

HOW TO KEEP FROM LOSING YOUR MIND

Deal W. Hudson

Deal W. Hudson, *How To Keep From Losing Your Mind: Educating Yourself Classically to Resist Cultural Indoctrination* (TAN Books)

What I call losing your mind is not about those moments when you throw up your hands in disgust, it's about losing your mind to a lie. When you buy into a false worldview, such as one that guarantees your happiness, you have made yourself captive and you have lost your freedom. All the big lies of the twentieth century—those of Hitler, Lenin, and Mao—promise a state that will meet all human needs. Once you hand that responsibility over to the state, you've enabled tyranny.

“Wisdom begins in wonder,” Socrates said. The intense desire to understand an incredible sunset or an excruciatingly beautiful passage of music—it is a natural response to something inexplicable, something good, true, or beautiful.

I am one of those who believe, however, that digital technology has diminished our capacity for wonder. Too many of us stay tethered to our electronic devices, through which we have almost unfettered access to the “World Wide Web” and all the information, intrigue, and deception therein. The ease of finding almost anything spoils us. What used to be distant and hard to find is now close at hand.

It is not all bad; indeed, it has many obvious benefits: vast libraries and beautiful performances are accessible on our multiple devices. The world, or at least a particular impression of it, is only a click away. Our children may never know the patience required to find just the right books, magazines, and newspapers for a research project or the

jubilant of finding the rare, the out-of-print, the long-lost work.

Since three-step plans are all the rage these days, I offer my own for the sake of keeping our sanity and freedom. First, I recommend we put technology to good use, to return to the classics. Many classics are now available online free or at a nominal cost. Second, let us set some time aside for leisure and contemplation. Let's adjust our habits of attention so we can read, listen, and watch without distractions. The use of social media and ubiquitous entertainment has shrunk attention spans. Third, let us engage ideas that created our civilization before they are entirely forced out of existence by the iconoclasts and book burners of today. Several generations of students have been taught lies about our civilization and have not read the classics for themselves.

We can pursue self-education because we live in a free society, at least for now. No one is burning books yet, though many of the classics have been eliminated from university curricula by "progressive" university professors. Thus, I don't rule out the possibility of book-burning, or its equivalent, in my lifetime. Fires are unnecessary when robust social media and search engines can prioritize information online and virtually erase those with whom they disagree.

The classic texts, films, or music I highlight are intended for delight and discovery. We begin by discussing what the Canon of Great Works consists of and why such collections became the subject of so much effort and discussion in the last century. I argue that the widely-accepted lists of Great Books would benefit from including now-classic films and musical works in their ongoing conversation, as I believe such dialogue will open up possibilities for new audiences and discoveries. Next, I revisit the movements in the twentieth century that together became an all-out assault on the classics, and indeed on the civilizational memory of the West. Finally, I offer a series of dialogues between great works

within the framework of the “Four Loves,” as determined in antiquity and famously discussed by the great classicist, apologist, and novelist C. S. Lewis.

The goal is not only enjoyment of the works themselves but to recover the first mark of an educated person, his freedom in thinking. I’m not interested in helping you to check classics off a list or better prepare you to “name drop.” I’m not handing out a list of “must-reads,” one of the most annoying phrases of the modern social media-dominated landscape. An educational journey should not feel like a grind or an assignment handed down from above. Classics are classics because they’ve brought joy and understanding to generations over centuries. They are self-recommending and don’t need to be pressed into your hands.

It is a privilege that we live in a society where we are not forbidden access to these treasures. Even thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there remain countries that censor what is read or seen by their citizens. I grant you that a healthy society would feature “some” censorship, but the kinds of things such a society should censor—I suspect you know what I am referring to here—are heartily consumed in our own.

We have a virtually limitless amount of information at our fingertips. In researching this book, I was astounded at the resources I found on the Internet. A century ago, no one except perhaps Jules Verne and H. G. Wells could have dreamt that the contents of vast libraries would be made available in a person’s hand.

Some habits of thought are inculcated in us by culture czars who insist we see the world from their point of view. These views are often laden with assumptions, usually wrong, about life’s purpose and what is most needed. In some settings, failure to “drink the Kool-Aid” can put you on the firing line. You will not merely be found wrong; you will be judged a

bigot for refusing to accept their worldview, however absurd. A climate of intimidation pervades most public debate found in many of our nation's colleges and universities. Sadly, ideological indoctrination had made its way into K-12 education as well.

Culture is the school we go to every day. I use the word advisedly: "culture," in its original definition, which had to do with veneration in a religious context, is not what we have today. Nor do we have the understanding of culture that shares its root with "cultivate," the act of toiling to grow something, such as crops. No, I use the term in its reduced modern understanding, in which it refers to the massive collection of norms, behaviors, habits, assumptions, arts, entertainment, institutions, and interests that define a place and time. This "culture," we do have, and there is little to be proud of. We would do well to recover the word's original meaning.

If we want to change the culture, we need to remain aware of all the factors that create and sustain it. The most influential factor in shaping society is education, followed closely by media in all its various platforms. Unfortunately, traditional religion plays a relatively small and diminishing role. Thus, the messages, attitudes, and values of those controlling the schools, media, and entertainment industries are the primary sources of modern culture.

Culture is also expressed by our manners, how we dress, and how we communicate, but even these are subject to regulation and manipulation. Strong religious faith and a distinctive family culture are the best antidotes to avoid being another product of cultural expectations. Attention to the classics can help to transform your culture at home.

I dedicate my book to one of my intellectual heroes, Mortimer J. Adler, whose example has served as a lodestar. We became friends, and I was privileged to be the Adler Fellow at the

Aspen Institute for three summers in the early 1990s. As a reader, I had learned from him about how deeply the “great ideas” were rooted in the history of our civilization. I saw that it was his prodigious learning, lightly carried, which enabled him to write simply about these ideas like truth, goodness, beauty, liberty, equality, and justice. Dr. Adler recoiled when anyone called them “simplified”! Anyone who has read Dr. Adler’s books knows that he did not trade truthfulness for clarity. This book grows out of what I learned from Dr. Adler and the conversations we shared.

This book is divided into three parts: Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, three transcendental aspects of being. Each of these represents a different way, or modality, of apprehending everything that exists. Truth is being as the mind knows it. Goodness is that which we rightly desire by the will. Beauty is the splendor of all the transcendentals united, a magnet for the senses and the heart. Wherever you find one of the transcendentals, you find the others as well.

Part 1 is called “Beauty: The Irresistible Canon” because the classics have stood the test of time—they have been irresistible because we learn more from them about ourselves, the lives we lead as human persons. Classics raise questions about how to live well or whether seeking a good life is an obligation we all share. I also respectfully present the benefits of expanding the canon to include both film and classical music: filmmakers and composers have created their own masterpieces of expression and exploration about human experience.

Part 2, “Truth: About Bad Ideas,” begins with reminding the reader of the habits of attention and detachment needed to engage with classics. Classics are demanding. They require detachment from the name-calling and political quarrels of the day’s headlines. Contemplation, not polemics, is needed. I try to unravel postmodern ideas now dominating the academy, education, public discourse, and the media. I argue these

ideas have poisoned the culture by rejecting truth, objective knowledge, and the idea of a shared human nature. With the rejection of objective knowledge, postmodernist arguments rely on power rather than reason or facts.

Part 3, "Goodness: Love Is the Crux," begins by revisiting the classic book by C. S. Lewis *The Four Loves*. Love, in all its forms, is the ground of our moral life. In each of the four chapters, I juxtapose books, film, and music, comparing how each love is expressed and portrayed. Human freedom is crucial to authentic love. A mother naturally loves her child, but she can freely abandon it. Friendships are made freely, and though Eros may feel like being possessed, it requires choice not to be swept along by it. Agape, most of all, requires the freedom of God to give and man to receive.

I wrote this book with a mounting sense of joy as I revisited classics I had not encountered for many years and some I was considering deeply for the first time. If you read it, I hope this book prompts you to start on your own exploration, and I will have been successful.

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MAKING THE TORAH COME ALIVE

Bill Donohue

Dennis Prager, *The Rational Bible: GENESIS, God, Creation, and Destruction* (Regnery Faith)

I have known Dennis Prager for decades. He is not only a

friend, he is one of the most brilliant, logical thinkers of our time. An Orthodox Jew, he is a cultural conservative who has much to impart. He is also courageous.

Prager's latest book is weighty in more ways than one. It tips the scale at 2.3 pounds and is rich with material. Over 500 pages long, it is nonetheless an easy read. He manages to do something no one else has done: He makes the Torah come alive.

Biblical works tend to be dry, but in the hands of Prager, this book is anything but. That's because he is more than a professor—he is a teacher. A professor professes; a teacher teaches. Regrettably, most professors can't teach worth a lick. Worse, many are so arrogant that they don't think it is their job to instill their students or readers with knowledge, never mind wisdom. They are content to babble or scribble, and they are good at both.

The Torah is the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, or what Christians call the Old Testament. It is analyzed with precision by Prager, practically line by line. His style is felicitous, never speaking above the reader while never speaking down to him either. The text is also easy on the eye: the spacing between sentences is generous, and the book is peppered with extended essays on various parts of the Torah.

"I have written this book for people of every faith, and for people of no faith," he says. Very true. Indeed, Prager often has something specific to say to Jews, Christians, and atheists. He maintains that the prescription for the good society is contained within the first five books of the Bible.

For Prager, the Torah is not just a holy book—it is divine. God, he says, is its ultimate source. Its Jewish cast shines clear: The Torah represents "a rejection of ancient Egypt and its values." Proud of his heritage, he is not at all ethnocentric. In fact, he wants to reach a wide audience, sharing with Catholics, for example, many of the same values

(it would be more accurate to say values that practicing Catholics share with observant Jews).

"I never ask the reader to accept anything I write on faith alone. If something I write does not make rational sense, I have not done my job." That's the teacher in Prager—it is important to him that we understand exactly what his faith has to offer. His job is to cajole, to persuade, to offer witness to the truth. He succeeds, and that is because (sounding very much like Pope Benedict XVI) he insists on abandoning "neither faith nor reason."

Prager can squeeze meaning from the driest of verses. Genesis 3.12 reads, "The woman you put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate." This refers to what Adam said to God about Eve. Prager astutely notes how "Adam not only shifted blame to the woman, he also blamed God."

Yes, when Adam referred to Eve as "the woman You gave me," Prager sees in that construction an attempt by Adam to say that "he never asked God to create the woman; and if God had not made her, he would never have eaten from that tree." Prager uses this as a jumping off point to say that "Blaming others for wrongs we have done is literally as old as humanity." This is "not only morally wrong; it makes emotional and moral growth impossible."

