

Garry Wills: Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit

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It is a sad phenomenon of modern America that too often self-identified Catholics display anti-Catholicism or anti-Catholic rhetoric in the public arena. Anti-Catholic statements from Catholics, or those with Catholic roots, may seem to be an oxymoron. But it exists and those Catholics that engage in such inflammatory rhetoric against their own faith rarely see it as bigotry. Influenced by the dominant secular culture, they see anti-Catholicism as a product of enlightened thought, rather than an inherited prejudice.¹ Worse still, by the very nature of their Catholic background, their remarks gain a certain cachet in secular circles that would otherwise ignore them if the source were non-Catholic.

Generally, anti-Catholicism from Catholics comes from three particular sources. We begin with the "Uncle Pats."² These are Catholics who find Catholic beliefs and practices embarrassing in an age of enlightened secularism. Usually they are converts to contemporary agnosticism who consider themselves far too learned to practice the faith, yet identify themselves by their Catholic heritage. They do their best to show the secular world that they have "grown" by taking visceral pleasure in publicly denigrating Catholicism. When challenged for mocking Catholicism, their response is that they are "Catholic," though their practice of the faith might be minimal or non-existent.

Then there are those raised Catholic who convert to fundamentalist sects. Not all, of course, but too many of these former Catholics find it necessary to publicly heap

scorn on their heritage. They are often bitterly anti-Catholic. They adopt a literal interpretation of Scripture and fling epithets at Catholic beliefs worthy of a 19th-century nativist.³ Curiously, one rarely finds Catholic converts from another Christian faith that behave in such a fashion toward their former denomination. For the most part, they have nothing but good things to say of their roots that they see as a positive part of their pilgrimage to Catholicism.

Finally, there are those Catholics who let their own vision of what the Church should or should not be poison their public comments. They often engage in the most shocking anti-Catholic rhetoric to push a particular agenda within the Church, with little interest in the impact such rhetoric might have on the image of the Church in the general culture. Their goal is to force change in the Church through assault. These are practicing Catholics who can come from any ideological perspective. However, they will engage in vicious and unfair attacks on the Church if they perceive that such attacks can bolster their particular viewpoint. In many cases, these attacks can be more vicious than that of the most engaged secular anti-Catholic or fundamentalist. Worse, they carry greater weight because the source is Catholic.

In his study of news media treatment of priestly pedophilia, for example, Philip Jenkins found that many of the false and invalid assertions over the extent of the problem had been generated in the secular media by those within the Church. It was exaggerated to the media in order to advance a particular cause within the Church. The so-called right used it as a means to discredit what they perceived to be liberalism and laxity within the hierarchy and in seminary training; the so-called left used it to push an agenda that would eliminate priestly celibacy and allow for women's ordination within the Church. Both sides used the secular media to exploit and exaggerate the extent of the problem.⁴

All of which serves as an introduction to Garry Wills' new

book *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*.⁵ Wills seems to combine the worst features of all the above in a book that is both contrary to the teachings of the Church, and employs rhetoric against Catholicism that would never be utilized by a reputable publisher if the author did not identify himself as Catholic. If the author were not Catholic and prominent, *Papal Sin* would have only found a home in a far right fundamentalist publishing house or a small humanist press.

Garry Wills is certainly a prominent author. A Catholic, he currently teaches history at Northwestern University, though his public career goes back well into the early 1960s. Wills began as a protégé of William Buckley at *National Review*. He rather quickly had a change of ideological heart and became a well-known liberal author. He won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his book, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* and recently published a short study of the life and thought of Saint Augustine.

Wills has written a number of books on Catholicism, including *Politics and Catholic Freedom*.⁶ Written in 1964 when he was still within the *National Review* orbit, that book was an attempt by Wills to explain how Catholics in the context of American political life could legitimately dissent in the arena of the Church's social teachings as defined by the pope. The book was written as a reaction to the battle that raged over Pope John XXIII's social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* (*Mother and Teacher*). Written in 1961 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's great social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John XXIII's encyclical stressed the importance of social justice and human rights, addressed political and economic inequalities among peoples and nations, and voiced the concerns of underdeveloped countries. In response, an issue of *National Review* proclaimed, "Mater si; Magistra no."

It became a curious debate, as one looks back with the advantage of hindsight. To oversimplify, certain conservative Catholics took issue with the focus of the encyclical and complained of its "anti-capitalist" slant in a world where

Communism threatened everywhere. Liberal Catholics defended Pope John XXIII's social agenda and argued that, as a papal encyclical, it should be accepted with "filial respect."⁷

Wills' 1964 book gave the conservative response, focusing not so much on *Mater et Magistra* but on the Catholic right to dissent from papal teaching, particularly in areas that do not touch on central notions of faith and doctrine. Wills' essential message was that papal encyclicals can err, and intelligent Catholics can legitimately disagree particularly when encyclicals deal with application of faith to contemporary issues.

Of course, when Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 many flip-flopped. Conservatives argued the vital nature of papal teaching; liberals defended dissent. The difference, of course, was that the issue in 1968 involved matters of defined faith and morals. While Wills, for example, could argue in 1964 that many areas of *Mater et Magistra* did not involve clear and long-standing Church teaching, that argument could not be made in response to *Humanae Vitae*. Church teaching on artificial contraception, though it had a convoluted history based on the weakness of scientific knowledge in prior centuries, could be traced directly back to the Church Fathers. Within the 20th century, Pope Pius XI had issued an encyclical in condemnation of the practice (*Casti Connubii*) and Pope Pius XII had reconfirmed that view in 1951.

That said, Wills was the rare bird in 1968 who was not caught having his own words thrown back at him. Wills had established a framework for dissent in 1964 that could be utilized again in 1968. His right-wing analysis in dismissing Pope John XXIII's social vision in *Mater et Magistra* had laid the foundation for his dissent from Paul VI's moral teaching in *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.

All of which serves as a lengthy introduction to *Papal Sin*. Wills had formally established a philosophy of dissent that

moved from social teachings to moral theology, from interpretation of Catholic teaching on contemporary issues, to the level of assent granted to the exercise of the ordinary teaching authority of the pope in moral theology. In *Papal Sin* Wills takes the last steps in the pilgrimage by denying papal authority altogether and in questioning foundational Catholic belief. Unfortunately, it is a pilgrimage that too many Catholics have taken.

Papal Sin reads and argues at varying times as if its author can't decide if he is a Bible-thumping fundamentalist, a secular agnostic or a bitter ex-Catholic. But for the most part, Wills comes across as a Catholic with such a heavy-handed agenda that reasonableness or any attempt to accurately portray Church teaching has long since been abandoned for ideological zealotry. Wills states, for example, that the arguments for much of "what passes as current church doctrine are so intellectually contemptible that mere self-respect forbids a man to voice them as his own."⁸ Such language would demand an immediate retraction and apology if its source were non-Catholic. Wills – and Doubleday – believe that it is acceptable as long as the author of the statement claims Catholicism as his own.

The level of rejection of basic tenets of Catholic belief within this book is profound, considering that the author firmly claims his Catholic identity and describes himself as a practicing Catholic. There is the standard fare concerning active support for women's ordination, dismissal of celibacy, and embracing of artificial contraception. Wills goes further than many involved in Catholic dissent by also professing unqualified support for abortion rights.⁹ But he does not stop there. In the course of the book he rejects the teaching authority of the Church if exercised without lay involvement and agreement,¹⁰ the concept of papal infallibility and any possibility of divine guidance to papal teaching,¹¹ the ordained priesthood,¹² the doctrine of the Real Presence in

the Eucharist¹³ and that the priest has the sacramental power alone to consecrate the Eucharist.¹⁴ Apostolic succession,¹⁵ the Immaculate Conception and Assumption,¹⁶ and Church teaching on homosexuality are dismissed as well.¹⁷ For the most part, the right for the Church to teach at all in the area of sexual morality is generally dismissed if it involves the actions of consenting adults.

It will be left to others to expose the theological deficiencies in Wills' arguments. Wills' personal rejection of much of defined Catholic belief is his own sad business. The public difficulty, however, is that Wills' book will be utilized by those outside the Church with an anti-Catholic agenda to reinforce their prejudices. While Wills certainly sees his book as a call to arms within a certain cadre of Catholics, the greater impact will be to reinforce anti-Catholic prejudices and assumptions within the secular culture.

Though the title is catchy, *Papal Sin* is not a collection of anti-clerical tales from the dark ages meant to poke fun at the papacy. There is no reference here to the legend of Pope Joan or the scandal of boy popes in the first millennium. Rather, "papal sin" refers to what Wills calls "structures of deceit" that he contends are inherent to the papacy. Wills charges that the Catholic Church exists in a system of lies, falsifications, and misrepresentations meant to prop up papal authority. And not only popes deceive. The whole structure and belief system of the Church, from sacramental and moral theology, to ecclesiology, Marian beliefs and the essential understanding of Christ's death as atonement for the sins of mankind, are part of a fabricated "structure of deceit."

The very title of the book – and the general thesis concerning "structures of deceit" – reflects classic themes of anti-Catholic post-Reformation propaganda. Much like Protestants in 17th Century England, or today's anti-Catholic fundamentalists, Wills is not content to merely argue that

Catholic beliefs are wrong. He argues that they are consciously wrong. Church leaders know these teachings are wrong, yet they still attempt to impose such beliefs on the Catholic laity. Why would church leadership engage in such deceit? They do so solely in the name of power. "To maintain an impression that popes cannot err," Wills writes, "Popes deceive."¹⁸ Again, this goes far beyond theological exploration, dissent or disagreement with Catholic teaching. Wills is accusing the Church of conscious deception in fundamental beliefs. The Church knows these teachings are wrong, Wills charges, but they are taught anyway. These "pressures of deceit," Wills writes, "are our most subtle modern form of papal sin."¹⁹

Wills also embraces the "ignorant Catholic laity" portrait common to post-Reformation literature, though he gives his own twist to it. In this early Protestant argument, which thrives in today's secular world, Catholic laity believe in Church teaching only until they are exposed to enlightened thought. In Wills' twist, Catholic laity have been so informed and now dismiss most Church teaching. The difference is that in the past, the assumption would be that Catholics would depart from the Church when properly enlightened. Today, Wills argues, there is no necessity for that because they are simply rejecting a "structure of deceit" that maintains an unwarranted papal authority that is not true to Catholic tradition. Those Catholic laity who maintain orthodox Catholic positions – "papalotors" Wills calls them – are silently cooperating with the "structures of deceit." Catholics who reject these "structures of deceit" have, of course, grown.

