

# Gregorianum

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**RECENSIONES**



REGINI, MASSIMO, *Vivere in Cristo. Una teologia morale fondamentale*, Manuali, EDB, Bologna 2018; pp. 384. € 32,00. ISBN 978-88-10-43022-4.

Massimo Regini's book seeks to provide a robust and comprehensive fundamental moral theology manual for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After an introduction situating the discipline with respect to moral philosophy and spiritual theology, and a chapter which presents the sources of moral knowledge in theological ethics, Regini dedicates a chapter to the moral calling that humans discover in themselves, linking it to flourishing and to "living in Christ" (whence the title of the book). He then discusses human freedom, understood both as self-determination and self-realization, linking this to Johannine and Pauline reflections on the topic. This is followed by a chapter on values and on law (eternal, natural, revealed, and human, according to the classical Thomistic distinctions), and a chapter on conscience.

Regini then dedicates his next chapters to the fundamental option, the classical sources of the morality of the act, and traditional moral principles (with a discussion of "intrinsically evil acts" and "cooperation in evil"). In his final chapters, Regini discusses sin, conversion, and the cardinal virtues.

The 97-page chapter on the sources of theological moral knowledge, though exceedingly long, contains well-crafted overviews of the ethical reflection present in Scripture, an insightful history of moral theology, and a reflection on the role of the Magisterium, and on the relationship between faith and reason, in theological ethics. The chapter on freedom, though not always clear in presenting the many layers and distinctions between different kinds of freedom, is quite refreshing to read, overall, and promises an approach to the discipline which speaks to contemporary readers and is in line with Magisterium of Pope Francis.

Some of the later chapters, however, are full of direct citations and paraphrases of *Veritatis Splendor* and the *Catechism*, technical distinctions reproduced from pre-Vatican II moral manuals with little adaptation to the contemporary context, and traditional claims and sayings repeated with little or no historical consciousness, critical distance or nuance. At times, the book feels like one is reading a manual from the years before the Francis papacy, when many authors seemed more concerned with proving their faithfulness to the magisterium of St John Paul II and Benedict XVI than with thinking through (with some creativity) the foundational moral issues for a world in rapid social and cultural transformation, while engaging the thought of their peers, in a way that is accessible and stimulating to their students.

To give an example, on page 163, Regini concludes from Aquinas' experiential knowledge of goods (through natural inclinations) that tradition claims that (all) *values are self-evident*. This seems to mix up the debate on the infallibility of synderesis with Aquinas' discussion on the formal self-evidence of the first precept of the natural law. Then, in a footnote citing *Caritas in veritate*, Regini introduces, in a very guarded way, some element of nuance, that, when carefully read, might be helpful to a critical student left baffled by such a sweeping claim, who might be thinking: "I am not sure how many values are 'self-evident' to narcissists... or to my teenage brother". Of course, some dialogue with empirical sciences like modern psychology could be helpful in discussing these claims, but such dialogue is not a strong feature of this manual.

This brings us back to Regini's discussion of interdisciplinarity in his epistemology chapter: while he does not exclude that ethics may have something to learn from the positive sciences, he seems to think that all non-praxical sciences are "hard sciences" to be conceived in a positivistic manner (as idealized by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle), totally lacking of any personal dimension and hard to reconcile with the notion of human freedom which underpins ethics. While we should educate ethics students in an intelligent and nuanced manner about the epistemic limitations of partner sciences, I am not sure that simply referencing the classical distinctions between "factibilium" and "agibilium" knowledge, as Regini does, is guidance enough when seeking the inter- and trans-disciplinarity promoted by *Veritatis Gaudium*, n.4. The Aristotelian reflection on the epistemic differences pertaining to these different kinds of knowledge (implying different understandings of "law", "certitude", "truth" and "universality" in the theoretical, practical and poietic disciplines), could probably have been more helpful in nuancing certain sweeping claims in other parts of the manual.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, as regards content, Regini's book is balanced, comprehensive, and navigates some very polarized debates with skill, while not avoiding the real issues. I would however like to focus on the form and methodology in my overall appraisal, since these are particularly important in a manual, given the pedagogical *telos* of the act of manual writing. One of the features I appreciate in Regini's book is the use of gender-inclusive language (which is still seen as too "politically correct" and quite rare in the Italian theological world). The organization of the material (epistemology, moral anthropology, moral diakrinology, hamartiology and aretology) is adequate, except for the separation of the virtues from the chapters discussing the tools for moral discernment and decision-making. The fact that the bibliography mostly references books in Italian (both originals and translations) makes sense for a first-cycle theology manual (though part of the readership of Italian theology manuals is in fact quite international!), but the fact that Regini does not really engage with the work of moral theologians of his generation from other language areas makes the book a bit parochial and emblematic of a theological milieu which continues to struggle with self-referentiality in some specializations. Furthermore, I think it is fair to say that the book is a bit lengthy and overly "conceptual" for undergraduate millennials (371 pages excluding indices).

From an editorial point of view, it would be helpful to distinguish what is essential from what is secondary, to systematically illustrate new concepts with cases and metaphors, and to start writing chapters having in mind the question "what skills do students need to learn to serve the Church?", rather than "what content do I want

to transmit?” (we all learn better when we feel we are being given tools to achieve something, rather than simply information to accumulate). To be sure, I appreciate EDB’s effort and investment in this new series of theology manuals which speak to the issues and concerns of this day and age: each generation needs a set of manuals that responds to its reality. However, I think theologians and theology publishers could learn a lot, pedagogically, from looking at the first-cycle manuals of other disciplines. Boxes with case studies and excursuses, boxed paragraphs with major claims, use of bold type and italics to highlight the most important concepts, a list of thesis being defended at the beginning of chapters, a summary / revision checklist at the end of each chapter, suggestions for further reading, discussion questions, comparative and schematic tables, conceptual diagrams and flow charts: none of this is new in editing and pedagogy, but in many of the humanities we still seem to ignore these tools or treat them as too “mundane”. Though some of these features entail costly professional desktop publishing, and the Italian market is small and very competitive, my hope is that we will someday start producing manuals which do not simply consist of paragraph after paragraph of flowing prose in regular type.

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