

BOTHERING TO LOVE

*James F. Keenan's Retrieval and
Reinvention of Catholic Ethics*

*Christopher P. Vogt
and Kate Ward, Editors*

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Introduction

This volume honors James F. Keenan, SJ, a theologian, mentor, author, and teacher whose many and distinguished contributions to the church and the academy are almost impossible to evoke in a single phrase. We might summon Keenan's famous statement, "Mercy is entering into the chaos of another," noting the prominent role of God's mercy in his theology and the descent to the chaos of ordinary life in his practice of theological ethics. We might note his coinage of "Jesuit hospitality" as the hospitality that goes out to encounter the other on the road, and reflect on Keenan's intellectual and literal journeying, as a Jesuit and scholar, to accompany those on the margins.¹ "Bridgebuilder" is one of Keenan's own highest forms of praise, and one that could easily apply to Keenan himself, as his career is characterized by building bridges across cultures, disciplines, and misunderstandings, and creating community among those who long to have their voices heard. Or we could recognize his pioneering role in the establishment of both clergy ethics and university ethics, where Keenan exposes utilitarian thinking and practice in both fields by pointing to the simple alternative phrase, "But is it ethical?"

Instead, the title of our book in Keenan's honor riffs on another famous ethical definition of his, one which, like so much of his work, clarifies a rich insight of the Catholic theological tradition while making it accessible and new for modern believers. "Sin," Keenan tells us in his often-reprinted book *Moral Wisdom*, "is the failure to bother to love."² Catholics understand that sin is what separates us from God and one another, and Keenan's unforgettable framing helps us see how absolutely banal sin's presence in our lives can be, appearing when we feel most at ease, when we believe we have tamed sin and have it under control, when we forget or ignore our call to grow in love. For our title we take the mirror image

¹ James F. Keenan, "Jesuit Hospitality?" in *Promise Renewed: Jesuit Higher Education for a New Millennium*, ed. Martin R. Tripole (Chicago: Jesuit Way, 1999), 230–44.

² James F. Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 42.

of Keenan's insight, reminding us that God calls Christians to bother to love, to allow love to draw us out of our complacency to the side of the other who needs us. The Christian vocation is to love, a love that can be practiced in ten thousand places, amid the minutiae of ordinary life, in the distinct paths where God has called us. The call to bother to love reminds us that God calls us to grow, to change, to emerge into what we can be beyond what we currently are, and reminds us too that God does not call us to this difficult growth on our own, but remains present to us in empowering love and grace.

The many who have been privileged to be Keenan's students have seen, as we see, that for him the vocation of a moral theologian—of scholar, mentor, teacher, and leader—is a practice of bothering to love. Retrieving ancient theological traditions for contemporary believers; reinventing theological approaches to meet unforeseen contemporary needs; walking with those pushed to the margins whom the theological and ecclesial main-streams ignore; giving voice to generations of scholars and building new communities for them to work together—we gratefully acknowledge these tireless achievements as evidence of Jim's practice of bothering to love the church, his brothers in the Society of Jesus, his students, and primordially Jesus, the Merciful Teacher. It is in reciprocal love and thanks that we offer this series of reflections on his theological accomplishments.

The subtitle of our book names what we see as two fundamental, interrelated dynamics that recur in Jim Keenan's scholarship: retrieval and reinvention. Much of his work entails an engagement of history and the Catholic moral tradition to unearth principles, concepts, and methods that have been forgotten or erased over time. At the same time, this retrieval does not seek to elevate an imagined past over the real claims of the present. Stewardship of the tradition requires a deep engagement of the world in which we find ourselves so as to provide a vision for how the riches of the past should be reimagined and reapplied in ways that fit the needs of the present moment. The ways Keenan's work is so often at once a retrieval and the creation of something new will become clear as we explore his many contributions to theological scholarship.

Retrieval

Keenan once shared a story of getting a telephone call from some Jesuits at Xavier High School in New York City who called to ask if he knew anyone who might have use for fifty volumes of manuals of moral theology published from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Keenan promptly jumped into a car with a Jesuit scholastic and drove over to Xavier

to pick up all fifty volumes. The scholastic who had been drafted into service asked Keenan why he was so delighted to add these books to his collection. Keenan replied, "One of the tasks of a moral theologian is to be a keeper of the tradition. Now, I am getting some of that tradition before it gets lost."³ While the divinity schools at Yale or the University of Chicago drew many of the most promising American graduate students in theology at the time, Keenan chose to pursue doctoral studies at the Gregorian in Rome because he wanted to learn the tradition. For Keenan, to be a keeper of the tradition entails much more than rescuing old books. Being a faithful steward requires a process of retrieval, interpretation, interrogation, and sometimes reimagination.

