

**D. Brian Scarnecchia, *Bioethics, Law, and Human Life Issues: A Catholic Perspective on Marriage, Family, Contraception, Abortion, Reproductive Technology, and Death and Dying*. Lanham, Maryland, The Scarecrow Press (Rowman and Littlefield), 2010. 470 pages. \$60, cloth.**

Brian Scarnecchia has written an impressive book that applies Catholic moral theology and Christian moral principles to the most important issues of our time. The book is the fruit of his many years of teaching courses in Theology, Human Life Studies, and Law at Franciscan University and Ave Maria Law School. The heart of this book flows from both the “light of right reason” and “the light of Christ.”

The first eight chapters of the book provide an introduction to (or review of) Christian moral principles, especially those of St. Thomas Aquinas. Chapter 1 explores the difference between persons and animals, the relational nature of persons, and how the ideology of “animal rights” denies man’s relational nature. Chapter 2 covers human freedom and conscience, freedom and law, and the four kinds of law (from St. Thomas Aquinas’s “Treatise on Law” in his *Summa Theologica*).

Chapter 3 (my favorite) is a primer on morality, discussing the three sources of morality: the object chosen or moral deed, the intention or motive, and the circumstances of the action and foreseeable consequences. Six principles are provided for analyzing moral behavior. The first principle, for example, states, “intrinsically evil moral objects (acts) never become good acts even if they are done with a good motive and/or under good circumstances, including the likelihood of good consequences, effects or outcome” (57). In the words of the Pauline principle, “do not do evil that good may come of it.” Today, many deny “intrinsically evil acts” and thus all that matters is motive and circumstances. Abortion, contraception, and embryonic stem cell research, among other things, are then “justified.”

Chapter 4 explains the “Principle of Double Effect,” breaking it down into four elements: good moral object (or act), good motive, good effect comes before evil effect, and good effect is as great as or greater than the evil effect. This chapter is crucial as it enables one to clearly distinguish between cases of self-defense and murder, and between a direct abortion and a salpingectomy (the “surgical removal of all or part of the fallopian tube in order to remove maternal tissue on the point of rupturing, due to an ectopic pregnancy containing (possibly) a living human embryo” [293]). The principle of double effect is applied to the

difficult case of ectopic pregnancy from pages 290 through 300. The remainder of chapter 4 critiques revisionist moral theology (fundamental option, proportionalism, and consequentialism). The chapter ends with a fascinating juxtaposition: “Assassins and Martyrs Give Witness to Moral Absolutes.” Assassins believe they are justified in doing evil that good may come of it. Martyrs on the other hand do *not* do evil that good may come of it, but instead give up their own lives for the faith.

Chapter 5 touches on the subject of “Cooperation and Scandal.” The terms “formal cooperation,” “material cooperation,” and “remote material cooperation” are defined and outlined. This is an important forgotten subject that today needs to be relearned and applied to everyday life.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8, cover “Virtues (Natural and Supernatural),” “Sin and Grace,” and “Revelation,” in that order. Chapter 8 is particularly good in that everything is tied together. Divine Revelation (faith) and reason are the “two-fold order of knowledge” (121, quoting John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio*). The author explains that Christian moral principles are derived from both reason and divine revelation. “Through reason we can know objective reality outside our mind and an objective natural law of moral behavior written deep within our mind and heart” (121). Divine revelation is the “living and fruitful source of the Church’s moral doctrine” that “provides assurance, through God’s direct testimony, that we are not absurd creatures longing for something which does not exist” (121). Chapter 8 is completed with a discussion of “The Church’s Teaching Office” and a straightforward explanation of the doctrine of infallibility. Finally, the author provides a summary of the important magisterial documents: *To Defend the Faith* (John Paul II, *Ad Tuendam Fidem*, 1998) and its companion, the *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1998).

The book is organized in two parts: 1) Christian Moral Principles, and 2) Bioethics in Light of Christian Moral Principles, with chapters 9 through 12 in Part II. Chapter 9 covers “Reproductive Technologies.” Chapter 10 discusses “Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage.”

Chapter 11, “Contraception,” provides an analysis of *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968), followed by an analysis of Church documents in the decades prior to *Humanae Vitae* (e.g., Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 1930; Pope Pius XII, Address to Italian Midwives, 1951; Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961; and Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 49–51, 1965). The important questions are posed: Is the Church’s teaching on contraception infallible? Is contraception

intrinsically evil?” These are answered affirmatively, with references to *Humanae Vitae*, Pope John Paul II’s *Ad Tuendam Fidem* and *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), as well as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994).

The final chapters (12 through 14) cover “Abortion,” “Marriage and Family,” and “End of Life issues.” Chapter 13, “Marriage and Family,” is particularly good, covering all the important Church documents in recent decades (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, *Theology of the Body*, 1979-1984, *Charter Rights of the Family*, 1983, *Letter to Families*, 1994).

It should be noted that Appendices A and B contain great summaries of John Paul II’s *Gospel of Life* (*Evangelium Vitae*, 1995) and *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering* (*Salvifici Doloris*, 1984). In addition to the wealth of footnotes at the end of each chapter, some chapters have summary diagrams. Finally, the bibliography is a treasure trove of related articles and books, and the index provides quick access to any particular topic.

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