

The Secular Crusade Against Religion

by Dinesh D'Souza

(Catalyst, 1/2007)

This article is adapted from Dinesh D'Souza's new book The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11, just published by Doubleday.

Is Osama Bin Laden right when he alleges that America is a pagan society, the “leading power of the unbelievers”? Bin Laden and the Islamic radicals point to America's policy of separation of church and state to prove their point. To many Americans, of course, this charge is ridiculous. Even so, it is worth asking why America is so committed to such a systematic exclusion of religion from government and public life. Even European countries, where religious belief and practice is much lower than in the United States, treat religion more sympathetically and provide recognition and support to religious institutions and religious schools.

So why is America virtually alone in the world dedicated to strict separation of church and state? Many Americans have become convinced that religion represents, as author Sam Harris puts it in *The End of Faith*, “the most potent source of human conflict, past and present.” Columnist Robert Kuttner gives the familiar litany. “The Crusades slaughtered millions in the name of Jesus. The Inquisition brought the torture and murder of millions more. After Luther, Christians did bloody battle with other Christians for another three centuries.” In a recent book, Richard Dawkins contends that most of the recent conflicts in the world—in the Middle East, in the Balkans, in Northern Ireland, in Kashmir, in Sri Lanka—show the continued vitality of the murderous impulse that seems

inherent in religion.

The problem with this expose is that it exaggerates the crimes of religion, while ignoring the vastly greater offenses of secular or atheist fanaticism. The best example of religious persecution in America is the Salem Witch Trials. How many people were killed in those trials? Thousands? Hundreds? Actually, nineteen. Yet the event continues to haunt the liberal imagination.

It is strange to witness the passion with which some secular people rail against the Crusaders' and Inquisitors' misdeeds of more than five hundred years ago. Ironically these religious zealots did not come close to killing the number of people murdered by secular tyrants of our own era. How many people were killed in the Spanish Inquisition? The actual number sentenced to death appears to be around 10,000. This figure is tragic, and of course population levels were much lower at the time.

But even taking that difference into account, the death tolls of the Inquisition are miniscule compared to those produced by the secular despotisms of the twentieth century. In the name of creating their version of a secular utopia, Hitler, Stalin and Mao produced the kind of mass slaughter that no Inquisitor could possibly match. Collectively these atheist tyrants murdered more than 100 million people.

Moreover, many of the conflicts that liberals count as "religious wars" were not fought over religion. They were mainly fought over rival claims to territory and power. Can the wars between England and France be counted as religious wars because the English were Protestants and the French were Catholics? Hardly. The same is true today. The contemporary conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is not, at its core, a religious one. It arises out of a dispute over self-determination and land. Hamas and the extreme orthodox parties in Israel may advance theological claims—"God gave us

this land" and so forth—but even without these religious motives the conflict would remain essentially the same. Ethnic rivalry, not religion, is the source of the tension in Northern Ireland and the Balkans.

"While the motivations of the Tamil Tigers are not explicitly religious," Harris informs us, "they are Hindus who undoubtedly believe many improbable things about the nature of life and death." In other words, while the Tigers see themselves as fighting for land and the right to rule themselves—in other words, as combatants in a secular political struggle—Harris detects a religious motive because these people happen to be Hindu and surely there must be some underlying religious craziness that explains their fanaticism.

It's obvious that Harris can go on forever in this vein. Seeking to exonerate secularism and atheism from the horrors perpetrated in their name, he argues that Stalinism and Maoism were in reality "little more than a political religion." As for Nazism, "while the hatred of Jews in Germany expressed itself in a predominantly secular way, it was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity." Indeed, "The holocaust marked the culmination of...two thousand years of Christian fulminating against the Jews."

Is anyone fooled by this rhetorical legerdemain? For Harris to call twentieth-century atheist ideologies "religion" is to render the term meaningless. Should religion now be responsible not only for the sins of believers, but also those of atheists? Moreover, Harris does not explain why, if Nazism was directly descended from medieval Christianity, medieval Christianity did not produce a Hitler. How can a self-proclaimed atheist ideology, advanced by Hitler as a repudiation of Christianity, be a "culmination" of two thousand years of Christianity? Harris is employing a transparent slight-of-hand that holds Christianity responsible for the crimes committed in its name, while exonerating secularism and atheism for the greater crimes committed in

their name.

A second justification for America's church-state jurisprudence is the claim that the founders enshrined secularism in the Constitution as the basis for their "new order for the ages." In her book *Freethinkers*, Susan Jacoby argues that it was precisely to establish such a framework that the founders declined to make America a Christian nation and instead gave us "a nation founded on the separation of church and state." Jacoby credits the founders with "creating the first secular government in the world."

But consider this anomaly. The idea of separating religion and government was not an American idea, it was a Christian idea. It was Christ, not Jefferson, who said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The American founders institutionalized this Christian idea—admittedly an idea ignored for much of medieval history—in the Constitution.

The framers' understanding of separation, however, was very different from that of today's ACLU. From the founding through the middle of the twentieth century, America had religious displays on public property, congressionally-designated religious services and holidays, government-funded chaplains, and prayer in public schools. So entrenched was religion in American private and public life that, writing in the early nineteenth century, Tocqueville called it the first of America's political institutions. In a unanimous ruling in 1892, the Supreme Court declared that if one takes "a view of American life as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs, and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth...that this is a Christian nation."