What does the divine order look like? Prager lists several dualities: Human-God; Human-Animal; Man-Woman; Parent-Child; Life-Death; Good-Evil; Holy-Profane. Those realities are challenged today, and nowhere is this more clear than in the mad insistence that there are no fundamental differences between men and women. Yet as Prager reminds us, God made "male and female." Importantly, "*this distinction is part of God's order*" (his italics).

The Lord instructed (Genesis 2.18), "It is not good for man to be alone." Prager quotes from John Milton in *Paradise Lost*

what this means: "Loneliness is the first thing which God's eye named not good." Prager goes on to say how contemporary research has conclusively demonstrated the negative effects of loneliness (something which I documented in *The Catholic Advantage: How Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful*).

How did God deal with Adam and Eve? "And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them" (Genesis 3.21). Prager sees this as a statement by God that "he does not want human beings walking around naked." Its real significance should not be overlooked. "The obvious reason is sexual modesty. But there is an equally important, though much less obvious reason: Clothing distinguished the human being from, and elevates the human above, animals. Animals are naked, human beings are to be clothed."

The moral message of the Torah, Prager says, can easily be summed up: "God determines good and evil." Problems arise when man thinks he has no need for God, substituting his own intellectual prowess for that of the Almighty's. This is what totalitarians believe, and it is also why they carve up those who resist; the crazed social engineers see themselves as the arbiters of truth.

A close cousin to this idea, found in Chapter 8 of Genesis, is the belief that man is basically good, and all that is wrong is the result of bad policies instituted by wrongheaded people. That conviction—typically proffered by atheists and by those who see themselves as occupying the command centers of the culture—rejects original sin, holding that God is morally unnecessary. Historically, that idea has had bloody consequences.

Believers have their problems as well.

Prager comments in Chapter 12 that it is not unusual for the faithful to have doubts. "I have rarely met a believing Jew

who never experienced doubt," he says. He admits that he has met a few Christians who say they have never experienced doubt, and he suspects there are more Muslims in that camp.

Significantly, he says it is one thing not to believe—that is not what doubt is—and another to be a believer who has doubts. For Jews, this is not hard to understand given that the word Israel literally means "struggle with God." It is also not hard for Catholics to understand.

Mother Teresa herself confessed that there were times in her life that she did not feel the love of God, something she felt despondent about. This was interpreted by her enemies, chief among them being the English atheist Christopher Hitchens, who said this was proof that she "did not believe that Jesus was present in the Eucharist."

Nonsense. There is a profound difference between doubting whether the touch of God is always present and rejecting belief in the Real Presence. Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, who promoted Mother Teresa's cause for sainthood, and authored the book, *Come Be My Light* (a collection of her letters which contain examples of her "dark days"), said she "lived a trial of faith, not a crisis of faith." This explains why she was "up at 4:30 every morning for Jesus, still writing to him, 'Your happiness is all I want.'"

Chapter 28 of Genesis details another challenge for believers. "Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go." This has unfortunately allowed many Christians and Jews to conclude that it is not fair for God not to intervene and protect them from bad things. Prager has a more mature understanding of this verse.

"Many people believe God will protect them from tragedy," he writes, "and when it turns out they have not been protected, they lose not only trust in God but even belief in God's existence. That is one reason it is a bad idea to have such an

image of God.”

Such a view, Prager informs, is irrational, and it inexorably leads to disillusionment. It is irrational because we have free will, thus we cannot reasonably expect that God will intervene whenever adversity strikes.

Also, always allowing for exceptions, “if God protects you or me, He will have to protect every decent person in the world. Otherwise, He would be an unfair and capricious God.”

Not to be misunderstood, Prager says that this “does not mean God never protects us or intervenes in any of our lives. I believe God intervenes in any number of people’s lives. We simply cannot expect Him to.” So what can we expect from God? We can expect that “God will honor His promises. And God will provide ultimate justice in the afterlife.”

Prager’s discussion of the afterlife is one of his most insightful in the book. He readily admits that most Jews do not believe in an afterlife, but then again most Jews are not observant. He argues in Chapter 25 that “it is a mistake to equate what most Jews believe with what Judaism teaches. Most Jews do not observe the Sabbath, yet Judaism clearly teaches observance of the Sabbath, which is one of the Ten Commandments.”

What counts most of all is the belief that *“if God is just, it is axiomatic there is an afterlife”* (his emphasis). Which gets us to the next question: What must we do to be saved?

On this issue, Prager, who works more closely with evangelical Protestants than Catholics, takes the same position as enunciated by the Catholic Church: it takes faith and works to be saved.

He quotes from the Old Testament, “He [God] has told you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your

God” (Micah 6:8). He quotes from the New Testament, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say that you have faith but do not have works?” (James 2:14).

Prager does not opine on whether atheists can be saved, but what he says about them is enlightening.

How do atheists explain existence? Or, as Prager puts it, “*Why is there anything?*” (his italics.) He acknowledges that believers cannot prove the existence of God, but at least they have a logical answer: “A Creator. God.” What does the atheist have? Science?

Not so fast. “Science explains what is. But it cannot explain why what is came about—why something, rather than nothing, exists. Only a Creator of that something can explain why there is something rather than nothing.” Atheists are in a bind. “To be an atheist is to believe that the universe came about by itself, life came from non-life by itself, and consciousness came about by itself.” That simply does not make any sense.

The Rational Bible is a gift to believing Christians and Jews. It is also a book that everyone, regardless of faith, or none at all, can wean something of great value from. Chock full of cogent interpretations, logical conclusions, and persuasive advice, it has the added value of being based on sound scholarship. It is a stunning achievement.

THE RIGHT TONIC: COMMON SENSE CATHOLICISM

Russell Shaw

Bill Donohue, *Common Sense Catholicism: How to Resolve Our Cultural Crisis* (Ignatius Press)

Imagine that dueling has been legalized in America. Imagine that two men decide to settle their differences by fighting a duel. What then? Bill Donohue points to some of the questions that then might very well be raised: "What if an arena agrees to host the event? What if a pay-for-view cable channel agrees to air the contest live? What if corporate advertisers jump at the chance to make money? What if everyone agrees that the winner gets to keep a hefty slice of the proceeds? What if a portion of the proceeds goes to fighting breast cancer?"

The answer, Donohue suggests, is all too obvious: "If the only value that matters is freedom of choice, then the duel is on."

Not to worry, Donohue isn't predicting the legalization of dueling, much less advocating it. This bit of fantasy is only meant to underline the craziness that surrounds the social acceptance of various aberrations already approved or currently being advocated, on the principle that the fundamental good to be preserved and promoted in the setting of social policy is the freedom to do as you please. (And dueling? The chances of dueling being legalized in America in the foreseeable future are of course somewhere between slight and nonexistent. Bear in mind, though, that the same thing was said not so long ago about same-sex marriage and, before that, about abortion. Like much else, social approval of bad policies and destructive practices occurs with breakneck speed these days.)

The little mind game about dueling is one of the small gems buried in Donohue's new book, *Common Sense Catholicism* (Ignatius Press). The volume is a well reasoned, vigorously argued, immensely timely, and intensely serious defense of the wisdom embodied in the insights of the American founders and the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Its practical relevance is clear from the subtitle: *How to Resolve Our*

Cultural Crisis. If this won't do it, the reader comes away thinking, nothing short of some sort of social cataclysm will.

But what is the "common sense" that Donohue celebrates as the solution to our cultural ills? The dictionary defines it as "sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts." This is to say common sense is best understood as another name for the cardinal virtue of prudence as it is found in the Aristotelian-Thomistic catalogue of virtues.

Concerning prudence the eminent Thomist philosopher Joseph Pieper writes: "The meaning of the virtue of prudence...is primarily this: that not only the end of human action but also the means for its realization shall be in keeping with the truth of real things. This in turn necessitates that the egocentric 'interests' of man be silenced...so that reality itself may guide him to the proper means for realizing his goal." Prudence—common sense—understood this way is traditionally held to be first among the virtues, for without the well-balanced guidance of prudence, the other virtues are at risk of going awry, justice becoming rigorism, fortitude becoming rashness, and temperance becoming prudishness.

Bill Donohue has been fighting this particular good fight for many years as president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. *Common Sense Catholicism*, however, is not so much concerned to defend the Catholic Church against attacks as to tap the resources of the Catholic tradition as a service to the common good. Noting the alarming disarray of contemporary American culture, he states his case at the start:

"It wasn't always this way, and it doesn't have to be this way. Getting back on track, however, requires that we figure out what happened and why, and then apply the right remedies. To understand what ails us, we need to put aside the notion that our problems are fundamentally political and economic.

They are not. American society is in trouble largely because our social and cultural house is broken....We have adopted policies, norms, and values that are at odds with some very fundamental truths governing human nature....The collapse of common sense is driving our derailment."

The text that follows is divided into three large sections under the familiar catchwords of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, and fraternity. There is deliberate irony in this of course, inasmuch as the vision of the French *philosophes* who provided intellectual underpinning for that historic outburst was grievously flawed, much like the rationalizing of today's secular "deep thinkers" whom Donohue skewers mercilessly in his book but whose bad ideas so often shape our laws and policies.

Consider the prevailing confusion about that fundamental value, liberty. For many people today, liberty means freedom to do as you please. But it is the absolutizing of freedom of that sort which lies at the heart of so many of our largest social problems. Immature individuals tend naturally to suppose that this is the highest level of freedom; adolescents straining to shake off the requirements imposed by authority—parents, teachers, others in a position to tell them what to do—are seeking freedom to do as they please. But a more mature view of the matter suggests that merely doing as you please is neither the last word on liberty nor an unqualified good. To be sure, some degree of this sort of freedom is essential to moral responsibility. But for anyone living in social relationships with others, unconditional freedom to do as you please is impossible—and would be undesirable even if somehow possible.

Yet the assertion of a right to unconditional freedom of this kind now functions as a touchstone in setting social policy relating to questions of personal behavior. And not only adolescents think this way. For example, in a notorious opinion in 1992 affirming an unconditional right of unfettered

access to abortion (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*), three justices of the Supreme Court—Anthony Kennedy, Sandra Day O'Connor, and David Souter—delivered themselves of this remarkable sentiment: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

Pause and let that sink in. Is the universe really whatever and however I choose to define it? Try telling that to someone—which is to say, everyone—who now and then knocks his or her head up against a hard, external something called reality. Yet just such balderdash lies at the very “heart of liberty” as it is understood by those who share the world view championed by Justices Kennedy, O'Connor, and Souter. One is reminded of something George Orwell, quoted by Donohue, once said: “One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool.” (It should come as no surprise that Justice Kennedy went on to write the Supreme Court’s majority opinion declaring a constitutional right to same-sex marriage.)

