

# **SOME PRINCIPLES OF MORAL THEOLOGY AND THEIR APPLICATION**

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Some Principles of Moral Theology and Their Application by Kenneth E. Kirk

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**KENNETH E. KIRK**

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KENNETH E. KIRK

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TO  
THE VEN. H. ARMSTRONG HALL, C.B.E., B.D.

CHAPLAIN TO THE KING  
ARCHDEACON OF RICHMOND

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE INFLUENCE  
WHICH BY HIS ENTHUSIASM, ADVICE, AND EXAMPLE  
HE HAS HAD UPON THE LIVES OF THE CLERGY WHO  
HAVE KNOWN HIM

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

## PREFACE

THE present book is an attempt to bring together, from the Bible and from Christian experience, the principles which have guided the Church in dealing with individual souls; to test those principles by the light of modern knowledge; and to apply them to present-day conditions and needs. Some of the traditional terminology of moral theology has been discarded; much has been retained, either because it seemed the best medium for expressing what had to be expressed, or because it would have been impossible otherwise to indicate the development and formulation of Christian thought on the subject. Thus the book may prove of interest not merely to the clergy and others who are confronted by the practical problems of conduct and morality, but also to students entering upon the study of moral theology for its own sake.

The Church of England affords her clergy singularly little expert guidance in this matter of the direction of souls. Two branches of the subject—those which go by the names of 'Christian ethics' and the 'theory and practice of the confessional' respectively—have indeed been systematically and fully treated by recent writers; and there is a wealth of practical experience to be drawn both from manuals of 'pastoral theology' and from biographies. Moral theology, however, as will appear, comprises much more than the two topics just mentioned. Yet within the last fifty years, apparently, only three books have attempted to present the whole content of moral theology in such a form as should guide the theory and practice of the Church of England, and all three are out of print and consequently difficult of access.

The three in question are the following :

James Skinner, 'Synopsis of Moral and Ascetical Theology' (London, 1882).

J. J. Elmendorf, 'Elements of Moral Theology based on the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas' (first edition, New York, 1892; second edition, New York, 1895).

W. W. Webb, 'The Cure of Souls' (first edition, New York, 1892).

Of these three, Skinner's 'Synopsis' is by far the greatest; though by reason of its being a synopsis alone it is at the same time the least useful to the general reader. The fruit of many years' patient study of patristic and later writers, it was intended to give the clergy 'a *conspectus* of the whole subject, arranged in a scientific form, with direction to authorities which they may consult for themselves'; and the Committee at whose request it was compiled had in view the further possibility that it might serve as a basis for the 'construction of a "Manual of Moral Theology" suited to the growing needs of the English priesthood.' Unfortunately this hope was never fulfilled. Mr. Skinner died before his 'Synopsis' was actually published; and the whole edition, all but a few hundred copies, was accidentally destroyed by a warehouse fire. For these reasons, therefore, the 'Synopsis' never exerted the influence its great authority deserved. But it remains an indispensable book for the student; and if ever the study of moral theology in the Church of England reaches a point at which the task of compiling a 'manual' becomes possible, the value of Mr. Skinner's vast researches will be widely recognised.

Elmendorf's 'Moral Theology' and Bishop Webb's 'Cure of Souls' are by comparison slighter books, though each is the outcome of careful study—the former of the 'Summa Theologica,' the latter of patristic, Eastern and Anglican writers. Both of them assume, however, as does the 'Synopsis,' a considerable acquaintance with the principles and terminology of moral theology on the part of their readers. It is just this acquaintance which seems to be lacking in the Church to-day. I have tried, therefore, in the chapters which follow, to provide a general outline