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## Review of *Calendar: Humanity's Epic Struggle to Determine a True and Accurate Year*, by David Ewing Duncan

Martin Connell

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, [mconnell@csbsju.edu](mailto:mconnell@csbsju.edu)

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ogy of these earliest hymns. Even for Jesus and the disciples, I expect, such an initially romantic approach for hymn-writing would have resulted in a cat fight.)

In spite of these problems, the author is a good writer. His style would lend itself to making difficult theological or philosophical issues accessible to students, as the issues of this text were much of the time. If the method and content were held near the range suggested by the book's title, Liederbach would be an even better writer.

*Saint John's University*  
*Collegeville, Minnesota*

*Martin Connell*

*Calendar: Humanity's Epic Struggle to Determine a True and Accurate Year.* By David Ewing Duncan. New York: Avon Books 1998. Pages, xix + 328. Paper, \$13.50. ISBN: 0-380-79324-5.

About fifteen years ago, reading the documents of Vatican II for a theology class, I was moved as I considered the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from beginning to end. It was a rallying exercise, an energizing inspiration as I was absorbed into its chapters on general principles (1), the eucharist (2), other sacraments (3), the liturgy of the hours (4), the liturgical year (5), music (6), and art (7). I recall too how perplexed I was on coming upon the Appendix, "Concerning the Assignment of the Feast of Easter to a Fixed Sunday." It struck me as a too unnecessarily specific topic in a constitution that otherwise came off as a bird's-eye view of the reform of the liturgy. I wondered: So why the urgency and specificity all of a sudden about the date of Easter?

In the intervening decade and a half, I have learned more about the liturgical year, but never really got a sharp grasp as to how the various dates of Easter came to be settled variously by different Christian communions. How did it come to be, for example, that Protestants and Catholics observe the same day as one another for Easter but that these are usually out of sync with the Orthodox determination? Though a popularly accessible exposition, David Ewing Duncan's recent book on the calendar in general did more than any other work to prompt me to appreciate the complexity of the problems involved in determining a universally agreed-upon calendar and, in turn, a universal date for the observation of Easter by so many Christian communities in so many cultures of the seven continents of the globe.

*Calendar* is a wonderful book for many reasons, but I would suggest that the author's main gift here is in making primary texts on difficult issues come alive (in translation) by strong and amusing writing and by putting

otherwise easily dismissible texts in engaging historical and often quite bellicose contexts. He takes otherwise boring treatises and animates them with backgrounds of intrigue, scheming, murder, and backbiting. (Who can resist even Thomas' *Summa Theologica* when it is on the same page as the condemnation of Averroës and Islam's "political turmoil and outside threats"?) And, at the other end of the rhetorical spectrum, he takes complexly detailed documents witnessing to changes in the calendar and flattens them out just enough for the reader to understand their influence on changing the way we appropriate measuring time.

The author is a television producer and writer of essays and short stories. And, as a correspondent for *Life*, "Nightline," and ABC News, perhaps he has come to find a level of accessibility for complex information so that it is neither overly dumbed down to the point of being untrue nor easily dismissed because of intricate complexities. A spouse and father of three, the author also comments for National Public Radio and the Discovery Channel.

For those with a penchant for theology and liturgy, Duncan introduces to the history of the calendar many figures with whom we are familiar for quite different contributions. We come across the familiar figures of Christian history such as Jesus of Nazareth, Augustine, Constantine and Helena, Benedict, the Venerable Bede, Alcuin, Peter Abelard, Martin Luther and Pope Gregory XIII (after whom, one discovers, the "Gregorian calendar" is named). And, added to these is a hoard of other Christian characters — and many are indeed characters! — who, to varying degrees, are not as familiar: Isidore of Seville, Roger Bacon, Hermann the Lame, Ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (known to most as Boethius), Cassiodorus, Dionysius Exiguus ("Little Dennis"), even Notker the Stammerer, Notker the Peppercorn, and Notker the Thick-Lipped.

Anticipating, perhaps, that readers might find themselves lost along the way, the author includes summary overviews: an opening "Calendar Index," a table of how "The Year 2000 Will Be" according to various calendars, a wonderful synopsis at the end of the history in the "Time Line: A Chronology of Events; The Calendar." Readers will learn new words about measuring time — femtoseconds, cesium, nilometer, for example — and how the present strange number of days in each month came to be. The author also knits together the contributions of different cultures and places, Egypt, India, China, Maya, Aztec, and many others, all coming together in incremental ways to the present calendar as it is nearly universally recognized.

One criticism: Though it is understandable that the author kept the citations of primary texts out of the body of the narrative, it would be much easier to look up these sources if, at the back of the book, in addition to

the bibliography of secondary materials (which includes websites), there was a list of the specific citations from primary texts. This is an insignificant omission in an otherwise wonderful book.

Saint John's University  
Collegeville, Minnesota

Martin Connell

*A Spirituality of Everyday Faith, A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner.* By Declan Marmion. Louvain: Peeters Press; Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans 1998. Pages, 372. Paper, \$30.00. ISBN: 90-6831-988-4

This well-researched and clearly written book, originally a dissertation at Louvain, explores the contributions of Karl Rahner to a contemporary spirituality, especially his focus on personal experience of God and the essential link between theology and spirituality. The book can be read as an extended reflection on Rahner's famous statement that: "The Christian of tomorrow will either be a 'mystic' — who has experienced something — or will not exist."

The first chapter sets the stage by summarizing the way the term "spirituality" has functioned throughout Christian history from Paul, who focused on life in the Spirit, to the modern tendency to separate spirituality from ordinary experience and from theology. Marmion grounds spirituality in a personal encounter with Christ, who touches the whole person in a concrete historical situation.

Chapter Two introduces Rahner as a valuable guide in responding to the contemporary desire for a more integrated spirituality. His vast theological corpus is rooted in his personal experience of God, which is especially evident in his prayers, meditations, and homilies. Rahner's understanding of spirituality reflects his major theological themes: God as the holy, inexhaustible mystery, beyond all words and images; the universal call to mysticism, understood as a personal experience of God in ordinary life; prayer as a fundamental act of human existence, which invites a total surrender of the whole person to God; and the essential unity of the love of God and the love of neighbor.

The third chapter concentrates on the experiential dimension of Rahner's dialectical spirituality. His theology of uncreated grace, God's self-communication which divinizes us, sets the mystagogical task of disclosing the depth dimension of all human experience, especially the common experiences of loving our neighbor, facing death and hoping for a better future.

In the fourth chapter Marmion skillfully elucidates the influence of *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius on Rahner's spirituality, especially the common



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