Absurd as it is, this view of liberty would nevertheless be merely amusing were it not for its profoundly destructive practical consequences. Not long ago I came across the following posted outside the office door of some people I know: “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.” The source was identified as that enormously popular rock singer of the 1960s Janis Joplin, and an internet search showed that the line occurs in a Joplin song about a woman who has hit rock bottom after losing her boyfriend. While the song has a certain poignancy in depicting despair, what it says about freedom is self-pitying nihilism. This, you might say, is where doing as you please and only that tragically ends. (Janis Joplin—God rest her soul—died of a heroin overdose in 1970.)

By contrast, there is the clear, sweet music of common sense in something like this from Donohue: “Our cultural crisis is

our own doing. It can be undone, but only if we commit ourselves to creating a society of ordered liberty. Otherwise, we will collapse under the weight of rights run amuck. Freedom has a lovely face, but when it is distorted, there is nothing uglier."

The disastrous social consequences of the embrace of individualistic doing-as-you-please may nowhere be more obvious in America today than in the calamitous decline of marriage and family life. Over the last seventy years, such causal factors as no-fault divorce, sexual libertinism, and legalized abortion have contributed to an ongoing social disaster now clearly visible in such things as the fact that four out of ten American children are now born out of wedlock (seven out of ten among blacks, five out of ten among Hispanics). The marriage rate has fallen below the rate at the depth of the Great Depression (7.9 per thousand in 1932, 6.9 per thousand in 2015), cohabiting adults numbered about 18 million in 2016 (an increase of 4 million in just nine years), and the birth rate reported last year by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fell to a new low of about 60 per 1,000 women ages 15-44, well below the replacement rate. The U.S. has now joined Japan and the countries of Western Europe in the demographic winter.

In the hands of secularists, moreover, the ideology of do-as-you-please freedom readily operates as an engine driving social control and coercion. In this it mirrors the thinking of the spiritual father of the French Revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in his influential *Social Contract* offered this chilling bit of counsel: "In order that the social compact may not be an empty formula, it tacitly includes the undertaking, which alone gives force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free." And so the door is flung open for secularist ideologues to persecute dissenters in ways ranging from the

Soviet Gulags to the hounding of bakers and florists who refuse in conscience to provide their services to same-sex marriage celebrations.

Near the end of *Common Sense Catholicism*, Bill Donohue says this: “The social teachings of the Catholic Church are ordered toward the good of individuals and society. They work because they are in harmony with human nature, respecting the limitations of the human condition....If freedom, equality, and fraternity are to be realized, we can do no better than to heed what the Church instructs us to do.” As a realist, nevertheless, he knows perfectly well that this is a large order indeed at a time when the Catholic Church, far from being heeded, is itself often a target of scorn and derision while unconcealed persecution may perhaps lie just around the corner. “If our cultural crisis is to be rectified,” Donohue writes, “we will have to stop treating the public expression of religion as if it were a problem. We need to get over our public phobia of religion.”

Here’s hoping that this invigorating book carries this message to many readers soon. The time may be shorter than we care to think.

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DEBUNKING POPULAR ANTI-

CATHOLIC LIES

Rick Hinshaw

Gerard Verschuuren, Ph.D., *Forty Anti-Catholic Lies: A Myth-Busting Apologist Sets The Record Straight* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2018)

“There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church,” Bishop Fulton J. Sheen famously said, “but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be.”

As we at the Catholic League know, today there are many in America who do hate the Catholic Church, primarily for certain of its teachings—on marriage and family, human sexuality, the sanctity of life—that conflict with the materialism and hedonism of our age. But here too, those who hate the Church are guilty of falsely caricaturing its teachings, practices and history, in order to discredit its voice.

Today more than ever, it is necessary for Catholics to refute the many popular lies told about our faith. To do so, Catholics must first understand the truths about our faith.

Enter Gerard Verschuuren, with *Forty Anti-Catholic Lies*. A human biologist who also holds a doctorate in the philosophy of science, Verschuuren is a prolific writer and speaker on science and religion, faith and reason; and *Forty Anti-Catholic Lies* is the latest in a series of works he has authored debunking popular anti-Catholic myths.

The book is organized simply, the forty anti-Catholic lies broken down into seven categories: Catholicism and the Bible; Catholicism and its Controversies; Catholicism and its Uniqueness; Catholicism and Other Religions; Catholicism and its History; Catholicism and Science; and Catholicism and Society.

In Catholicism and the Bible, Verschuuren takes on what has been a Protestant mischaracterization, ever since the Reformation, of the Catholic Church's approach to Scripture.

Martin Luther, Verschuuren explains, taught a doctrine of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone)—that “Scripture is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.” As Catholicism rejects that doctrine, critics hold that “most Catholics live a life of *sine Scriptura* (without Scripture).” This is demonstrably false; as Verschuuren points out, Catholics “can’t go to Mass without hearing Scripture readings over and over again.”

But Catholics believe that sacred Tradition, along with sacred Scripture, is essential to transmitting the faith. It cannot be Scripture alone, Verschuuren concludes, quoting St. Thomas More, because “The Church was gathered and the faith was believed before any part of the New Testament was put in writing.”

“St. Paul did not walk around with a copy of the New Testament in his pocket,” Verschuuren writes, “because there was no New Testament yet.” Instead, St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians attested to the complementarity of Tradition and Scripture: “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.”

Catholics do not *reject* the teaching authority of Scripture. Rather, we join it to the equally authoritative teachings of sacred Tradition.

Within the category of Catholicism and its Controversies falls the lie that “Catholics think salvation can be earned.” This is the age-old argument about whether salvation is achieved through God’s grace or through good works. Critics of Catholicism make this an “either-or” proposition, in which Catholics, because they encourage good works in the name of the Lord, are guilty of elevating “works” over “grace” as the

means to salvation.

In truth, the Catholic Church has always taught that we are saved by Christ's redemptive suffering and death. "Salvation ultimately comes from God's grace," writes Verschuuren, "not from our doings. Even when we do 'good works,' on our side, they are always a fruit of grace, coming from God's side first."

Yet critical to Catholic teaching about salvation is our power to reject it through acts (or omissions) of our free will. God's grace must be "preserved, nourished, and cherished" throughout our lifetimes, Verschuuren explains. Good works help us to do that. But when we "(put) our work in opposition to God's grace" we reject that grace, and with it God's gift of salvation.

Catholicism and its Uniqueness covers a number of the most oft-repeated lies about Catholic beliefs and practices, including our veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is claimed that Catholics venerate Mary as a goddess, on a par with Jesus as Redeemer. The claim is false, but so widely held that this may be the most important topic Verschuuren addresses.

He begins by noting the important role Mary plays in the Bible and the early life of the Church, demonstrating how vital Mary's "Yes" to God was to our redemption. This was the meaning of Mother Teresa's words, "No Mary, no Jesus." "God chose to bring His Son into the world through the cooperation of Mary," Verschuuren explains. "Without her cooperation there would have been no Incarnation, and therefore no Redemption."

This is not the same as elevating Mary to the level of Christ the Redeemer. "Even in the great Marian churches of the world," Verschuuren emphasizes, "the central act of worship is the Mass—the Lord's Supper, the bloodless reenactment of his sacrifice on Calvary. The focus of worship is the altar, Cross

and tabernacle. Christ alone is the center of Catholic Faith."

He quotes St. John Paul II: "The text of St. Paul's letter to Timothy ["There is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ"] excludes any other parallel mediation, *but not subordinate mediation.*" (my emphasis) And that subordinate mediation is the role of Mary.

Verschuuren reminds us that in the Hail Mary, Catholics ask Mary to pray for sinners, not to redeem sinners. "She brings them to her Son" and He redeems us. That is what Catholics believe about our Blessed Mother and her intercessory role.

Catholicism and Other Religions deals with the claim that "Catholics think Heaven is only for them." The basis for this contention is the teaching that "Outside the Church there is no salvation." It is a widely misunderstood teaching that the Church in recent years has sought to clarify. As Verschuuren explains, it derives from the understanding that "all salvation comes from Christ." But this is contingent on first knowing Christ. Such knowledge comes through the Church, which is Christ's body; and that is how salvation comes through the Church.

Ultimately, Verschuuren makes clear, it is God who decides who goes to Heaven and who does not. One does not have to be Catholic to be saved; but if one knows and willfully rejects Christ and his Church, they reject salvation. "Depending on *our* choices, God makes *His* choices."

Catholicism and its History tackles some of the favorite lies of anti-Catholics: those that vilify the Church unfairly for the Crusades and the Inquisition, and that advance the calumny against Pope Pius XII as "Hitler's Pope." This book debunks all of them.

With regard to Pius XII, Verschuuren points out that Pius always had to weigh the moral imperative of speaking out against the probability that it would only increase Nazi

persecutions. Yet he did speak out, beginning with his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, that deplored the Nazi invasion of Poland and reiterated Church teaching against racial persecution. He acted aggressively, at great risk to himself and the Church, to protect Jews in Rome. And he was widely praised, by media and Jewish leaders, during and after the war and upon his death in 1958. His 1942 Christmas address prompted the *New York Times* to proclaim him “a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent.”

What then accounts for the “Hitler’s Pope” defamation? Verschuuren pinpoints it. The phrase was first used by Radio Moscow in June 1945. Pope Pius, with his consistent opposition to totalitarian oppression, was an obstacle to Stalin’s communists, as he had been to Hitler’s Nazis. He had to be discredited. Thus, when German playwright Rolf Hochhuth—who had been a junior member of the Hitler Youth!—issued his play *The Deputy*, defaming Pius XII, it was produced and given wide circulation by Erwin Piscator, a German communist who had worked for Soviet intelligence in Moscow during World War II.

Verschuuren further reports that General Ion Pacepa, a former high-ranking official in Romania’s communist government—and the highest ranking official ever to defect from the Soviet Union—revealed the anti-Pius disinformation campaign, and his own role in it.

Among the most widely accepted of anti-Catholic lies is that the Church is “anti-science.” Verschuuren demolishes this one. He begins by citing the Church’s historic commitment to “Faith and Reason (*Fides et Ratio*),” tracing it from Augustine to Aquinas to St. John Paul II, who proclaimed faith and reason as “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”

Verschuuren shows that, far from being opposed by the Church, “science was born in the Catholic cradle of the Middle Ages.” During the so-called “Dark Ages,” it was the Catholic Church

that provided schooling, preserved educational research, and promoted scientific inquiry.

“Had it not been for the Catholic Church,” Verschuuren argues, “the scientific revolution would most likely never have happened.” The first universities in the world, which arose during the Middle Ages, “were Catholic universities,” and they “were the hotbed for a period of great technological and scientific advancements, as well as achievements in nearly all other fields of knowledge.”

