

Bernard Häring's Influence on American Catholic Moral Theology

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IN 1954, BERNARD HÄRING published in German the sixteen-hundred-page magisterial manual *Das Gesetz Christi*, (English: *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*).¹ Of his 104 published books, this landmark work represented a decisive break with the more than two hundred year moral manual tradition that preceded him, a tradition of “moral pathology,” as the English Jesuit manualist Thomas Slater described it.²

These manuals evolved from the *Summa de casibus*, the seventeenth century texts that presented the summary of moral cases of casuistry argued and resolved in the sixteenth century.³ We learn

¹ Bernard Häring, *Das Gesetz Christi* (Freiburg: Verlag Wewel, 1954); *The Law of Christ* (Paramus, New Jersey: The Newman Press, 1961).

² Thomas Slater, *A Manual of Moral Theology for English-speaking Countries* (London: Benziger Brothers, 1906), 6. See 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.

³ On casuistry, see Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Edmund Leites, ed., *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); James Keenan and Thomas Shannon, ed., *The Context of Casuistry* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995); Keenan, “Casuistry,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans Hillerbrand (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), I: 272-74; James Keenan, “The Return of Casuistry,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 123-139; James Keenan, “The Birth of Jesuit Casuistry: Summa casuum con-

from the Redemptorist Louis Vereecke and the Opus Dei theologian Renzo Gerardi that over time these *summae* developed into foundational texts known as the *Institutiones morales* in the eighteenth century and, later, became text books, commonly referred to as the “moral manuals” in the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁴ Though much has been written on them, still more needs to be done.⁵

In order to appreciate the legacy of Bernard Häring we have to recognize that moral theologians in the first half of the twentieth century attempted to develop the foundations of a contemporary moral theology to replace these moral manuals. For reasons too numerous to explain, these theologians wanted to revisit the roots of this “new” moral theology in the Catholic tradition as it developed from the time of Christ until the dawn of sixteenth-century casuistry.⁶ That is, they wanted to revisit the tradition prior to the emergence of the *summa de casibus*. Häring’s work represents the crowning achievement of these efforts.

We shall see some of the legacy that we have inherited from Häring, but first we need to appreciate what he inherited from the pioneers before him. I will highlight three: the German diocesan priest, Fritz Tillmann who led us to the Scriptures and therein to Jesus Christ and our call to discipleship; the Belgian Benedictine Odon Lottin who turned to the history of the tradition and of the person;

scientiae, sive de instructione sacerdotum, libri septem by Francesco de Toledo (1532-1596),” in *The Mercurian Project: Forming Jesuit Culture, 1573-1580*, ed. Thomas McCoog (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2004), 461-482.

⁴ Louis Vereecke, *De Guillaume d'Ockham à Saint Alphonse de Liguori: études d'histoire de la théologie morale moderne, 1300-1787* (Rome: Alfonsianum University Press, 1986); *Conscience morale et loi humaine selon Gabriel Vasquez S.J.* (Paris: Desclee, 1957). The Redemptorists did a tribute to Vereecke on his seventieth birthday, Real Tremblay and Dennis Billy, ed., *Historia: Memoria Futuri* (Rome: Editiones Academicæ Alphonsianæ, 1991). Renzo Gerardi, *Storia della morale: Interpretazioni teologiche dell'esperienza Cristiana* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2003), 317-449. Other major works on the history of moral theology are: Giuseppe Angelini and Ambrogio Valsecchi, *Disegno storico della teologia morale*, (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1972); John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); John Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990). At the heart of this evolution is the founder of the Redemptorist order, Alphonsus Liguori. On his work see, Marciano Vidal, *Frente al rigorismo moral, benignidad pastoral, Alfonso de Liguori (1696-1787)* (Madrid: PS, 1986); Frederick Jones, *Alphonsus de Liguori: The Saint of Bourbon Naples, 1696-1787* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1992). Presently, another Redemptorist, Raphael Gallagher is translating Liguori’s writings on conscience.

⁵ Julia Fleming is clearly the lead investigator for English-speaking moral theologians. See her *Defending Probabilism: The Moral Theology of Juan Caramuel* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

⁶ Keenan, *A History*, 35-81.

and, the French Jesuit Gerard Gillemann who invoked charity as the ultimate good.

THE LEGACY THAT HÄRING INHERITED

In 1912, the internationally-known Scripture scholar Fritz Tillmann was ordered by the Vatican to leave Scripture studies, but given the opportunity to enter another field of theology. He became a moral theologian. His difficulties with the Vatican arose from the fact that, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger explains, he was editor of a collection of essays about the New Testament, and one of the contributing authors defended the two source theory for the writing of the synoptic Gospels.⁷

After writing moral theology for fifteen years, he later collaborated with Theodor Steinbüchel and Theodor Müncker on a three volume work, which he edited, entitled, *Die katholische sittenlehre* (*Catholic Moral Teaching*) in 1934. Steinbüchel wrote the first volume on philosophical foundations; Müncker authored the second, on epistemological and psychological foundations; and Tillmann wrote the third, *Die Idee der Nachfolge Christi*, on the idea of the disciple of Christ.⁸

Tillman's volume was a tremendous success. Seventy years after its publication, Karl-Heinz Kleber writes that in the search to express what the foundational principle of moral theology ought to be, Tillman came forward and named it: the disciple of Christ. Others followed Tillmann's lead: Gustav Ermecke, Johannes Stelzenberger, Bernard Häring, Gerard Gillemann, and Rene Carpentier.⁹

In 1937 he published a more accessible text for lay people, *Die Meister Ruft*, which was translated into English in 1960 as *The Master Calls*. Here he presented a handbook of lay morality not as a list of sins, but as virtues dominated by the idea of the disciple guided by Scripture to follow Christ. Its three central parts are practical explanations of the love of God, self, and neighbor. Throughout, he highlighted the grandeur of the call to discipleship: "The goal of the fol-

⁷ Pope Benedict VI, *Relationship between Magisterium and Exegetes*, May 10, 2003, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030510_ratzinger-comm-Bible_en.html.

