Noonan's *Contraception: A*

At the end of the eleventh century, theologians spawned a conceptual category of note: sins against nature. John T. Noonan, Jr. attributes this development to Ivo (1040–1116) who declared, "to act against nature is always unlawful and beyond doubt more flagrant and shameful than to sin by a natural use in fornication or adultery." Ivo then defined unnatural intercourse as "the use of a member not granted for this (use)."[22] Noonan comments that Ivo's work is a milestone in the development of Church teaching.[23]

Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* developed the issue further when he explained that venereal acts "are highly necessary to the common good, which is the conservation of the human race."[24] Here he developed the natural teleology of the (male) reproductive capacity as pertaining to the common good and in many ways laid the groundwork for presupposing that our sexuality and reproductive capacity existed not for ourselves, but for the propagation of the species.[25]

The sin against nature became a clear marker in the manuals that followed. From Thomas to the twentieth century, the moral treatises distinguished between sexual sins "in accordance with nature" and those "contrary to nature." While the former could include fornication, adultery, incest, rape, and abduction, in general the latter sins (solitary or mutual masturbation, contraception, anal or oral intercourse, bestiality) were more grievous.

Sins against nature received further treatment by being coupled with two other conceptual categories: intrinsic evil and parvity of matter. Intrinsic evil is a fourteenth--century concept that described a particular type of action as absolutely, always wrong regardless of circumstances.[26] This a priori evaluation removed from consideration any question of the moral legitimacy of such actions. These were described as such either because the action was against nature and/or the agent had no right to the exercise of such activity.[27] Interestingly, sins against nature qualified as intrinsically evil for both reasons, and this criterion was so inclusive that nothing about sex was licit except simple marital coitus open to procreation.

History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1965) remains the definitive text in our understanding of the history of sex and sin in Roman Catholicism. On the influence of confession on moral theology see Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology* 1–36.

[22] Ivo, *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Lavrentivm Cottereav,1647) 9.106 and 110 respectively, as cited in Noonan, *Contraception* 172.

[23] Noonan, *Contraception* 172–73.

[24] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (II.II, q. 153, a. 3).

[25] See Noonan, *Contraception* 244ff.; Hubertus Lutterbach, "Die Sexualtabus in den Bussbüchern," *Saeculum* 46 (1995) 216–48; *Sexualität im Mittelalter. Eine Kulturstudie anhand von Bussbüchern des 6. bis 12. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999).

[26] John Dedek, "Intrinsically Evil Acts: The Emergence of a Doctrine," *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale* 50 (1983) 191–226.

[27] Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, *The Principle of Double Effect: A Critical Appraisal of Its Traditional Understanding and Its Modern Reinterpretation* (Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 1985).

This still left open the question of the degree of sinfulness, and here arose the question of whether any sin of lust could be considered light matter or whether it had what the manualists called parvity of matter.

Parvity of matter, meaning whether any lust was ever light matter as opposed to grave, came to the forefront in the 17th century.[28] In 1612 the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Claudio Acquaviva, condemned the position that excused from mortal sin some slight pleasure in deliberately sought venereal desires. Not only did he bind Jesuits to obey the teaching under pain of excommunication, he imposed on them the obligation to reveal the names of those Jesuits who violated even the spirit of the decree.[29] Therein was sealed the decision that sins against the sixth and ninth commandments had no parvity of matter. Notably this position did not apply to any of the other commandments.

These and other sanctions dissuaded moralists from entertaining any of the circumstantial exceptions as earlier casuists had.[30] With sins against nature, intrinsic evil and parvity of matter, the moral manualists locked into place the teaching that all sexual desires and subsequent activity were always mortally sinful and damnable unless it was the conjugal action of spouses that was in itself left open to procreation. Moreover the teleology of one's sexual and reproductive capacity as belonging to the common good and the denial of the right of the agent to exercise one's sexuality for anything other than marital procreation made sins against the sixth and ninth commandment as exclusively different in kind.[31] Finally, as time passed, these moralists insisted that these teachings were unchangeable and had always been taught as such, even though we now know that they had literally "developed."[32]

Sin after Vatican II and *Humanae vitae*

Until Vatican II, a good deal of our understanding of sin was the result of a central preoccupation with teachings on sins against chastity. The often-lamented criticism that our notions of sin were self-oriented as opposed to other-oriented had a great deal to do with the central role played by the gravity of sins against the sixth and ninth commandments.

