

Behind Closed Doors: Conflicts in Today's Church

Francis Anthony Quinn

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This is an open examination of living a life of faith, despite all of the challenges.

Behind Closed Doors: Conflicts in Today's Church by Francis Anthony Quinn is a complex fictional memoir based on a life spent in the priesthood.

David Carmichael enters the priesthood with his friends Tyler and Ladd. Though the three stay in touch, their journeys take them in different directions. Each finds controversy in his own way: David through disagreements with G.O.D. (Guardians of Doctrine), Tyler through the burden of celibacy, and Ladd through a lifelong friendship with a woman. They're separated for much of the story, but the three men share a deep bond that comes through in David's heartfelt narration.

Over the course of the book, David describes day-to-day acts like hearing confession, and also relates life-altering conflicts such as clashes over doctrine and a friend's trial for alleged sexual molestation. The narrative is simple and easy to read, using clear dialogue and description; the pace is smooth, but also slow at times. David's gentle voice conveys everyday faith, conflicts, and questions with sensitivity and compassion. His narration is sincere and sympathetic, ultimately coming across as deeply human.

An opening note to readers reveals that though the novel's key relationships and events are fictional, they otherwise "tell the story of the actual lives of real women and men, priests, and bishops," and become a way to examine key issues in the church. David's relationships and his life in the priesthood are used to address widespread issues, hitting on hot-button themes such as the Catholic Church's stance on, and response to, topics like homosexuality, divorce, and celibacy. By using personal stories, the narrative achieves a balance between individual faith and complex issues.

While this mix of real topics with fictional stories is an adept method of protecting identities, it can also feel disconcerting, even false at times. The title and cover don't convey that the book is fiction; instead, at first glance, it seems more like a nonfiction look at disputes within religious groups.

A retired bishop, Quinn is able to share the ins and outs of Catholic ministry, having learned its nuances and rhythms over decades of experience. Devout Catholics, priests, and people interested in the priesthood will find Quinn's story of a life of faith familiar, heartrending, and ultimately hopeful. Quinn shows how it is possible to live an honest life of faith even in the face of incredible conflicts and uncertainty.

Behind Closed Doors is an open story of a life of faith.

MELISSA WUSKE (September 23, 2016)

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