⁸ Theodor Steinbüchel, *Die philosophische Grundlegung*; Theodor Müncker, *Die psychologische Grundlegung*; Fritz Tillmann, *Die Idee der Nachfolge Christi*; in Fritz Tillmann, ed., *Die katholische sittenlehre* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1934).

⁹ Karl-Heinz Kleber, *Historia Docet: Zur Geschichte der Moralthologie. Studien der Moralthologie* 15 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 89.

lowing of Christ is none other than the attainment of the status of a child of God."¹⁰

Tillmann's breakthrough was inestimable. First, as a Scripture scholar he derived an appropriate identity for the contemporary Christian, the disciple of Christ. No one had made that identification in modern theology before Tillmann. Second, he developed this into a vigorous scholarly text which allowed him to engage other theologians on the very idea he was putting forth. Third, he made this idea accessible and pastorally concrete by *The Master Calls*. The text is extraordinarily comprehensive, never departing from the double insight that the text had to be fundamentally based on Scripture and that it had to give an anthropological shape to the vocation of discipleship. Fourth, wisely, he turned to the virtues, most appropriately because virtue is the language of Paul and the Evangelists as well as the Prophets and Wisdom writers. Thus, entering into moral theology, he did not abandon Scriptural language, but found in virtue the worthy bridge between Scripture and moral theology. Fifth, coupled with this, the architectonic structure of the work placed charity at the very heart of his ethics. Revelation conveyed the singular primacy of charity.

To bring moral theology into the contemporary world, Dom Odon Lottin brought in history.¹¹ From 1942 to 1960 he wrote his four-volume study (roughly three thousand pages) on the writings of the scholastics on matters related to conscience and moral decision-making, *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*.¹² Here he revolutionized our understanding of scholasticism in general and Thomas Aquinas in particular.

Lottin's extensive investigations would show that Thomas, among others, was constantly developing his thoughts and that earlier positions might well not be the same as later ones. To admonish those who could not think this way, he would remark that Thomas Aquinas was not a Melchizedek without mother or father, but a man. The premise of the development of thought meant, then, that our own understandings of moral concepts, judgments and truth are themselves tentative. This was a radical break from the static metaphysical foundations of the moral manuals in which moral truth was found in its universal and unchanging nature.

¹⁰ Tillmann, *The Master Calls: A Handbook of Morals for the Layman*, tr. Gregory J. Roettger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960), 4-5.

¹¹ See Mary Jo Iozzio, *Self-Determination and the Moral Act: A Study of the Contributions of Odon Lottin, O.S.B.* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995).

¹² Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Gembloux, Belgium: J. Duculot, Volume I, 1942; II, 1948; III, 1949; IV, 1960).

In 1954, he published his revolutionary text on moral theology, *Morale Fondamentale*. There he developed a Thomist-like virtue ethic that emphasized the specificity of Christian ethics, particularly through its supernatural end. He insisted that moral theology ought not to be divided according to the Decalogue, but rather according to the moral and theological virtues, and that moral method ought to be inductive, not deductive.

Far from writing a moral pathology, Lottin, like Tillmann before him, believed that morality conveyed humanity's greatness: "the true grandeur of being human resides in morality, because one's moral life is one's own self manifesto, the fruit of one's own personality."¹³ The end of morality is the right realization of the person and the community in God's salvific plan.

For Lottin, ministers of the Church are called to help the members of the Church lead conscientious lives.¹⁴ His striking break with the manualists is evident by the hermeneutical context in which he established the conscience as foundational to the moral life. Unlike the manualists' pathology of the layperson's conscience (doubtful, lax, scrupulous, uncertain, erroneous, etc.), Lottin wrote at length about the "formation" of conscience, the virtuous life, and the formation of the prudential judgment.¹⁵

By turning to prudence, Lottin liberated the Christian conscience from its singular docility to the confessor priest. He instructed Church members to become mature self-governing Christians, insisting that they have a life-long task, a progressive one, as he called it,¹⁶ toward growing in virtue. By turning to prudence, Lottin urged his readers to find within themselves, their community, their faith, the Church's tradition and its Scriptures, the mode and the practical wisdom for determining themselves into growing as better Christians.

Gerard Gilleman examined the most profound and gracious of all virtues, charity, by studying the *Summa theologiae* of Aquinas in light of the work of the Jesuit moral theologian Émile Mersch (1890-1940). In three successive works, Mersch examined the mystical body of Christ: first through historical investigations, then in its relevance for morality, and finally, in its own theological significance.¹⁷ Gil-

¹³ Odon Lottin, *Aux Sources de Notre Grandeur Morale* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1946), 20.

¹⁴ Odon Lottin, *Morale Fondamentale* (Tournai, Belgium: 1954), 297-339.

¹⁵ For instance, Lottin, *Morale Fondamentale*, 297-339, 363-9, 379-81, 448-52.