The author also debunks Exhibit A for the “Catholics are anti-science” lie: the Galileo affair. Besides exposing the flaws in Galileo’s research and personal character, he also refutes the myths that Galileo was imprisoned, tortured, even burned at the stake by the Church. Voltaire’s claim that Galileo “groaned away his days in the dungeons of the Inquisition,” was “a complete fabrication made up by an anti-Catholic.” That’s an apt description for many of the anti-Catholic lies exposed in this book.

Among the lies Verschuuren takes on in *Catholicism and Society* is the assertion that Catholics use religion to discriminate. He shows that in fact the opposite is true: Today’s secularists, led by groups like the ACLU, blatantly discriminate against religion, Catholicism in particular. They do so, he explains, by defining secular values—i.e., abortion, same sex “marriage”—as “rights,” while relegating religious values to “beliefs” that cannot be imposed on others in a pluralist society. But as he notes, secular values “are far from neutral—they are usually pro-abortion, pro-euthanasia, and pro-homosexual activity.”

Thus, while we are told that “religion cannot impose its values on secular society,” secular society is accorded “the right to impose its values on religion.” This is the very definition of discrimination, and it is practiced today *against* the Church, not by the Church.

Forty Anti-Catholic Lies is easy reading, accessible to readers from all walks of life, all levels of education, and all degrees of faith commitment. All Catholics, and anyone interested in the truth about Catholicism, should read it.

ELITES IMPOSE WESTERN VALUES ON AFRICA

Bill Donohue

The arrogance of Western elites should never be underestimated, and this is especially true of their vision for affecting change in the developing world. While they decry as ethnocentric the beliefs of many patriotic Americans—they are uncomfortable with those who see America as the greatest country on earth—they themselves exhibit an astonishingly ethnocentric bias by foisting Western ideas of sexuality on non-Western, non-white, nations.

That is the theme of a brilliant new book, *Target Africa*, by Obianuju Ekeocha, a Nigerian biomedical scientist who works in the United Kingdom. She is the founder of Culture of Life Africa, an organization that promotes traditional moral values, including a respect for the human dignity of the unborn.

Like most books, the subtitle more accurately describes the thesis: “Ideological Neocolonialism in the Twenty-First Century” is her focus.

When Europeans colonized Africa, most Africans showed them much deference; they learned to “look up to the White Man.” Now Africans are dealing with a new variant of colonialism:

Neocolonialism has less to do with explorers and traders than with cultural imperialists.

Who are these people? The do-gooders. Liberal elites from North America and Europe, armed with foundation money and research papers, have invaded Africa, projecting their secular values on to an unwilling populace. To be exact, they are trying to jam their anti-Christian notions of sexuality down the throats of Africans.

As Ekeocha details, these elites are the real masters of ethnocentrism. Every corrupt idea about family planning, marriage, and sexual expression that the West has entertained is being sold to Africans—it really is being imposed—as if it were the key to happiness and prosperity. It is neither.

Bill Gates' wife, Melinda, is one of the key global elites working to persuade Africans to adopt Western sexual values. The Ford Foundation, which funds the anti-Catholic American group, Catholics for Choice, is also interfering in African affairs. George Soros, of course, is involved, mainly through his Open Society Foundation.

The Canadians, the British, the French, the Danes, the Swedes, the Germans, the Norwegians—they all have their hands in the cultural crevices of Africa. One of their most conspicuous traits, as Ekeocha points out, is their condescending attitude: The White Man, this time sporting a liberal agenda, knows best.

How do these global elites get their way? Money. Every dime they give through international organizations and governmental agencies comes with strings attached. Do it our way and you get the cash. Do it your way and you're on your own.

What is their way? A pro-contraception, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual platform, one right out of the playbook of radical feminists and radical gays. By hosting international conferences, inviting nothing but the most "progressive"

scholars and scientists, the neocolonial masters make sure that Africa cannot decide its own fate. That will be done for them in New York and London.

The do-gooders are obsessed with African fertility rates. "Family planning" to the Planned Parenthood crowd means less children, the first weapon being contraception. Ekeocha objects on moral and scientific grounds.

Who appointed these white liberal global elitists to make such decisions for Africans? As Ekeocha sees it, "Western nations, organizations, and foundations wage war against the bodies of African women." She also objects to the shoddy scholarship used to justify this cultural invasion.

She cites the example of an English television personality who said the reason why Ethiopia suffers from famines is too many people living on too little land. But the population density of Great Britain, she notes, is more than three times the population density of Ethiopia. "So how can anyone living there tell the Ethiopians to control their 'wild' reproduction rate or forever face the scourge of famine?" Moreover, population decline is a problem in America and Europe, and a major one in Japan.

If Ekeocha's convictions were not representative of most Africans, she could be dismissed as holding to a minority view. But if anything, she is an accurate barometer of the cultural views held by the large majority of African men and women, making plain why so many Africans object to their neocolonial masters. What makes this so outrageous is the boasting by Western elites of their tolerance for diversity. That they have no tolerance for the traditional moral values of Africans is incontestable.

What right do global potentates have to "liberate" African women from their fertility? "I can say with certainty," writes Ekeocha, "that Africans love babies." To the chagrin of

liberal elites, they do not ascribe to the morally debased views of *Cosmopolitan*. Why not? "With most African women faithfully practicing and adhering to a faith (mainly Christianity or, in some cases, Muslim), there is a high regard for the sexual act as a sacred and private trust between a husband and a wife." Not so in the West, she rightly observes, where the "trivialization of sex" is the rule.

Ekeocha buttresses her argument by relaying what happened at a 2014 African conference on family planning sponsored by the Gates Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, several U.N. bodies, and other international elites. Needless to say, they promoted hedonism.

Here is how Ekeocha put it. "These wealthy prestigious organizations gathered in our capital [Abuja, Nigeria] with their conference in order to disparage our widely held cultural and religious views on life, love, marriage, and family. Their campaigns represented nothing less than an attack on the natural modesty and innocence of our vulnerable and impressionable young people." The conference, she explains, "was convened at the behest of the cultural imperialists who consider themselves our 'betters.'"

These same arrogant organizations are pushing the Western idea of sex education in African schools. That means an emphasis on pleasure absent any reference to marriage. These sexperts are single-mindedly pursuing children, hoping the boys and girls will experiment at their young age. It never occurs to these busy bodies that they are sticking their noses into a society that rejects their idea of sexuality.

A 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center found that most Africans hold to conservative views on abortion, contraception, premarital sex, homosexuality, and divorce. The cock-sure elites think these poor Africans need to be enlightened, and that is why they persist in imposing Western standards on them. As Ekeocha puts it, the global do-gooders

“want to circumvent African parents in order to indoctrinate their children.”

Progress against the spread of HIV-AIDS has been made in many parts of the world, though it remains a problem in much of Africa. What do the elites think the answer is? Condoms, of course. As usual, they are wrong.

No nation in Africa distributes more condoms than South Africa; it has the world's largest condom plant. No nation in Africa has rejected this approach more than Uganda: it adopted a program that emphasizes abstinence before marriage, faithfulness in marriage or to one partner, and condoms as a last resort. Guess which nation is among the worst in combating AIDS and which is among the best? No matter, Western elites still push the condom model.

When Pew Research Center asked Africans about abortion, they found that the vast majority—80 to 90 percent—were opposed to it. “For us,” writes Ekeocha, “abortion, which is the direct killing of little ones in the womb, is a direct attack on innocent human life.”

In Africa, parents often give names to their children that reflect their idea of life. Chinwendu is a common name: it means “God owns life.” Chijindu means “God sustains life.” Ndubueze refers to “Life is supreme.” Ndudi means “There is life.” Not exactly what Americans do. Instead, we find it adorable that Kim Kardashian and Kanye West named their son North West.

This is an uphill battle for Africans. The Dutch and the Scandinavians, in particular, are bent on promoting the wonders of abortion. Ekeocha knows what needs to be done. “If Western leaders can speak so unabashedly about the right to abortion, as if they are proud of the killing of their unborn, with matching confidence African leaders should speak about the dignity of the unborn child and his right not to be

killed.”

Western nations are obsessed with homosexuality—they can’t celebrate it enough—but to Africans, this is a sick agenda. They value marriage as it was intended, namely, as a union between a man and a woman. For them, “male” and “female” are not fluid concepts—they reflect human nature.

When President Obama visited Senegal in 2013, he could have addressed many problems in Africa, yet he ignored them in favor of promoting acceptance of homosexuality. Ekeocha wrote him a letter explaining her disappointment. Here is an excerpt of what she said.

“What if our African values and religious beliefs teach us to elevate the highest good of the family above sexual gratification? What if African society is naturally wired to value the awesome wonder of natural conception and birth of children within the loving embrace of marriage? What if the greatest consolation of the African child is the experience of being raised by both a mother and a father?”

Ekeocha also takes umbrage with those who call people like her bigots. “But am I a hater for believing that a child should not be subjected to fatherlessness by the choice of two women? Am I a bigot for thinking it is wrong for homosexuals to exploit poor women through surrogacy? Am I a homophobe for seeing the biological fact that a procreative marital act can be accomplished only by a man and a woman? No, I am none of these things. Neither I nor anyone in my sphere of family or friends would ever condone or perpetrate an attack on a homosexual.”

Everything she says is true and eminently defensible. Unfortunately, most of those inclined to agree with her—this is certainly true in America—lack her courage.

Though Ekeocha doesn’t address multiculturalism in Western schools and colleges, much of what she says takes direct aim

at it.

Multiculturalism touts the notion that all civilizations are equal, contending that we should respect every culture, independent of its norms and values. Here's the irony: both of these positions, which are dear to the hearts of Western elites, are historically indefensible. Paradoxically, the brainy ones violate their own tenets with regularity.

Noted historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. maintains that what has distinguished Western civilization from the rest of the world are "those liberating ideas of individual liberty, political democracy, rule of law, human rights, and cultural freedom." That is our legacy. "These are *European* ideas, not Asian, nor African, nor Middle Eastern ideas, except by adoption." (His italic.) Western civilization is indeed superior to other civilizations.

It is equally absurd to say that we should respect all cultures. That would mean respecting those that practice infanticide and wife beating with impunity.

So the smug elites who foster the multicultural agenda are wrong on both counts. Yet, as Ekeocha makes clear, it is they who think they have some preordained right to impose their morally debased notions of life and sexuality on the entire continent of Africa. Thus do they flagrantly violate their own precepts.

