

BOOK REVIEW

James F. Keenan, SJ. Towards a Global Vision of Catholic Moral Theology: Reflections on the Twentieth Century, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007, pages ISBN: 978-81-89958-114.

A correct understanding of its historical development is necessary for the right evaluation of any doctrine or theological approach. Only then shall we be able to perceive the reasons behind many theological positions taken in different periods of history and to pursue the new directions according to the need of the times. This is especially true in moral theology. The human person and human life are not static and fixed for all times; rather they change and develop. Failure to understand and accept this truth will make moral theology irrelevant to life, whereas the readiness to read the signs of the times will help it to become more and more meaningful. Rev. Dr James Keenan, S. J. , in his *Towards a Global Vision of Catholic Moral Theology: Reflections on the Twentieth Century* gives a balanced and scholarly evaluation of the main streams in Catholic moral theology in the twentieth century and thus attempts to indicate the new trends and directions that moral theology takes today. Keenan is professor of Theological Ethics at Boston College, USA, and is the author of many successful books like *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae* and *Virtue for Ordinary Christians* and has published over 200 essays. His wide and profound reading of the works of moral theologians in the past and in the present as well as his capability to critically analyse their contributions for the shaping of the present and future of moral theology can be noticed in this new book.

The book is divided into six chapters. These were originally lectures delivered for the "Bishop Jonas Thaliath CMI Endowment Lectures" at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, India. The book begins with an introduction to the twentieth century, which presents the

background, dividing it into three periods, namely, the high middle ages, the sixteenth century and the seventeenth through the nineteenth century.

The first chapter is on "The Moral Manuals and Moral Pathology." Three moral manuals — Thomas Slater's *A Manual of Moral Theology for English Speaking Countries*, Henry Davis's *Moral and Pastoral Theology in Four Volumes* and Heribert Jone's *Moral Theology* which had the greatest influence on the English speaking world as well as the Church as a whole in the first half of the twentieth century, are considered in this chapter. Although these manuals were addressed to the educated laity as well, they were primarily meant for the priests who were confessors. The role of the moral theologian was limited to the analysis of sin and the avoidance of evil. Hence the moral manuals can be called books of moral pathology. As these manuals were addressed to the confessors, they addressed concrete life situations and tried to give very clear and precise solutions without entering into long philosophical discussions. Keenan points out that in the twentieth century, as Rome intervenes and defines more and more in moral issues, the role of the moral theologian is increasingly considered as only that of interpreting what is taught by Rome. Instead of developing moral theology integrating it into fundamental and spiritual theology, the manuals tend to depend more and more on canon law. Moreover, they fail to address the real critical issues like the World Wars.

In the second chapter Keenan speaks about the innovations that took place over the same span of time of these manuals, incorporating history, the Scriptures and spirituality into moral theology. Dom Odon Lottin, through his historical-critical method, investigated how medieval theologians developed their arguments. Keenan points out that looking historically for the actual roots of moral theology, Lottin tries to let moral theology flourish in its own proper theological setting. He succeeds in showing that after scholastics the moralists fixed on sin ignoring the virtuous ends, uprooting moral theology from its dogmatic sources and transplanting it into the field of canon law.

This historical-critical analysis led Lottin to set moral theology in the right perspective. Fritz Tillmann demonstrated that it was possible to create a sound moral theology based directly on the Scriptures. Keenan explains that based on the Scriptures, Tillmann presents the attainment of perfection as the goal of every Christian and derives an appropriate identity for the Christian agent, that is, the disciple. Turning to Gerard Gilleman, the author underscores that Gilleman succeeds in demonstrating that the nature of charity falls into disuse in the manuals and that charity is the real source of virtue.

The following chapter shows how the innovations by Lottin, Tillmann and Gilleman were opposed by some other moral theologians. John Ford and Gerald Kelly wanted to preserve manualism. They are convinced that Rome is the only authentic interpreter of the laws of God. The magisterial authority takes a more and more important role in defining moral truths and norms and giving solutions to moral problems, following the manualist tradition. Following this, Keenan speaks about the 'intellectual conversion' of Josef Fuchs, who was known as a traditionalist up to his involvement in the Papal Commission on Birth Control. According to the author, although the promulgation and reception of *Humane Vitae* highlights the rift between bishops and moral theologians, there are rays of hope coming from the attempts to promote dialogue between theologians and the magisterial authority.

The fourth chapter deals with the European Schools and the new School of

Virtue. The author points out that four European Schools, namely, Alfonsianum, Gregorian, Leuven and Tübingen have contributed in different but complementary ways to the ongoing growth of Moral Theology. Together with this there is a renewed interest in virtue ethics, arising from the dissatisfaction with the way we do ethics today, namely, reducing the role of ethics to the discussion on controversial issues. Keenan shows that virtue ethics, on the other hand, is pro-active.

In the last two chapters the author tries to show how theologians today do moral theology locally and globally. To illustrate how moral theology develops locally he has chosen Africa and the United States. Keenan underscores that it is important to speak from our own local experience, but we should also speak cross-culturally without forgetting our catholicity. The African moral theologians are trying to respond to the challenges that they are facing, namely, poverty, health and identity. The contemporary U.S. moral theologians have made significant contributions in feminism, justice and justice in sexual and biomedical ethics. Finally, Keenan makes a survey of how moral theologians around the world respond to some key issues.

The book serves both as an introduction to the twentieth century Catholic moral theology and an analysis of it. It is indeed helpful to students and scholars alike. Keenan's wide and deep reading and knowledge, his contact with moral theologians around the world and his direct and personal experience of the moral challenges and situations in different countries and cultures can be noticed in this work. Perhaps the limitations of the project did not allow him to make a more detailed analysis of the developments in moral theology in all the continents and cultures. Although the present work is itself a great contribution to moral theology, a more elaborate work, highlighting also the works of Asian, Latin American and Australian moral theologians, will be a great contribution to Catholic moral theology. Keenan, with his deep knowledge and contact with moral theologians and life situations and challenges around the world seems to be the apt person for making such a contribution.

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