

THE STATE OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Anne Hendershott

Anne Hendershott, *A Lamp in the Darkness: How Faithful Catholic Colleges Are Helping to Save the Church* (Sophia Institute Press)

For faithful Catholics, the loss of a strong Catholic identity at most of the 230 Catholic colleges and universities has been a great disappointment. Earlier generations of Catholic immigrants built the majority of those schools during the late 1800s and early 1900s at great personal sacrifice because they wanted to nurture the faith of their children and protect them from the anti-immigrant nature of the existing colleges.

Unfortunately, there are few faithful Catholic colleges left today which share the vision of helping young Catholics maintain their faith. From internships at Planned Parenthood, and “reproductive choice” clubs at schools like Georgetown, to Catholic campus GLBTQ celebrations and Drag Shows presented annually at campuses like the once-faithful University of San Diego, and several of the Jesuit schools, parents can no longer assume that their children will receive a faithful Catholic education on a Catholic campus. Even the once-venerable University of Notre Dame appears to have given up much of its commitment to supporting Catholic teachings on life and traditional families by giving awards and speaking platforms to notorious pro-abortion politicians and GLBTQ activists. In 2016, Notre Dame awarded its most prestigious award, the Laetare Medal, to then Vice-President Joseph Biden in recognition of his “outstanding service to the Catholic Church,” even though he had long promoted both abortion and same-sex marriage. The Laetare Medal is an award that was originally created by Notre Dame to honor an American Catholic

“whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the church, and enriched the heritage of humanity.”

And although the award to Biden created scandal among the faithful, nothing could have prepared them for Ash Williams, the transgendered pro-abortion speaker who was given a platform at Notre Dame to present her position that “abortion is a type of birth.” Williams, a self-described “transgender man” who calls herself an “abortion doula,” told students during her Notre Dame presentation on March 20, 2023, that she draws upon the experiences in her own “Black, trans, abortion-having life” to question and demean what she called oppressive norms against abortion. As a self-described “abortion doula” Williams claims to provide physical, emotional, or financial help to people seeking to end a pregnancy, suggesting that the reason we don’t understand an abortion as a type of birth “is because it has become so disenfranchised.” Williams, who shared with Notre Dame students that she had undergone two abortions, has a tattoo on her left forearm of a surgical instrument used for manual vacuum aspiration abortion. Glib about her own abortions and celebrating the abortion success stories of those she helps, she told the Notre Dame students that she tells her abortion stories “as often as a broken record.”

This latest abortion doula scandal was not just a fringe event sponsored by a renegade Notre Dame Gender Studies department on campus. Rather, Ash Williams, the transgendered abortion advocate was sponsored by the Dean’s Office in the College of Arts and Letters, as well as by seven other major departments in the university including the Center for Social Concerns, a Notre Dame institute that was created to apply Catholic social teaching to societal problems. It is clear that the loss of the Catholic identity is a systemic or structural problem at Notre Dame—like that at most Catholic colleges.

In fact, rather than embracing the good, the true, and the

beautiful, most Catholic universities have adopted the same curricular fads as their secular peers, trading their commitment to the Catholic faith and the liberal arts for trendy departments of gender studies, black studies, ethnic studies, and gay and lesbian studies. Most of these schools host GLBTQ social clubs and celebrations of Pride Month using student affairs funds so that all enrolled students contribute to the festivities. Campus leaders on these now-faithless campuses claim that their Catholic campus commitment to social justice differentiates them from non-Catholic colleges, but they neglect to mention that their definition of social justice is so broad as to include “reproductive justice,” transgender rights, and equal access to marriage for same sex couples as among the social justice issues they promote.

The situation is dire but not hopeless. There are still some Catholic colleges that are true to the original mission of Catholic higher education. *A Lamp in the Darkness* introduces readers to 14 faithful Catholic colleges and universities that have resisted the cultural pressure to conform to the world and have instead, stayed true in their mission, their commitment to the liberal arts and academic excellence, their liturgies, and to the magisterial teachings of the Church. These schools have made significant sacrifices to continue providing students with a faithful Catholic education that not only prepares them for careers but also prepares them to live lives of integrity, goodness, holiness, and authenticity. When any of these “faithful few” schools have fallen short—as some of them have—they have quickly recovered because they have never lost sight of the salvific mission of authentic Catholic higher education.

Many of these faithful Catholic colleges like Christendom, Thomas More and Thomas Aquinas College were born from the ashes of the secular revolution that gripped the Church following Vatican II and have become some of the most faithful Catholic colleges in the country. Others, like Belmont Abbey,

Franciscan University of Steubenville, Catholic University, the University of Mary, and the University of Dallas were founded in the late nineteenth or early to mid-twentieth centuries, but have each, in their own way, sought continuous renewal in faithfulness and mission orientation.

The most recent wave of faithful Catholic universities emerged after 1990, apparently in response to the release of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the apostolic constitution on faithful Catholic higher education promulgated by Pope St. John Paul II in 1990. These schools, including Ave Maria University and John Paul the Great Catholic University, both founded in 2003, and Wyoming Catholic College in 2005, all had the ability to form their mission and identity while drawing directly upon the evangelical spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. In fact, the influence of the 1990 papal constitution is seen most explicitly in the mission statement of Ave Maria University which describes itself as “Founded in fidelity to Christ and His Church...dedicated to the advancement of human culture, the promotion of dialogue between faith and reason, and the formation of men and women in the intellectual and moral virtues of the Catholic faith.”

Although *A Lamp in the Darkness* is not a book specifically about Franciscan University, the renewal of orthodoxy on Catholic college campuses cannot be properly understood without acknowledging the important role played by that university so an entire chapter is devoted to understanding the 1974 revitalization and renewal of Franciscan that transformed a struggling school into the center of evangelization that it is today. In a 2021 interview with Dr. Scott Hahn, a theology professor at Franciscan, Monsignor James P. Shea, the president of the University of Mary in North Dakota—one of the faithful colleges profiled in this book—spoke of the “ripple effect” of Franciscan on his own campus: “What does St. Thomas say? *Bonum diffusivum sui*—the good is diffusive of itself. The ripples of the renewal of

Catholic higher education, of which Steubenville is an exemplar, are felt all around. The students that we get to serve here are recipients of that as well, and so I am grateful. May we be worthy of that legacy.”

Franciscan University was not always the vibrantly Catholic place that it is today and certainly not the center of a dynamic orthodoxy that is “diffusive of itself.” In fact, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it was still called the College of Steubenville, the struggling school was known as one of the premier party schools in the country, featuring a hook-up culture that involved heavy alcohol and drug use. Established in 1946 by Franciscans of the Third Order Regular (T.O.R.), the school had lost its way and was on the verge of collapse in the early 1970s. But in 1974, with the arrival of the university’s dynamic new president, Father Michael Scanlan, the newly renamed Franciscan University of Steubenville became the vibrant center of Catholic orthodoxy it is today.

That ripple effect continues. One person who was inspired by Father Scanlan was Tom Monaghan, who, in 1986, while still at the helm as founder and president of Domino’s Pizza, Inc., provided the following endorsement for the back cover of Father Scanlan’s book *Let the Fire Fall*: “This book has given me inspiration and a road map for my life. Never in one book have I learned so much about my religion and how to live it.” Monaghan actually used the book as a “road map,” creating Ave Maria Law School, and later Ave Maria University, as a way to honor God. Both vibrantly Catholic and faithful to the Magisterium, these schools continue to flourish as Tom Monaghan often says, “to help as many people as possible get into heaven.”

Today, Ave Maria University and the faithful few continue to attract students who desire an authentically Catholic education. They come to these schools because they want to be part of a faith-filled community that enriches their lives.

Faithful Catholic parents who want their children to be nurtured by the faith while receiving an academic challenging environment are drawn to these schools. The stories of the founding and constant renewal of these faithful schools can inspire other Catholic colleges which have lost their way. The 1974 transformation of Franciscan University into today's passionately Catholic college occurred because one charismatic priest—Father Michael Scanlan, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit—devoted himself to that renewal.

It is easy to feel bleak, looking at the state of modern culture and particularly at the decomposing state of higher education. It is tempting to think that all the battles have been lost, and that the secularization of society and of our Catholic schools is a *fait accompli*. Indeed, it may appear that from a sociological point of view, the battle has been lost. The faithful colleges and universities are too few and too small to make much of a difference. However, God does not see as humans see. God chose one-hundred-year-old Abraham to father a nation. He chose David, the smallest child of Jesse, to be a king. And He chose the teenage virgin Mary to bear His Son. That same God chose a lawyer-priest to redeem Franciscan University, a pizza mogul to start Ave Maria University, and a penniless historian to found Christendom College. The pattern that unites all these figures is not their strength, wealth, or wisdom, but rather their willingness to say yes to His plan. The hope that inspired this book and that caused Pope John Paul to prophesy of a new flowering of Christian culture is not borne from particular signs of worldly success, but rather is founded on the person of Jesus Christ and on His promise that we would not remain in darkness. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). The same light burns in the lamp of each faithful school today, and, by God's grace, the darkness has not overcome it.

Anne Hendershott is Professor of Sociology and Director of the

WHY AMERICA IS IN TROUBLE

This is the article that appeared in the July/August 2024 edition of Catalyst, our monthly journal. The date that prints out reflects the day that it was uploaded to our website. For a more accurate date of when the article was first published, check out the news release, [here](#).

Bill Donohue

Bill Donohue, *Cultural Meltdown: The Secular Roots of Our Moral Crisis* (Sophia Institute Press, 2024)

The principal reason I wrote my new book is to address why America is in trouble. We live in a topsy-turvy world and most people, especially older adults, can't seem to make sense of it. It is my hope that after reading *Cultural Meltdown* the reader will have a better handle on how this happened.

We are a country torn between two conflicting visions of man and society. There are those who accept the religious vision and there are those who accept the secular vision. These perspectives are not only different, they are irreconcilable.

Right now everything is in flux. As someone who favors the religious vision, I see signs of optimism. But not always. At some point one side will win. We can't go on indefinitely living as if we are living in two different worlds.

The religious vision acknowledges belief in God, truth, human nature, the natural law, moral absolutes and Original Sin. It recognizes the limitations of the human condition. While it believes in progress it manifestly rejects the idea of human perfectibility.

The secular vision promotes exactly the opposite view: God does not exist; truth is a mirage; human nature can be changed; there is no such thing as natural law; there are no moral absolutes; and the idea of Original Sin is fanciful. Furthermore, as the secular vision considers the human condition to be infinitely malleable, it champions the idea of the perfectibility of man.