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[28] Karl-Heinz Kleber, *De Parvitate Materiae in Sexto* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1971); Patrick Boyle, *Parvitas Materiae in Sexto in Contemporary Catholic Thought* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987).

[29] Boyle, *Parvitas Materiae in Sexto* 14–16.

[30] Prior to the 17th century, moralists entertained questions of sexual pleasure, see Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition* (Rome: Gregorian University, 2007).

[31] Charles Curran provides a helpful description of sexuality in the manuals of the Italian Jesuit manualist, Aloyius Sabetti (1839–1898), who taught in Woodstock, Maryland, in *The Origins of Moral Theology in the United States: Three Different Approaches* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1997) 133–67.

[32] For instance Giovanni Cappelli investigated whether the church had always taught that masturbation was a sin in his *Autoerotismo: Un problema morale nei primi secoli cristiani?* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniano, 1986). See also Bernard Hoose, *Received Wisdom? Reviewing the Role of Tradition in Christian Ethics* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) 43–78. In a similar way, Aline Kalbian addresses "developments" on contraception in the aftermath of *Humanae vitae* in her *Sex, Violence and Justice: Contraception and the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 2014).

Anxiety about sex and eternal damnation was palpable in the confessional from 1620 to 1970, but it diminished remarkably after the Council. Besides the noteworthy developments in theology and church teachings on conscience,[33] significant pastoral devices, most notably the law of graduality, brought to the confessional and to the penitent a perspective on sexuality that highlighted not moral failure and eternal damnation but the integrity and striving of disciples faithful in the pursuit of holiness.[34] Moreover sexuality was treated more openly in theology. When the manuals appeared in the vernacular at the beginning of the twentieth century, the texts on the sixth and the ninth commandment remained in Latin so as not to excite the uninformed. Theologians, and especially feminists, did not want sex to recede into "privacy." Sex was to be understood, discussed, and appreciated not only among theologians, but also among the laity. In the United States, feminist theologians like Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret Farley, and then Christine Gudorf, Cristina Traina, Susan Ross, and Patricia Beattie Jung emphasized relationality and justice as they constructed a new sexual ethics.[35]

As anxiety about sex abated, moral theologians began thinking anew about sin.

Sinning out of Strength

Soon after the Council, we discovered that through our sinfulness, we could know not primarily our weaknesses but our strengths and our freedom. One of the first voices on this insight was unexpected: the American psychiatrist Karl Menninger. His *What Became of Sin?* was a significant popular summons to recognize that the language of sin within the context of moral accountability and responsibility was a true guide to healthy self-understanding.[36] Later the German moral theologian, Franz Böckle, demonstrated in a masterful study, *Fundamental Moral Theology*, that "sin is only possible as a result of human freedom."[37] Beginning with an appreciation of the human person as being in conflict and contradiction, he recognized the significance of admitting guilt. For him the confession of sin is itself "performative" (better, effective) and illuminative. It is effective inasmuch as we do not know the scope of our sinfulness until we begin to acknowledge it. Only when we utter "mea culpa" do we begin to allow ourselves to see the history of sinful harm. Until we do, we remain behind artificial blinders that keep us from recognizing the trajectory of effects that have occurred from our sinfulness. He writes,

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[33] For the critical influence of Bernhard Häring and Josef Fuchs and their lead on the retrieval of conscience, see Keenan, *A History* 141–96. More recently and noteworthy, see David DeCosse and Kristin Heyer, eds., *Conscience and Catholicism: Rights, Responsibilities, and Institutional Policies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015); David DeCosse, "The Primacy of Conscience, Vatican II, and Pope Francis: The Opportunity to Renew a Tradition," in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014) 156–69; Kristin Heyer and Bryan Massingale, "*Gaudium et spes* and the Call to Justice: The U.S. Experience," ibid. 81–100. See also Keenan, "Redeeming Conscience," *Theological Studies* 76 (2015) 129–47.

[34] Keenan, *A History* 147–48.

[35] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (New York: Paulist, 1985); *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996); Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006). For a contemporary attempt to bring sex more into the public arena, see Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance and Religion on America's College Campuses* (New York: Oxford University, 2008).

[36] Karl Menninger, *What Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1973).

