Reading A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church

Heidi Schlumpf | Jul. 22, 2009   NCR Today

Topping my summer reading list [1] is A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church [2], Archbishop Rembert Weakland's memoir that includes his response to the scandal that precipitated his resignation, along with a frank discussion of his own homosexuality. I'm only on page 85 of the 284-page tome, but have already covered his childhood in Patton, Pa., the novitiate at St. Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe, his theological studies in Rome and now his musical studies at Julliard and Columbia in New York.

Smartly (so that readers don't skip to the end to find the juicy stuff), Weakland begin the book with his response to the revelations about his relationship with and payoff to Paul Marcoux. While I didn't learn anything new that wasn't in the thousands of column inches devoted to this story in 2002, that first chapter sets the tone for what follows. And what follows is a very detailed, contemplative reflection about all of the influences in his life -- most especially that of the Benedictine order he joined as a teenager.

Weakland's memoir has landed in the number-two spot on July's bestseller [3] list from the Catholic Book Publishers Association (surrounded by four books by Matthew Kelly in the top five). It also is #6 on amazon.com's Catholic bestseller list [4]. Amazon also includes two customer discussion threads: one called "You are a wicked man"; the other "You are a great man." Predictably, they are filled with the sniping and lack of charity that so frustrated Weakland during his service as Archbishop of Milwaukee. I still tend to agree with the title of the latter thread.

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