Left-wing intellectuals epitomize the secular vision. They are the ones who have had the greatest influence on the young, liberals, Democrats and the well educated. As survey research shows, these are the most secular people in our society.

The Catholic Church epitomizes the religious vision. We are made in the image and likeness of God. Men and women are biologically different but they possess equal dignity. We are expected to conform our behavior according to the tenets of the natural law. The faculty of reason is important, but it should complement faith, not oppose it.

Those who ascribe to the religious vision reject the moral relativism that secularists promote. Moral relativism holds that what is moral is a matter of opinion and that there is no such thing as an act which is inherently immoral. Intellectuals very much believe this to be true. So did Hitler.

I mention Hitler because he rode the waves of moral relativism right into office. There were political and economic reasons why he succeeded, but it was the moral collapse of German culture during the Weimar Republic (between the two world wars) that left the masses without a clear understanding of right and wrong. He capitalized on this cultural meltdown.

Secularists are fond of saying that as long as two people agree on what constitutes proper moral behavior, that's all that matters. It all boils down to consent. Those who believe in the religious vision know this to be false: it could

justify incest. Without an understanding that God has given us commandments to live by—and the moral absolutes they entail—all kinds of monstrosities are possible. History has shown exactly that.

If there is one intellectual strain that is creating mass confusion it is postmodernism. For this we can thank French intellectuals in the 1960s. It is the most extreme expression of the secular vision. At bottom, it regards truth to be a fiction. Once this idea takes hold, look out. Here's how postmodernism plays out in real life.

David Detmer is a philosopher who knows how absurd postmodernism is. He interviewed one of its practitioners, fellow philosopher Laurie Calhoun. He asked her a simple question, one that any pre-school child could answer. Are giraffes taller than ants? "No," she replied, it is "an article of religious faith in our culture."

In an earlier time we would house people like her in an asylum. Today they are working in the academy.

There is a chapter in the book on libertinism, or sexual license. Normal people regard people with perversions as sick and in need of help. Many left-wing intellectuals—who do not want to be regarded as normal, and who indeed reject the idea of normalcy—not only disagree that perverts are abnormal, they want to celebrate them.

In 2022, Indiana University erected a large bronze sculpture of Alfred Kinsey, the zoologist-turned-sexologist. School officials celebrated his years of work there; there is also a Kinsey Institute on the campus. They are proud of his writings and research on sexuality. They shouldn't be.

As I point out, Kinsey was "a scientific fraud, a pervert, a voyeur, an exhibitionist, a masochist, a gay-bar-hopping homosexual (even though he was married), and a child abuser. Oh, yes, he also had sex with animals." Guess which

institution he hated? The Catholic Church.

The secular vision, especially postmodernism, explains the existence of transgenderism, or gender ideology. If truth does not exist, then it is entirely possible for boys to think they are girls and vice versa. It does not matter what our chromosomes are—all that matters is what we feel is real.

The tenets of Christianity and transgenderism are polar opposites and cannot be reconciled. Pope Francis understands this as well as anyone. He calls gender ideology “one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations” of our time. “Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs the differences and the value of men and women.” So upset was he with this ideological madness that he once called it “demonic.”

Anti-science transgender activists are among the most intolerant people in our society. They believe there are more than two sexes (which they falsely call genders) and anyone who disagrees with them—which is to say most normal people—is dismissed as a bigot.

For example, when the famous British atheist Richard Dawkins said the obvious, “sex really is binary,” he was slammed by fellow atheists. But Dawkins is a biologist, not a pundit. His critics nearly fell off the cliff when he offered this pedestrian definition of a woman: “A woman is an adult female, free of Y chromosomes.” They accused him of being “transphobic.”

The damage being done to young people—80 percent of those who “transition” to the opposite sex are girls who want to be boys—is incalculable. The long-term physical and psychological problems that they will experience has yet to be determined. We already know that puberty blockers, chemical castration and genital mutilation have created enormous suffering. Indeed, this is the greatest child abuse issue of our day.

The last two chapters seek to explain why we are so divided as

a nation. To take one example, we are treating racial and ethnic groups as if they were different tribes, pitting one against the other. Robin DiAngelo, the author of the best-selling book, *White Fragility*, likes it that way. "People of color need to get away from white people and have some community with each other." They teach this racism—in the name of combating it—in many corporations and the colleges.

No doubt the Klan would agree with her. So does Harvard. That is why it designated "an exclusive space for Black-identifying audience members" when an adaptation of *Macbeth* was performed in 2021.

Welcome to the world of the "new apartheid." The much condemned South African practice of separating the races is now very much in vogue in the United States. We have separate dorms on college campuses based on race, as well as separate graduation ceremonies.

Part of the problem is the tendency of left-wing intellectuals to compare the tenets of the American Creed—the belief in freedom, equality and rule of law—to existing conditions. Inevitably, we come up short. But the Creed is the ideal; it is not reality. It gives us something to shoot for—holding out the potential that some day we will make good on this promise. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood this. Why can't intellectuals?

When I taught a college class on Social Problems, I gave the students one of the standard textbooks. It focused on how unequal social and economic conditions were, especially with regards to race, sex and class. The conclusion that students were invited to draw—how unfair America is—was baked into the game plan. But I didn't stop there.

I spent a great deal of time showing what conditions were like for minorities, women and the poor in the past—fifty, a hundred, and two hundred years ago. I also compared current

conditions in the United States for minorities, women and the poor to current conditions on these three categories in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

What makes more sense? Comparing social conditions to some mythical ideal, or to real-life historical and cross-cultural conditions?

Alienated intellectuals who have rejected God find themselves searching for transcendent meaning in some secular universe of ideas. They do not believe in Original Sin, maintaining that there are no limitations to the human condition. As such they believe they can craft a utopian society. Ironically, the word "utopian" means "no place."

From a Christian perspective, all of this is nonsense. As the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr said, there is no possibility of creating a perfectly moral social order; we are imperfect and fallen.

If these secular ideas were confined to the classroom, it may not matter much. But they are not. Attempts at utopia were tried by Hitler, Stalin and Mao, yielding a death toll of approximately 150 million. So not only are secularists wrong about their view of man and society, they are a menace to both.

If we are to see a restoration of the religious vision, the Catholic Church is going to have to lead the way. The clergy sexual abuse scandal hurt us, but there have been incredible improvements. The damage done is real but it is not terminal. Besides, who else are we going to turn to for leadership?

It behooves traditional Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Evangelical Protestants, Orthodox Jews, Muslims and Mormons to put aside their theological differences and join hands in the culture war. We share a similar religious vision, and on cultural issues we are in even more agreement. This is especially true of sexual issues. None of these faith

communities wants anything to do with the insanity of transgenderism.

We are at a crossroads. We have a self-identified devout Catholic president who may believe in God, but who nonetheless rejects the existence of human nature. The belief in human nature entails the belief that we are either male or female. Our president clearly does not share this perspective.

Our cultural meltdown is a serious matter but it is folly to think that we cannot change course. There is no iron law of history. It is up to us to make the case for the religious vision and to resist top-down measures that seek to subvert our Judeo-Christian heritage.

It is my hope that after reading this book you will encourage others to read it as well. It is not a history book, so after reading the Introduction, feel free to jump to any chapter that interests you.

PEERING INSIDE THE VATICAN

Mary Ann Glendon

Mary Ann Glendon, *In the Courts of Three Popes: An American Lawyer and Diplomat in the Last Absolute Monarchy of the West* (Penguin Random House Image Books, 2024)

Veteran Vatican journalist John Allen once wrote, after years of observing the Holy See, that “You could make a pretty good case that your odds of accomplishing something positive in the Catholic Church actually increase by a percentage point for every 25 miles or so of distance you put between yourself and Rome.”

After 23 years of service to the Holy See, I tend to agree with Allen's judgment. But at a time when the Church is facing grave challenges on many fronts, I also believe that it needs all the assistance it can get, at all levels, including the Holy See.

One of my reasons for writing about my experiences during the pontificates of Saint Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, was to provide encouragement to young people like the college and law students who have told me over the years that they feel called to devote some of their time and talents to the Church in this time of turmoil.

Some of us remember that the Second Vatican Council was supposed to initiate a whole new era where the role of the laity is concerned. It was "the hour of the laity," we were told. To their credit, the Council Fathers tried hard to waken "the sleeping giant" (as John Paul II would later describe the lay faithful). They reminded us that it is the laity who have the *primary* responsibility for evangelization of the secular sphere where we live and work: "The effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed adequately by others" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 13).

They also made it clear that none of us has the option of retreating from the world, withdrawing into a closed circle of family and friends. Even the members of our cloistered contemplative religious orders do not spend their time in abstract meditation. They are praying for the world.

But the sleeping giant proved hard to arouse. For one thing, the Council was woefully late in addressing the challenge of a world falling into disbelief, even though Saint John Henry Newman and others had forcefully sounded the alarm a century earlier. And, when they finally acted, they neglected the

problem of formation. As Newman had warned, the lay faithful needed to be *prepared* to be a transformative presence in a world that was rapidly changing.

Then, just as the Council closed its doors in 1965, a profound cultural revolution in western countries presented the Church with a whole new set of challenges! Catholics, like everyone else, were caught up in the maelstrom. The Church and its leaders were wholly unprepared for the up-ending of moral and religious principles regarding sex, marriage, honor, and personal responsibility.

Today, the sad truth is that laity and clergy alike have been relatively unresponsive to the Council's exhortations. Recently, when Cardinal Francis Arinze, one of the few still-living Council Fathers, was asked: "What are the most challenging issues facing the Church today?", he replied: "First, convince each member of the Church—lay faithful (who are 99% of the Church), clerics and religious—to do his or her own specific part in the general mission of the Church. And second: Convince the clergy of the importance of the lay apostolate and therefore that the lay faithful have their own distinctive role as leaders." In other words, the Church is facing the same challenges that it has always faced since the beginning of Christianity.

Cardinal Arinze was right to put his primary emphasis on the role of the laity in the general mission of the church—the mission that requires all of us, laity and clergy alike, first and foremost to be witnesses to Christ wherever we find ourselves.

But it is more important than ever, in my view, for lay men and women to contemplate whether and how they might fit service to the institutional church within that general mission. With religious vocations declining in many parts of the world, lay people with their varied skills and talents can enable the clergy to do more of what they are called to do,

what they have been trained to do, and what they know how to do best.