The difficulty, of course, is that Wills' theory is based both on an inaccurate understanding of the teaching authority of the Church and of the papacy. Similar to anti-Catholic Protestants in the 19th century, Wills distorts Catholic understanding of papal authority and then proceeds to knock down that straw man: "The Pope alone...is competent to tell

Christians how to live”²⁰; defenders of orthodox Catholicism believe that “the whole test of Catholicism, the essence of faith, is submission to the Pope.”²¹ Catholics, of course, recognize the difference between the ordinary magisterium and infallible Church teachings. They also understand the teaching role of the papacy and its essentially conservative nature, in the best sense of that phrase, in defending the deposit of faith. The difference is that Wills summarily rejects any papal authority to teach and, as such, it has led him down a road that moves from quiet dissent on social issues to outright rejection of fundamental Church teachings. Catholics know that once it is denied that the Church can teach authoritatively through its foundation in Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in matters of faith and doctrine, one is reduced to a faith of his or her own creation.

Wills’ book is filled not so much with argument and documentation as with statements. He makes assertions and those assertions are the only substantiation for his positions. “Women,” he proclaims, were “censored out of the Last Supper,”²² without giving any Scriptural or historical proof for such an assertion. And, “It is clear that the Spirit’s presence in the community is what consecrates” the Eucharist²³ His sources are primarily secondary, and based solely on interpretations and expositions from those that share his views. Most of the book cites opinions sanctified by secondary sources that are as biased as Wills himself. His major source on priestly pedophilia, homosexuality and heterosexual activity is A.W. Richard Sipe, whose research has been seriously questioned both in its methodology and studied bias. Wills also misstates even friendly sources, or fails to acknowledge that reputable scholars seriously dispute the facts cited. For example, he states as fact that today “80 percent of young priests think that the Pope is wrong on contraception, 60 percent of them think he is wrong on homosexuality, yet the Vatican keeps up the pressure to have them voice what they do not believe.”²⁴ His cited reference

for these statistics is *American Catholic*, by Charles Morris, page 293.²⁵ In checking Morris, one discovers first that Morris clearly identifies that these were opinions of young priests analyzed in the mid 1980s – 15 years ago. Wills presents them as contemporary viewpoints. More important, the analysis that generated even these old statistics was strongly challenged for its accuracy at the time, and nowhere is that acknowledged. (Even in the vapid *Kansas City Star* survey taken in late 1999 to find out if priests were opposed to Church teaching on homosexuality, not even 20 percent of the priests responding advocated any change in Church teaching.)

Wills slips into a biblical fundamentalism when it serves his purpose. At times, he sounds like the anti-Catholic comic book publisher Jack Chick. He attacks the consecrated priesthood as an invention of the Church in the Fourth Century as a means to limit the growing popularity of the desert hermits. He declares that women were Apostles, stating that the reference by Paul to “Junias” in Romans 16: 7 is a cleverly edited reference to a female apostle, “Junia.” (While one could make an unprovable argument that Junias could be a woman, it is clear anyway that the use of the term “apostle” is generic and not referencing the Twelve.) Wills’ essential argument is that women should be ordained priests because there was no mention of ordained priests in the New Testament. Women can be priests because Christ did not *not* ordain women. Like a good fundamentalist, if a teaching cannot be cited chapter and verse in Scripture – a male-only priesthood – it cannot be doctrinal. At the same time, he ignores Scripture that contradicts his position. When the Gospels speak of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist, it is clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke that only the Apostles are present. Wills simply dismisses this as censorship of the reality of women in attendance without establishing any foundation for such a charge.

Again, with almost a fundamentalist perspective Wills displays

little understanding of Sacred Tradition and the development of doctrine. He dismisses the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a power grab by the Church to make the clergy “a hydraulic system pumping grace back into souls...a substitution of human agencies for the free action of the Divinity.”²⁶ He concludes that “grace is made a stuff controlled by the papal system of spiritual aqueducts and storage tanks. In a new form of idolatry, the Pope becomes a substitute for the Spirit.”²⁷

The Church has long understood the value of theological reflection and the necessity of forever growing in our understanding of the faith. Wills never sees any progression in the understanding of doctrinal truths and moral teachings. He responds to Church teaching on women’s ordination by refuting ancient arguments of ritual impurity. He attacks celibacy in a similar fashion with no expressed sense of the reasons for the historical development of that discipline. Every action of the Church is viewed from the prism of an insatiable papal power. One of the greatest sources of scandal historically within the Church – the control of the appointment of bishops by secular authorities – he simply brushes aside. The desire to secure those appointments to the Holy See simply becomes another papal power grab.

While acknowledging at one point that Church teaching on artificial contraception is nearly as old as the Church itself and condemned by the Fathers of the Church, he states simply that we cannot “look for sanity” in their treatment of the issue. He condemns *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical that reasserted this traditional teaching as “truly perverse,”²⁸ while claiming that the only reason Pope Paul issued the encyclical was because he was “trapped by his predecessors.” *Humanae Vitae* “is about authority. Paul decided the issue on that ground alone. He meant to check the notion that church teaching could change.”²⁹ He offers no proof for that statement, of course, as the simple act of assertion is meant to make it fact.

In the discussion of abortion, he wanders off into the unanswerable issue of "ensoulment," (at what point that God "infuses" the soul into unborn life). He then speaks of abortions in nature, when the body spontaneously "aborts" and snidely wonders if this means that God Himself aborts millions of souls to "Limbo." Of course, the issue of ensoulment was debated in Church history to determine the stages of gravity of the sin but had nothing to do with the inherent evil in the killing of unborn life, acknowledged in the very earliest moral teachings of the Church (And it is foolish to equate Thomas Aquinas' presentation of the issue of "ensoulment" and his understanding of fetal development in the 13th-century with contemporary science's understanding in the third millennium). Of course, Wills knows that what we commonly refer to as "abortion" these days is the conscious choosing to abort life, not a natural miscarriage.

Wills berates pro-lifers that are willing to compromise on the issue in case of rape or incest, stating that this is proof of their fundamental dishonesty, rather than the realities that they face in combating legalized abortion within American culture. Wills concludes his discussion on abortion by stating that he supports legalized abortion, but that "it is not a thing that can be proposed as an ideal and that women should not make the decision lightly."³⁰ He never states why he holds that position. If fetal life is not worthy of protection – if it is not "life" – then what possible difference could it make if women make the decision to abort lightly? And why would it not be "ideal"? If the fetus is nothing, issues of "ideals" are meaningless.

Wills moves into even shakier ground with his discussion of Vatican I and the definition of papal infallibility. Of course, he sees the definition of papal infallibility in the Vatican Council of 1870 as the ultimate power ploy by Pope Pius IX. He claims that Pius was attempting to establish a new doctrine and that the brave dissenters were silenced by

papalotors in the Curia. Yet, as noted by Eamon Duffy, today's foremost Church historian, "Few nineteenth-century Catholics rejected out-of-hand the notion that the pope might teach infallibly. But many thought that it was dangerous to try to define just how and when that might happen. They thought it unnecessary, for the infallibility of the Church had never been defined, yet all Catholics believed it."³¹ Wills portrays the Council as an argument for or against infallibility, and a minority in opposition with the deck stacked against them and virtually silenced by papal manipulation. In fact, debate was hot and heavy throughout the Council. As the conciliar fathers grew closer to consensus and understanding, a definition emerged that was far from ultramontane (that virtually every formal utterance of the Holy Father was infallible). The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point it had held for centuries. Wills seems to think so, even though the subsequent popes issued one ex cathedra statement (Pope Pius XII defining Catholic teaching on the Assumption of Mary in 1950) and did so only after extensive consultation with the world's bishops.

In his discussion of the first Vatican Council, Wills canonizes Sir John Acton, a British Catholic who had developed a loathing for Pius IX and politicked behind the scenes to undercut any definition of papal infallibility. A student of Ignaz von Dollinger, a German priest who would leave the Church over the definition of infallibility, Acton's primary contribution to the Council was his attempt to undercut it by convincing secular governments to interfere. He began "a campaign to whip up public opinion and British, French and German action to prevent the definition. There was talk of the English Cabinet sending a gunboat."³² Acton actually managed to convince Otto von Bismarck's Prussian government to threaten to withdraw its ambassador from Rome, but the threat was never followed through. (Acton's rhetoric would eventually show its influence within the Prussian government. In 1871, the government launched the Kulturkampf against the Church,

seeing Catholicism as an “alien” presence in Germany and the declaration of papal infallibility of Vatican I an internal threat because of alleged foreign loyalty. A series of vicious anti-Catholic laws were enacted and many clergy and prelates arrested.)

Wills sees his “structures of deceit” as an essential “dishonesty” in the Church over papal authority. He sees dishonesty in history and dishonesty in Catholic doctrine all to prop up papal authority. While his 1964 book was respectful in its dissent, *Papal Sin* has a distinct tone of viciousness that moves it from theological dissent to anti-Catholicism. Like an anti-Catholic polemicist, Wills slashes and burns, inventing evil motives, distorting doctrine and history, and resorts at last to ridicule. He refers to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a teaching that would “muddy and confuse the nature of the Incarnation” and scoffed that Mary’s “very flesh was a cosmic marvel, like kryptonite, unable to die.”³³ Again reflecting the worst of fundamentalist rhetoric, he refers to Mary and Marian doctrine as creating “an idol-goddess”³⁴ that replaced the Holy Spirit as the object of Catholic devotion.³⁵ Quoting Sipe, he calls devotion to Mary a sign of male immaturity rampant in the clergy and hierarchy, and that if one sees oneself as a “child of Mary” this can “infantilize spiritual life.”³⁶

Wills sees the canonization by martyrdom of Edith Stein as an historical dishonesty. Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism who became a Carmelite nun, was murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust. As a Christian of Jewish descent in a convent in Holland, Stein had first avoided arrest at the hands of the Nazis. But when the Archbishop of Utrecht publicly denounced Nazi deportation of the Jews, the exemption was canceled and Stein was caught in the roundup. She died at Auschwitz. Wills scoffs at her canonization as a martyr. Stein died because she was a Jew, Wills argued, and her Catholicity had nothing to do with it. Her canonization was a cold-blooded attempt to claim

victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust, Wills states. Such an argument is loathsome. First, Stein died because she was a Jew and a Catholic, the very specific reasons for her arrest. Second, that is the reason for the canonization, not some attempt to claim victimhood for the Church. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly for improved Christian-Jewish relations. The canonization of Stein recognized both her heroic Catholic witness, and her Jewish heritage. In any case, Wills can cite nothing but second-rate charges by unfriendly sources to make a claim of the Church grasping for victimhood, rather than documented proof of any such strategy.

Wills' book proceeds in a similarly mean-spirited vein. He states that the Concordat that Pope Pius XI concluded with the German government in 1933 would prevent the Church from protesting against Nazi actions against Jews. First, the Church had no choice but to conclude such a Concordat, or face draconian restrictions on the lives of the faithful in Germany. Second, the Concordat gave the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action in the years prior to the war and after hostilities began. It provided a legal basis for arguing, for example, that baptized Jews in Germany were Christian and should be exempt from legal disabilities. The first official protest by the Vatican under the terms of the Concordat dealt with the government-initiated boycott of Jewish businesses. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, its existence allowed for Vatican protest, and it did save Jewish lives. Wills also claims that the Vatican wanted a strong Nazi Germany as a bulwark to the communist Soviet Union, though there is no evidence that the Vatican ever entertained such a policy. In fact, Pius XII intervened with the hierarchy of the United States to assure assistance to the Soviet war effort against Nazi Germany.