THE CONTROVERSY OVER EDGARDO

MORTARA

Ronald J. Rychlak

Vittorio Messori, *Kidnapped by the Vatican? The Unpublished Memoirs of Edgardo Mortara* (Ignatius Press 2017)

On Wednesday June 23, 1858, a knock came on the door of Salomone and Marianna Mortara, Jewish residents of Bologna, the second-largest city of the Papal States. Marianna answered; it was the police. "Your son Edgardo has been baptized, and I have been ordered to take him with me," boomed the man at the door.

It is hard to think of a more horrific occurrence not involving a death. The government has come for a six-year-old child, and there is nothing for the parents to do. Moreover, in this case, the police were representatives of the pope, Blessed Pope Pius IX, who at the time was the secular leader of the Papal States, recognized as both pope and prince.

The son, Edgardo Mortara, had been born in Bologna in 1851. When he was about a year old, he fell ill and appeared on the verge of death. Fearing for his eternal salvation, his Catholic nursemaid, Anna Morisi, secretly baptized him. (He later considered her "as his mother in the supernatural order.") After he recovered, Anna did not mention the baptism. However, when another Mortara child fell ill and unfortunately died about five years later, she told some friends and her confessor about Edgardo's earlier baptism. Thus began one of the more controversial moments in Catholic history.

The problem was that while Catholic tradition had long forbidden the baptism of infants whose parents are not Catholic, it made an exception for those in danger of death. (Even today, the Code of Canon Law provides: "An infant of Catholic parents or even of non-Catholic parents is baptized licitly in danger of death even against the will of the

parents.”) Moreover, any child who was baptized as a Catholic had to be given a Catholic education.

According to the book, Church officials – who also were state officials – spent about a year trying to work out an acceptable arrangement with the parents. They offered to enroll Edgardo in a Catholic boarding school in Bologna until he reached the age of majority. The Church would cover the expenses, and the parents could visit anytime they wanted. Eventually, however, it became clear that neither this nor any other offer was acceptable. Accordingly, the pope arranged for the six-year-old to be brought to Rome.

While this is the most widely known of such events, it was not the only time something like this happened in the Papal States. In fact, at this time similar matters happened all around the world. The book’s introduction talks about horrific events in Islamic Turkey, but even in the United States, slavery was still the law in many states. In fact, not long after this American authorities began removing Native American children from their parents and sending them to special boarding schools. The Mortara event, however, was different. It involved a pope, and it was part of a significant revolution in European geopolitics.

The Mortara case has been researched in depth and dissected in articles and books. Never before, however, has the account of the involved child, Edgardo Mortara, been published. Even for those who have read a good deal about the case, there are several interesting insights.

In the first half of *Kidnapped by the Vatican?*, Italian Church historian Vittorio Messori reviews writings from Mortara’s personal archive and elsewhere. He strongly defends the papal action – so much so that his analysis has offended many reviewers of the work and spawned an open debate in Catholic circles.

Messori argues that the pope had to follow established Church law to save the child's soul, which was more important than any earthly relationship, even that between a six year old and his parents. He draws an analogy to a modern society that might remove a child from his parents due to physical or other abuse. At what point are such decisions made? One cannot help but think about the U.S. decision to return Elián González to Cuba in 2000.

Still, the more interesting part of the book is the second half, written by Mortara himself. In these memoirs (written in the third person), Mortara describes his "sequestration" as "a miracle of grace." He says that he shed some tears when he was taken from his mother, but after a few kind words, he calmed down and he did not cry anymore or ask about his family.

He reports feeling the warmth of Christianity and quickly developing a great love for Pope Pius IX, who considered the boy as a son. Edgardo still loved his parents, and he prayed for them, but when they asked, he said he would return to them only if they converted to Christianity. This they would not do.

Some previous accounts reported that the family did not practice their Jewish faith. Mortara makes clear that they were devout. At one point, however, his mother was ready to convert so that she could be close to her son, but his father would not consent.

The "kidnapping" made international news and became a rallying cry for those who supported toppling the Papal States. Pius IX, however, was convinced of the justness of his action. To those who urged him to return the boy to the Mortara family, he replied: "*Non possumus*" ("We cannot"). He would incur the wrath of the world, if that were necessary.

Young Edgardo understood that he was "the little Mortara" who was at the center of an international dispute. Revealing

passages show that this both embarrassed and frightened him. Having once been seized by authorities and taken from his family, he feared that those who opposed the pope would remove him from his new "father." Neither he nor the pope wanted that to happen. Pius vowed: "I declare to everyone that not even all the bayonets of the world will force me to hand this child over to the clutches of the Revolution and the devil."

In these memoirs, Mortara wrote that Pope Pius IX "neither stole nor kidnapped a child from his parents, as the anti-Catholic press repeated tirelessly." Instead, the pope tried "all possible methods of persuasion and conciliation," including "gentle, paternal measures," to persuade the parents to provide a Catholic education. Only when that failed and due to the "extreme and imminent danger incurred by the child's soul," did Pius IX sequester the child from his parents.

As Mortara saw it, the pope "rescued this soul from Hell so as to restore it to the One who predestined and chose it, to Christ, the son of the true God, the invisible Head of the Church." In fact, Mortara saw sacrifice in the pope's actions: "For him I was the child of tears, and he loved me like a mother who prefers the son who has made her suffer the most."

At age 16, Mortara decided to become a Catholic priest. He joined the Order of the Canons Regular as a novice. When he told his parents, they said "if that was his decision and if he had made it freely, they had no objection, and were completely satisfied." Others, however, did not take it as well.

Political agitators plotted to kidnap him from his seminary in Rome. He wrote: "The controversy over the Mortara child was only a pretext. What they wanted was to humiliate the Church by discrediting the papacy, so as to put an end to it with its temporal power." Mortara fled to South Tyrol (a region in the Alps then under Austrian rule) in disguise.

Mortara eventually was ordained as Reverend Father Pio Maria Mortara, C.R.L. He was scholarly and fluent in several languages. He maintained good relations with his family, regularly corresponded with them, and constantly prayed for them.

His father having passed away, Fr. Mortara tried to convince his mother to convert to Catholicism, but she “would begin crying, and what can one say to a weeping mother? What other response can one make but a respectful silence?” He referred to her as the “poor lady, who, in the famous Mortara case, was and always will be the lady of suffering.” While writing of her love for him, he explained that he was both her “son of sorrow” and her preferred child. These are very similar to the terms he used when writing about Pope Pius IX.

Fr. Mortara spent most of his priestly life outside Italy, eventually settling in Liege, Belgium. He preached and encouraged others to come to Christ. He also never ceased to champion the cause of Pius IX. His dearest hope was that Pius would be named a saint. Here are his exact words:

“There will come a day, yes, and it is not far away, in which, once they have stopped listening to the calumnies and the “*Crucifige*” of the dregs of humanity, posterity will accept the poor arguments of the Mortara child so as to tie them into scented garlands of immortal flowers that will adorn and decorate the altar on which the Catholic world will greet, with enthusiastic acclamation, PIUS IX, THE SAINT.”

Fr. Mortara died in 1940, at the age of 88. Forty years later, St. John Paul II declared Pope Pius IX blessed.

Kidnapped by the Vatican? has created something of a firestorm in the Catholic press, primarily because both the first half of the book (written by Messori) and an early influential review endorsed the actions of Pius IX. At least one noted author suggested that Messori doctored Mortara’s writings to

make them appear more favorable to the Church. Press clippings from the late 1800s, however, show Mortara saying things largely consistent with his words in the book. Of course, that still leaves the argument that Mortara suffered from some combination of brainwashing and the Stockholm Syndrome. That's not an easy sell, and others have raised some interesting questions.

In the foreword to the book, Roy Schoeman, a Catholic convert from Judaism and author of the book *Salvation Is From the Jews*, explains that this case sits at the crossroads of the greatest social transformation of modern times: from a fundamentally religious view of the world to a fundamentally materialistic one. Schoeman asks, "What if the teaching of the Catholic Church is true? What if, once created, the human person lives for all eternity, and the nature of that eternity – whether perfect bliss or unending misery – is dependent on the sacraments and on the person's moral formation?" If that were the case, would the pope have been justified?

Vatican II's "Declaration on Religious Freedom" proclaimed that secular power cannot be used to coerce in matters of religion. For most Catholics, this is uncontroversial, but the Mortara case does more than reveal a problem with the Church of the 1800s or any church having temporal authority. It raises questions about the very nature of faith. How, for instance, does one weigh the saving of a soul against the natural rights of parents and children? Good people of all faiths can and should ponder these questions, and this book is not a bad place to start.

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THERE'S NOTHING "GAY" ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Robert R. Reilly

Daniel C. Mattson, *Why I Don't Call Myself Gay: How I Reclaimed My Sexual Reality and Found Peace* (Ignatius Press)

Why would someone with homosexual inclinations not call himself "gay"? After all, our popular culture practically screams for him to do so. The Supreme Court even offers to bless his "union" with another man. It seems he has nothing to lose and everything to gain by "coming out." But with author Daniel Mattson, there is something even stranger here than his refusal to call himself "gay." He once did consider himself "gay" and lived the "lifestyle," but then threw it over for something better – a chaste life as a single Catholic man. One could hardly imagine a more unpardonable offense in the face of today's Zeitgeist than to renounce "sexual freedom" for the sake of freedom in Christ.

Why did he do it – especially in light of the social rejection and splenetic invective he will inevitably receive as a result? The short answer is the profound unhappiness he experienced in trying to live out the homosexual fantasy. Of course, there are all kinds of unhappiness, but the greatest is caused by sin. The guilt from sin often drives a person to repentance and thus to a restored relationship with God, the true source of happiness. In a nutshell, this is what happened to Mattson, who had spent a good part of his life being angry at God. It was not an easy journey.

His book is a searing spiritual autobiography in which he lays his soul bare. He does not flinch in examining the evil into

which he fell, the rationalizations that he gave himself for it, and the agony it caused him. This book is particularly invaluable because it comes from within the homosexual experience and reveals it for what it is. The book's honesty is almost frightening. It's as if we are eavesdropping on the most intimate and thorough confession, the experience of which makes the absolution he eventually receives all the more moving.

In fact, well before reading this book, I saw Mattson in the 2014 documentary *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* (<https://everlastinghills.org/>), in which he and several others with homosexual or lesbian tendencies tell the stories of how they lived active homosexual or lesbian lives, but then eventually returned to the Church. This film is the most powerful advertisement for Confession that I have ever seen. The restorative power of God's overwhelming mercy is seen in the tears streaming down their faces. They are beneficiaries of it, and that is the story they want to tell.