So, when consulted by young men and women interested in service to the Church, I have always encouraged them to be attentive to their promptings, while keeping in mind that there are bound to be setbacks as well as advances, disappointments as well as satisfactions, as with any other form of service. One of my hopes for *In the Courts of Three Popes* is that the account of my experiences will both encourage and inform the discernment of laypersons pondering how they might aid the Church in these difficult times.

As a lawyer and a student of politics, I had another reason for writing about those experiences, namely, to share some of the insights I had gained into the predicament of an absolute monarchy as it attempts to operate in the world of modern states. (I am aware of the view that the Holy See is not an absolute monarchy because the Pope is subject to divine law, but I use the term here in a political sense.)

The opinions I express in the book are based on my observations of the government and administration of the Holy See. They are not the views of an “insider,” but those of an outsider with a variety of vantage points. They were gained through heading Holy See delegations to three UN conferences; serving on the Council for the Laity, the Commission for the Jubilee 2000, the Commission of Reference for the Institute of Religious Works (Vatican Bank), and the Board of Superintendence of the Vatican Bank, as well as by chairing the Holy See Secretariat of State’s Committee on Legal Affairs in the United States and serving for ten years as President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

One of the principal features that distinguishes the Holy See from most modern states is that it is a court, a court with its own distinctive internal culture. Today’s Roman curia still bears many of the marks of its medieval predecessors

where the courtiers are inescapably and permanently bound to one another and to the ruler; where they are acutely conscious of their own and each other's place in the hierarchy; and where intrigues over rank and favor abound. Curial culture is also inevitably influenced by aspects of the Italian culture by which it is surrounded and from which it draws much of its ecclesiastical and lay personnel.

The internal culture of the Holy See has hampered its ability to function in the modern world in a number of ways. To understand the current situation, it helps to recall that neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI, for all their great accomplishments, was a hands-on administrator. During the long pontificate of John Paul II, the Pope's mode of governing had been to set broad goals and leave trusted people to pursue them. Pope Benedict continued in that mode. Sometimes it worked out well thanks to faithful and competent prelates, but the combination of court culture and relaxed oversight created an atmosphere conducive to financial and other scandals.

Dysfunction was most noticeable in the area of finances, where the Holy See was slow to modernize and to align its operations with internationally recognized best practices. When I began my service to the Holy See in the 1990s, I was astonished, for example, that travel expenses were being reimbursed in cash and upon minimal documentation. Later, one of things that worried me and other members of the committee overseeing US litigation against the Holy See was that the Holy See does not have a centralized department to coordinate its legal affairs. Cardinal Pell was similarly surprised when he found that there was no central management of the financial holdings of the Holy See, and he was dismayed when then-Sostituto Cardinal Becciu vigorously opposed his plan to have an external accounting firm perform an audit.

It might seem obvious that if there is one area where the Church is in particular need of lay assistance, it is where money is involved. But the problem has not been easy to solve.

Just as few prelates are equipped with the skills to manage the finances of a sovereign entity, most are no better equipped to choose and oversee honest and capable lay experts—as witness the history of the Vatican bank where time and again trusted laymen turned out to be foxes in the chicken coop.

In 2022, Pope Francis took a step toward administrative reform with the issuance of a new Constitution for the Roman Curia. Besides making several changes in the organization and structure of the Curia, the document expanded opportunities for lay participation.

It will, however, take more than a new set of rules to change a deep-seated culture. Everything will depend on the character and competence of those who are charged with the Constitution's implementation. The notorious scandals of the Vatican Bank, for example, were not due to flaws in its governing rules, but to spectacular failures to follow those rules, and to a general disregard for the rule of law as such. As Pope Paul VI wisely remarked after the last reform of the Curia (in 1967), "It does no good to change faces if we don't change hearts."

To say that what is needed is nothing less than a transformation of culture may sound like a tall order. But that, after all, is no more than what all Christians are supposed to be doing anyway. There is encouragement to be found in the fact that the Church has emerged rejuvenated in many other periods when it seemed to be in serious decline.

Mary Ann Glendon is Learned Hand Professor of Law emerita at Harvard University and a former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See. In 1995, she led the Vatican delegation to the UN's World Conference on Women in Beijing, becoming the first woman ever to lead a Vatican delegation.

Mary Ann Glendon is the most prominent lay Catholic person in the nation. An author, professor, ambassador—her work in defense of the family and religious liberty is astounding. Always humble, she never seeks the limelight. That is why I am happy to brag about her stunning accomplishments. We are delighted to have her serve on our board of advisors.

Bill Donohue

REVITALIZING CATHOLICISM IN AMERICA

Msgr. Robert J. Batule

Russell Shaw and David Byers, *Revitalizing Catholicism in America* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2023)

Authors Russell Shaw and David Byers in their new book *Revitalizing Catholicism in America* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2023) present evidence for the nation's largest religious body to be in a decline. To revitalize Catholicism in America, they say, we must start with what is true (doctrinally and otherwise) and also to examine Catholicism's relation to the broader culture. How does this impact the Church too? Telling the truth about Catholicism in America involves admitting that things have not gone well in large sectors of ecclesial life from one end of our country to the other. Take, for example, the Sacrament of Baptism. Shaw and Byers cite the statistics on infant baptism, comparing 1970 with 2019. During that nearly fifty-year stretch, infant baptisms dropped from 1.089 million to 582,331—a decline of fifty percent! The decline was

even greater for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. In 1970, there were 426,309 Catholic marriages; in 2019, there were but 137,885—a fall-off of more than seventy-five percent! Meanwhile, the total Catholic population in the United States grew from 54.1 million to 72.4 million in that same period of comparison.

Along with statistics on Baptism and Marriage, Shaw and Byers offer statistics on Mass attendance, priestly ordinations, enrollment in Catholic schools and a few other indices or barometers of Catholic life. In every area, the Church has lost ground (in the 1970s and 80s not that much but with faster and faster acceleration after that). The cause of so much ground being lost? Without a doubt it is secularism. To put a finer point on it though, Shaw and Byers maintain that the decline has occurred because instead of evangelizing the secular culture, Catholics were instead evangelized by the secular culture. (p. 33)

Secularization also obviously raises the issue of assimilation. How much assimilation can there be for Catholics before the faith is chiseled away partly or wholly? We can begin to answer that question by saying a fair amount or even a large amount provided the Catholic subculture remains intact. And for a while it did in America. The Catholic subculture acted as a kind of cellular membrane—allowing in to the body or organism things judged not detrimental to Catholicism and holding at bay other things considered threatening to the faith. This approach of selective permeability worked well when immigration levels from Europe were high and religious solidarity helped to buffet Catholics against any isolation stemming from prejudice and discrimination. The massive influence of American culture however and its ability to confer or withhold prestige and status according to alma mater (the Ivy League colleges and a handful of other schools), its promotion of enviable professional accomplishments (especially in law, the

professoriate and in business) and the ambition of having a home address in suburbia (not far from cities like New York, Washington, D.C. and some other urban areas) have proven too much for the plausibility of the Catholic subculture. Shaw and Byers put it this way: “[T]he failure—or inability—of Church institutions to offer sufficiently persuasive grounds for remaining attached to Catholicism in the face of serious inducements to disaffiliate” (p. 38) helped bring about a collapse of the Catholic subculture.

Serious inducements to disaffiliate, as Shaw and Byers note above, and hostility. “Except for the abuse of Blacks and Indians,” Shaw and Byers write, “there is little if anything in American history to compare with the outpouring of hostility and contempt lately directed at Catholics and other Christians by Hollywood, major news organizations, and even secular academic institutions.” (p. 48) And what is behind this hostility? Shaw and Byers cite Mary Eberstadt whose books include *Adam and Eve after the Pill* (2012), *It’s Dangerous to Believe* (2016) and *Adam and Eve after the Pill, Revisited* (2023). She, among a host of commentators, holds the position that opposition to the Sexual Revolution has engendered the hostility being directed at Catholics and some other Christians. It is good to recall here that Catholics and other Christians who oppose the Sexual Revolution are minorities themselves among the baptized. And, further, they practice the faith with an ardor not usually observed in other adherents. Important too is that the Catholic Church has not officially abandoned pre-Sexual Revolution positions in exchange for “better press” and more favorable treatment from the ruling elites.

The question is always going to be then: What are believing and practicing Catholics supposed to do? Shaw and Byers identify three stances (or “versions” as Shaw and Byers call them) which can be adopted. The first is basically not to do anything because at some unknown point in the future the

decline will level off. The second is known in some circles as the Benedict Option, keeping in mind the title of Rod Dreher's book (2017) and obviously before that, Saint Benedict (480 – 547). This second stance is effectively a retreat or withdrawal from the culture. The third stance is what the authors call new communities for a new Catholic subculture. The emphasis with the third stance is on evangelization, what our authors consider "an irreplaceable element of Catholic identity." (p. 59) The third stance, by the way, is what Shaw and Byers favor. H. Richard Niebuhr (1894 – 1962) offered something akin to these stances or versions in his landmark book *Christ and Culture* (1951), wherein the American Protestant theologian discussed various typologies in relation to the interaction of faith and culture.

The last major part of the book is the authors setting forth a way for the revitalization of the Church in America to happen. It consists of nine "action points" or recommendations to implement. For the record, I mention each one here: (1) heed the universal call to holiness; (2) discern, accept and live out your personal vocation; (3) rid yourself of ways of thinking and acting that smack of clericalism; (4) do your bit to build the new Catholic subculture; (5) encourage and contribute to a new apologetics; (6) do apostolate; (7) be an evangelizer; (8) do your part in promoting and practicing shared responsibility; (9) insist on accountability, and practice it yourself.

Let me say that all nine "action points" or recommendations are consistent with what Shaw and Byers present throughout their short volume. Next, I want to add that it is unlike some other offerings on the market which call for the Church to change her doctrine and discipline. Faithful Catholics will be pleased with a book by two authors who want only for the Church to breathe again with the fresh air of faith. For that to happen, we cannot continue to ingest the toxic fumes of a culture turned in on itself, and with more and more antipathy

for Catholicism.

The effort to breathe again with the fresh air of faith will take enormous resolve and an extraordinary amount of work by clergy and lay people alike. This review referenced statistics at the start; I wish to offer a few more words about how to read pastoral statistics. Having gone through a period in the 1970s and 80s when many were heard to say, "We're not concerned about numbers," now we are deeply concerned about them. And for good reason. Without numbers and substantiated data, we are unable to exercise a necessary and sustained stewardship for the future. At some point, then, the Catholic Church may hardly be recognizable as the Church of the Acts of the Apostles wherein growth and holiness are real and evident to the eye. Indeed, it is growth through holiness that puts to the lie the wry observation of Ralph Martin quoted by Shaw and Byers: "Business as usual [is] going out of business." (p. 36) If the Church were a business, her numbers now would be on par with Bud Light's after its recent disastrous marketing campaign using Dylan Mulvaney.

