

sprawling field of theological ethics, with its daunting methodological pluralism and increasing cultural complexity, with both elegance and grace.

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*Sex, Violence, and Justice: Contraception and the Catholic Church.* Aline H. Kalbian. Moral Traditions Series. Washington: Georgetown University, 2014. Pp. xii + 212. \$29.95.

In the first pages of her important study, Kalbian makes a strong contextualizing claim: “My analysis about contraception is not directed toward mediating or resolving an internal Catholic discussion” (2). She does, however, set out two ends: first, to “discover and express insights about the justificatory and rhetorical moves that a religious tradition makes as it responds to cultural and social forces” (2, 168); and second, to refresh or awaken in the reader’s mind the fact that any particular moral issue will inevitably be addressed from a plurality of ethical contexts (3–4, 168). Each chapter includes the magisterial approach, an explanation of contemporary debate among theologians, and a discussion of implications. K.’s chief insight is that the context of a particular instance of contraception dictates the moral framework used to justify the Church’s position: for condoms and HIV—sexual immorality; for emergency contraception after rape—abortion violence; for demographics and development—social justice and the common good.

K.’s prescinding from any effort to solve the contraception conundrum follows necessarily from her method. She distinguishes “theological ethics” from her own task of “religious ethics.” The theological ethicist is “constrained by duties of fidelity to a theological tradition” and by “assumptions about doctrine,” whereas the religious ethicist “has more freedom” (6), positioning herself on the margins of a tradition to read with “openness the texts, traditions, and reasoning of the Catholic Church from a more scholarly posture of critical reflection and analysis” (6). For K., doctrinal commitments bias the theological ethicist’s analysis of the history, validity, and applicability of moral norms. While K.’s religious ethics method is done from the margins of the ecclesial community she assesses and within which she was formed, it also approaches the question from the center of the contemporary Christian feminist theological tradition: “The most significant influence on the way I read and interpret religious traditions is feminist analysis” (7). K. deserves praise for largely refraining from explicit assessment of the truth character of the Church’s moral conclusions, but occasionally she marshals her feminist hermeneutic in a normative mode. She claims, for example, that John Paul II’s link between hedonism and rape is part of the Catholic hierarchy’s persistent, oppressive gender structuring (115, 174).

K.’s chapter on condoms and HIV/AIDS argues that “concerns about sexual propriety lead the Magisterium to articulate a position that is inconsistent, because it reduces condom use to a mere physical act. It fails to notice how radically different condom use

in this context [married couple, one spouse has HIV] is from other uses of contraception that are driven by an antiprocreative intent" (62). Most interesting in this chapter is K.'s attempt to draw a conflict between the Vatican's more strident opposition and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) seeming appearance of toleration of the question (73). A reading of USCCB documents on the question, however, suggests that the tension is overdrawn.

In the context of emergency contraception, K. demonstrates that the rhetorical strategy shifts from sexual immorality to abortion violence (96). She claims that a "serious contradiction" exists between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Dignitas personae* and the USCCB's *Ethical and Religious Directives* (96). K. suggests that the Church's magisterium makes a calculated rhetorical move in blurring and confusing the lines between the use of abortifacients and prevention of conception, hoping to solidify its base against contraception by linking it to the Church's more widely accepted stance against abortion (103). Finally, K. argues that the Church's valorization of Saints like Maria Goretti (who preferred death to suffering rape) puts an undue moral burden on women (117).

K.'s final substantive chapter considers Catholic arguments against contraception within the context of demographics and economic development. She treats well the "myth of overpopulation" as well as shifts in US foreign and domestic policy, especially related to abortion and eugenics. K. finds that the Church has argued against state-supported contraceptive measures (coercive and otherwise) on two grounds: (1) they violate the primacy of the family's authority to determine its size (against subsidiarity and family's dignity); and (2) they are ineffective at promoting economic and demographic development because they ignore "integral human development" (143–48).

K. has collected valuable insights on the varied cultural, political, and intellectual places wherein the Church has explained and developed her teaching on contraception over the last century. The comprehensive work has, nevertheless, some omissions. First, inclusion of material from David Matzko McCarthy's work on *Humanae vitae* as a social encyclical would have strengthened the demographics chapter, which did not attend to coercive family planning policies. Equally surprising is the absence of Janet Smith's studies on *Humanae vitae*, its commission, and contraception argumentation. Finally, K.'s laudable treatment of the Health and Human Services contraception mandate for the Affordable Care Act was limited because its positioning made it read as an appendix or afterthought. The topic deserves more space for K.'s keen analysis.

This book fits upper-level undergraduate or introductory graduate courses to explore the shape of 20th-century scholarly and ecclesial debates around contraception. However, while K.'s method is a strength, it is also her limitation. Religious ethics implicitly reduces these debates to mere strategies—rhetorical techniques justifying a community's ultimately arbitrary moral standards. K.'s work, therefore, should be paired with a complementary approach from the center of the Catholic theological tradition.

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