This is why Mattson has written this book. He was willing to expose mercilessly the torment in his soul in order to show us God's mercy to him—with the intention of drawing others into Divine Love, for which he has become an apostle. As he states toward the end of the book, "I want to help people see the face of Jesus." He wants others to know that they too can be forgiven and are called to a higher love. The palpable joy Mattson expresses on his return to Holy Communion will bring tears to the reader's eyes. Who would not wish to share in such joy? This is what makes the book so compelling.

The problem, however, is how to continue living this way, particularly in today's culture. This is hardly a struggle only for those with homosexual inclinations (*everyone* has disordered desires of some sort), but it can be particularly acute for them. Consider the analogy of an alcoholic trying to achieve sobriety during a perpetual Happy Hour. With a great deal of spiritual perspicacity and practical wisdom, the

latter half of the book addresses the problem of living chastely in a sexually depraved culture. As Mattson points out, for those with homosexual inclinations, the indispensable Catholic spiritual support group is Courage, which produced *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*.

While a good deal of the book is personal testimony and Christian witness, Mattson does not neglect what reason can tell us about reality in general and the purpose of our sexual powers specifically. In fact, these philosophical reflections played a role in his recovery. Central to these considerations is the role of nature.

One of the critiques of Mattson's book posted on Amazon comes from someone who appears to be a parent of a homosexual. She counsels: "Hey everyone, did you know there are gay swans— it is just a part of nature, that's all." I wonder if she would be as accepting if her child had cancer: "Hey everyone, you know there are cancerous cells—it is just part of nature, that's all." Somehow, I don't think so. Most likely she would object to the cancerous cells because they are killing her child and seek their removal. Why would she be able to see the danger in the one, but not in the other? Mattson addresses this important question in his chapter titled "What Does the Word 'Disorder-ed' Mean Anyway?" In it, he proves to be a good Aristotelian. It is worth spending some time on what constitutes order, so we can understand how we know what is disordered.

Aristotle said that "what is" operates according to the laws of nature. What are these laws? Aristotle taught that the essence or nature of a thing is what makes it what it is, and why it is not, and cannot be, something else. In *The Politics*, he said that "the 'nature' of things consists in their end or consummation; for what each thing is when its growth is completed we call the nature of that thing, whether it be a man or a horse or a family." For example, as an acorn develops into an oak tree, there is no point along its trajectory of

growth that it will turn into something other than an oak. That is because it has the “nature” of an oak tree and not of anything else. Hence, by nature or natural law, Aristotle meant the principle of development which makes any living thing what it is and, given the proper conditions, what it will become when it reaches its fulfillment. This end state is its telos, the reason for which it is. The telos of the acorn is a fully mature oak tree. The natural law for each thing is what allows us to speak of what it “ought” to be.

This means that what is “good” for a thing are those things or actions that assist it in reaching its perfection. Likewise, those things that inhibit or prevent something from reaching its end are “bad” for it, as drought or poisoned soil would be “bad” for an acorn. In each case, Aristotle would refer to the good things for the growth of the oak tree as *natural* to it, and the bad things for its growth as *unnatural* to it. What is good or natural for something is, therefore, intrinsic to that thing, internal to and inseparable from it. This is how we know that cancer is bad for human beings. Cancer may indeed happen but it is not natural to the body.

How does this relate to homosexual acts and the “gay swan” theory? Man is the only creature that has conscious knowledge of the end for which he is made. He alone has the ability to choose between those acts or things which are conducive to his end and those things which are not. Only man can act in defiance of his nature.

While man can come to know what is good or evil, he does not have the prerogative to determine what is good or evil. “Oughtness” is already in the given nature of things. Therefore, man is morally obliged to choose the good that will bring about what “ought” to be. Otherwise, he will become less than fully human and what he “ought” *not* to be—even something worse than a beast, as Aristotle warned.

Because we know what a human being is in the fullest, we can

understand what a privation is. For example, we can know with certainty that 20/20 vision is the best for the eye and blindness the worst. In respect to a man's sexual powers, which are unitive and generative *by nature*, the one whose state is best would be a man as husband and father, just as for a woman it would be as wife and mother. This is how we know that homosexual inclinations are privations and that homosexual acts are *disorders*. It is not a matter of "who says." Homosexual acts cannot actualize sexual potential because they can be neither unitive nor procreative. As Mattson came to realize, homosexual inclinations are not part of what a human being is in his essence. A privation of the good cannot itself be good. In fact, as St. Augustine said, evil is a privation of the good. This is where the "gay swan" argument falls apart.

When Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, announced in 2014 that, "I'm proud to be gay, and I consider being gay among the greatest gifts God has given me," he substituted a privation of the good for the good itself. This is a metaphysical travesty. Unless blindness is the same as sight, one cannot say that the disposition to use sexual organs in ways unfit for either generation or union is the same as, or even superior to, their use for generation and/or union.

Mattson sets this sort of argument forth ably and does not flinch from its application. He writes: "I realize I live with a sexual *disorientation*, which is the lack of something within me that should be present." He embraces the description in the *Catholic Catechism* of homosexual acts as "objectively disordered." In a recent interview with the *National Catholic Register*, Mattson said, "For me, that language is vitally important for my moral safety. I need those hard words for a safety measure for me and my soul. Thanks be to God that the Catholic Church says to me that to behave in a sexual manner with another man is intrinsically disordered. They respect me enough and have enough compassion for me to tell me the

truth..."

Mattson knows that the full truth of man is contained only in Christ, including in his Suffering. For our own salvation, we are called to participate in that Suffering—partly through our own times of loneliness. Mattson advises, "When they come, though they may chafe against us, the answer is to embrace them as Christ embraced the Cross, and offer them for the salvation of those whom we love."

Our society is suffused with rationalizations for sexual disorders of all kinds. Mattson's self-examination explodes them with spiritual realism of high-intensity. He has emerged from the darkness through which he has traveled bearing gifts. I cannot imagine a greater one than this book he offers us.

Robert R. Reilly served in the White House under President Reagan and was director of the Voice of America; he also taught at the National Defense University. He is the author of several books, including Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior is Changing Everything and The Closing of the Muslim Mind. He has also published many articles on classical music.

THE FATE OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ronald J. Rychlak

The Persecution and Genocide of Christians in the Middle East: Prevention, Prohibition, & Prosecution (Angelica Press, 2017)

"I knew they were persecuting Westerners," she said. "I just

didn't know they were persecuting Christians."

The "she" is a very well educated and informed woman who had just read the first chapter of a new book, which I had the privilege of editing along with Ave Maria Law Professor Jane Adolphe. To say the book was eye-opening would be an understatement.

We have all seen news stories of beheadings; we know about the terror and warfare of ISIS (aka ISIL, Islamic State, IS, and Daesh); and we are certainly aware of the refugees who are fleeing Syria and elsewhere. In this book, a very impressive group of scholars shows how these matters all fit together. It should be of interest to all concerned Christians.

Spread throughout the book are 28 photos, some of them hopeful but more of them gut-wrenching, of desecrated churches, children playing in rubble, kneeling men about to be executed, and girls who were kidnapped by extremists. One particularly poignant photo shows a distressed priest with his head bowed, standing in his demolished church, shortly after his town was liberated from ISIS. In front of him is a statue of the Virgin Mary with her hands and head cut off. ISIS defaces all Christian images; it does not care about their antiquity, historical importance, or cultural value.

This book grew out of a conference held in 2016, the point of which was to urge the U.S. government to label the on-going persecution of Middle Eastern Christians as a genocide. That designation is important because it brings special rights to the victims under international and U.S. law, and it subjects the perpetrators to prosecution and punishment.

At the time of the conference, Pope Francis had called the persecution a "genocide," but other officials had not yet gone that far. Shortly after the conference, Secretary of State John Kerry used the term genocide to refer to the Islamic State's persecution of Christians and other minorities. It was

a significant advance in terms of the conference's aim, but the waters have once again become murky. In the summer of 2017, the legal advisor to the U.S. State Department said that Kerry had expressed a personal opinion, and going forward the term genocide would not be used by the department. So the book is even more timely than it seemed as it was being assembled.

The term genocide was coined in 1944 and gained notoriety when it was used to explain what the Nazis tried to do to the Jews in the Holocaust. In 1948, the *U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* defined "genocide" as killing and certain acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." The convention opened the avenue for prosecution of perpetrators and protection of victims under international law. Many nations adopted similar domestic laws. That's why the "genocide" label is so important.

Anyone who reads this book will have a hard time denying that the term genocide is fully applicable to the persecution of Christians in the Middle East today. The first chapter was written by Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute. In it, she reviews account after account of persecuted Christian men, women, and children in areas under ISIS control. The horrors are so dreadful and so common that a reader could almost become numb to the violence, but the issue is too important to lay aside.

Among the better known atrocities reviewed in the book are: the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians on a beach in Libya, an elderly French priest beheaded at morning Mass, and the kidnapping and sexual enslavement of 276 Nigerian schoolgirls by Boko Haram (a terrorist organization that collaborates with ISIS). The little-known details of these events are horrific, but so are the stories that are not as well known.

The book is filled with dozens of accounts like those of the Iraqi Christian woman who watched jihadists crucify her

husband to the front door of their home; a Syrian evangelical preacher and his twelve year old son who were tortured and crucified after they refused to renounce their Christianity; and the harrowing story of a Christian mother who escaped ISIS enslavement where she had been brutally tortured and taken to a sex slave detention center. The center was run by an ISIS sheikh who performed “marriages” between captive girls and women and ISIS fighters. She explained: “That night I was married to eight different men and divorced eight times. Each man raped me three or four times. When all this was over, we were taken back to the room where all the girls were being held. They made us walk naked through the big room where all the men were sitting. We were barely able to walk. This scenario was repeated every week—it was like a nightmare.”

Jane Adolphe’s chapter in the book, *Sexual Violence as a Tactic of Terror: The Plight of Christian Women and Girls*, presents many similar accounts.

In addition to numerous firsthand accounts from the victims, in many public statements, ISIS has “taken credit” for the murder of Christians precisely because they were Christians. Representatives have expressed the intent to wholly eradicate Christian and other minority communities from the “Islamic State.” Why then is there a question as to the genocide designation of this persecution? It is largely because of a tax.

Islam considers Christians and Jews to be “people of the book” and therefore purportedly gives them certain rights. Among those rights is that rather than suffering the full extent of ISIS persecution, Christians and Jews are supposed to be able to pay “jizya” in exchange for the right to live and worship in peace. The ISIS periodical *Dabiq* regularly boasts of ISIS’s magnanimity in offering Christians the choice of paying jizya.

Because of the jizya option, the Office of the UN’s High

Commissioner for Human Rights has stated: "While Christian communities still living in Daesh-controlled territories live difficult and often precarious existences... their right to exist as Christians within any Islamic State existing at any point in time, is recognized..." As such, the High Commissioner has refused to find that a true genocide is taking place.

