

9-1-2002

# American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience, and Public Life, by Claire E. Wolfteich

Paul F. Lakeland

Fairfield University, [pflakeland@fairfield.edu](mailto:pflakeland@fairfield.edu)

## Peer Reviewed

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### Repository Citation

Lakeland, Paul F. "American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience, and Public Life, by Claire E. Wolfteich" (2002). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. Paper 29.  
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### Published Citation

Lakeland, Paul F. "American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience, and Public Life, by Claire E. Wolfteich." *Theological Studies* 63.3 (2002): 645-645.

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ated from Jacques and Raïssa Maritain "Faith as a Way of Knowing" (chap. 5), and applied their notion of symbol to experiencing "God through the Symbols of Bible, Liturgy, and Prayer" (chap. 6). Then Karl Rahner's profound teaching of "real symbol" leads Griffiths to "God beyond the Symbols of the Religions" (chap. 9). And, as one of many examples of Griffiths's self-awareness as "culture bearer," T. explains how seriously Griffiths kept laboring to prove the coherence of his Hindu-influenced Christian nondualism to Western "new scientists" K. Wilber, F. Capra, and R. Sheldrake.

But beyond usual discourse, T. shows how Griffiths's recurrent epistemological agony between reason and intuition was resolved ultimately only by his first, massive stroke, in which, as he said, "the Mother" whacked him in the head and stilled his left brain's tumultuous babble (2-3). Somehow, that endears Griffiths.

As to shortcomings, T.'s conclusion might have pressed the questions of Griffiths's critics harder. Also, is disagreement a sufficient reason for the rarity of Griffiths's dialogue with Hindus in his later years? Finally, T. could have profitably moved into the main text his footnote on Panikkar's view that Griffiths was not the greatest scholar.

Overall, however, this is the finest book yet written on Bede Griffiths. I recommend it for those involved in dialogue and in dialogue theology, and for courses on Eastern and Western culture and religion.

JAMES D. REDINGTON, S.J. WOODSTOCK  
Theological Center, Washington

AMERICAN CATHOLICS THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: SPIRITUALITY, LAY EXPERIENCE, AND PUBLIC LIFE. By Claire E. Wolfteich. New York: Crossroad, 2001. Pp. xi + 212. \$24.95.

In the century that the laity have been accounted worthy to be both subject and object of theological reflection, conservatives and liberals alike have

agreed that the laity's distinctive characteristic is their secularity. But few have done serious work on the implications of this observation. Claire Wolfteich's outstanding book explores the borders between theology, spirituality, and cultural studies, seeking a picture of how the laity can and should develop a style of theological reflection appropriate to their secular reality—family, public life, work, and the specifically lay sense of vocation.

W. begins with a history of American lay movements before Vatican II, and ends with a set of theological and pastoral reflections. Sandwiched between, and the strongest part of the work, is a close analysis of a series of public figures for whom balancing public and private life has been particularly challenging. Her studies of John F. Kennedy, Cesar Chavez, Mario Cuomo, and Geraldine Ferraro are particularly thoughtful. If W. is a little harsh on the politician's quick recourse to a convenient separation between personal religious conviction and public responsibilities, she is right to focus her concerns here. Most Catholic lay people do not face quite the intensity of the challenge that public figures must meet, but the elements are much the same. Being a lay Catholic who is also a responsible citizen of a pluralistic society means coming to terms with how faith and the public forum meet. W.'s view is that there must be a continuum between faith and worldly responsibility, and that "practical reasoning is part of the faithful life." At the same time, the theological analysis needs to be pressed further. To say that "secular work does not earn salvation" but "is part of the calling of the faithful person" (163) seems still to be a little too close to the harsher forms of Luther's two kingdoms theology that W. claims to want to avoid. A theology of the world empowered by Catholic theological impulses, while it certainly should eschew any language about "earning" salvation, needs to stress that it is secular life, and not some other life, that is the place where salvation is offered and received.

PAUL LAKELAND  
Fairfield University, Conn.