A sense of the importance of the tradition and the need for it always to be reinterpreted and renewed characterizes Keenan's work from the very beginning. The first academic article he published after taking his first tenure-track appointment as assistant professor of theology at Fordham University was "Taking Aim at the Principle of Double Effect: A Response to Khatchadourian."⁴ A few years later, he published a second, more expansive article on double effect in *Theological Studies* that exemplified the dynamic of retrieval and renewal that would characterize so much of his work.⁵ There, Keenan objected to using the principle as a formula for testing whether an action was right or wrong. To explain why, he turned to history and to how double effect emerged from the tradition of moral casuistry as a synthesis of insights gleaned from the resolution of paradigmatic cases. He showed that the principle is not some sort of universally applicable, magical formula for determining right and wrong, but only an aid to sound prudential reasoning. Investing the principle itself with authority only provides the illusion of moral objectivity. This was the first of many insights Keenan's retrieval of casuistry would contribute to ongoing debates in fundamental moral theology about freedom, conscience, and moral objectivity.⁶

Keenan's focus on the Catholic moral tradition is but one dimension of his vocation as a moral theologian and a Jesuit priest. He also has demonstrated a deep pastoral sensitivity and a profound sense of the importance of mercy for Christian theology and practice. His engagement of the tradition often has been guided by the pastoral needs of the moment. Some of the

³ James F. Keenan, "Collaboration and Cooperation in Healthcare," *Australasian Catholic Record* 77, no. 2 (2000): 164.

⁴ James F. Keenan, "Taking Aim at the Principle of Double Effect: A Response to Khatchadourian," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1988): 201–5.

⁵ James F. Keenan, "The Function of the Principle of Double Effect," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 294.

⁶ James F. Keenan, SJ, and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *The Context of Casuistry* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995).

most urgent questions facing the church and the world early in Keenan's career emerged in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as the medical community struggled with how to treat and prevent the spread of the disease, and the church struggled with how to care pastorally for people who were HIV-positive (including members of many religious orders).

An especially heated controversy erupted after the administrative board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published a pastoral letter on HIV/AIDS, in which the bishops maintained that Catholics should tolerate policies that allowed recommending condom use to HIV-positive patients who were insistent on being sexually active.⁷ Keenan entered this debate by demonstrating that with the aid of the principle of cooperation (not tolerance), we can use prudential reason to conclude that it is morally licit for healthcare workers to advocate for condom use in certain circumstances.⁸

As the HIV epidemic raged on, many similar ethical and pastoral questions emerged. Keenan remained confident that the Catholic moral tradition was a rich, humane, and supple resource that could guide the church through these challenges. He turned again to the recovery of casuistry, proposing it as an ideal method for analyzing many new questions emerging in the face of HIV/AIDS. He favored an approach to casuistry that emerged in the seventeenth century, which did not seek to overturn principles but to be faithful to them while considering new cases—thereby offering solutions that are at once very traditional while also responsive to new circumstances and contexts.⁹ This method was the centerpiece of a book Keenan edited with colleagues from the Catholic Theological Coalition on HIV/AIDS Prevention. It included essays by thirty-five Catholic theologians from around the world who used casuistry to analyze real cases that had come up in their local contexts.¹⁰ Many of the book's chapters combined casuistry with the recovery of traditional principles of toleration, cooperation, and so on. The book demonstrated the value of the Catholic moral tradition and initiated a truly global theological dialogue. Lifting up the importance of

⁷ Jon D. Fuller, SJ, and James F. Keenan, SJ, "Church Politics and HIV Prevention: Why Is the Condom Question So Significant and So Neuralgic?" in *Between Poetry and Politics: Essays in Honour of Enda McDonagh*, ed. Linda Hogan and Barbara FitzGerald, 158–81 (Dublin: Columba Press, 2003), 161.

⁸ James Keenan, "Prophylactics, Toleration, and Cooperation: Contemporary Problems and Traditional Principles," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1988): 205–21.

⁹ James F. Keenan, SJ, "Applying the Seventeenth-Century Casuistry of Accommodation to HIV Prevention," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 500.

¹⁰ James F. Keenan, SJ, "About This Book," in *Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention*, ed. James F. Keenan, SJ (New York: Continuum, 2000), 13.

international, cross-cultural dialogue would become another of Keenan's important contributions to the field.