As made clear early in the book, jizya is simply a way for ISIS to extort money from the few remaining Christians in its territories. Consider the situation in Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State. After ISIS moved in, Christian women were routinely abducted and raped, while places of Christian worship were destroyed. Dozens of "Nazarenes," ISIS's favored term for Christians, were murdered. Only a few dozen Christian families remained by the time ISIS offered jizya agreements.

In early 2014, ISIS told Raqqa's Christians that they could either pay jizya and abide by a list of restrictions regarding the practice of their faith, or they would be "put to the sword." Under the proposed arrangement, Christian men would pay, in gold, amounts equivalent to one month of the average Raqqa salary. (Later this was raised to three months salary.) In exchange, they would not be harmed, and they would have a limited right to worship. The contract, however, contained a list of prohibitions, including: ringing bells, displaying crosses, making repairs, and holding wedding or funeral processions outside church walls.

Despite promises to the contrary, ISIS immediately set about shutting down, destroying, or re-purposing all the churches. No churches or priests remained by the time the caliphate was announced in July 2014. The last cleric in Raqqa, Italian Jesuit Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio, had been murdered almost a year earlier. Today, perhaps a few dozen older Christians remain in Raqqa, where they are used by ISIS as human shields to protect against foreign military strikes.

These situations are repeated throughout the ISIS-controlled

world. Jizya tax is used to extract money from the Christians. When the money is gone, Christians are forced to flee, convert, or face execution. Christianity is being exterminated. It is a genocide.

Even Christians who flee face great personal risk. With their cars and money having been taken by ISIS militants, they often have to walk through miles of desert-like terrain in 100+ degree temperatures. They carry small children and push the elderly in wheelchairs. What few possessions and wealth the families are able to pack are subject to being confiscated by ISIS officials at checkpoints set along the way. A Sunni imam from Mosul who protested this treatment was killed by ISIS.

Those Christians who make it to a refugee camp risk a whole new round of persecution. Many face violence and mistreatment at the hands of Muslim migrants who share the camp. Rape is rampant. Unprotected from such persecution and unsure of the likelihood of resettlement, many Christians have opted to stay away from the camps, but that makes mere survival even more difficult.

The Persecution and Genocide of Christians in the Middle East: Prevention, Prohibition, & Prosecution tells these stories and more. Chapters are devoted to Historical and Theological Reflections on the Persecution of Christians, International Humanitarian Law, Sharia Law and the Persecution of Christians, The Holy See's Diplomatic Response, International Criminal Law, and more. There is also a helpful glossary in the back for those who fear the terminology. My own contribution is a chapter on the International Criminal Court, which unfortunately does not present many good options to protect the victims from genocide.

As bleak as the situation seems, some prayers are answered. The book tells of three-year-old Christina Khader Ebada, who was abducted by ISIS in August 2014, as her family was fleeing their home in northern Iraq. She was last seen crying and

sobbing as a heavily bearded man carried her away. In 2017, however, just days before this book was released, Christina was reunited with her family. She seemed healthy. Her brother said: “With all that we have been through, we are overjoyed that our Christina has been returned to us safely. I thank all those who have prayed for her safe return.”

How many others are praying for the return of a child, a parent, or a spouse? The accounts of persecution in this book are multiple and they are ugly, but the chapters review different avenues that might offer some ways to fight back. As editor, I wish we had identified more solutions, but becoming knowledgeable, spreading the word, and trying to solidify the finding that the persecution constitutes “genocide” are important starting points. *The Persecution and Genocide of Christians in the Middle East: Prevention, Prohibition, & Prosecution* helps us do that and challenges us to do more.

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BEING CATHOLIC IN TODAY’S SOCIETY

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, *Strangers in a Strange Land* (Henry Holt, 2017)

“Simply put, America can’t be the way it once was.” (Original italic.) This is not so much a lament as it is a reality check: Catholics upset with the culture can work to change it, but they cannot expect a return to more placid times. That is one of the most defining conclusions in this intellectually rich volume.

Archbishop Chaput has a great command of theology, history, sociology, and political science—his range is wide and deep—making him the right person to analyze current conditions and make cogent prescriptions for change. His love for the Church shines through over and over again, which is why this is a book that Catholics of every leaning can embrace.

What’s wrong with America is as obvious as it is distressing. The social order is in disarray on many fronts. Young people are spiritually lost, having no moral anchor to guide them. Pornography is commonplace; its destructive elements are wreaking havoc in relationships. Cohabitation and divorce are also creating problems for men, women, and children, fraying bonds that are integral to our well being. But there are some good signs.

We’ve made progress on abortion—especially among youth. “They’ve seen what abortion does. They’ve lived with the fact that they could have been aborted. The humanity of the unborn child is obvious on any ultrasound machine.” Where we’ve gone backwards, and nowhere is this more apparent than with young people, is with gay marriage and gender ideology.

June 2015 was a watershed moment in American history. That is when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, imposed gay marriage on the states.

For Chaput, the effects were far reaching: “It changed the meaning of the family by wiping away the need for the natural relationships—husband and wife, mother and father—at the heart of these institutions.” Just as ominous, “the state implicitly

claims the authority to define what is and isn't properly human." Indeed, he calls this ruling "poisonous," precisely because it weakens marriage and the family, the two most important bedrocks of a free society.

Gender ideology is an offshoot of this phenomenon, blurring the lines between the sexes. Nature is the enemy: cultural elites teach that whatever exists is a social construction, having nothing to do with nature, or nature's God. This represents "a revolt against biology itself—and it's not without its own peculiar form of bullying."

We have reached the state where those who do not accept gay marriage and gender ideology are condemned as bigots. Tolerance does not extend to those who believe in traditional marriage, or to those who see the sexes as binary, as either a man or a woman. Worse, when there is a showdown between gay rights and religious liberty, the latter is trashed, even though it is cited in the First Amendment (the Constitution says nothing about two men marrying).

These changes all took place in a nation dominated by Christians. Chaput notes that Catholics and Protestants have long shared the same basic faith and worldview, but success has spoiled us.

"Over time," he writes, "we Catholics have succeeded very well—evidently too well." Thus did we miss the opportunity to claim a "Catholic moment" in the culture. As a consequence, our "appetite for comfort and security has replaced conviction," making it more difficult to bring about a much needed cultural renewal.

Our affluence is a function of our democratic and capitalist society, and while there is much to celebrate, it also has the effect of weakening the authority that resides in civil society. Parents, teachers, the clergy, and civic leaders have seen their moral muscles atrophy in the wake of the ever-

increasing role of government. Now we take our cues from public opinion and market forces. The results are not sanguine.

We've been compromised. Truth is under attack, and the pernicious notion that all moral values are equal has triumphed. So we speak about "abortion rights" without ever saying exactly what the term means. The fluidity of our moral vocabulary allows us to skirt reality, bringing us to the point where "sucking the brains out of unborn children, or trading in their body parts, is not so appalling."

Chaput does not sugarcoat our condition, but he is not without hope. "The gift of hope creates in us a desire for heaven and eternal life as our happiness," he says. But to many Americans, despair and presumption have eclipsed hope. They are a reflection of our secular pursuit of progress, and our conviction that we need no external moral authority. This makes us more likely to follow the Machiavellian politics of a Saul Alinsky than to accept the challenges of the Beatitudes.

So where does this leave us? Citing an early Christian author who observed a similar condition, "They [Christians] live in their own countries, but only as aliens." To understand Chaput's point, consider that the subtitle to this book is *Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World*. That is our challenge: how do we as Catholics navigate the secularization of America, and the moral crisis it has spurred?

Contrary to what some commentators have said about *Strangers in a Strange Land*, Chaput is not asking us to throw in the towel; he asks that we consider how the early Christians handled their challenge. He says that "they didn't abandon or retire from the world. They didn't build fortress enclaves. They didn't manufacture their own culture or invent their own language. They took elements from the surrounding society and 'baptized' them with a new spirit and a new way of living."

In other words, for us to change society, we must first attend to our own spiritual health. What does it mean to be a Catholic? Recapturing our lost identity is not simply a good thing to do—it is the foundation of our ability to help renew the culture. There is much work to do: the baby boomers have failed to “pass along our faith in a compelling way to the generation now taking our place.”

Chaput outlines three challenges to the Catholic community: individualism, institutionalism, and clericalism.

“Christianity *invented* the idea of the individual.” (Chaput’s emphasis.) Yes, by stressing the unique God-given qualities that inhere in every individual, and by recognizing that we are all equal in the eyes of God, possessing the same human dignity, Catholic teachings transformed the traditional group identities of tribe, clan, kinship, and social statuses. Unfortunately, a modest interpretation of individualism has given way to an extremist one.

Radical individualism is not something to cheer about. The idea that we don’t need God—we are self-sufficient—is vacuous, failing to satisfy our base needs. “I’m spiritual, but not religious,” is a popular refrain, but it is a dodge. Indeed, the idea that we are on automatic pilot needing no external moral authority is absurd.

There is a Catholic tendency to see the Church as some huge institution that is self-propelling, needing little input from the faithful. This is the meaning of institutionalism, the fatuous notion that we do not have to participate in the life of the Church in order to remain Catholic. But what kind of Catholic is it that passes the buck, as well as the basket?

Clericalism is an unhealthy situation where the laity settle into a second-class condition, leaving to priests all responsibilities for governance. This cannot be corrected, however, by merely extending more rights to men and women in

the pews—they must be willing to assume concomitant responsibilities. Many do not.

St. Augustine instructed us not to entertain the notion that a just and perfect social order is possible: we are all sinners, making perfectibility an illusion. But that doesn't mean we do not have the power to transform society. Indeed, Chaput argues that "we can't simply withdraw from public affairs." So what should we do?

"The surest way to transform a culture is from the inside out." What Chaput has in mind is "colonizing and reshaping the culture's appetites and behaviors." This begins at the micro level: he is not talking about some grand social engineering agenda, he is talking about you and me. "To recover the Church's identity," he contends, "we first need to recall our own." That way we can "bring the Gospel to all those we encounter." We are all called to do so.

This will not be easy. Chaput does not mince words: "The world hates the story Christians tell. It no longer believes in sin. It doesn't understand the forgiveness of sinners."

When I read those words, I immediately thought of Richard Dawkins, arguably the most famous atheist intellectual in the world. The English author says that sin is "one of the nastiest aspects of Christianity." Of course, to admit to sin is to admit to God, and he will have none of it. And as Chaput informs, "If we don't believe in the devil, sooner or later we won't believe in God."

