

Curran, Charles E., and Richard J. McCormick, S.J., eds. *John Paul II and Moral Theology: Readings in Moral Theology No. 10*. Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1998. 378 pp.

In the wake of *Veritatis splendor*, proportionalism has become a fading and sputtering star, close to extinction. This decline is quite apparent in the present volume, number 10 in the series *Readings in Moral Theology*, edited by Charles Curran and the late Richard McCormick. The editors' professed aim is to contribute to "the purification and development of John Paul II's "moral writings [sic]." The editors promise that this somewhat presumptuous project will include "contrasting, even opposing views." Unfortunately, however, this is largely an in-house, inbred collection of pieces by liberal Catholic American academics unhappy with the teachings of John Paul II. Hence the reader must plow through the usual discussion of John Paul's misunderstanding of proportionalism, use of patriarchal language, and so on. There is nothing new here, nothing not heard many times before.

"Purification and development"? "Contrasting, even opposing views"? Well, sometimes. Divided into three parts, the volume begins with a section entitled "Ethical Theory." The balance is decidedly lopsided. There are seven essays from the revisionists—McCormick on "Some Early Reactions to *Veritatis splendor*," Häring on "A Distrust that Wounds," Fuchs on "Good Acts and Good Persons," Gaffney on "The Pope on Proportionalism," Lisa Sowle Cahill on "Accent on the Masculine," Leslie Griffin on "*Evangelium vitae*: The Law of Abortion," and Charles Curran on "*Evangelium*

vitae and Its Broader Context." But there are only three from opposing positions: Grisez ("Revelation vs. Dissent"), Janet Smith ("Natural Law and Personalism in *Veritatis splendor*"), and Mark Ouellet ("The Mystery of Easter and the Culture of Death"). More careful editing and attention to balance would have made this section better. Four of the pieces are snippets from *The Tablet*, hardly the heavy artillery of serious, considered engagement. One might have shortened the McCormick piece, eliminated some of the Häring remarks, specifically what is already quoted in McCormick, dropped the obfuscations of Fuchs, and kept Grisez, Gaffney, and Smith, whose classy essay rises above legalistic quibbling and brings a refreshing order, clarity, and illumination to the collection. Absent are two significant articles from *The Thomist* by Alasdair MacIntyre ("How Can We Learn What *Veritatis splendor* Has to Teach?" 1994) and Servais Pinckaers ("The Use of Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology: The Catechism and *Veritatis Splendor*," 1995). Thus the "reactions" of the two preeminent virtue ethicists are simply ignored. So also with important pieces by Russell Hittinger ("Law and Liberty in *Veritatis Splendor*" in *The Splendor of Truth and Health Care*, Pope John Center, 1995) and Martin Rhonheimer (" 'Intrinsically Evil Acts' and the Moral Viewpoint: Clarifying a Central Teaching of *Veritatis Splendor*," *Thomist* 1995).

The second section, entitled "Sexuality, Gender, Marriage and Family," contains six essays and is more balanced. Bishop Richard Grecco reviews the three phases (prehistorical, historical, and eschatological) of John Paul's theology of the body; Ronald

Modras tries to come to grips with concupiscence, self-control, and homosexuality; Richard Hogan and John LeVair elaborate beautifully on the notion of love as a communion of persons in "The Family and Sexuality." Michael Place reconsiders the theology of *Familiaris consortio*; Pamela Brubaker deals with economic justice for women; and Leonie Caldecott explains the Pope's "New Feminism."

The final section deals with "Social Teaching." Gregory Baum provides an ethical critique of capitalism, Richard DeGeorge writes on the social encyclicals, Maria Riley gives us a feminist perspective, Donal Dorr traces the themes of "Concern and Consolidation" through the period 1981-92. Finally, George Weigel, J. Bryan Hehir, Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus, David Schindler, and David Hollenbach discuss *Centesimus annus*.

The basic problem with the collection, primarily in the first section, is that its concerns are largely with the political consequences of moral theology, with whether this or that position will be accepted within a democratic culture, whereas the papal concern is more directly concerned with what is the good for human beings. Thus there is a certain defensive tone with the proportionalists, a certain tendentiousness in favor of a democratic way of life consonant with their entrenched position. Most of the liberal participants assume that a democratic consensus among all groups is possible and desirable on moral issues. They are reluctant to brand anyone as wrong, excepting of course the pope. They are timid with respect to the culture, bold in their disagreement with papal authority. A second major deficiency is that, as MacIntyre and Pinckaers have pointed out, the era of "quandary ethics" (ethics as concerned with problems, issues, and dilemmas arising from a concentration on rules and laws) has passed, and the virtue ethics of Aristotle and Aquinas is once again in favor. Many of the essayists seem unaware of this. Thus John Paul II's classic *Love and Responsibility*, which explores the emotional dimensions of love, is

rarely cited, and much attention is given to *Veritatis splendor*, *Evangelium vitae*, and the social encyclicals. For all their claims that nothing new is coming out of Rome, the more liberal essayists seem blind to new developments, largely because they are fixated on past issues.

