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BOOK REVIEW

James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century. From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2011 (reprinted. Originally published by Continuum International, 2010) Pages: viii+248. ISBN: 978-81-88821-82-2

A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century. From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences is a unique and timely contribution by James F. Keenan, who has authored many books and a number of articles, including the regularly published "Notes on Moral Theology" in *Theological Studies*, and who has given a new direction to catholic moral theology by organizing two international conferences, "Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church."

The book is divided into nine chapters. The area of investigation is restricted to fundamental moral theology (p. vii). What is interesting in Keenan's approach to history is that he is not presenting the development of ideas in an abstract dry manner, but he is interested in persons as well. Hence we get a number of biographical details of the great theologians whose ideas formed moral theology, especially in the 20th century. Another unique feature is that in each chapter on the revisionists, the author presents a contemporary work that captures the contribution of the chapter's main theme. "In this way," according to the author, "we can move through the last century with insight into our own time and place" (p. vii).

The first chapter, "Background", briefly introduces three important periods of moral theology before 20th century, namely, *Summas*, casuistry and moral manuals. The author underscores that moral theology should make use of historically appropriate theological methods. Keenan states the central focus of his work as follows: "What we find in the twentieth century, then is the enormously complex move from defining moral theology as the fixed science of human action to becoming a guide for the personal and communal development of the conscientious disciples of Christ. That move is the central focus of this work" (p. 6-7).

After a short introduction to the moral manualists, the second chapter deals in detail with three manualists, who continued to exert influence into the twentieth century, namely, Thomas Slater, Henry Davis and Heribert Jones. Manualist theology shaped the clergy's disposition toward the pastoral care of Catholics on moral matters (p. 29).

The following three chapters present four great moral theologians of the twentieth century, who initiated, advanced and synthesized reforms. The third chapter depicts the contributions of Odon Lottin who initiated reforms turning to history. Lottin rendered moral theologians historically sensitive to the development of ideas (p. 37). Keenan goes on to show how Lottin was a historian, a critic and a revisionist builder. I found very inspiring what Keenan says analyzing Lottin the historian: "Truth was not, for him, a series of always held, ahistorical, universal utterances. He did not believe he would find one position held by all, always... The tradition, then, was not monolithic; it was a series of debates and engagements that historically developed. He wanted to know that history" (p. 38-39). The author shows how moral theologians like Louis Vereecke, Bernard Häring and many others undertook the historical study of moral theology. In the last section of this chapter Keenan presents John Mahoney's *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* and other five works, to enunciate how Lottin's legacy became influential in the continuing development of moral theology.

The fourth chapter appraises the contributions of Fritz Tillmann, who was originally a biblical scholar and "who wrote a moral handbook in the key of scripture" and Gérard Gillemann, who "wrote a moral theology that emerged from a dynamic spirituality" (p.59). Tillmann's works, especially *Die Idee der Nachfolge Christi* and *Der Meister Ruft (The Master Calls)*, had great impact on moral theology in building up a lay morality, not as a list of sins, but as virtues dominated by the idea of the following of Christ and guided by scripture (p. 61). For Gillemann the "most internal and gracious of all virtues" was charity (p. 69-70). His work, *The Primacy of Charity*, had long-lasting influence in shaping moral theology. After giving an overview of Gillemann's work, the author considers William C. Spohn's *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, a contemporary work that reflects Gillemann's innovations.

Keenan says that in the 1950s, Catholic moral theology split over theological methods - between manualists who taught moral theology as an aid for priest confessor and revisionists who began looking for a more positive moral theology (p. 83). The synthesis was brought about by Bernard Häring, according to whom, as stated in his landmark contribution *The Law of Christ*, "The principle, the norm, the centre and the goal of Christian moral theology is Christ" (p. 88). According to Keenan, Häring's work represents a certain coming together of almost 40 years of a variety of attempts to resituate moral theology as a theological enterprise, deeply connected to dogmatic, biblical, and ascetical theology (p. 91). As two contemporary works capturing the legacy of Häring, Keenan presents Charles Curran's *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* and Marciano Vidal's *Neuva Moral Fundamental: El hogar teológico de la E'tica*.

Whereas the development of moral theology in the first half of the 20th century depended mainly on four eminent moral theologians, in the next half we witness how the march forward is taken up by a number of them.

