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Book Reviews



David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Canton: Front Edge Publishing, 2022), xxiv + 339 pp., \$20.49, paperback (ISBN 9781641801249).

In my teaching of Christian ethics, I have often found it challenging to select a suitable textbook to acquaint students with the field. For me, this search is now largely over thanks to David Gushee's *Introducing Christian Ethics*. This book, drawing on twenty-eight years of teaching by the author, does an excellent job of providing an overview of the discipline, as well as an example of how to do Christian ethics. The book engages several moral issues, outlining a response to each one.

The first seven chapters are more general in focus and treat topics such as the nature of Christian ethics (chapter 1) and moral theory (chapter 2). Then follow five chapters on specific Christian values and virtues, such as sacredness (chapter 9), justice (chapter 10), and forgiveness (chapter 12). A third group of chapters addresses concrete moral issues, such as environmental ethics (chapter 13), white supremacy (chapter 15), and crime and punishment (chapter 21). In describing these issues, Gushee takes what he calls a “lifecycle approach” (155), discussing issues “roughly in the order in which they are experienced in the lives of people” (155).

There is much that I like about this book: it is comprehensive in scope, striking a good balance between, on the one hand, discussing ethical theory and, on the other hand, treating concrete moral issues. Furthermore, while clear on the contribution that Christian ethics can make, it is also honest about the dark sides of (evangelical) Christianity, for example, in treatment of the environmental crisis. When discussing Lynn White's thesis that Christianity is largely to blame for this crisis, Gushee notes: “It is hard to deny that there are deep structural impediments to serious environmental concern within dominant Christian theological traditions” (160). At the same time, he views these impediments primarily as a result of the cultural captivity of the church to the age of

industrialization, claiming that the Bible and Christian tradition in fact contain rich sources to inform a much more environmentally friendly approach to nature.

Despite its positive aspects, the book does have an important drawback: its orientation. Gushee states that the book is specifically aimed at a global audience (xxiii); however, in my opinion, it falls short of delivering on that score, instead focusing strongly on a North American context. This is apparent both in the choice of topics and in the way they are discussed. For example, the chapter on “The Radical Economic Ethics of Jesus” (199–210) is exclusively geared toward the USA. While Gushee’s treatment of economic inequality in the USA is original—through his study of Luke 6:1–15—the chapter is unbalanced by its ignorance of economic struggles in developing nations, as well as of innovative Christian ethical responses that have developed in response to these, such as Latin American liberation theologies.

This focus on the American context is also visible in chapter 20, “Where Church Meets State” (253–266), taking the relationship between church and state as established in the USA, one characterized by separation, to be the gold standard by which arrangements in other countries, most notably Germany during the Nazi era, are judged. This presentation cuts too many corners, ignoring the rich tapestry of nuanced perspectives on church and state that have developed both in Europe and in North America over the course of centuries, not to mention the rest of the world. This is not to say that Gushee is jingoistic. In fact, he is very critical of the way many American Evangelicals have abandoned the separation between church and state, which he favors, in particular during the time of the Trump administration.

Despite this criticism, I still intend to use this book in teaching ethics in a Northwestern European context, expanding on it and nuancing it in my classes. Its use for teaching is facilitated by discussion questions at the end of each chapter, which are helpful in the setting of a class or study group. In conclusion, this book makes a helpful and (mostly) nuanced contribution to the teaching of Christian ethics in contemporary contexts of the developed world.

Steven C. van den Heuvel

Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium

steven.vandenheuvel@etf.edu