

BOOK REVIEW

The Diocesan Priest: Consecrated and Sent. By David Bohr. Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009. 168 pp. ISBN 978-0-8146-3278 (hardcover); ISBN: 978-0-8146-3905-4 (eBook)

With the close of the Year for Priests in sight, some are wondering if there is a volume out there which might continue the momentum generated by a special year focused on the ministerial priesthood. Is there a book which brings together the various elements considered essential for understanding and appreciating anew what Christ did for us in establishing the sacramental priesthood?

Let me say that the quest for such a work need not extend beyond *The Diocesan Priest: Consecrated and Sent* by David Bohr. Msgr. Bohr is a priest of the Diocese of Scranton who has spent the greater part of his ministry working with seminarians and priests in a variety of posts. Not only does he have rich and varied experiences to draw on, but his writing and reflections are borne out of advanced studies in both systematic and moral theology. Msgr. Bohr is the previous author of two other books.

The Diocesan Priest: Consecrated and Sent is not a long and wordy exercise (168 pages). Its relative brevity, though, should not suggest a light or superficial read. The volume is very substantial, with the author devoting chapters to the biblical foundations of the priestly office; the priesthood through history; consecration; mission and celibacy. The last chapter also treats the Church's authoritative teaching on the reservation of the ministerial priesthood to men only.

Msgr. Bohr is conscious of having written on a topic which has been much discussed in some circles for quite some time now. Yet, he still sees a place for his contribution. In the Introduction, he writes that he views his work chiefly as a theological reflection. To emphasize this specific orientation he has given to *The Diocesan Priest*, the author references Saint Bonaventure who held that theology ought to make us contemplative, yes, but its first purpose is to make us holy (11).

What makes Bohr's volume so valuable for students of theology is the impressive range of sources he cites in his footnotes. He appeals to theologians of various schools of thought, careful to mine from these disparate sources the best in terms of observations and insights. The fact that Bohr exercises such a commendable discernment in this respect gives his readers a balanced presentation of the published literature on the ministerial priesthood.

Exposure to different ways of thinking about the ministerial priesthood is not the same, however, as giving endorsement to all the conclusions drawn by the diverse membership within the theological guild. Bohr makes clear in his commentary that his personal outlook is guided decisively by the likes of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the former who gave us *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) and the latter who initiated the Year for Priests.

Another reason for being enthusiastic about *The Diocesan Priest* is the candor which fills its pages. Bohr serves up this judgment in the book's Conclusion: "There can be no doubt that doctrinal orthodoxy and the sense of Mystery were downplayed in the post-Vatican II period. The renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council very soon got caught up in the 'spirit of the age' marked by a previous skepticism of traditional authority" (160). Honest assessments, like the preceding one, hasten the pace whereby reforms are enacted to preserve what needs to be preserved and halt what needs to be halted. This insures that *aggiornamento* is not detached from *resourcement*.

Related to the author's frankness of judgment is a willingness on his part to take up issues which lie just beneath the surface, and still exercise a powerful influence on how the ministerial priesthood is lived and modeled today. I am thinking of this issue: How do we essentially understand the ministerial priesthood: functionally or ontologically? No doubt the Church understands the ministerial priesthood ontologically. That a functional understanding of the ministerial priesthood has been operative in many places over decades is incontestable though, and there are indeed repercussions pastorally. Bohr recommends that we continue to take our cues from the theological writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI and "other theologians who have followed this same approach, such as Galot, von Balthasar, Greshake, as well as Dulles and Barron in the United States" (162).

The renewal of the ministerial priesthood depends, in the first instance, on priests themselves having or re-claiming a proper identity within Christ's Body. Identity precedes function – cognitively and theologically. Knowing that they belong to the Lord first, priests are then ready to serve as the Church needs them.

The Diocesan Priest is a must read for those involved in the formation of candidates for the ministerial priesthood, and it belongs on every seminarian's bookshelf. Msgr. Bohr is deserving of praise for giving us such a fine synthetic treatment of key considerations connected to that office in the Church by which men are called to be and live and serve *in persona Christi capitis*.

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