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# Review: 'Goodbye Father: The Celibate Male Priesthood and the Future of the Catholic Church'

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## Book Reviews

dreas Tabarroni, Roberto Lambertini, Giacomo Todeschini, Raoul Manselli, and Giovanni Miccoli. Jacques Le Goff, summarizing a lifetime of acclaimed medieval scholarship, makes the following observation about Francis in his latest book: “[For his era] Francis rose up against what some contemporaries today refer to as the ‘economic horror of our time’ with a rigor and an intelligence which has no equal among contemporary adversaries of globalization” (*A la recherche du moyen age* [Paris, 2003], p. 86). Later, Le Goff writes, “The early Franciscans served as a ferment in contraposition to the rising new wealth of the times, a permanent witness questioning and recalling the social responsibilities of the wealthy and the scholarly” (Le Goff, p. 88). In response to criticism of her involvement with the poor quite similar to that which Wolfe addresses to Francis, Dorothy Day, very likely the most prominent inheritor of Francis’s tradition in our time, writes tellingly, “Yes, it is true according to the candlelight of common sense, but not according to the flaming heat of the Sun of justice. . . . The natural man does not perceive the things of the spirit. We need to be fools for Christ” (quoted from “On Pilgrimage,” *St. Anthony Messenger* [April 2003], p. 27).

PAUL LACHANCE, O.F.M., *Chicago Theological Union*.

SCHOENHERR, RICHARD A. *Goodbye Father: The Celibate Male Priesthood and the Future of the Catholic Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. xlii+274 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).

Richard Schoenherr died in 1996, three years after publishing *Full Pews and Empty Altars* (Madison, Wis., 1993). This book, the final report of a demographic study sponsored by the United States Catholic Conference, documented the Catholic priest shortage in the United States. His obituary in the *New York Times* dubbed Schoenherr the “sociologist who counted priests.” At his death, Schoenherr left an unpublished manuscript of twelve hundred pages. His editor, David Yamane, cut it to four hundred pages. *Goodbye Father* is the result. As a sociological reading of the signs of the times, it does much more than count priests.

Between 1966 and 1984, as the Catholic population in the United States increased, priests declined by 19 percent, with a projected decline of 40 percent by 2005. Schoenherr attributes this to widespread rejection of mandatory celibacy. Far from a narrowly Catholic issue, the priest shortage, as he sees it, is a powerful force for social change.

The heart of the book (chaps. 3–9) explains the theories of social change and religion that allow Schoenherr to give world-historical significance to the Catholic priest shortage. To explain social change, he combines classical and rational choice theory. In modern society, social change occurs when large-scale organizations change. As one of the largest organizations on earth, the Catholic Church is potentially an agent of change. However, Schoenherr argues that social change theory has underestimated the role of organized religion. Because they provide access to the highest levels of human development, authentic religious organizations have a special character, and any complete account of social change must include them. The way that religious organizations change is through the resolution of conflicts between charismatic coalitions and officeholders, but the priest shortage makes it impossible for the church to reproduce the officeholders it needs. The Catholic ministry combines hier-

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ophanic (sacramental) and hierarchic (sacerdotal) powers. Although the church will always need sacramental/sacerdotal officeholders, it will not necessarily need them to be male and celibate. The priest shortage is a crucial force for change because it is the most unstable in a constellation of dialectical trends in Western society moving from male domination to gender equality. The direction of social change depends on rational agents who control organizations; in the Catholic Church, a coalition of prophetic insurgents has arisen against the priestly coalition. Soon the priest shortage will force the hierarchic officeholders to yield to the charismatic coalition or risk the “Catholic tragedy” of sacrificing the Eucharist on the altar of male celibate exclusivity (pp. 127–29). Limited permission to ordain married men will come in this decade. Contemporary Catholics will see the routinization of married priests. Celibacy as the sacred legitimation for patriarchy will be no more. The subsequent ordination of women will strike a blow against patriarchy that will reverberate throughout society.

This is a brilliantly idiosyncratic book. Dean Hoge’s brief foreword tries to deflect three obvious lines of criticism. The first line of criticism is the intimate connection between Schoenherr’s biography and his sociology. He is not the first scholar to produce a grand narrative that repeats his own life journey. Before he married, Schoenherr spent nearly a decade as a celibate priest. Separating the author’s deepest hopes from his theory is not as easy as Hoge suggests. And then there is the sheer scope of Schoenherr’s theorizing; he moves from a specific demographic question to the end of patriarchy. The further away Schoenherr gets from the data on the priest shortage, the more he must become an advocate and prophet. The end of the male celibate priesthood will bring on the end of patriarchy, he argues. But if celibacy were abolished today, other social engines would continue to define women in subordination to men. People would still watch television and have access to pornography. Granting such leverage to Catholicism as an agent of social change recalls Schoenherr’s own biography and depends conceptually on his theory of religion. This leads to the third line of criticism that Hoge foresees. The special character of religious organizations in Schoenherr’s social change theory depends on his uncritical acceptance of the *sui generis* character of religious experience, an issue hotly debated in the contemporary academic study of religion. Anticipating objections that the book is out-of-date, Hoge tells us that the manuscript was completed in 1995. But some sections, notably the description of the charismatic coalition in chapter 12, show evidence of having been completed much earlier—say, in 1989. Two bishops from the prophetic coalition have died, and its charismatic leader retired in disgrace.

This book reveals the wide-ranging spirit of a true scholar. But as theory and prophecy, it is more of a period piece that will appeal mainly to Schoenherr’s generational cohort.

WILLIAM L. PORTIER, *University of Dayton*.

BROWN, STEWART J. *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1801–1846*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. x+459 pp. \$95.00 (cloth).

It may be platitudinous to observe that theology is often a neater, tidier business than history, but Stewart Brown’s vast and multidimensional study on the na-

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