

SEARCHING FOR A UNIVERSAL ETHIC: MULTIDISCIPLINARY, ECUMENICAL, AND INTERFAITH RESPONSES TO THE CATHOLIC NATURAL LAW TRADITION

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With great perspicacity, John Berkman and William C. Mattison III commissioned and edited this volume of critical essays by well-known authors in the window of opportunity between the original publication of the International Theological Commission's document, *In Search of a Universal Ethic*, and its official English translation. Under its all-encompassing title the book welcomes the ITC document, while also critiquing it for its perceived gaps. The book's introduction situates both the ITC document and the essay responses. It then gives the English version of the ITC document itself, followed by the essays in three further sections.

The first section on the document's background and context benefits from contributions by Serge-Thomas Bonino and Anthony Kelly, members of one of the ITC's sub-committees. Bonino charts misunderstandings of the natural law tradition and recent attempts to locate it more firmly in Thomistic and personalist approaches. He regards the document as an invitation to dialogue with those outside the Church and as a resource for those within, particularly in the light of the worrying disconnect between the political and social order, and the ethical order. Kelly notes the enormity of the ITC's task of finding a common language, and accepts that some of the tensions within the natural law tradition remain unresolved, a point raised explicitly and implicitly by many of the other contributors. Both authors underline the challenge of globalization for a new presentation of the natural law. While Bonino and Kelly accept the document's limitations and promise, Russell Hittinger is concerned that it may present the natural law tradition as merely one wisdom tradition among others. Moreover, he questions the form of dialogue envisaged with secular modernity that, he says, lacks a wisdom tradition.

The second section deals with the search for a universal ethic. The first two essays engage with two non-Christian religious wisdom traditions: Islam and Judaism. Anver Emon challenges the document's representation of the Islamic tradition for being incorrect, naive or imperialistic, warning of the problem of presenting a reductive view of the role and authority of reason in Islam. In particular, he thinks that the document over-privileges theology over jurisprudence. Similarly concerned about the document's interpretation of Judaism, David Novak questions the target audience for the document. The next three essays explore dialogue in the secular arena. Again, pointing to the dangers of reductionism, Jean Porter reflects on the relationship between legal positivism and natural law jurisprudence and the problems of seeing them as mutually exclusive. Tracey Rowland questions the assumption that there is a recognised common good or flourishing life in view of post modern romanticism and liberalism, and she suggests that dialogue on human dignity, freedom and self-development may be more fruitful than discussion on laws of nature or rights rhetoric. Fergus Kerr asks for a willingness to find common ground with perceived opponents of natural law, and he usefully gives an account of the thinking of Hume and Moore that could contribute to dialogue. Opening out the discussion further, Michael Northcott introduces a green perspective, charting both the damaging ecological consequences of abandoning an account of natural law as a purposive web of relationships between God, humanity and the created order as well as the often unacknowledged responsibility that a corrupted Christianity has had in this process. Northcott welcomes the revival of natural law and a philosophy of nature as significant contributions to a more ecologically benign global civilisation. Finally, in this section, David Burrell calls for an understanding of natural law that is both theological and also ordinary and where religions, traditions and language can confirm the Creator, creatures

and the transcendent so that diverse traditions may be bound together rather than collapsed into one.

The third section addresses the document's claim to a new look at natural law. Jennifer Herdt, David Cloutier and Gilbert Meilaender offer differing perspectives, informed by Protestant concerns, that relate in particular to autonomous ethics and the gospel. Herdt critiques the document for failing to acknowledge the contestable character of some of its discussions. She welcomes its attempt to avoid both rationalism and physicalism, and she explores possible common ground with Calvin. She believes that the document does not respond fully to Protestant disquiet, notably the impact of the fall on the human capacity to know and do the good, and she thinks it is insufficiently reliant on Revelation and insufficiently Christocentric. Cloutier uses the work of Hauerwas to highlight the temptation of the Church to try and speak to all people of good will while neglecting its own people. For Meilaender, the document is more restating than bringing in anything new, and he considers the document's starting point that 'we can all get along' as 'admirable, though touchingly naive'. He finds that there is too much theory and too little anthropology, with insufficient recognition both of the need for virtue to discern the natural law and the document's Christological implications.

Moving to a focus on experience, M. Cathleen Kaveny regards the document as sharing the same rhetorical tone as *Gaudium et spes* in a shift towards teaching by persuasion rather than coercion, where natural law is rooted in experience and in the recognition of the influence of culture and historicity. Lisa Sowle Cahill acknowledges that natural law can appeal across cultures for consensus and commitment to the global common good, dignity of all persons, mutual rights and duties, just government and peaceful co-existence. However, she notes insufficiency in recognising equality and the experience of women. Moreover, she says that the document does not fully take account of the need for re-evaluation of certain teachings, notably those concerning sex and gender. Joseph Capizzi points to the contemporary increased senses of interdependence and diversity of values. He advocates political reflection beyond the state to the global common good, that takes account of individual flourishing within the whole human family.

The final five essays explore some stock issues. Steven Long surveys the document's insight that the roots of moral antinomianism lie in seeing human and divine freedom in competition. Martin Rhonheimer usefully distinguishes between formal and material considerations of the natural law. He brings attention to the natural law as a work of the created intellect such that its universality is grounded in anthropology. William Mattison looks at how the document affirms the natural law as something both discerned by and constituted by human practical reason and the way in which the document uses other terms alongside inclination to go beyond a physicalist understanding. Livio Melina is inspired by the document to draw on an analogy between language, grammar and human action. Sherif Girgis and Robert George work on the perceived gap in the document on the complementary relationship of faith and reason.

Overall, these twenty one essays, written in a spirit of charity by critical friends of the ITC document, touch on many of the perennial questions related to the natural law such as the tensions between theology and philosophy, the possibilities of dialogue with religious and secular traditions, the place of virtues, experience and principles, human anthropology, the relationship of faith and reason, the difference that Christ makes. Many of the essays complement or counteract others. As Porter points out, the document is directed to all people of good will and it would be regrettable if it does not reach them. This book is an important contribution to making that happen.

