
This book provocatively epitomizes a compelling theological framework for comprehending something of the nature and mission of the Church with attention to its global, postmodern, and ecumenical import in the twenty-first century.

Gaillardetz traces the provenance of the communitarian consciousness of the Church to ancient Israelite faith as shaped by the exodus event. In that event Israel was envisioned as a priestly people, a royal, and holy nation (Ex. 19: 5-6). By that event Israel became a people called to be a servant community by God, fulfilling God’s intention for the world. Similarly, the post-Easter encounter of the risen Lord constituted his disciples into a community that was empowered by the Holy Spirit for mission in the world. In this way, G. presents a paradigm that brings the Christological and Pneumatological foundations as well as the Institutional and Charismatic dimensions of the Church together. This vision also bears testimony to Pauline understanding of the Church as a koinonia of believers called by God by the power of the Spirit into common life in Christ and for ministry and service (diakonia) in the life of the community (1 Cor. 12: 27-31). One hopes that this more holistic approach to ecclesiology will set a standard for future research on this subject.

This awareness of early Christian communitarianism inspires G. to favor a catholicity that connotes an ecclesial unity that is always a unity-in-diversity and not a stifling uniformity as has been the perpetual temptation of the Church. G. is for a catholicity that presupposes a dialogical mission since all cultures are potentially receptive to the gospel, and all cultures have gifts to offer for the enrichment of the gospel; he thus envisions a communion ecclesiology that is all inclusive. G. demonstrates in this book a firm grasp of the foundational issues of communion ecclesiological discourse today; he displays competence, ability, and an openness
to engage diverse approaches of experts in the field including the magisterium of the Catholic Church as well as Orthodox theologians and others from diverse faith traditions.

For G., the Church as communion is fundamentally a People called by the Triune God and built up for mission through various forms of ministries. Thus, Vatican II’s recovery of the theology of baptism which guarantees the fundamental equality and common dignity of all the People of God, as well as charisms, did not only significantly undermine lay/clergy separation, but also repositioned the necessary role of the ministerial priesthood within the broader perspective of the priesthood of the baptized. This recovery, moreover, not only reoriented ministry from one of power to that of Christian service and pastoral care but also paved way for a re-emergence of lay ministries in the Church. G. here explores further what he wrote elsewhere that the dominant magisterial characterization of lay vocation as secular hardly offers an ontological definition of the Laics but merely a typological one.

G. competently mines communion ecclesiology with both ressourcement and aggiornamento in mind. G. reimagines different elements of the Church such as apostolicity, laity, episcopacy, papacy, mission, etc, with a profound ecumenical sensitivity. I must however, observe that in matters of Church structures, G. appears to be more sympathetic with the view that such structures are more culturally determined and consequently, should be subject to change when they no longer serve the purpose for which they were established ab initio. Though he mentions the Holy Spirit with respect to these structures, but he fails to substantiate or rather sustain the tension between the cultural contingency and the role of the movement of the Spirit in guiding the Church in the development of such structures. It will be great to consider filling the above lacuna in subsequent edition in order to strike a balance.

The aforementioned shortcoming notwithstanding, G. has written this book with an impressive scholarship that captures the contemporary global and postmodern situation of the Church and a consequent communion ecclesiology, all inclusive enough to meet the demands of diversity in the Church as well as the demands of
ecumenical and intercultural interreligious dialogue. It is a book that is a must read for all professors of ecclesiology, graduate students, undergraduates, and its modesty renders it appealing to all who love the Church.

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