

# Book Reviews

## Medical Ethics: Sources of Catholic Teachings

Kevin D. O'Rourke and Philip Boyle

3rd ed., Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 1999, 442 pp., \$37.50 (paperback)

IN THESE POST-BALANCED BUDGET ACT days of belt tightening and fiscal constraint in healthcare, we face another ethical dilemma: Should one buy the third edition of *Medical Ethics: Sources of Catholic Teachings*, especially if one already has both the 1989 and 1993 editions? Does this book contain significant amounts of new substantive material and modifications to justify its purchase? The answer is yes.

The third edition of *Medical Ethics* contains the following new material:

- Eleven new chapters, including a chapter on AIDS which focuses on the international ethical problem of the African AIDS crisis
- Church teachings applied to con-

temporary social and ethical issues, including healthcare reform and assisted suicide

• Recently published encyclicals and magisterial statements such as *The Splendor of Truth*, *The Gospel of Life*, and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

• Recent church teachings applied to addiction, anencephaly, artificial reproduction, assisted suicide, suicide, capital punishment, murder, Catholic healthcare, healthcare reform, the principle of cooperation, and the principle of double effect

In addition to these new chapters, O'Rourke and Boyle have made substantive revisions such as the deletion of citations from the earlier chapter on hydration and nutrition and the relocation of the section on the *Ethical and Religious Directives* to later in the book.

While these changes contribute to the book's excellence, there is the potential misuse of this valuable resource as an ecclesiological proof text. The authors

acknowledge this danger and realize that, while most healthcare professionals are knowledgeable in matters of medicine and science, many lack an understanding of the church's teachings. The authors' purpose in the third edition is "to help Catholic healthcare professionals understand, internalize, and apply the principles of Catholic teaching to the many ethical issues they encounter in research and practice." For the reasons stated above it is imperative that a person read the first two chapters before using the book for research purposes.

The first chapter presents the teachings of the church regarding the concept of the human person and human action, which pertains to various issues of medical ethics. The second chapter distinguishes between erroneous notions of ethical norms and conscience and the role of the church's teachings in the appropriately formed and informed conscience. O'Rourke and Boyle emphasize the fact that "decisions of conscience are always about particular actions which

## BOOK BRIEFS

### Healthcare Law and Ethics: Issues for the Age of Managed Care

Dean M. Harris, *Health Administration Press, Chicago, 1999, 320 pp., \$52 (hardbound)*

In this book, written for healthcare leaders who may have little or no legal background, the author discusses legal issues in healthcare today, how to develop an intuitive sense for avoiding legal problems, and when to consult a lawyer. Part I reviews America's legal system and outlines how to do legal research. Part II discusses the business of healthcare in chapters on the legal structure of healthcare providers, government regulations, medical staff privileges, government payment programs, and antitrust laws. Part III focuses on patient care issues such as

tort liability, legal and ethical obligations to provide care, termination or refusal of care, and human reproduction. Finally, in Part IV, the author outlines legal and ethical issues in managed care.

### The Wisdom of Dying: Practices for Living

N. Michael Murphy, *Element Books, Boston, 1999, 231 pp., \$24.95 (hardbound)*

The author, a clinical professor and the founder of a hospice, offers a guide to living and dying a life of meaning. Emphasizing the importance of storytelling, throughout the book he relates ancient myths and legends, real-life stories of death and life, and personal experiences. The book's 14

chapters cover the topics of dying and the soul, the denial of death, care of the soul, suffering and dying, letting go, mourning, and rituals of both living and dying. The book concludes with a curriculum for living and dying as a model for medical, nursing, and other schools that teach caregiving.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

**Doctors Who Followed Christ: Thirty-Two Biographies of Eminent Physicians and Their Christian Faith**, Dan Graves, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1999

**Sunflowers in the Sand: Stories from Children of War**, Leah Curtin, Cooper Square Press, Lanham, MD, 2000



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involve particular facts and judgements. The teachings of the Church are never to be considered as preconceived solutions to serious problems." The church's teaching are general statements that "reflect the teachings of Christ and Christian wisdom requiring application to difficult situations by compassionate individuals."

Duly noting this caution, the user will find this text indispensable in not only becoming acquainted with the church's teachings but also essential to integrating these teachings in medical ethics.

As O'Rourke and Boyle plan their fourth edition, there are some changes I would suggest. First, I would suggest a change in the title. The title *Medical Ethics: Sources of Catholic Teachings* suggests a broad inclusion of teachings from other national episcopal conferences as well as excerpts from the works of theologians. The sources used in the book are exclusively from papal/Vatican and the American National Conference of Catholic Bishops documents.

The second change concerns the chapters on capital punishment and murder. The chapter on capital punishment seems out of place in a book on medical ethics, although it is a significant ethical issue for our society. Murder, the title of Chapter 36, seems a misnomer, with "killing" being a more accurate term. The chapter makes the distinction between killing and allowing to die. Murder is often used as a legal term connecting this particular form of killing to a criminal act.

Over the years I have found the previous editions to be most helpful as a handy reference for church teachings pertaining to healthcare issues. The third edition of *Medical Ethics: Sources of Catholic Teaching* is an excellent, indispensable, and cost-effective research tool that should be in every healthcare professional's resource library.

Carl L. Middleton Jr., DMin  
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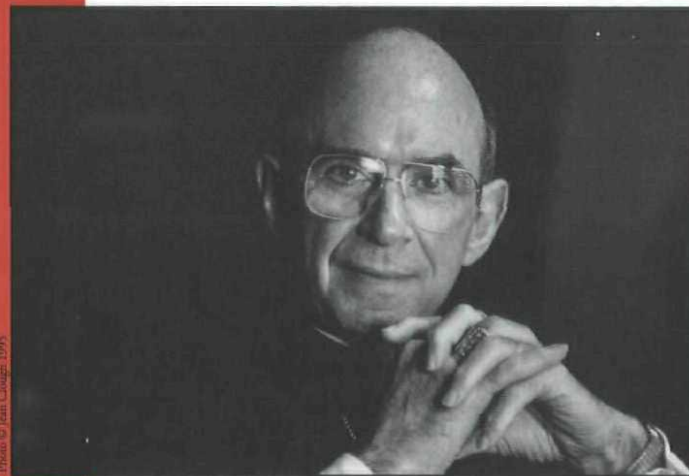


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### Reviewer's Comments:

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