¹⁶ Lottin, *Morale Fondamentale*, 54ff.

¹⁷ Émile Mersch, *Le Corps mystique du Christ: Études de théologie historique* (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1936); Émile Mersch, *Morale et corps mystique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937); Émile Mersch, *La Théologie du corps mystique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1944).

leman found in Mersch compelling grounds for identifying the Christian with the filial self-understanding of Jesus, the Son of God. In that self-understanding, Gilleman found that charity establishes our union with God. For Gilleman, by pursuing charity he would find the key to the renewal of moral theology. As he wrote in *The Primacy of Charity*, the purpose of his study is “to apply to the formulation of each and every question of moral theology the universal principle of St. Thomas: *Caritas forma omnium virtutum*.”¹⁸

The main contributions of Gilleman in *The Primacy of Charity* were, I think, threefold. First, he noted that most authors acknowledge the primacy of the “precept” of charity, but not the primacy of the “virtue” of charity.¹⁹ They discussed what charity prescribes, but they did not say where or how charity resides. In short they explained charity as an external reality governing normative conduct, but they did not consider it as at the core of our internal lives, that is, as it is found and described in the Pauline letters as a virtue.

Second, appreciating charity as internal, he rightly directed us to Thomas’s thoughts where charity is expressed as the form, mother, and source of virtue. As form it precedes all other virtues and exists at the core of our life, directing us to the development of other virtues.²⁰ As mother, she generates all other virtues. As source, every Christian virtue finds its roots in charity. In short, charity is the foundation of all virtue.

Finally, when we fully understand the depth and breadth of charity we see here how charity is not only the mother of all moral virtues but inevitably all ascetical virtues as well. The link between moral and ascetical theology is found in the life of the person living with the gift of charity. As form of the virtues, charity becomes “our profound spiritual tendency” which seeks expression in the moral act.²¹ Gilleman provided his own summary to these three claims: “The task of Christian morality and of asceticism which is intimately linked to it, is to render the intention and exercise of charity in us always more and more explicit.”²²

It is hard to overestimate the influence of Gilleman’s work. Even to this day his direct influence is felt, as in Pope Benedict XVI’s *Deus*

¹⁸ Gerard Gilleman, *Le primat de la charité en théologie morale* (Bruxelles: L’Edition universelle, 1952); *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), xxxvi.

¹⁹ Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity*, xxvii–xxxiv.

²⁰ Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity*, 29–55.

²¹ Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity*, 57–160.

²² Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity*, 82.

*Caritas Est.*²³ There, though Gilleman is not invoked, his influence is unmistakably present.²⁴

Before Häring wrote, then, a sustained "revisionist" movement was already thirty years old and these reformers effectively insisted that before talking about sin, moral theology had to talk first about virtue and grace.²⁵ Starting there, revisionist moral theology had to be rooted in Scripture, Christologically founded, sustained by charity, historically connected to the tradition, integrated with the ascetical life, and articulated in the key of virtue. Before Häring these claims are already expressed. What then did Häring give us beyond this? I will argue that Häring incorporates the revisionist work into his own style of theology that later shapes the reception of Vatican II's theology.

HÄRING'S LEGACY

In order to specify Häring's contemporary legacy, I compare him first with my own mentor, Josef Fuchs.²⁶ I hope my reasons for turning to Fuchs further highlight the achievement of Häring.

When I attended the Gregorian University (1982-1987), I studied at an institution that had been awarding degrees since the Jesuits arrived in Rome and founded the Gregorian's earlier incarnation, the Roman College (1551, suspended in 1773 during the suppression of the Society of Jesus). I did my licentiate with Klaus Demmer²⁷ and my doctorate with Josef Fuchs. I was the last person to study with Fuchs as a doctoral director.

In the 1950s Fuchs wrote two books, one on the sexual morality of Thomas Aquinas, the other on natural law. In those years, he was a moderate revisionist, with an emphasis on moderate. Then, in 1964, he was invited onto the now famous papal commission on birth control, where he radically changed his moral theology.

The basic shift in his moral theology concerned competency, with a distinct nod to subsidiarity. On the papal commission he realized that an individual married couple was ultimately competent to de-

²³ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.

²⁴ See "A More Excellent Way," *America* 194, no. 5 (February 13, 2006), 4.

²⁵ James Keenan, "Virtue, Grace and the Early Revisionists of the Twentieth Century," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23 (2010): 365-380.

²⁶ The most perceptive and detailed assessment of Fuchs is Mark Graham, *Josef Fuchs on Natural Law* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002); see also, Keenan, *A History*, 120-126, 142-157, 179-189.

²⁷ Klaus Demmer, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000); Klaus Demmer, *Living the Truth: A Theory of Action*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

termine whether and how they should regulate the births for their own family. The Vatican's universal declarations that birth control was always wrong became, for Fuchs, at best a general rule that needed to be entertained by married couples, who had to consider other moral claims as well.

Like Lottin, who influenced him, Fuchs thought that the Christian disciple should form and follow her/his conscience. Moreover, he never wrote for a general audience but rather exclusively for theologians in general, and moral theologians in particular.²⁸

In fact, he never wrote a book after *Natural Law*, though his essays were numerous, with six volumes of them being translated into English. His greatest influence was on very particular, critical, and technical discussions. His essays on intrinsic evil, basic freedom, the use of scripture, the distinctiveness of Christian ethics, and the competency of the Magisterium were focused and highly analytical.