The sixth chapter, "The Neo-Manualists," begins by pointing out that developments in moral theology are prompted not only by moral theologians

but also by those in dogmatic/systematic theology. The main tension in this period is between the classicists who stand for moral law that never changes and historicists who are more inclined to context and change when it “illustrates a greater approximation to the law of love” (p. 114). This distinction between classicism and historicism, according to Keenan, plays out in the Catholic Church throughout the second half of the twentieth century (p. 115). Another important development in this period is that the hierarchy began to exercise more frequently and decisively its role as a neomanualist teacher. In the same chapter the author considers *Humanae Vitae*, which had henceforth a profound influence on the development of moral theology. As a contemporary expression of neo-manualism, the author presents *Veritatis Splendor* (John Paul II).

Chapter seven is on “New Foundations for Moral Reasoning, 1970-89.” In the aftermath of *Humanae Vitae*, moral theologians had a protracted battle with hierarchical authority about the competency of the moral magisterium (p. 141). In this period, re-examining moral concepts, moral theologians developed a scholastic, scientific tone to their investigations. Clerical nature of theological ethics became less evident as lay people entered the field of theological ethics. Moreover, moral theologians had themselves trained in an atmosphere and under the direction of mentors away from the Roman universities. The discussions and debates centre around a number of themes: law of graduality, moral objectivity, intrinsic evil, universal validity, moral absolutes, pre-moral evil, and proportionalism are only some of them. As a contemporary work representing the trends of this period, the author presents *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* by Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin.

Chapter eight, “New Foundations for a Theological Anthropology, 1980-2000,” under three sub-headings, discusses the major developments in this period: Re-examining the natural law; Autonomous ethics, an ethics of faith, and a middle position; Goodness and rightness, sin and fundamental option. As a contemporary work expressing the trends of this period, the author presents Christina Traiana’s *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas*.

The last chapter, “Toward a Global Discourse on Suffering and Solidarity,” describes the development of moral theology in different continents. Thus, the author shows that, “though the irruption of suffering into Catholic theological ethics is fairly universal, it appears locally in the theology of indigenous ethicists on each continent.” (p. 199). The way theological ethicists from other continents find a place in the history of moral theology, as enunciated in this chapter, makes this book unique. Practically, in all other works on the history of moral theology, only those from the West appear. Therefore, I would consider, without reducing the value of other sections of the book, this chapter as the most original and unique contribution of Keenan’s work. The author begins with the discussion on Latin American contribution, focussing mainly on liberation theology, which includes also the “irruption of women into liberation theology” (p. 201). According to Keenan, “inclusion that is critically approached through liberation theology is Africa’s contribution to

the Church and the world" (p. 203). One particular area in which inculturation plays a major role is HIV/AIDS. In the recent decades concerns of ordinary people, liberation theology, cultural context, the need for dialogue, a critical reconstruction of the tradition, caste discriminations, cultural complexity, social inequality, gender discrimination, ecological concerns, etc. have found their place in the reflections of ethicists in India. Vimal Tirimanna (Sri Lanka) has written on suffering and economic disparities in a globalized world and on religion, violence and civil strife. Agnes Brazal and others in Philippines write on the challenges of globalization, the resourcefulness of interdisciplinarity and cultural and religious identities. Moral theology in the United States was deeply affected by the irruption of liberation theology and black theology as the clearest connection between liberation theology in Latin America and theological movements in the U.S. (p. 211). After considering the contributions from each continent, the points out that at the end of the twentieth century, Catholic theological ethics became inclined to crosscultural discourse (p. 216). The first international conference on Catholic Theological Ethics (July 2006, Padova, Italy) is specially mentioned in this context. As a contemporary work reflecting the trends of this period, the author presents Margaret Farley's *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. The book has an afterword on the encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI.

The unique contributions of this book, as I consider, are:

1. It gives a comprehensive vision of 20th century moral theology.
2. This may be the only work in history of moral theology that presents the contributions from Asia, Africa and Latin America and integrate them into the history of moral theology.
3. The global and the local dimensions find a balance in this book.
4. Keenan, with his vast reading and contact with the developments in moral theology in different contexts, highlights the contributions of many theologians, otherwise might have been unnoticed by many.
5. Differing and opposing trends and schools find their place in this book.
6. Keenan succeeds in linking the developments in moral theology to developments in other branches of theology.

Theologians and students of theology have to read this book to get an idea of the developments in contemporary moral theology as well as in other theological disciplines.

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