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A Guide to the Sacraments is a refreshing and insightful study of Christian sacramental life. Even if the reader might not fully agree with every statement therein, he/she will be stimulated to appreciate anew the nature and role of Christian sacraments in today's church.

Reviewed by James T. Meehan, S.J.


Veritatis Splendor, Pope John Paul II's encyclical on fundamental moral theology published in 1993, has tried to resolve the difficult and complex efforts in the current search for truth and clarity in moral theology. Moral theologians have reacted to this magisterial teaching in both positive and negative responses. In The Sources of Christian Ethics, Servais Pinckaers, O.P., professor of moral theology at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, has contributed an important study that is certainly a positive response. Originally published in French in 1985, with a second edition in 1990, Sources preceded Veritatis Splendor. The English translation by Sister Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. and based on the third edition (1993) was published in 1995 after Veritatis Splendor. A study of both Sources and Veritatis Splendor reveals a striking harmony in the two works. Sources presents the basic vision and foundations of the papal encyclical, especially its central teaching: "the 'heart' converted to the Lord and to the love of what is good... a 'connaturality' between man and the true good" (VS 64). Pinckaers shows this harmony by his brilliant and creative exposition of what he terms "the freedom of excellence."

Pinckaers returns Christian ethics to its sources: Scripture, the Holy
Spirit, the Gospel Law, and Natural Law, which is rooted in freedom itself. He presents the relationship between the natural inclinations, freedom, and natural law expressed as the "freedom of excellence," the freedom at the heart of the biblical, patristic, and Thomistic understanding of the human person and the moral life. This kind of freedom presupposes an individual's natural inclinations to the goods perfective of him and to happiness. Open to reason and the appeal of the truth, this freedom is rooted in the interpretation of intellect and will and in human natural inclinations to the good and true. Developed through education and requiring virtue for its perfection, it interiorizes intelligent requirements of the law by becoming conaturally disposed through virtues to the real goods to which law directs. The proper focus of the motivation of the moral life is from within the human person.

In proposing this "freedom of excellence," Pinckaers severely criticizes what he terms the "freedom of indifference," blaming William of Ockham and the Nominalists for changing the way Saint Thomas Aquinas proposed moral theology to be done. "Freedom of indifference" is defined as the power to choose between contraries, residing in the will alone and excluding natural inclinations from the free act. Because it is entire in each free choice and is performed at the instant of decision, no stages of formation and progress are required; there is no need of virtue. Law appears as an external restraint and a limitation of freedom. For Ockham, human freedom is confronted by the divine omnipotence and God's freedom. God's will is completely, infinitely autonomous, at liberty to command whatever it wills. Law is essentially a set of arbitrary obligations imposed on humans by God's sovereign will and confronting human freedom, which it limits and restrains. The obligations of this law are set forth in the Decalogue, and the moral life consists in conforming one's action to these obligations.

Human freedom and the law are set in opposition, quite different from the "freedom of excellence," which proposes a harmony between human freedom and the law, with a focus on interiority. Thus, in
the "freedom of indifference," the ethics of obligation replaces the ethics of happiness/beatitude, and becomes the mark of the Christian life. This ultimately gives rise to the moral theology of the manuals and casuistry, which attempts to resolve the conflict between human freedom and the ethics of obligation. Ultimately, the "freedom of indifference" evolving through the Cartesian Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment results in the human passion for self-assertion and autonomy; it gives rise to the false understanding of freedom as doing whatever one chooses to do and held in check only by an ethics of obligation.

Christian ethics is caught between these two schools of freedom. Pinckaers builds a strong case for the "freedom of excellence" in Part III of Sources: "Freedom and Natural Law." Here he presents chapters analyzing "Freedom of Indifference: The Origin of Obligational Moral Theology," "Freedom for Excellence," "Human Freedom according to St. Thomas Aquinas," and "Natural Inclinations at the Source of Freedom and Morality." This section is the heart of the book.

In earlier sections, Pinckaers prepares for this analysis by presenting in "The Introduction," a full definition of Christian ethics as "the branch of theology that studies human acts so as to direct them to a loving vision of God as seen as our true, complete happiness and our final end. This vision is attained by means of grace, the virtues, and the gifts, in the light of revelation and reason."

In "Part One: Ethics: Human and Christian," he discusses the human aspect of Christian ethics and its distinctive character. Of particular interest is his discussion of fonsal knowledge, "a direct, intuitive, total perception, often instantaneous and dynamic, of all the elements of an action,... originating in the heart, understood in the Gospel sense"; this is a concept helpful for building his understanding of the "connaturalized heart." Pinckaers then returns Christian ethics to its sources by tracing the scriptural themes that most influence moral instruction; particularly those found in the Sermon on the Mount and the writings of St.Paul.
"Part Two: A Brief History of Moral Theology" presents the key characteristics of moral theology during the Patristic period, the period of High Scholasticism, the Nominalist Revolution, the Modern Era of the Manuals, Catholic Moral Theology and Protestant Ethics, and Moral Theology Today. The historical presentation gives a very good overview of moral theology evolving through the centuries, especially the negative influence of the "freedom of indifference."

This is an essential book for every theological library, a must for every student of moral theology; it can serve as a textbook for a course on Fundamental Moral Theology. It is important that this book be known in the Philippines and throughout Asia. *The Sources of Christian Ethics* is an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue that must continue following *Veritatis Splendor*.

Reviewed by Pasquale Giordano, S.J.

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For anyone looking for a brief but substantial introduction to Rahner's spiritual teaching, H.D. Egan's book, part of Crossroad's *A Spiritual Legacy Book* series, wondrously fulfills that need. In the Preface, Egan quotes Rahner as saying that "Thomas' theology is his spiritual life and his spiritual life is his theology" (11). The same can very well be said of Rahner. Egan does not hesitate to confirm this: "I knew him as a mystic of everyday life, as a priest who constantly surrendered to God's loving incomprehensibility through a life of self-giving love, a theologian whose thinking was inseparable from his own spiritual life" (Ibid.).

After the Preface and Chronology of Rahner's life, the first chap-