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[Book Review of] *Living a Christian Life*, by Germain Grisez

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and not absolute. Autonomy is rooted in the notion of the inherent dignity of the human person and is important in so far as it identifies and nourishes that dignity. That inherent worth is independent of all the trials and tribulations, the sufferings, imperfections and yes, even sins, of the person. It is to be acknowledged and respected. It does not place an obligation on others, for instance physicians, to act in a way that eliminates that very person.

It is legitimate to expect physicians to relieve pain but, as physician, can they eliminate suffering? At a different level Callahan notes that it is an illusion "that society can safely put in the private hands of physicians the power directly and deliberately to take life." (P. 93) **It pushes us further into the ideology of control.**

Death is inevitable. Death involves (or should) our social group, family, friends, community. Whether to fight or to accept death? There is a time for both. The secret, not easy to discover, is to know which time it is? But there is a never a time to cause it.

We cannot expect to exert our control over all aspects of nature including life and death. Callahan proposes (p. 173) three alternatives. The first, which he rejects, is that death is "the ultimate insult" something to be "struggled against", conquered by science and "not accepted." Medicine should reject the concept that the private taking of life **under any circumstances** is the purview of either society or medicine.

The second option is that an answer can be found in religion. This is not a personal solution for Callahan but one he sees as an acceptable alternative. In our pluralistic society an answer based on a religious tradition alone, however, is not an effective argument, especially in trying to effect public policy.

The third option which he explores in great detail is that death is part of a biological life that eventually and certainly will come to an end. In the words of Callahan: "I am able to live with . . . the view that death is part of life, to be accepted, and the grief that goes with it to be endured." That position involves the acceptance of nature and the recognition of meaning in death, a view certainly **compatible with the Christian tradition.**

This is an important book which should be read and discussed by those concerned about the issues of euthanasia, assisted suicide and both the present and future role of medicine. There is considerable sense in what Callahan has to say.

— Robert J. Barnet, M.D., M.A.

Living a Christian Life **by Germain Grisez**

Franciscan Press, Illinois, 1992. XXIII 950 pp., U.S. \$35.00

Living a Christian Life is the second volume of a projected four-volume work entitled *The Way of the Lord Jesus*.¹ The whole work is billed by its author as primarily for use as a textbook for students in Catholic seminaries, although he hopes it will also be useful for pastors, religious instructors and even parents. Whereas the first volume was a textbook in fundamental moral theology, the volume under review seeks to provide future and current pastors with a body of normative knowledge that they can and should communicate in their teaching, preaching and counselling. With the exception of the lengthy chapter on marriage (Chapter 9, pp. 553-752) it deals with the moral responsibilities common to clerics, religious and lay people.² The pervading principle throughout this volume is *personal vocation*, understood not only in the narrower sense as a Christian's calling by God to a certain state of life such as religious life or marriage or single life in the world but also, and more adequately, as a calling to love and serve God with all one's and mind strength and one's neighbor as one's self. Taken in conjunction with other volume, this work represents a profound and wide-ranging response to the Second Vatican Council's call for a renewed moral theology.

Against a certain legalism that he finds in both pre-Vatican and post-Vatican Catholic moral theology and also against the challenge of secular humanism, Grisez insists that the moral norms of the Church have to be seen in the context of everyone's personal vocation to authentic knowledge and love of self, others and God and they have to be understood as truths about what is really good for people or harmful to them, about what really makes for or takes away from integral human fulfillment. They are not rules imposed by God or the Church in order to restrict our freedom to do as we please, although they are bound to be perceived as such by a fallen and sinful human race. Nor are they to be regarded as unbearable burdens that legalistic pastors with a false compassion should seek to minimize by leaving people in good faith but also with erroneous consciences. If we envisage the Church as a hospital for sinners it is Grisez's contention that its spiritual physicians should not seek to hide the sometimes painful truth about their patient's spiritual condition but should instead offer the efficacious remedies available in the hospital that will ameliorate, perhaps over a long period of time in some cases, that condition.