Statistics are important to the Church for they give us a first look at what is happening to life in the Spirit. They obviously don't tell us the whole story. But they begin to give us snapshots of whether or not the Catholic faith is being passed on generationally. Shaw and Byers are convinced that the Catholic faith is not being transmitted even by the once vaunted Catholic school system. They write that "[l]arge numbers of American Catholic children and young people now receive little or no formation in the Faith, with the predictable result of ignorance of what the Church teaches and carelessness in religious practice – supposing that these kids practice at all, as many do not." (p. 63) On this point of religious illiteracy leading to non-practice of the Catholic faith, Shaw and Byers cite the published work of Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk in a volume entitled *Handing Down the Faith* (2021). Smith and Adamczyk place the blame on parents

for raising their own children to be so intellectually ignorant of the Faith and to be so unserious about practicing it. As a way of attempting to remedy this grave pastoral problem, Smith and Adamczyk advise that parents who have “clear and implemented life standards and expectations for their children” and express these “with expressive emotional warmth and relational bonding” (p. 65) are in the best position to see that an “effective religious transmission” (p. 66) takes place.

Well, is there any good news on the horizon, you might be wondering. Yes, there is—but in the form of small seeds. Homeschooling and classical academies do not have long histories on the American scene but already have demonstrated that they are a kind of leaven in the world. There are also those educational institutions which make the grade and make it into the Cardinal Newman Guide. Making that list of authentically Catholic schools is the institutional equivalent of what Smith and Adamczyk counsel for parents at home. Schools that have “clear and implemented life standards and expectations” for their students are the best environments for the Faith to take root and grow in the lives of young Catholics.

As a country, we seem to be having a lot of trouble right now with “clear and implemented life standards and expectations.” This is traceable, I think, to the increasingly widespread denial of truth and norms for living and loving in our culture. We see too the hideous aim of wanting to quash the “emotional warmth and relational bonding,” the trust, that is, that ought to exist between parents and their children by third parties who fancy themselves as enlightened educators.

As we learned during the pandemic, live streaming Masses is not the way to encounter the Lord and His Church as we ought—much less can it revitalize Catholicism in America. What it comes down to is what Shaw and Byers say about maintaining a Catholic subculture. It’s a matter of existential faith. Do

you believe? Do you believe that Catholicism is true? If so, embrace the Faith. For hearing and understanding the word, you will bear fruit and yield a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. (cf. Matt 13:23)

Msgr. Robert J. Batule is a priest of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. He is the Pastor of Saint Margaret in Selden, New York. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Catholic League.

WAR ON VIRTUE

[Bill Donohue](#)

Bill Donohue, *War on Virtue: How the Ruling Class Is Killing the American Dream* (Sophia Institute Press, 2023)

This book is about the making of the American dream and attempts to thwart it by the ruling class.

Having studied why some people are a success, as measured by educational and economic achievement, I came to the conclusion that cultural factors are the key to understanding success. Virtue matters.

People do not do well in school or in the workplace because they are lucky, or even smart. They come out on top because they possess the three most important virtues that make for success: self-discipline, personal responsibility and perseverance. Having these attributes does not guarantee success, but not having them guarantees failure. This is as true for athletes as it is pianists. I call them the “vital virtues.”

Without self-discipline, the kinds of sacrifices that it takes

to measure up isn't going to happen. In fact, those who cannot, or will not, exercise self-control are destined to fail in school and in the workplace.

The Catholic Church has long understood the role that virtue plays in character formation. That is why Catholic schools do so well, even in neighborhoods where public school students fail. In fact, no institution has done more for those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale to succeed than the Catholic Church.

Taking responsibility for oneself is critical to success. Blaming others for one's failures may be psychologically comforting, but it is a dead end. Even when an individual, or an entire racial or ethnic group, has clearly been mistreated, it makes no sense to wallow in misery. Victimhood is one of the most destructive characteristics anyone can possess—it breeds a sense of impotence.

High achievers have all experienced failure, but unlike many others, they find a way to better themselves. They persevere. They have grit. Basketball superstar Michael Jordan was a model of grit. "If you're trying to achieve, there will be roadblocks. I've had them; everybody has had them. But obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."

There are four demographic groups that embody the vital virtues, par excellence: Asians, Jews, Mormons and Nigerians.

These groups succeed in school and in the workplace because they exercise self-discipline, personal responsibility and perseverance. The source of the vital virtues is the same in every case: they all come from intact two-parent families. Those who come from one-parent families can succeed, but their chances are slim compared to those who come from homes where there is a father and a mother.

The social science evidence on this is overwhelming. Why, then, does the ruling class—the elites who run our institutions—not do more to nurture the vital virtues? Worse, why are they increasingly doing everything they can to undermine them?

No group has suffered more at the hands of the ruling class than African Americans. It is not white supremacists whom they need to fear—it is the mostly white, well-educated elites who claim to be on their side. They are the real menace. They are the ones who promote policies that subvert the inculcation of the vital virtues.

Well-educated white people who claim to be on the side of blacks—but are in fact their real-life enemy—are not new.

George Fitzhugh was America's first sociologist. He is the author of the 1854 book *Sociology of the South*. Like many of those on the Left today, he railed against what he perceived to be the exploitative nature of capitalism. He was also a strong proponent of slavery.

Why would a “progressive” support slavery? He said blacks were not capable of competing with white people in a capitalist economy, and it was therefore preferable for them to remain as slaves.

In his work “The Universal Law of Slavery,” written in 1850, Fitzhugh explained his view that “the Negro is but a grown up child and must be governed as a child, not as a lunatic or criminal. The master occupies toward him the place of parent or guardian.” He noted that slavery had a positive effect. “The negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world.” Everything was taken care of for them.

Fitzhugh said something that the white “allies” of blacks would never say today, though their thinking and their behavior toward them suggests a similar outlook.

"The negro is improvident [and] would become an insufferable burden to society. Society has a right to prevent this, and can only do so by subjecting him to domestic slavery. In the last place, the negro is inferior to the white race, and living in their midst, they would be far outstripped or outwitted in the chaos of free competition. Gradual but certain extermination would be their fate."

Fitzhugh was not an anomaly. During the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Richard T. Ely was one of the most prominent leaders in the social-justice crusade; he was considered sympathetic to blacks. What he said was similar to what Fitzhugh said. "Negroes, are for the most part grownup children, and should be treated as such."

Fast forward to 1988. That is when the astute social scientist, Charles Murray, wrote a classic essay wherein he predicted the "coming of the custodial democracy." His prediction has come true. He said "what is now a more or less hidden liberal condescension toward blacks in general, and toward the black underclass in particular, will have worked its way into a new consensus."

Murray maintained that liberal intellectuals and policy makers would come to terms with their view that "inner-city blacks are really quite different from you and me, and the rules that apply to us cannot be applied to them." Therefore the best that can be done is to generously supply them with "medical care, food, housing, and other social services—much as we do for American Indians who live on reservations." This is the face of custodial democracy, treating inner-city blacks as "wards of the state."

Matters have only gotten worse. Now we have an array of reparation policies and equity programs designed to "help" blacks. In essence, the ruling class has given up on blacks.

If the elites in government, education, law, the media, the

entertainment industry, non-profit advocacy sector, the big corporations and the foundations truly believed that black people were just as capable of exercising personal responsibility, self-discipline and perseverance as white people, they would never give up on them.

The dirty little progressive secret—the sentiment that they don't want to state publicly—is their conviction that blacks can't make it on their own. This explains why they are always looking to implement new government policies, initiatives that smack of racism.

For example, the thinking behind critical race theory is that blacks can't move forward unless white people move backwards. As one of the chief gurus of this pernicious idea says, Ibram X. Kendi, "The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination."

Kendi is the darling of the corporate, government and education elite. Not only does he promote racist ideas—in the name of combating racism—he sends a message of victimhood to blacks. There is no surer way to promote failure than to convince people that they are incapable of self-improvement, yet this is what the ruling class does every day.

If the elites were serious about treating blacks as equals, they would do what they can to repair the damage that the welfare state has done. It was the welfare programs of the 1960s—pushed by the ruling class—that did more to undermine the black family than any other factor, including racism and discrimination.

Instead of strengthening marriage, the ruling class is responsible for weakening it. Now every conceivable social arrangement qualifies as marriage. After a clear majority of the people in the very liberal state of California voted in 2008 not to recognize same-sex marriage, who rushed into the

courts to overturn the expressed will of the people? Two of the most elite lawyers in the nation—one a Republican and the other a Democrat.

When Theodore B. Olson and David Boies (who had squared off against each other in the 2000 presidential election debacle) were granted a hearing in a San Francisco court in 2010, the voters in thirty states had already voted 30-0 to affirm legal marriage as the union between a man and a woman. But that didn't stop the elite duo from neutering the voice of the people.

The schools should be promoting the vital virtues, but instead they often work to undermine them. Students who are given the most homework do the best in school, and no group does more homework than Asians. Their parents see to that. Students raised in one-parent families do the least homework; they also do the least well in school.

Students cannot learn unless there is order in the classroom, but in many schools it is difficult to maintain order. This is a function of the teacher unions and the courts. By putting a quota—a cap—on the number of students from any given racial or ethnic group that can be disciplined, the elites who make these policies are ensuring that those at the bottom stay there.

A key prerequisite for academic success—indeed success in almost any area of life—is civility. But when self-discipline breaks down, the incidence of criminal behavior increases. When personal responsibility is eschewed, crime follows. When young men, in particular, fail to develop the virtue of perseverance, attempts at rehabilitation invariably fail—resulting in more crime. When all three virtues are under attack, it is nearly impossible to achieve civility.

Following some ugly incidents between the police and black men in 2020, crime started to get out of control. Instead of holding everyone accountable—rioters as well as cops—the

elites promoted policies that went easy on criminals and all but disarmed the cops. The “defund the police” movement—which blacks opposed—did nothing to ensure justice, but it did much to guarantee incivility.

It is a tribute to the patriotism of most Americans that they still believe in the goodness of the nation. It is a tribute to their commitment to the vital virtue of perseverance that they refuse to give up on the prospect of realizing the American dream. This is especially true of minorities who refuse to give up, despite the obstacles deliberately erected by the ruling class.

