



The Democracy Of God: An American Catholicism

Robert Willis

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Crisis grips the American Catholic community. Church professionals abandon it in record numbers while many who remain grapple with low morale, overwork, and compensatory addictions. Schools either close or laypeople staff them. Parishes consolidate, bereft of pastors and communicants. The people itself lies fragmented, a landscape of polarized groups, a kaleidoscope of political partisans more than gatherings of the faithful. Its future hangs in the balance. Current leaders fixate on two plans. In one they march steadfastly into the past, pursuing the illusion of a remnant group of the righteous armored by uniformity, a sorry substitute for a religious community. In another they resolutely protect the status quo. Before the eyes of an incredulous people they are transforming the church into a museum of religious artifacts, a fitting destination for inquisitive tourists, occasional visitors, and the uninvolved. The author offers a third alternative. Calling upon the democratic attempts of John Carroll and John England, the incisive comments of Tocqueville about religion in a democracy, and the theology of Vatican II, he challenges bishops to forsake their status as minor lords in a medieval monarchy and, instead, to embrace a servant leadership within the People of God.

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