Wills tells the story of a "hidden encyclical," buried after the death of Pius XI, that would have condemned anti-Semitism. He concludes that the encyclical was killed because of that

condemnation. However, he then quotes from the encyclical statements that are clearly anti-Semitic and bad theology as proof of how anti-Semitic the Church was at the time. It was this weakness of the encyclical draft that was the real reason it was never published, not some lurking anti-Semitism. Pius XII, an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism along with his predecessor Pius IX, would never have allowed such a poorly drafted encyclical to be released. But Wills does not accept that. The real reason, according to Wills, was that even though it was a terrible work, it still maintained a condemnation of anti-Semitism that the Vatican was loath to make. Wills' arguments are not only self-contradicting. They also fly in the face of an encyclical that already condemned Nazis and their treatment of the Jews (*Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937), and additional written and public statements that would be issued by Pius XII and the Vatican throughout the war years, including his own 1939 encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, on the unity of human society.

Wills states that the document on the Holocaust (*We Remember*, 1998) denied that some priests and bishops supported the Nazis. It did not. Wills then goes on to argue that since the Church is the People of God, if any members of the Church took an active role in the Holocaust, then the Church is "sinful." It's a curious theology that argues that any sin committed by any member of the Church becomes part of a collective guilt of the Church as the theological Body of Christ.

Such is the standard of reasoning throughout Wills book that he becomes so ludicrous as to proclaim that "Truth is a modern virtue."³⁷ That is stated about a Western culture that has as its bedrock value today that objective truth does not exist. Wills writes that the Church is "an institution that claims never to have been wrong, never to have persecuted, never to have inflicted injustice."³⁸ He does not state when the Church ever made such a claim, but certainly a hasty re-write will be necessary in light of the papal apology in March, 2000. But,

once again, Wills makes these charges without ever documenting what clearly cannot be documented. Like a sidewalk evangelist in the old South, he asserts beliefs for Catholics that Catholics do not hold, then refutes them.

Wills' book is an exercise in anti-Catholic rhetoric. He tosses out offensive phrases and charges that would never see the published light of day if he did not hide under the cloak of his Catholicity. He calls *Humanae Vitae* "truly perverse teaching on contraception."³⁹ He decides that Vatican II was simply another Church exercise undertaken "within a structure of deceit."⁴⁰ He cynically states that Pope John Paul II "makes sex so holy that only monks are really worthy of it"⁴¹ and that his teaching is rooted in a "total devotion...to the virginity of Mary" so that "one man's devotion poses as the measure of divine truth. The rest of the Church must live in structures of deceit because this one man is true to his intensely personal devotion."⁴²

Wills takes delight in calling priests "the peoples eunuchs" and notes that a man considering the priesthood must question if he is "to become a eunuch, not for the heavenly reign, but for the Pope's dominion."⁴³ In a book sorely offensive to Catholics, Wills reserves his most offensive language toward the priesthood. Not only does he refer to priests as "eunuchs," but constantly calls the Eucharistic prayer of consecration at the Mass "magic." Even a Jimmy Swaggart at his most anti-Catholic bombastic would not stoop to such a level of pure insult to sacred Catholic belief. In one of the saddest sections of the book, Wills makes fun of an old priest for whom he used to serve at the altar. The priest would carefully and piously pronounce Latin words of consecration over the Eucharist (Wills calls them "the purported words of consecration"). He chuckles that the priest was "making sure the magic formula was given all its force."⁴⁴ One wonders if he has lost all sense of decency.

Wills states without any documentation that priestly celibacy

has chased out heterosexual priests and created a gay clergy. He also cites the practice of celibacy as a primary reason for cases of priestly pedophilia, this despite absolutely no clinical evidence to support such a monstrous charge, and the simple fact that pedophiles are very often married. He twists John Cardinal Newman's theological insight on the development of doctrine to mean moving from untruth to truth – or vice-versa – rather than to a richer understanding of the initial truth. He takes the concept of the “sense of the faithful” – an essentially conservative doctrine that recognizes the beliefs held by the laity for centuries have a role in doctrinal understanding – to mean that anything burped out in a contemporary survey has an equivalency to the deposit of faith. He concludes by calling the Church “a victimizer with Satan,”⁴⁵ a perfect coda for a perfectly awful anti-Catholic diatribe.

Wills certainly considers his book some kind of affirmation for a small subset of Catholics who see the pope as the enemy and Church doctrine as a relic of the past. Unfortunately, Wills goes so far out that even the most liberal of Catholics will find this a distasteful exercise. In the end this book will only be supported by those who already actively hate the Catholic Church.

SUMMARY POINTS

*Anti-Catholic remarks by Catholics gain a certain cachet in secular circles that would otherwise ignore them if the source were non-Catholic.

*There are Catholics who let their own vision of what the Church should or should not be poison their public comments. They often engage in the most shocking anti-Catholic rhetoric to push a particular agenda within the Church, with little interest in the impact such rhetoric might have on the image of the Church in the general culture.

*If Garry Wills were not Catholic, *Papal Sin* would have only found a home in a far right fundamentalist publishing house or a small humanist press. It would hardly have been taken seriously without the legitimacy conferred by its prominent author being Catholic.

*In *Politics and Catholic Freedom* in 1964, writing from a conservative perspective, Wills focused on the Catholic right to dissent from papal teaching, particularly in areas of social doctrine that do not touch on central notions of faith and doctrine. Wills' essential message was that papal encyclicals can err, and intelligent Catholics can legitimately disagree particularly when encyclicals deal with application of faith to contemporary issues.

*Wills had formally established a philosophy of dissent that moved from social teachings to moral theology, from interpretation of Catholic teaching on contemporary issues, to the level of assent granted to the exercise of the ordinary teaching authority of the pope in moral theology. In *Papal Sin* Wills takes the last steps in the pilgrimage by denying papal authority altogether and in questioning foundational Catholic belief.

*The anti-Catholic sentiments and language used by Wills would demand an immediate retraction and apology if its source were non-Catholic. Wills – and Doubleday – believe that it is acceptable as long as the author of the statement claims Catholicism as his own.

*Wills exhibits the ordinary elements of dissenting Catholicism: active support for women's ordination, dismissal of celibacy, and embracing of artificial contraception. *Wills goes further by also professing unqualified support for abortion rights. But he does not stop there. In the course of the book he rejects the teaching authority of the Church if exercised without lay involvement and agreement, the concept of papal infallibility and any possibility of divine guidance

to papal teaching, the ordained priesthood, the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist and that the priest alone has the sacramental power to consecrate the Eucharist. Apostolic succession, the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, and Church teaching on homosexuality are also subverted.

*Wills' book will be utilized by those outside the Church with an anti-Catholic agenda to reinforce their prejudices. While Wills certainly sees his book as a call to arms within a certain cadre of Catholics, the greater impact will be to reinforce anti-Catholic prejudices and assumptions within the secular culture.

*Wills charges that the Catholic Church exists in a system of lies, falsifications, and misrepresentations meant to prop up papal authority.

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*Wills' essential argument is that women should be ordained priests because there was no mention of ordained priests in the New Testament. Women can be priests because Christ did not *not* ordain women. Like a good fundamentalist, if a teaching cannot be cited chapter and verse in Scripture, it cannot be doctrinal. At the same time, he ignores Scripture that contradicts his position. When the Gospels speak of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist, it is clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke that only the Apostles are present. Wills simply dismisses this as censorship of the reality of women in attendance without establishing any foundation for

such a charge.

*Every action of the Church is viewed from the prism of an insatiable papal power. One of the greatest sources of scandal historically within the Church – the control of the appointment of bishops by secular authorities – he simply brushes aside. The desire to secure those appointments to the Holy See simply becomes another papal power grab.

*Wills speaks of abortions in nature, when the body spontaneously “aborts” and snidely wonders if this means that God Himself aborts millions of souls to “Limbo.” Of course, “abortion” refers to the conscious choosing of action to terminate a pregnancy, not a natural miscarriage.

*Wills states that he fully supports legalized abortion, but that “it is not a thing that can be proposed as an ideal and that women should not make the decision lightly.” If fetal life is not worthy of protection – if it is not “life” – then what possible difference could it make if women make the decision to abort lightly? And why would it not be “ideal”? If the fetus is nothing, issues of “ideals” are meaningless.

*Wills portrays Vatican Council I as an argument for or against infallibility, and a minority in opposition with the deck stacked against them. In fact, most 19th century Catholics clearly accepted the infallibility of the pope and the divisions at the Council concerned the necessity and extent of a formal definition.

*Those opposed to a formal definition at the Council were hardly silenced, as Wills charges. Debate was hot and heavy throughout the Council. As the conciliar fathers grew closer to consensus and understanding, a definition emerged that was not ultramontane (that virtually every formal utterance of the Holy Father was infallible).

*Like an anti-Catholic polemicist, Wills slashes and burns, inventing evil motives, distorting doctrine and history, and

resorts at last to ridicule. He refers to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a teaching that would “muddy and confuse the nature of the Incarnation” and scoffed that Mary’s “very flesh was a cosmic marvel, like kryptonite, unable to die.”

*Wills states that the canonization by martyrdom of Edith Stein was a cold-blooded attempt to claim victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust. Stein died because she was a Catholic and a Jew, the very specific reasons for her arrest. That is the reason for the canonization, not some attempt to claim victimhood. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly for improved Christian-Jewish relations. The canonization of Stein recognized both her heroic Catholic witness, and her Jewish heritage.

*Wills states that the Concordat that Pope Pius XI concluded with the German government in 1933 would prevent the Church from protesting Nazi actions against Jews. The reality is that the Concordat gave the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action. The first official protest by the Vatican under the terms of the Concordat dealt with the government-initiated boycott of Jewish businesses. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, its existence allowed for Vatican protest, and it did save Jewish lives.

*Wills calls priests “the peoples eunuchs” and notes that a man considering the priesthood must question if he is “to become a eunuch, not for the heavenly reign, but for the Pope’s dominion.” Wills reserves his most offensive language toward the priesthood. He calls the Eucharistic prayer of consecration at the Mass “magic.”

*Wills states without any documentation that priestly celibacy has chased out heterosexual priests and created a gay clergy. He also cites the practice of celibacy as a primary reason for cases of priestly pedophilia, this despite absolutely no clinical evidence to support such a monstrous charge, and the

simple fact that many pedophiles are married.

*Wills twists John Cardinal Newman's theological insight on the development of doctrine to mean moving from untruth to truth, rather than to a richer understanding of the initial truth.

*Wills takes the concept of the "sense of the faithful" – an essentially conservative doctrine that recognizes the beliefs held by the laity for centuries has a role in doctrinal understanding – to mean that anything burped out in a contemporary survey has an equivalency to the deposit of faith.

