

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Why You Can Disagree... and Remain a Faithful Catholic* by Philip S. Kaufman

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## THE FURROW

insight; or, alternatively, a sympathetic portrayal of the priestly character in some of its complexity. 'Yeats and his Unchristened Heart' brings a quizzical Christian intelligence to bear on a great poet whose system seems to dwarf Christianity itself. His extended essay on tragedy, where he distinguishes controversially between the 'pathos' of O'Neill and Synge and the authentic tragic rhythm of Sophocles, Shakespeare and Ibsen, makes us regret that he published so little 'pure criticism'.

But being a fisher of men he had bigger fish to fry. 'God in Modern Literature' and the fiction reviews with which the book ends are Peter Connolly in his chosen matter. We can hear the impatience of his tone in this comment on Morris West:

The notion that the act of love bestows knowledge and divinity is as old as mankind; the theme itself is not a matter for refutation. To treat it this way however – exalting it as an initiatory rite into faith, hope and charity – is one of the spiritual vulgarities of the 'Catholic' novel today.

The series of appreciations with which Dr Murphy's book opens – by Barbara Hayley, T. H. O'Donnell, Mícheál Ledwith, A. Norman Jeffares and Patrick Hannon – add up to a reasonable portrait of his complex personality. But he was a brilliant ironic man and the heart of his mystery remains intact. The editor's introduction gives us a useful digest of his life and place in our cultural history. It is, perhaps correctly, reticent on the hard knocks he received from our society, lay and clerical. I must say, however, that Hugh O'Donnell's poem, 'The Sun also Rises' catches a great deal of his devilment:

The laugh lifting through you, startling  
The late-night cinema audience, not quite so quick  
To see the joke, as the bishop raised  
The double-barrelled shot-gun to blow  
His just-absolved penitent's brains out.

and his compassion

Afternoons in the corrida, and once,  
With the crowd on its excited feet, shouting,  
The matador passed you, white-faced,  
Wide-eyed and anxious, and very, very tired.

We have each our own images of a man who will not easily fade from memory.

AUGUSTINE MARTIN

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**Why you can disagree . . . and remain a faithful Catholic.** Philip S. Kaufman, O.S.B. Bloomington, Indiana: Meyer-Stone Books. Pp. 192. Price \$9.95.

The basic thesis of this book is that Catholics have a right to know not only official Church teaching but also 'other information in the Church'. In his foreword, Richard A. McCormack, the distinguished moral theologian now teaching at Notre Dame, calls the author Kaufman courageous and thoughtful in his presentation of several burning

issues and the dissent that has arisen about them. Kaufman's tone is provocative and sometimes vitriolic in his disagreement with current Church teachings. This tone is set by a 1986 poll printed opposite the title page, showing widespread disagreement (among American Catholics) with official teaching on several moral issues. In many ways Kaufman's book is a popularization of the scholarly opinions of theologians who have questioned various aspects of Church teaching. The author wants these views to be available to ordinary Catholics.

Kaufman starts with the doctrine of infallibility because he believes that the 'cloak of infallibility' is given to teachings that have not been formally defined. Indeed he is clearly unsympathetic to the concept of papal infallibility itself, seemingly accepting the view of Brian Tierney that the idea of papal infallibility arose from a dispute between two branches of the Franciscan Order in the middle ages. Kaufman is on firmer ground when he deals with the infallibility of the ordinary and universal magisterium. He clearly outlines this concept, while dwelling on its elusiveness when applied to particular moral issues, quoting canon 749, 3: 'No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly established as such.' However, since most of the issues dealt with later in the book concern the response due to the non-infallible teaching of the Church it is a pity that Kaufman's treatment of this is scant. The *obsequium* of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, 25, gets only a few lines and then to downplay it as vague. Given the title of the book, one would have expected an in-depth treatment.

Kaufman next discusses probabilism about which he has some good points to make, although one might have hoped for a thorough discussion of the relative weights of theological scholarship and Church teaching authority. He then goes on to three concrete issues: birth control; divorce/remarriage; and democracy in the Church. On contraception Kaufman gives a presentation of Robert Blair Kaiser's book on the birth control commission of 1963-66, followed by arguments that *Humanae Vitae* was mistaken. For Kaufman, it was really 'old wine in new wineskins', having a Stoic understanding of natural law but expressed in the language of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*. John T. Noonan's view that the two documents have an essential unity is given short shrift by Kaufman who also does his argument a disservice by claiming that Paul VI implicitly intended to teach that contraception involves mortal sin. Finding no evidence for this in *Humanae Vitae*, Kaufman reads it into the 1975 Vatican *Declaration on Sexual Ethics*. He never mentions the 1973 document of the Congregation of the Clergy which stated that objective/subjective distinction of moral theology applied in assessing the sinfulness of contraception in particular circumstances. Interestingly enough, Kaufman has a footnote regarding dissent about abortion but does not discuss it. His reticence here is strange especially in the American context.

On the issue of divorce/remarriage, Kaufman depends largely on the work of Theodore Mackin who has written three tomes on marriage, its sacramentality and divorce/remarriage. After throwing doubt on the biblical evidence for the Church's position on remarriage, Kaufman

## THE FURROW

deals with the early Church's attitude. This of course is not a simple question; Kaufman uses Mackin's research to bolster his argument that the early Church Fathers accepted divorce/remarriage in some circumstances and that absolute indissolubility was a later western idea. The Jesuit patristic scholar Henri Crouzel has disagreed strongly with some of Mackin's conclusions but Crouzel merits only a line in this book. On democracy in the Church Kaufman has some very good points to make about power and centralization, even if he rather uncritically champions the idea of the popular election of bishops.

This book doesn't pretend to be anything but partisan – the author sees his role as presenting theological opinion opposed to present teachings and practices. It is a book written for popular consumption, with a racy style and plenty of punchlines. Perhaps a nuanced book might be more convincing; the reader needs to be aware that not all scholars have come to the same conclusions as the ones the author presents. Yet Kaufman (now over 80) writes passionately and clearly. It is a very readable book.

PATRICK CONNOLLY

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**The Spirit of the Psalms.** Noel Quesson. Translated and edited by Marie Frances Curtin. New York: Paulist Press. Pp. 260. Price £9.95.

**Psalm Prayers for Morning and Evening.** Brian Magee, C.M. Dublin: Veritas. Pp. 63. Price £3.95.

These are two books which will be greatly welcomed by those who pray the psalms. Noel Quesson's volume, beautifully translated from the French original, is a gem, and more than fulfils the author's purpose – 'to offer suggestions on how to open our minds to an understanding of the psalms'. It takes fifty of the most widely-used psalms and with a very simple concise outline provides three interpretations for each psalm.

First it uncovers the literal meaning – what the psalm would have meant to the Israelites when it was written. Then it gives a very enriching interpretation of how Jesus would have prayed the psalm, and finally it suggests ways of praying the psalm in the context of our own life today.

I found this a delightful book. Its interpretation of how Jesus would have prayed some of the psalms, especially psalms 51, 63 and 22, can lead to a rediscovery of the psalms as the beautiful prayers they are. It is an ideal companion for anyone who loves the psalms and I warmly recommend it.

Brian Magee's slim volume provides an English translation of 256 psalm prayers which were included in the Supplement to the Latin edition of the Liturgy of the Hours but omitted in the edition we use. Many of the psalm prayers are helpful in bringing a Christian dimension to the reading of the psalms and will be welcomed especially by those who recite the Office in common, pausing after each psalm for silent reflection. I found that attempting to use them can break the rhythm of