However, the book is not, as we said earlier, about the responsibilities of pastors alone. The first three chapters discuss the responsibilities of Christians initiated into the faith through Baptism, strengthened in their hope through Confirmation and nurtured in their love of God and neighbor by the Eucharist. In faith we commit ourselves to God and to what He reveals not only about Himself but also about ourselves and His plan for us. Immediately we see that the moral life is not something peripheral to faith or revelation; we also see that moral truth is part of the deposit of faith that the Church safeguards and serves and authoritatively interprets. Sections H and I of the first chapter (pp. 38-55) contain a clear summary (based chiefly on Vatican I and II) of the Catholic Christian's responsibility with regard to both the propositional truths which the Church proposes as revealed (either in a solemn decree or in her ordinary, universal teaching) and the propositional truths which are not of faith but are somehow related to it. Grisez points out that even when Catholics mistakenly think that teachings the Church proposes as revealed (such as, according to Grisez, the teaching on the evil of contraception) fall outside the ambit of faith, they still owe religious assent of mind and heart to any constant and most firm teaching on a matter of faith or morals. Moreover, the possibility that some authoritative teachings may be mistaken in no way justifies radical theological dissent from those teachings which are constant and most firm. Grisez also carefully distinguishes between religious nonassent and heresy and between dissent and the propagation of heresy.

Faith provides the content for hope. Hope is *in* God because of His saving work in Jesus; it is *for* God's kingdom and fulfillment in it. Although Jesus's mission was directed exclusively to serving the heavenly kingdom, Grisez points out that the gospel also calls for radical social and economic reform. The Church expresses a preferential option for the poor without taking the side of one class or another. The needs of the hungry and severely oppressed must claim our attention before the wants of the rich and the powerful. They require immediate attention. But the Church also seeks to serve the needs of the spiritually hungry and oppressed — the oppressors themselves are victims of their own moral enslavement and need to be liberated from their sins. The Church is concerned first and foremost with the liberation of human beings from sin; without liberation from sin freedom from oppressive political, social and economic structures is a short-lived illusion. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . ." Nevertheless, hope calls for an apostolic life on the part of everyone and it also calls, especially through the laity, for expression "through the structures of secular life".³ The Christian cannot be resigned to evil in this world.

Chapter III develops some of the responsibilities that flow from the theological virtue of love, at least that aspect of it that bears on God. All Christians should worship God, especially by participation in the Eucharist, but also through other devotions and the offering of one's whole life. The Eucharist is also the sacrament of church unity and the Christian, while deepening his own spiritual life, has an obligation to promote unity with other members of the Church and also with other Christians. Ecumenism is not an optional extra in the Christian's life, although one's responsibility in this area will obviously depend on one's vocation and expertise.

Faith, hope and love are the opposites of prideful self-sufficiency, defiant and presumptuous despair, and selfish pleasure-seeking. They involve a radical change of heart and life. Growth in faith, hope and love goes hand in hand with the penitential works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Christian seeks reconciliation with God and neighbor through the sacrament of penance,

avoids the occasions of sin, and shows his concern for the moral welfare of others by admonishing them and avoiding scandal.