In addition to retrieving traditional principles and methods, Keenan also turned to history to set the agenda of Catholic moral theology at the start of the twenty-first century. In Aquinas, Alphonsus, and several influential twentieth-century moral theologians, Keenan found role models who embodied different aspects of his vision of what it means to do Catholic moral theology. He singled out St. Alphonsus Liguori as "the role model for the contemporary theologian," describing him as "the first major figure to combine ministry to the outcast with a vocation to shape the field of moral theology."¹¹ In both the theology and the pastoral practice of St. Alphonsus, what stands out is his appreciation of the importance of mercy. Alphonsus engaged in various ministries throughout his life that fit Keenan's definition of mercy as entering into the chaos of another person: as a member of a confraternity that attended to the needs of prisoners, especially those who were condemned to death; and later while teaching in Naples ministering to the poorest of the poor. Living at a time marked by moral rigorism, Liguori was known as a sympathetic confessor who encouraged penitents to trust in the mercy of God and the grace of the Eucharist and confession. As someone who spent a good deal of time among those most on the margins, he came to appreciate the complexity of the moral challenges they faced.¹²

We can see many of St. Alphonsus's theological priorities reflected in Keenan's work. In addition to serving as a leading scholar, Keenan consistently devotes considerable attention to addressing the pastoral needs of ordinary Christians.¹³ He has raised up the moral issues of daily living as worthy of theological attention, and has done so in a way marked by a deep sense of the importance of mercy.¹⁴ As a preacher and confessor, Alphonsus encouraged Christians to see themselves as called to strive for perfection. This was not an invitation to excessive scrupulosity. Alphonsus recognized that the most difficult answer is not always the right one but more typically lies somewhere between laxism and rigorism. The invitation to perfection was a reflection of God's loving call to each person to strive always for moral growth.

¹¹ James F. Keenan, "How Alphonsus' Ministry to the Margins Formed His Life as a Moral Theologian," *Studia Moralia* 59, no. 2 (2021): 277.

¹² Keenan, 281.

¹³ James F. Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1996); James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

¹⁴ James F. Keenan, SJ, *Commandments of Compassion* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1999); Keenan, *The Works of Mercy*.

Similar themes and priorities can be found in the work of several theologians whom Keenan credits with dramatically reshaping the discipline in his careful work on the history of Catholic moral theology in the twentieth century.¹⁵ That century began with a continuation of the manualist tradition—"books of moral pathology" focused on preparing priests to hear confessions.¹⁶ The manualist tradition presented itself as timeless, claiming historical and universal consistency to such a degree that many at the time assumed it was only way that moral theology could be done.¹⁷ Keenan documented the contributions of several early twentieth-century theologians he named as revisionists (Fritz Tillmann, Odon Lottin, Gerard Gilleman, among others) who transformed the discipline in ways we can see reflected in his own methodology. For their inaugural issue, the editors of the *Journal of Moral Theology* invited several leading moral theologians to write about a major figure who had influenced their own work and the discipline more broadly. Keenan chose to write about Bernard Häring, who, he believed, built successfully upon many of the advances of the earlier pioneers of moral theology in the twentieth century. Häring incorporated Tillmann's insights on the importance of scripture for moral theology and his framing the moral life in terms of a call to discipleship. He also drew upon Lottin's sense of the importance of focusing on conscience and the person as moral agent, and Gilleman's understanding of the centrality of charity for all the virtues and the moral life.¹⁸

Keenan characterizes Häring's writing as "invitational" and engaging, noting that one reason he was such an influential moral theologian was his conscious decision to write for general audiences in addition to his colleagues in the field. Häring did not write down to his lay audience, but rather "presumed the competency and the interest of the laity, in a way that no one else did."¹⁹ Häring and his work were deeply formed by history and experience, especially his experience as a German who lived under the Nazi regime during the Second World War. His experience led him to conclude that responsibility—not obedience—should be at the center of Catholic

¹⁵ James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

¹⁶ James F. Keenan, "From Teaching Confessors to Guiding Lay People: The Development of Catholic Moral Theologians from 1900–1965," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 28, no. 2 (2008): 142.

¹⁷ James F. Keenan, "John Mahoney's *The Making of Moral Theology*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski, 503–19 (New York: Oxford, 2007): 505.

¹⁸ James F. Keenan, SJ, "Bernard Häring's Influence on American Catholic Moral Theology," *The Journal of Moral Theology* 1, no. 1 (2012): 24.

¹⁹ Keenan, 31.

moral theology. His work emphasized the capacity of ordinary people to discern and to do good in response to God's invitation to discipleship.

