

## Introduction: Vocation, Friendship, and the Catholic Moral Tradition

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THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE *Journal of Moral Theology* (JMT) collects essays by current or recent members of New Wine New Wineskins (NWNW), an association for early-career Catholic moral theologians.<sup>1</sup> Many JMT readers will be familiar with NWNW because this is the second issue dedicated to the work of the association.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, many former members of the association regularly write on these pages and are part of the journal editorial staff.

NWNW started in 2002 to give moral theologians at the beginning stages of their careers a place to “engage in scholarly activities relevant to the field of moral theology and devote particular attention to the vocational meaning of being a moral theologian in today’s Church and academy.”<sup>3</sup> Since then, the group has regularly met for a yearly symposium at the University of Notre Dame’s Moreau Seminary for a mix of dialogue with established moral theologians, presentations of the members’ research, as well as fellowship and common worship.

NWNW is not a unified school of thought.<sup>4</sup> Its current and past members come from various backgrounds, are formed in diverse graduate programs, and have differing ecclesial and theological sensibilities. In fact, from the beginning, the group intentionally strived to establish an environment where diversity of perspective would be cherished, not just tolerated. The cultivation of friendship has been crucial to that endeavor.

There are three main reasons NWNW has striven to establish such

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<sup>1</sup> Details about the association and its work can be found on its website [www.newwinenewwineskins.com/](http://www.newwinenewwineskins.com/).

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no. 1 (2017). NWNW’s members have published two other collections of essays: William C. Mattison III, ed., *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); David Cloutier, ed., *Leaving and Coming Home: New Wineskins for Catholic Sexual Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> David Cloutier and William C. Mattison III, “Introduction,” in *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Curran reflects on what makes NWNW an identifiable voice in current theological debates in his *Diverse Voices in Modern US Moral Theology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 210–219.

an environment. First, NWNW takes to heart St. Paul's insistence that the Holy Spirit endows people with a diversity of gifts and charisms for the sake of edifying the church (1 Corinthians 12). What is true for the ecclesial community is also true for the moral theological community—or indeed, any community. The other, in her diversity, is always a gift to be welcomed, a companion God gave to enter more deeply into the truth. Second, contestation, debate, and questioning are all part of a healthy living tradition. Consequently, creating intellectual spaces where disagreements may be articulated and discussed constructively is essential.<sup>5</sup> NWNW hopes to be just that: an association where conversations across differences are cultivated, not shut down. Third, in light of the previous two reasons, the polarization that so often determines our society, the church, and even the academy must be resisted. Polarization is like an acid upon genuine theological exploration.<sup>6</sup> Besides leading people to lose sight of the complexity of moral issues, it ends up “othering” those with a different perspective, including those within the same ecclesial body.<sup>7</sup> NWNW, instead, seeks authentic encounters among scholars with differing views.

While it is hard to describe NWNW as a school of thought,<sup>8</sup> the association's work has fostered a distinctive *ethos* among its members. Such *ethos* is constituted by three fundamental commitments.

First, doing moral theology is above all a vocation. NWNW members understand the work of moral theology as an expression of their faith. They think of their scholarship as profoundly connected to both their personal moral formation and call to discipleship. Furthermore, by comprehending the work of moral theology as a vocation, members emphasize the ecclesial location of theology, in

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<sup>5</sup> For one of the, by now, canonical presentations of such a claim, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> For a description of how polarization hurts theological reflection, see David Cloutier, “The Trajectories of Catholic Sexual Ethics,” in *Leaving and Coming Home*, 7–10.

