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Review: 'What's Right with the Church: A Spirited Statement For Those Who Have Not Given Up On the Church and For Those Who Have'

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Dulles searches the theological literature of past and present to show how the meaning of catholicity has been affirmed and deepened since the times of the earliest Christian writers. He incorporates the whole tradition, Orthodox, Protestant, even the Modernist thinkers, as well as Scripture, the Fathers, and Roman Catholic theologians, and does this so irenically that one almost forgets the hostility and strife that accompanied (and often still accompanies) the forging of a more inclusive, and non-triumphalist, understanding of the catholicity of the church. Perhaps Dulles' reliance on texts of theologians and church groups—on what the church ought to be—gives a certain air of unreality or idealism to this study. It might well be supplemented by a more critical, historical treatment that shows how the church has enacted or failed to enact the catholicity that is so beautifully ascribed to it.

Dulles deals with the relation between catholicity and Roman Catholicism by opting for a fluid use of the term, sometimes indicating (usually by a capital letter) the Catholic Church, at other times intending the wider notion of catholic as general or universal. With this strategy he deftly suggests a dialectical tension between a catholicity already given in the Catholic Church and that universality which is an eschatological goal in a painfully divided Christianity and world. Dulles further contends that there is a Catholic "principle" (not only a "substance") that derives from the church's visible and social structures of mediation—its sacramentality or incarnationism—which, like Tillich's Protestant principle, is meant to shield Christianity from the distortions and exaggerations that each principle by itself entails. Authentic catholicity "consists in a dynamic interplay of mutually opposed but complementary principles" (p. 121), a pluralist position that Dulles supports with references to the writings of Newman, von Hügel, and G. B. Shaw in the preface to his play, *St. Joan*.

This inclusive spirit however, exhibited especially by Dulles in his treatment of Catholic-Protestant relations, fails when one looks for some discussion of the question of women in the church—certainly a major issue in ecumenism and in the Catholic Church today. Beyond some references to the work of Rosemary Haughton, Dulles refers to no women writers. Nor is there any allusion to the feminist critique of those churches which continue to exclude women from leadership and decision-making roles. This is a point where, again, some historical discussion would have offered a fuller picture of the reality of the church. The harmony of pure thought needs the abrasion of history in theology if the latter is to perform its critical task in and for the church.

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ANNE E. CARR

What's Right with the Church: A Spirited Statement for Those Who Have Not Given Up on the Church and for Those Who Have. By William H. Willimon. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. 144 pages. \$13.95.

If someone is going to tell me what is right with the church, my first question is, "What do you mean by 'church'?" What Willimon, a Methodist minister and professor at Duke University, means is mainline American Protestant congregations. His emphasis throughout is on the church as a concrete, visible, social, incarnate reality.

This book is an energetic and even feisty apologetic for those local churches that avoid the extremes of conservative evangelicalism and liberal activism. It is academically informed but written in a strictly popular style. Willimon demonstrates a flair for weaving together diverse and complex themes in a highly readable manner. His arguments are nicely seasoned with personal stories.

After establishing his position that "your local church is the church," Willimon launches into a discussion of a variety of themes, covering apologetics, church and world, ethics, the Bible, preaching, worship, and ministry. For each issue he tries to tread a middle path between a fundamentalist individualism that does not appreciate the value of the church and a social activism that does not appreciate the distinctiveness of the gospel vision.

For example, in answer to "why the church?" Willimon argues against individualists that grace is always mediated; he argues against liberals that the importance of the church lies in the truth of its convictions and stories. On questions of morals he argues against individualists that values are acquired through socialization; he argues against liberals that the Christian vision is distinct from that of the world. He argues against those who see the Bible as full of changeless truths and those who see it only as an uplifting guide to human behavior. He argues against those who see no justification for common worship and against those who try to justify worship by linking it to social practice. He argues against those who would have the church withdraw from the world and against those who would allow the church to collapse into the world. He argues against those who are against ordained ministry and against those who do not recognize that the main task of the minister is the service not of the world but of the community.

A recurring theme of the book is that while being and doing are both important, it is being that should be recognized as having clear priority. Faith is given priority over works, vision over action, *theōria* over *praxis*, worship over social justice, community over the world.

Although Willimon presents his work as a *via media* between liberalism and conservatism, it is in my judgment a conservative book. By using American evangelicalism to represent one extreme, Willimon is able to carve out a conservative niche for himself and present it as the middle. His book might be described as a popular rendition of post-liberalism: a call for the church to be a hermeneutically sophisticated yet relatively insular community. One can imagine a work that could be considered moderate and that would present liberalism as one extreme and the positions taken by Willimon as the other extreme.

One of the main effects of this book will be to make mainline Protestants feel good about themselves by reinforcing their sense of identity and mission. It is on the whole an inspiring work that may well contribute to revitalizing local church communities.

University of Dayton

DENNIS M. DOYLE

What Are They Saying About Mary? By Anthony J. Tambasco. New York: Paulist, 1984. v + 93 pages. \$3.95 (paper).

This valuable survey of developing issues in mariology places recent discussions into historical and ecumenical perspective. Although the scope of the