> The person confessing declares when he confesses, that he is ready to be converted. In other words, he turns his gaze from the past to the future. In his confession, his sin is not simply finished by the acceptance of his guilt. The condition for its overcoming is also created.[38]

Turning to Wisdom literature and the Psalms, Böckle's argument is rooted in the Scriptures as he reminds us that "sin is not simply a question of human guilt—it is also guilt in the presence of God."[39] In that effective acknowledgement of our culpability, we are gifted with an illumination by which we understand first, what we did, but second, what we could have done: the confession of our sinfulness lets us recognize that we could have acted otherwise. Until we have that insight we are trapped by an understanding of our selves as weak and constrained, a convenient stance that literally keeps us from believing that we need to confess. When we confess, however, we realize not that we sinned out of weakness, but out of strength.[40]

Consider the Gospels. When the rich man ignores Lazarus in need at the gate, the rich man's sin is not in his weakness, but in his strength (Luke 16:19–31). He could have done something, he did not; he sinned, precisely out of his riches. The forgiven steward is punished because he does not forgive the minor debt of his own employee. Out of his own easy capacity to forgive and absolve, the steward is convicted (Matt 18:21–35). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, where is the sin? The focus is on the Levite and the priest; they could have acted, but they did not (Luke 10:25–37). Or think of the Last Judgment: the sheep and goats are separated by what they could have done and whether they did it (Matt 25:31–46).

So much of our manualist theology of sin, without a theology of conscience, made sin seem inevitable and our own selves look weak, living in a world without virtue and grace. In that context we confessed sins that we could not have avoided, pleading that other conditions made us do what we did. Learning to confess our sins in the light of Christ, we realize in grace that the chance of acting otherwise is there and that the excuses we proffer are just, well, excuses. The true confession of sin that Böckle and Lottin wrote about, makes us realize that the trajectory of our personal and social history can be changed.

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[37] Franz Böckle, "Theological Reflection about Guilt and Sin," *Fundamental Moral Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980) 87–124, at 88.

[38] Böckle, *Fundamental Moral Theology* 90.

[39] Ibid. 91.

[40] James Keenan, "Sin," in *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Moral Tradition* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010) 45–67.

Moreover, in the illumination of our sinfulness, we see just how sinful we are. We might do well to remember contemporary figures like Dorothy Day and Pope Francis who remind us of their own sinfulness.[41] That insight brings with it a redemptive humility, a humility not burdened with self-deprecation, but rather with an unabashed self-understanding of what grace and freedom are.[42] William Cavanaugh reminds us that the only reason why believers can be witnesses to the world is that "they have been enabled to name sin truthfully through the revelation of the living God."[43]

Love and Sins against Our Relational Nature

The second development was the turn to love and a relational anthropology. It would be impossible to describe here how the priority of love was restored to moral theology after Vatican II. Theologians and Scripture scholars like Gérard Gilleman,[44] Fritz Tillmann,[45] Ceslas Spicq,[46] and Karl Rahner[47] led the way. From there, Margaret Farley in many ways led us to see in the summons of love, an attentiveness to relationality.[48] Through them the primacy of the call to love was restored to our moral lives.

Moral theology began to see the failure to love as leaving one in a state of moral compromise. Referring to "the challenge that sin presents," David Cloutier writes, "we live in a world where we have systematically distorted these relationships, so that they are ones of competition, domination and self-seeking. In our own culture, a high premium is placed on independence, on making our own choices."[49] He adds, "For Christians the ultimate distortion of our relationships is our alienation from God, not because God is angry with us, but because we as humans have wanted to reject God's love in favor of our own autonomy."[50] Cavanaugh argues similarly:

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[41] Stephen Bullivant, "'I Am a Sinner': The Deep Humility of Pope Francis," *America*, September 25, 2013, www.americamagazine.org/issue/i-am-sinner.

[42] See Paulinus Odozor on Häring and Rahner on sin in his *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2003) 94–98.

[43] William T. Cavanaugh, "Pilgrim People," in *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective*, ed. David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 88–105, at 95.

[44] Gérard Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster: Newman, 1959).

[45] Fritz Tillmann, *The Master Calls* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1960).

[46] Ceslas Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament* (St. Louis: Herder, 1963).

[47] Karl Rahner, "The Commandment of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 439–59; "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," *Theological Investigations* 6 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 231–59.

[48] Margaret Farley, *Changing the Questions: Explorations in Christian Ethics* (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2015).