Words such as sin and evil are no longer part of our vocabulary, though the experience of 9/11 helped to resurrect them for a while. In our therapeutic society of grief counselors and consoling dogs, human tragedy has nothing to do with sin: we can be reclaimed by talk, if not by yoga.

Despite the subtitle of Chaput's book, he emphasizes that the first thing that God asks of us is "to realize that the words

‘post-Christian’ are a lie, so long as the fire of Christian faith, hope, and love lives in any of us.” But that means we cannot “tag along as compliant fellow travelers with a secular culture that’s now, in so many ways, better described as *apostate*.” (His accent.)

Chaput, then, is not preaching resignation, pulling back into some safe quarters. We have a moral duty to change ourselves and change society, but to do so we must be realistic: the secularism is stacked against us, requiring us to rebuild our Catholic identity in ways that work.

When I was a board member of the National Association of Scholars, a non-sectarian organization seeking to restore higher education, I was asked by the executive director to reach out to like-minded professors who belonged to NAS in the Pittsburgh area. We met from time to time in each other’s home, or on the campus of one of the colleges or universities.

The purpose of these meetings was to build bonds, to establish a confidence in our pursuit of truth, not politics. In short, to embolden us, thereby setting in motion a determination to change our institutions, knowing that we had the backing and resources of our colleagues. Did it work? Higher education is still a hotbed of activism, but matters would be worse if we simply went quietly into the night.

As Archbishop Chaput aptly notes, we have a moral duty to bring the Gospel to our fellow citizens, and that cannot happen if we run for safety, living in some cocoon. If we can transform the Catholic community, we can transform society, or at least put the brakes on our precipitous moral decline.

NEW EVIDENCE VALIDATES STEPINAC

Ronald J. Rychlak

Robin Harris, *Stepinac: His Life and Times* (Gracewing Publishing, 2016)

Those who study churchmen of the WWII era know that Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac, Archbishop of Zagreb during WWII, is controversial. Following the war, communist authorities charged and convicted him of collaboration with the Nazi-like Ustashe party. Those false charges have followed Stepinac, even after many of the authorities who took part in framing him came forth and admitted their misdeeds. *Stepinac: His Life and Times*, by British historian Robin Harris, is the first all-encompassing biography of Stepinac, and it should put to rest all of the questions about him that have been debated ever since the close of the Second World War.

Harris draws on the latest and best archival evidence, including previously unexplored Secret Police files stored in the Croatian State Archives, to give the reader a close look at Stepinac's entire life. In so doing, he presents the clearest and best look available in the English language at this man who remains an icon across Croatia.

Stepinac rose to positions of authority in the Church at a young age. In 1934, Pope Pius XI nominated him to be coadjutor archbishop of Zagreb. At 36, he was the youngest bishop in the world. In 1937, though still below the prescribed canonical age of 40, Stepinac succeeded Anton Bauer as the archbishop of Zagreb, becoming one of the youngest archbishops in the Church's history.

Archbishop Stepinac was extraordinarily active. He founded more than a dozen new parishes, established a committee for

sacred art, helped found the first cloistered Carmelite monastery in Croatia, participated in numerous national and international Eucharistic Congresses, visited the Holy Land, began work on a complete translation of the Bible, and helped to establish a Catholic daily newspaper. He also opened a diocesan museum and directed the preparations for a celebration of the 1,300th anniversary of the first ties between Croatia and the Holy See. It was a time of dynamic growth for the Catholic Church in Croatia (which was then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, also sometimes called the first Yugoslavia). Unfortunately, it all came to an end with the outbreak of war.

Two years after Stepinac was consecrated archbishop of Zagreb, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. Within two more years, a Nazi-puppet regime took over in Croatia. Ante Pavelic and his Ustashi government unleashed a wave of brutality against Serbian Orthodox and others. They were very vicious, worse even than the Nazis in their persecution of those who got in their way. Pavelic called himself a Catholic, and the Ustashe forcibly converted many people to Catholicism, even over the objection of Archbishop Stepinac.

Stepinac initially cooperated with the Ustashe government, but he soon saw through the fog. The very same month that the Ustashi came into power (April 1941), they enacted Nuremberg-like racial laws. Stepinac not only condemned the laws from his cathedral, he wrote a letter of protest to the new government. Moreover, the letter makes clear that he had *previously* contacted the authorities with reference to the Jews and Serbs – immediately after the first measures against them had been taken.

In one typical homily from 1943, Stepinac condemned notions of racial superiority. "The Catholic Church knows nothing of races born to rule and born to slavery," he said. "The Catholic Church knows races and nations only as creatures of God." His sermons were so strong that the Ustashe prohibited

them from being published, but his words were secretly printed, circulated, and occasionally broadcast over the radio. The files of the German police attaché in Zagreb show that Stepinac was often identified as a traitor by the Nazis and the Ustashi.

In 1941, Stepinac severely condemned the Ustashe's destruction of Zagreb's main synagogue: "A House of God, of whatever religion, is a holy place," he said. "An attack on a House of God of any religion constitutes an attack on all religious communities." There is even a story about a Nazi officer who came to Zagreb and heard Stepinac speak. The archbishop condemned the Ustashe's actions so strongly that the general said "If a churchman in Germany spoke like that, he would not step down from the pulpit alive."

In 1944-45, Communist partisans under Marshal Josip Broz—better known as Tito—conquered the Balkans and occupied Zagreb. Soon, a communist regime, the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia, had control of the nation. More than 150,000 Croats were killed—most of them war prisoners who died during a long march from the Slovenian border to Macedonia that became known as "the way of the Cross." The new government also undertook persecution of the Catholic Church, confiscating property, closing seminaries and schools, banning Masses, and persecuting clergy.

Before coming to power, the Communists used Cardinal Stepinac's speeches in their propaganda, siding with him, as he always spoke against the violation of human rights by the Ustashe. In fact, pictures were published in the Yugoslav press of three Orthodox bishops, Archbishop Stepinac, his auxiliary bishop Josip Lach, the Soviet Military Attaches, and the Croatian Communist leaders. They were even scheduled to be honored at a Zagreb parade to celebrate the establishment of a "Peoples Government." Soon, however, any hope for a working relationship fell apart.

Stepinac refused to be silent, and he became a threat. Several times, he was assaulted while he was trying to carry out his pastoral tasks. Finally, on May 17, 1945, Tito had him arrested. Pope Pius XII filed a protest, but the archbishop was held for 17 days. On the day after his release, Tito summoned Stepinac for a face-to-face meeting. The Communist leader wanted the Croatian Church to sever its ties with Rome. Stepinac, of course, refused. Tito then put the Catholic Church in his crosshairs.

Persecution got so bad that a synod of bishops met to discuss it on September 17-22, 1945. They issued a pastoral letter that was read in churches across the country. It said the bishops were willing to work with the state for the good of the people, but at the same time they condemned "all ideologies and social systems not based on the eternal principles of Christian Revelation, but on shallow material foundations, that is to say philosophic atheism." They protested the killing of over 200 Catholic priests and believers, "whose lives were taken away in unlawful trials based upon false accusations by haters of the Catholic Church." They also protested the suppression of youth education, the requisitioning of Church property, the destruction of graves, and the confiscation of the Catholic press and print shops. Stepinac was the President of the Bishops Conference and the first signatory of the letter.

In October 1945, Tito wrote a newspaper editorial accusing Stepinac of declaring war on the fledgling government. Within days, the government launched an intense propaganda campaign. Priests and bishops, including Stepinac, were attacked physically and accused of having collaborated with Hitler. Serbian radio condemned Stepinac as a war criminal and paved the way for his arrest. Stepinac was charged and put on trial for allegedly collaborating with the Ustashe. The trial drew much critical coverage from Western media and protests from those who recognized it as a fraudulent show trial.

Stepinac was denied even minimal due process. Prosecution witnesses were told what to say, and the defense was not allowed cross-examination. Many defense witnesses were not permitted to testify, and much of Stepinac's evidence was excluded. Stepinac was permitted to meet with his attorney for only an hour prior to the trial, and he was not permitted to consult with the representative sent by the pope.

On the fourth day of the trial, Stepinac gave a 38-minute speech. *Time* magazine reported that the archbishop "temporarily lost his equanimity." He "shook an angry finger at the court, cried: 'Not only does the church in Yugoslavia have no freedom, but in a short while the church will be annihilated.'" He accused his Communist prosecutors of behaving like the Gestapo. He said his conscience was clear. Publication of the statement (or arguments made by his attorneys) was prohibited during the entire rule of the Communists in the former Yugoslavia. Fortunately, there is no such problem today. Harris provides his readers with the full text of the speech.

The trial verdict, of course, was set in advance. Stepinac was found guilty of all six counts. He was sentenced to 16 years of hard labor, but due to the indignation throughout the democratic world, he was not made to do the hard labor. He was, however, put in Lepoglava prison, which was used to hold political dissidents in harsh conditions.

In the late 1940s, pressure mounted, particularly in the United States, for Tito to release Stepinac. In 1951, Tito expressed a willingness to do so if he would leave Yugoslavia. Stepinac's answer was that: "They will never make me leave unless they put me on a plane by force and take me over the frontier. It is my duty in these difficult times to stay with the people." Tito finally consented to hold the archbishop under house arrest in his native village of Krašić.

Pope Pius XII named Stepinac a cardinal, but he did not travel

to Rome for a ceremony due to concern about being permitted to return. He died in 1960 of a blood disorder, which was said to have been caused by the conditions he endured in prison. Tests of his remains conducted by Vatican investigators suggest that he may have been poisoned. Harris includes a separate appendix dealing with that issue.

After the fall of communism, one of the first acts of the new parliament was to apologize for the archbishop's show trial. The prosecutor acknowledged that the trial was motivated by Stepinac's bad relationship with the communists, not because of his relationship with the Nazis. Others involved in the fabrication of documents also came forward and confirmed that Stepinac's trial was a fraud.

Pope St. John Paul II beatified Stepinac as a martyr in October 1998. He said the cardinal stood against "the dictatorship of communism, where he again fought for the faith, for the presence of God in the world, the true humanity that is dependent on the presence of God." In June 2011, Pope Benedict XVI praised Stepinac as a courageous defender of those oppressed by the Ustashe, including Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies.

Recently, Pope Francis arranged a special commission of Catholic and Orthodox leaders to explore Stepinac's wartime record. The commission would do well to begin with Harris's book. It contains 409 pages, 12 chapters, and four interesting addendums: Stepinac's speech in the court; the list of a number of officials in the administration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during 1930s; a text concerning the issue of whether Stepinac was poisoned; and Stepinac's spiritual testament.

Stepinac: His Life and Times is an important treatment of a giant figure in Catholic history. Robin Harris has done a great service to truth by unearthing the facts and telling the story of this truly heroic man.

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