The reformists of the twentieth century left a clear mark on Keenan's thinking, and many of his own contributions to contemporary moral theology can be seen as carrying forward the work they began. Like Tillmann, Keenan recognized the importance of integrating scripture into his work, especially as a means of connecting reflections on the moral life with the overriding theme of discipleship. With his longtime colleague at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, Keenan wrote two books on scripture and ethics—first on Jesus and virtue ethics, and later, on Paul.²⁰ These books made helpful contributions to each field while remaining accessible to an educated lay audience. More recently, Keenan published the fruits of his career-long integration of history into moral theology with monographs on the history of Catholic moral theology in the twentieth century and a magisterial volume on the entire history of Catholic theological ethics.²¹

Like Häring, Keenan manages to be prolific and insightful in his writing both for academic audiences and lay readership. Throughout the 1990s he contributed monthly to the popular publication *Church* on discipleship, specific virtues, prayer, and spirituality, turning to the Ten Commandments in the latter half of the decade. His writing made clear that an important part of Keenan's vocation was to help ordinary people work through the moral issues that arose in their ordinary lives, and to invite his readers to see themselves as disciples of Christ who are called always to strive to grow in love and holiness. Woven throughout his popular and academic writing is the central importance of mercy. His engagement of the Ten Commandments was through the lens of compassion.²² In the 2000s his writing for *Church* turned to the works of mercy; he later revised and published those columns as a book for a general audience.²³ Like his role models, Keenan's style of writing here was invitational, taking on a supportive, encouraging tone that conveyed a confidence in God's mercy and a desire for spiritual and moral growth in his readers.

As we turn to Keenan's reinvention of Catholic moral theology, one more note on the importance of retrieval is in order. The revisionists were

²⁰ Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, and James F. Keenan, SJ, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2002) and *Paul and Virtue Ethics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

²¹ Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century*; James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2022).

²² James F. Keenan, SJ, *Commandments of Compassion* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1999).

²³ Keenan, *The Works of Mercy*.

dissatisfied with the methods and focus of moral theology in their day. Each one turned to history and to forgotten parts of the tradition as resources for charting a new way of doing moral theology that was at once new and still faithfully Catholic. Lottin wrote his three-thousand-page study of the Scholastics on conscience and moral decision-making to demonstrate that what he was proposing—while seemingly new—was very traditional. Häring included a brief history of moral theology in *The Law of Christ* to show that his innovations on conscience and freedom were in fact in continuity with the tradition.²⁴ Against an ahistorical rendering of what is Catholic, a deep engagement with history and tradition is necessary to make clear that the immediate past is not “the way things have always been.” The tradition is indeed richer, deeper, and more humane than that.

Reinvention

While retrieving key categories of ethical insight is a hallmark of Keenan’s work, equally his legacy has been to approach ethical questions in a new way, or better, to reinvent our understandings of what constitutes an ethical question. His writings for general and scholarly audiences insist on the choices of ordinary life as the key ethical matter with which Christians should be concerned—from *Moral Wisdom* and *The Works of Mercy* to *The Moral Life: Eight Essays*, which discusses dispositions and resources for approaching the Christian moral life.²⁵ If this focus on ordinary life as distinct from the “quandary ethics” of the late twentieth century was not original enough, Keenan’s reinvention of Catholic theological ethics has introduced whole new fields of inquiry to the lexicon, with church ethics, university ethics, and global Catholic ethics being just a few.

Keenan’s work in church ethics extends from multiple edited volumes responding to the clergy sex-abuse crisis to articles probing the ethics of Jesuit formation practices. One of his earliest essays on clergy ethics raises moral issues with the practice of *informationes*, confidential internal reports, in the formation of Jesuits.²⁶ One of the most recent refines ethical criticism of the issue of clericalism in the Catholic Church to define and critique hierarchicalism, a vicious culture among bishops and church officials: “Hierarchy has a culture; when and where it is vicious in its elitism,

²⁴ James F. Keenan, SJ, “Notes on Moral Theology: Moral Theology and History,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 87.

²⁵ James F. Keenan, *The Moral Life: Eight Essays* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2024).

²⁶ James F. Keenan, “Are *Informationes* Ethical?” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 29, no. 4 (1997).

power, networking capability, and impunity is precisely what I mean by hierarchicalism.”²⁷ Another significant contribution to clergy ethics is *Practice What You Preach: Virtue, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations*, which Keenan coedited with his student and contributor to this volume Joseph J. Kotva, Jr.²⁸ The volume gathers more than twenty contributions from an ecumenical group of theologians and pastoral ministers reflecting on ethical practice between ministers and their church communities. The volume appeared in 1999, three years before the *Boston Globe*’s Spotlight Team’s initial report on the ecclesial coverup of clergy sex abuse reminded many Catholics that clergy ethics is an issue with which every religious community must contend.