The time is ripe for leaders who embrace the vital virtues to bring about a cultural renewal. No institution is better suited to do that than the Catholic Church. Its moral voice was hurt by the clergy abuse scandal, but that is behind us. We need the clergy to become more vocal, and we need the laity to be supportive of their efforts. Making the American dream a reality for everyone depends on it.

THE COMING CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

Thomas D. Williams

Thomas D. Williams, *The Coming Christian Persecution: Why Things are Getting Worse and What You Can Do About It* (Sophia Institute Press, 2023)

Christian persecution is the sleeper story of the decade. It is perhaps the most newsworthy and least reported of any phenomenon in the world today.

Let me begin with an example. On March 15, 2019, 28-year-old Brenton Harrison Tarrant carried out two horrific consecutive mass shootings of Muslims in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Tarrant entered both mosques during Friday prayer, starting with the Al Noor Mosque and continuing to the Linwood Islamic Centre. In his rampage, Tarrant killed 51 people and wounded another 40.

Tarrant's religiously motivated killing spree was atrocious and rightly captured front-page billing in *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. All the major television networks and 24-hour cable news stations likewise accorded the story pride of place.

The problem with this scenario is not what was covered but what was not. In the very same moment when a lone shooter with a documented mental problem was shooting up mosques in New Zealand, 120 Christians lost their lives in brutal, targeted attacks over a three-week period in Nigeria. The difference was that no one in the West heard about it because no one bothered to report it. Not only was it not frontpage news; it wasn't mentioned at all. That includes NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, Fox News, and all the print media worth mentioning.

Many of our contemporaries, Christians included, mistakenly think of Christian persecution as a historical curiosity, a one-time occurrence happening during the first three centuries of the modern era, which forever disappeared with the Edict of Milan and the fall of the Roman Empire. This is unfortunately far from reality.

The troubling fact is that a full 75 percent of religiously motivated violence today occurs against Christians and some 360 million Christians around the world live in situations of serious persecution, meaning they fear for their lives and wellbeing on a daily basis. As grim as these statistics are, you would never know it because Western mainstream media—for a number of reasons—refrain from reporting on this, leaving

ordinary people in the dark.

Widespread ignorance and downplaying of the magnitude of the problem is an important factor explaining why Christian persecution is getting more serious by the year. The other is the intensification of the *drivers* of such persecution, which are not getting weaker but stronger.

According to the director of Open Doors Italy, which monitors Christian persecution, there are nine primary drivers of persecution in today's world: radical Islam, communist and post-communist oppression, religious nationalism, ethnic antagonism, tribal oppression, denominational protectionism, secular intolerance, dictatorial paranoia, and organized crime.

In a country like North Korea, run by an explicitly atheistic Marxist regime, Christians have no rights whatsoever, and a crime as simple as being found with a Bible can mean winding up in prison or even death. China, another communist state, offers a veneer of religious freedom but only on the communist party's terms, and the state employs advanced surveillance methods to be sure that the content of Christian worship coheres with the ideology of Maoist socialism. Children under the age of 18 are not allowed in church for any reason.

Radical Islam is the number one driver of violent Christian persecution today and nine out of the ten countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian are Muslim majority nations, including Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, and Sudan. Unsurprisingly, the nation in which a Christian is most likely to be killed for the faith is among these: Nigeria.

Some of this persecution has come from governments, some from individuals and mobs, and some from organized Islamic terror groups like Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, or the Islamic State. Who can forget the scene of 21 Coptic Christians martyred by the

Islamic State on a beach in Libya in February 2015? Wearing bright orange jump suits, the Egyptian Christians were forced by their captors to kneel down before having their throats slit. Given the chance to save themselves by denying their Christian faith, not one did.

While these and the other drivers seem in no way to be abating, the post-Christian West seems to be losing its will to defend Christians, which ties in with the shameful lack of reporting on Christian persecution. Worse still, in the West, Christians are looked upon increasingly as part of the problem, especially those who espouse biblical morality and are unwilling to conform to society's expectations.

This is where "secular intolerance" comes into play. Whereas Christian ideas about the human person, the family, and society itself historically formed the undergirding of Western civilization, Christianity is now often equated with bigotry by radical secularists and Christians are viewed with suspicion or even outright hostility. This is particularly true when it comes to the LGBT lobby and so-called "abortion rights," which orthodox Christians naturally oppose. As part of this trend, religious freedom is often downgraded to just one right among many with no special status, and Christians are often expected to act against their conscience when it comes to the rights of others.

This secular intolerance also manifests itself in hostility to those who take their Christian faith seriously, as if this would disqualify them from participating fully in society, especially in a formal capacity. In 2017, President Donald Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett to serve as a U.S. Circuit Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Barrett, who held a named chair of law at the University of Notre Dame at the time and is also the mother of seven children, was fiercely hazed during her confirmation hearing by members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and multiple senators challenged her fitness to serve due to her Catholic

faith.

"When you read your speeches, the conclusion one draws is that the dogma lives loudly within you," Sen. Dianne Feinstein famously said. "And that's of concern when you come to big issues that large numbers of people have fought for for years in this country."

One simple fact that has strengthened oppressed Christians down through the ages has been the entirely *expected* nature of the abuse. From the Apostolic Age to the present, no follower of Christ can reasonably say that he never knew persecution was coming. Even before His disciples knew what the "cross" was, Jesus made it quite apparent that it would accompany all those who chose to associate themselves with Him.

People sometimes speak of the "prosperity gospel" or the "gospel of success," but except in the most metaphorical of senses, such terminology stands diametrically opposed to the message of Jesus. While no Christian can be certain of reaping material benefits from his faith, all Christians can be sure that the more closely they follow Christ, the more they will experience the persecution that was the hallmark of His own life on earth.

Jesus not only foretold His own Passion and death, preparing His disciples for the agony of seeing Him brutally tortured and killed; He also foretold their own sharing in His fate, insisting that whoever follows Him will partake of His Passion as well. It is because of their union with Jesus that this will happen, He asserts, and thus persecution is a mark of the true disciple's intimate sharing in the life and mission of Jesus, just as the world's love and acceptance is a sure sign that a would-be disciple has not attained to this union.

This persecution began in earnest in the Roman Empire, especially under the reign of the emperor Nero when Peter, Paul, and many others were martyred, but it has continued down

through the centuries to our own time. There are, in fact, more martyrs today than at any other time in history.

Various theories have been advanced as to why Christians have been a particular magnet for persecution ever since the foundation of the Church. While Christians themselves have generally accepted the fact of persecution as a mark of authenticity and faithfulness to Jesus, others have proposed that there is something essentially *intolerable* about Christianity that provoked even the famously tolerant Roman Empire to treat Christians with cruelty.

Monotheism alone, for instance, cannot explain the unique hostility toward the followers of Jesus. The Jews, in obedience to the first commandment, declined to take part in many of the religious rituals prescribed by the Roman emperors and yet were generally given a pass when it came time to enforce their civic duty. Being Jewish was not illegal in the Roman Empire, whereas being a Christian was.

Some, like Voltaire and Edward Gibbon, have tried to downplay Christian persecution and even to blame persecution on the Christians themselves, but these efforts reveal more about those who make them than about the Christians.

A better explanation for the motives behind antipathy toward Christians was offered by the author of an ancient Christian text known as the *Letter to Diognetus*. Written by an unknown author sometime between AD 130 and 200, the letter attempts to describe the relationship between Christians and the world, thereby elucidating what it is about them that the “world” finds so irritating and intolerable.

Outwardly, Christians are not all that different from others, the text explains, and Christians “are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe.” They do not live apart in self-made ghettos or communes, but inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian

cities, they follow “the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct.”

But by their lives, Christians stand as a silent reproach to the worldly and their pursuits, and this fact alone is sufficient to explain the hostility they elicit.

Regardless of the motivations behind it, however, Christian persecution is a fact that is not going away but only intensifying.

No one seeks persecution for its own sake; it is unpleasant, painful, and repulsive to our human nature. No one wants to be mistreated, misunderstood, or ridiculed—much less punished, tortured, or put to death. And yet a willingness to endure such things out of fidelity to Jesus points to the truth of the faith and the sustaining power of God’s grace even in the most trying ordeals.

In today’s world, the greatest temptation for many Christians is not apostasy per se but rather assimilation. It is so much easier to shade the truth of the gospel in order to be well liked, to advance in our careers, and to be accepted by “the world” than to stand firm and expose ourselves to ridicule and ostracization for our fidelity to Christ.

This is the challenge that faces today’s Christians: to stand firm in the faith, emboldened by the grace of the Holy Spirit and sure of the victory that Christ has already won for his Church. Jesus’ words must be a light for our path: “In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Thomas D. Williams, Ph.D., is Rome Bureau Chief, Breitbart News.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE: CLARIFYING THE FACTS AND THE CAUSES

Bill Donohue

When the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church is discussed, the focus is usually on the two principal parties to it, namely the molesting priests and their enabling bishops. In my new book, [*The Truth About Clergy Sexual Abuse: Clarifying The Facts And The Causes*](#), I call this Scandal I.

It is my contention that there was another scandal. Scandal II is how the media, the entertainment industry, advocacy groups, victims' activists and their lawyers, state attorneys general and others have been preoccupied with the Church, to the exclusion of other groups and institutions. Quite frankly, they have been playing us. Their interest in combating the sexual abuse of minors depends solely on the identity of the abuser, not his conduct.

Ch.1 "Catholics Don't Own This Problem"

The opening chapter reviews extensive data on sexual misconduct committed by many other organizations. We have known for a long time that when adults and minors interact on a regular basis, problems of sexual abuse arise. After reviewing the problem of sexual abuse by the clergy of other religions, I turn my attention to sexual misconduct in secular institutions.

The evidence shows that those who work in the media, government, education, healthcare, and many other professions,

have had their fair share of sexual deviants. Not only that, they covered up for them. In short, we don't own this problem, though many elites—those responsible for Scandal II—would like to convince the public otherwise.

Ch. 2 “The Church Confronts the Scandal”

This chapter explores how the Church responded when the Boston Globe broke the news of Scandal I in 2002. There is an analysis of the Dallas reforms and the progress that had been made. Though most of this part is praiseworthy, fault is noted regarding the short shrift given to the due process rights of accused priests.

The progress made is undeniable. In the 1970s, which was the worst decade, over 6,000 accusations were made in any given year against current members of the clergy. Now the figures are in the single digits.

