

## **EVOLVING VISIONS OF THE PRIESTHOOD: CHANGES FROM VATICAN II TO THE TURN OF THE CENTURY**

DEAN R. HOGE & JACQUELINE E. WENGER  
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*Reviewed by Mary Louque*

The priesthood in the United States has always provided a sense of order and tradition for the faithful of the Catholic Church. While acknowledging the spiritual traditions inside this noble calling, Hoge and Wenger provide a fascinating look at the human beings who wear the clerical collar today. Hoge, a professor of sociology at The Catholic University of America, has studied the sociological impact of the Catholic Church for 30 years. Hoge's insights provide the Catholic Church with a framework to further understand the Church and her faithful. Wenger is a graduate student in sociology and a licensed clinical social worker.

*Evolving Visions of the Priesthood* is an in-depth reflection of four studies done in 1970, 1985, 1993, and 2001. The book also provides commentary by several leading scholars and pastoral ministers. Data contained in the studies may provide the background for a productive discussion that will continue for years to come. Bishops, as well as the National Federation of Priests' Councils, may find the material provided in this book helpful in understanding priests' feelings, thoughts, problems, and hopes for the future.

The authors acknowledge a certain level of discomfort in the fact that the book was written in 2002, when the perception of the priesthood changed dramatically due to allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy. The book was using pre-2002 data to write about the hopes of the priesthood in the years to come. The authors decided to address the abuse issue in the book, but to separate it from the major issues they are interested in discussing due to the fact that the allegations reached crisis proportions during the summer of 2002. The authors reported that the media and most major newspapers were full of condemnation aimed at our Catholic priests. The entire priesthood is not

based upon the egregious behaviors of a minority. In any group of people the opportunity for criminal sexual behavior exists, but because the behavior was perpetrated on those in our community considered to be helpless, by those who are thought of as spiritual leaders and models for morality, the outrage was increased. The authors address what changes have occurred as a result of the crisis in the epilogue of the book. This reviewer applauds the careful surveying and extensive research that Hoge and Wenger undertook as an overview of the priesthood.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the history of the Catholic Church. The authors point to the 1960s as a time of dramatic and sweeping change in the Church. The election of John F. Kennedy as the first Catholic president of the United States was a heralding call to all Catholics that they have earned a place at the table. The United States was experiencing a cultural, ideological, and political revolution. The authors cite *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom; Vatican II Council, 1965) as the most “important achievement for Americans...because it aligned the Church with America’s constitutional commitment to religious freedom and removed a festering source of suspicion over the Vatican’s motives by many American leaders” (Hoge & Wenger, 2003, p. 8).

The Second Vatican Council changed the way many priests viewed their roles. The authors explain that the younger priests were supportive of the changes instituted as a result of Vatican II. The priests were of the belief that the very role of the priest would change. The authors point out that when *Humanae Vitae* (On the Regulation of Births; Paul VI, 1968) was published, the priests removed their rose-colored glasses about the idea that the Catholic Church was really changing: “The priests were admonished to toe the line” (Hoge & Wenger, 2003, p. 8).

The authors discuss the impact of seminary training on the priesthood. The seminary in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was a type of institutionalized military training designed to set the priest apart from society: “The ‘cultic ministry’ named so by James Bacik because of the central importance it placed on sacraments and worship saw the priest as a provider of sacraments. The sacred role was underlined by the priests’ distinctive lifestyle” (Hoge & Wenger, 2003, p. 10). Priests were viewed by their parishioners as a link to God, the central figure who remained at a distance from the people. The seminaries trained men to be a kind of soldier for God, with their every step calculated and their bed times and mealtimes regimented. The seminaries dictated what types of books and magazines could be read.

Many sons of depression-era immigrants recall fond memories of their seminary experience due to the fact that their basic human needs were being met:

The simple fact that the seminary provided three square meals per day guaranteed happy memories of their time there. Camaraderie was encouraged, while personal attachments were not. Organized recreation, advanced education, and a structured lifestyle appealed to many of the seminarians. (Hoge & Wenger, 2003, p. 10)

During the tumultuous 1960s, the face of the seminary began to change. The authors refer to this as the servant-leader model. According to historian Schwartz, the priests were now considered to be part of the community, no longer a separate and elevated entity who serves as a go-between for their parishioners and Christ. Hoge and Wenger note, however, that Vatican II documents never indicated a preference for the servant-leader model: "Support for the cultic and servant-leader models is clear in the conciliar documents. At this point in time a polarization develops between the younger priests over the theology of the priesthood" (2003, p. 13).

