

Charles E. Curran. *Tradition and Church Reform: Perspectives on Catholic Moral Teaching*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016. 294 pp. \$32.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9781626981713.

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This new volume from the dean of U.S. Catholic moral theology collects 15 scholarly essays published in various places from 1998 to 2015. An introduction summarizing the chapters, a conclusion reflecting on Pope Francis's reforms, and cross-references between its chapters help the book cohere. It is divided into sections on social perspectives, bioethical and sexual perspectives, and reform. The chapters range from broad historical surveys, to deep dives on particular authors or topics, to critical or constructive works, yet two themes radiate throughout: *Method matters* and *Tradition can change*.

Both themes are evident in several chapters showing the magisterial command of history readers expect from Curran, all of which would make excellent reading in an introductory course on moral theology. In particular, chapters entitled "Overview of the Development of the Catholic Social and Political Tradition," "Human Rights in the Christian Tradition," and "The Catholic Moral Tradition in Bioethics" provide sweeping overviews of their respective topics in clear language, with key terms defined for neophytes. These chapters demonstrate the stake of historical debates in moral theology for their contemporaries and for Christians today. Insights for specialists are here as well: for example, Curran suggests that Catholics developed a bioethics well before other Christians because of their tradition's emphasis on the role of works in salvation.

In all his work, Curran insists and clearly shows readers that tradition can change. His essay on "The Need for Reform of the Sacrament of Reconciliation" packs in a compelling history of the sacrament of penance, reflections on its contemporary decline, and suggestions for its retrieval. A brief essay on *Humanae Vitae* and a more comprehensive one on Catholic social teaching in the United States explore the reception of Vatican moral teaching by local bishops and the Catholic faithful.

Curran shows us that method matters in essays looking closely at the works of George Higgins, J. Deotis Roberts, John Paul II, John XXIII, and Enda McDonagh. Key questions in method are a theologian's embrace (or not) of historical consciousness and the breadth of consultation a scholar practices. This volume's only new work, the essay on Pope Francis, praises him on these two criteria while calling for continued work by those who hope for Church reform. Two essays on the influence of Vatican II on moral theology and spirituality explore how the Council succeeded and failed at linking its proposed reforms to a fully realized theology.

The volume offers welcome insight into Curran's own life as a theologian, as in a confessional essay confronting white privilege and a moving appreciation of Bernard Häring that includes reflections on Curran's own investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The book's final essay, proposing "A Theology and Spirituality for Church Reformers," points to the reality of changing tradition, needles reformers for a "triumphalist"

view that expects the Church to be perfect, and notes that Christians hope against hope—hope is not based on experience.

Many collections like this are aimed at specialists who want a desk-reference copy of works by a single author. Certainly moral theologians will find this book useful, but Curran's comprehensive view and careful, clear writing make it a genuinely accessible introduction to many significant debates in Catholic moral teaching throughout history. Teachers who want students to understand developments in Catholic social ethics, human rights, bioethics, and sexuality should consider it as a text. General readers will gain insight into the living Catholic tradition Curran values so highly and the stakes of his hope-filled call for reform.