*Wills goes so far out that even the most liberal of Catholics will find this a distasteful exercise. In the end this book will only be supported by those who already actively hate the Catholic Church.

FOOTNOTES

1See *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture*, edited by Robert P. Lockwood (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), chapter one, for an historical outline of how anti-Catholicism remains an acceptable bigotry.

2A term first coined by Michael Schwartz in *The Persistent Prejudice* (Our Sunday Visitor). An excellent, if dated, review of anti-Catholicism, the work is currently out of print.

3There are any number of former Catholic anti-Catholics who could be quoted as representative. Bart Brewer, founder of "Mission to Catholics International" is a suitably hysterical example. Brewer, a former priest, was recently quoted as saying that the papal apology for past sins was part of a dark conspiracy "to rejoin separated brethren outside of Rome's control. Rome's mask will change, but the face remains the same. Catholicism is a political system." Quoted in the *Five Cities Gazette*, April 6, 2000.

4*Pedophiles and Priests*, by Philip Jenkins (Oxford University Press). Jenkins summarized his study in an article in the February, 1996 edition of *First Things*.

5*Papal Sin, Structures of Deceit* by Gary Wills (Doubleday, June 2000). All further references to Wills' book will give page number alone. Page numbers and content are from the bound galley edition provided by the publisher for review purposes.

6*Politics and Catholic Freedom* by Gary Wills (Henry Regnery Company, 1964).

7*America*, August 12, 1961.

8p. 5.

9p. 230.

10pp. 269-270.

11pp. 161-162.

12pp. 132-148.

13 "It is more the faithful who become the body and blood of Christ than bread and wine do." p. 140.

14 "The validity of the sacrament (is) in the recipient's unity with God, not in any preceding words of magic of the priest." p. 140.

15pp. 159-168.

16pp. 205-220.

17pp. 200-201.

18p. 7.

19p. 9.

20p. 163.

21p. 6.

22p.118.

23p. 140.

24p. 6.

25 *American Catholics*, by Charles R. Morris (Times Books, 1997).

26p. 173.

27p. 173.

28p. 7.

29p.74.

30p. 230.

31 *Saints and Sinners, A History of the Popes*, Eamon Duffy (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 230 ff.

32 *Ibid.*, p.231.

33p. 212.

34p. 212.

35p. 207.

36p. 213.

37p. 8.

38p. 45.

39p. 7.

40p. 85.

41p. 101.

42p. 102.

43p. 128.

44p. 136.

45p. 311.

John Cornwell: Hitler's Pope

by Ronald Rychlak

(*Catalyst* 12/1999)

John Cornwell's new book, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, turns out to be a deeply flawed attack on Pope John Paul II. That's right, the final chapter is actually an attack on the current plaintiff. Cornwell is disturbed by John Paul's "conservative" positions on celibate clergy, women priests, artificial contraception, and abortion. He is especially concerned about the Pope's opposition to direct political activity by the clergy.

Cornwell apparently decided that the easiest way to attack the Pope of today was to go after Pius XII. If he can prove that Pius was flawed, then he establishes that popes can be wrong. If that is the case, then he can argue that John Paul II is wrong about the whole catalogue of teachings that tend to upset many modern Catholics.

Cornwell's thesis is that Eugenio Pacelli—Pope Pius XII—was driven by the desire to concentrate the authority of the Church under a strong, central papacy. Cornwell argues that as Pacelli worked toward that end, he created a situation that was easy for Hitler to exploit. Cornwell denies that Pacelli

was a "monster." In fact, he recognizes that Pacelli "hated" Hitler. His theory, deeply flawed though it may be, is that Hitler exploited Pacelli's efforts to expand Roman influence. Unfortunately, many reviews, like those in the *New York Post* and the *London Sunday Times*, missed that point. They simply reported that "Pius XII helped Adolf Hitler gain power," as if the two worked together. That is certainly not Cornwell's point.

Some of the mistakes reported in the press are obvious to anyone who read Cornwell's book. For instance, *The Indianapolis News* reported that Pius knew of Hitler's plan for the Final Solution "in 1939 when he first became involved with the German leader." First of all, the Nazis did not decide on the course of extermination until 1942. Perhaps more telling, this statement is at odds with two things in the book: 1) Cornwell argues that Hitler and the future Pope Pius XII first "became involved" in the early 1930s, and 2) Cornwell expressly notes that Pius XII's first reliable information concerning extermination of the Jews came in the spring of 1942, not 1939.

Similarly, the *New York Post* reported in a couple of different editions that "Pacelli... met with Hitler several times." This is not true. The two men never met, and Cornwell does not claim that they did. The most common error by made reviewers was that of accepting Cornwell's assertions without checking out the facts. On some of these points, the reviewer's oversight might be forgiven. For instance, Viking Press has marketed this book as having been written by a practicing Catholic who started out to defend Pius XII. One is always reluctant to say what another person's beliefs are, so reviewers could be forgiven had they simply remained silent about that issue. Instead, the vast majority took delight in calling Cornwell a good, practicing Catholic.

Having decided to report on Cornwell's religious beliefs, the reviewers might have noted that his earlier books were

marketed as having been written by a “lapsed Catholic for more than 20 years” and that reviewers said he wrote “with that astringent, cool, jaundiced view of the Vatican that only ex-Catholics familiar with Rome seem to have mastered.” They might also have reported that during the time he was researching this book he described himself as an “agnostic Catholic.” Finally, it might have been worth noting that in a 1993 book he declared that human beings are “morally, psychologically and materially better off without a belief in God.” Instead, they presented only that side of the story that Cornwell and his publisher wanted the public to hear.

The Vatican had not yet spoken, so a reviewer might be excused for not knowing that Cornwell lied about being the first person to see certain “secret” files and about the number of hours that he spent researching at the Vatican. When, however, he claimed that a certain letter was a “time bomb” lying in the Vatican archives since 1919, a careful reviewer might have mentioned that it had been fully reprinted and discussed in *Germany and the Holy See: Pacelli's Nunciature between the Great War and the Weimar Republic*, by Emma Fattorini (1992).

That letter at issue reports on the occupation of the royal palace in Munich by a group of Bolshevik revolutionaries. Pacelli was the nuncio in Munich and a noted opponent of the Bolsheviks. The revolutionaries sprayed his house with gunfire, assaulted him in his car, and invaded his home. The description of the scene in the palace (which was actually written by one of Pacelli's assistants, not him) included derogatory comments about the Bolsheviks and noted that many of them were Jewish. Cornwell couples the anti-revolutionary statements with the references to Jews and concludes that it reflects “stereotypical anti-Semitic contempt.” That is a logical jump unwarranted by the facts. Even worse, however, is the report in *USA Today* that Pacelli described Jews (not a specific group of revolutionaries) “as physically and morally repulsive, worthy of suspicion and contempt.” Again, it is a

case of the press being particularly anxious to report the worst about the Catholic Church.

Cornwell claims that he received special assistance from the Vatican due to earlier writings which were favorable to the Vatican. Many reviewers gleefully reported this and he asserted "moral shock" at what he found in the archives. A simple call to the Vatican would have revealed that he received no special treatment. If the reviewer were suspicious about taking the word of Vatican officials, a quick consultation of Cornwell's earlier works (or easily-available reviews thereof) would have revealed that he has never been friendly to the Holy See.

Cornwell stretched the facts to such a point that any impartial reader should be put on notice. For instance, Cornwell suggests that Pacelli dominated Vatican foreign policy from the time that he was a young prelate. One chapter describes the young Pacelli's hand in the negotiation of a June 1914 concordat with Serbia (he took the minutes), and leaves the impression that he was responsible for the outbreak of World War I.

Certainly Cornwell, who describes Pope Pius XI as "bossy" and "authoritarian," knows that Pacelli was unable to dominate Vatican policy as Secretary of State, much less as nuncio. Any fair reviewer should have at least questioned this point.

Another point that would be a tip-off to any critical reviewer is Cornwell's handling of the so-called "secret encyclical." The traditional story (and the evidence suggests that it is little more than that) is that Pius XI was prepared to make a strong anti-Nazi statement, and he commissioned an encyclical to that effect. A draft was prepared, but Pius XI died before he was able to release it. His successor, Pius XII, then buried the draft.

One of the problems that most critics of Pius XII have with

this theory is that the original draft contained anti-Semitic statements. These critics are reluctant to attribute such sentiments to Pius XI. Cornwell resolved this problem by accusing Pacelli of having written the original draft (or of having overseen the writing) when he was Secretary of State, then burying it when he was Pope. It is really such a stretch that any good reviewer should have questioned it. Instead, most merely took Cornwell at his word and reported that an anti-Semitic paper was written by Pacelli or under his authority. (In actuality, there is no evidence that either Pope ever saw the draft.)

Perhaps more startling than anything else is the way reviewers avoided any mention of the last chapter of Cornwell's book, entitled "*Pius XII Redivivus*." In this chapter, it becomes clear that the book is a condemnation of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, not just that of Pius XII. This chapter also reveals a serious flaw in Cornwell's understanding of Catholicism, politics, and the papacy of John Paul II.

Cornwell argues that John Paul II represents a return to a more "highly centralized, autocratic papacy," as opposed to a "more diversified Church." The over-arching theory of the book, remember, is that the centralization of power in Rome took away the political power from local priests and bishops who might have stopped Hitler. Accordingly, Cornwell thinks that John Paul is leading the Church in a very dangerous direction, particularly by preventing clergy from becoming directly involved in political movements, including everything from liberation theology to condom distribution.

Cornwell, of course, has to deal with the fact that John Paul II has played a central part in world events, including a pivotal role in the downfall of the Soviet Union. Cornwell's answer is that John Paul was more "sympathetic to pluralism" early in his pontificate, but that he has retreated into "an intransigently absolutist cast of mind" and has hurt the Church in the process.

Cornwell misses the important point that is so well explained in George Weigel's new biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*. John Paul's political impact came about precisely because *he did not primarily seek to be political, or to think or speak politically*. The pontiff's contribution to the downfall of Soviet Communism was that he launched an authentic and deep challenge to the lies that made Communistic rule possible. He fought Communism in the same way that Pius XII fought Nazism: not by name-calling but by challenging the intellectual foundation on which it was based.

John Paul has recognized the parallels between his efforts and those of Pius XII, perhaps better than anyone else. He, of course, did not have a horrible war to contend with, nor was he threatened with the possibility of Vatican City being invaded, but given those differences, the approach each Pope took was similar. As John Paul has explained: "Anyone who does not limit himself to cheap polemics knows very well what Pius XII thought of the Nazi regime and how much he did to help countless people persecuted by the regime." The most disappointing thing is that the modern press seems unable to recognize cheap polemics, at least when it comes to the Catholic Church.

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A Survey of Chick Publications

by William A. Donohue

(Catalyst 10/1996)

Perhaps the most invidious form of anti-Catholicism is that which emanates from elite circles. When men and women of power and influence engage in Catholic bashing, the effects can be devastating, which is why the Catholic League responds so quickly and decisively. But there is also a brand of anti-Catholicism that comes from less urbane quarters, from places that target the undereducated. And no one is better at doing this than Chick Publications.

