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Modern Moral Problems: Contemporary Moral Theology

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MODERN MORAL PROBLEMS

CONTEMPORARY MORAL THEOLOGY. Vol. I: Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology. By John C. Ford, S.J. and Gerald Kelly, S.J. Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1958. 368 p. \$4.50.

This volume is the beginning of a projected series on contemporary moral problems. The authors are two outstanding American moralists whose collaboration has resulted here in a work with a value that can hardly be exaggerated both for the tyro and the expert in the field. Together with the clarity and readability that have always distinguished their writings, we find manifested also the fine balanced judgments and common sense that have been their hallmark in treating of the most knotty and vexing questions.

Moral theology is passing through an agonizing reappraisal, a period of transition; it is exposed to attacks from within and without, from friend and foe. Some have argued dispassionately and objectively for changes which they claim are long overdue, for a return to a moral theology based on virtue free from juridical preoccupations; others have resorted to an "implacable demolition by a battering ram". As we would expect, the authors have taken the high middle road where virtue lies. They point out the good as well as the bad in the various positions taken in the controversy. The evils of excessive casuistry, of a social individualism, of the merely ethical and/or juridical approach in contemporary moral theology, are examined and discussed, in addition to the charge of "moral minimalism", of being manuals of spiritual pathology, "peccatometers", etc.

The need for a Christ-centered morality, for the primacy of virtue and especially of charity, for the proper treatment of the counsels and Christian perfection, are all weighed in a fine balance with such objections as the danger of confusing asceticism and moral theology, of trying "to study everything in connection with everything". No clearcut solution has yet been found, and a solution is sought, temporarily at least, in the pedagogical skill of the professor of moral theology. It will be his job to integrate his teaching with the other parts of the theology course, thus repairing the damage done by fragmentation and offering by his positive approach the best antidote to minimalism and legalism. Especially valuable for spiritual directors is the treatment of obligation and counsel in chapter 6 with its emphasis on the dangers in the modern trends to decry a morality of duty, of law and of obligation. The false antagonism between law and love is exposed in the light of traditional fundamental Christian teaching.

The introductory chapters treat of the role of the Church in its relation to the moral law, together with a practical analysis of the doctrinal value and interpretation of papal teaching. There is also a study of the scope of episcopal teaching, a question not usually discussed in the manuals. Situation ethics is analyzed in two chapters after some of its errors had been detected in various criticisms of contemporary moral theology. The immanent relativism of this "new morality" is exposed and its rejection of objective and universal law when there is question of special circumstances. In such cases the proponents of the new ethic would leave to the sincere conscience the decision to be made, with the Christian having the added advantage of a personal intuition by which, Protestant-wise, he knows the will of God in this concrete, existential, unique situation. His decision, no matter how much it differs from traditional morality as taught by the Church, is, they affirm, morally correct and subject to review by no higher authority on earth. This false sense of freedom stemming from a wrong concept of love and a misunderstanding of the father-child relationship as applied to creatures is shown to be as pernicious as an excessive formalism and legalistic approach to morality.

The modern moral problems of teen-age company keeping and dancing are faced squarely and soberly in the chapter dealing with occasions of sin. In this matter of judging occasions of sins, the authors are almost iconoclastic in showing the need of understanding classical moralists of another day in the light of their concrete contemporary situations. Modern authoritative statements are presented and divergence of opinions among the present-day writers is respected.

For the chapters dealing with modern moral problems in depth psychology and psychiatry and with imputability in the light of unconscious motivation, and for their contribution towards a rapprochement between psychiatrists and priests, all readers will be especially grateful. The difficulty of treading through such fields today without an expert guide is matched only by the danger of falling into error. Fr. Ford's special competence in treating of imputability and alcoholism bears fruit in chapter 13.

The bibliography and index add to the general utility of this "superb example of Catholic scholarship", as it has been called. The evaluation of various authors given from time to time in the course of the text or in the footnotes will be welcomed by all.

For the busy priest and confessor who feels that he is falling behind in his reading, for the seminarian still poring over the texts, for professors of theology, and for spiritual directors who would wish to have two experts show them around in the scholar's world of contemporary moral theology, this volume cannot be too highly recom-

mended. We look forward to future volumes of the series characterized by an equally balanced and scholarly treatment of the other moral questions which are so crucial in our atomic age.

GERALD W. HEALY

WESTERN SHIPS IN EASTERN WATERS

DUTCH-ASIATIC TRADE, 1620-1740. By Kristoff Glamann. Niels Haislund, trans. Copenhagen: Danish Science Press; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958. xi, 334 p.

THE MANILA GALLEON. By William Lytle Schurz. New York: E. P. Dutton Paperback, 1959. 453 p. \$1.75.

Dutch-Asiatic Trade is an outstanding piece of scholarship which painstakingly analyzes the commercial activity of the Dutch East India Company from 1620 to 1740. Professor Glamann, after an introduction to the organization of the "Nederland Factory" and a rather detailed chapter on the bullion used in the business transactions of the Company, discusses the principal commodities of the trade: pepper, spices, silk, piece-goods, sugar, copper, coffee and tea. Each article is examined for its importance in the trade, fluctuations of its price, its demand and methods of supply, as well as the quantity purchased over the years, and finally, the rapidity or lag in its disposal in Europe. The work is so thoroughly done that it is probably definitive.

We are used to thinking, as Professor Glamann says, that the Dutch monopoly was simply an ever-green pagoda-tree whose golden fruits the Heeren XVII (company directors) shook into their collective turban at suitable intervals. In reality change and competition rather than constancy characterized the Dutch Company. Spices were soon superseded by textiles and tea as the main commodities. English and French encroachment was constantly to be met even in such distant places as coffee-growing Yemen. Contraband returns by Dutch sailors grew to sizable proportions. New areas in the Far East were constantly being sought for and opened as bases for Dutch purchasing. All of which "are aspects of the relations of the Dutch to Asiatic peoples."

A number of valuable appendices are added: quantity lists of pepper, amounts of silver and gold shipped from Amsterdam, and tea and coffee purchases, to mention a few.

Professor Glamann has put English-speaking historians in his debt by allowing the translation of his monograph, and although there are