The authors discuss the changes in American society beginning with the fact that many seminaries closed in the 1970s and the 1980s. They report that the decline continues today even though the number of Catholics in the United States has gradually increased over time. The tensions in the priesthood during the years 1965 to 1975 produced a large number of resignations from the priesthood. By 1970, both younger and older priests had very different ideas about what being a priest meant. Greeley surveyed priests in 1970 during which he posed this question: "Ordination confers on the priest a new status or a permanent character which makes him essentially different from the laity within the church" (as cited in Hoge & Wenger, p. 12). The responses from the priests indicated that only 52% of priests aged 35 and younger agreed. Ninety-five percent of all priests aged 66 and older agreed. Hoge commented that both older and younger priests had a different idea about essentially the same vocation. On the statement, "I feel I am most a priest when I am saying Mass and hearing confessions," about 56% of the priests aged 35 and younger agreed. Ninety-three percent of priests 66 and older agreed. The authors note that each group is rooted in the theology of the Catholic Church, but represents a definite schism in beliefs about how the priestly life should be lived.

The authors address two areas of sexuality in the priesthood by acknowledging that homosexuality has always been a part of the priesthood, and that sexual abuse of children has been a problem with some priests. Since celibacy is the expected behavior, homosexuality was not in and of itself a problem: "The official theology of the priesthood holds that celibacy is a gift from God, and that once a man is ordained, sexuality of any kind will not be allowed to interfere with his devotion and his ministry" (Hoge & Wenger, 2003, p. 13). Therefore, based on the idea of a celibate life, heterosexual and homosexual men were welcomed.

During the 1990s, two areas for concern relating to sexuality were addressed. One area focused on whether homosexual priests tended to form subcultures in the seminary, thereby excluding heterosexual men from their circle of fellowship. The concern had as much to do with heterosexual men feeling alienated and left out as it did with the homosexual aspect of the subculture. The other concern had to do with the possibility that the public may perceive that the priesthood was a place of refuge for homosexual priests. The priests were concerned that the association of homosexuality with the priesthood would compromise their authority as moral leaders of our society.

The authors deal with the topic of homosexuality in chapter 6 of the book, which can be summarized by the overall consensus that homosexuality is more of a problem in the seminaries than in the dioceses. Some of the priests surveyed expressed concern over rapacious or predatory attitudes toward young seminarians. Hoge and Wenger suggest that most priests surveyed “recommend a healthy integration of sexuality orientation—whether it be homosexual or heterosexual—into the total celibate life of the priest” (2003, p. 110). These expectations, however, are based on the continuance of a celibate lifestyle. It is acknowledged that many in the Church today believe that celibacy should be optional as a way to ameliorate the problem of the shortage of priests.

The authors pose four questions intended for reflection as the Church looks toward the 21st century. The questions address such concerns as whether homosexual priests should reveal their sexual preference, and if so to whom? Should the Church re-examine its long held beliefs about homosexuality? Does the Church attract fewer heterosexuals than in the past? Is there a link between the way in which seminaries address sexuality and the way in which pedophilia has reached crisis proportion?

The survey that Hoge conducted in 2001 and is examined in chapter 2 discusses characteristics of priests with respect to their age, their ministry, their satisfaction, their problems, and their thoughts for the future. Chapter 2 presents anecdotal data as well as research findings based on what the priests of today think. The authors did a superb job of asking what seem to be very appropriate questions, therefore allowing the priests to speak openly and honestly about many issues affecting the priesthood.

An entire chapter is devoted to recommendations that the priests themselves make, and the emphasis is on the practical issues of every day life; the fact that their many responsibilities make their jobs difficult at times. Separation of home spaces and work spaces, as well as the loneliness and lack of fraternization and collegiality, are also an important focus.

In this reviewer’s opinion, Hoge and Wenger provide the historical back-

drop necessary to help the Church move ahead with many issues affecting the priesthood. The book provides solid insight as well as poignant anecdotal snapshots of what it is really like to be a priest.

## REFERENCES

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## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO TOLKIEN: VISIONS OF THE KINGDOM IN MIDDLE- EARTH

RALPH C. WOOD  
WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX PRESS, 2003  
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*Reviewed by Jeny Sejdinaj*

J. R. R. Tolkien, for those readers who are oblivious to the cinematic extravaganzas of the 21st century as well as the literary marvels of the 20th century, is the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, a fantasy tale written throughout the 1940s and published between 1954 and 1955. The printed work runs over 1,200 pages and is usually published in three volumes. Part of a larger collection of works that center around Middle-Earth, a world inhabited by elves, men, dwarves, wizards, hobbits, ents, orcs, and wargs, Tolkien constructs a creation story to rival Greek, Roman, or Norse mythology. Tolkien once said that he was building a mythology for Great Britain; it had been invaded so many times that it had never developed its own particular legends in this regard.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) takes place in a pre-Christian setting where the characters enter into a monumental struggle of good versus