<sup>7</sup> For a theoretical and practical description of the phenomenon of polarization among US Catholics, see Mary Ellen Konieczny, Charles C. Camosy, and Tricia C. Bruce, eds., *Polarization in the US Catholic Church: Naming the Wounds, Beginning to Heal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Eclecticism in theological methodologies and visions is a foundational feature of NWNW. Still, it is possible to outline some consistent characteristics that mark how NWNW members approach moral theology. Looking back at the four NWNW collections of essays, one notices the following common traits: an emphasis on virtue, character, and moral formation; a focus on practices; an interest in discussing moral norms and exceptions only by inserting them into their broader context; an attempt to find common ground among differing perspectives; and a commitment to cultivating and enriching Christian identity amidst a changing society. On these shared features, see Cloutier and Mattison III, “Introduction,” 11–12, and David Cloutier, “The Trajectories of Catholic Sexual Ethics,” 10–22.

which scholarship is always ultimately a service to the church and its people. It is no mistake that so many NWNW members couple their individual research and work in the academy with a thick involvement in the life of their local church, be it by teaching seminarians, permanent deacons, and the laity, collaborating with their dioceses, or volunteering in their parishes. Finally, the group has always included space for common prayer and the celebration of the Mass in its gatherings to emphasize that the life of faith must feed theological work and theological work must, in turn, nourish a person's faith journey.

Second, Aristotle famously said in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that friends are integral to the good life, and we believe the same is true of the life of the moral theologian as well. Over the years, NWNW has created an extensive network of friendships that have provided support to its many members and given them occasions for creative projects, theological explorations, and other common undertakings. The annual symposium is characterized by many occasions for informal conversations, a casual ambiance, and uncountable heartfelt exchanges (often accompanied by good drinks and late nights together). Such a context has allowed three generations of moral theologians to enter into intimate relationships that last beyond official membership in the association.<sup>9</sup> It is this climate of friendship that has allowed NWNW to resist polarization, giving space to the bonds of charity that come from common belonging to the church over and above any possible disagreement. The same friendship has allowed constructive dialogues across differences and provided many an opportunity to expand their horizons and add depth and complexity to their theological vision. Finally, the sense of belonging to one another that characterizes NWNW has allowed the association to be especially attentive to and inclusive of those whose academic location makes particularly vulnerable to being excluded from the conversation. NWNW always invites and financially supports contingent faculty, faculty in smaller colleges with little or no institutional support for scholarship, and graduates of PhD programs that do not have the R1 universities' prestige and network.<sup>10</sup>

Third, NWNW members share a profound commitment to the

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<sup>9</sup> According to NWNW's bylaws, membership concludes either upon reception of tenure or seven years after the completion of a PhD.

<sup>10</sup> On the topic of contingent faculty and university ethics, see *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, Special Issue no. 1 (2019). For an account of the academy's shifting working conditions away from full-time tenure-track opportunities to more precarious forms of employment and the relative pressures they create on NWNW members, see Conor Hill, Kent J. Lasnoski, Matthew Sherman, John Sikorski, and Matthew Whelan, "Is New Wine, New Wineskins Still New? Reflecting on Wineskins after Seventeen Years," *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no. 1 (2017): 5–9.

Catholic moral tradition and to helping one another find within it lesser-known resources or unexplored paths. Furthermore, they put such a foundational knowledge at the service of today's questions and pressing issues. Finally, they are unafraid to ask questions about and probe the reasons for what the church teaches, knowing that to engage in such work is the way not only to better understand Christian commitments but to live them out more fully as a witness to the world. The result of the NWNW *ethos* is a way of practicing moral theology together with others that seeks to build bridges across theological, ecclesial, and political divides, that draws upon the church's sources creatively to reflect on previously unanswered questions, and that looks for ways to embody the Christian call to holiness today.

The essays contained in this special issue offer a window into the work of early career Catholic moral theologians, embodying the style and sensibility that has characterized the work of NWNW for over two decades now. Several essays in this volume seek to recover parts of the Catholic moral-theological tradition that have been neglected. In "A Shadowy Sort of Right," Matthew Philipp Whelan examines several recent court cases that have appealed to the legal doctrine of necessity in order to reveal how their reasoning is rooted in a much older tradition of moral-theological reflection about the *ius necessitatis* (law of necessity). At the same time, Whelan argues that this tradition, while neglected, has been preserved within Catholic social teaching (CST), and he tries to highlight some of the challenges it poses within a world that not only dismisses but also denies claims of need. Jacob Kohlhaas similarly examines neglected possibilities regarding how CST has envisioned masculinity and fatherhood. His contribution, "Nurturing Masculinities," draws on social scientific research in the field of fatherhood studies to probe different narratives surrounding masculinity and fatherhood, both within CST, as well as within contemporary US society more generally. Kohlhaas attends to diverse expressions of paternal care in order to argue that the realization of authentic personhood and relational potential requires more expansive understandings of male capabilities in caregiving and family life than CST currently envisions.

