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Christian Ethics

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CHRISTIAN ETHICS: A Presentation of General Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II. By Rev. Dr. C. Henry Peschke, S. V. D. Alcester and Dublin: C. Goodliffe Neale, 1975. 293 pages. Paper \$4.25, cloth \$7, and Manila: Catholic Trade School, 1975. Paper P27.

The first thing to be said about this new textbook which is primarily written for the use of students of moral theology is that it *is* what the sub-title and its stated limited purpose in the Preface modestly promise to be. Eleven years have passed since Vatican II (1962–1965) called for a renewal of moral theology (as well as of other theological disciplines) in order to update and adapt it to the needs of the contemporary world. During all that time, at least in the Philippines, there has been a great need for a printed standard manual of General Moral Theology in the spirit and according to the guidelines of Vatican II. At long last Fr. P. has written a systematic, unified, and complete treatment of Vatican II Fundamental Moral Theology which students of theology, moral theology teachers, priests, and Christian educators will welcome. To the knowledge of this reviewer, Fr. P. is the first to fill a real need and for this alone he has done a great service. The Christian laity will also find this book profitable reading because it strikes a happy mean between scholarship and popularization.

According to the directives of Vatican II, the scientific exposition of moral theology “should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching.” That the book is thoroughly biblical in its approach is evident not only in Part I of the book where the author develops the scriptural foundations of Christian ethics in both the Old and New Testaments but also throughout Part II where he relates the basic concepts and principles of moral theology to their roots in Holy Scripture. Furthermore, Vatican II desires that a renewed moral theology “should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.” How to take a thoroughly biblical approach to Christian ethics; to integrate the best in traditional Catholic moral theology with the new theological insights ten years after Vatican II, while at the same time being in ecumenical dialogue with Protestant theology as well as with the recent findings of the new human sciences (e.g., conscience and psychology, part II, chapter 3); to re-think in a refreshing and positive way classical moral theology in view of the needs of our times and in the light of *all* the documents of Vatican II; and then to present all this in a clear, concise, and systematic manner to students of moral theology — is indeed a long and painstaking task. Fr. P. has succeeded remarkably well in fulfilling this task in his book.

In line with Vatican II's acceptance of the transition from a static to an historical world view as a basic premise and new theological direction, chapter 3 of part I on the historical evolution of moral theology from the age of the Fathers, through the age of the scholastic and Thomistic syntheses, to the

modern age in quest of a new synthesis — is valuable and instructive. So is chapter 1 of part II on the brief history of different Western ethical systems. But in the opinion of this reviewer, these two historical accounts assume a new significance, of which the author is surely not unaware; namely, that the Western Aristotelico-scholastic-thomistic model is by no means the only model for the future of moral theology especially in the Third World where the local churches are in search of an indigenous model within each culture.

It is difficult to say anything negative about Fr. P's work as a student handbook. But current theological themes like freedom as 'fundamental option' or 'core decision' (p. 227), conscience and the Magisterium of the Church (p. 182f.), and the new concept of "social sin" or "sinful structures" (p. 220f.), in the opinion of this reviewer, should have deserved longer treatment. Presumably the question of justice "as a constitutive dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel" in Fr. P's forthcoming book on Special Moral Theology will get the attention its importance and relevance deserve. The author himself does not claim total completeness in his book and admits that he has not consulted all the recent literature on the subject matter set forth in the book. But for future editions of his book, it will be helpful to theology students if Fr. P. could summarize the problems and controversies involved in ongoing studies on method in moral theology, moral proof and models of moral argumentation, various dynamic interpretations of the natural law, faith and morals, freedom and sin, conscience and authority, and conflict moral situations. For the purposes of the book, the author's treatment of the natural law and of the distinction between mortal, grave, and venial sins is adequate and satisfactory. One of the merits of the book are the author's brief but balanced critiques of, to mention a few, various ethical systems (part II, chapter 1), the theological controversy on the natural law (part II, chapter 2), and of old and new controversial questions like probabilism (part II, chapter 3), situation ethics (part II, chapter 2), and the question of moral absolutes in moral theology (part II, chapter 5). The book also contains a very useful select bibliography of Catholic and Protestant manuals and textbooks, biblical ethics, and introductions to modern problems, as well as a subject-author index.

As the author himself acknowledges, his work leans very heavily on the theological reflections of Bernard Häring, and the reader will easily see the influence of Häring throughout the book, especially in the sections on the dialogal (invitation-response) nature of the Christian moral life, Christian personalism, the primacy of charity, and the Christian's sublime vocation to perfection in holiness. Fr. P's treatment of the natural law and the concept of sin relies mainly on the works of Johannes Messner and Piet Schoonenberg.

The author is currently teaching moral theology in the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay City and previously taught in the major seminaries of the Divine Word Society in São Paulo, Brazil, and in St. Augustin, Germany. He did not write his textbook specifically for the Philippine context but as

one that can be used universally in any part of the English-speaking world. Hence, there are no local examples or references in the book. In this age of indigenization or the inculturation of Christianity "within the culture," there is certainly a need for a 'Moral Theology within a Filipino Context' based on an indigenous Christian model. Fr. P is wise in leaving this continuing task to native Filipino theologians. As a matter of fact one of his confreres in the Society of the Divine Word has already pioneered in writing two books – *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* and *Elements of Filipino Theology*. Had Fr. P's book come out earlier, this reviewer would have profited much in popularizing Vatican II moral theology in his *The New Christian Morality and the Filipino*.

Those who will benefit from Fr. P's *Christian Ethics* are eagerly awaiting his forthcoming Special Moral Theology, which will be a more difficult book to do.

Vitaliano R. Gorospe

PHILIPPINE POPULATION: Implications, Program and Policies. By Ana Maria Rotor Peralta and Marlene C. Ligan. Manila: University of the East Press, 1975. 148 pages.

Since the Department of Education and Culture initiated its Population Education Program (PEP) to be implemented in the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels, there has suddenly arisen an urgent need for textbooks on population education written for the Philippine context. In November 1975 the Communication Foundation for Asia applied for funding to the Commission on Population to develop a standard textbook on population education for junior and senior high school as well as for college students. This textbook is still in the process of preparation. The University of the East can be justly proud that two of its faculty members of the College of Arts and Sciences, after a year of hard work have published the first Philippine textbook on population education for college students. The Department of Education and Culture will also be happy to know that this textbook was written in accordance with the four major aims of PEP (what is expected of the students) and its content covers the five major areas chosen by PEP (chapter 1.)

This primer on population education, for that is what it really is, is mainly informational. Although the chapters on Human Sexuality and Methods of Contraception are nothing new to college students, the co-authors have done a service by putting together in one volume information scattered in books, pamphlets, periodicals, reports, interview-write-ups, charts, and tables, to which students have difficult access. The presentation and style of the book is clear, concise, and systematic. The sources on the whole are well documented, except in a few instances primary sources are not properly acknowledged, e.g., Frank Lynch's "The Catholic Church: Philippines' Silent Partner in