Jesuits in formation and laity in a hierarchical church are relatively voiceless within complex structures built on history, tradition, and status. The contemporary university is another historically situated structure in which many groups, including students and contingently employed faculty, lack adequate power to defend their own dignity. Keenan pointed to an ethical vacuum in reflection on higher education as early as 2013, telling the Society of Christian Ethics that “in our own centers of higher learning, we have lived and worked wearing blinders to their lack of professional ethics. We have not asked ‘but is it ethical?’ when we should have, in part because we were not accustomed to see how ethically barren the academy’s landscape is.”²⁹ Rather than letting this omission stand, Keenan wrote *University Ethics*, in which he drew attention to precarious labor, lack of financial transparency, student hazing, and other glaring ethical concerns within higher education.³⁰ With ethicist and contingent scholar Matthew Gaudet, he coedited two special volumes of the *Journal of Moral Theology* focused on contingent faculty and on university ethics more broadly.³¹

Keenan’s work on virtue ethics, one of his most prolific and influential areas of focus, certainly exemplifies retrieval. In many articles and edited volumes for general and scholarly audiences Keenan has raised up the

²⁷ James F. Keenan, “Hierarchicalism,” *Theological Studies* 83, no. 1 (March 2022): 84–108.

²⁸ James F. Keenan and Joseph J. Kotva, eds., *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999).

²⁹ James F. Keenan, “A Summons to Promote Professional Ethics in the Academy,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33, no. 1 (2013): 180.

³⁰ James F. Keenan, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit From a Culture of Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

³¹ Matthew J. Gaudet and James F. Keenan, SJ, eds., *Contingent Faculty*, *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue no. 1 (Spring 2019); and Matthew J. Gaudet and James F. Keenan, SJ, eds., *University Ethics*, *Journal of Moral Theology* 9, special issue no. 2 (2020).

legacy of Thomas Aquinas's theological virtue ethics to help believers today understand this context-sensitive, practical, growth-oriented method for living the Christian life.³² One of his most influential contributions to virtue ethics may be "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," an article in *Theological Studies* that envisions the virtues on which the moral life "hinges" not through Aquinas's medieval psychology, but through the ways humans are relational—generally, specifically, and uniquely.³³ Keenan's framework retrieves Aquinas, reflecting the ways his virtue ethics points us toward practices of bothering to love and reinvents him in ways that can inspire moderns to such practices. For example, Aquinas's order of charity urges love for oneself as a gift from God (II-II q. 26 ad. 4). Keenan responds to this by elevating as a cardinal virtue self-care, the virtue through which we care for ourself, the relationship each of us has uniquely. Remaining firmly rooted in the tradition, his work viscerally connects with today's university students, who are concerned about finding self-worth outside the world's markers of success. Keenan uses virtue ethics not only to attend to the concreteness of moral lives, but also to make the Catholic ethical tradition vivid in a way that respects each person's call to growth. Uniting the down-to-earth elements of the manualist tradition with the concern for conscience and growth of postconciliar ethical approaches, virtue ethics in Keenan's hands is a tool for uniting believers struggling to do right and become good with the opportunities for moral action they see in the world around them.

Throughout his career Keenan has taught at universities around the world, including Loyola School of Theology in the Philippines, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram in Bangalore, and his alma mater, the Gregorian. During his travels, when he realized that European ethicists, though only a brief train ride apart, did not know one another's work, he formed the idea that became Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC). When Keenan founded the international organization in 2003, he unleashed an unprecedented wave of global intellectual energy. As of this writing, CTEWC has hosted nine international conferences on three continents, some involving hundreds of scholars; published fourteen books in three distinct series; funded scholars from Africa and Asia to complete their PhDs; and maintained a thriving international network of theological scholars through its directory, "virtual tables," publication projects, and newsletter. One of the greatest parts of Keenan's legacy, CTEWC helps Catholic ethicists see themselves as members of a global community, responding to global concerns. In his message to CTEWC in honor of its 2018 meeting in Sarajevo,

³² For example, James F. Keenan, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992).

³³ James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–29.

Pope Francis praised the group's "style of sharing which I trust you will pursue in a way that will prove fruitful for the entire Church."³⁴ When the Catholic Theological Society of America honored Keenan with its John Courtney Murray Award, CTSA president Paul Lakeland remarked that by recognizing Keenan, "the Society takes a step forward in recognizing much of what the future holds for the work of theological and ethical scholarship north and south of the equator."³⁵ Keenan's gift for elevating the voices of others means that his work as scholar and community-builder consistently points beyond himself to those often excluded by the church: voices of women, survivors of clergy abuse, LGBTQ+ persons, those experiencing street homelessness, and those in the global South.³⁶

The work of an ethicist concerned with the practical experience of human suffering often requires courage. As Keenan became known for his research on HIV/AIDS, his promotion of the human dignity of people living with the virus drew slur-filled hate mail and attempts to threaten his ecclesial status and his employment. Following his conscience to defend the common good, he led Catholics for Obama in Massachusetts and spoke in favor of same-sex civil marriage in the Massachusetts State House. His political activism, which Michael Jaycox celebrates in his essay for this volume, drew another round of vitriol and hate. Here was a Jesuit priest acting as a moral leader, not presuming on his clergy status but drawing on his scholarly expertise to stand with the marginalized at a time of great import. This consequential entry into the public square was a reinvention of the ethicist's role as Keenan brought moral theology from the ivory tower to front-page news.