As Charles Curran notes, Fuchs and Häring were quite clearly the two most influential figures on post-Vatican II moral theologians in the United States.²⁹ They specifically influenced the two most important moral theologians who shaped U.S. Catholic theological ethics, Richard McCormick and Curran himself.³⁰ Curran and McCormick each met Fuchs in Rome during their doctoral studies, though neither did their doctoral degrees with him. They each made his work known in the United States, McCormick through his "Notes in Moral Theology" which he authored in *Theological Studies* for twenty years, and Curran through his own extraordinarily prolific and accessible writing and the *Readings in Moral Theology* series which he and McCormick co-edited from 1979-1999.³¹

When I studied at the Gregorian, the claim was that while the Alfonsianum had many courses in moral theology, the Gregorian was more academic and its moral theology was rooted in systematic theology. The Alfonsianum was more "pastoral," but in hindsight I would add, "innovative" as well. Though both Fuchs and Demmer were innovative and wrote about innovation, they were the exception (along with the Australian Jesuit Gerald O'Collins) to the institutional stability of the Gregorian's theology. After all, the program for the

²⁸ He frequently published in *Stimmen der Zeit*, a Jesuit monthly similar to the US Jesuit quarterly, *Theological Studies*.

²⁹ Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States: A History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 93-95.

³⁰ Keenan, *A History*, on McCormick, 142-42, 147-48, 156-7; on Curran, 96-104, 147-50.

³¹ Additionally, Timothy O'Connell authored an important textbook used throughout the U.S., *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1976), which integrated Fuchs' writings into his own.

Gregorian's mass of the Holy Spirit, on the feast of Robert Bellarmine, lists each year all alumni who have been consecrated to the episcopacy or promoted to a higher position within the hierarchy.

In this light, we can begin to appreciate why I believe that the most distinctive contribution by Häring to the United States was that his work embodied and promoted what would eventually be called "the Vatican II style." In a noted essay in *America* magazine, the historian John O'Malley identified the singularity of the Council, in its style:

Style—no other aspect of Vatican II sets it off so impressively from all previous councils and thereby suggests its break with "business as usual." No other aspect so impressively indicates that a new mode of interpretation is required if we are to understand it and get at its "spirit."³²

Style defines the legacy of Häring better than anything. His is an engaging style, one that presumed the competency and the interest of the laity, in a way that no one else did. He wrote for a Catholic looking to understand, wanting to be a disciple, searching to find the truth. His writing was accessible, inviting, uplifting, and challenging. No major moral theologian wrote in this way and none wrote for an educated-but-not-theologically-literate audience.

Among the early revisionists, only once (*The Master Calls*) did Tillmann write in such a way or for such an audience. Lottin wrote exclusively for the scholar; Gillemann wrote nothing but a dissertation for his director. Among Häring's contemporaries, none wrote in such a way or for such an audience. Fuchs, Auer, Demmer, Schüller, and Böckle wrote in academically thick German; Janssens wrote for his students and colleagues at Louvain. Only Häring wrote for this much more literate and disposed audience, in this way. Anyone reading the following words from O'Malley must see the name of Häring all over it. Häring was clearly interested in the Patristics, rhetoric, consolation, persuasion, and conversion.³³ Moreover, unlike the other moral theologians, Häring participated in and drafted documents for the council. No wonder why the style of the council is so clearly Häring's.

The style of the council was invitational. It was new for a council in that it replicated to a remarkable degree the style the Fathers of the

³² John O'Malley, "The Style of Vatican II," *America* (February 24, 2003), http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2812.

³³ On conversion and Häring, see Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today* 94-98; *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States*, 136-39.

Church used in their sermons, treatises and commentaries down to the advent of Scholasticism in the 13th century. The Scholastic style was essentially based on dialectics, the art of debate, the art of proving one's enemies wrong. But the style the council adopted was based, as was the style of the early Fathers for the most part, on rhetoric, the art of persuasion, the art of finding common ground. That is the art that will enable previously disagreeing parties to join in action for a common cause. The style was invitational in that it looked to motivation and called for conversion. It looked to winning assent to its teachings rather than imposing it.³⁴

Style is not content-less; on the contrary, it shapes the text, the community, the Church. O'Malley continues: "We know, moreover, that content and mode of expression are inextricably intertwined, that there is no thought without expression, that expression is what style is all about. In dealing with style we are at the same time dealing with content."³⁵

A significantly new approach or style is what Häring brought to his students. Häring taught at the Alfonsianum, a theological institute solely dedicated to moral theology, founded and staffed by members of the Redemptorist order since 1949. Unlike the Jesuits, the Redemptorists were forbidden until 1910 to earn degrees for teaching. From 1910 until 1960, Redemptorist professors studied at different European institutions, though notably not at the Gregorian. In 1960, they inaugurated their own doctoral program. In that year, they awarded their first doctoral degree to the American Charles Curran.

At the Alfonsianum, Häring directed seventy-seven dissertations of students from around the world, including: Terence Kennedy (Australia); Karl Heinz Peschke (Germany); Francisco Moreno Rejon (Peru); and Clement Waidyasekara (Sri Lanka).³⁶ To each of them, he taught this new style. "Style" in fact was what he wanted to offer. In his wonderful interview with Gary MacEoin, he said, "I don't want to destroy authority. What is needed is another style."³⁷

Beyond his doctoral students, he influenced many other moralists, though most notably, two other Alfonsianum students, the American Curran and the Spaniard Marciano Vidal. Though they each did their

³⁴ O'Malley, "The Style of Vatican II."