Founded by Jack Chick, his company publishes books, magazines, small tracts and comic books, and now releases videos, all of which are designed to convince Protestants that Roman Catholicism is a false religion; Chick also distributes anti-Catholic works published by other sources. Perhaps best known for its release of 3x5 cartoon-like tracts, Chick has operations all over the world. Headquartered in Chino, California, Chick has outlets in Scotland, Germany, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

Chick's booklets are available in Afrikaans, Albanian, Bulgarian, Burmese, Cambodian, Chichewa, Chinese, Creole, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Haitian, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, New Guinea, Norwegian, Pidgin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Zulu. Priced to sell at just 13 cents each, Chick has done a masterful job marketing its hatred. Titles include "Are Roman Catholics Christians?"; "Why is Mary Crying?"; and "The Death Cookie," which by that is meant the Host.

The *Alberto* series of comic books are also quite popular. Aimed primarily at teenagers, this series is based on the work of Alberto Rivera, a man who claims to be an ex-Jesuit from the Diocese of Madrid. Past research by the Catholic League,

however, shows no record of Rivera ever being a priest. Vintage Chick in content, the comic books are strewn with vile anti-Catholicism.

Catholicism's Errors

Chick specializes in attempting to debunk Catholic teachings, thereby preparing the confused for eventual conversion to Protestantism. For example, in his book *Answers to My Catholic Friends*, Thomas F. Heinze writes that "There is no real salvation in the Roman Catholic Church." From William C. Standridge in *Born-Again Catholics and the Mass*, we learn that Catholics cannot be "born again." Ralph Edward Woodrow, in his book *Babylon Mystery Religion*, goes further by arguing that Mary is the "goddess of paganism" and that "a mixture of paganism and Christianity produced the Roman Catholic Church."

Understanding Roman Catholicism, by Rick Jones, purports to explain "37 Roman Catholic Doctrines." The reader gets an idea of the author's explanations by reading the following conclusion: "Catholicism brings people into bondage." For those who prefer a video presentation of so-called Catholic mythology, there is *Catholicism: Crisis of Faith*, by Lumen Productions. The 54 minute video divides Catholic "errors" into four sections: the Mass; Statues; Mary; and Catholic salvation. As expected, the video attacks transubstantiation, misrepresents Catholic teachings on statues and Our Blessed Mother, and contends that faith alone is necessary for salvation.

Some of the assaults on Catholicism chose quite specific topics, such as Charles Chiniquy's *The Priest, the Women and the Confessional*. This book, written by a nineteenth century former priest, has had quite a run, covering the span of a century and a half. Confession, we are told, is the invention of Satan. In practice, "The confessor is the worm which is biting, polluting, and destroying the very roots of civil and religious society, by contaminating, debasing, and enslaving

women.”

Speaking of wives, Chiniquy writes that “As she becomes an adulteress the day that she gives her body to another man, is she any the less an adulteress the day that she gives her confidence and trusts her soul to a stranger?” Chiniquy writes like a contemporary reporter for *Enquirer* or *The Star* when he says that the “poor confessor” is “surrounded by attractive women and tempting girls, speaking to him from morning to night on things which a man cannot hear without falling.” This is because the woman confesses “her constant temptations, her bad thoughts, [and] her most intimate secret desires and sins.”

In a recent Chick listing, *Far From Rome: Near to God*, we have the alleged testimony of 50 converted Catholic priests. All have found the “errors in the Church” and have since seen the light. Most of the laments are quite dry, but there is one that deserves a comment.

Leo Lehmann was born in Dublin in 1895, and right from the beginning was saddled with despair. “I have no joyous memories of my boyhood years.” None. He attributes his misery to the “fear” he experienced being raised Catholic. The fear he felt had dramatic consequences: “It was principally the fear connected with everything in the Roman Catholic religion that helped me with my decision to become a priest.”

The day Lehmann was ordained, he noticed late at night that one of his companions “became affected in his mind, the strain of mechanical routine, innumerable petty restrictions and formulas,” a condition Lehmann describes as “a species of religious madness called `scrupulosity.’”

In another incident, Lehmann says he remembers the case of a fourteen year-old girl who suffered from insanity. He blames Catholicism for her insanity, stating that when he met her, she constantly recited the “Hail Mary.” Obviously intending to

persuade the reader, Lehmann maintains that "Her mind was deranged by the idea that she was obliged to say this prayer a hundred times each day, and in order to make sure of having them said on time, she was over a thousand ahead. Some priest, doubtless, had imposed the saying of these 'Hail Mary's' as a penance in confession." Doubtless. Anyway, this was enough to have the fear-ridden Lehmann call it quits.

The "Secret Army" of the Jesuits

It will surprise no one to learn that Jack Chick thinks he's a regular guy. In his infamous book, *Smokescreens*, Chick says "There has been a multi-million dollar campaign made through the media to convince people that I am a bigoted, anti-Catholic hate literature publisher." But this is nonsense, as there has been no well-funded campaign of any sort. And to the extent that even a dollar has been spent trying to convince people that Chick is a bigot, it's a waste of money: just reading his hate-filled books is evidence enough.

Just two pages after Chick makes his remarkable protest that he is not an anti-Catholic bigot, he writes of the Eucharist that "I call it the little Jesus cookie." Anticipating criticism, Chick adds, "I know Catholics are going to be offended by this, but I can't help it. The Protestants have to realize where they stand on this thing."

It's a sure bet that most Catholics never knew that "The Jesuits had secretly prepared World War II, and Hitler's war machine was built and financed by the Vatican to conquer the world for Roman Catholicism." And how many knew that "Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco were to be the defenders of the faith"? It gets better: "They were set up to win and conquer the world, and set up a millennium for the pope. Behind the scenes, the Jesuits controlled the Gestapo." Somehow every historian who has written on World War II seems to have missed these "facts" altogether, but not the world-renowned scholar, Jack Chick.

So pro-Nazi was the Catholic Church that Chick regrets that Pope Pius XII wasn't killed. "Pope Pius XII should have stood before the judges in Nuremberg. His war crimes were worthy of death." But if the Catholic Church was fascist, and the fascists fought the communists in World War II, then Mr. Chick needs to explain why he charges the Jesuits with not only running the Gestapo, but with founding the Communist Party as well. He also wants us to believe that the Jesuits aided the John Birch Society, thus adding confusion to confusion. But to Jack Chick, at least, it all makes sense.

Jack really doesn't like the Jesuits. As he sees it, the Society of Jesus managed to come to America just as the second wave of Pilgrims was beginning. Ever sneaky, the Jesuits "used different names with I.D.'s. They were followed years later when the Vatican sent multitudes of Catholic families from England, Ireland and France posing as Protestants, into the colonies. These were plants."

But that was only the beginning. "The next move by the Jesuits," Chick informs, "was to destroy or control all the Christian schools across America." They did this, of course, by "working undercover," infiltrating school boards and the like. This venture would then be followed by taking control of the legislature and judiciary "in order to manipulate the Constitution in their favor until it could be changed." Next was a plot "to capture the political parties." After that, "Then the military and the newspapers." And so on. "It is obvious," Chick states, "that the whore of Revelation is the Roman Catholic Institution, and God **hates** it!"

Michael de Semlyen, author of *All Roads Lead to Rome? The Ecumenical Movement*, is, like Jack Chick, sensitive to charges of bigotry. He says his book

"will be viewed by some as bigoted," never explaining why anyone who has read his volume might think otherwise. But never mind, de Semlyen feels the same way about the Jesuits as

Chick does, blaming them for both Hitler and Marxism. The Church, of course, is the "*great whore of Revelation 17.*"

Though similar to Chick, de Semlyen has a creative side to him as well. Readers learn, for example, that the "Roman Catholic hierarchy" played a role in the assassination of President Lincoln. Also newsworthy is the charge that the Vatican "has the most efficient and widespread spy network in the whole world" (de Semlyen is kind enough to attribute this finding to yet another careful student of Catholicism, Nino Lo Bello, in his book, *The_Vatican Papers*).

Treating readers to another revelation, de Semlyen tells us that "There is much in Roman Catholic tradition to contribute to New Age thinking"; he fingers Mother Teresa as a primary force for New Ageism. Even more ground-breaking is the news that Vatican opposition to abortion, birth control and homosexuality "has little to do with the sanctity of human life and Biblical ordinance," rather it stems from a need to add to the "Catholic army" and the financial resources of the Church.

The classic Jesuit-hating book was written by Edmond Paris. *The Secret History of the Jesuits* claims that the Jesuits constitute "a truly secret army" all over the world. According to Paris, the Jesuits have "kept alive" the Catholic Church's "mad aspiration to govern the world." "The public is practically unaware," writes Paris, "of the overwhelming responsibility carried by the Vatican and its Jesuits in the start of the two world wars." Indeed, "Catholics were the masters of Nazi Germany."

Paris even blames the death camps on the Catholic Church: "The right the Church arrogates herself to exterminate slowly or speedily those who are in the way was 'put into practice' at Auschwitz, Dachau, Belsen, Buchenwald and other death camps." As always, no documentation is ever presented to substantiate any of these outrageous claims. In conclusion, Paris says that

the Jesuits are responsible for spreading "a kind of sclerosis, if not necrosis," through the Church.

Catholic Cabals

Chick Publications loves to publish books that promote devil's theories, but when it comes to conspiracy-minded plots that implicate the Vatican, few can top Avro Manhattan. In his best-selling work, *The Vatican Billions*, Manhattan sets the tone right from the start: "Christ was born, lived and died in poverty. His `church' is a multi-, multi-billion concern." In fact, the Catholic Church is "the wealthiest institution on earth." But how did it get so rich? My favorite story is the one about the end of the first millennium.

It seems that as the year 1000 grew near, the people of Europe became nervous. Recalling tales about the end of the world, and remembering the Biblical injunction that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Catholics began unloading their loot. The depository, of course, was the Church.

"When," writes Manhattan, "following the long night of terror of the last day of December 999, the first dawn of the year 1000 lit the Eastern sky without anything happening," many Catholics breathed a sigh of relief. "Those who had given away their property made for the ecclesiastical centers which had accepted their `offerings,' only to be told that their money, houses, lands, were no longer theirs. It had been the most spectacular give-away in history."

The result was predictable. "Since the Church returned nothing," opines Manhattan, "she embarked upon the second millennium with more wealth than ever, the result being that the monasteries, abbeys and bishoprics, with their inmates and incumbents, became richer, fatter and more corrupt than before."

Kind of reminds me of the Billie Holiday refrain, "Nice Work

If You Can Get It.”

