

graduate seminars of spirituality and Catholic social teaching. It offers opportunities for personal spiritual introspection and discernment, especially when read with other theological and philosophical articulations of the greater integration of faith and free time in Christian living.

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The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology. By Matthew Levering. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021. viii + 360 pages. \$45.00.

Matthew Levering's *The Abuse of Conscience* joins the body of work in moral theology that examines, explores, and delineates intellectual strands, features, and thinkers in twentieth-century moral theology. Levering's stated aims are "to introduce the main paths taken by Catholic moral theology in the twentieth century and to expose the deficiencies of the dominant academic versions of conscience-centered Catholic moral theology" (1). He specifically traces two intellectual trajectories within moral theology. The first surveys how pre-conciliar "conscience centered morality of the manuals based upon law" transitions into "conscience centered morality in an existentialist, freedom focused framework." The second considers how pre-conciliar attempts to move away from manuals to a more scriptural, virtue framing of moral theology continues in some post-conciliar Thomistic moral theology. Levering provides a balanced assessment of most thinkers, even as his preference for the second trajectory is clearly stated. He writes, "The path forward today consists in integrating the best biblical and Thomistic insight with an existentialist emphasis on a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Conscience will continue to have a significant role, but now within the virtue of prudence" (16).

Levering's diagnosis of the problem, retrieval of an alternative path, and a proposed way forward unfolds over four chapters examining conscience in relation to 1) the Bible, 2) the moral manuals, 3) the Thomists, and 4) German thought. After providing a thematic overview in each chapter, Levering spends time explicating the work of several representative thinkers. The ecumenical group of philosophers and theologians include, for example, George Tyrrell, Philippe Delhaye, Michael Cronin, Michel Labourdette, OP; Servais Pinckaers, OP; Heidegger, Bonhoeffer, Rahner, and Ratzinger.

Levering helpfully traces how early twentieth century attention to scripture was a pivot from the moral minimalism often attributed to the manuals. Chapter three picks up the shift away from the moral manuals. Levering evaluates the work of several Thomists chosen for their attention to conscience in the context of Aquinas's full ethics and

the virtues, specifically prudence. He concludes that Thomists Labourdette (1950s) and Pinckaers (post-Vatican II) “provide a rich understanding of conscience within prudence and the Christian moral life as a whole” (124).

Levering’s choice of manualists in chapter two was refreshing. Even as Levering finds much to appreciate in the manualists, he thinks the stress they placed on conscience and law ultimately “distort the shape of Christian ethics.” Whereby, a “better path consists in apprehending the Decalogue, and the moral precepts taught in the New Testament within a virtue-centered framework, constituted by communion with Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Conscience has its proper role within this framework” (82–83). Picking up the conscience-centered theme in chapter four, Levering traces how German philosophical and theological thought influenced approaches to conscience, resulting in recasting conscience’s centrality in an existential, transcendental key.

Levering concludes his study with a brief look at ethicists James Keenan, SJ, and Reinhard Hütter. Each reader will need to determine if the Fuchs-Rahner-Keenan vision of conscience is problematic and the Labourdette-Pinckaers-Hütter approach the solution. This reviewer sees value in elements of both approaches, with neither being sufficient in its entirety or on its own.

Every author makes choices, and Levering’s review and sketching of twentieth century moral theology is masterful. Yet Levering’s lack of sustained engagement with writings by women moral theologians (e.g., Anne E. Patrick, Linda Hogan) is notable. All 26 scholars plus the two in the conclusion are men. Likewise, the book’s structure meant that the work of post-Vatican II biblical ethicists William Spohn and Lucas Chan, SJ, or Dominican biblical scholar Barbara Reid were not evaluated. This reviewer would look forward to a future work by Levering engaging these and other scholars.

The ninety-two pages of footnotes (almost a third of the book) provide additional insights and extensive commentary about each chapter or scholar, along with Levering’s own analysis and positions. The thirty-six-page bibliography is a wonderful gift for researchers. All told, this book adds value to any theological library. It is most suited for PhD students, researchers, faculty, and libraries. Faculty could use it for lecture preparation regarding different intellectual strands and thinkers within twentieth century moral theology.

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