Given the centrality of the moral life to the Christian life of faith, hope and charity, it is not surprising that Grisez devotes a chapter (#5) to the Christian's responsibilities with respect to moral truth. Chapter 5 offers guidance for making conscientious judgements either in the presence of many morally good options or in the absence of any moral norms or in situations of conflicts of duties. Chapter 6 specifies the Christian meaning of love of neighbor and this leads naturally into a useful discussion of justice and rights. Grisez, in good Aristotelian and Thomistic form, distinguishes between the narrower and broader meanings of justice. Justice may mean acting uprightly in any action bearing on others or acting fairly (according to the Golden Rule) or acting to fulfill responsibilities defined by prior undertakings towards others. It is important to understand that the latter two meanings of justice do not exhaust the whole intelligibility of the concept. Grisez also shows how the Church's understanding of the relationship between each person and the community and the common good (one of mutual inclusiveness) leads it to reject both the extremes of individualism (unrestrained capitalism) and collectivism (state socialism) without, however, pretending to propose or endorse any particular political, economic or social arrangement. The Church supports private property with social responsibility and a free economy together with the necessary public assistance for families and intermediate groups. Every Christian, guided by justice and mercy, is duty-bound to integrate social responsibility into his vocation.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 form a natural group. Chapter 7 deals with issues of equal dignity among people and among men and women - an equality incompatible with social stratification into castes but compatible with complementary differences in talents and roles, both in the family and religious life. In the context of our responsibilities for communication and community building, Grisez shows why lying is always wrong whereas keeping promises and guarding secrets are defensible duties. Grisez also spells out our responsibilities in voluntary associations and friendships together with the limits of our cooperation with those who are doing wrong. The subject of chapter 8 will be familiar to anyone who has read Grisez's other works. Intentional killing of the innocent — suicide, euthanasia, abortion — is always wrong although it is sometimes right to accept death or the risk of death as a side-effect. Contraception, defined as "any action which either before, at the moment of, or after marital intercourse, is specifically intended to impede procreation — whether as an end or as a means"⁴ is contralife (pace Janet Smith!) and, although it is not homicide, bears startling resemblances to that and to suicide. Grisez defends the Church's distinction between immoral contraception and the moral use of natural family planning, although he concedes that the method of periodic abstinence and the use of the infertile phases of the woman's cycle may sometimes be as contraceptive in intent as the use of the pill. This portion of his exposition I find least satisfactory. It does not appear to me to be consistent with the definition of contraception he accepts from *Humanae Vitae*, which seems to confine contraception to action taken in the context of a present or pending or past act of sexual intercourse so as to obstruct the "natural unfolding of the generative process."⁵ This is what the pill and other contraceptive devices do or help one to do. However, when one has recourse to abstinence as a way of avoiding pregnancy one can not be *contracepting* since conception is not then possible. The same holds true of having sexual intercourse during the infertile period of the woman's cycle, as Grisez himself admits in the case of couples who use this method of avoiding pregnancy in a morally upright manner. Of them he says that "if they choose to have normal marital intercourse at those times [identified as infertile], their intention in doing so plainly cannot be to impede the beginning of a new life, since the infertility is due to natural conditions, not their marital intercourse."⁶ I am inclined to say, therefore, that the selfish couple who use natural family planning instead of the pill in order to avoid having another child (because the former method is cost free, effective, without bad side-effects etc.) *contracept* not in their actual use of natural family planning but in their willingness to use any means, including preventive means, to avoid in their selfishness having another child. They don't do anything to prevent conception, so they don't *contracept*, but they are quite prepared to *contracept* if that's what it takes to avoid having a child. On the other hand, someone who uses the pill may have legitimate reasons for not wanting to have another child at a given time. Their avoidance is not selfishly motivated. Unfortunately, using the pill to prevent conception is a morally wrong means to a good end. Finally, there is the couple who has a good reason for avoiding having another child but who is

unwilling to contracept (or abort) as a means to that end. I find it difficult to comprehend Grisez's distinction between an intention "not to cause a complex foreseen state of affairs, including not only a prospective child's coming to be but, at once and inseparably, the bad consequences which made it reasonable for them to avoid having a child."⁷ Of course, whether Grisez has gotten the morality or immorality of using natural family planning right has no effect on the substantive issue whether contraception, as defined, is wrong. And whether or not the Church is right or wrong in seeing a difference between contraception and natural family planning is one thing; an entirely different matter is whether the Church is right or wrong concerning the immorality of contraception.

