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BOOK REVIEW

Scaria Kanniyakonil, *Bioethical Issues: A Catholic Moral Analysis*, Kottayam: OIRSI Publications, 2017. Pages: 344.

A new book on moral theology, especially one discussing a Catholic approach to bioethics, is a welcome addition to the understanding of the Church's teaching of ethics pertaining to life issues. The author, Fr Scaria Kanniyakonil from St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kerala, India has written a comprehensive treatment of bioethics, building upon his prior publications on related topics. This book attempts to introduce both the novice and the learned to the current understanding of bioethics and the issues therein from a Catholic perspective. In the first chapter Kanniyakonil lays a solid foundation for readers, providing definitions, historical background and sources of bioethics. He introduces bioethics as "Bioethics is concerned with life and death issues, and, between those two extremes, about health and sickness and what we can do about them. Bioethics is usually used in a way that includes medical ethics as a subset (for this reason, see also the term "biomedical ethics"). In the more general and broader definition, bioethics seems to include additional issues that are not necessarily a part of medical ethics, e.g. research ethics, ethical issues related to new scientific techniques such as cloning, and environmental policy." This initial chapter continues to lay the framework for reviewing bioethics by discussing the concept of body, health and sickness, the goals of healthcare and the Relation between Bioethics and Family. The introductory chapter concludes with a review of bioethical approaches and methods, including empirical, clinical, scientific, legal, sociological, psychological, secular and religious approaches and methods of study. This chapter is a solid foundation for any review of bioethics, regardless of one's religion or perspective.

Kanniyakonil continues to guide the reader by introducing the theology of the human body and of life. This important chapter discusses the concepts of the human body, both secular and Christian, drawing upon Sacred Scripture and Patristic writings to lead us to a Christian understanding of human life. In this chapter, as throughout the book, the author provides abundant footnotes and citations to Sacred Scripture, to papal encyclicals, learned papers and treatises from other reputable sources. Indeed, Kanniyakonil at all times appears to be leading the reader to delve further into the cited sources in order to further improve one's knowledge and understanding of the topic in question.

Chapter three continues the discussion of the concept of human life, drawing specifically upon the documents of the Catholic Church. In this regard, and throughout his book, Kanniyakonil is steadfast in his understanding and presentation of the tradition, understanding and teaching of the Catholic Church in these matters of ethics and morality. Chapter four begins the discussion of Christian medical codes, oaths and prayers, drawing upon both the Old and New Testaments, as well as national Catholic health care codes. One such code, found in chapter one, which was passed by the Christian Medical and Dental Association House of Delegates on 3 May, 1991 at Chicago, Illinois, is exceptional.

The remaining chapters of Kanniyakonil's book delve into specific areas of health care, hospitals, institutions, and how moral evaluations of bioethical issues should be decided. To lay a foundation for a review of specific life issues, he reviews moral theology principles such as the principle of totality, of double effect and of legitimate material cooperation. The author explains these principles in specific applications in subsequent chapters of his book. The remainder of the book is divided into chapters discussing issues at the beginning of life, bodily integrity during life, care for the vulnerable, disabled and elderly, and then euthanasia, suicide and capital punishment. These chapters cover the span of a lifetime, together with its challenges, review of modern presentation and discussion, particularly pertaining to end of life issues. Kanniyakonil addresses topics in a family-oriented manner such as withdrawal from a ventilator, artificial nutrition and hydration (one can remember the Terri Schiavo case and the ethical and moral issues therein raised), Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) and Do Not Intubate (DNI) orders which have different force and effect in different states in the USA. The author concludes this chapter with a thorough understanding of the difference between ordinary and extraordinary means of care. As a prior hospital chaplain, it is imperative to know and appreciate these differences, especially when reviewing end of life issues. Having worked in Intensive Care Units (ICU), Cardiac Care Units (CCU) and emergency departments (ED), one constantly faces these moral and ethical issues which Kanniyakonil's book addresses and then provides a clear and moral resolution to such end-of-life issues. These issues are faced by family members on a daily basis and it is important that an understanding of Catholic teaching be prevalent in such circumstances. Kanniyakonil is not afraid to discuss topics such as persistent vegetative state (PVS), killing and letting die, as well as teachings on ordinary and extraordinary treatment according to the teachings of the Catholic Church. At all times the author presents the church's teaching in a compassionate and learned manner, drawing upon church documents and papal encyclicals. For example, discussing the provision of nutrition and hydration, he states: "For instance, *Cor Unum* document of 1981 states

that: “There remains the strict obligation to apply under all circumstances those therapeutic measures which are called ‘minimal’: that is, those which are normally and customarily used for the maintenance of life (alimentation – the provision of nourishment or other necessities of life, blood transfusions, injections, etc.). To interrupt these minimal measures would, in practice, be equivalent to wishing to put an end to the patient’s life.” With these and similar references, the author offers a sound and practical Catholic understanding of moral theology as it pertains to bioethical issues, to specific issues of life itself.

This critic has been privileged to know and discuss some such issues with Fr Scaria Kanniyakonil and to be of minor assistance in the preparation of his latest book. As a student of moral theology, especially as it pertains to the study of current medical challenges and technologies, Kanniyakonil’s book is to be welcomed as it provides a comprehensive and thorough review of the state of medical advances, providing a sound basis for reviewing such medical challenges. In a feverishly changing world, with ever increasing changes in medical technology and related research fields, this book is a solid foundation upon which we can build our understanding and knowledge of the Catholic Church and be better prepared to address and answer these modern challenges. This critic strongly recommends this book for its thoroughness and adherence to Catholic principles.

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