According to Manhattan, at the end of the Middle Ages, the Vatican resorted to some rather bizarre means to extract money from the peasants. Various bishops, Manhattan contends, were busy excommunicating insects, the result of which was an outpouring of revenue from grateful peasants. To be specific, leeches were excommunicated in 1451, caterpillars in 1480 (and again in 1587), snails got the boot in 1481 (they were dumped again in 1487) and grasshoppers were shown the door in 1516. He says not a word about the praying mantis, but perhaps this was an oversight. Either that or the bishops thought they were too holy to excommunicate.

In the nineteenth century, Manhattan tells us that the dogma of infallibility was struck “to lay the foundations of a novel structure directed at amassing the riches of the world with more efficiency than ever before.” In the twentieth century, the Church “secretly welcomed the Bolshevik Revolution,” but then had second thoughts and turned against “Red Russia.” Manhattan does not leave us in lurch, explaining this anomaly by stating that “Such double policies, conducted simultaneously at all levels during a period of years, were the result of the two most basic urges which have always bedeviled her [the Church’s] conduct throughout her long experience: insatiable greed for ecclesiastical aggrandizement and an equally insatiable appetite for any prospect of potential earthly wealth.”

Avro Manhattan’s *The Vatican Moscow Washington Alliance* follows the same logic. When fascism emerged in Europe, Pope Pius XI “welcomed” it as a bulwark against communism, calling Mussolini “the man sent by Divine Providence.” Not only does Manhattan fail to cite his sources for this charge, he cites not one source in his entire book. Be that as it may, we learn that Pius XI eventually turned against the fascists. That was a mistake: one of Mussolini’s physicians gave the pope a lethal injection for doing so. Pius

XII was spared such a fate because he “helped Hitler into power.”

Manhattan credits Pope John XXIII with beginning the Vatican-Moscow alliance, but awards Paul VI the title of “the father” of this alliance. Essentially, Manhattan says that the Catholic Church was anti-Marxist from World War I to the death of Pius XII in 1958, and then turned left with the formation of the Vatican-Moscow alliance.

John Paul I, we learn, was “liquidated” because he was not anti-Russian; like Pius XI, he was drugged, only this time it was the United States government that did the job. The attempted assassination of John Paul II is credited to the Soviets, this a result of the Pontiff’s creation of the Vatican-Washington alliance. If there is a moral here, it is that popes live longer when they don’t get involved in alliances.

Manhattan is not optimistic. The “Curia-CIA Coalition,” started by John Paul II, has already succeeded in doing what it set out to do: “America has willingly surrendered her political seniority as a superpower to that of the Vatican.” He The Vatican, Manhattan declares, felt that “the whole of North America should by historical right, be Catholic.” This is not a fantasy, he instructs, but the result of “well-calculated plans.” The ultimate goal is to establish “the Catholic Church as a global religion.”

How could all this come to pass? Manhattan is angry with Protestants for allowing the “Catholicization of America,” by which he means the mass migration of Catholics into the U.S.; this is “destroying the traditional Protestant motivated America of the past.” Guess it’s fair to say that Latinos are not high on Manhattan’s list.

The “enfeeblement of the major Protestant bodies,” we are told, began with “ecumenism.” This is not simply Manhattan’s

view, it's the position of William Standbridge in *What's Happening in the Roman Church*. Standridge pulls no punches, holding that "the present ecumenical campaign of the Roman church differs little from its purpose during the tortures and massacres of the inquisition: that is, to take control over all who call themselves Christians." In other words, ecumenical dialogue is a manipulative scheme designed to crush unsuspecting Protestants.

Dave Hunt is similarly distressed by ecumenism. In his book, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, Hunt expresses his outrage over the 1994 joint declaration, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." For Hunt, this attempt at reaching a consensus on non-doctrinal matters, "overturned the Reformation and will unquestionably have far-reaching repercussions throughout the Christian world for years to come." As he sees it, the Evangelical-Catholic accord means that Catholics will be considered Christians. Nothing could be worse: "The millions who were martyred...for rejecting Catholicism as a false gospel have all died in vain."

In a section entitled "The Vatican and the New World Order," Hunt says that "Uncompromising Christians will be put to death for standing in the way of unity and peace." Our Blessed Mother, he argues, is to blame. "From current trends," Hunt writes, "it seems inevitable that a *woman* [his emphasis] must ride the beast. And of all the women in history, none rivals Roman Catholicism's omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent 'Mary.'"

Much of the same charges hurled by other Catholic bashers are found in Hunt's books. "The Roman Catholic Church is by far the wealthiest institution on earth." When the Church asks the faithful for donations, "such pleas are unconscionable ploys." For those dumb enough to think that Rio de Janeiro, with its seven hills, is the home of "spiritual fornication," think again. "Against only one other *city* in history could a charge of fornication be leveled. That city is Rome, and more

specifically *Vatican City*.”

Hunt goes further with this charge by saying that “The gross immorality of the Roman Catholic clergy is not confined to the past but continues on a grand scale to this day.” To make sure we get his point, Hunt contends that “popes, cardinals, bishops and priests without number have been habitual fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, and mass-murderers—ruthless and depraved villains who pursued their degenerate lifestyles immune from discipline.” Nothing nuanced about that!

In his book, *A Cup of Trembling: Jerusalem and Bible Prophecy*, Hunt offers the standard line about Hitler and Himmler being good Catholics, and blames the Catholic Church for promoting Nazism. What drove the Church to do this? “The fanaticism that aroused Catholics to murder was often associated with the Eucharist and the wafer (Host).” Not to be outdone, Hunt brands recent statements by the Vatican condemning anti-Semitism as “hypocritical,” saying they are nothing more than “deceptive declarations.”

What Makes Chick Tick?

No serious student of religion or history would ever believe the absurd charges that Chick Publications specializes in, but that should hardly give us pause. There are millions of people all over the world who want to believe the worst about the Catholic Church, and unsophisticated though they may be, these men, women and children will never dislodge themselves of their hatred for Catholicism as long as they are given a steady supply of Chick fodder. To be sure, the Church will survive this assault, but that doesn't relieve the objections that fair-minded people of every religion should have about Chick.

What makes Chick tick? In one four-letter word, it's called ENVY. Chick writers attribute fantastic powers to the Catholic

Church precisely because they see in the Church a strength and resourcefulness that is absent in Protestantism. In the West, in particular, Chick authors believe that Protestantism should have eclipsed Catholicism long ago. But it hasn't, for reasons that reasonable people can debate. What can't be debated is that those driven by envy (with a little madness thrown in) will never cease their offensive against the Church. The one true Church, that is.

Philip Jenkins: Pedophiles and Priests

by William A. Donohue

(Catalyst 5/1996)

The issue of pedophile priests has been the source of much discussion both in and out of the Catholic community. Like all incendiary issues, it has been the subject of heated analysis, much of it irrationally based. The good news is that there is finally a book that examines the issue in a scholarly and sober manner. The book is *Pedophiles and Priests*, published this year by Oxford University Press, and written by a veteran Penn State historian, Philip Jenkins. Jenkins is a first rate academic and, given that he is also an ex-Catholic, his book merits special attention.

The first problem with conventional thinking on this subject is that almost all of those priests who have been charged with pedophilia have been charged with the wrong offense: the term pedophile refers to adult sex with youngsters who haven't

reached puberty. Because the vast majority of alleged so-called pedophile priest cases involve teenagers, it is inaccurate to slap the term pedophilia on them. This is not to suggest for one moment that priest sex with anyone is somehow acceptable, it is simply to say that when charges are being bandied about, it is useful to speak truthfully about the nature of the charges.

Though Jenkins is an historian, he is well versed in sociology, especially the field of social problems. Social problems, he writes, are often the product of "social constructions," which is to say that prevailing ideologies help determine which objective conditions are regarded as socially problematic. What this means is that under new lens, what was once considered mundane or merely troublesome, now appears as a crisis that demands immediate attention.

To provide my own example, take poverty. It has always existed, but only in the 1960s (when there was less of it than ever before), did it become dubbed a social problem. The same is true of women's rights. The very same people who once resisted an Equal Rights Amendment, e.g., Eleanor Roosevelt, Judge Dorothy Kenyon, the ACLU and the League of Women's Voters, found themselves swept away by the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s and began pressing earnestly for an amendment they previously worked to defeat. It is not that the objective condition of women had seriously deteriorated from previous decades, rather it was that a new construction of reality had emerged.

Sexual misconduct has always existed among the Catholic clergy, the non-Catholic clergy and in the general populace as a whole. What is new is the way many elites in American society began to socially construct the problem of priest sexual abuse, beginning in the mid-1980s. Again, this is not said to exculpate the guilty, but it is to say that a "moral panic," as Jenkins terms it, did begin to evidence itself by 1985.

By the mid-1980s, several social currents that had begun in the 1960s had become institutionalized in American society. The civil rights movement of the 1960s, properly associated with the efforts of Martin Luther King, was the trigger for demands that went far beyond the goal of racial equality. In short time, virtually every segment of American society, from women to migrant farm workers, began to assert its rights and make claims against institutions and society in general. And they did so by using the weapon of the law. So, too, did those who pressed charges against priests, except it took two decades for them to do so.

Feminism took root in the 1960s, and with it came a concern for a newly discovered problem (it had always been there), namely child abuse. In the decades that followed, a whole host of abuse problems would surface, complete with victim and victimizer status. In due course, attention would focus on clergy sexual abuse.

Factionalism within the Church, as well as an adversarial media, also helped to define the contours of the problem. The disputes among politically divergent elements in the Church antedated the construction of the priest "pedophilia" problem, and when the time came for the problem to surface, both sides were ideologically prepared to weigh in with their own critiques. The media of the 1980s, which had by then become accustomed to drawing blood, also seized the moment.

Jenkins asks us to consider why there is no such term as "pastor pedophilia"? It is not for lack of pastors involved in sexual abuse, rather it has much to do with the way the issue of pedophilia has been "framed" by our social constructionists. For example, who ever heard of Tony Leyva?

In the 1980s, Leyva had abused perhaps one hundred boys in several southern states, but few of us ever learned of it. Leyva had the distinction of being a Pentecostal minister and was, therefore, not within the "frame" of those who were busy

constructing reality. The same is true of the three brothers, all Baptist ministers, who were charged with child molestation in the 1990s: the public learned little about this highly unusual series of cases because it was not deemed worthy of dissemination by those fixated on Catholic scandals.

Were it not for the way the problem of clergy sexual abuse has been socially defined, the public would know that the problem is hardly confined to the Catholic community. Indeed, as Jenkins has written, "In reality, Catholic clergy are not necessarily represented in the sexual abuse phenomenon at a rate higher than or even equal to their numbers in the clerical profession as a whole." The biggest difference between the Catholic and Protestant clergy in relation to this problem is due mostly to reporting procedures: there is no counterpart among Protestants to the highly centralized data keeping done by the Catholic Church, hence it is often difficult to make comparisons between the clergy of the two religions.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that such data comparisons hold, the available information on clergy sexual misconduct shows that the problem is bigger among Protestant clergy. For example, the most cited survey of sexual problems among the Protestant clergy shows that 10 percent have been involved in sexual misconduct and "about two or three percent" are "pedophiles." With regard to the "pedophile" problem, the figure for the Catholic clergy, drawn from the most authoritative studies, ranges between .2 percent to 1.7 percent. Yet we hear precious little about these comparative statistics.

The reaction of the media to clergy problems has had something to do with the underreporting of this issue among Protestant clergy. Once the media elites focused their attention on framing the issue in terms of the "celibacy" problem, it became difficult for them to assert that the problem was larger among the non-celibate Protestant clergy. Moreover, the

prurient interest appeal of the day time television talk shows found better fodder conjuring up images of sexually deprived Catholic priests rather than in reporting the truth.

Catholic authors contributed to the hysteria. Jenkins names Father Jason Berry, the author of Lead Us Not into Temptation, and Father Andrew Greeley, the sociologist turned sex novelist, as two principal actors in this melodrama. Berry's book, as the title implies, is bent on showing how natural the temptation to "pedophilia" is among celibate clergy. Chapter titles in his book, "The Sacred Secret" and "Clergy Sexual Abuse: Dirty Secrets Come to Light," offer just the kind of hype that is attractive to the likes of Geraldo Rivera, on whose program Berry appeared. Uninterested in the problem of clergy abuse across the board, Berry focuses exclusively on Catholic clergy misconduct.

Father Greeley, though not sympathetic to the celibacy-causes-pedophilia argument, nonetheless has done much to profile the problem of sexual abuse. For Greeley, it is the structure of the Catholic Church that gives rise to the problem. Closed in secrecy, Greeley charges that the Catholic Church is similar to the Mafia, except that the Mafia does not tolerate deviancy the way the Church does. There is hardly a media outlet that Greeley hasn't used to vent his deep-seated anger at the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which explains why he receives a receptive audience from those not otherwise disposed to treating Catholicism fairly.

Jenkins finds that there were Catholics on the right who also made hay with this issue (the reforms of Vatican II were to blame), but he concludes that it was the dissenters on the "Left/liberal" side of the political spectrum "who did most to shape and define the issue during the 1960s." In particular, Jenkins fingers the *National Catholic Reporter* for its reporting. Not only did this weekly newspaper provide gist for the larger media, it pioneered the term "pedophile priest" in the first place.

Then there is the book, *A Gospel of Shame*, written by Elinor Burkett and Frank Bruni. This diatribe attacks the Catholic Church broadside, contending that oppression has always been a staple of Catholicism. The book is loaded with chapter titles such as "While God Wasn't Watching" and "Revelations." Catholic misdeeds are stigmatized in similar language, e.g., "False Idols," "Casting Out Lepers" and "Cardinal Sins." Abusive acts are termed "The Crucifixion of Innocence" or "Suffer the Children," and the phrase, "The Silencing of the Lambs," is used to convey the polarities of good and evil. Unlike Berry, who is capable of doing some objective analysis, these authors are preoccupied with sensationalism, accounting for their popularity with those who want to demonize Catholicism.

The visuals used in television programs on this subject are, of course, laden with Catholic religious symbols, suggesting once again that there is some real nexus between religion and the problem. When liturgical music is added to the setting, the stigmatizing effect is complete. In the print medium, cartoonists have also had a field day, making the kind of sweeping generalizations that would never be tolerated if the subject were black crime, gay promiscuity, etc.

Jenkins does not neglect the important role that those in law have played in feeding off of charges of clergy abuse. The litigious nature of our society, promoted largely by changes in law that have made it easier to soak those with alleged "deep pockets," has made the issue of clergy sex abuse a mini-industry for some attorneys. It has gotten to such absurd lengths that attempts to name the Pope as codefendant have been tried.

In many instances, the alleged abuse occurred so long ago that the statute of limitations has expired, the result being that civil litigation is pursued instead. But civil cases need only to establish guilt on the basis of the preponderance of evidence, a much lower standard than the reasonable doubt

criterion used in criminal cases. In addition, civil cases do not require substantial evidence to begin litigation, and that makes it quite easy—and relatively inexpensive—to set a case in motion. Add to this the media attention that such charges garner, and the process of indictment is well under way.

Cardinal O'Connor of New York has been criticized by some for saying that although harassing countersuits should be avoided, the archdiocese would still fight "excessively punitive measures" or strategies designed "to teach the church a lesson." Jenkins deals with O'Connor fairly by saying that "The extraordinary inflation of damage claims virtually demands a vigorous defense." Indeed it does: only the naive or malevolent would claim otherwise.

"For purposes of litigation," writes Jenkins, "there is a natural commonality of interest between therapists and child-abuse experts on the one hand and the lawyers who are seeking to prove the extent and harm of clergy abuse on the other." Recall the incredible charges made by the late Steven Cook against Cardinal Bernardin and the attention it received from those in law and in the media. "Recovered memory," surely one of the most contentious and least scientific methods of psychological insight, was used to establish that Cook had had "a seeing and feeling memory" about an incident seventeen years earlier. But Cook later recanted, saying he wasn't sure about his memory. Yet there are many in the therapeutic profession who continue to entertain such discredited concepts.

In the 1960s and 1970s, therapists generally understood that sexual abuse was treatable, itself a condition of some prior malady. Jenkins is right in asserting that officials in the Catholic Church embraced the reigning orthodoxy, and is he also right in maintaining that when the tide turned in the 1980s—when a more litigious approach gained favor—those same officials were now seen as culprits, men who sought to treat a problem that demanded a more punitive approach. In this

instance, when reality was socially reconstructed, it had unfortunate consequences for the Church.

It would be impossible to appreciate the magnification of this issue into a "moral panic" without addressing anti-Catholicism. Jenkins pulls no punches here, stating that "much of the analysis of the 'pedophile crisis' from 1985 onward can legitimately be described as anti-Catholic." In his concluding notes, Jenkins argues that "the pedophile issue has legitimized patterns of rhetoric and prejudice that would have been quite familiar in the era of the Know-Nothings." Jenkins, of course, has no problem with those who report on clergy sexual abuse. But there is a difference between a story that focuses on the alleged wrongdoing of a priest and one that seeks to indict Roman Catholicism. There is a difference between analyzing clergy abuse in the Protestant community by dealing solely with the abuser, and attempting a cause and effect relationship between a wayward priest and the structural and psychodynamic conditions of the Catholic Church. Root causes, it seems, are of selective interest to many who cover this issue.

The idea of priest as sexual deviant, Jenkins notes, is nothing new, having been a characteristic of medieval Europe, Tudor England, Revolutionary France, Nazi Germany and Republican Spain. Especially Nazi Germany. "The enduring power of the pedophile theme," Jenkins says, "is suggested by the fact that this was the propaganda device utilized by the Nazis in their attempt to break the power of the German Catholic church, especially in the realm of education and social services." Himmler charged that "not one crime is lacking from perjury through incest to sexual murder," offering the sinister comment that no one really knows what is going on "behind the walls of monasteries and in the ranks of the Roman brotherhood."

There has been quite an evolution in the way Church officials have responded to this problem. Before the mid-1980s, that is

before the "moral panic" surfaced, individual cases of clergy sexual abuse were dealt with by the dioceses in varying ways. But in 1992 and 1993, following the lead of the Chicago Archdiocese, dioceses around the country began instituting tight measures, and the National Catholic Conference of Bishops set forth stringent guidelines that also addressed the problem.

Unfortunately, we now have the predictable problem of overkill. It is not uncommon anymore to hear priests admit that they do not want to take kids in vans, be with altar boys alone, hug schoolchildren (forbidden by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles) or even horse around in a school playground. The stigmas and taboos that exist are, quite naturally, the outgrowth of a determined effort to "get the Church." It would have been sociologically incoherent had some other outcome been realized.

This book by Philip Jenkins deserves a wide audience, but given the way the issue of clergy sexual abuse has been framed, it will not be easy for Jenkins to get a fair hearing. Don't look for the Sally Jesses of this world to invite him to appear on their show. They have made up their minds, and what they have concluded is that there is something terribly awry with the Catholic Church. All the evidence in the world won't convince them that sexual abuse of youths is found in many segments of society, from married men to ministers, and that Catholic priests actually have a lower rate of offense than their non-celibate counterparts.

To those still interested in the pursuit of truth—and not ideology—the Jenkins volume offers much to digest. It is a tribute to him that he has been able to wade through this politicized forest and emerge with a clear vision. His book is no whitewash, rather it is the product of a scholarly exercise, the kind which used to be the rule, and not the exception, in academia.

Christopher Hitchens: The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice

by William A. Donohue

(Catalyst 3/1996)

Mother Teresa has “deceived” us. Her work with the poor is done not for its own sake, but to “propagandize one highly subjective view of human nature.” She is “a religious fundamentalist, a political operative, a primitive sermonizer and accomplice of worldly secular powers.” Furthermore, the Albanian nun is “a demagogue, an obscurantist and a servant of earthly powers.” She keeps company with “frauds, crooks and exploiters,” and takes in millions of unaccounted for dollars.

If this sounds like nonsense, well, it is. But it is also the way Christopher Hitchens looks at Mother Teresa. His book, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, is a sequel to his British television “documentary” entitled “Hell’s Angel.” The sexual message implied in the book’s title demonstrates that Hitchens never escaped adolescence, and both the book and the film are designed to get the public to hate Mother Teresa the way he does. That he hasn’t fooled even the *Village Voice*, which took note of Hitchens’ hidden agenda “to prove all religion equally false,” must be disconcerting for the author. After all, if the alienated can’t be fooled, it’s time for Hitchens to pack it in.

Christopher Hitchens is a British transplant, a political pundit who has written a column for the *Nation* magazine for decades. The *Nation*, for the unacquainted, is a magazine that would put a smile on the face of Joseph Stalin. (Speaking of Stalin, it is not unimportant that Hitchens' father was a gunrunner for Old Joe, proving once again the maxim "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.") Hitchens has also written many books, none of them of any consequence, and has now found a new home writing for *Vanity Fair*. Having spent his entire adult life on the wrong side of history, he has become a very bitter and angry man.

Why does Hitchens hate Mother Teresa? Like Mother Teresa, Hitchens is troubled by poverty. Unlike her, he does nothing about it. What upsets him most is that the world's greatest champion of the dispossessed is an unassuming nun. Hitchens would prefer to grant the award to ideology, namely to the politics of socialism. And because he is a determined atheist, he cannot come to terms with Mother Teresa's spirituality and the millions who adore her. More than this, it is her Catholicism that drives him mad.

Even some of Hitchens' fellow leftists have noticed his deep-seated hatred of Catholicism. In the 1980s, Robert Orsi accused Hitchens of continuing "a shameful *Nation* tradition of anti-Catholicism," adding that "Hitchens's straightforward hatred of Catholics is offensive and ugly prejudice." It is to be expected, then, that anyone as well received as Mother Teresa would be too much for Hitchens to bear.

As expected, Mother Teresa has won scores of awards from all over the world. This bothers Hitchens. What has she done with the money earned from the awards? He doesn't know, but that doesn't stop him from saying "nobody has ever asked what became of the funds." Not true. He has asked, so why doesn't he tell us what he found? Because that would take work. Worse than that, he would then have to confront the truth. This is why he would rather imply that Mother Teresa is sticking the

loot in her pocket. It's easier this way.

His book, by the way, is a 98 page essay printed on eight-and-a-half by five-and-a-half inch paper, one that is so small it could easily fit into the opening of a sewer. It contains no footnotes, no citations of any kind. There is a role for this genre, but it is not associated with serious scholarship, and it certainly isn't associated with works that make strong allegations against public persons. Rather, it is associated with the gossip pages of, say, a *Vanity Fair*.

Hitchens doesn't like rich people (save for those obsessed with guilt and who give to "progressive" causes) and that explains why he doesn't like it when Mother Teresa takes money from the wealthy. But it wouldn't bother Hitchens if she took money from the government, because that would make her a real redistributionist. From this perspective, Robin Hood is a game that only collectivists can play.

In the promotion flyer accompanying the book, the publisher delights in saying that Hitchens outlines Mother Teresa's relationship with "Paul Keating, the man now serving a ten-year sentence for his central role in the United States Savings and Loan scandal." Wrong, the man's name is Charles Keating, but what difference does that make to a publisher unconcerned with verifying the sources of its authors?

Keating gave Mother Teresa one and a quarter million dollars. It does not matter to Hitchens that all of the money was spent before anyone ever knew of his shenanigans. What matters is that Mother Teresa gave to the poor a lot of money taken from a rich guy who later went to jail. But her biggest crime, according to Hitchens, was writing a letter to Judge Lance Ito (yeah, the same one) "seeking clemency for Mr. Keating."

It would be rather audacious of Mother Teresa if she were to intervene in a trial "seeking clemency" for the accused, unless, of course, she had evidence that the accused was

innocent. But she did nothing of the kind: what she wrote to Judge Ito was a reference letter, not a missive “seeking clemency.”

“I do not know anything about Mr. Charles Keating’s work,” Mother Teresa said, “or his business or the matters you are dealing with.” She then explains her letter by saying “Mr. Keating has done much to help the poor, which is why I am writing to you on his behalf.”

Now why this character reference, written of someone who was presumed innocent at the time, should be grounds for condemnation is truly remarkable. It reveals more about Hitchens than his subject that he brands her letter an appeal for “clemency.” It was nothing of the sort, but this matters little to someone filled with rage.

Here’s another example of how Hitchens proceeds. He begins one chapter quoting Mother Teresa on why her congregation has taken a special vow to work for the poor. “This vow,” she exclaimed, “means that we cannot work for the rich; neither can we accept money for the work we do. Ours has to be a free service, and to the poor.” A few pages later, after citing numerous cash awards that her order has received, Hitchens writes “if she is claiming that the order does not solicit money from the rich and powerful, or accept it from them, this is easily shown to be false.”

Hitchens isn’t being sloppy here, just dishonest. He knows full well that there is a world of difference between soliciting money from the rich and working for them. Furthermore, he knows full well that Mother Teresa never even implied that she wouldn’t accept money from the rich. And precisely whom should she—or anyone else—accept money from, if not the rich? Would it make Hitchens feel better if the middle class were tapped and the rich got off scot free? Would it make any sense to take from the poor and then give it back to them? Who’s left?

Hitchens lets the reader know that there aren't too many people that he likes. On this, he is bipartisan. He doesn't like Hillary Clinton (she "almost single-handedly destroyed a coalition on national health care that had taken a quarter century to build and nurture"), Marion Barry (responsible for corruption and the crime of "calling for mandatory prayer in the schools") or Ronald Reagan (his sins are too long to cite here). As such, he objects to Mother Teresa being photographed with them. Now if only she had posed with the characters who hangout at the Marxist Institute for Policy Studies (a favorite Hitchens cell), she would have escaped his wrath altogether.

Hitchens also hates Mother Teresa's itinerary, charging that there is a political motive to her travels. For example, in 1984 she went to comfort the suffering in Bhopal after a Union Carbide chemical explosion. While there, she asked that forgiveness be given to those responsible for the plant (the Indian government was mostly to blame, though Hitchens, the inveterate anti-capitalist, cannot admit to this). So what does Hitchens make of this?

He takes great umbrage at her right to ask for forgiveness, questioning who "authorized" her to dispense with such virtues in the first place. For Hitchens, her refusal to answer this question (never mind that she was never asked in the first place) is proof positive that her trip "read like a hasty exercise in damage control." Damage control for whom? Union Carbide? Does Hitchens even have a picture of Mother Teresa and a Union Carbide official to show?

Hitchens smells politics whenever Mother Teresa supports moral causes he objects to. For example, in 1988, while in London tending to the homeless, Mother Teresa was asked to meet with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She did. She also met a pro-life legislator. So? For Hitchens, this shows the political side of Mother Teresa. Forget for a moment that Mother Teresa is perhaps the most noted pro-life advocate alive, and that

abortion is first and foremost a moral issue. And does anyone doubt that had she met with a politician interested in socialized medicine, Hitchens would be citing her humanity, not her politics?

Mother Teresa has tended to the sick and poor all over the world. She doesn't pick and choose which countries to go to on the basis of internal politics, and this explains why she has visited both right-wing repressive nations like Haiti and left-wing repressive nations like Albania. Hitchens can't stomach this and indicts Mother Teresa for servicing dictatorships. Now if his logic is to be followed here, then most Peace Corps workers and Red Cross personnel are guilty of courting despots. This may make sense to those who write for the *Nation*, but no one else can be expected to believe it.

It would be a mistake to think that Hitchens is a principled opponent of dictatorships. What matters is whether he believes the regime is sufficiently utopian in its leftist politics to merit his approval (this is why Albania doesn't qualify—it was just an old fashioned tyranny). Allende's Chile, however, is a different story.

In 1983, Hitchens lamented the "tenth anniversary of the slaughter of Chilean democracy" under Salvador Allende. This is a strange way to characterize thuggery. Corrupt and despotic, Allende welcomed terrorists from all over Latin America, bankrupted the poor with runaway inflation, locked up dissidents, installed a censorial press and abused the court system in an unprecedented manner. But despite his record, Allende was the darling of Christopher Hitchens, and Western socialists in general, in the early 1970s.

The Sandinistas were the favorites of the *Nation* crowd in the 1980s. These gangsters fleeced the country, punished the poor (in whose name they served) and instituted mass censorship. Hitchens acknowledges the latter outrage but cannot bring himself to condemn his friends. Censorship, which if practiced

by a right-wing regime is called "fascism," is understood by Hitchens as suggestive of "the crisis of the left in the twentieth century." And what is this crisis? The resolution of the problem of "individual rights versus the common good." But Hitchens must be joking, because in reality the left has never been faced with such a democratic dilemma, having long settled the problem squarely in favor of totalitarianism.

In exemplary Catholic fashion, Mother Teresa comes to the poor not out of sentimentality, but out of love. No matter how impoverished and debased the poor are, they are still God's children, all of whom possess human dignity. This is not something Hitchens can accept. An unrelenting secularist, he cannot comprehend how Mother Teresa can console the terminally ill by saying, "You are suffering like Christ on the cross. So Jesus must be kissing you."

Hitchens is so far gone that he cannot make sense of Christ's admonition that "The poor will always be with you." Not surprisingly, Hitchens says "I remember as a child finding this famous crack rather unsatisfactory. Either one eschews luxury and serves the poor or one does not." But he just doesn't get it: Mother Teresa eschews luxury and serves the poor, yet not for a moment does she believe that she is conquering poverty in the meantime. Only someone hopelessly wedded to a materialist vision of the world would think otherwise.

Hitchens also objects to Mother Teresa's asceticism (if she lived the Life of Riley he would condemn her for that). He charges that her operation in Bengal is "a haphazard and cranky institution which would expose itself to litigation and protest were it run by any branch of the medical profession." Hitchens would prefer that the Bengalis force Mother Teresa to follow regulations established by the Department of Health and Human Services before attending to her work. It does not matter to him that Mother Teresa and her loyal sisters have managed to do what his saintly bureaucrats have never

done—namely to comfort the ill and indigent.

It is a telling commentary on any author when he twists the facts to suit his ends. Hitchens is a master of this and his book is chock full of examples. To cite one, he chastises Mother Teresa for not working cooperatively with the City of New York when she refused to install an elevator in a building she was acquiring to service the homeless. What he doesn't mention is that the Missionaries of Charity pledged to carry the handicapped up the stairs, making moot the need for an elevator. But for Hitchens to mention this fact would have gotten in the way of his agenda.

It is jealousy, not ideology, that propels Hitchens to criticize Mother Teresa for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. He wonders "what she had ever done, or even *claimed* to do, for the cause of peace." (His accent.) This is a strange comment coming as it does from one of those "If You Want Peace, Work For Justice" types. And it apparently never occurred to Hitchens that it is precisely Mother Teresa's humility that disallows her to grandstand before the world trumpeting her own work. A true crusader for the underclass, Mother Teresa is not in the habit of *claiming* to do anything. She is too busy practicing what others are content to preach.

If receiving the Nobel Peace Prize angered Hitchens, it is safe to say he suffered from apoplexy when he read Mother Teresa's acceptance speech. In it, she took the occasion to say that "Today, abortion is the worst evil, and the greatest enemy of peace." Hitchens labels her speech a "diatribe" that is riddled with "fallacies and distortions," none of which he identifies, preferring instead to say that there "is not much necessity for identifying" them. Not, it should be added, if your goal is a smear campaign.

It is a staple of secularist thought that contraception and abortion are the best means to ending poverty and population growth. This may explain why people like Mother Teresa are not

popular with this crowd, but it is no excuse for cheap *ad hominem* attacks. Someone who is confident about the logic of his argument doesn't need to stoop to the gutter to make his point. But Hitchens does just that when he charges that Mother Teresa's opposition to contraception and abortion "sounds grotesque when uttered by an elderly virgin." That it is his own utterance about her that is grotesque seems to have escaped him.

What is perhaps most flabbergasting about Hitchens is that he has no idea about the very nature of the problem Mother Teresa is addressing. On one page he writes that "it is difficult to spend any time at all in Calcutta and conclude that what it most needs is a campaign against population control." Yet on the previous page he notes, with admiration, that in Calcutta "secular-leftist politics predominate." It is a safe bet that Hitchens will go to grave not understanding that it is the predominance of secular-leftist politics that promotes high levels of population growth and ultimately accounts for the misery of Calcutta.

It is ironic that after hurling one unsubstantiated charge after another that Hitchens ends his little book by saying, "It is past time she [Mother Teresa] was subjected to the rational critique that she has evaded so arrogantly and for so long." It would be more accurate to say that it is one more source of her greatness that Mother Teresa never evades anything, including irrational tracts written by vindictive authors. The arrogance is all his, because in the end, Hitchens hasn't even laid a glove on her.