Chapter IX on marriage and family life is the lengthiest chapter in the book. In it Grisez defends the view that every marriage (including non-sacramental marriages) is a permanent exclusive and indissoluble union or communion. Marriage, he contends, following recent developments in papal teachings on marriage, is a good in itself, not a mere instrumental good or means for the procreation and education of children. At the same time, having and raising children are the specific, intrinsic perfections of this multifaceted and basic good of marriage. The Church's practice of granting annulments and dissolving non-consummated as well as nonsacramental but consummated marriages (in the case of the Petrine or Pauline privilege) is compatible, he argues, with the view that marriage is indissoluble. In the case of the Pauline privilege Grisez rejects the explanation in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic indissolubility in favor of a distinction between imperfect and perfect nonsacramental marriages. Just as he elsewhere rejects the view that God commands the intentional killing of the innocent (v.g. Isaac) as a means to a religious end, so he rejects the view that God dissolves the basic good of marriage for the benefit of Christians who find themselves wanting to dissolve their marriage with a non-baptised person. Instead, he thinks, we should take into account the inherent differences in marital relationships arising from differences in the objects of the consent which constitutes marriage. This would mean that the church's practice based on St. Paul's teaching does not imply that nonsacramental marriages are therefore dissoluble, but rather than imperfect marriages, although dissoluble, are valid marriages. An imperfect marriage lacks permanence and exclusiveness because the marital consent which constituted it was defective —not due to the personal bad will of the parties but due to fallen mankind's hardness of heart.

Following the lead of *Familiaris Consortio*, Grisez has good things to say about the family as domestic Church, the mutual subjection of husband and wife, the integration of sexual pleasure with marital communion, and the responsibilities to and of children.

Chapter 10 presents the Church's social doctrine about the Christian's responsibilities regarding work (another basic human good and not a mere useful commodity) and subpersonal creation (including the ownership of property — an instrumental good); the responsibilities of and to employers; and the responsibilities regarding lending, borrowing and the taking of interest.

The final chapter speaks of the obligation of citizens to be patriotic (not narrowly nationalistic), to be law-abiding, and to take an active part in public affairs including cooperating with the criminal justice system by serving on juries etc. Christians should promote values such as religious liberty, equal justice for all, justice with respect to human life, protection of marriage and family, economic justice, and international peace and justice. Grisez also presents a principal argument why Christians should oppose the use of the death penalty and serve in a just war.

Conclusion

Jesus said that He came that we might have more abundant life and that His is the Way and the Truth and the Life. His way is the path of demanding and challenging love and the new Adam can not emerge from the old without a thousand little deaths to pride and selfishness. Still the yoke of Christ is sweet, not burdensome, so long as we walk the path humbly hand in hand with the Lord of life. *Living a Christian Life* presents a coherent and consistent pro-life moral theology both in terms of its negative prohibitions against intentionally destroying or damaging or impeding human life, innocent or not, and in terms of its affirmative norms that call all Christians to faithful stewardship over all creation, hopeful striving after what is genuinely good and humanly fulfilling and loving service of one's neighbour in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

1. The first volume, *Christian Moral Principles*, appeared in 1983 and Grisez hopes that the other two volumes will appear by 2000. The material is arranged somewhat differently from that in Vol. I. Each of the eleven chapters is headed by a summary of the chapter's contents. The chapter is then divided into questions alphabetically. Footnotes appear on the bottom of the page for easy reference. The volume also contains six indexes to the work's sources in Sacred Scripture, Schonmetzer, the Vatican II documents, the documents of popes and the Holy See, the Code of Canon Law, and the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. A final index lists the names of all the authors quoted or mentioned in the book and the subjects or topics treated. Each of the topics is treated in accord with Catholic doctrine as it has been developed by the Second Vatican Council and recent papal teaching.

2. The third volume will deal with the special responsibilities of certain groups such as physicians, lawyers, business people etc. and the fourth volume with the special responsibilities of clerics and religious. This seems to be an expansion of his original intent since in Vol. I Grisez announced that the third volume would take up the responsibilities of Christians in various specific roles and states of life and that a fourth volume would spell out the responsibilities of members of the Church as such toward one another.

3. Grisez cites *Optatam totius* 16.

4. Grisez cites *Lumen Gentium* 35.

5. Grisez cites *Humanae Vitae* 14.

6. *CMP*, p. 511, note 102.

7. *op. cit.*, p. 511.

8. *op. cit.*, pp. 510-511.

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