If the topics of Keenan's work speak of tireless reinvention, so too does his method. He continually works to overcome silos within academic theology, cowriting and teaching with the late biblical scholar Daniel J. Harrington, SJ; clearly outlining the links between spirituality and morality over decades of work; and advocating for the bridge-building character of virtue ethics. When his friend and doctoral student Lúcas Chan passed away at a tragically early age, Keenan completed his works in progress, enshrining

³⁴ Pope Francis, "Message of the Holy Father to Participants in the Third International Conference of 'Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church' [Sarajevo, 26–29 July 2018]," July 11, 2018.

³⁵ Michael Chovan Dalton, "James Keenan John Courtney Murray Award," video of Paul Lakeland's remarks, June 10, 2019, YouTube.

³⁶ See James F. Keenan, *Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics*, Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019); James F. Keenan, "The Gallant Rule: A Feminist Proposal," in *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, ed. Linda F. Hogan and A. E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 219–31.

ing Lúcas's contributions in history as a last act of love for his friend.³⁷ Before it was fashionable for theologians to do interdisciplinary work, Keenan drew insights from psychology (Carol Gilligan), public health (Paul Farmer), literature (Graham Greene), and philosophy (Judith Butler), among other disciplines, to illuminate and communicate the insights of Catholic moral theology. Decades before *public theology* became a buzzword and academics learned to value clear, expert writing for general audiences, he broke open virtues, the works of mercy, the moral life, and other topics for non-scholarly readers with simplicity, clarity, and heart.³⁸

Keenan's great gift for descending to the particular animates his scholarly contributions on innumerable painful topics of human life but might appear most memorably in his general-interest writings. His essay on love in the oft-reprinted general interest book *Moral Wisdom* is packed with unforgettable images, from the barbed-wire cross acknowledging German guilt in a Catholic church in Dachau to the aluminum-foil costumes Keenan's loving, hardworking parents created for their children. Insistently drawing our attention to the concrete reality of God's world and creatures, he concludes, "We cannot love our neighbors except for as they are."³⁹

Keenan's work as theological mentor and editor respects this God-given call to attend to particularity, with the result that his legacy within theological scholarship is carried forward by a community of scholars noteworthy for their number, achievements, and diversity. His goal is not to form copies of himself, but to ensure that those scholars with whom he works are able to develop and refine the best possible version of their own voices and thoughts. As editor for a decade of the Moral Traditions series with Georgetown University Press, he shepherded the books of scholars who are now many of the leading voices of English-speaking moral theology. His work as editor of the Notes on Moral Theology section of the leading journal *Theological Studies* similarly guaranteed that readers would learn about concerns on the cutting edge of ethics, often at the hands of under-represented or emerging scholars in the field. In the diversity of voices

³⁷ (Yiu Sing) Lúcas Chan, SJ, James F. Keenan, SJ, and Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, eds., *Doing Asian Theological Ethics in a Cross-Cultural and an Interreligious Context* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2016); George Griener, SJ, and James F. Keenan, SJ, eds., *A Lúcas Chan Reader: Pioneering Essays on Biblical and Asian Theological Ethics* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017); and Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan, SJ, James F. Keenan, SJ, and Ronaldo Zacharias, eds., *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017). See also the volume in tribute, *Bridging Scripture and Moral Theology: Essays in Dialogue with Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan, SJ*, ed. Michael B. Cover, John Thiede, SJ, and Joshua Ezra Burns (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019).

³⁸ Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*; Keenan, *The Works of Mercy*.

³⁹ Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 18.

collected in this volume we see Keenan's students appreciating his work, building on it, jumping off from it, and even disagreeing with his insights, illustrating how one of his many remarkable gifts to the church as a scholar has been to help many theologians establish their own voice.

This Volume

As we envisioned this volume, we wanted it to reflect some of the breadth of the areas of moral theology to which Keenan has contributed over his long career. Fundamental moral theology, virtue and the virtues, and bioethics were obvious examples of areas where Keenan and many of his students have made noteworthy contributions. His recurring attention to the importance of discipleship, pastoral concerns of ordinary Christians, and his expansive writing on issues of religious life made a section on the intersection of spirituality and morality another natural choice. Although Keenan's own contributions on the ethics of sex and gender are comparatively modest, many of his students are among today's leaders in that subfield. The section featuring their work especially highlights how Keenan is a teacher and dissertation director who empowers his students to make the contributions they see as important rather than guiding them always toward his own priorities or producing a new generation of scholars cloned in his image.

