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The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism (review)

Michael A. Fahey S.J.

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The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism. By Richard P. McBrien. (New York: HarperCollins. 2008. Pp. xxx, 496. \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-061-24521-3.)

Richard McBrien has long been a steady and reliable promoter of enlightened Vatican II ecclesiology through his numerous books, weekly newspaper column, and sought-after theology lectures at the University of Notre Dame. He closely monitors and analyzes contemporary ecclesiastical documents and theological publications to identify trends and developments. Throughout his writings he reflects a notable familiarity with the various ecumenical international consensus statements, as well as the works of a wide cross-section of men and women theologians whose works are available in English including the writings of feminist and Latino/a theologians. He possesses a knack for explaining complex concepts and specialized terminology to Catholics who are not specialists in this field. Not surprisingly, therefore his books on the Church are widely read and used even as texts for college courses.

Here again in *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* his mastery is evident, his prose clear and accessible. In addition to eight informative chapters he includes seventy-one pages of useful footnotes, a twenty-one-page glossary of technical terms, a select bibliography, and several indices.

Part 1, the introductory material, provides a workable definition of the Church and touches briefly upon ecclesiology's systematic, pastoral, ecumenical, and even controversial character. In the following section, part 2, he reviews the major themes related to Church in the New Testament as interpreted over the last seven decades by biblical scholars. He is quick to highlight the fact that in the first century, there was no uniform order or organizational structure in the various Mediterranean-based communities.

Part 3, which extends from the end of the New Testament period all the way up to the mid-nineteenth century, is—because of its considerable time span—the least rewarding section, although the brief treatments of Martin Luther's and John Calvin's ecclesiologies are notable.

McBrien's special interests focus on the periods spanning the mid-nineteenth century to the pre-Vatican II era (part 4), and then the ecclesiology of Vatican II (part 5). The next two parts are devoted to probing the post-Vatican II ecclesiologies (the Church *ad extra* and *ad intra*). The study is rounded off with a look into the possible future.

Although the table of contents would seem to indicate that McBrien is following a strictly chronological historical approach, at times he jumps ahead and brings in material that emerged years later. This can be somewhat disorienting, especially in his chapter on Vatican I. In other words, especially in parts 4 and 5, he inserts twentieth-century insights into the nineteenth century.

The book is rather optimistic in that it does not sufficiently address the dark side of contemporary Catholicism, such as sexual abuse, ineffective lead-

ership, understaffed churches, fall-off of church attendance, declining interest in ecumenism, arguments about liturgical changes, and tensions between so-called liberals and conservatives. Still, amid the numerous publications on the theology of the Church, McBrien's book holds a pride of place.

Boston College

MICHAEL A. FAHEY, S.J.

The Religious Crisis of the 1960s. By Hugh McLeod. (New York: Oxford University Press. 2007. Pp. x, 290. \$110.00. ISBN 978-0-199-29825-9.)

From the impressively wide range of reading Hugh McLeod cites in this volume, there is a consensus that the 1960s ("a time when history moved faster," p. 15) was a period of religious crisis. McLeod does not dissent, but is circumspect. He prefers to speak not of a decline in religious practice—although he does, and often—because this is quantitative, but of the "decline of Christendom," which he regards as a qualitative change. Christendom he defines as a society in which there are close links between the elites of church and society, where laws are said to be based on Christian principles, and where the majority of people are presumed to be Christian. A Catholic might be disposed to think that the end of Christendom, in the *integrative* sense, came with the Declaration on Religious Liberty at the Second Vatican Council, but that document is not mentioned. Indeed, although he acknowledges Vatican II as being of "pivotal significance" (p. 29) in the 1960s, along with the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, he devotes relatively little space to it. He does not believe that it was particularly responsible in itself for the ferment within the Roman Catholic Church. More important than the Council itself, he seems to suggest, was the disappointment felt by many at the perceived failure to implement the Council's outcomes. Proponents of Vatican II had, he says more than once, unrealistically high expectations, but he does not explicate this charge further.

McLeod's is a vast canvas. He takes in the United Kingdom (but especially England, where he has access to primary sources), the United States, France, Germany, and occasionally Spain and Italy. The "white" British Commonwealth is also well represented, but as he remarks, he has little to say of the church in Africa and Asia. Unlike several of the authors with whom he takes issue, he proposes no "master theme" for the decline of Christendom. It was, he very sensibly argues, the result of a combination of factors, although he appears to favor especially the increasing affluence of the postwar period, followed by the decay of collective identity—although this may itself have been a consequence of growing prosperity. In the prosperity stakes, he suggests, the United States had a head start, which should have led to an earlier decline in church attendance. He has interesting things to say about the apparent disparity between religious practice in the United States and in Europe, always excepting, at this period, Ireland and Italy—Malta, also an exception, does not get a mention.