Ch. 3 “The Poisoning of the Public Mind”

This chapter hones in on Scandal II. The faulty public perception that no progress has been made is commonplace. The role played by the media has been huge. By reporting on new accusations—even though the alleged misbehavior took place decades ago—it leaves the impression that nothing has changed. There is no other institution in society that is treated this way.

Hollywood has also fanned the flames by making movies about alleged mistreatment of children by nuns. By doing so, it leads the public to think that sexual abuse of minors is common in many parts of the Catholic Church. Yet a closer look at these films reveals how utterly dishonest the portrayals have been.

The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, along with victims' lawyers and victims' advocates, have also poisoned the public mind. Their agenda, and their distortion of the truth, is

discussed in detail. Included is an extensive takedown of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), a mostly moribund group that was the media's darling. The role the Catholic League played in dismantling this dishonest entity is given much coverage.

Ch. 4 "Myths of the Scandal's Origins Debunked"

Before I explain what really caused Scandal I, the myths regarding its origin are debunked. Celibacy, for example, had nothing to do with it. If celibacy were the problem, then why were so few priests engaged in sexual misconduct in the 1940s and 1950s? Why were the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s the worst decades?

Some critics actually blame Catholic moral teachings, as if teaching the virtue of sexual restraint somehow caused priests not to restrain themselves. Just as ludicrous are attempts to blame homophobia.

This chapter also explains why some bishops enabled the molesters. Six explanations are offered: fear of scandalizing the Church; in-group favoritism; elitism; ineptitude (e.g., not picking up on red flags); the role of therapists; and the failure to follow Vatican norms.

Ch. 5 "The Role of Evil"

The fifth chapter makes clear that while all of the molesters were sick men, most were not evil. However, some were. When a priest uses sacred objects or sacred words when abusing his victims, this is evil. There is an extensive analysis of the McCarrick Report, named after former cardinal Theodore McCarrick. While he was solely responsible for his behavior, many in the Church were derelict in their duties by not reining him in decades earlier.

Ch. 6 "The Role of Homosexuality: Denying the Obvious"

This chapter focuses on those bishops, priests, nuns, and laypeople who have danced around the obvious, namely the overwhelming role that homosexuals have played in creating the scandal. Indeed, the dance is still ongoing, as witnessed by the Vatican Summit of 2019. Those clerics put the blame squarely on clericalism, as if elitism had anything to do with why priests molested minors (it may have had something to do with why some bishops enabled the molesters). Also, such supposed causes of priestly sexual abuse as pedophilia and ephebophilia are examined and discredited.

Ch. 7 "The Role of Homosexuality: Admitting the Obvious"

Some Church leaders, such as Pope Benedict XVI, have been courageous in discussing the role that homosexuals have played, though they have been hammered for doing so. To understand what happened, we need to give due consideration to the deleterious effects of the gay subculture. The evidence that a gay subculture contributed mightily to the scandal cannot be denied. The good news is that the seminaries have undergone a much needed reformation.

Ch. 8 "The Role of Homosexuality: An Analysis of the John Jay Thesis"

I credit the methodology of the John Jay College for Criminal Justice researchers for doing the two reports on this subject for the bishops. But I fault them for being deceptive in their analysis of the data.

For example, they admit that most of the abuse was male-on-male sex, and that most of the victims were postpubescent. They also do not deny that the sexual acts were homosexual in nature. Yet they discount the role that homosexuality played. How did they pull off this magic trick? They said that many of these molesting priests did not identify as homosexual.

So what? Sexual identity is not dispositive. It is one's behavior, not his perception of it, that counts. If the

molesters identified as heterosexual, would the social scientists at John Jay have concluded that we had a heterosexual-driven scandal?

Ch. 9 "The Role of Homosexuality: Does Homosexuality Cause the Sexual Abuse of Minors?"

This may be the most controversial chapter in the book. While I conclude that homosexuality does not, per se, cause the sexual abuse of minors, I also conclude that there is a link between the two (otherwise homosexual priests would not be so overrepresented).

There is an intervening variable, one that intervenes between homosexual priests and the sexual abuse of minors, and that variable is the emotional and sexual immaturity of the offenders. In other words, homosexuals are more likely to be immature, and immaturity is associated with the sexual abuse of minors. The immaturity that is prevalent among homosexuals was noted by Freud and Jung. Subsequently, the evidence has only grown.

There is another homosexual trait, narcissism (it is a close cousin to immaturity), that helps explain why homosexuals are overrepresented among those who abuse minors. Gay psychiatrists and psychologists have been open about the role that narcissism plays in the gay community.

The self-destructive behaviors that gays engage in is also discussed. By this I mean promiscuity (almost all homosexual men are promiscuous, and most can't form lasting relationships). This is not easy reading, but the sources cited are authoritative and the truth needs to be told.

Ch. 10 "The Role of the Sexual Revolution"

The tenth chapter shows the social context in which the scandal occurred.

The sexual revolution was felt everywhere, but nowhere was it more impactful than in Boston. There is a reason why Boston was the epicenter of the scandal: it spawned a deviant cultural environment. Father Paul Shanley, who abused males of all ages, was a hero to liberal non-Catholics, as well as to the Catholic left.

There is a section in this chapter, "Justifying Man-Boy Sex," that focuses on American and European intellectuals, celebrities, and psychiatrists who have sought to justify sex between adult men and children. It shows how phony these people are. To be specific, why are they upset when molesting priests did exactly what they promote?

Ch. 11 "The Role of Dissent in the Church"

The scandal could not have happened if men who were already troubled or disordered were not given the rationale to do so. Those who provided the rationale were Church dissidents. The evidence is clear that the assault on traditional Catholic moral teachings that occurred in the second half of the 20th century did much to feed the scandal.

Beginning in the late 1960s, many seminaries became hotbeds of dissent. This chapter devotes considerable attention to the sexual misdeeds of Father Shanley and Archbishop Rembert Weakland, two dissenting and morally compromised clerics.

Ch. 12 "The Role of Organized Dissent"

Starting in the 1960s, there was no shortage of organized Catholic dissidents who were in open rebellion against the Church's teachings on sexuality. The National Catholic Reporter certainly inspired dissidents in many Catholic circles, including those who worked in the dioceses. Just as disconcerting, legions of nuns openly defied Catholic teachings, giving support to the sexual offenses committed by homosexual priests.

Catholic colleges and universities were infected with dissent, and many still are. But not all the agitation occurred within the Catholic community. Outside activists also sought to undermine the Church; their role is covered in detail.

I expect that many Catholics will welcome this book. But not everyone will be happy.

The pushback against the book will be formidable. There is a segment of our society that does not want the truth to be told about the damage that many homosexual priests have done, as well as the disastrous role played by Catholic dissidents.

However, this book was not written to shade the truth, but to tell it.

BATTLE OF THE TEXTBOOKS

Mike McDonald

As the new school year begins, what children learn has become one of the biggest flash points in the culture war. From curricula to textbooks in elementary schools to high schools and beyond, these are now battlegrounds hotly contested by activist mobs and parents.

So, with this as our backdrop, the Catholic League decided over the course of the 2020-21 school year to take a survey of prominent history and government textbooks to see what children are learning. Our findings should raise the ire of all members of the Catholic League.

One thing becomes abundantly apparent from our deep dive into these textbooks; namely, the current curriculum provides a biased perspective against traditional and Catholic values. By

and large, these textbooks present religion, traditional values, and conservatism in a negative light.

First, religion is portrayed as a net negative for society. On the whole, history textbooks tend to be worse than government textbooks at making this argument. History allows for more interpretation of the facts. The writers of these textbooks use that leeway to continually present both religious and traditional values in the most negative light possible.

In these history books, they routinely point to the Catholic missionaries as the first to come to the New World to destroy the harmonious lives of the Indians. The overall portrayal of the native population, of course, is utopian, and it was torn asunder by the conniving Catholics. While we view these Catholic missionaries as saints and heroes who spread the Gospel, provided for the salvation of souls, and generally brought the moral underpinnings of modernity to the Americas, the textbooks present the missionaries as the vanguard of imperialism making the natives a subservient class to do the biddings of their new colonial masters.

According to the history books, the worst among these Catholic interlopers were the Spanish. The Catholic nature of their empire drove them to commit all levels of depravity against the indigenous peoples. A more honest interpretation of history might have considered the imperial nature of the Spanish Empire as a larger contributing factor to Spanish activity in the Americas. However, these history books seem less interested in providing an accurate historic analysis and more focused on indoctrinating students to despise religion. As such, the consensus they reach is right after the unifying of Spain and the terrible atrocities of the Inquisition, Catholic intolerance drove them to exploit the New World in a similar fashion.

While Catholic Spain might have been the worst, Christians in general are to be understood by the curriculum as ruining the

lives of the Indians. British Protestantism is probably the next worse offender; however, French Catholics and Dutch Protestants also contributed in turning America into a paradise lost.

In addition to portraying Catholic Spain and more generally Christian Europe as blood-lusting, religious fanatics seeking the genocide of the native population, these history books also introduce the concept that America from the colonial period to the present has always viewed religion with open skepticism and a subtle hostility.

The textbooks contend that the Wars of Religion in Europe inspired the colonists to chart a different course from the Old World. Religion had promulgated war, destruction, and death, and as such the colonists sought to create a secular world free from the intolerance and bloodletting that is baked into the nature of religion. To this end, America has always had a very strong inclination toward secularism. While America has not always lived up to this ideal, a strong secularist strand has permeated every aspect of the country, and this has allowed the United States to advance as a nation.

Second, from these books' biased perspective, traditional values are problematic. They stand in the way of the societal march to progress.

The textbooks argue that America has always been a progressive country. In part this is thanks to America's strong secular streak that freed the nation from the shackles of religion. In doing so, America is truly a progressive country. Further founded on the notion of rejecting the ancient order, America has continually evolved into a society free from the constraints of traditional values.

Anyone who clings to such superstitious beliefs as religion and other archaic notions generally called traditional values only do so because, at best, they do not fully understand

American freedom, or, at worst, they wish to oppress the downtrodden.

In this regard, both the history and government textbooks were equally bad. While history lends itself more to interpretation, government books were more constrained to explaining the nuts and bolts of government. The mechanics of the Electoral College or the means by which the legislature can override a veto do not naturally lend themselves to subjectivism; they are what they are.

However, since traditional values play a large role in today's political environment, the government textbooks had an opening to opine and apparently relished the opportunity to besmirch them.

A favorite example of theirs to explain how rights and liberties were supposed to work was *Roe v. Wade*. Ultimately, they argued that a woman must have the right to murder her unborn child to be truly free and those opposed to that were barbaric, knuckle-dragging Neanderthals who wished to deny women basic liberties.