In any case, a number of incredible blunders mar the collection. McCormick thinks that, pace *Lumen gentium* (ch. 3), "Vatican II adopted a concentric model" of the Church. Cahill takes an ideological approach to feminist issues, which leads her into a contradiction (the Pope "condemns rape and prostitution" but "does not specifically condemn sexual violence as a crime against women"). Leslie Griffin thinks that Mario Cuomo's political stance on abortion possibly "has been vindicated by the current pontiff." Gaffney quotes the compelling paragraph in *Veritatis splendor* listing intrinsically evil acts and then complains that the list is not helpful unless the Pope tells us which ones are intrinsically evil. Curran himself provides a rich number of inconsistencies and contradictions. After pointing out that "the danger of the Roman Catholic tradition has been its failure at times to criticize the surrounding culture," he trips up in the very next paragraph and objects that the Pope's "oppositional approach" does not appreciate that "many proponents of some abortions would not see themselves as part of the culture of death." Following this line of argumentation, of course, the U.S. should not have opposed Hitler in World War II because Hitler and many Germans did not see themselves as doing anything wrong. Both Curran and Place simplify Lonergan's distinction between deductive classicism and inductive "historicism," which Lonergan qualifies as "very ambiguous" and as including decline as well as progress. Any question in the *Summa*, of course, shows Aquinas considering a significant range of "historical" opinions from Aristotle, Seneca, Cicero, and Augustine before he undertakes any "deduction." Ronald Modras thinks self-control impedes sexual spontaneity. He claims that, like the Stoics and schoolmen,

John Paul views the emotions as “dangerous if not evil,” a gross misclassification and misinterpretation. And so it goes. Citations are virtually always of other proportionalists and members of the clique. Examples relentlessly concentrate on abortion or contraception.

Basically the first two sections come down, then, to some older dissenters following the Enlightenment tradition of “critical” questioning, of adversarial “purification and development” of Catholic tradition. The sexual agenda fueling their anxiety is obvious. The overwhelming fear seems to be that there will be “questions” (this horrifying possibility apparently constitutes an argument). So the constant refrain is that John Paul II does not capture every nuance, attain absolute certitude, incorporate every divergent opinion, explain every phrase, admit error in Church teaching, and declare something new. This sets an impossible standard, against which the participants themselves fail. That is, there is nothing new here, many theologians will disagree, the proportionalists miss many of the nuances of the Pope’s teaching, etc., etc. In short, much of this chatter, carping at papal reasoning, will at first annoy and then bore normal readers, particularly the young and intelligent.

Struggling to keep up with contemporary thought, Max Beerbohm once bemoaned his “inability to keep pace with the leaders of thought as they pass into oblivion.” In this case the struggle to keep up seems unnecessary, since the “leaders of thought” have moved on. McCormick and Häring are dead, and Baum and Curran are in their elder years. This volume is largely a very expensive monument to their dead ideas.

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Garrett, Laurie. *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health.* New York: Hyperion, 2000. 754 + xiv pp.

Laurie Garrett’s second book, *Betrayal of Trust*, is a mammoth, but clearly written, review of what happens when societies deny sufficient resources to public-health efforts. Her works are thorough and historically sound, smoothly translating detailed scientific information for the general public.

Garrett’s book consists of five major chapters, an epilogue, 154 pages of notes and sources, and a detailed index. Each chapter can be read independently, although the common theme is clear: people suffer and die when their government fails to provide or promote sanitation, shelter, laboratory, and other resources. Among the myriad facts she presents, I detected one frank error (contrary to p. 518, cholera vaccine cannot cause cholera) and several instances where I thought absolute statements deserved to be tempered. Nonetheless, her writing is powerful, enlightening, and persuasive.

The first two chapters give an account of the 1994 pneumonic plague epidemic in India and of the 1995 Ebola virus outbreak in Zaire. Next is a review of the astounding failures of health care during socialist rule in the Soviet Union, unmasked and accelerated in the 1990s by the breakup behind the Iron Curtain. The longest chapter confronts America’s own policies to protect and preserve health, strikingly titled “Preferring Anarchy and Class Disparity.” Chapter five addresses inadequacies in our ability to defend against biological terrorism.

The descriptions of impoverished India and Zaire illustrate contemporary health problems in many developing countries. These chapters also recall conditions in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. In India’s case, complacency led to cutbacks in funding that permitted plague to resurge after being controlled for thirty years. That message transcends borders and time: the public-health infrastructure takes a long time to build, but can crumble in far less time.