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Christian Ethics II

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analysis, *Sa Bagwis ng Sigwa* derives its power and significance from its successful attempt to force the present to reckon with its past and to draw relevant lessons from its history and the men who determined its course.

Soledad S. Reyes

CHRISTIAN ETHICS II. A PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL MORAL THEOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF VATICAN II. By C. Henry Peschke. Alcester and Dublin: C. Goodlife Neale, 1978. xv, 627 pages.

The author, Henry Peschke, S.V.D., ambitioning a contemporary manual in moral theology, presents us with the companion volume to his 1975 text on General Moral. This second volume covers the matter traditionally found in the older manuals under special moral. Following the directive of Vatican II (Priestly Formation) for the renewal of moral theology, the author gives a rich scriptural basis whenever possible. He is honest in facing controversial questions and is not afraid to take a position, giving his theological reasons.

On contraception the author faces the issues squarely and honestly. After situating the problem in our contemporary world he gives the official answer of *Humanae Vitae* and then goes on to give the pastoral interpretations of the Encyclical as proposed by various National Conferences of Bishops around the world. Excluding abortion, which all condemn, and after stressing the fact that Paul VI does not mention mortal sin, a good number of the Bishops offer their people various interpretations such as the choice of the lesser evil in a conflict of duties (either artificial contraception or serious danger to the marriage), and the right to follow one's conscience if it dissents for weighty reasons. Granting the disvalue in contraception, these considerations will enable most couples to find peace of soul when, with the best of good will, they cannot follow the encyclical literally. These pastoral letters of the National Bishops' Conference are judged by the author to be "truly acts of the ordinary teaching office of the Church" (p. 476).

On abortion the author defends the traditional doctrine while honestly admitting the current controversy among Catholic theologians with regard to therapeutic abortion, in the mother-child dilemma when there is no other means to save the life of the mother. Also the scientific reasons for accepting delayed hominization today are presented with the consequent moral judgment that "one could not speak of abortion in the strict sense before the elapse of a period of about 14 days" (p. 355). He draws the logical conclusion that "one could not also simply classify the IUD or those medicines and pills that possibly or certainly hinder the fertilized ovum from nidation as 'abortive' means. . . ." (ibid.). Nevertheless, because the fertilized ovum is alive "contraceptives which prevent a fertilized ovum from nidation cannot

simply be put on a par with the other contraceptives. There is greater reason to avoid them" (p. 356). Peschke cites with approval the use of the "morning after pill" to prevent nidation in cases of rape because the fertilized ovum is not yet a human person during the first two weeks after conception" (*ibid.*).

Treating of sterilization Peschke shows the difficulty and misunderstanding inherent in the traditional distinction between direct and indirect sterilization. He opts for "the lesser evil" principle. Using this approach he justifies sterilization for a woman whose heart is too weak to withstand another pregnancy, and for the woman whose uterus is so weakened by multiple caesarean sections that there is grave danger in another pregnancy (p. 333). For Peschke the decisive question in such cases is not whether it is direct or indirect sterilization but "whether the mutilation by sterilization is a lesser evil than either total continence with its negative consequences for her marriage or the danger to life by another pregnancy" (*ibid.*). Cited in a footnote is the 1976 reaffirmation of the Roman condemnation of every direct sterilization.

The problem of drug abuse is treated in a very balanced way. Peschke avoids extremes, distinguishing carefully between the various drugs and their effects. Believing that marijuana is "rather harmless in nature" (p. 313), he concludes that our present knowledge of marijuana and its effects puts it on the same moral level as the use of tobacco (*ibid.*). But caution is needed because there "remain serious gaps in our knowledge with regard to the mental and public health implications of chronic marijuana use" (*ibid.*). The author pinpoints the root cause of our present almost world-wide drug problem as "a materialistic, pleasure-seeking philosophy and outlook on life which lacks true ideals and is unable to give deeper meaning to man's existence" (p. 315). This problem appears both among slum dwellers and in "golden ghettos" of the world and has become a challenge to the individual, the family and the state to reexamine their basic life orientation. One of his footnotes citing B. Häring, gives much food for thought. It speaks of the mounting incidence of neurosis in a materialistic welfare society, "the collective neurosis of the whole entourage, of a social environment devoid of sense and ideals" (p. 339). Both the successful welfare state, as well as the oppressive totalitarian regime imposing a materialistic ideology, could be nurturing a nation of sick people.

In general the author's treatment of medico-moral problems is up-to-date and quite thorough.

CONCERNING SEXUALITY

The section on human sexuality presents the best of the Christian teaching on the matter as found in Scripture and tradition while acknowledging the unfortunate negative influence of the past flowing from the Stoic, Mani-

chaean, Augustinian traditions. Modern efforts to purify the Catholic teaching are presented by the author in a way that comes through as realistic and balanced. He is very much aware of the modern "sexual revolution," the number of teen-age pregnancies, the suspicion of all restrictive norms, the licentiousness of the age. But his solution is positive: teaching the value of sex and the dignity of the human person. Counsellors and confessors would profit much from considering his comments on the sexual problems and attitudes of modern youth as they progress from childhood through puberty, adolescence, dating, engagement, marriage. Their physical, psychological and moral development must be matched with a progressive understanding of the role of sex in human encounters. The older, mostly negative, more narrow codes of conduct have proven ineffective and have to be deepened and enriched to make them acceptable to the new generation. In this the author follows closely the 1968 work of Robert O'Neil/Michael Donovan: *Sexuality and Moral Responsibility* (Washington/Cleveland: Corpus Books).

