

PREFACE

This book tells the story of Catholic moral theology in the United States. Those interested in the discipline of moral theology will find here the first monograph telling the story that began in the middle of the nineteenth century in this country. The title clearly indicates what the book attempts to do, but three aspects of the title need further explanation.

First, what is moral theology? Moral theology is the name the Roman Catholic tradition gives to the theological discipline that deals with Christian life and action. Protestants often call the same discipline by the name of Christian ethics. In one sense all theology is one, but to facilitate the study of the various aspects of theology, separate disciplines have come into existence. The various theological disciplines today include systematic theology (in the past often called dogmatic theology), which deals with Christian faith, moral theology, spiritual theology, pastoral theology, liturgical theology, historical theology, and biblical theology. Divisions are necessary for the study of theology, but they always remain somewhat artificial. The boundaries of moral theology are quite porous because Christian life and action are clearly connected with faith as well as with spiritual, pastoral, historical, liturgical, and biblical theologies. Thus, at times, it is difficult to discern what belongs to moral theology and what does not. This book follows the practical criterion of determining the field of moral theology on the basis of how people who call themselves moral theologians have dealt with these issues.

Within moral theology different divisions exist to facilitate the study of the subject matter of the discipline itself. This volume follows the often-used divisions of fundamental moral theology, sexual, bioethical, and social moral theology. Fundamental moral theology considers those aspects of the discipline such as the person as moral agent and subject, virtues, principles, conscience, and human actions in general that come into play in all the different areas and issues of human moral activity. The division among sexual, bioethical, and social moral theology derives from the areas and subjects considered. These divisions are certainly helpful, but there is the danger that some aspects of personal morality tend to be overlooked by this tripartite division.

Second, what is meant by *Catholic* moral theology? This book considers those theologians who write from the Catholic moral tradition. The ecumenical character of Catholic moral theology in the United States in the last half century, however, tends to blur somewhat the boundaries of Catholic moral theology. Catholic

moral theology, especially after Vatican II, has learned much from ecumenical dialogue especially with Protestant thought. The subsequent pages occasionally recognize the influence and importance of the ecumenical dialogue, but the focus is on Catholic moral theology and not on the broader discipline of Christian ethics understood as involving all those who write from the broader Christian tradition. In the present ecumenical climate, Catholic moral theologians will sometimes write from the general Christian perspective and address a broad Christian audience rather than from a specifically Catholic perspective and for a specifically Catholic audience. Parameters of Catholic moral theology were much more clear and sharp in the pre-ecumenical era before Vatican II.

Third, the United States part of the title also raises some boundary issues. The Catholic Church is universal and the universal Church strongly influences what occurs in any individual country. In the world of theology in general and moral theology in particular, Europe was the primary home of Catholic theology well into the post-Vatican II era. Books by European authors frequently had English translations and exerted a great influence in the United States. In addition, English-speaking theologians, especially from England, Ireland, Canada, and Australia, have been in dialogue with moral theologians in the United States. This book recognizes the existence of these contributions, but because of space and the need for strict limits, the focus remains on moral theologians from the United States.

I have written in some detail about aspects of the history of Catholic moral theology in the United States, especially with regard to the nineteenth century, and with regard to Catholic social ethics in the twentieth century. In this book I will depend on these earlier writings. I have always been interested in the history of Catholic moral theology, and in the back of my mind I had the intention at some time to write a complete history of Catholic moral theology in the United States. My intention has come to fruition in the present volume.

Catholic theology lately is very conscious of social location and the effect that has on one's theology. My social location has certainly influenced how I have approached this history. I received doctorates in moral theology in Rome in 1961 and began teaching moral theology even before the start of Vatican II. As a result I have personal familiarity with much that has occurred in Catholic moral theology in the United States, including the pre-Vatican II period.

I write this history as a participant observer and do not claim to be neutral. The challenge is to strive to be objective in reporting and assessing what has occurred in moral theology but at the same time to explain my own approaches and positions. This role of a participant-observer is not an easy one. In this context I use the third person to refer to my past writings and actions and the first person to refer to the judgments and positions I take as the author of this history. The reader

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will have to determine for oneself how well I have dealt with the tensions involved in such a role.

As a participant in the story of Catholic moral theology in the United States, I have been privileged to be part of an ongoing community of theologians committed both to the scholarly discipline of moral theology and to the Church. I have learned from all the moral theologians mentioned in this text, and I have personally known all the leading figures in Catholic moral theology since the 1950s. To be a part of this ongoing tradition of ideas and community of people has been a marvelous experience for me, and I am truly grateful.

Finally, I want to recognize significant debts and publicly express my gratitude. Southern Methodist University has provided me a congenial and challenging academic environment and many good colleagues. I am privileged to hold the Elizabeth Scurlock University Chair of Human Values, generously endowed by Jack S. and Laura Lee Blanton in honor of her mother. Laura Lee Blanton passed away a few years ago, but her memory lives on at SMU thanks to the many benefactions of the Blanton family. The Birdwell Library and its accomplished and friendly librarians continue to facilitate my research. Richard Brown, the director of the Georgetown University Press, and James F. Keenan, the editor of the *Moral Traditions* series, together with the very efficient staff of the press, have been most helpful and easy to work with. Richard Brown, Richard Gula, Kenneth Himes, and James Keenan read the manuscript and made very helpful comments. My most immediate cooperater is my associate, Carol Swartz, who in addition to preparing this manuscript for publication, assists me in many ways with her efficient, cheerful, and friendly help.