

**Fundamental Moral Theology.** By Cataldo Zuccaro. Città del Vaticano: Urbaniana University, 2015. Pp. 391. Price €35 (pbk). ISBN 978-88-401-7050-3.

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This is an English translation of *Teologia morale fondamentale*, published in 2013. An *Introduction* spells out the intention of the author, to pay attention to historical and cultural factors while acknowledging both its genre and guiding principle which ‘stresses the specific character of theological ethics that do not give up, but explicitly accept, acknowledgement of their origins in Christian revelation, and finds in the sacred Scriptures a crucial landmark.’ Governed by ‘its own specific approach to reflection and method, with particular nuances’ this ‘manual’ takes as its ‘guiding principal [principle] the attempt to give the reader, who is living within a network of irreplaceable social relationships, the possibility to find, in all too complex reality, what is needed to operate his own moral discernment.’ This contextual and nuanced statement supports ‘the need to rethink moral theology in a more open and dialogue-friendly light.’

Divided into nine chapters, this book begins with epistemological issues before moving on to the history of moral theology. Having already signalled Scripture as a critical point of reference, Chapter three, ‘Morals in the Bible,’ moves from the Patristic period to the present day. In an interesting metaphor the author asserts that ‘to avoid slipping into past errors, we must stand guard against the risk of considering Scripture as a pharmaceutical handbook that provides us with first-hand information on the chemical composition and price of the medicines.’ Extending this moral theologians could—in the *Extraordinary Year of Mercy in the Church*—explore the ministry of healing in all its aspects and the pharmacological approach of pastoral practice. With its focus on the relationship between morality and faith, Four emphasizes the centrality of encounter with Christ for both the moral life of his followers and fundamental moral theology.

Eschewing a 'strict Christomonism,' the author emphasizes the relational life of the Christian rooted in the Trinity and his/her responsibility to imitate Christ in the concrete circumstances of contemporary contexts.

Chapters on *Natural Law* and *Conscience* follow with a further chapter dedicated to the topic and theology of *Fundamental Option*. These lead to and link up with a chapter on *Sin* which concludes with a consideration of 'Listening to Scripture' in relation to God, ourselves and others, the final sentence of which is worth quoting: 'Moral reflection must not neglect ... the perspective from which to view sin is that of grace, i.e. of the Victory of Christ over sin. In this way night opens to the hope of a new, reconciled, life.' Acknowledging that discernment is already observed and operated within spiritual and pastoral theology, the author applies it to moral theology in the final chapter. This is considered in the context of the conversation between the objective and subjective poles in morality, the 'communion-based structure of the church' and the 'crucial role' played by the magisterium in contributing to 'help the single faithful to carry out his moral discernment.' The concluding section, 'With the owl's eyes,' opens a window on the operation of 'moral discernment in the light of faith' and the opportunity it offers to 'find always new alternatives that come ever closer to the criterion of love.'

An interesting feature is the sub-title of each chapter. 'Standing on the shoulders of giants' is a necessary reminder of the need to take stock of the historical tradition of moral theology and its continuing relevance to fundamental questions. 'The backstage direction' subtly suggests the need to consider conscience as more than a mechanism for moral decision making. 'Life's polar star' is an imaginative indication of the importance of fundamental option. Bringing together the scriptural and philosophical bases of moral theology, Zuccaro zones in on its Christological core as both a personal and communal call to face contemporary challenges through faithful and fruitful discernment. With its extensive footnotes and bibliography (helpfully compiled in six sections) this translation offers a valuable initiation for students of fundamental moral theology and an invitation to teachers to reflect further on its foundation, formulation and function.