
The name of John Mahoney at the head of his many articles appearing in such journals as The Month, Heythrop Journal, The Tablet and The Way never disappoints one’s anticipation of a most satisfying comment in the field of moral theology, invariably solidly grounded and extremely well written. In this most recent book, a compilation of the prestigious Martin D’Arcy Memorial Lectures of 1981-82, delivered in Campion Hall, Oxford University, Mahoney has made a most extraordinary contribution not only to the history of moral theology, but to its contemporary understanding and development as well. His writing is a most remarkable blend of precise scholarship and a deep personal synthesis, presented in a manner that is eminently clear and readable, enriched with well chosen literary references and wit, as well.

Fr. Bernard Härting, commenting on his own monumental compendia of Moral Theology, observed that his second contribution, Free and Faithful in Christ, was written not "to disown my earlier effort," The Law of Christ, but rather because "in this quarter of a century as much has happened as in a given century of the past, and perhaps even more." There have been many excellent accounts of the startling transition which marks that period from the post-Tridentine manualist tradition in moral theology to the post-Vatican II contemporary scene. Härting’s books can be taken as representative of the latter, and are an indispensable source for understanding today’s methodology and content in moral theology. Mahoney’s book does much more: it situates the total process of development of moral method and content
not only in our own contemporary period, but in the total span of the cen-
turies from the Patristic Period to John Paul II.

Mahoney's method of presentation is itself a stroke of genius, risky per-
haps as an undertaking, but extremely successful in its outcome. Rather than
proceeding in the usual historical manner, "on a broad chronological front
from New Testament times to the present," he has opted for a thematic
approach. In this he has selected "the eight most significant aspects in the
history of moral theology," providing for each a historical description, fol-
lowed by reflection and comment on each. His choices, some of them some-
what surprising at first glance, are most felicitous. The execution of his intent
and achievement of his goal are masterful.

His first chapter, one of the surprises, at least as a starter for the whole
work, is "The Influence of Auricular Confession." The development clearly
justifies the choice, for he brings out "the central influence of confession
in the long making of moral theology." The presentation is so rich that it
would be futile and frustrating to attempt further summary of the content.

The remaining seven chapters representing the "significant aspects in the
making of moral theology," are "The Legacy of Augustine," "Nature and
Supernature," "Teaching with Authority," "Subjectivity," "The Language
of Law," "The Impact of Humanae Vitae," and finally, "A Pattern of Renew-
al?" I would be hard-pressed to choose which of these I would most highly
recommend, or which best fulfills its purpose. The development of each is so
well integrated and the themes so closely interrelated that they must be read
as constitutive parts of a very stimulating and satisfying whole. However,
one's particular interest which leads to reading any one of these chapters by
itself will also be well rewarded. I almost said "worth the effort," but the
clarity and style require very little "effort."

The chapter on Humanae Vitae is not intended as a rehash of the "vexed
question of contraception," but rather provides a setting "to identify and
reflect upon what we have termed 'the impact of Humanae Vitae' upon the
Church and upon twentieth-century moral theology in the reactions it occa-
sioned as the first major testing of the Church and of moral theology after
the Second Vatican Council." Mahoney's reflections are most perceptive,
indeed, and raise many questions for acquiring a proper understanding of
theological problems that go far beyond the strict confines of "morality." To
mention just a few, he deals in this context with notions of magisterium,
collegiality, "reasoning, prophecy and intuition," as well as the place of the
Spirit in the Church, in a very thought provoking way. This, I might add,
without ever showing any disloyalty to "authority" or "tradition" in the
Church, but giving to these terms some fresh new insights.

The book is very well documented, even to the point of providing in the footnotes the original Latin texts for the original sources which have been used. At first this may seem somewhat excessive, but in fact it provides ready access to these sources for anyone who may care to verify Mahoney’s own translations or interpretations, or to pursue further research on one’s own. The book is well indexed, and also provides a bibliography, which is deliberately limited in scope, referring mainly “to recent works and secondary sources which are referred to in the course of this study,” with no intention of providing “an encyclopaedic bibliography on moral theology.”

For this reviewer, the reading of this book has been a most enjoyable and highly rewarding experience. In a field that has been marked in recent years by many outstanding contributions of the highest quality and of major import, it would not be at all surprising if John Mahoney’s *The Making of Moral Theology* finds its rightful place as something of a watershed, not only for its immediate impact on moral theology as such, but on the more significant level of the on-going attempts to reintegrate moral theology with its systematic and dogmatic foundations, as these are derived from the authentic Roman Catholic Tradition. This book is most highly recommended not only for all teachers and students of Christian morality, but for anyone at all interested in theology. The very high price of the original Oxford hardbound edition was rather dismaying, especially for a Third World wallet. Therefore its publication as a Clarendon Paperback is good news indeed, putting it much more easily within the reach of countless people who will certainly want to read it.

*Calvin H. Poulin, S.J.*


This is an important book. It is well-written. The author’s mastery of technical English is matched by his impressive concern to lay the groundwork for mastering technical Tagalog, both for himself and for his students of moral theology. Equally impressive is his competence in the use of analytical tools for the task he has set for himself.

He goes about the task through five densely-packed chapters. The first chapter, entitled “In Search for the Filipino ‘Within’,“ is basically a descrip-