Part I, "Fundamental Moral Theology," begins fittingly with an essay that combines attention to history and mercy. Inspired by Keenan's definition of mercy as "entering into the chaos of another," Eric Marcelo O. Genilo, SJ, calls moral theologians to practice mercy in order to "translate into the church's moral consciousness the experiences of chaos that have often been ignored or dismissed as unimportant." Mercy is a key ingredient in the development of doctrine, even though theologians may not always be successful in advocating for developments that respond to the chaos of concrete lives, as Genilo shows through examples from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Osamu Takeuchi, SJ, examines the ways conscience is understood in contemporary Catholic moral theology, tracing key themes back to the thought of John Henry Newman. Takeuchi links conscience and the fundamental option to the importance of freedom, with particular attention to the ways that freedom is a gift of God's love and should be exercised responsibly as a response to that love.

Keenan's work often made clear the relevance of debates in fundamental moral theology for more practical issues. Christopher P. Vogt argues that the traditional concept of scandal is being overused and misappropriated in the development of diocesan and Catholic school policies on sex and

gender. He describes how scripture and the broader moral tradition can yield a richer understanding of scandal, and he turns to casuistry to explain how focusing on specific persons and cases might make space for moral discernment on issues of sexuality and gender.

Kate Ward draws on Keenan's observation that virtues can conflict, pointing to material scarcity as a particular contributor to situations where "an opportunity for one virtuous choice is restricted by the equally good claim of another due to lack of resources." She turns to systematic theology and the parable of the father who had two sons to suggest that moral agency persists amid material scarcity because it is ultimately a gift of God's grace.

Finally, Mark Graham develops the concepts of moral goodness, sin, and the importance of love in Keenan's fundamental moral theology to give readers a deeper appreciation of the meaning of ecological conversion and its centrality for the Christian moral life.

Daniel Daly leads off Part II, "Virtue and Virtues," by sketching the key features of Keenan's approach to virtue ethics and examining the ways institutions influence the efforts of Christians to grow in virtue and the ability of all members of society to flourish and live good lives. He describes the ways that a virtue lens can enhance approaches to institutional and organizational ethics and concludes by pointing out how scholars might build upon Keenan's work on virtue and institutional ethics, especially by developing more precise, scientific accounts of the ways organizations shape individuals morally.

Kathryn Getek Soltis turns our attention again to Keenan's description of mercy as entering into the chaos of another, adding that it is a virtue that entails growing in solidarity with others and empowering them to act. She argues that Christians must resist a dangerous tendency of wanting to reserve mercy for the innocent and must instead enthusiastically enter into spheres of culpable chaos. Soltis calls for "a mercy that defies stigma and otherness, proclaiming that no one is beyond the scope of our concern," and explores some of the implications of a more expansive conception of mercy for addressing mass incarceration in the United States.

John Karuvelil, SJ, proposes the virtues of vulnerability and hospitality, consistent touchstones of Keenan's work, in response to the Indian government's profound violation of the rights of migrant laborers in response to COVID-19. In Keenan's definitions vulnerability is the capacity to be moral, and Jesuit hospitality goes out to meet those in need where they are. Karuvelil denounces the lack of these virtues in the Indian government's treatment of its migrant laborer citizens.

Following Keenan's lead as an early adopter of virtue ethics to address moral growth in ordinary life, Conor Kelly shows how virtue can provide a "theologically robust conception of the good life." Kelly proposes the

virtues of humility, perseverance and mercy as necessary for addressing the ethical challenges facing twenty-first-century Christians in their ordinary lives.

Xavier Montecel finds in Keenan's work on spirituality, morality, and virtue a profound sense of the importance of the liturgy in the moral life. Delving deeply into Keenan's work and reflecting on the Christology implicit in virtue ethics, Montecel concludes: "The virtues . . . are more than just the good habits we carry from liturgy. Virtues are the means through which we sacramentally embody the presence and action of Christ for the life of the world."

Drawing upon his own experiences as a physician who has cared for vulnerable populations in Africa and his theological training, Vincent Leclercq, AA, begins Part III, "Bioethics," by analyzing how Keenan's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic brought new methods and priorities to bioethics. Keenan's revival of casuistry, his focus on persons and virtue, and his insistence on examining the social and political dimensions of the epidemic had lasting effects on Christian bioethics and Catholic moral theology more broadly.

