

Book compiles several definitions of priests

What Are They Saying about the Ministerial Priesthood?, by Father Daniel Donovan; Paulist Press (Mahwah, N.J., 1992); 149 pages; \$7.95.

By Father Robert F. McNamara
Guest contributor

Truth is complex: not normally "either-or" but "both-and." Unfortunately, the human mind is more comfortable with "either-or" — inclined to overemphasize one aspect of truth to the disadvantage of the other.

Take the revealed truth that Christ is both God and man. Many a heresy has sprung from people's overemphasizing either his Godhood or his manhood. Truth demands that both be kept in balance.

Vatican II's fathers sought to correct such imbalances. One they found in the concept of the ordained priesthood. Obviously, the priest in pastoral work has duties both in the sanctuary

and outside the church walls. The council's bishops agreed, however, that some Catholics were stressing too much the "apartness" of the ordained priest, and too little his "togetherness" with the rest of God's people. Therefore, as a corrective, the bishops reminded us that a priest is not ordained for himself alone but for others.

However nuanced the council references to this double priestly role, they sparked considerable popular controversy, which certainly contributed to the post-conciliar confusion as to just what a priest is, if anything. Meanwhile, however, serious theologians had set about developing the priesthood's doctrines.

Father Daniel Donovan, professor of theology of the University of St. Michael at the Toronto School of Theology, has attempted in this book to summarize: first, the switched empha-

sis on holy orders in the conciliar documents; secondly, the contribution to the subject by the Synod of Bishops (1971) and Pope John Paul II; and finally, the speculative reactions of a good cross-section of contemporary Catholic theologians.

Some of these theologians have attracted enthusiastic followings, but Father Donovan has chosen them all because they are dedicated savants, ready (usually) to accept their peers' criticisms in the trial-and-error laboratory that is speculative theology.

The picked scholars are: Yves Congar, OP; Karl Rahner, SJ; Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger; Jean Galot, SJ; Edward Schillebeekx, OP, (and his critics); Bernard Cooke; George Tavard; Thomas O'Meara; Edward Kilmartin; and Avery Dulles, SJ.

Feminist theologians Elizabeth Schuelessner Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether are cited in passing and their influence in certain sectors is noted. The author's analysis is painstaking, and he seldom interposes his own reflections. He does stress, however, the need to ground such theological investigations in a thorough knowledge of theology's history.

What Are They Saying about the Ministerial Priesthood presupposes a readership possessed of a fair degree of theological knowledge. Priests and those interested in sacramental theology are therefore the people most likely to be attracted by the book.

Not that Father Donovan is able to present any clear-cut definition of ministerial priesthood. Its theology is still far from crystallized. As he points out, however, the present debate's give-and-take manifests the "many-splendored" richness of the sacrament of orders.

A balanced concept of what is a priest is certainly necessary. Whatever final definition may be achieved, however, one ironic thought occurs to this reviewer as he closes this little book. Even though they lacked a theological definition of what they were, thousands of good priests over the years have acted on the conviction that their duty called them to both locales — the sanctuary and the sheepfold.

The Good Shepherd himself was their definition.

Father McNamara, diocesan archivist, is in residence at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Rochester.



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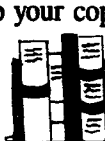
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