Other contributions to this volume seek a deeper understanding of what the church teaches on a given topic, as well as to push for greater clarity or development of that teaching. In "Theologies of Labor and the Limits of Capital," Nicholas Norman-Krause turns to CST's conception of work in light of late-capitalist material conditions. In doing so, Norman-Krause uncovers within CST—especially within its US reception—a tension between normative theologies and material realities. Norman-Krause re-reads John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* in dialogue with the liberationist Gustavo Gutiérrez in order to imagine the underlying material conditions necessary for the encyclical's vision of dignified labor to become a reality. Gina Maria Noia's

contribution, “*Sensus Fidei-whom?*,” turns to Tübingen scholar Johann Adam Möhler to examine the controverted concept of the *sensus fidei* (sense of the faith) within post-Vatican II theological reflection. Although Möhler himself does not use the term *sensus fidei*, Noia demonstrates how his thought can help us find a way beyond current controversies and unclarities. Finally, the point of departure for Arielle Harms’s contribution, “Virtue as Birth Control,” is the intra-ecclesial conflict surrounding Pope Paul VI’s controversial encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Harms examines how the competing camps in this conflict assumed and operationalized distinct conceptions of natural law, and she is particularly interested in illuminating the kind of natural law thought embodied in *Humanae Vitae* itself.

The final group of contributions place Catholic moral theology in dialogue with—or seek to clarify its relationship to—non-theological sources. In “Catholic Social Teaching, Liberalism, and Economic Justice,” Jason A. Heron and Bharat Ranganathan try to build bridges between Catholic social thought and liberalism, suggesting these two traditions have more to learn from one another than is typically thought. Heron and Ranganathan are especially interested in how the concept of subsidiarity, a key tenet of CST, can benefit from and be deepened by engagement with Rawlsian liberalism. A unique feature of their contribution is that they are two scholars and friends who write together across confessional, moral, and political commitments, embodying the ethos of NWNW. Justin Menno’s “A Good Moral Teacher Must Be a Good Pre-Moral Teacher” homes in upon the thought of Cathleen Kaveny, especially her treatment of the virtue of solidarity. Menno is keen to show that, *contra* Kaveny, the underlying contractarian and anthropological assumptions of US constitutional law make it a particularly inhospitable soil for the cultivation of this virtue. Menno also suggests some possible alternative paths forward, which can be found in the work of Carter Snead and Helen Alvaré. In the “Healing Power of the Body of Christ,” an article framed against the backdrop of the pandemic, Chris Krall argues that Covid-19 wreaked havoc, not only through the contagion of the virus itself, but also in terms of how it exacerbated pre-existing trends of social disengagement and isolation in the United States. Krall looks to the thought of Yves Congar as a source and guide for reimagining communal life, ecclesial and otherwise, and for offering practical remedies to address and heal social division. Finally, like Krause’s contribution, Mark R. Ryan’s essay, “Looking for Good Work,” examines work from a moral-theological vantage. Ryan relies both on the narrative account—in *Shop Class as Soulcraft*—of Matthew Crawford’s experience as an employee, as well as Wittgenstinian

“therapy,” to help bridge the chasm between Catholic teaching on work and the deformed and deforming reality of work within the contemporary world. Ryan is especially interested in how a ubiquitous technocratic paradigm, along with the confusions about work that arise from it, undermines the skilled, tacit knowledge required for good and dignified work, based upon responsive engagement with creatures and creaturely realities independent of the worker’s will. **M**

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