³⁵ O'Malley, "The Style of Vatican II." For more detail, see John O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); on style, see the two volume work, Christoph Theobald, *Le christianisme comme style: Une manière de faire de la théologie en postmodernité* (Paris: Cerf, 2007).

³⁶ http://www.alfonsiana.edu/Italian/studenti/dissertazioni/db/index_db.html.

³⁷ Gary MacEoin, "Conversation with Bernard Häring," *Worldview Magazine* 15, no. 8 (1972), 22-28 at 28.

doctorates with other Redemptorists, by their own admission, no one influenced them more than Häring.³⁸ Moreover, no two other theologians appreciated the style of Häring and emulated it more than Curran and Vidal. While McCormick wrote for readers of *Theological Studies*, Curran wrote for a broader audience in a series of books with Notre Dame University Press. My favorite, and one that I took with me to Rome, was *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue*. The dedication reads "To Bernard Häring, C.S.S.R. teacher, theologian, friend, and priestly minister of the Gospel in theory and practice on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday."³⁹ It introduced me to a variety of discussions of the contemporary Church.

What are the central components of Häring's style? The first was that there was a deep presumption of the theological competency and interest of the educated Catholic and of other sympathetic Protestant readers. Indeed, there was and is an American audience for this. Elsewhere, I have narrated the importance of Orbis Press publishing on liberation theology in the United States starting in 1970.⁴⁰ But, in 1960, Tillmann's *The Master Calls* and Gillemann's dissertation are both published in English in the United States. The next year, Häring's first volume of the *Law of Christ* appears, and is a bestseller.

While Curran, in English, and Vidal, in Spanish, develop and cultivate the same audience that Häring wrote for, Häring himself in 1978 validates again this audience by writing *Free and Faithful in Christ* for an English-speaking audience; it was later translated into German.⁴¹ This instinct to write for the non-theologically trained but still educated Catholic lives on today in many of the works of the new generation of scholars in moral theology very intent on constructing a positive, relational, confessional, contemporary ethics. Though they write so as to capture an identity once formed by identifiable communities of Catholics raised and taught in the parochial school system,⁴² like Häring they write in an accessible style, very much the style of Vatican II. The movement *New Wine, New Wineskins*,⁴³ shows a sensitivity to lay Roman Catholics that is certainly, to this day, not found in continental Europe, with the exception of Vidal's

³⁸ Curran actually did two doctorates, one at the Gregorian, the other at the Alfonsianum. On Häring's influence on Curran and Vidal, see Keenan, *A History*, 98-104.

³⁹ Charles Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972).

⁴⁰ Keenan, *A History*, 211-215.

⁴¹ Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ* (New York: Seabury Press, 1987).

⁴² David McCarthy, "Shifting Settings from Subculture to Pluralism: Catholic Moral Theology in an Evangelical Key," *Communio* 31 (2004): 85-110.

⁴³ William Mattison III, ed., *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

Spain and Häring's Italy. These texts include: David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught, ed., *Gathered for the Journey* (2007);⁴⁴ Jozef Zalot and Benedict Guevin, *Catholic Ethics in Today's World* (2008);⁴⁵ David Cloutier, *Love Reason, and God's Story* (2008);⁴⁶ and William Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology* (2008).⁴⁷ They are works that continue today the vision first realized by Häring: confessional, traditional, communal, religiously sensitive and often biblically-based texts not only for the trained theologian but also for the searching Catholic. While these younger writers might think that Stanley Hauerwas more directly influenced them, still Häring shaped the readership disposed to such writing. Thus, we should note that, between Häring and this new generation there are others who wrote in similar styles, like Richard Gula,⁴⁸ Eileen Flynn,⁴⁹ Russell Connors and Patrick McCormick,⁵⁰ James Keenan,⁵¹ and more recently, Patricia Lamoureux and Paul Wadell.⁵²

⁴⁴ David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught, ed., *Gathered for the Journey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁴⁵ Jozef Zalot and Benedict Guevin, *Catholic Ethics in Today's World* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ David Cloutier, *Love Reason, and God's Story* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, (2008).

⁴⁷ William Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

⁴⁸ Richard Gula, *What Are They Saying about Moral Norms?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); Richard Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Richard Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); Richard Gula, *Moral Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997); Richard Gula, *The Good Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999); Richard Gula, *The Call to Holiness* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Eileen Flynn, *AIDS: A Catholic Call to Compassion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1985); Eileen Flynn, *Issues in Healthcare Ethics* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999); Eileen Flynn, *The Ten Commandments: Case Studies in Catholic Morality* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2010).

⁵⁰ Russell Connors and Patrick McCormick, *Character, Choices and Community* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998); Russell Connors and Patrick McCormick, *Facing Ethical Issues* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002); Patrick McCormick, *Sin as Addiction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Patrick McCormick, *A Banqueters Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

⁵¹ James Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996); James Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1999); James Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2004); James Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2005).

⁵² Patricia Lamoureux and Paul Waddell, *The Christian Moral Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010); Paul Waddell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); Paul Waddell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

A second trait of his style was his reliance on experience in order to share common ground with readers. This animates the style that most of the above-named authors use as well. Here we do well, then, to pause and consider the experiences that shaped Häring.

The most significant experiences for Häring in shaping his writing were the classes of moral theology that he took. When asked to prepare himself to teach in the field, he reported, "I told my superior that this was my very last choice because I found the teaching of moral theology an absolutely crushing bore."⁵³ In subsequently pursuing moral theology, Häring realized that if he found little benefit in its study so would the laity. He began to see that moral theology needed to be framed for others as well.

