

Marquette University

e-Publications@Marquette

Theology Faculty Research and Publications

Theology, Department of

Spring 2000

Review of *Living on the Border of the Holy, Renewing the Priesthood of All* by L. William Countryman

Robert B. Slocum
Marquette University

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_fac



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Slocum, Robert B., "Review of *Living on the Border of the Holy, Renewing the Priesthood of All* by L. William Countryman" (2000). *Theology Faculty Research and Publications*. 245.
https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_fac/245

Living on the Border of the Holy, Renewing the Priesthood of All. By L. William Countryman. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999. xiii + 205 pp. \$17.95 (paper).

Living on the Border of the Holy considers the relationship of the fundamental human priesthood and the sacramental priesthood relative to the “borderlands” where everyday experience reveals glimpses of the divine (p. xi). Countryman emphasizes that priesthood is shared by all humanity as we participate in this border country where God encounters us. We can mediate our own experience of God’s mystery, as we are open to receive from others who may have experienced the divine holiness in different ways. We are not to be remote, as if we had already “passed over into the holy,” nor are we to be absorbed by the visible realities of the world, as if there were no beyond (pp. 66, 161-162). A priest is one who reveals mystery to another who did not know, and this is a ministry that all may extend and receive. For example, a parent “reveals to the child the hopes and values that shape an inner center to our seemingly miscellaneous experience,” but the child also “sees things that adults have learned not to see, and the child will often show the parent a thing or two that the parent had long forgotten” (p. 21). Both parent and child may serve as priest to one another. The sacramental priesthood is to draw out and serve as icon for the fundamental priesthood of all. Priesthood in both fundamental and sacramental senses has everything to do with a willingness to listen to God and each other. We can exercise and allow the freedom that makes love possible. We can stand in the borderlands where God’s love is found and shared, and stand with others in that place as they grow in their own experience of divine holiness.

Countryman crosses boundaries of disciplines and academic categories

to present his theology of priesthood and the border country. He challenges a concern with academic order and specialization that may lead to seminary education in which scholars and thinkers are encouraged "to talk with narrower and narrower circles about more and more abstruse topics" (p. 156). A professor of New Testament at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Countryman also laments the tendency in training for ordination that has kept academic preparation and the student's life of faith on separate tracks. In this regard, seminary faculty are like the Church as a whole and the academy, and tend to perpetuate the disjunction of faith and reflection. He explains, "Even if we think of our own calling as priestly (as many of us do), we have little experience of integrating faith with our intellectual pursuits in explicit and public ways" (p. 153). This is a matter of great concern, because knowledge that is not integrated with soul and spirit and the shaping of the self is not available for priestly ministry (p. 157).

Living on the Border of the Holy demonstrates the integration of experience, ministry, and reflection that Countryman commends urgently to the Church. His footnotes typically serve as starting points for new ideas and further investigation rather than documentary justifications for his positions. A bibliography is provided. *Living on the Border of the Holy* will be helpful for all kinds of people who want to consider the meanings of priesthood relative to encounter with the holy, including parish study groups, seminarians, and those who wish to reexamine and renew their ministry. Prospective readers should not be misled or daunted by the cover of this edition, which portrays the brooding presence of snow-capped mountain peaks and dark clouds. Instead of urging that we climb Mount Everest to reach the borderlands of the holy, Countryman insists that we can see the divine transcendent in the ordinary events of life and "recognize that the dulllest circumstances may be unexpectedly shot through with fire" (9).

ROBERT B. SLOCUM

Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin