Catholic Feasts: Learning the Faith through Celebration

Rick Hinshaw

Cardinal Donald Wuerl and Mike Aquilina, *The Feasts: How the Church Year Forms Us as Catholics* (New York: Image, 2014)

While the feasts of the Catholic Church might "seem to be a crazy quilt of customs," they are in reality so much more than that – if we take the time to understand their origins, their meanings, and what they teach us. In *The Feasts*, Cardinal Donald Wuerl and Mike Aquilina give us the opportunity to do just that, and so to allow our own faith to be strengthened and even transformed by our celebration of our Church's feasts.

"They are lessons, too. They teach us. They evangelize us," and thus prepare us to evangelize others, Cardinal Wuerl and Aquilina write. "They tell and retell the stories of the Gospel. They proclaim the dogmas of the faith." As such, "they are our dress rehearsal for heaven," drawing us closer to God, helping us to know Him better and worship Him more perfectly, preparing us for that eternal existence when "we shall share God's life intimately in heaven."

At the same time, our Catholic feast days and special seasons are also vital to us along our earthly journey toward that eternal life. They draw us more deeply into the knowledge and practice of our faith, and equip us for our essential earthly vocation of sharing that faith with others, and so bringing them also closer to Christ.

And, because of their festive nature, "they do all this," the authors observe, "in the sweetest and most memorable way – in a family way."

Indeed, the very essence of our feast days is that of celebration. “All the feasts are celebrations of Jesus Christ,” the authors write. And it is that spirit of joyful celebration that makes religious feasts so effective in teaching us our faith, drawing us more joyfully into the life of Christ and his Church, and assisting us in inviting others to experience that joy with us.

In *The Feasts*, Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., and Mike Aquilina, author of more than forty books—including two previous works with Cardinal Wuerl, “The Mass” and “The Church” — help us to understand why this is so.

They explain how “for close to fifteen hundred years” — prior to the printing press, let alone today’s mass communications technologies — the Church still “raised up devout generations of worshipers, millions of people who had a lively faith in Jesus Christ and a deep familiarity with his saving doctrine.” This was made possible, they explain — quoting “one of the great Church historians of the last century, Father Josef Jungmann” — by the prevalence of feast days in the church calendar, which “impressed the chief mysteries of faith upon the popular consciousness.”

“Calendars,” the authors point out, “help to define us as the people we are,” giving us reference points to the past, a grounding in our present time and a context for future hopes. And so for Christians, the Church “calendar and its feasts remind us who we are,” providing “a standard medium for the expression of the profound loves at the center of our lives — our love for God and for our family, for our Church and our community.”

“Keeping the feasts is part of our commitment to live as a child of God,” Cardinal Wuerl and Aquilina write. “Christians benefit spiritually when we understand the Christian calendar — when we’ve come to know ‘the reason for the season.'”

“By celebrating Christmas, believers grew in their understanding of the incarnation of the Lord,” the authors observe. “Through the many memorials of the saints and martyrs, ordinary people became familiar with the great historic exemplars of heroic virtue. On Easter – and indeed on every Sunday – they celebrated the glory of God in a human being who is fully alive, who is in fact the fullness of life: Jesus Christ.”

That emphasis on Sunday Mass as “the model for all other feasts” is perhaps the book’s most important focus. Many Catholics today, while they pack our churches for major celebrations like Christmas and Easter, take a decidedly lackadaisical approach to the weekly Sunday Mass celebration. Yet it is “Christianity’s ‘primordial feast,'” the authors remind us – quoting from the Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments – “and the ‘basis and centre of the liturgical year.'” All of our other liturgical feasts, Cardinal Wuerl and Aquilina write, “make little sense apart from it.”

In one sense, the authors trace the importance of weekly celebration to the book of Genesis, when God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh – bringing into being the weekly Jewish Sabbath, “the original religious festival, the prototype of all the feasts.” And indeed, the authors draw a direct connection between Jewish festival traditions dating from the Old Testament – such as Passover – and our Catholic feast day celebrations. In both cases, they emphasize, believers *learn* about their faith through such celebrations. “Jews absorbed the central ideas of their faith not by studying them systematically,” the book quotes best-selling author Rabbi Harold Kushner, “but by celebrating the weekly Sabbath and the annual cycle of festivals, and gradually absorbing the lessons they conveyed.” Just as, the authors write – again citing Father Jungmann – “Christians through most of history … *learned* the mysteries of Christianity by

celebrating the mysteries of Christianity."

And of course, while each of our feasts celebrates something historic –events in the life of Christ, the lives of the saints, miraculous interventions – they are "not merely the recollection of past events," the authors quote the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* "In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real."

We know this, of course, with regard to the Mass, in which Christ, every Sunday – indeed, *every day* if we so choose – again offers us the sacrifice of His Body and Blood for our salvation. But this book, as it takes us through some of the significant feast days that fill the Church's calendar, reminds us how *each* of them celebrate not just a historical event or person, but a *living* embodiment of Christ and His Church that can enter into our lives today if we open ourselves to these celebrations. The gift of the Holy Spirit that we celebrate on the feast of Pentecost, for example, did not occur just one time, to one group of Jesus' disciples; Jesus sent the Spirit upon all of us, for all time. Our Blessed Mother's Assumption did not bring to an end her role in human history; rather, it placed her in heaven as Mother of us all, ready to intercede for us with her divine Son. Similarly, the authors write, the feast days of our saints serve as "annual reminders of their great example" – not simply for us to admire, but for all generations to learn from and emulate – and "their intercessory power before the throne of God." One of our newest feast days, Divine Mercy Sunday, should fill us with joy and hope at the gift of God's infinite mercy.

Cardinal Wuerl and Mike Aquilina quote Saint Faustina, the nun who inspired the annual feast of Divine Mercy: "Almost every feast of the Church gives me a deeper knowledge of God and a special grace." And in this work they offer us the same opportunity to grow in knowledge of God and to gain special graces, by inviting us to journey with them through the

marvelous faith experiences that our Catholic feast days and special seasons offer. They help us to connect our feast celebrations to the origins of religious festival in the Jewish traditions of the Old Testament – with even a chapter on "The Feasts That Jesus Kept." They explain the reasons for religious feasts – from the practical human need for respite and celebration amid the trials of daily life, to the religious teaching that such feasts provide, to the spiritual graces they offer. They give a sampling of some of the many significant feast days on the Church calendar, so that we may enter into their celebration with a deeper understanding of their meaning. And they embrace the many different cultural traditions that make the Church truly universal, and that allow for each culture to mark its own Catholic heritage with its own unique festivals commemorating its own local devotions and saints.

Just as important, the authors make clear, is the power of our feast celebrations to "fortify" us for our work of evangelizing the world.

"The Church is both a mother and a teacher," they write, "and the feasts are always timely lessons she delivers to her children – giving us something we otherwise lack, or fortifying us against some emerging challenge." So, for example, they note that the feast of Corpus Christi calls us to be Christ's witnesses "as we live our faith by loving and serving others."

The feast of Christ the King, they explain, was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI "to be an antidote to the poisons of secularism, which was then spreading in deadly forms throughout the world." Most glaring were anti-Catholic laws in Mexico, under which thousands of men, women and children were martyred, and the religious persecutions in Communist Russia. But Pope Pius warned against a broader sweep of secularism that would exclude religion from public life, with dire consequences. Cardinal Wuerl and Mike Aquilina observe how

that reality has taken hold today.

Noting how the Puritan-led government of 17th century England tried to impose a ban on Christmas, they warn that although "the seventeenth century Puritans may seem amusing to us now, they represent an anti-Catholic, anti-*festive* spirit that is always in the world.

"Today's Puritans," they point out, "tend to have a secularist bent, but they are as joyless as their spiritual ancestors. They would rather drain the cheer out of days than permit any public reference to Jesus Christ. They advocate legislation to have his name and symbols removed from every postage stamp, courthouse square, and even window sills that can be seen from the street." They note that "Western nations treat the name of Christ as an expletive to be deleted from all public discourse."

Indeed. In fact it seems that the only acceptable use of "Jesus Christ" is when it is literally uttered as an expletive.

"We should charitably resist" the anti-Catholic joylessness of the secularists, the authors urge. "We should, by the example of our joy, teach the world how to feast." Even as the secular world rejects Christ, they need what we as a Church have to offer.

"We need, once again, to teach the world how to celebrate, how to feast, how to be happy," the authors write.

They have given us a good start, with a book that helps us to better understand and celebrate our Church's feasts and their meaning; and so fortifies us to go forth and offer to the world the joy of the Gospel, as it radiates through the celebration of our Catholic feasts.

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BRINGING YOUNG ADULTS BACK TO CHURCH

RICK HINSHAW

Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Got Religion?: How Churches, Mosques and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014)

Naomi Schaefer Riley, in her weekly columns in the *New York Post* as well as in several books she has authored, has emerged as an insightful commentator on a range of cultural issues impacting especially on marriage, family, and religious faith and practice – in the process, puncturing some of the myths about faith and family regularly perpetuated by America's cultural elite. And so when she authors a work exploring ways that the major religions might bring young adults back to active involvement in their faith, it commands notice.

In *Got Religion?*, Schaefer Riley focuses on specific – and highly varied – initiatives she has examined within six different faith traditions: a Presbyterian church in New Orleans; a Muslim young adult organization in California; a program designed to draw young Catholics into teaching in Catholic schools; an effort to encourage a permanent Jewish commitment among young people who have visited Israel through a philanthropic program; the Mormon church's creation of Young Single Adult (YSA) wards; and the efforts of one pastor to adapt his church to the changing role of black churches in today's African American communities.

Each of these approaches is instructive for us, as Catholics concerned with the challenge of bringing young adults and young families into greater participation in the life of the

Church. In some instances, strategies undertaken in these particular faith communities offer new ideas that might be worth trying; in other cases, they reflect things that may have already been tried in some form in our own Church, with varying degrees of success; and in still other cases, there are concerns raised by some of these strategies.

In her first chapter, Schaefer Riley, focusing on Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, illustrates how the pastor has tapped into what seems to be the desire for physically tight, close-knit communities that she sees as driving the "reverse migration" of many millenials back into city life. Bucking the approach tried by faith communities – including our own – over several generations now, of special "programs" and separate groupings for young people – youth ministries, young adult ministries, etc. – this pastor strives to invite younger members into the full life of a unified congregation. In doing so, he is putting into action what we in the Catholic Church have always heard emphasized among youth and young adult leaders, but not always effectively implemented: that our young people are not just the Church of the future, they are an essential part of the Church of today.

One of the key components of involving young adults that Schaefer Riley finds in virtually every faith group she studied is a desire to be involved in service to others. But here, too, she identifies a different approach among millenials. Rather than getting involved in far-reaching "social justice" efforts (think globally, act locally, in baby boomer parlance), they seem to want to both think and act locally – focusing on, and addressing, the needs of their immediate neighbors, in the true spirit of community.

In a sense, that faith-based community spirit seems kind of a throwback to the bygone, pre-suburban era of the Catholic Church, when community life for Catholics in the cities centered on their parishes. My father-in-law always told us how, growing up in Brooklyn, when someone asked where you were

from, you didn't respond, "Bensonhurst" or "Canarsie"; you said "St. Dominic's" or "Holy Family." Your parish was your community.

Can we ever go back to those times? With the secularization of modern society, probably not to the degree it was then. But what Redeemer Presbyterian seems to be demonstrating is that there are opportunities for churches, if they find the right approaches, to help fill the strong desire for community that millenials seem to be searching for in their return to city life.

In looking at a Jewish initiative called Birthright NEXT, Schaefer Riley touches on a challenge facing all religious communities – how to transform what she calls the "wow" moment of certain faith experiences into ongoing commitment to a faith community and, especially, to its rituals of worship and its permanent institutions.

Birthright NEXT, she explains, grew out of a philanthropic endeavor, Taglit-Birthright Israel (Taglit being Hebrew for "discovery"), that every year sends groups of young people on a ten day trip to Israel "to strengthen Jewish identity, Jewish communities, and solidarity with Israel." Birthright NEXT, as the name suggests, is a response, Schaefer Riley explains, to the question of "What comes next?" after Jewish young people have had this "wow" experience. How can it be built upon to channel the enthusiasm of that event into a permanent commitment, not only to Jewish culture and community, but to the Jewish faith? We can see a parallel in the challenge for the Catholic Church to build upon the enthusiasm of millions of young people who have experienced World Youth Days. How can that spectacular faith experience be transformed into not only an ongoing faith life, but into active involvement in their parishes back home?

Birthright NEXT responds to this challenge by bringing Taglit-Birthright "alumni" together in reunion events that are not

just social, but also involve religious observances; and—in an approach also evident in all of the other initiatives Schaefer Riley explores in this book – giving them leadership roles in facilitating these gatherings, roles not always available to them in their established religious institutions. Besides thus giving young adults "ownership" in the practice of their faith, Schaefer Riley points out, this kind of "peer-to-peer" ministry may also make religious involvement more attractive to other young adults they are trying to reach out to.

This is not without its pitfalls – as Pastor DeForest Soaries of the First Baptist Church in Somerset, New Jersey, found when he tried to place some younger church members in leadership roles, in the process easing out some of the older, longtime leaders who came to see their positions as their "personal property." We had a similar situation in my home diocese some years back, when our leaders endeavored to re-energize our college campus ministries by bringing in "peer ministers," young adults fresh out of college whom it was thought could better relate to current college students. It caused a lot of controversy – including in our traditionally unfriendly secular media – over long-time, entrenched campus ministers who were being replaced. But a decade later, the new vibrancy in Catholic life on our secular college campuses is undeniable.

Other of Schaefer Riley's observations do raise concerns; for example, the suggestion that Muslim institutions in America, whose older leadership tend to be immigrants, need to adjust to American culture— in order to appeal to their younger, American-born members – while at the same time, to be sure, holding on to their basic religious tenets. As we Catholics know, this is not easy in today's secularized American culture, when our Church has been called upon to be a *countercultural* force. Too many American Catholics, rather than risk being socially ostracized, choose to follow the popular cultural trends, in the process rejecting the

teachings of their faith. As the U.S. Bishops said in their 1999 document, “Living the Gospel of Life,” Catholics in America have “been changed by the culture too much,” and “we have changed the culture not enough.”

My own judgment, based on years of research, writing, and involvement in many aspects of Catholic life in America, is that young people approach religion with the natural idealism of youth. This is what drives the desire, so prevalent among youth and young adults, as Schaefer Riley found in her research, to be involved in service to others. It is natural that they would be attracted to faith communities that offer them opportunities for “hands-on” work to assist those in need.

But it is my experience that the idealism of youth also inspires a desire for truth, and an attraction to religious institutions that are forthright in proclaiming the eternal truths in which they believe. Not, to be sure, in a condemnatory, fire and brimstone way; but in a positive, persuasive way that invites young people to fully understand what the Church teaches and why.

If, for example, we allow the secular culture to define Catholic teaching on marriage as nothing more than “homophobia,” our Church will not be attractive to young people looking for a religion of love. But if they have an opportunity to understand the natural law of God on which Church teaching is based, and the true essence of human love and sexuality as beautifully taught by Pope John Paul II in his Theology of the Body, Catholic youth truly looking for the truth will be drawn more deeply into the faith. Similarly, rather than allowing the secular culture to politicize Church teachings on abortion and contraception as a “war on women,” we need to show young people the truth that these teachings are founded in the same respect for the sanctity of human life that they find so attractive in the Church’s commitment to serving people in need.

And of course, we need to proclaim to young people – not only by how we teach, but also by the example of our own reverence each week at Mass – our belief that the Eucharist, the center of our faith, is truly the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Finally, some thought should be given to what we can learn from those young people who have *stayed* with the faith, who have not strayed or been "turned off" by a Church they feel has no place for them. For this I turned to my own primary sources: my daughter, 23 now, living and working in the Washington, D.C. area, and my son, just beginning his freshman year at Franciscan University of Steubenville. Both gave pretty much the same answer: a strong family faith life from their earliest years, nurtured and broadened by their experiences in a solidly Catholic high school (whose president, Marianist Father Philip Eichner, chairs the board of the Catholic League), in various youth-oriented faith activities (some in our parish, some that they found in other parts of Long Island), and of course at Franciscan University. These have given them those communities of young Catholic peers and opportunities for leadership so important to their growth in the faith. While parish life might not right now be the center of their faith lives, Mass and the Eucharist are. And I feel certain that in the future, as they marry and have children, their parishes and Catholic schools will become centers of their families' faith involvement–into which, if invited, they will assume leadership roles.

So the challenge comes back again to how to involve more young families more fully in the life of the Church, so their children will have the foundation through which their faith will be either sustained through those challenging years of adolescence and young adulthood, or re-ignited later on. *Got Religion?* offers some ideas, in some dynamic faith communities, that might be helpful.

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MICHAEL NOVAK'S REMARKABLE LIFE JOURNEY

Rick Hinshaw

Michael Novak, *Writing from Left to Right: My Journey from Liberal to Conservative* (New York: Image, 2013)

"It is not those who cry, 'the poor, the poor' who will enter the Kingdom, but those who truly help the poor."

More than 20 years ago, that paraphrase of Scripture from the distinguished theologian, philosopher and political and social commentator Michael Novak resonated with me as I covered a talk by Mr. Novak at our diocesan seminary. For he was articulating the thinking of many of us who, while taking to heart our Church's admonition to give special priority (a "preferential option") to the needs of the poor, have found conventional approaches to that priority at least somewhat wanting. He was saying that good intentions are not enough, and that although the welfare state may *seem* the most compassionate approach, if it is not working, it is not Christian to perpetuate it simply for appearance's sake.

Most importantly, what he was affirming was not, primarily, particular *conclusions*; but rather the importance of the *search*, of *opening our minds* to new ideas, new approaches, new insights in service to the common good.

In *Writing from Left to Right* Michael Novak chronicles a life lived doing exactly that, in the process offering us a road map on how to arrive at our own best prudential judgments as how to best apply the principles of Catholic social teaching to the critical issues of our time.

This work is a treasure on several levels: first, as a remarkable inside historical account of so many epochal events of the latter half of the twentieth century – in our Church, in our nation, in the international community – from someone who was not only in the center of it all, but who exerted a profound influence on emerging social, political, cultural and religious thought, and in policy approaches in areas ranging from economics, to foreign policy and human rights, to cultural issues.

On a second level, Novak offers his specific insights in many of these areas, even as his own views at times shifted – for example, from support of the Vietnam war to opposition, and then somewhat back again in retrospect; from support for the welfare state approach to combating poverty, to an embrace of free-market capitalism and job-stimulating tax cuts; and ultimately, away from purely economic responses to poverty, to a realization of the cultural factors that must also be addressed; and, as a result, from years of activism in national Democratic Party politics – at the service of such luminaries as Robert Kennedy, George McGovern and Sargent Shriver – to involvement in the emerging neoconservative movement and active service, in various capacities, in the Reagan Administration.

But it is on the third level – Novak's description of his own detailed, open-minded but principled *search* for the best solutions to the issues of human suffering he has sought to address – that this work is of greatest value; because, as he laments near the book's conclusion, he sees less and less inclination today – on all sides of our nation's great partisan divide – toward the kind of sincere, respectful dialogue, mutual charity and openness to new ideas that can best advance the common good.

Novak shares with us how his Slovak roots implanted in him an early and lifelong commitment to human rights and opposition to the Communist philosophy under which his family members

were then being oppressed; and also how those eastern European roots would later give him a special kinship with “the Pope who called me friend,” John Paul II. He explains how his upbringing in the Pennsylvania mining town of Johnstown gave him early exposure to, and sensitivity toward, economic deprivation; yet at the same time how his father taught him never to “envy the rich,” and how he came to understand, and sees today, that class envy, far from being a solution to poverty, can actually perpetuate it, while also engendering damaging conflicts within and between nations.

He recounts how after some 12 years of seminary training, he found himself in 1960 drawn instead to lay vocation, and to “the war of political ideas.” Subsequent studies in philosophy led him to the “Christian Realism” of Reinhold Niebuhr, which would reinforce his natural inclination toward trying to explore all sides of an issue.

“I was born with a conservative temperament,” he writes, “but I tried hard to inspect opposing arguments closely.” He would take as his own guide—and today urges on all of us—Niebuhr’s admonition that “In my own views there is always some error; and in the views of those I disagree with there is always some truth.”

Travel to Rome in 1963 to report on the Second Vatican Council furthered his belief in the importance of such humble introspection – within institutions as well as individual minds.

“If the most time-encrusted and hidebound institution in the world was examining its conscience, instituting reforms, and taking in large gulps of fresh air,” he writes, “well, then, any institution in the world could do so. And *should* – that seemed to be the subtext.”

Novak describes how his growing opposition to the Vietnam war, while teaching at Stanford in the late 1960s, pushed him into

a philosophical "left turn"– moderately at first, then more sharply after an erstwhile hero, then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey, delivered a "glib, insensitive" speech at Stanford defending the war. True to form, however, Novak did not stop his own examination and re-examination of his positions, traveling to Vietnam to experience first hand the war he was writing and speaking against, and concluding at war's end that he had allowed himself to be somewhat deceived about the true nature of the conflict – that far from being simply a homegrown revolution by the Viet Cong, it had in fact been a war of outside Communist aggression from the north.

While Novak marks "The publication of *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* in 1972″ as his "declaration of independence from the cultural left," that was not his intention. He was hoping to be seen as offering a needed corrective to what he saw as "the unworthy prejudices of the cultural left" against "family people, traditional values and ethnic neighborhoods."

"I was still writing as a man of the anti-capitalist left," he observes, "but I was, in truth, departing from left-wing orthodoxy by singling out cultural issues (rather than economic issues) as the primary neuralgic point in American life." He discovered that this departure from liberal orthodoxy offended the cultural left, "at that time the preeminent force watching over what couldn't be said in American culture and what could." He experienced for the first time "the fury of the Left when it marks someone as beyond the pale of acceptability," and found himself so banished – as many Catholics likewise have found ourselves ostracized by the Catholic left, the self-appointed gatekeepers of Catholic social teaching, if we dare to posit applications of that teaching that stray from their liberal political orthodoxy.

Novak would subsequently find a home with the American Enterprise Institute, where he would join a growing number of similarly disaffected Democrats determined to explore

alternative approaches to accomplishing social justice goals; and he found himself from its outset called to serve the Reagan Administration in its global human rights efforts and domestic economic initiatives.

“Four main inquiries drove me in the 1980s,” he recounts:

“1) how to rethink capitalism in a moral and religious language,” an effort that would afford him influence not just in national and international political circles (Margaret Thatcher said of his book, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, “You are doing the most important work in the world”), but also in the Church, where his insights were welcomed by Pope John Paul II;

“2) what are the root concepts of human rights and how are they best protected?” – “by strong associations in free societies” was his answer, which he worked to advance as Ronald Reagan’s ambassador to the UN Commission on Human Rights;

“3) how to … defeat communism in the Soviet Union and China,” which he worked to do on the board of Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe; and

“4) how to break the chains of poverty throughout the world,” which inquiry he terms “my personal favorite,” reinforcing his lifelong commitment to this moral imperative that he knew must transcend partisan politics.

He documents the great strides that have been made worldwide in this effort – “over the last 30 years we have reduced the number of poor in the world by over 1 billion persons”– and observes that the “two propositions” tested over the last, “bloodiest century” have been disproven: that “dictatorship is better for the people than democracy,” and “socialism is better for the people than capitalism.” The opposite, he says, has been proven true: “democracy is better, and capitalism is better.”

Yet amid such progress, he worries about the destructive effects of growing appeals to class envy, and about the cultural factors exacerbating economic deprivation. “Poverty in America (is) no longer characterized solely by low income but also by self-damaging behaviors” which must also be addressed.

Novak warns of a coming “demographic tsunami” brought on by a “de-population” crisis. Low birthrates, and “54 million abortions in the United States since 1973,” he writes, have blasted “a gaping hole” in projected funding for Social Security and Medicare, and threaten shrinking future generations with insurmountable national debt. And he worries that the re-definition of marriage is undermining the state’s ability to preserve an institution essential to “bearing children and nurturing them” in the “civic virtues and skills” essential to an ordered, prosperous society. He also laments the trend toward forcing “the traditional religious heritage of the nation’s institutions and morals … out of the public square” in favor of a secularism that is “not neutral” but “totalitarian” in its ideology.

Of perhaps greatest concern to Novak however, is what he sees as the growing hostility to the kind of “honest argument” that has been his life’s work, and that he knows is essential to building community and working together to develop the most effective responses to the critical issues of our time.

“I am more discouraged in 2013 than I have ever been over the determination of so many to refuse to talk with those with whom they disagree,” he writes.

He is not calling on us to compromise our principles. Rather, he is urging an openness in exploring the most effective ways to implement those principles – for Catholics, the principles of our Church’s social teaching – in service to the common good.

Michael Novak's life story, chronicled so compellingly in this work, shows us how to do that.

Rick Hinshaw is editor of The Long Island Catholic magazine.

The Future Church: Explaining Our Beliefs

Rick Hinshaw

Michael Coren, *The Future of Catholicism*, (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart, 2013)

"The future Church must explain why it thinks what it thinks."

In that one sentence Michael Coren encapsulates, in my view, both the essence and the great challenge for the Church and for all Catholics in our mission to teach and evangelize the faith.

Coren, a convert to the faith, is a prolific Catholic author whose *Why Catholics Are Right* was a national best seller, and who was recently named columnist of the year by the Catholic Press Association. Coren's latest work, *The Future of Catholicism*, seems most appropriately timed, as the Church, led by Pope Francis, ventures onto what many regard as uncharted territory following the quarter-century papacy of John Paul the Great and the eight years of Pope Benedict XVI.

Now we have a new kind of pope, not from Europe but from the western hemisphere; not from the established "first world" but from the developing "third world." And so, from the time of

Pope Francis' election last April, his background, his style, and carefully chosen selections from his speeches, writings and interviews have all stoked an anticipation of major changes in virtually every aspect of the Church's life—its internal governance, its worship practices, its moral and social teachings. This anticipation has occasioned hope and excitement in some circles, fear and dread in others—all depending, of course, on what kinds of changes are anticipated and on who is doing the anticipating.

"The phrase 'We are expecting great things,'" Coren observes, "has varying definitions according to who says it and who hears it. That the secular and non-Catholic world expected great things from Pope Francis means something rather different from the Catholic world expecting the same." To which must be added, of course, that even *within* each of those two different worlds, there will be different definitions of what is meant by "great things," depending on one's perspective and priorities, and what one believes the Church's perspective and priorities ought to be.

Coren illustrates this by describing how Francis, on his first Holy Thursday as pope, rather than simply washing the feet of the faithful in church, ventured out into the community, as he had done in Argentina, to wash the feet of the poor and marginalized—and how, in doing so at a juvenile detention center in Rome, he had broken with the tradition of only washing the feet of men by washing and kissing the feet of two females in detention, one of them a Serbian Muslim woman. This was misunderstood, Coren writes—with presumably quite different reactions—both by mainstream media and "perhaps" by those he terms "ultra conservatives" within the Church.

"This was not novelty, not trendiness, not fashion, not changing with the times, not trying to appear 'relevant,'" he writes. Rather, it was simply "a new way of demonstrating the oldest virtue—the divine paradox of the leader of more than a billion Catholics reminding the world that he was here to

serve."

"The underlying tradition was continued and even extended and magnified," Coren concludes, "but the cosmetics were slightly changed."

Noting how Pope Francis' election occasioned the usual secular media clamor about the possibility of the Church "chang(ing) with the times and alter(ing) its teaching on same sex marriage, abortion, contraception, female ordination, celibate clergy, divorce, and so on," Coren counters correctly that the Church *cannot* "change in its fundamentals"; and shows, with a number of citations from his writings and teachings, Cardinal Bergoglio/Pope Francis' full and firm commitment to those fundamentals.

Yet Michael Coren also argues that the Church can and must adapt its *methods* of communicating its teachings—something that Blessed John Paul espoused constantly, and Pope Benedict modeled in his embrace of the Church's use of social media—because "the world around it, and the context in which it exists, is changing all the time." Coren cites in this context "the post-Reformation Church in the sixteenth century.

"There were some Catholics who looked to the restoration of medievalism" at that time, he writes, "something that could never come." But there were also "younger, reformed and educated Catholics who worked for an intensely faithful but refreshed Catholicism. We know many of them now as saints," he writes, "but they were the new orthodox of their time."

Today, Michael Coren contends, Catholics "have to explain where the Church is rooted in permanent truth and why it cannot change," but they must "just as boldly" explain "where the Church is indeed in need of reform, why this is the case, and how it can be achieved."

Essential to all these endeavors —proclaiming and defending the timeless truths of the Gospel, adapting the presentation

of those truths to make them more accessible in changing times, and identifying and carrying forward needed internal Church reforms—Catholics must, as Michael Coren exhorts, explain *why* the Church thinks as it does.

To do so, however, we must first be certain that we as Catholics know what the Church teaches and why.

It is understandable that Catholics who dissent from certain Church teachings portray those teachings as nothing more than arbitrary, capricious, man-made rules that can be done away with. But we also encounter orthodox Catholics who likewise seem disinterested in probing the depth of Catholic teachings that underlie the "rules." "Just say it's a sin," one such person told me after, as director of my diocesan Office of Family Ministry some years ago, I had undertaken to explain the Church's very positive teachings on love and human sexuality as the basis of its teaching against artificial birth control.

As Pope Benedict taught us, every "no" contained in Catholic teaching is a natural response to a larger, broader, "yes"—our "no" to abortion or euthanasia, for instance, part of a universal "yes" to God's gift of life. Even positive requirements—such as attendance at Sunday Mass, for example—is part of our glorious "yes" to accepting the love of Jesus Christ and His gift to us of His body and blood for our salvation.

As Coren notes, we cannot force anyone to accept what the Church teaches. But we have an obligation as Church to do all we can to assure that everyone—especially those who profess to be Catholic—has the opportunity to clearly understand what it is they are accepting or rejecting. As Coren explains, decades of inadequate catechesis have left many Catholics adrift, coming to conclusions about virtually every aspect of the life of the Church—its history and governance, its worship and sacraments, its teachings on faith and morals, its role in the

public square—with virtually no grounding in the depth of Church teaching that informs Catholic belief and practice in all these areas.

This is well-illustrated by reflecting on Coren's observation that—in contrast to the abortion issue, where polls show increasing numbers of young people to be pro-life— "the Church's opposition to same-sex marriage is particularly difficult for younger Catholics to defend and accept."

Why the difference on these two issues? The observation of a former colleague of mine at *The Long Island Catholic*, that America is a "why not?" culture, may be instructive. If some heretofore verboten behavior is now proposed as acceptable, the common American response is, "Why not?" And if no clear, immediate answer comes to their mind, they assume there is no good reason for continuing the social, or legal, sanction against it.

With abortion, the "why not?" is immediate and obvious—and, as Michael Coren points out, powerfully fortified by modern scientific evidence: every abortion kills a living human baby, brutally and often painfully.

The "why not?" on same sex "marriage" becomes obvious only with an understanding of the natural law—that just as God set in motion natural laws to govern the physical world, He ordained natural *moral* laws, imprinted on every human heart and discernable through the gift of reason, to guide human behavior.

When one applies the natural law—moral *and* physical—to marriage, the natural complementarity between male and female physiology make self-evident God's plan for marriage: that a man and a woman together complete one another, and provide their children with the natural completeness of family. But without a grounding in Catholic teaching and natural law, the answer to the "Why not?" question does not come easily on the

same sex “marriage” issue—even when, instinctively, we sense that there is something not right about it.

Coren offers an easily readable work here that will help readers develop or strengthen our grounding in Catholic teachings, and how they apply to some of the critical issues that challenge the Church now and into the future. He buttresses the strength of his own insights with those of an impressive range of great thinkers past and present, from G.K. Chesterton, Evelyn Waugh and Anne Roche Muggeridge to George Weigel, Robert George, and Mary Eberstadt; from Popes Francis, John Paul II and Benedict XVI to Archbishop Charles Chaput, Father John McCloskey and Rabbi David Dalin; and many, many others.

With their help, he addresses issues of life, marriage and human sexuality; takes on the questions of female ordination and the celibate priesthood; examines challenges to be faced by the papacy in its divinely appointed role as the foundation of the Church; looks specifically at what the leadership of Pope Francis portends for the Church’s future; discusses ecumenical relations with other faith communities; and looks at issues of church and state and the recurring question of the Church’s response to Catholics in politics and government who publicly defy the Church’s moral teachings.

The future Church, Coren explains, will have to “get used to” and “learn to ignore … being accused of arrogance and judgmentalism” for “proclaiming truth.” For as he and his sources remind us, the role of the Church is not to “adapt” its teachings “to society.” Rather, as Chesterton wrote, “each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most.”

Michael Coren gives us great cause for hope as he reports that “respect and awe for the Eucharist is increasing exponentially, miraculously.”

“As long as Catholics hold” to that reverence for the body and

blood of Christ, he concludes, “there will be no defeats that last longer than passing moments.”

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THE HOW AND WHY OF ROE’S RADICAL MANDATE

RICK HINSHAW

Clarke D. Forsythe, *Abuse of Discretion: The Inside Story of Roe v. Wade* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013)

With his extensive background in law, Clarke Forsythe, senior counsel at Americans United for Life, seems the ideal author for a detailed overview of *Roe v. Wade*. In *Abuse of Discretion*, he does not disappoint, providing a comprehensive account of *how* and *why* the Supreme Court justices used Roe – and its often overlooked but equally significant companion case, *Doe v. Bolton* – to impose a radical pro-abortion mandate on the entire nation.

Through what he describes as “a quarter-century of research” – research that included examination of the papers of eight of the nine justices who decided *Roe* – Forsythe analyzes *Roe* and its impact, 40 years later, in the process confirming what many pro-life activists knew instinctively at the time:

- that the ruling was far more sweeping, and radical, than claimed by media and Court members themselves;
- that it resulted *not* from a comprehensive, reasoned analysis of facts, but from an *ideological agenda* pushed by the Court’s most activist members;

- that the justices misused, misunderstood and misrepresented pertinent facts in a range of critically relevant areas, from the history of abortion laws, to medical data and developments, to public opinion regarding abortion;
- that instead of a careful, balanced study of empirical data from various perspectives, the justices relied almost exclusively on *advocacy* pieces produced by pro-abortion activists;
- that the social crises the justices believed legal abortion would help alleviate – poverty, child abuse, out-of-wedlock pregnancies – would grow *worse* in ensuing decades.

Most disturbing is the justices' – especially Justices William O. Douglas and William J. Brennan, Jr. – manipulation of the judicial process to bring about their fore-ordained result: a nationwide mandate legalizing abortion.

This is telegraphed in Brennan's communication to Douglas, in December 1971, that the "right to privacy" Brennan was then positing in a contraception case would prove "useful" later in the abortion cases.

"Brennan knew well the tactic of 'burying bones' – secreting language in one opinion to be dug up and put to use in another one down the road," Forsythe quotes Brennan's former law clerk Edward Lazarus. In this case, Lazarus explained, "Brennan slipped into *Eisenstadt* (the contraception case) the tendentious statement explicitly linking privacy to the decision whether to have an abortion."

Even the targeting of *Roe* and *Doe* – "cases without any factual record addressing the legal, historical, or medical questions involving abortion" – as vehicles to transform the nation's abortion laws was part of this manipulation. The Court had agreed to hear these cases, Forsythe explains, *not* to address the broad issue of abortion laws, but only to clarify a recent

ruling, unrelated to abortion, involving federal jurisdiction to intervene in state criminal proceedings.

Douglas and Brennan, however – "as evidenced by … phone and written exchanges" between them – wanted "to find the best way to get around" such procedural and jurisdictional issues, so they could use *Roe* and *Doe* to advance their pro-abortion agenda. And as Forsythe makes clear, the *absence* of a trial record bearing on legal, historical and medical factors – a record which *other* pending abortion cases did have – would better serve that goal, allowing the justices to substitute pro-abortion advocacy papers for true evidentiary documents.

For example, the justices seemed to take at face value pro-abortion claims that prior to the 19th century abortion was not a crime, and that the purpose of 19th century laws against abortion was solely to protect the mother, not the child *in utero*.

Forsythe documents – dating back to 1200 A.D. – that English common law and American laws based on it have historically restricted abortion to protect unborn children. As for 19th century American laws, he points out, "The Justices did not have to speculate" because "as one legal scholar has summarized the data, there were 'thirty-one decisions from seventeen jurisdictions expressly affirming that their nineteenth century statutes were intended to protect unborn human life, and twenty-seven other decisions from seventeen additional jurisdictions strongly implying the same.'" Forsythe also effectively debunks the related claim that restrictive abortion laws "criminalize women," noting that historically such laws have treated women as "the second victim of abortion."

Ignoring all this, "the Justices relied almost exclusively on the historical revisionism in two articles by Professor Cyril Means" who was general counsel to the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL).

The justices also accepted wildly exaggerated claims regarding the numbers of deaths resulting from illegal abortions – dismissed even by some pro-abortion leaders as "unmitigated nonsense" (Christopher Teitze, statistician for the Population Council); and the "mantra" adopted by Justice Harry Blackmun that legal abortion "is safer than childbirth." In making this assertion, Forsythe observes, Blackmun and Douglas cited a total of only seven medical sources: three papers by prominent abortion activist Teitze; another by a leader of the International Planned Parenthood Federation of London; a letter-to-the-editor from a Czech doctor; and two reports, woefully lacking in reliable empirical data, purporting to prove the assertion through the abortion experiences within the Soviet bloc and New York's less than one year of legalized abortion. Forsythe notes contradictory sources that the justices ignored, showing little interest in true data about the *dangers* to women posed by legal abortion.

Forsythe illustrates the sloppiness of the Court's reasoning with a rather remarkable quote from Blackmun's ruling, as he stumbles through the assertion that abortion is safer than childbirth:

On page 149, Blackmun states that "Mortality rates for women undergoing early abortions, where the procedure is legal, *appear to be* as low or lower than the rates of normal childbirth." Fourteen pages later, Blackmun writes of the "*now-established medical fact*" that, "until the end of the first trimester mortality in abortion *may be less* than mortality in normal child birth."

So, as Forsythe points out, "The 'appear to be' on page 149 becomes an 'established medical fact' on page 163"; but then Blackmun "immediately qualifies the 'established medical fact'" with a "may be." Yet "despite the contradiction in this paragraph, the mantra was taken to be fact by the Justices."

Relying on such one-sided "data," the justices arrived at

Brennan's and Douglas's ultimate goal – overturning the abortion laws of all 50 states. They did so by guiding Justice Blackmun, once he was assigned to write the majority opinion, away from his much more moderate initial inclinations (he had originally found the Georgia statute challenged in *Doe* – which allowed abortion only in cases of fetal deformity, rape and incest, or to protect the mother's life and health – to be "perfectly workable").

Roe and *Doe* mandated legalized abortion for any reason, at any time of gestation. While pro-life activists recognized this immediately, the Court – with enthusiastic media cooperation – promulgated a widely-accepted myth that they had legalized only "early" abortions – a myth that, as Forsythe notes, still has many Americans today claiming to be in favor of *Roe*, while also voicing support for many abortion restrictions that *Roe* has disallowed. Much of the public still does not know how extreme the ruling was.

Forsythe lays it out clearly: *Roe* held that in the first trimester, the only restriction a state may impose is that abortions be done by a licensed physician. The state interest in protecting fetal life during the second trimester is undermined by the Court holding that "viability" – when the child can survive outside the womb (usually not before the *end* of the second trimester) – is the "turning point" when the state may provide some protection for the child. And in *Doe*, the Court included a "health of the mother exception" so broad – and subject to the sole medical judgment of the *abortion provider* – that it renders even third trimester restrictions meaningless. (Forsythe notes how the justices, buying into the slogan that "an abortion should be between a woman and her doctor," did not foresee the explosion of an abortion industry in which the vast majority of women seeking abortions go *not* to their personal physician, but to strangers, abortionists who do not know them or their medical history.)

Forsythe also challenges the perception that Americans are

"polarized" over the abortion issue. He refutes the conventional wisdom – clearly accepted by the *Roe* justices – that the nation at that time was moving inexorably toward widespread public support for reform or repeal of laws protecting the unborn. While 13 states had legislated some reforms between 1967 and 1970, he notes, most had only moderately liberalized their laws, and *none* had gone as far as the Supreme Court did in allowing abortion at any time for any reason. Then in 1971, not one additional state passed legislation loosening prohibitions on abortion. And in 1972 voters in Michigan and North Dakota overwhelmingly defeated referendum proposals to legalize abortion, while New York's elected state representatives voted to *repeal* its liberalized abortion law – which was only sustained by Gov. Nelson Rockefeller's veto. The trend seemed to be shifting away from the brief flurry of liberalized state abortion laws, as the nation began to take a closer look at the reality of abortion and life before birth.

In the ensuing four decades, dramatic advances in medical technology have further enhanced public knowledge of pre-born human life, and further *united* Americans in what surveys increasingly show is a widespread national discomfort with unlimited abortion. Our "polarization," Forsythe shows, is not *between* the vast majority of Americans, but between that vast majority and a Supreme Court that continues to mandate legal abortion at any time for any reason.

Some pro-lifers will be unhappy with Forsythe's concluding vision of a post-Roe America in which, with the issue returned to the states and the people therein, there might result a wide variety of abortion laws: some states "might maintain abortion-on-demand as under Roe," others "might prohibit abortion except to save the life of the mother," and the majority will probably keep abortion legal, but with tighter time limits and more restrictions than *Roe*.

Abuse of Discretion is a work of analysis, however, not

advocacy. And while it reminds us that even should *Roe* be overturned, we will still have much work to do, there is great hope to be taken from Forsythe's analysis. For he confirms what surveys consistently show: that the American people, profoundly uncomfortable with abortion at the time of *Roe*, are even more so now; and while they have not yet arrived at a consensus for securing full Constitutional protection for pre-born human life, they are much closer to that position than they have ever been to the Court's mandate of legal abortion at any time, for any reason.

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A JOURNEY OF CONTINUING CONVERSION

Rick Hinshaw

George Weigel, *Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches,* with Elizabeth Lev and Stephen Weigel (New York: Basic Books, 2013)

When I read *Witness to Hope*, George Weigel's seminal biography on Pope John Paul II, I found I could only absorb it a few pages at a time. So steeped was it in probing the essence of the Holy Father – his faith and spirituality, his theology, philosophy, his understanding of the world – historically, currently, and into the future – that I soon realized if I tried to read it quickly, like a normal historical biography, I would miss so much of what it had to offer. By taking it slowly, I was better able to discern the breadth and depth of Pope John Paul's teachings, and deepen my own faith and spirituality in the process.

Weigel's latest book, *Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches*, is actually *designed* to be read a few pages at a time, as it takes us, day-by-day in very short chapters, through an entire Lenten pilgrimage to the station churches in Rome – and once again, I found myself coming away from each short reading with some new or deepened knowledge of some aspect of the faith, and some renewed spiritual insights and inspiration.

The author sets out for us an "itinerary of conversion" in which the "ancient penitential season that precedes Easter" is joined to "the rediscovery of the baptismal character of Lent," which he credits in large part to "Pope Pius XII's restoration of the Easter vigil and the liturgical reforms mandated by the Second Vatican Council." The penitential "disciplines" of Lent – fasting, almsgiving, intensified prayer – are properly understood, Weigel explains, as an opportunity for the "continuing conversion" to which every baptized Christian is called, and through which we are given the graces to evangelize the faith to others.

Along this pilgrimage, Weigel takes us on a number of different journeys simultaneously.

He takes us through the histories: of the concept of pilgrimage itself, from ancient and Old Testament times to Christian Holy Land pilgrimages that grew during Constantine's rule; of the practice of visiting and praying at the tombs of martyrs that in the early fourth century grew into Lenten pilgrimages to churches built above or around those tombs, and then became formalized as station church pilgrimages led during Lent by the Bishop of Rome; of the decline of the practice, for a variety of reasons, in the early part of the second millennium; and of its resurgence in the 20th century, for which "the greatest impetus" came from American seminarians and student priests studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, who began such a daily Lenten pilgrimage in the mid-1970s, and by the turn of the century were attracting "hundreds of English-speakers from Rome's

universities, diplomatic posts and Anglophone seminaries" to join with them.

He takes us—brilliantly assisted by the photography of Stephen Weigel and the artistic, architectural and historical descriptions of art historian Elizabeth Lev—into each station church, sharing with us their physical magnificence, their rich and sometimes turbulent histories, and the unique spiritual significance of each of them, that integrate together to provide the journey of conversion that is this Lenten pilgrimage.

In each church, Weigel takes us through that particular day of Lent – its Mass and readings, the office of readings for the day, the saint whose feast day it is – and intertwines them with the spiritual and faith-historical significance of that day's particular station church.

For example, on the Wednesday of Holy Week, "as the forces of darkness are closing in" on Jesus, "the Lenten pilgrim's attention is naturally drawn to Mary's 'second *fiat*': the inarticulate, silent *fiat* at the foot of the cross." And so the pilgrimage that day is to the Basilica of St. Mary Major, and leads also to reflection on the "notable developments of Marian doctrine in the Catholic Church" that "deepen our understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the mystery of the Church."

At the book's outset, Weigel tells us that "The station church pilgrimage can be, and in fact is, walked on many levels." So too, this book can be read – and can be enlightening and fulfilling—on many levels: spiritual, historical, cultural, aesthetic, to name just a few. What makes it most compelling, however, is how the reader is transformed from a kind of outside observer of these phenomena, to an active *participant* in the spiritual pilgrimage being taken here. This Weigel does by drawing us into contemplation on how we can – and should – apply each day's pilgrimage experience to our current times –

in our individual lives, but also in our call to evangelize the Gospel in the modern world – as part of our own Lenten itinerary of conversion.

For example, reflecting on the reading from Exodus for the second Monday of Lent, in which the fleeing Israelites fear they are about to be overtaken by the pursuing Egyptians, "Moses," Weigel writes, "responds as Jesus did (in the previous day's Gospel) to the terrified disciples who hid from his glory" in the Transfiguration: "Be not afraid"; or, "as one translation has it, 'Fear not, stand firm. And see the salvation of the Lord.'"

In America today, we know that we too are called to "stand firm" against forces hostile to our faith, who seem to grow ever more aggressive in their attacks not only on our beliefs, but on our right to act on or even express those beliefs in the public square; and, increasingly, on our right to even live those beliefs in our own lives, free of government imposition.

But Weigel also reflected on how "the call to 'stand fast' can inspire an examination of conscience on a far more mundane challenge: our response to petty aggravation or general obnoxiousness."

That resonated with me as I thought back to the guidance a priest gave me some years ago, when I shared with him how sinful feelings of anger and hostility, over what I perceived as an injustice being done to me and to others, were getting the better of me. He advised me to spend some time in front of the first station of the cross, where Jesus stands before Pilate and is condemned to death, and to meditate on our Lord's humble acceptance of that greatest act of injustice in the history of the world. The priest wasn't dismissing my sense of injustice; he was helping me to respond to it with humility rather than anger, by following our Lord's example, reflecting on my own sinfulness, and "standing fast" against

overreaction on my part to a comparatively minor grievance. Excellent guidance to follow any time, but particularly during Lent, as we meditate on Christ's suffering and death in reparation for *our* sins.

On Thursday of the first week of Lent, Weigel uses the Gospel from Matthew ("Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you…") to reflect on what he terms "arguably *the* characteristic spiritual malady of the twenty-first-century Western world": "*acedia*," which he defines as "the kind of world-weariness that comes, not from spiritual detachment, but from boredom: a lack of interest in life born of cynicism."

"Given the pervasive cynicism in postmodern Western culture," he writes, "the milder forms of *acedia* are a perennial temptation, surrender to which is a point on which consciences might well be examined in this first stage of the Forty Days." Those who do so, he suggests, will find the answer in the "divine generosity" that Jesus offers in the Gospel reading from Matthew.

Weigel takes us through Holy Week, through what he aptly terms "the ultimate pilgrimage": our Lord's passion, death, and Easter Sunday Resurrection. The station church pilgrimage does not end there, however. It continues through Easter Week, the oft-neglected Octave of Easter, "which is really Easter extended for seven more days," he explains. Noting how Pilate, on handing Jesus over to be crucified, proclaimed sarcastically, "*Ecce homo*—'Here is the man!'" Weigel writes that throughout the Easter Octave, that is exactly what the Church is proclaiming: that Christ, indeed, is "the man" — "the man in whom the world's destiny is embodied"; the man "in whom humanity is reborn", who has "overcome death, trampled the powers of hell underfoot, and restored hope to suffering humanity."

And all who have completed this pilgrimage—indeed, all who have rediscovered the baptismal character of Lent, and so

embarked on the journey of continuing conversion, should now be filled with that hope in Christ, and inspired to share it with a world so desperately in need of it.

This book is certainly a fine tool for embarking on that journey of continuing conversion. Obviously, anyone traveling to Rome should not leave home without it. (It even includes maps by which to locate each of the station churches.) But even for those not able to be physically in Rome, *Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches* is a kind of spiritual travelogue that will take the reader on an inspiring Lenten journey of faith and renewal.

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HOLLYWOOD AND HITLER

Rick Hinshaw

Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013)

It's quite easy – and quite morally offensive – for those safely removed in time and place from the horrors of Hitler's genocide to point fingers of blame at others – the German people, the Holy See (despite compelling evidence to the contrary), even victims of the Holocaust – for not doing enough to stop it.

But what if there were powerful people who – themselves safely removed from Hitler's terror – not only failed to use their

power to oppose him, but actively collaborated with the Nazis, and for the basest of motives: financial gain.

Such is the thoroughly documented case that Ben Urwand, a junior fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University, lays out against all of the major Hollywood studios.

The roots of this collaboration lay in Hitler's recognition of the propaganda value of film.

Sometimes, propaganda value was found in American films produced for entertainment. For example, the Nazis found "strong National Socialist tendencies" in films like "The Lives of a Bengal Lancer" (1935) and "Mr. Deeds goes to Town" (1936); positive portrayals of fascism's "leader principle" in such movies as "Our Daily Bread" (1934) and "Mutiny on the Bounty" (1935); and effective satirizing of democracy in "Mr. Smith goes to Washington" (1939).

While American companies were marketing such movies in Germany to make money, not provide Nazi propaganda, they seemed little concerned when that happened; for as Urwand notes, "ever since MGM's "Gabriel over the White House" (1933) the Hollywood studios had released one pro-fascist film after another – films that expressed dissatisfaction with the slowness and inefficiency of the democratic form of government."

More flagrant was the controlling influence Hollywood – anxious to preserve its lucrative German market – allowed Nazi Germany to exert in drastically altering numerous American movie scripts, and completely quashing the production of others.

The stage had been set in 1930, several years before Hitler came to power, when the Nazis fomented national opposition to the portrayal of Germany in Universal Pictures' "All Quiet on the Western Front." When the German government banned the film – negating what one Universal representative said would have been "a huge financial success" – Universal president Carl

Laemmle presented a new, heavily edited version. When told it could be approved for screening in Germany only if he instructed all Universal branches throughout the world to make the same cuts to the film, he agreed.

"The Nazis' actions against "All Quiet on the Western Front," Urwand writes, "set off a chain of events that lasted over a decade. Not only Universal Pictures but all the Hollywood studios started making deep concessions to the German government, and when Hitler came to power in January 1933, the studios dealt with his representatives directly." That meant dealing with Georg Gyssling, a German diplomat and Nazi party member who was dispatched to Los Angeles as a "permanent representative …to work directly with the studios on all movies relating to Germany."

Gyssling was a hard-liner, and he had at his disposal "Article Fifteen" of Germany's 1932 movie quota law, stating, as Urwand explains, that "if a company distributed an anti-German picture anywhere in the world, that company would no longer be granted import permits for the German market."

Gyssling immediately targeted Warner Brothers' "Captured," a film set in a German prison camp during World War I. There was "hardly anything" in the film "to which Gyssling did not object." Although Warner Brothers made some of Gyssling's demanded cuts, the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin denounced "Captured" as a hate film and invoked Article Fifteen, closing the German market to Warner Brothers.

The message was received. "For the remainder of the decade," Urwand writes, "the studios still doing business in Germany were very careful to remain on good terms with Georg Gyssling. Every time they embarked on a potentially threatening production, they received one of his letters reminding them of the terms of Article Fifteen." In response, "they did not make the same mistake as Warner Brothers. They simply invited Gyssling to the studio lot to preview the film in question,

and they made all the cuts that he requested. In an effort to keep the market open for their films … they were collaborating with Nazi Germany." The collaboration was especially evident in efforts to emasculate – or kill – the few film scripts in 1930s Hollywood that portrayed the evils of Nazi Germany. And it was aided by the obsequiousness of the Hays Office, the organization headed by Will Hays "that represented the major Hollywood studios."

In 1933, when RKO – which did not do business in Germany – tried to make "The Mad Dog of Europe," about Hitler's persecution of the Jews, the producers, Urwand reports, were told by Hays "that their activities were endangering the business of the major Hollywood studios" in Germany. When Hollywood agent Al Rosen obtained the rights to the film, he said he had it "on good authority" that Gyssling had approached the Hays organization "to use its influence with the producers in Hollywood to make me stop the production." Rosen vowed to go forward but he was unable to raise financial support from Holly-wood's powerful executives, with Louis B. Mayer, head of MGM, telling him, "I represent the picture industry here in Hollywood … we have terrific incomes in Germany and, as far as I am concerned, this picture will never be made." It wasn't.

"The first crucial moment in the studios' dealings with the Nazis," writes Urwand, "was one of pure collaboration: the studios collectively boycotted the anti-Nazi film "The Mad Dog of Europe" to preserve their business interests in Germany."

When, in 1936, "MGM planned to assemble some of its greatest talent" to bring to the screen Sinclair Lewis' novel, *It Can't Happen Here* – "the most important anti-fascist work to appear in the United States in the 1930s," Urwand calls it – the Hays Office issued dire warnings that the film "would have damaging impact on Hollywood's foreign markets."

"Mr. Hays says that a film cannot be made showing the horrors

of fascism and extolling the advantages of liberal democracy," Lewis said after MGM cancelled production, "because Hitler and Mussolini might ban other Hollywood films from their countries if we were so rash. I wrote, "'It Can't Happen Here,'" Lewis added, "but I begin to think it certainly can."

The studios were also complicit in Nazi efforts to purge Jews from the film industry. In March 1933, the American film companies in Germany, pressured by the Nazi-affiliated Salesmen's Syndicate, pulled their Jewish workers off the job – first temporarily, then permanently. Ultimately a compromise was worked out, whereby the companies were granted exemptions for their "most desirable Jewish salesmen." "The rest," Urwand reports, "had to go."

"U.S. film units yield to Nazis on Race Issue," was the headline in "Variety," which reported, "American attitude on the matter is that American companies cannot afford to lose the German market at this time no matter what the inconvenience of personnel shifts."

In 1936, Urwand recounts, Germany's chief censor, Dr. Ernst Seeger, announced that "the American companies could not bring in pictures employing Jews in any capacity." This coincided with what one commentator described as "the almost complete disappearance of the Jew from American fiction, stage, radio and movies." While this was due at least in part, Urwand explains, to a desire to damp down anti-Semitic reaction in America, for the Hollywood studios it dovetailed nicely with their efforts to please their Nazi business partners.

Their desire to purge Jews from the film industry did not, Urwand points out, preclude the Nazis from doing business with major Hollywood studios, many of them headed by Jews; nor, Urwand laments, did it stop these Jewish film executives from doing business with the Nazis.

"The excuse of ignorance can immediately be ruled out," he

states. “The Hollywood executives knew exactly what was going on in Germany, not only because they had been forced to fire their own Jewish salesmen but also because the persecution of the Jews was common knowledge at the time.” At this very time, “the largest Jewish organization in the United States, the American Jewish Congress,” was sounding the alarm and calling for a boycott on German goods.

The Nazis also benefited from the studios’ efforts to get around a 1933 law that prohibited foreign companies from taking their money out of Germany. Paramount and Twentieth Century-Fox produced newsreels of Nazi events inside Germany, which they could sell around the world. The newsreels, predictably, brought the world staged, positive Nazi propaganda. MGM, which did not do newsreels, devised another scheme. In 1938, they began loaning money to certain German firms, receiving in exchange bonds they could sell abroad. However, the firms they were loaning money to, the American trade commissioner pointed out, “are connected to the armament industry especially in the Sudenten territory or Austria. “

“In other words,” Urwand writes, “the largest American motion picture company helped to finance the German war machine.”

Ben Urwand has presented a damning account of what he correctly terms “a dark chapter in Hollywood history” and “a dark chapter in American history.”

Some might be inclined, more than 70 years later, to echo Hillary Clinton’s take on Benghazi: “What difference does it make at this point?”

It makes a difference, first of all, because all history makes a difference, if told truthfully and learned from. It makes a difference because it dramatizes the terrible evil that results when material gain is pursued at all cost, in utter disregard for human life, human rights and human freedom. It makes a difference because – as the September *Catalyst* noted –

Hollywood today is engaged in exactly the same kind of collaboration with another oppressive, inhuman regime, Communist China.

It makes a difference because it never should have happened—and we need to know that it did. It makes a difference because it should never happen again—and we need to know that it is.

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CATHOLICISM'S RISE, FALL, AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE

KENNETH D. WHITEHEAD

Russell Shaw, *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013).

This new book of Russell Shaw's on the "American Church" is the best available current account that you are likely to find describing what the Catholic Church in America has become today and where she stands. It is readable, fast-paced, and accurately sourced. The author writes from a solidly orthodox standpoint; he believes the faith and loves the Church; and he is also quite knowledgeable about his chosen subject, occasionally even adding an insider's revelation (he was in charge of media relations for the American Catholic bishops for 18 years). Although he is quite critical of some recent trends in the Catholic Church in America today, as the title

of his book indicates, he is most distinctly not one of those carping liberal critics who thinks that the Church has got to "change" in order "to keep up with the times."

Quite the contrary. He sees and views with no little alarm some of the results of the "Americanization" of Catholicism which has brought with it widespread attitudes and practices by some American Catholics that are simply incompatible with traditional and authentic Catholic belief and practice. In becoming assimilated to American life and society—in striving to prove that "good Catholics" could indeed be "good Americans"—many American Catholics have ended up buying into some American practices and attitudes that diverge, sometimes sharply, from what the Church continues to teach and enjoin.

From Catholic politicians who say they are "personally opposed" to abortion, but who nevertheless publicly promote it, to the Catholic married couples who employ forbidden birth control methods, these Catholics are actually demonstrating that Americanization has not resulted in maintaining their Catholic faith and practice. While there was a time when it could be argued that American democracy was for the most part quite compatible with true Catholicism, today's galloping decadence and moral decline—Shaw calls it "toxic"—render increasingly difficult, if not impossible, the notion that today's brand of "Americanism" can be considered compatible with authentic Catholicism.

But the author's concern for the Church in America is not confined to the contemporary scene. He goes back to the beginnings of the Church in this country and shows how the successive waves of Catholic immigrants to these shores from Ireland, Germany, and later from Italy and Eastern Europe, brought about the "remarkable rise" of Catholicism in what was originally almost entirely a Protestant America. This rise was remarkable, and yet the bishops and the religious orders of the day largely succeeded in keeping the large number of Catholics who arrived in this country as loyal sons and

daughters of the Church. At the same time, this same leadership saw the absence of any state religion in the United States as an opportunity for the advancement of Catholicism. Such figures as Father Isaac Hecker, founder of the Paulist Fathers, actually thought America was ripe for conversion to Catholicism.

This hope and estimate proved to be overly optimistic (as the author shows, the "public intellec- tual" and convert, Orestes Brownson, realized this at the time). In chronicling the establishment of a flourishing Catholicism in America, however, Shaw focuses on the career of James Cardinal Gibbons. The archbishop of Baltimore from 1877 until his death in 1921, Gibbons was the principal leader of the American bishops who successfully advocated assimilation to the American way. Catholics need to know this history if they are to understand the Church today, and Shaw has provided a convenient and accurate summary of its main features.

A major theme of Shaw's book, in fact, deals with what he calls the "Gibbons Legacy." Indeed, references to this phrase by both the author and by Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., in the latter's introduction, suggest that it was the original title of the book. However that may be, Shaw's treatment of Cardinal Gibbons, and of episcopal colleagues of his such as the archbishop of St. Paul, John Ireland, results in a ready and understandable explanation of how the Church in America developed.

Throughout his narrative, the author is also conscious of how the Church in America is related to the universal Church, and he provides a brief but clear account of such little understood issues as the so-called "Americanist heresy." Noting how Pope Leo XIII in his *Testem Benevolentiae* of 1899 judged that what the pope styled "Americanism" was unacceptable from a true Catholic standpoint, Shaw shows how the seeds of today's liberal Catholicism and dissent from Catholic teaching were already present in the original drive

for Americanization and assimilation to American culture. That this American culture would eventually become transformed into the secularist, materialist, and relativist system which we see today—and which plainly diverges from anything acceptable to Catholic orthodoxy—was something that Leo XIII feared all along, but which the American bishops of the Gibbons type apparently did not see or anticipate. Meanwhile, however, American Catholics allowed to go by the board, and even sometimes dismantled, many of the Church structures and practices that had traditionally buttressed the faith and practice of Catholics.

In illustrating what in his title he calls the "meteoric fall" of the Church in America, Shaw correctly cites the spectacular drops in Mass attendance and other sacramental participation. Similarly, he takes note of the mass defections of priests and religious that followed Vatican Council II, and the large numbers of the laity that have strayed. No less than 22 million Catholics have left the Church—one in three of those who were once Catholic. Ex-Catholics constitute the second largest "denomination" in America after the Catholic community itself!

Among other polls, Shaw instances the 2011 survey which found that even among Catholics who describe themselves as "highly committed" to the Church, some 49 percent say it is possible to be a "good Catholic" while deliberately missing Mass on Sundays; 60 percent disagree with the Church's teaching forbidding birth control; 46 percent dissent from the teaching against divorce and remarriage; and even 31 percent disagree with the Church's firm teaching against abortion. The author cites yet other polls in the same vein, and this, along with not a little anecdotal evidence that he mentions in passing, perhaps understandably, leads to the conclusion that the future of the Church in America is "uncertain."

And certainly, there is the added fact that a majority of American Catholics voted for the radically pro-abortion Barack

Obama, while America's premier Catholic institution of higher education, the University of Notre Dame, actually awarded this same pro-abortion president an honorary degree, thereby going directly against the announced position of the American bishops that Catholic institutions should not honor those who speak and act against Catholic teaching.

Following the massive public dissent from Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* by Catholic theologians—and the equally massive shift in the behavior of the Catholic laity in the 1960s and 1970s—it seemed that "some form of 'liberal' or 'progressive' Catholicism, freed from (or, more neutrally, disengaged from) the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the past, would emerge as the 'serious' Catholicism of the future." This did seem to be the case to many observers, and not a few of them apparently continue to believe pretty much the same thing today. On the basis of the facts, arguments, and statistics adduced by Shaw, then, it is not easy to dismiss out of hand his conclusion that the future of the Catholic Church in America is indeed "uncertain."

Students of Catholic history, however, aware of the Catholic Church's well-known and often-demonstrated ability to revive after periods of decline, and like the phoenix bird to rise again out of the ashes, have in very recent years been able to point to many signs of revival. The pontificates of both Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI have been particularly positive in helping to inspire such a revival. For example, the issuance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the early 1990s, along with the revision of the Roman Missal later in the same decade, as well as the new English liturgical translations, have been particularly influential in helping restore both authenticity and greater stability to contemporary Catholic faith and practice in the United States. In other words, there is hope. The pontificate of Pope Francis seems to be shaping up in the same way. The Catholic Church is, after all, still the true Church of Christ, who promised

to be with her “always”(Mt 28:20).

Shaw mentions some of the signs of this revival. They include: new Catholic schools and colleges that are truly Catholic; reversion to a more authentic Catholic character by some of the older institutions that had gone astray; new media ventures such as EWTN and Catholic radio; new periodicals and publishers, as well as the new Catholic Internet; new orders, institutes, and organizations promoting Catholic spirituality, causes such as the pro-life and pro-family movements; the appearance of a new generation of gung-ho “John Paul II priests”; and, above all, bishops standing up to the current secularist juggernaut in areas such as healthcare, marriage, and the like. The response of the Catholic people generally to the bishops’ call for resistance to the HHS mandate is particularly noteworthy.

There are signs, then, that the Catholic Church in America does have a future. This future no doubt remains “uncertain,” as Shaw contends. But there are also many grounds for hope. Shaw’s book, *American Church*, is thus eminently worth reading: it allows us to see where we have been and where we are. Where we are going is still in God’s hands—and in ours!

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Russell Shaw serves on the board of advisors of the Catholic League, and is the author of numerous books and articles.

MYTHS ABOUT CHRISTIAN NON-PERSECUTION

Robert Royal

At the present moment, Christians are the most widely persecuted religious group in the world. They are forbidden normal freedom to practice or attacked for explicitly religious reasons in Muslim countries from Algeria across North Africa, throughout the Middle East, into Pakistan and Indonesia. In other countries, such as China, Christians of various kinds exist and even continue to grow in numbers, but are subject to political control intended to keep them from becoming a potential force for reform as they did in Poland, the Philippines, and Latin America in the twentieth century. The Chinese Communists are quite aware of the role Solidarity and John Paul II played in the fall of the Soviet Union, and that is one among several reasons they are determined to keep a lid on Christianity, even going so far as to establishing a Patriotic Catholic Church to compete with the historic Catholicism in communion with Rome.

The motives for these persecutions—and sometimes outright martyrdom—vary, as you well might expect, depending on multiple factors. And there are several nations in the developed world that practice subtler forms of discriminations and government control: witness our own American government's misguided efforts to impose healthcare guidelines on religious institutions, which violate their settled moral principles. But the fact and scope of anti-Christian persecution is beyond all doubt. Non-partisan human rights organizations report on it, in detail, annually. And former French President Nicholas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel—neither exactly the kind of right-wing Christian extremist that the media love to mock—have both pronounced Christianity "the most persecuted religion in the world."

Which makes it quite odd that Candida Moss, a professor at Notre Dame, has just published *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. In the main, her book deals with misconceptions about early persecution and martyrdom, but her real goal—beyond what is essentially a series of technical debates among scholars of the early Church—is to dispel a dangerous "myth," as she would have it, which she claims is not merely "academic":

The view that the history of Christianity is a history of unrelenting persecution persists in modern religious and political debate about what it means to be Christian. It creates a world in which Christians are under attack; it endorses political warfare rather than encouraging political discourse; and it legitimizes seeing those who disagree with us as our enemies. It is precisely because the myth of persecution continues to be so influential that it is imperative that we get the history right.

All those persecuted Christians around the world noted above might think this a merely "academic" reading of their plight indeed. And to be fair to Professor Moss, her aim seems less to deny them than to block Christians in America from vigorous action to defend what they see as threats to their beliefs and institutions. She couches her point in a way that it would be difficult to disagree with. Christians should not believe that they have "always and everywhere," "relentlessly," and "constantly," been suffering under persecution. That is simply not true, as she rightly argues. But outside of a rather slender sect of scholars – the kind that generally gathers impressions of what traditional Christians believe from the most extreme statements of a very few that are deliberately highlighted in the liberal media—who ever believed such a thing? The most rabid Christian culture warrior knows that the anti-Christians lay low or take a break now and then.

If Professor Moss were to extend her efforts at a generous understanding—which she so clearly wishes to do to

contemporary Muslims and even ancient pagan figures—to the large numbers of Christians she's actually living among, she might be surprised to find that they are not bent on "sacred violence," don't even have a jaundiced view of, say, Muslims as a whole. But they can read and think. And they know pretty well where the HHS mandates are headed or where something like the Boston bombings came from.

The latter wasn't from Christian discrimination against Muslims—the Tsarnaev brothers had many American friends and did rather well here in academics and sports. It wasn't from economic stress—the family pulled in hundreds of thousands of dollars for rent and food from Massachusetts's welfare agencies. It was from an Islamist ideology of the sort that academic discourse or "dialogue" can do little to affect. The reason we even have police, FBI, military services, and intelligence agencies is precisely because some malefactors can only be stopped with the appropriate and justified use of force.

And even in domestic terms, are the Christians really the ones most to blame and most offending in today's culture clashes? Do we practice "sacred violence," which Dr. Moss sees in many places? And does a long "myth" of persecution play a significant role in whatever problem Professor Moss thinks she detects?

In fact, she has really tried to write two books that don't have much to do with one another.

In one, a trained scholar of early Christianity applies the historical/critical method developed over the past several centuries by Scripture scholars to raise doubts about the truth of all but a handful of early Christian martyrdom accounts. Like the use of this method in search of the "historical Jesus," the results largely reflect the presuppositions the writer brings to the task. Close reading of any text, even a formal legal filing, can be used to

increase doubts about how it all fits together—if at all. Scholarly conclusions, therefore, are more often than not reserved and skeptical, not only as to the words and acts of early Christians, including Jesus, but about how the Church received the history, interpreted it, and passed it on.

In Professor Moss's other book, however, which is to say the one she has written in her opening and closing chapters along with a sprinkling of editorializing comments throughout, a trained scholar of early Christianity steps into current debates about the legal penalizing, sometimes bordering on persecution, that traditional Christians routinely suffer in modern societies. She isn't particularly well informed about this side of things—whether in this country or abroad—and has very little sympathy for those very fellow Christians who, rightly or wrongly, do very much feel—not without considerable evidence—that ominous developments are under way.

Professor Moss writes, she believes, from the highest motives: the wish to find common ground together, to work towards the good of all across partisan and religious lines. But she, like many another liberal thinker, has all the proportions—outside the academy—simply wrong. You won't need to break a sweat looking for extreme statements by talk-radio hosts, politicians, the occasional bishop. But whereas Moss would extend the hand of liberal understanding to the most destructive of Muslim terrorists—we should understand why they want to do what they do to us—there's no similar sympathy to Americans, Christians, Westerners more generally who believe they are being wronged.

And it's hard not to believe that this bias warps more than one interpretation of the ancient material. For example, the "heretical" early Gnostics, Professor Moss assures us, never really existed as a "coherent movement." This is a very carefully formulated, almost lawyer-like scholarly assessment. But when it comes to the opponents' views—i.e., the reactions of traditional Christians who lived a lot closer to these

Gnostic movements than any modern scholar—the judgment is much broader and "judgmental." The idea that the Gnostics presented serious threats were "the product of paranoid orthodox invective." How we know this after all this time is less clear than the doubts about embroidered stories of martyrdom. At the same time, despite their non-existence, we learn a few lines later that the Gnostics might be taken in some of their unorthodox texts such as the Gospel of Judas as examples of "a more moderate and reasonable form of ancient Christianity for post 9/11 Christians."

Say what? The early Christians no doubt editorialized in the martyr stories to make Christian points. But in many respects, whatever their editorial interventions, they were recounting something that their fellow Christians could have no trouble recognizing was plausible. Compared to their narratives, Professor Moss's transmuting of ancient literary material into fodder that can be put to use for contemporary political maneuvers borders on sheer invention. To ask an embarrassing question, why exactly do we need to debunk stories of the early martyrs if all we're really after is trying to talk contemporary Christians out of the notion that they should engage in "dialogue" with anti-Christian culture and with the perpetrators of the recent wave of Islamist terrorism? Professor Moss presents no convincing case for linking the two, because there isn't one—not a good one, anyway.

Professor Moss is using some doubtful material about Christian persecution and martyrdom to do exactly what? Is the U. S. involved in drone-strikes, even under the liberal Obama Administration, because Christians are being persecuted and martyred in Pakistan (as they most certainly are)? No. Did we invade Afghanistan and drive out the Taliban because they persecuted Christians along with Hindus, Buddhists, and others? No. Do we bomb southern Somalia solely because it's persecuting and slaughtering Christians, which it is? No.

Some Christians might think these would all be justified use

of force in humanitarian relief of a persecuted religious minority. But we haven't acted for those reasons and are unlikely to. So what are the reasons for these warnings about Christian self-righteousness and "sacred violence"?

She and her endorsers seem most to lament a lack of "compassion and dialogue today" because Christians are so self-righteous and so wedded to the notion that they are always and everywhere victims, that they are unwilling to talk with those with a differing faith and different view of the world. Everyone has to judge these complex questions with such lights as God grants, but is it really the case – outside some academic framing of our current situation – that our actively violent enemies want to talk and all we want to do is bomb, and that because we're martyrdom–obsessed Christians? There are myths of persecution and myths of a lack of persecution. Professor Moss has chosen to write a new chapter in the latter mold.

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MODERN MARTYRDOM

Patrick J. McNamara, Ph.D.

Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity," wrote the author Tertullian in the third century A.D. Tertullian was writing as the early Church was being persecuted by the Roman

emperors. Today when we in the West think of Christian persecutions, we often envision an arena with hungry lions and a blood-thirsty crowd. In short, we tend to think of it as something that happened long ago.

It isn't. It's happening right now as we speak. Yet we don't hear much about it. The fact is, as authors Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea note in their new book *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, "Christians are the single most persecuted religious group in the world today." That's not a matter of opinion: they aptly cite sources as divergent as the Pew Research Center and the Vatican. The European Bishops' Conference, for example, notes seventy-five percent of "acts of religious intolerance" are directed against Christians worldwide.

The authors know their subject well. Marshall is connected with the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and has lectured widely on the subject. Gilbert is an award-winning journalist and author whose focus is religion. Shea is a lawyer specializing in international human rights. They dedicate their book to religious freedom, the "first freedom," without which other freedoms fall apart; it is a necessity to "the preservation of human dignity and the flourishing of the person." We in the West take this for granted.

The authors look at the following groups:

•The world's last communist states: China, Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea and Laos.
•Former communist states, such as Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
•Countries with a large Hindu/Buddhist population.
•Countries with a predominantly Muslim population.

While persecution occurs elsewhere, it's in the above that they're most frequent and intense. All Christian groups are oppressed in one way or another: Catholic, Protestant and

Orthodox. The late Pope John Paul II called this an “Ecumenism of the Martyrs.” It’s not missionaries who are being persecuted, but the indigenous Christian population. (Most missionaries actually head to America for their immigrant co-religionists who emigrated there.)

In his foreword to the book, Eric Metaxas, author of a bestselling biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor martyred by the Nazis, writes:

“Those of us who live in the West don’t experience anything along these lines, and most of us are deeply ignorant of the sufferings of our brethren around the world. Indeed, as we read these words now, millions suffer. And we have been blessed with such a bounty of religious freedom that we can hardly imagine what such suffering must be like.”

It’s not a pretty picture. The authors describe North Korea as “today’s most intense persecutor of Christians,” where people are executed or sent to prison camps merely for possessing a Bible. In China, the government has brought about a schism within the Catholic Church, arbitrarily appointing bishops without Vatican approval. It also forces women to act against their con- sciences by having forced abortions. Protest is met with imprisonment. However, China’s “stock answer is that people are not punished for their religious faith but for breaking the law.” China may have the largest growing Christian population in the world (some estimate 100 million).

Vietnam maintains an equally tight control over churches, including a state-sponsored church. The Christian population is also expanding here. Laos has been called a “mini-Vietnam,” with government crackdowns in the mainly Buddhist nation not uncommon. From 1959 to 1992, Cuba, a traditionally Catholic nation, was officially atheist (now Cuba calls itself secular). Tight control is still the rule, with a state-sponsored Protestant Cuban Council of Churches (CCC).

In former Communist nations, registration and surveillance are keywords. In Uzbekistan, a largely Muslim nation, religious literature cannot be distributed without a license, which is practically impossible to get. Belarus has been called "Europe's last dictatorship." While religious freedom is ostensibly guaranteed, it's practically impossible to register for normal religious activity. Although particular restrictions may vary from region to region, in general, the authors note, "the laws of the former Soviet republics are both harsh and ambiguous, and those in authority often act arbitrarily."

In south Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism are the main religions (Christianity also has a long history there). While both faiths have a history of peaceful coexistence with neighbors, there's also a history of militant exclusivism (the authors note this isn't the predominant pattern). Examples include the Hindu nationalist movement Sangh Parivar ("family of organizations") and the radical Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya party in Sri Lanka. In some areas of India, there are anticonversion laws, as well as communal acts of violence directed against Christian minorities. Discrimination also exists. In 2003, an order of Catholic nuns in Sri Lanka was prohibited from legal incorporation. The judge argued that there was no fundamental right to propagate a religion, and that Christian expansion would "impair the very existence of Buddhism."

Nowhere is Christian persecution more intense or widespread than the Muslim world. In Turkey, Christian communities (which form .015% of the population) face "a dense web of legal regulations that thwart the ability of churches to survive and, in some cases, even to meet together for worship." Saudi Arabia allows no churches of any kind; the "Christian community consists almost entirely of foreign workers and diplomats."

Iran, the authors write, is "one of the world's worst

religious persecutors.” In its government, Islamic clergy have a prominent place. Religious discrimination is not banned. The penalty for killing women and non-Muslims is less than that for killing a Muslim male. Jews and Orthodox Christians may not hold military commissions or government positions. In recent years the arrest of Christians has increased for alleged conspiracy. Converts are routinely arrested. The authors contend the United States has focused more on Iran’s potentiali- ty for developing nuclear weapons than its religious persecution. In the case of Saudi Arabia, a strategic ally and supplier of a fourth of the world’s oil, America has been reluctant to protest on religious matters.

In other countries, the threat of persecution is increasing. In Iraq, the main threat comes not from the government, but from terrorists and extremists. The Arab Spring of 2011, a series of revolutionary uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, has not boded well for the Christian population of those countries. Islamist regimes have brought greater danger than ever before. This is a major problem for peace, especially in the Middle East, and in more ways than one. For example, Charles Malik, who played a major role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notes that these Christian communities have helped encourage “Islamic openness and moderation, creating an environment of pluralism that fosters open acknowledgement of the different other.” Once gone, widespread intolerance can’t be far.

There is also the question of anti-Christian abuses far different from those in Communist, post-Communist, Islamic and other regimes. In Burma and Eritrea, we see militant regimes determined to wipe out any type of opposition. In Ethiopia, long a Christian country, Muslims are making significant inroads and directing violence against local Christians. The message is quite clear throughout this book; as one witness put it, there are many parts of the world where Christians are becoming an “endangered species.” Then there are other areas,

like China, where Christianity is growing in unprecedented numbers. But this expansion is taking place there under the aegis of state-sponsored oppression.

The sources used in this book are extremely reliable. There are no polemical anecdotes here; there's just hard fact. The U.S. International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), which they describe as "[o]ne of the great successes of past political mobilization against religious persecution," mandated that the State Department publish annual reports of religious persecution throughout the world. These are the sources for many of the incidents described in this book. The authors write: "They have official stature and are relied upon throughout the world." Add to this the writing and work of the three authors, and it makes for powerful reading.

The authors conclude this impressive work with a "call to action." They call for use of the presidential "bully pulpit," whereby the President of the United States calls attention to human rights abuses involving religious intolerance. It's a tool that's gone largely silent under the present administration. There are other suggestions:

"We, as citizens living in freedom, are not powerless. Sometimes within our given circumstances we are able to take steps on our own to help: as diplomats or members of the international business community, or as ordinary people by starting social media or Internet campaigns, by organizing mass letter writing and petitions to oppressive governments abroad, or by using music and art to raise awareness."

The authors are quick to point out that this isn't just an issue that concerns Christians alone, nor even religious people alone. It's an issue that involves all: "We believe that all citizens of any or no religion should be equally concerned with the persecution of people of any or no religion."

This is an important book, and a well written one. It reads quick- ly, even if the contents are sometimes hard to process. Once again, it’s hard for us in the West, where we often take our freedom (particularly our religious freedom) for granted, to process everything contained herein. But it’s important that we do, because it’s an issue that concerns all of us, believers and non-believers. And we need to remember that we have a moral obligation to lessen the plight of our brothers and sisters worldwide, in any way we can. Persecution isn’t just something that happened long ago in ancient Rome: it’s happening right now. And we need to do something about it.

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