In looking to find a compelling source for this "new" approach to moral theology, Häring reflected on another experience: the war. Unlike the manualists who wrote during and after World War II, Häring's experience of the war shaped the breadth and depth of his project. The war empowered him: "During the Second World War I stood before a military court four times. Twice it was a case of life and death. At that time I felt honored because I was accused by the enemies of God. The accusations then were to a large extent true, because I was not submissive to that regime."⁵⁴ Häring witnessed to how many Christians recognized the truth, were convicted by it, and stood firm with it. There he found truth not primarily in what persons said but in how they acted and lived. The war experiences irretrievably disposed him to the agenda of developing a moral theology that aimed for the bravery, solidarity, and truthfulness of those committed Christians he met in the war.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, then, he found truth more in persons than in propositional utterances.

While he encountered heroes and heroines, he also witnessed to

the most absurd obedience by Christians toward a criminal regime. And that too radically affected my thinking and acting as a moral theologian. After the war, I returned to moral theology with the firm decision to teach it so that the core concept would not be obedience but responsibility, the courage to be responsible.⁵⁶

He realized therein the need to develop not a conforming, obediential moral theology, but rather one that summoned conscientious Christians to a responsive and responsible life of discipleship.

⁵³ Häring, *My Witness for the Church* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 19.

⁵⁴ Häring, *My Witness*, 132.

⁵⁵ Häring, *Embattled Witness: Memories of a Time of War* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

⁵⁶ Häring, *Embattled Witness*, 23-4.

The conviction of the competency of the laity and the belief in the truth of his experience led him to a third integral component of his style: its deep commitment to Vatican II. Häring's style is identifiable with Vatican II, not because he imitated it, but because, in a manner of speaking, he *shaped* it. At the council, Häring served on pre-conciliar and conciliar commissions. Thus, when the document on priestly formation, *Optatam totius*, defined seminary education, it offered a simple two sentence statement on moral theology. This comment not only validated the revisionists' work, but admonished the seminaries to incorporate the Scriptures in their study of moral theology and discipleship (Tillmann) and to embrace more clearly the virtue of charity (Gilleman). Häring was its draftsman and since its promulgation, the paragraph has become a kind of a terse manifesto of the revisionists' agenda:

Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific exposition, nourished more on the teaching of the Bible, should shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world.⁵⁷

Häring was the secretary of the editorial committee that drafted the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*⁵⁸ and was referred to as "the quasi-father of *Gaudium et Spes*."⁵⁹ We see his hand throughout it. The anthropological vision of the document was based on the human as a relational, social being. Moral issues were not treated as primarily individual, but rather communal and even global. Moreover, even though sin is pervasive in the document, still the vision is fundamentally positive as the Church stands with the world in joy and hope. A new moral theological foundation was emerging: here the Church conveyed a deep sympathy for the human condition, especially in all its anxieties, and stood in confident solidarity with the world. The entire experience of ambivalence that so affected the world in its tumultuous changes of the 1960s was positively entertained and engaged.⁶⁰ Finally, in looking at contemporary moral challenges, the Church encouraged an interdisciplinary ap-

⁵⁷ *Optatam totius*, no. 16.

⁵⁸ Häring also assisted in other documents, among them the chapters on the laity and the call to holiness in *Lumen gentium*.

⁵⁹ Charles Curran, "Bernard Häring: A Moral Theologian Whose Soul Matched His Scholarship," *National Catholic Reporter* 34 (17 July 1998), 11.

⁶⁰ Philippe Bordeyne, *L'Homme et son angoisse: La Théologie Morale de 'Gaudium et Spes'* (Paris: Cerf, 2004).

proach in understanding and promoting a globalized vision of modernity.⁶¹

Two particular dimensions of *Gaudium et spes* bear the indelible traits of Häring. First, his theology of marriage emerges from the constitution: marriage is a "communion of love" (47), an "intimate partnership" (48); it is no longer seen as a contract, but as a covenant (48). Rather than asserting procreation as the singular end of marriage, the council fathers argued: "Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation" (50).⁶² Such positive, non-legalistic, but deeply affirming language was a new phenomenon for Vatican teaching on marriage.

That more and more lay people entered the field of moral theology after Vatican II is quite evident, but I think it fair to say that the positive reception of *Gaudium et spes* by the laity, particularly on marriage, had sustained positive repercussions on the later work of American moral theologians. Here I think of the work on marriage of Lisa Sowle Cahill,⁶³ Florence Caffrey Bourg,⁶⁴ David Matzko McCarthy,⁶⁵ and Julie Hanlon Rubio.⁶⁶ One cannot find parallel works in other countries by lay moral theologians.⁶⁷

Also, out of this same framework, the council shaped its teaching on conscience, evidently indebted to Häring's extensive description of conscience in *The Law of Christ*.⁶⁸ His work anticipated, inspired, and formed some of the most important words from the Council, the now famous definition of conscience.⁶⁹ In fact, after the council,

⁶¹ Josef Römelt advanced Häring's project on interdisciplinary cooperation between ethics and the social sciences; see his "*Fides quarens Scientiam*, Das Gespräch Bernard Häring mit den Humanwissenschaften am Beispiel der Ethik der Familie und der Bioethik," in *50 Jahre "Das Gesetz Christi,"* eds. Augustin Schmied and Josef Römelt, *Studien der Moraltheologie* 14 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 93-114.

