

Editorial

*The Natural-Law Tradition in
Christian Social Ethics*

While natural law has played an important role in Christian social ethics from the very beginning, over the centuries it has gone through periods of greater and lesser influence in the Christian church. The sixteenth century, for example, was a period of relatively greater influence, as moral theologians (Protestant and Catholic alike) sought to apply the insights of the Christian moral tradition to pressing issues in foreign affairs, domestic governance, trade, and commerce. The twentieth century, however, can be classified as a period of relatively diminished influence. Philosophically, moral realism sustained vigorous assault from both existentialist and analytic philosophers who denied the existence of transtemporal and transcultural moral goods. Many twentieth-century theologians, heeding the advice of Karl Barth in the celebrated 1934 debate with Emil Brunner, rejected the natural-law tradition in favor of an ethic of divine command.

Though indications of renewed and serious interest in the natural-law tradition exist already in the 1960s, the 1990s represent the point at which theologians, public intellectuals, and Christian social ethicists begin to view natural law as a viable means for addressing moral issues in the often hostile and religiously pluralistic environment of the public square. The privatization of religious belief and the impoverishment of public moral discourse provide the backdrop against which the renewed interest in natural law must be seen. The natural-law tradition supplies an antidote to these cultural trends because, according to it, there is a universal moral law to which people of all races, cultures, and religions can have access through their rational capacities. Natural

law thus provides moral standards that all persons can grasp without the aid of special or divine revelation. Natural law is particularly advantageous in terms of political discourse and Christian engagement in the public square because it provides a moral vocabulary that can function for both religious and secular interlocutors.

The renewed interest in natural law also seems to derive from a more fundamental concern on the part of Christian scholars, in particular, to promote ecumenical agreement on normative moral concerns and to show respect for the common search for truth among people in all spheres of intellectual life. Increased ecumenical engagement by Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders in public intellectual life is one principal factor that has contributed both to the revival of interest in and endorsement of natural law. This factor can be seen in the work of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, an initiative sponsored by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus to promote unity, and in the 1996 ecumenical gathering of scholars to discuss natural law, sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center's Evangelical Studies Project. The net effect of increased ecumenical engagement has led to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the precedent for natural-law ethics that existed at an earlier stage in the history of Christian social ethics.

To assist scholars in retrieving the once vibrant natural-law foundation of Christian social ethics, economics, and moral philosophy, *Markets & Morality* will regularly feature previously untranslated texts by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Roman Catholic and Protestant authors as scholia installments. Juan de Mariana's (1536–1624) *A Treatise on the Alteration of Money* is the first such text to appear in the scholia. Pascal Duprat, a nineteenth-century French economist, said of Mariana, "He had set forth the true principles of the money question far better than his contemporaries." However, the *Treatise*, which first appeared in 1609 under the title, *De monetae mutatione*, proved disastrous for its author. The fact that Mariana had so strenuously opposed the depreciation of Spanish currency laid him under a charge of treason to the king. Eventually, he was convicted, and, at seventy-three years of age, was condemned to lifelong imprisonment, which meant being confined within a Franciscan convent. He was granted freedom only shortly before his death.

The translation that appears in this issue of *Markets & Morality* is the first ever within the English language. Patrick T. Brannan, S.J. has rendered Mariana's dense Latin prose into an elegant and lucid English style. Furthermore, Father Brannan has provided scholars with a critical first translation of the *monetae* that works principally from the Latin text of 1609 but

has been meticulously checked over against the Spanish edition of 1864 (published in Mariana's *Collected Works*) for numeric and other discrepancies. Where discrepancies exist between the Latin and Spanish texts, Father Brannan has provided illuminating annotations in footnotes. A modern Spanish edition of the *monetae* has been published recently under the title *Tratado y discurso sobre la moneda de vellon*, with an introduction by Lucas Beltran (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1987).

(An aside on scholia page numbering: you will notice the two sets of page numbers. Citations of the scholia in a scholarly work should reference the numbers of the translated work and not those of the *Markets & Morality* folios.)

It is my sincere desire that the scholia and expanded review sections will benefit scholars in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Furthermore, the spring 2003 issue (vol. 6, no. 1) will feature a controversy on new urbanism. As always, I am interested in your feedback on the recent changes to *Markets & Morality*, so please do not hesitate to contact me. I also invite you to visit our new website at www.marketsandmorality.com.

—Stephen J. Grabill