Joseph Kotva applauds Keenan's efforts to advance university ethics but challenges his assumption that medical education provides a model for it. He calls attention to problems in both the official and hidden curricula at medical schools that undermine the well-being of students and foster vice rather than virtue. Kotva recommends changes in institutional culture and systemic reforms that would address structural injustices in medical education while better protecting the mental health of medical students and enhancing their formation in virtues such as empathy.

Cristina Richie proposes practices for "integral bioethics," including lower carbon consumption in healthcare systems and applying the principle of proportionality when causing suffering to nonhuman animals. Integral bioethics is inspired by the principle of integral ecology and Keenan's radical inclusivity.

The section on bioethics concludes as Edwin Vásquez Gheri, SJ, shows how the COVID-19 pandemic teaches us that global bioethics must broaden its gaze beyond the individual. He proposes relationality, vulnerability, cooperation and multilateralism, social justice, solidarity, and responsibility and care as "traits of affective wisdom" that assist bioethicists in this crucial task.

In Part IV, "Ethics of Sex and Gender," Michael Jaycox draws on his own experience to affirm Keenan's efforts to cultivate the distinctive priorities and voice of each of his students. He then leads us into the subfield of the ethics of sex and gender by reflecting on Keenan's ethical method to deduce anthropological, historical, and practical considerations for

articulating a Catholic sexual ethic. A relational anthropology focused on the moral growth of the person and rigorous retrieval of historical sources are important tools for ethicists, whom Jaycox also calls to apply their ethical commitments in practical action on behalf of vulnerable persons as Keenan has done throughout his career.

Megan McCabe applauds Keenan's call to understand conscience as socially responsible but highlights the need to advance theologies of conscience even further in light of the fact that culture can form consciences in ways that ignore or accept the suffering of others, such as in the cultural construction of "rape myths." McCabe proposes the preferential option for the poor as a necessary normative principle to direct the social conscience's formation: "A socially responsible conscience formed by the preferential option is one that is able to wrestle with complicity in upholding the cultural scaffolding of rape in a wide variety of ways, including subtle and unconscious actions."

Animated by similar concerns, Craig Ford builds on Keenan's relational ethics to propose *eros* as an epistemological key to overcoming racism and heterosexism, products of sinful morally formative communities. Drawing on insights from queer thinkers and scholars of color, Ford extends relational virtue ethics in an eschatological direction, proposing we envision our consciences formed by exemplars from the future.

Ronaldo Zacharias observes that traditional Catholic sexual ethics forces homosexual persons into a problematic dichotomy between being and acting. Virtue ethics, led by a renewed understanding of the virtue of chastity, can help homosexual persons integrate their selves and their actions. Zacharias asserts, "An inclusive sexual ethic cannot make normative claims while disregarding that we all were created to be free in corresponding to God's love and in finding ways that allow us to integrate being and acting in just, faithful, and caring relationships."

Part V, "Spirituality and Morality," begins with Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, who finds vivid resonance between virtue ethics, the church's journey toward synodality, and insights and practices from religious community life. Articulating synodality as a virtue, she finds that the practices of sacred conversation used in religious life yield rich insights for growth in this personal and communal virtue, which the whole church can learn from members of consecrated communities.

Then, engaging the literature of disability studies, Mary Jo Iozzio provides a rich analysis of the meaning and significance of vulnerability for theological anthropology and our understanding of God's passibility. Finally, Ai Pham, SJ, describes Keenan's method as bridging moral teaching and pastoral practice centered on three themes of charity-love, conscience, and moral discernment. Pham finds such bridge-building alive in Australian

Catholics' reception of *Amoris Laetitia* as the church in Australia navigates between the ideal and the reality of family life.

We thank the contributors for their exceptional contributions, which advance the future of Catholic moral theology even as they demonstrate each author's gratitude to Jim Keenan for his mentorship, friendship, and leadership in the field. Thanks are due as well to many people whose generous help made the volume's publication possible. Steve Dalton, the head librarian at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, combed the shelves of printed dissertations to ensure we were able to find and contact all of Jim's doctoral students. We are delighted to publish the volume with Orbis Books, where Jill Brennan O'Brien first welcomed the project, and Robert Ellsberg and Tom Hermans-Webster shepherded it home. Gregory Kalscheur, SJ, dean of the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College, provided funds to support the publication of this book. In addition to their contributions to this volume, Dan Daly and Mary Jo Iozzio conceived, planned, and raised funds for the celebratory conference where we will present it to Jim. We are grateful to Toni Ross for helping protect Jim's schedule for the conference, and we recognize her role as a sustaining partner in so much of Jim's important work in the theological community. Finally, Jim, we thank you. If this volume's editors and contributors have succeeded in retrieving and reinventing the Catholic theological tradition, lifting up the voices of others, and collaborating together in vulnerability, trust, and charity, it is because we have you as our exemplar.