When it comes to a moral judgment on homosexuality Peschke follows the more traditional doctrine. Judging it "to a considerable extent a neurotic disorder" (p. 437), he believes that marriage-like liaisons will not solve their problems. Sublimation of energies in a life of service to others is offered while stressing compassion and understanding because the homosexual "has no hope for a possible fulfillment of his sexual inclinations" (ibid.). The possibility of compulsion working on some level in the homosexual must also be considered as a mitigating factor (ibid.).

ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

On the morality of war in the atomic age Peschke holds that all nuclear weapons should be banned and existing stockpiles destroyed by international agreement, but still allows for the defensive use of such weapons against an atomic assault. He would even allow the use of nuclear weapons whose effects are uncontrollable if there are no other nuclear weapons available when the aggressor has used the same uncontrollable type (p. 281).

Writing in an age when most of the people of the world live under oppressive totalitarian regimes, the author reflects the new openness of moralists to more radical ideas. "After the experience with recent tyrannies of nazist and communist nature, theologians of the present are more inclined to grant an oppressed people the right to violent resistance, not excluding the killing of the tyrant himself, than were the theologians of the past" (p. 293). The people must not be left morally helpless when someone seizes power and rules with an iron hand. Naturally, there are many qualifications to be made and the author makes them.

In treating of community obligations, specifically taxation, the author insists on the government's obligation to follow a just fiscal policy avoiding

excessive taxes which discourage economic productivity, and taxes which hurt those with smaller incomes (p. 274-75). When treating of the citizen's obligation to pay taxes the author rejects the penal-law theory and insists on the moral obligation of citizens "to contribute their share to the necessities of the state, whose help they need, by which they profit, and which also assumes certain obligations in the citizen's place and stead" (p. 285). Perhaps a qualification is needed here concerning the government's use or abuse of money raised by taxation, recalling that all citizens pay indirect taxes on countless things through customs and sales taxes, taxes on entertainment, gasoline, tobacco, etc. Not all governments conscientiously use tax money for the common good. Often dictators are more concerned with perpetuating themselves in office, and the military get the lion's share of the budget.

On this moral aspect of income tax in the modern world, for example, the Irish moralist Enda McDonagh insists on the citizens' moral obligation to pay, also rejecting the "merely penal law theory" as no longer acceptable. But he links the obligation of the citizens with the corresponding government obligation to use the money for the common good. "The neglect of social and/or distributive justice in the allocation of tax money or the waste of taxpayers' money on grandiose schemes or as a reward for loyal supporters or to gain votes in an election makes the state guilty of appropriating citizens' money under false pretenses and negates the obligation on the part of the citizen to pay" ("How Just Is Income Tax?" *The Furrow* 29, 2 [February 1978]: 104).

Even when the governments are scrupulously honest in putting taxes to good use, especially in the so-called "Welfare States," citizens today complain about the burden. The author cites another writer on this problem: "Taxation is becoming a battle which must gradually demoralize or immoralize both sides" (p. 286). When governments take more and more from their subjects in taxes, while the cost of living steadily increases, appeals to be honest and patriotic begin to fall on deaf ears, especially when services to the poor and underprivileged are minimal. Governments must constantly prove their fiscal responsibility and honesty before they can expect the people to feel a moral obligation to pay taxes.

In criticism of the author it might be said that many of the burning issues of the day which fill the headlines and touch the lives of millions, especially in the Third World, are either not mentioned in any detail or treated in a very detached manner. For example, the problem of denial of the most basic human rights, the socioeconomic moral problems stemming from the government embracing the multinationals and providing them with a docile, poorly paid labor force deprived of the basic right to strike, the never-ending housing problem, the evil of environmental pollution, the runaway arms race with 1 billion dollars a day said to be spent on military

hardware while the poor get poorer — these and many other of the moral concerns of the contemporary citizen would seem to deserve more emphasis.

The reader has to search carefully to find evidence that the author has been living and teaching in the Third World for many years. In fairness to the author he may have felt that his manual provides the basics, the skeleton to be fleshed out by the professor. Fair enough. But by itself the text seems to stand aloof from the fray. The modern student, obsessed with instant relevance, may not appreciate the wealth of knowledge the author has placed at his disposal.

For example, the pages which the author devoted to usury give no clue to the magnitude of the problem locally. The few words on faith healers do not even hint that the author is teaching in a country which draws the sick and afflicted from all over the world to its faith healers. The element of coercion in a government family planning program is not mentioned even though it played no small part in the rejection of the government in India and is latent in the local practice of assigning quotas to government doctors in the program.

The pages spent on the problem of lying with explanations of the subtleties of false speech and mental reservation seem, today, a luxury the modern manual cannot afford. A few sentences with reference to traditional sources would seem to suffice. The same could be said for the treatment of Sunday rest and prohibited works which might appear meaningless to the vast majority of the poor of the Third World.

But the author has provided the readable two-volume modern manual that he ambited as “a book of reference . . . a textbook to which the student can be referred . . . in addition to their (professors’) own notes and outlines of moral theology.”

The many apt excerpts from the documents of Vatican II enrich the manual while its detailed index adds to its usefulness.

G. W. Healy, S.J.

WORD, MEMORY, WITNESS: THE 1977 BISHOP'S SYNOD ON CATECHESIS. Edited by Pedro S. de Achutegui and Joseph L. Roche. Loyola Papers 11. Manila: Loyola Papers Board of Editors, 1978. 177 pages.

More or less a year has passed since the Bishops' Synod on “Catechesis in Our Time” was held in Rome. Much has been written in appreciation and evaluation of the Synod, especially in periodicals. In the book to be reviewed here, valuable material on the Synod is made available. The volume can serve as a source book for the researcher, but above all as a practical guide for those responsible for catechesis.