

Book Review:

Diarmuid O’Murchu, *The Meaning and Practice of Faith*

(New York, Orbis, 2014), 136 pp., ISBN 978-1-62698-081-5

Anyone questioning the usefulness of belief and in search for practical guides to discern the faith should definitely get hold of Diarmuid O’Murchu’s books. A renowned Catholic priest and a member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Order, O’Murchu, who is also a social psychologist from Ireland, has become one of today’s renowned authors on the subject of faith. Among his pioneering books in this field, there are *Quantum Theology* (1997), *Evolutionary Faith* (2002), *Ancestral Grace* (2008), and *Adult Faith* (2010). One of his great gifts is his ability to be clear and synthetic at the same time.

Dividing the book in six chapters, O’Murchu aims to engage his readers to discern their faith-experience. His method is simple and straightforward. He starts each chapter with provoking thoughts that speak to the heart, discusses issues of the faith in relationship to one’s personal experience, and then offers a few questions for further reflection either for personal use or to aid discussion in a group. Every now and again, the author seems to stress the need for discernment and (personal and spiritual) maturity.

This book does, in fact, emphasize orthopraxis (orthopraxy), more than orthodoxy. Faith is less defined in the light of age-old treatises, than in view of the human quest for God in terms of discernment and personal experience. O’Murchu is no prophet of doom and this seems to be the magical formula of his books. In a nutshell, he leads his readers to see a promising epoch in what others define as hard times or a cultural breakdown. Instead of a return to the established norms of the past, he encourages a growing sense of how to navigate one’s self and one’s faith through today’s complex and fluid global culture.

In the first chapter, one finds a sincere contextualization of the Christian faith. The author insists that it is only through one's process of "emerging adulthood" that one can possibly grasp the meaning and practice of faith. In the subsequent chapters, the author engages his readers to reflect on their faith in God (chapter 2), in Jesus (chapter 3), in the Holy Spirit (chapter 4), in the Church (chapter 5), and in the life to come which he calls "Faith in the Future" (chapter 6). In all, O'Murchu seeks to challenge all Catholics to come to terms with their Christian faith by purifying religion and growing in faith.

The following is just one typical example of how O'Murchu's clear style leads the reader into introspection: "The awakening of an adult quality of faith nearly always involves – to one degree or another – a break with inherited beliefs. Rarely does it evolve into what might be labeled full-blown atheism (whatever exactly that is). Adults tend to go through a process with well-defined stages. [These are] inner questioning ... substantial doubts ... cynicism ... drifting ... challenge ... attempting serious change ... exploring alternatives" (p. 31-33).

As the author attests, this book is a resource that will enable people to discern more deeply what they are experiencing and to develop a vocabulary to articulate their inner processes. His quest is hence nothing less than to gently lead his readers to become adult seekers with renewed responsibility to come up not merely with a sense of individual resolution concerning life's big questions, but with a discerning wisdom that can be checked, challenged, and validated in the dialogical forums of spiritual accompaniment (p. viii). In the end, the very meaning and practice of faith, as the book title suggests, involves an awakening experience that everyone could go through until one reaches a faith which is fully alive in God.

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