Another was school prayer. Again, this issue was framed as there is a Christian-Conservative Axis that is hell bent on establishing a theocracy to force school children to violate their constitutional rights by compelling them to pray.

In a similar vein, both history and government books used the Equal Rights Amendment as evidence that traditional values stand in the way of progress. While government books used it as an example of how amendments can be defeated, it was clear, like their historical counterparts the Equal Rights Amendment would have been a good thing and could have propelled America forward had not the pesky social conservatives and their pro-life allies intervened.

Finally, conservatism, in part because this philosophy is rooted in religious and traditional values, is a threat to

freedom, and those who adhere to its principles are the worst oppressors in human history. Conversely, thanks to America's secular nature and the progressive national spirit, the United States has created fertile grounds for leftism to take root. Running the gambit from workers' rights to liberalism to socialism and even communism, leftist forces have always played an active role in American society, working to champion the rights of the downtrodden and make America the true land of liberty.

The textbooks would have students believe that these leftists were the true American heroes. They have always been on the forefront of American progress, and they make a new pantheon that has given this nation the true ideals of a leftist utopia.

A final trend worth noting, textbooks written for Advanced Placement (AP) tests were far worse than textbooks that were not geared toward that test. Why that is, we cannot say. Perhaps the notion is that these students need to be fully indoctrinated as if they were in a university setting. Seeing the point of the test is to pass and not have to take those classes in college, the College Board might want to make sure these children fully hate America as if they had sat through a semester at college.

After all, the College board is a cartel, but instead of trafficking drugs, guns, or people, it peddles a far more toxic substance, the ideological poisoning of young minds in hopes of turning them against the principles that made America great.

Equally plausible, the less advanced classes have been written off as unlikely to benefit from this degree of propaganda; even worse, they might be so unenlightened that they or their parents might take offense with the egalitarian utopia presented in the AP textbooks.

On the whole, while the non-AP textbooks had the same biased worldview, they did a fairer job presenting the other side. Reading through them one gets the notion that religion might have had a hand in some bad things in history, but it also had a few positive contributions. The same could be said of traditional values. These two were presented as net negatives for society, but they were not all bad. Conservatives were still the bad guys, but they were more nuanced villains that may have had some redeeming qualities. They were almost like anti-heroes and less like evil personified. These textbooks were typically longer, but that allowed them to be more balanced in comparison to their AP counterparts.

While we cannot concretely say why the AP textbooks were so blatant in their bias, we can say they were definitively worse than non-AP textbooks. For those who are parents of a child in an AP class, it is important to remember that the benefit of your child earning a few university credits comes with the risk of them becoming steeped in anti-Americanism and ideology contrary to Catholic teachings.

Ultimately, the best guidance the Catholic League can offer from our findings in this survey is, as a parent, you must constantly be involved in your child's learning. The textbooks are generally very biased, and they can lead children to despise religion, traditional values, and conservatives. You need to engage your child, the teachers, and the school to make sure your student's world view is not warped. Keep in mind, that even if your child is in Catholic school or homeschooled they might be using one of the textbooks we used in our survey.

One final point, our survey used books in circulation prior to the great push that is underway to teach Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the schools. Radicals, the National Education Association, and numerous school boards across America are working to ensure that CRT becomes the national standard for education.

No doubt what we found is just the beginning of the battle of the textbooks. The publishers are more than likely producing new editions that make the objectionable material we found seem pedestrian. This is a long fight, and it is only heating up. Parents must remain vigilant. At the Catholic League, we will continue our efforts to combat these biased perspectives against traditional, Catholic values that are printed in these textbooks.

Mike McDonald is our director of communications

THE HISTORIC ROLE OF 20th CENTURY POPES

Bill Donohue

Russell Shaw, *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* (Ignatius Press)

Today we turn on the Internet to do our research. Those researching the Catholic Church would find their job easier if they simply called Russell Shaw. Not for nothing do I call him a walking encyclopedia of the Catholic Church.

Shaw has done it again. *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* is a masterful overview of how eight popes affected the Church and left their mark on world history in the 20th century.

Shaw blends the historical record with interesting anecdotes, never shying from making fair criticisms, while always showing respect for the men who are his subject. His own faith shines through.

Pope Saint Pius X (8/4/1903–8/20/1914) is known for “standing firm against the inroads of a modernity devoid of faith that he saw as the deadly foe of the ancient Church.” He was confronted, as Shaw rightly points out, with a world where the efforts of Darwin, Marx, and Freud left an intellectual trail of militant secularism in their wake. The pope could either succumb to the zeitgeist or confront it. We are fortunate that he chose to fight it.

It may be, as the future Pope Benedict XVI has said, that Pius X was “over-zealous,” but the deck was clearly stacked against the Church. That is why he responded to agnosticism with an Oath for priests. The Church was engulfed in a blitz of secular attacks, and not to insist on fidelity was not something the pope would chance. Meanwhile, he never sought to disengage the Church from the world around him, for had he done so, 4,618 French priests would not have died fighting in World War I.

Under Pope Benedict XV (9/3/1914–1/22/1922), the Church had no place at the table when the Treaty of Versailles was held following the war, which meant, as Shaw notes, “at least no one could blame the pope for the disastrous peace that was no peace that emerged from the talks.” While the pope continued to resist the worst elements of modernity, he was, understandably, consumed with World War I and its aftermath.

It was under his pontificate that the “Roman question” was first broached. The issue of how to deal with the relationship between the papacy and the Italian government had been on the back burner—it dated to 1870 when Italian troops seized Rome and Pius IX sought refuge behind Vatican walls—but the time had come to seek reconciliation.

Benedict was against the war, and while he did not take sides, he authorized humanitarian efforts. He also opposed the harsh reparations that the Versailles accord mandated, proving that he was more prescient than secular leaders who put the squeeze

on Germany. Shaw is right to mention that the events of Fatima in 1917 happened on his watch, even if he had no direct role in them.

If his predecessors were faced with serious threats, Pope Pius XI (2/6/22–2/10/39) was faced with monumental ones. The Great Depression and the rise of the totalitarian twins—fascism and communism—set off the alarms everywhere. So did the moral collapse that paved the way for Hitler in the Weimar Republic. The pope responded by unapologetically defending the Church's sexual ethics.

The pope's response to the economic crisis was to criticize both socialism and capitalism, though by promulgating the principle of subsidiarity—those closest to events are best suited to address them—he tilted away from the social engineering and consolidation of power that marks socialism.

Pius XI fought the anti-Semitism of Hitler's regime. He issued an important encyclical condemning racism and anti-Semitism, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern), that was smuggled into Germany; priests read it from the pulpit. He also condemned the Soviet regime and the threat it posed to the Catholic Church.

Catholic League members are well aware of the yeoman work of Pope Pius XII (3/2/39–10/9/58), one of the most maligned figures in the 20th century. It was he who played a major role in writing his predecessor's encyclical against anti-Semitism. His first encyclical was a fierce denouncement of the German and Soviet invasions of Poland, and their immense threat to human rights. He also kept his eye on Soviet ambitions in Eastern Europe.

Now that the Vatican archives on World War II are open, it is hoped that the distortions and out-and-out lies about Pope Pius XII will be put to rest. No leader in the world, religious or secular, did more to stand up to Hitler and save

Jews than the pope. The lies that began with the KGB and made their way into a despicable play, *The Deputy*, have already been written about by Ronald Rychlak and others, but now they will be given new light.

The pope could have been more outspoken, but to what end? The Dutch bishops who spoke up triggered a vicious Nazi reaction, which is why Jews pleaded with the pope not to be too strident in his condemnations. Pius XII played it smart: everyone knew where he stood, and that is why he chose to be prudent in his resistance. Once the war was over, he issued his infallible edict on Our Blessed Mother's bodily Assumption into heaven.

Pope Saint John XXIII (10/28/58–6/3/63) launched Vatican II, which Shaw says was "perhaps the most *religious* event" of the 20th century. It certainly was a momentous one. Indeed, it has been the subject of much distortion, and much debate, the result of which was to transform the Church on many fronts. It pitted traditionalists against reformers.

Was Vatican II necessary? Some said it was—the Church needed to confront new challenges—while others questioned the logic of fixing something that wasn't broken. Would an ecumenical council clarify or complicate matters? "One of the few things everyone agrees on is that the council was followed by a period of intense and sometimes raucous controversy and dissent," Shaw notes, "a dismaying number of noisy defections from the priesthood and religious life, numerous flagrant abuses in liturgical practice, and much else of a similarly alarming nature."

The fact that we cannot agree today on what Vatican II did is not a good sign. There are the "textualists" who insist on fidelity to the sixteen documents as written, and those who speak about the "spirit of Vatican II"; they prefer a more elastic interpretation. Some in the "spirit" camp, unable to justify their grandiose vision by appealing to the text, took a rather boundless approach. This philosophical split led to

major divisions within the Church. They still exist.

The war within the Church hit a new high with the papacy of Pope Saint Paul VI (6/21/63–8/6/78). The “spirit of Vatican II” devotees hit stride. It was a time when the Church sought to maintain allegiance to traditional moral values while the Western world railed against them. Some of the priests and nuns who sided against the Church left their ministry and joined the ranks of the laity; others stayed put and rebelled from the inside.

Much has been written about the cultural fallout of *Humanae Vitae*. If more of the critics actually read the encyclical, there would be fewer of them. It was a brilliant statement on the need to preserve marriage and the family, with a particular concern for the sexual exploitation of women. But in the minds of secular-leaning ideologues, it was an antiquated document that made little sense in the Age of Aquarius.

Pope John XXIII had established a commission to advise the Vatican on what to do about artificial birth control, lifting the expectations of reformers. When Paul VI turned down their advice and ratified the status quo, it set off a firestorm. “Looking back,” Shaw writes, “it is clear that *Humanae Vitae* could hardly have come at a worse time. In 1968 a cultural—and sexual—revolution was well underway in the United States and other countries, creating a tidal wave of rebellion that threatened to sweep aside whatever smacked of authority and tradition.” He does not exaggerate.

Pope John Paul I (8/26/78–9/28/78) served for only thirty-three days before being taken by the Lord, so he obviously didn’t have time to leave his mark. With good reason, he is not counted among the eight popes that Shaw chose to write about.