[49] David Cloutier, "Human Fulfillment," *Gathered for the Journey* 134–52, at 143.

> The root of sin is the desire to be autonomous, to stand in competition with others, build walls around the self, and stuff it full. Salvation is being saved from the confinement of the self. It is an opening to the other, pouring out of the small self into a wider communion with God and with others.[51]

In Europe, most of moral theology developed an autonomous ethics that was very different from the critique of autonomy in the United States. In Europe this ethics meant that ultimately one needed to conform one's self to God's call to become a true disciple.[52] By the end of the 1990s these ethicists made a significant shift, arguing that an autonomous ethics had to be constitutively relational for it to be Christian.[53] Today we see the fruit of these shifts. From Italy we find similar concerns regarding sin and its relationship to the triple love of God, self, and neighbor as Cataldo Zuccaro engages us to listen to the Scriptures and discover how we are called into relationships and therein to discover our sin and the need for reconciliation and restoration.[54] From Spain, Julio Luis Martínez and José Manuel Caamaño remind us that the sin of our time is the loss of the sense of sin.[55] Sin is an alienation from others and oneself and fundamentally from God.[56]

Goodness and Rightness, Subjective and Objective Sin

Philosophers and theologians consistently referred to the fact that "doing the good" is not sufficient for describing a person as good.[57] Democritus, for instance, argued that doing the good is not necessarily an indication of being good: being good requires doing the good and wanting it done precisely because it is good.[58] Kant similarly distinguished between actions motivated or done out of duty (*Handeln aus Pflicht*) and dutiful actions (*pflichtmäßiges Handeln*). In attempting to describe the only thing that can be called "good," he argued that a dutiful act is only good if done out of duty.[59]

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[50] Cloutier, "Human Fulfillment" 145.

[51] Cavanaugh, "Pilgrim People" 140.

[52] A prime example of this ethics is Klaus Demmer, *Living the Truth* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 2010).

[53] See James Keenan and Thomas Kopfensteiner, "Moral Theology out of Western Europe," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) 107–35.

[54] Cataldo Zuccaro, *Fundamental Moral Theology* (Vatican City: Urbaniana University, 2015) 275–301.

[55] Julio Luis Martínez and José Manuel Caamaño, *Moral Fundamental: Bases teológicas del discernimento ético* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2014) 465.

[56] Martínez and Caamaño, *Moral Fundamental* 490–504.

[57] For a list of instances see Bruno Schüller, *Die Begrundung sittlicher Urteile* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1980) 140.

[58] See his *Fragmenta Moralia* no. 109, cited in Stephen Toulmin, *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1958) 170.

George Moore made a similar move to determine the morality of an action free of any consideration of an agent's motivations. He called the moral description of the action right or wrong, and the person good or bad. His measure for moral action was based on utilitarianism. His measure for the moral person was basically an honest motivation. Here Moore uncovered the possibility of a very right act being done by a person with bad motivations and described a paradox: "A man may actually deserve the strongest moral condemnation for choosing an action which is morally right."[60]

A skeptical insight into human activity underlined these positions and it is found in Augustine who presumed that an agent may not be as good as her or his actions are and developed three lists of virtues and vices: one for virtues, but two for vices. Each moral virtue has a contrary vice and a "deceptive resemblance."[61] Prudence has imprudence as its contrary vice but craftiness as its "deceptive resemblance." A person who acts prudently could actually be crafty.

Though these authors recognized that we may not be as good as our actions are right, they never developed the equally valid insight that we may not be as bad as our actions are wrong. One near exception occurs when theologians asked whether a person is bad who follows her or his erroneous conscience.[62]

After the Council, European moralists became interested in this distinction between goodness and rightness. Bruno Schüller,[63] Josef Fuchs,[64] and Klaus Demmer[65] maintained that if a person strives out of love or out of duty to realize right living, then the agent is good notwithstanding the fact that the actual realization may be right or wrong. Goodness does not require right action. Goodness requires that the agent be striving out of love or out of duty to realize right living.

Rightness concerns whether or not an action or a form of conduct actually attains set moral demands. Moral theories today generally debate what exactly constitutes rightness,[66] but they presume that implicit moral motivations precede actions. Goodness is the striving out of love, charity, or duty for the right. But rightness, whether it focuses on a particular act, a class of rules or values, or even habitual character traits or virtues, measures not whether we strive, but whether we attain those standards.

