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Review: 'The 'Priesthood of the Faithful': Key to a Living Church'

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The Priesthood of the Faithful: Key to a Living Church. By Paul J. Philibert, O.P. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005. viii + 173 pages. \$15.95 (paper).

A bishop once remarked to me that his biggest disappointment concerning the implementation of Vatican II was that the laity had not yet begun to think of themselves as “church.” Paul Philibert directly addresses that bishop’s concern. Writing with energy and passion, Philibert appears to be trying to touch off a veritable awakening regarding the nature and importance of the lay vocation and its priestly dimension.

In this work of theological and pastoral synthesis, Philibert plumbs the depths of one key doctrine from ecclesiology and another from sacramental theology. The ecclesiological doctrine is the common priesthood of the faithful. The teaching from sacramental theology is the relationship between a “graced sign” (*res et sacramentum*) and a “realized mystery” (*res tantum*). He blends these already overlapping teachings together with insights from Scripture, Church documents, spiritual wisdom, and everyday experience. The resulting mixture is an impressive and hope-filled Vatican II-inspired theology of the laity.

The “graced sign” of the Eucharist is the consecrated bread and wine. The “realized mystery” of the Eucharist is the Church community as the Mystical Body of Christ. Philibert argues that this realized mystery is found not only in the eucharistic assembly as it is gathered in a church, but also and just as importantly in that body of Christians as they exercise their priestly ministries within the context of their daily lives. When they reassemble in church, they will bring back with them their everyday priestly sacrifices to offer along with the bread and wine.

Building upon *Lumen gentium* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Philibert explains how Baptism gives each Christian a share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal ministry of Christ. While demonstrating successfully how his own agenda reflects and elaborates upon official Church teaching, he acknowledges also that he is bucking trends among some Vatican officials to reassert the distinction between the ordained and common priesthoods in such a way as to downplay the latter.

Philibert wrings every drop of theological and pastoral meaning that he can out of the common priesthood of the faithful. It is a real form of priesthood that is truly sacramental, and therefore it must express the spiritual power of Christ to transform human lives as well as other created realities. Philibert acknowledges and respects the distinctiveness of ordained ministry, but he shows no sign of the contemporary fear that to sing the praises of one form of priesthood must somehow work to diminish the other.

Those who support the agenda behind the current official stress on the differences between the ordained and the lay will probably not like this book. Admittedly, some books promoting a lay revolution are written with an edge that cuts against all things hierarchical, but Philibert writes with remarkable balance. Some may find his vision unrealistic due to the relative lack of formation of the laity. Others may find that his language and concepts are too “churchy,” even as he applies his categories to Christian life in the world.

I find the book to be a gem. It is a work of vision and direction. It synthesizes and expresses ideas that have been brewing over a lifetime. It is rife with practical advice about how to renew Christian life within the Church and within the world. College teachers will find it useful for courses addressing topics such as Church, Laity, Ministry, Sacraments, Mission, and Spirituality. It will also prove useful for various forms of adult education and community formation.

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DENNIS M. DOYLE

Constructing Antichrist: Biblical Commentary and the Development of Doctrine in the Early Middle Ages. By Kevin L. Hughes. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005. xxi + 278 pages. \$59.95.

In six clearly written chapters the author leads the reader on a fascinating investigation of the apocalyptic imagination concerning the Antichrist beginning with St. Paul himself, continuing through the early Middle Ages. He includes a representative bibliography and helpful index.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the nuances of apocalyptic thought in general and its foundation in 2 Thessalonians Hughes provides the Latin Vulgate and English translation of this epistle on pages xii-xxi. He then summarizes two approaches to the Antichrist that he identified from his reading of the tradition. The first he identifies as "apocalyptic realism" that imagines the Antichrist understood to be imminent and external. The second he identifies as the "spiritual interpretation" where the Antichrist is understood to be immanent and internal.

Chapter 2 presents the foundation of this apocalyptic tradition in the authors he identifies as apocalyptic realists: Ambrose, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Pelagius, and Jerome. He argues that these writers demonstrated a concern with the tenuous position of the church in the Roman empire, especially in the context of Julian the Apostate's reign, which created the need to turn to commentary on the letters of Paul. The Ambrose tradition includes the commentaries of Ambrosiaster and Theodore of Mopsuestia while the Jerome tradition is identified with Pelagius and Jerome himself. Each of these authors understood the Antichrist in a non-allegorical sense as someone who would arrive at the end of time. While the Antichrist's coming will be announced by external events, these authors refuse to make concrete predictions concerning its coming.

The spiritualist reading of 2 Thessalonians is detailed in Chapter 3, where Hughes underlines the context of crisis in northern Africa in the fourth century concerning the nature of the true church, and is represented by Tyconius and Augustine. Tyconius' *Book of Rules* emphasizes the division of the body of the church in terms of the struggle of the spirit and flesh: the Body of Christ contains the body of the Antichrist. Tyconius also argues that apocalyptic language speaks not only to the future, but also to events that are "recapitulated through time" (87). Both of these insights lead Tyconius to develop a spiritual