John Paul I was succeeded by a towering figure in the annals

of the Catholic Church. Pope Saint John Paul II (10/16/78–4/2/05) was a first-class intellectual and a man of enormous courage. The youngest pope since Pius IX, he terrified the Soviet Union. His historic trip to his native Poland in 1979 set the stage for the ultimate demise of the U.S.S.R. When he told the millions who turned out to see him live or on television, “Be Not Afraid,” those in the Kremlin, as well as the Polish people, knew what he meant. The communist dictators were placed on life support.

The pope made five trips to the United States promoting interreligious harmony. His authorization of a new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was well received by everyone, save for the “spirit of Vatican II” crowd. Those who tried to portray him as outdated were knocked on their heels when he audaciously published the “Theology of the Body,” a cogent and original interpretation of human sexuality.

To my mind, John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* ranks with the greatest expositions on liberty ever written. His sociology was as impressive as his theology. Though it is not certain whether he wrote this partly as a rebuke of John Stuart Mill’s 1859 essay “On Liberty,” it certainly had that effect on me. Mill was top heavy on individual rights, paying lip service to individual responsibilities. For John Paul II, they were bound together.

The Soviet-inspired assassination attempt in 1981 by a Turkish gunman took a toll on him in many ways, but to our benefit he rebounded nicely. Beloved by millions across the globe, Pope Saint John Paul II was an extraordinary man.

The Catholic Church’s role in shaping the world in the 20th century is the story of some very determined men faced with incredible challenges, both inside and outside the Church. They had their weaknesses, but they also rose to the occasion and delivered some of the most timely and effective encyclicals ever written. They were also leaders on the world

stage, pioneers for natural law and natural rights.

Combating moral destitution in a world where freedom is defined as genital liberation is not easy. This was evident in Weimar Germany, and it is evident in Western societies today. The Church is called to pursue the truth, not fashion, making it an outlier among global institutions.

Similarly, combating the rise of genocidal regimes, especially under Hitler and Stalin, is something that our supreme leaders did not shy away from; they handled themselves with wisdom and honor.

Russell Shaw has given us a book that is informative and easy to read. It will make Catholics proud of the eight popes who faced adversity in the last millennium, and succeeded in doing so.

THE WESTERN WORLD IS DEEPLY TROUBLED

Bill Donohue

Robert Cardinal Sarah, *The Day Is Now Far Spent* (Ignatius Press)

Many observers have commented on the decline of Western civilization, but among Catholic students of this subject, no one captures the essence of what has happened better than Robert Cardinal Sarah. What makes his analysis so potent is that he is not of the West: He is African. Thus, he can see things that many Westerners overlook.

The Catholic Church faces problems in many parts of the world,

but it is in the West where the situation is most serious. Radical individualism and radical egalitarianism are destroying our Judeo-Christian heritage, leaving our culture corrupted by narcissism and an unhealthy appetite for equal outcomes (as opposed to equal opportunities). There is also a crisis of faith in the West, and it is one that has affected the internal dynamics of the Church.

Sarah is not dispirited. He is fully aware of the challenges that the Church is faced with but he does not despair. "The mystery of Judas is spreading. Therefore, I want to say to all priests: stay strong and upright. Certainly, because of a few ministers, you will all be labeled homosexuals. They will drag the Church through the mud. They will present her as though she were made up entirely of hypocritical, power-hungry priests. Let not your heart be troubled."

The problems within the Church are daunting, but it is wrong to make sweeping generalizations. "The immoral priests, bishops, and cardinals will in no way tarnish the luminous testimony of more than four hundred thousand priests throughout the world who, every day and faithfully, serve the Lord in holiness and joy." He is optimistic. "Despite the violence of the attacks that she may suffer," he says, "the Church will not die. This is the Lord's promise, and his word is infallible."

While much of this book shows the imprint of Pope Benedict XVI on Sarah—the African cardinal stresses the deleterious effects of moral relativism—he is at one with Pope Francis in emphasizing the role of the devil. It is not by happenstance that the West, and the Church itself, are suffering.

What was morally right is now morally wrong, and vice versa. "Good and evil no longer exists," he says. "Evil is good, good is evil." Indeed, "we prefer to think that the devil no longer exists. Some bishops even say that he is only a symbolic image. Jesus Christ is supposedly lying, therefore, when he

claims that he is quite real, that he was tempted several times by him, the Prince of the world!"

This is tough stuff. Sarah is not afraid to call out the dissenters in the Church, even those who are senior members of the clergy. "Satan has a fierce hatred of priests. He wants to defile them, to make them fall, to pervert them. Why? Because by their whole life they proclaim the truth of the Cross."

The evidence that Sarah is right is all around us. Most priests are good men, but there is a segment among the clergy—including members of the hierarchy—who have let us down. Some of their failures have been severe, and when that happens, the hand of the devil is surely at work.

What does the devil want? "The sign of Satan is division." He wants to "divide the Church. The prince of darkness wants first to sow opposition among us." Satan is particularly adept at targeting priests. "Satan intends to destroy priests and the teaching of doctrine." He not only hates the liturgy and the sacraments, he seeks "to instill lukewarmness and doubt in priests."

Sarah offers an extensive discussion of gender ideology, the idea that the sexes are not fixed attributes. The proponents of this ideology would have us believe that the sexes are a cultural creation, having nothing to do with our nature, or with nature's God. "According to this ideology," Sarah writes, "only what I construct is worthy of me." This view is the natural consequence of a society engulfed in narcissism and moral relativism.

It is this vision of humanity that Sarah challenges. "A man could therefore think of himself and construct himself as a woman. This claim can go so far as the alleged freedom to transform one's body by a surgical operation, thought of as the recreation of a sex chosen and fabricated by oneself." He does not exaggerate. Indeed, this kind of madness is enshrined

in a bill, the Equality Act, that will be taken up by the Congress this fall.

“In the gender ideology,” Sarah observes, “there is a deep rejection of God the Creator.” How could it not be? To be in rebellion against one’s nature is not only abnormal, it is a profound statement of pride, the notion that I am the center of the universe needing no help from God. No wonder the suicide rate is so high among transgender men and women.

Gender ideology has serious implications for the family. “It endangers the institutions of fatherhood and motherhood. In the view of some Western governments,” Sarah notes, “the words ‘father’ and ‘mother’ have become improper. They speak of ‘parent 1’ and ‘parent 2.’ The first victims of these behaviors are obviously the children.”

Sarah is right to say that we have reduced fatherhood and motherhood to “role playing.” This kind of game is an example, he says, of “a visceral hatred of the family,” one that has torn at the very fabric of society. The hatred he speaks of is on grand display by radical gay activists who are in a constant state of rebellion against traditional moral values. They are supported by many heterosexual activists as well.

Contrary to what Sarah’s critics say, he has more respect for the dignity of homosexuals than many gay leaders have. For instance, he objects to labeling people as LGBT and the like. Why? Because such a vision does not see homosexuals as individuals; rather, it portrays them as simply part of a collectivity. “These persons are fundamentally loved by God,” he says, “just as every man and woman is.”

Similarly, Sarah says “the first victims of LGBT ideology are the persons who experience a homosexual orientation. They are led by militants to reduce their whole identity to their sexual behavior.” Regrettably, this is often true.

Imagine someone who is an American, an Italian, a male, a

Catholic, a left-hander, a veteran, a Bostonian, a plumber, and a homosexual. One of those status groupings may be his master status, but it would be bizarre to learn that the only identity that matters to him is his sexual orientation. Yet that is what gay militants are fostering—reducing one's identity to what one does in bed and with whom.

Institutions of higher education are actively promoting gender ideology. As Sarah points out, so are many elites in the foundation world. He mentions the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Many more could be cited. Billionaire atheist George Soros is actively engaged, as are most of the cream of the crop in the philanthropic community. Count Wall Street among the big supporters as well.

Sarah sees the hand of the devil at work. He says that “the family is an institution that is utterly unbearable to the devil.” It is a “place of love,” and that is not something Satan will tolerate. “Even more profoundly,” Sarah opines, “the union of father, mother, and child is a trace of the fruitful unity of Divine Trinity. Through families, the devil tries to profane the Trinitarian Unity.”

As we have seen, Sarah is a great champion of priests, but he pulls no punches in assessing the damage that some have done. Not all of it is sexual in nature. Much of it is a function of cowardice.

“The Church is dying because her pastors are afraid to speak in all truth and clarity. We are afraid of the media, afraid of public opinion, afraid of our own brethren! The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep.” It is refreshing to read that he personally seeks “neither success nor popularity.”

What he says rings true. One Friday afternoon back in the late 1990s, New York Archbishop John Cardinal O'Connor summoned me

to his office. We never got around to talking about what he wanted to see me about. That's because I walked into his office rather dismayed, if not angry. I asked him, "What's wrong with so many priests these days? Why don't they take a stand?"

"Sit down, Bill," Cardinal O'Connor said. "Priests want to be liked," he said. "I want to be liked too, your Eminence, but I want to be respected first." He nodded in agreement, and we continued the conversation.

Sarah counsels against such cravings. "A priest must not be preoccupied with knowing whether he is appreciated by the faithful. He must simply ask himself whether he proclaims God's Word, whether the doctrine that he teaches is God's, whether he fully carries out God's will."

The esteemed sociologist, Amitai Etzioni, notes that there are two characteristics that are natural to all human beings: the need for affection and the need for recognition. If a child is deprived of these human wants, he suffers badly. But not only children: Adults need affection and recognition as well. Yet these needs can become a problem if they act to stunt our moral courage. Being liked should never trump our moral duties.

I have often been asked by those who work in other organizations, and who support our work at the Catholic League, what the secrets of our success are. What kind of advice can I offer? I always say the same thing: I can give you plenty of ideas, all sorts of do's and don'ts, but there is one thing I can never give you—courage. It is not transferable. And if you are to be a leader, I tell them, you had better have the chops to take a licking. The public can be cruel.

"For Jesus," Sarah maintains, "one thing only counts: the truth (Jn: 18: 37-38). All his life, he served the truth, he

gave witness to the truth.” The implications of this sage observation are profound. It means we cannot sell out in the name of being liked. This applies to all of us, not just priests.

Sarah asks us to reflect on the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus. “Pilate is the man of authority. He does not understand who Jesus is, this king who seems to have no human authority. Jesus seeks to make him understand that the power to dominate is nothing compared to the truth. Then Pilate takes refuge in calling it into question. The truth frightens him.”

The truth frightens more than Pilate. But we have a calling—one that emanates from God—to pursue the truth, even when it hurts to do so. Prudence, of course, is not something that should be ignored. But when caring about what others think of us matters more than doing what is right, trouble follows.

Cardinal Sarah gives us much to ponder. He is brilliant, courageous, and totally honest.