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[59] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

[60] George Moore, *Ethics* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1912) 193–95.

[61] Augustine, "Letter 167," *St. Augustine: Letters, Volume 4 (165–203)* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1955).

[62] See James Keenan, "Can a Wrong Action Be Good? The Development of Theological Opinion on Erroneous Conscience," *Église et Théologie* 24 (1993) 205–19.

[63] Besides his *Die Begrundung sittlicher Urteil*e, see "Various Types of Grounding for Ethical Norms," in *Readings in Moral Theology No.1: Moral Norms and Catholic Tradition*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1979) 184–98; *Wholly Human* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 1985).

[64] Josef Fuchs, "Morality: Person and Acts," in *Christian Morality: The Word Becomes Flesh* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 1987) 105–17.

[65] Klaus Demmer, *Deuten und Handeln* (Freiburg: Universitaetsverlag, 1985).

[66] That virtues normally describe right, instead of good conduct, see Keenan, "Die erworbenen Tugenden als richtige (nicht gute) Lebensführung: ein genauerer Ausdruck ethischer Beschreibung," in *Der Fundamentalmoraltheologische Ansatz in sozialethischer Entfaltung*, ed. Franz Furger (Muenster: Aschendorff, 1991) 19–35.

Parenting provides an easy example of the distinction. To the extent that parents try to find right ways of guiding and directing their children, to that extent they are loving and, therefore, good. To the extent, however, that they successfully attain proper guidance, their parenting is right. Parents know, certainly, that providing right guidance is not necessarily an indication of love and, likewise, that erring in guidance is not an indication of a failure to love. Parental errors are not automatic signs of parental selfishness.

The moral manuals' distinction between formal and material sin roughly parallels badness and wrongness as do the scholastic notions of subjective and objective sin. In the contemporary context, however, failure in striving is always in the context of capacity or strengths. As we saw earlier about the Gospel accounts of sinning out of strengths, the more one is reasonably able to exercise oneself, the more striving is required. Thus if one could reasonably strive more to help another in need and does not, one sins. If one could easily be more compassionate, understanding, with better self-control, less lazy, more friendly, or more open, and fails to bother at any of these, then, despite the sufficient rightness of the behavior, one sins. Similarly, if out of love one tries to overcome compulsive behavior, angry outbursts, lack of self-confidence, narrow-mindedness, depression or suspicion, and still fails to attain the aim sought, then despite that wrongness, one is good.[67]

Some argue that sin is not only failure but sometimes an actual desire to do harm.[68] These sins of malice ought to be seen as subsequent to the antecedent failure to respond to the call to love. Sinful hearts become hardened and, on occasion, turn to malice. Human goodness is therefore not the first movement. The first movement is from God who through Christ invites us to walk with him along is way by his grace. Goodness, then, is our first response; badness is simply a failure to respond. As Aquinas noted, "To stand in the way of God is to withdraw."[69] Sin or badness is the failure to respond to the Lord who calls us to move forward.

Sin is not fundamentally choosing the wrong or even the failure to choose the right, but the failure to be bothered in the first place. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius made this clear. In the colloquy with Jesus on the cross, the exercitant is asked to consider three questions: "What have I done for Christ?", "What am I doing for Christ?", and "What ought I to do for Christ?" These questions are not posing what right things ought one to do versus what wrong actions ought one to avoid. Rather, the questions concern whether one is trying to do anything at all for Christ. The underlying question is, whether I bother myself about Christ or not.[70]

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[67] See William McDonough, "Sin and Addiction: Alcoholics Anonymous and the Soul of Christian Sin-Talk," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32 (2012) 39–55.

[68] See John Langan, "Sins of Malice in the Moral Psychology of Thomas Aquinas," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 12 (1987) 19–198; see also Keenan, "The Problem with Thomas Aquinas's Concept of Sin," *Heythrop Journal* 35 (1994) 401–20; and Andrew Downing, "Sin and Its Relevance to Human Nature in the *Summa Theologiae*," *Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009) 793–805.

[69] "*In via Dei stare retrocedere est.*" *ST* II–II, q. 24, a. 6, obj. 3.

