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# Review: 'Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition'

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*“By explaining what the Church teaches and why, we hope to offer some practical suggestions for how people can respond to moral challenges and live out their call to be Christian disciples in the world today.”*

The question, then, is the extent to which the authors are effective in reaching their goals. They divide their text into two parts; Foundations and Considering Ethics in Today’s World. In their first part Zalot and Guevin attempt to lay out the foundations of Catholic morality; in the second, they address specific issues like business ethics, global economics, the death penalty, war, bioethics, and sexual ethics.

I believe the text has much to recommend it. It does a credible job of presenting the Church’s moral teachings. Students would definitely have a solid idea of what the Church was teaching regarding the foundations and the particular topics addressed in the text. At the same time, the use of case studies and good social research helps students understand that moral theology is *science* that goes far beyond the ten commandments. The authors work hard to present the material in a way that is clear and able to be grasped while at the same time avoiding a presentation that is simplistic or catechetical. The authors do a credible job of presenting the text as an introduction to moral *theology*, in other words, helping students experience Catholic theology as *fides querens intellectum*. Their analysis of contemporary issues in light of Catholic moral teaching is respectful, interesting and contemporary. Students are helped to know and understand Catholic moral theology; yet, the text does not shy away from questions that the readers may have encountered regarding Church teaching on some particular subjects like war, homosexuality, and birth control.

The “review questions” at the end of each chapter are helpful in directing the readers to the essential elements covered there. The citations provide a good starting point for further research on the topics presented. Ultimately, the presentation of Catholic moral methodology and content in a single volume, especially a volume that is designed to be *theological*, comprehensive and accessible to undergraduate students, is an almost impossible task. This text does a good job but has chosen not to present much of the historical development of moral methodology; nor does it provide any depth regarding the natural law or virtue ethics that underlie so much of Catholic moral theology. Nevertheless, the text could prove valuable as both a primary or supplementary text for a course, and as a good acquisition for a school’s library. The book does a good job overall of presenting Catholic teaching in a way that is engaging, contemporary and personally challenging.

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RICHARD BENSON, CM

*Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition*. Edited by Kieran Scott and Harold Daly Horell. Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward/Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. viii + 233 pages. \$27.95 (paper).

In the first chapter of *Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition*, Kieran Scott sets the tone for this edited volume on sexuality. He wishes to break the

silence on the topic and “repair the rift and bridge the gap between official teaching and the lived reality of Roman Catholics.”

The goal of the book, then, is to forge a conversation “between the realm of scholarship and the life of the church, and between the church’s teaching office(s) and ‘the sense of the faithful’.” (The book is based on a conference held at Fordham University in 2004 which had similar aims.) Through short essays written in an accessible style, various prominent voices address these questions. For example, Christine Gudorf forthrightly suggests a concrete list of current teachings that need to be abandoned in relation to peoples’ lived experiences (i.e., the “limitation of all sexual activity to marriage”). Sidney Callahan argues that there are little-recognized strands in “the tradition” that encourage views of sexuality for pleasure by referencing John Paul II in opposition to Augustine on this point.

Some essays are directed toward specific issues related to sexuality, such as Barbara Jean Daly Horell’s essay on her investigation of lay Catholic responses to the United States bishops’ statement on homosexuality. Other essays are reprints which are useful to have together in one book. For instance, Luke Timothy Johnson’s essay “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body’” is a reprint of an article that appeared in *Commonweal*, while an excerpt of Evelyn and James Whitehead’s discussion of celibacy appears from their book *Wisdom of the Body: Making Sense of Our Sexuality*.

The editors suggest that the book’s purpose is for conversation, but I find that the book is not sufficiently oriented toward conversation for that to be true. The “conversation” part consists in short response essays to four of the commentaries in the book, in which people generally agree with each other. In addition to these, Jennifer Babak’s essay “Engaging the Struggle: John Paul II on Personhood and Sexuality” is set up to be in conversation with Luke Timothy Johnson, though neither author references the other. The fact that other essays are not involved in any kind of conversation makes the book somewhat lopsided.

If, indeed, the purpose of the book is for conversation, I think it would be more interesting and perhaps constructive to see real engagement between these authors and “the teaching office,” and to acknowledge the “sense of the faithful” who *do* attempt to live the “reality” of following Church teaching. I would like to see a paper and response between Christine Gudorf and Angelo Cardinal Scola, for example. Otherwise, the two papers replicate the same dispute that has gone on for decades, in which each side preaches to its own choir. I would not expect agreement among the pairs of contributors, of course, but there could finally be some exciting *conversation*, which I do think is a very admirable and important goal of the editors.

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JANA M. BENNETT

*Against the Grain: Christianity and Democracy, War and Peace.* By George Weigel. New York: Crossroad, 2008. 339 pages. \$24.95.

Since his 1987 *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace*, this prolific writer,