⁶² Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 41-47.

⁶³ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁴ Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM, 2004).

⁶⁶ Julie Hanlon Rubio, *Family Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

⁶⁷ Charles Curran and Julie Hanlon Rubio, eds., *Marriage: Readings in Moral Theology Number 15* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ Häring, *Law of Christ*, I: 135-189.

⁶⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 16. On Redemptorist writings on conscience, see Marian Nalepa and Terence Kennedy, eds., *La Coscienza morale oggi* (Rome: Editiones Academicæ Alphonsianæ, 1987).

Häring returned, again at length, to claims about conscience in *Free and Faithful in Christ*.⁷⁰

The teaching on conscience is, I think, the emblematic expression of the hopeful expectations that were raised by Häring and affirmed by Vatican II. Universally, conscience becomes the point of departure for revisionists as witnessed by the plethora of books and essays on the topic.⁷¹ While the influence of Häring (as well as Josef Fuchs) on promoting the primacy of conscience as a universally embraced claim within the Roman Catholic tradition is clearly evident, we should not fail to see the specific impact it had on the United States.⁷²

While through the Council, Häring's own work helped shape a more social anthropology that was balanced by the personal freedom of conscience and a positive and integral notion of sexuality in a relational foundation for marriage, these two issues of conscience and marital sexuality came together in the showdown on *Humanae vitae*. I have already referred to the impact that the papal commission had on Josef Fuchs; it is important to remember, however, that before Fuchs was appointed to the commission, Häring was already an influential member of it.⁷³

Häring was the singular theological catalyst for credibly opening the question on birth control.⁷⁴ That the question eventually led to the promulgation of *Humanae vitae* is of note, but also of note is how the notion of dissent was born in its wake, both universally⁷⁵ and, more particularly, in the American context especially regarding the claims of academic freedom espoused by Charles Curran.⁷⁶

Americans might find it surprising that Häring, like Fuchs, rooted his understanding of conscience in freedom. This emphasis on freedom is a fourth identifiable trait of his style. The singularity of his interest in freedom, then, ought not to be overlooked: When his

⁷⁰ Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, I: 224-301.

⁷¹ See Keenan, *A History*, 96-97.

⁷² For instance, Charles Curran, ed., *Conscience: Readings in Moral Theology Number 14* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

⁷³ See Häring, *My Witness for the Church*, 70-80; Eric Genilo, *John Cuthbert Ford, S.J.: Moral Theologian at the End of the Manualist Era* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 132-137; Graham, *Josef Fuchs*, 88-89.

⁷⁴ See Robert Kaiser, *The Politics of Sex and Religion: A Case History in the Development of Doctrine, 1962-1984* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1985); Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission and How Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and the Future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

⁷⁵ See Hans Küng and Jurgen Moltmann, eds., *The Right to Dissent* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

⁷⁶ Charles Curran, *Loyal Dissent* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2007); Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, *Dissent in the Church: Readings in Moral Theology Number 6* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

three-volume work, *Free and Faithful in Christ* was translated into German, the title simply read *Frei in Christus*.

Noticeably different from his predecessors, Häring privileges human freedom as the possibility of responding to God's call to do God's will. "In essence freedom is the power to do good. The power to do evil is not of its essence."⁷⁷ That freedom is itself a gift. As God calls, God provides. Sin is the refusal to accept the gift and the call; it is therefore the defeat of freedom and the entrance into slavery. There are many reasons for Häring's turn to freedom: the Fascist and Nazi movements that imprisoned millions across the European continent; the subsequent developments in the philosophy of existentialism; the incredibly obsessive control of the manualists and the ever-encroaching dictates from the Vatican; Soviet expansionism into Eastern Europe; and the growing appreciation in ordinary European culture of human freedom. Moreover, theologians, particularly his doctoral director, Theodor Steinbuchel, had been writing on freedom.⁷⁸

The Irish Redemptorist Raphael Gallagher offers another reason for the turn to freedom: revelation. Häring has two thousand and thirty-one Scriptural citations in *The Law of Christ* and six hundred and fifty-nine come from Paul, "the apostle of Christian freedom."⁷⁹ These glad tidings are precisely that which makes us free. We have law as a pedagogue, teaching us how to proceed and revealing to us, forensically, our sins. But the Gospel, the law of Christ, makes us free to follow him. The Galatian message of Paul rings true in the life experiences of Häring, particularly those during the war; by his own testimony, Häring was free to stand and witness. Personal freedom is the foundation for doing good and for doing moral theology.

Though Tillmann broke the ground for a biblically-based moral theology, Häring is the one who brought the fullness of the moral tradition into the world of the Bible. Here, then, is the fifth trait. Tillmann brought the Bible with him when he left exegesis and entered moral theology. Häring, on the other hand, brought the moral tradition to be illuminated by the Scriptures. Describing *The Law of Christ*, he wrote, "The present work attempts to expound the most central truths in the light of the inspired word of the Bible."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Häring, *The Law of Christ*, I: 99.

⁷⁸ Theodor Steinbuchel, *Existenzialismus und christliches Ethos* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1948).

⁷⁹ Raphael Gallagher, "Bernard Häring's *The Law of Christ*: Reassessing its Contribution to the Renewal of Moral Theology in its Era," *Studia Moralia* 44 (2006): 336.

⁸⁰ Häring, *The Law of Christ*, I: viii.