Darlene Fozzard Weaver offers a big "nonetheless" when she asks not about sinful motivations, but sinful acts themselves: "I wonder if we take sin seriously enough without attending to sins."[71] Weaver brings an attention to the particular sins, those bad (often wrong) acts that affect others, including the very agent.[72] Sinning is in a way a redundant act affecting not only others but the agent as well. Asking after these particular acts where the demarcation between badness and wrongness is not so evident, Weaver reminds us that "Attention to sins and their expression in moral acts is essential if we are to understand and respond to the full reality of sin in a way that befits the person as subject and agent."[73] There is a lot for us to learn from her admonition.

Structural Sin

When talking about the root of sin in the failure to bother to love, we cannot forget that the description is but the beginning of subjective sin. Sin is expressed in the categorical world in which we live. Sin and our sins have a history in their effects in the world, an insight that led liberation theologians to the concept of structural sin.[74]

Ignacio Ellacuría defends the importance of such sins when he writes that some situations "can be an objectification of sin, and they can themselves be sin when they are a positive negation of an essential aspect of the God of life. To think that sin exists only when and insofar as there is personal responsibility is a mistaken and dangerous devaluation of the dominion of sin."[75] He adds, "The theology of liberation encourages people to change specific structures and to seek new ones, because it sees sin in some and grace in others. In the former it sees the negation of God's will and self-giving, while in the latter it sees the affirmation and fulfillment of God's will and self-giving."[76]

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[70] Eduardo López Azpitarte, "Ignatius' Meditations on Sin: From Guilt to Gratitude," *The Way* 471–72 (2008) 97–113.

[71] Darlene Fozzard Weaver, *The Acting Person and Christian Moral Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 2011) 45.

[72] See also Darlene Fozzard Weaver, "Intimacy with God and Self-Relation in the World: The Fundamental Option and Categorical Activity," in *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology*, ed. William C. Mattison (Lanham: Sheed and Ward, 2005) 143–63; and Weaver, "Taking Sin Seriously," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31 (2003) 45–74.

[73] Weaver, *Acting Person* 59.

[74] See José Antonio Trasferetti, "Pecado," in *Introdução à Ética Teológica*, ed. José Antonio Trasferetti, Maria Inês de Castro millen, and Ronaldo Zacharias (Sao Paulo: Paulus, 2015) 147–68, who develops sin against the meaning of life, turns to social and structural sin, and concludes on the banality of evil.

[75] Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993) 251–88, at 275.

After recognizing that "sin is not a matter of weakness,"[77] José Ignacio González Faus notes that in structural sin Latin America liberation theology recovered the Johannine notion of the sin of the world, "a socio-religious order hostile to God."[78] Faus proposes that the best definition of structural sin is Oscar Romero's Second Pastoral Letter, written in 1977. It bears repeating:

> The Church has denounced sin for centuries. It has certainly denounced the sin of the individual, and it has denounced the sin which perverts relationships between human beings, particularly at the family level. But now it has reminded us of what has been fundamental from the beginning of social sin, that is to say, the crystallization of individual egoisms in permanent structures which maintain this sin and exerts its power over the great majorities.[79]

Faus adds, "Accepting the notion of structural sin means we are saying that the relationship of all humanity with God has been degraded, precisely because of the degradation in the relationships of human beings to one another."[80]

Like Weaver, Ellacuría, and Faus, Jon Sobrino warns us that talking about badness or subjective sin is not enough:

> . . . centering sin within human interiority and defining it, in all of its concentration, in terms of human subjectivity, can, paradoxically, powerfully formulate what sin is and yet undermine an awareness of sin by failing to indicate it in its historical objectification—failing to show it as something visible and verifiable and accordingly, something of which one can and should have an awareness.[81]

Almost echoing the work of Weaver, he writes that these theologies can "formulate what sin is, but have difficulty in pointing to real, verifiable sins."[82]

We do well here to appreciate the work of Hugh Connolly on sin who insisted that we not settle for one perspective, but that we need a variety of ways of defining and capturing sin especially to not exclude other perspectives.[83] Whence here in these four strands we see that these developments eventually converge to develop a more robust notion of personal/social sin.

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[76] Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation" 275–76.

[77] José Ignacio González Faus, "Sin," in *Mysterium Liberationis* 532–42, at 533.

[78] Faus, 536. See Alexandre Andrade Martins, "O Evangelho de João e esperança: por uma ética de liberdade e do amor," in *Teologia Moral: Fundamentos Desafios Perspectivas*, ed. Leo Pessini and Ronaldo Zacharias (Aperecida: Santuário, 2015) 107–44.

[79] Ibid. 537.

[80] Ibid. 538.

[81] Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994) 85.

[82] Ibid. 86.

[83] Hugh Connolly, *Sin* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

Such a convergence is found in the Philippine theologian Christina A. Astorga's liberationist theology of sin. She writes, "An individualistic theology of sin does not have the standpoint from which to expose the systems and structures that expose evil. This evil is embedded in social, political, economic, and cultural structures and systems that institutionalize oppression, domination, and privilege."[84] Because these perspectives are different, we need to see that they are not contradictory but complementary:

> While sin is rooted in personal acts, it is facilitated and perpetuated by these systems and structures. Liberation theologians, however, have also articulated the unconscious dimension of social sin, the more involuntary ideological influences and subconscious dynamics that have an impact on personal agency.[85]

Astorga helps us to see that all sin begets sin:

> There is an intrinsic connection between personal sin and social sin, because structural sins are always linked to concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them, and make them difficult to remove. They spread, grow stronger, and become the source of sin. The evil found deep in social structures is an inducement to sin . . . Sin has come about from the accumulation of sin in history. This sin has an infectious power of entrapping all in a profound tendency to sin.[86]

Any perusal of contemporary theological ethical literature will show the extraordinary influence of structural sin.[87] From India, Shaji George Kochuthara writes about the structural sin of the practice of dowries: "The dowry is the leading cause of the continuing belief that a woman is inferior and a burden to her family."[88] From Brazil and Nigeria we hear about matters of resource extraction[89] and from the USA matters of immigration and race.[90] The concept helps us to see where humanity is at risk and God has been abandoned.

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[84] Christina A. Astorga, *Catholic Moral Theology and Social Ethics: A New Method* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 218.

[85] Ibid. 218. Porter also exhorts us to consider differing, even conflicting perspectives as she considers vicious tendencies in her essay mentioned earlier.

[86] Astorga, *Catholic Moral Theology and Social Ethics* 219. Here she acknowledges the work of Piet Schoonenberg, *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1965).

[87] Mark O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying about Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist, 1990).

[88] Shaji George Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," in *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics*, ed. Linda Hogan and A.E. O'Robator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 108–22, at 116.

[89] João Batista Libanio, "The Cry of Nature in the World of the Poor: The Case of Brazil," in *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology and Resource Extraction*, ed. Christiana Z. Peppard and Andrea Vicini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015) 43–45; Edward Osang Obi, "The Exploitation of Natural Resources," ibid., 223–33.

[90] Kristin Heyer, "Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 410–36; M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

Conclusion

In this brief article, we have seen the work of moral theologians raising expectations on sin. Though we have covered much, much could not be included. For instance, Faus writes presciently that "if it is theologically legitimate to speak of original sin, it is also legitimate to speak of structural sin."[91] Invariably our interest in structural sin will bring us back to original sin as the splendid works of Jesse Couenhoven and Lisa Sowle Cahill demonstrate.[92] We have much more to expect on the topic. Likewise there has been work from Scripture scholars[93] and even historians[94] that we did not attend to, though they are needed perspectives.

As we raise our expectations on sin, let us remember that where there is sin, there is grace; where there is vice, there is virtue; where there is curse, there is beatitude. These all came together in a fine essay by David Elliot who entertained the sin of worldliness and Aquinas's remedy for hope through the beatitude of the poor in spirit.[95] It reminded me of an insight from Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan: the beatitude for those who mourn refers precisely to those who mourn for the poor in spirit.[96] The beatitude for solidarity, Chan remarks, follows the beatitude for hope; our hope in the face of sin is found in standing firm in our relatedness to one another.

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[91] Faus, "Sin" 538.

[92] Jesse Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (New York: Oxford University, 2013); Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Creation and Evil," *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 2013) 32–75. See also Richard Prendergast, "Evil, Sin, and Evolution," *Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009) 833–45; Alexander Chow, "The East Asian Discovery of 'Sin'," *Studies in World Christianity* 19 (2013) 126–40.

[93] Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven; Yale, 2010); Mark Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005); Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

[94] Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2012).

[95] David Elliot, "The Christian as *Homo Viator*: A Resource in Aquinas for Overcoming 'Worldly Sin and Sorrow'," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 34 (2014) 101–22.

[96] Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012) 169–76.