The presentation of the content and specific characteristics of New Testament law is “the task of moral theology as a whole.”⁸¹ As mediator of the biblical message, moral theologians should be nourished by the Word of God and learn from the work of biblical scholars so as to discern what helps us to know Christ and God’s salvific plan better.⁸² “Moral theology, as I understand it...its basic task and purpose is to gain the right vision...we can gain the necessary vision of wholeness only by listening to the word of God.”⁸³

What influence did his use of the Bible have on the field of moral theology? Jeffrey Siker remarks that a decade before the council, Häring’s style preceded the Council’s style. In writing on the biblical contributions of many theologians, he comments that Häring’s *Law of Christ* “initiated changes that Vatican II sought to bring about a decade later.”⁸⁴ Lúcas Chan Yiu Sing observes that for Häring “what makes Christian morality distinctively Christian is the normative nature of the Bible.”⁸⁵ James Bretzke also notes that Häring was convinced that Scripture does not only inform but also forms the community into one of a particular character, and it is in this sense that Scripture is authoritative.⁸⁶

In writing *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* William Spohn names Häring as the Catholic theologian who led Catholic moral theology back to the Bible.⁸⁷ While Tillmann led Häring, it is clear that Häring led Americans. Spohn heard the call. When American Catholic ethicists like Spohn, Cahill, Farley, Himes, Keenan, Matzko McCarthy, and others turn to the Scriptures as the foundations of theological ethics, they are following in Häring’s footsteps.

In a collection of essays celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *The Law of Christ*, Raphael Gallagher makes clear that the Häring legacy is that ethics derives from the Church reflecting theologically on the

⁸¹ Häring, *The Law of Christ*, I: 257.

⁸² Bernard Häring, “The Role of the Catholic Moral Theologian,” in *Moral Theology: Challenges for the Future*, eds. Richard A. McCormick, Charles E. Curran, and Walter J. Burghardt (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 32-33.

⁸³ Häring, *Free and Faithful*, I, 6.

⁸⁴ Jeffrey Siker, “Bernard Häring: The Freedom of Responsive Love,” *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

⁸⁵ Lúcas Chan Yiu Sing, *Why Scripture Scholars and Theological Ethicists Need One Another: Exegeting and Interpreting the Beatitudes as a Scripted Script for Ethical Living* (Dissertation, Boston College, September 23, 2010), 104.

⁸⁶ James Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 90.

⁸⁷ William Spohn, *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1984), 11, 41.

Gospels.⁸⁸ Like Gallagher, Eberhard Schockenhoff argues that Häring's point of departure was always theology and from there he sought through ethics to engage culture and its sciences, with an appreciation for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the human situation.⁸⁹ But Häring's theological foundation animated and sustained by the Scriptures prompted Norbert Rigali, in noting the lasting influence of Bernard Häring, to declare that the subject of moral theology's present incarnation is "unmistakably Christian: life in Christ. There can be no question that the new discipline is theology."⁹⁰

Häring's enormous impact on Catholic moral theology in the United States was aided by his ecumenical spirit, a final trait of his style. In a very telling comment, James Gustafson wrote, "I believe Charles Curran and I had more agenda in common than I had with most of my Protestant colleagues and all of my Roman Catholic colleagues except Bernard Häring."⁹¹ Häring's dialogue with Protestants was a considerably new initiative. While in the United States, several moral theologians (for example, Albert Jonsen, David Hollenbach, Margaret Farley, and Lisa Cahill) studied at Protestant schools of divinity with scholars like James Gustafson who encouraged these students to know the Roman Catholic and Protestant dimensions of Christian ethics. Häring was one of the few, if not the only European moralist of his generation who cemented the ecumenical foundations of much of contemporary American Christian ethics established in the 1970s. In one sense, his deep reliance on Scripture, conscience, and experience made him a credible interlocutor with interested Protestant scholars.

CONCLUSION

There is much I have not considered. Without doubt, his ethics was Christologically-centered (think: *The Law of Christ* and *Free and*

⁸⁸ Raphael Gallagher, "Das Gesetz Christi: Seine Bedeutung für die Erneuerung der Moratheologie," in *50 Jahre "Das Gesetz Christi,"* 11-42.

⁸⁹ Eberhard Schockenhoff, "Pater Bernard Häring als Wegbereiter einer konziliaren Moratheologie," in *50 Jahre "Das Gesetz Christi,"* 43-68.

⁹⁰ Norbert Rigali, "On Theology of the Christian Life," in *Moral Theology: New Directions and Fundamental Issues*, ed. James Keating (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 19.

⁹¹ James Gustafson, "Charles Curran: Ecumenical Moral Theologian Par Excellence," in *A Call to Fidelity: On The Moral Theology of Charles Curran*, eds. James J. Walter, Timothy E. O'Connell, and Thomas A. Shannon (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 211-234, at 211; see his comments on Häring in *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1974), 50, 191-195.

Faithful in Christ).⁹² Similarly, he wrote like Tillmann in the key of virtue⁹³ which furthered the development of his relational anthropology. Still, I think that his lasting contribution to the United States is like that which he offered to those in Spain, India, Australia and, indeed, to the world Church, and that is a whole new style that is deeply confessional, engaging, biblically-based, and confident. It's what makes moral theology today ring true. **M**

⁹² The opening words of the foreword to the *Law of Christ* were decisive: "The principle, the norm, the center, and the goal of Christian moral Theology is Christ" (vii). See Keenan, *A History*, 88-95.

⁹³ Particularly the virtue of religion; see Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Formed in the Image of Christ: The Sacramental-Moral Theology of Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R.* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).