Virtually all of the actions that secular liberals claim are forbidden by the no-establishment clause of the First Amendment were permitted for most of American history. Thus

liberals like Jacoby are in the peculiar position of claiming that the religion provisions of the Constitution were misunderstood by the founders and by everyone else for a hundred and fifty years, until finally they were accurately comprehended by liberals. The arrogance of this claim is exceeded only by its implausibility.

Finally some people defend church-state separation by pointing to the religious diversity of America. Historian Diana Eck has a recent book titled *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. Since America is no longer religiously homogenous, Eck's argument goes, there is a pressing need to adopt constitutional rules that permit minorities to freely practice their religion. We frequently hear that nativity displays, monuments with the Ten Commandments, and prayers at high school graduations all make the multitudes of American non-Christians feel extremely uncomfortable.

But where is the evidence for this? It is not the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist immigrants who press for radical secularism, it is the liberal activist groups. So the mantra of "diversity" seems to be secular ruse to undermine all religious expression in the public sphere. Moreover, the factual premise is unsound. Contrary to Eck, America is not the world's most diverse nation. Surprising though it may seem, the total number of non-Christians in America adds up to less than 10 million people, which is around 3 percent of the population. Many Asian and African countries have religious minorities that make up 15 to 20 percent of the population.

In terms of religious background, America is no more diverse today than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. How is this possible? Because today's immigrants come mostly from Mexico and Latin and South America, and virtually all of them are Christians. So not only does America remain a Christian country, but as historian Philip Jenkins points out, its Christian population relative to non-Christians is

growing. Jenkins notes that the real story of America should be titled, "How this Christian country has become an even-more-Christian country."

My conclusion is that the radical Muslims are wrong about America but they are right about separation of church and state. America's church-state doctrine, in its current form, is a fraud. It is built on a bogus historical, constitutional and sociological foundation. The real purpose of its advocates is to marginalize traditional religion and traditional morality, so that the public sphere can be monopolized by their ideological agenda. It is time to dismantle the anti-religious scaffolding erected by the party of secularism.

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The Attempt to Derail John Roberts

by William Donohue

(7-29-05)

Attempts by some Democrats to derail John Roberts' nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court by dwelling on his religion will backfire: the nation has had enough of attempts to impose a veiled litmus test on Catholic nominees to the federal bench.

When Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Steven Breyer were nominated by President Clinton for a seat on the high court, no one in the media or the congress asked them to explain how their Jewish

heritage might impact their rulings. But from Barbara Walters on ABC to Lynn Neary on NPR, media pundits have wondered aloud whether Roberts' Catholicism might affect his decisions on the court. And, of course, Senator Dick Durbin—always one to pry about matters religious when Catholics are nominated—has already announced that he will grill Roberts about his faith when he gets a chance.

Indeed, within 24 hours of Roberts' nomination, leftist writer Adele M. Stan was opining in *The American Prospect* that President Bush was "Playing the Catholic card" by nominating Roberts; on her blog, she commented, "Rome must be smiling." Now it is inconceivable that anyone would say of Ginsburg or Breyer that Clinton was "Playing the Jewish card," or that "Israel must be smiling."

There is nothing wrong with offering a biographical portrait of a Supreme Court nominee that mentions his or her religious affiliation. But there is a monumental difference between a descriptive article and one that posits a cause-and-effect relationship between one's religious beliefs and one's likely rulings from the bench. The former is good journalism; the latter is yellow journalism. Everyone recognizes what the code words "fervent personal beliefs" mean.

It is even worse when senators start questioning a nominee about his religion. When Senator Chuck Schumer questioned circuit-court nominee Bill Pryor about his "fervent personal beliefs on *Roe v. Wade*," he crossed the line. Why? Because everyone knew that Schumer's words were code for "fervent religious beliefs." Indeed, the record shows that in the very next breath Schumer gratuitously observed that he is friends with the bishop in his community. Bully for him! But his real point was lost on no one.

It is morally offensive and constitutionally inappropriate to pursue such a line of inquiry. All a prospective judge should be asked in this regard is whether he holds to any convictions

so strongly that he could not faithfully execute his duties to interpret the Constitution in a fair manner. The source of those convictions should be a moot issue.

It is important to acknowledge that while a religiously informed conscience may play a legitimate role for a lawmaker, it has no legitimate role to play for a judge. Those who legislate have every right to seek insight from the teachings of their respective religions: their goal is to service the common good, thus they may feel it is wise to consult the fund of knowledge that their religious ancestors have bequeathed. But a judge is there for one reason and one reason only: to interpret the Constitution as it was meant to be interpreted by those who wrote it. Ergo, whatever religious, or secular, beliefs he personally holds should be irrelevant.

On August 14, I will proudly join with evangelicals and Jews in Justice Sunday II (I participated in the first event in April). We may be of different faiths, but it is not our theological differences that matter: we are united on the same side of the culture war against those who would like to censor the public expression of religion and drive people of faith out of the public square. Radical secularists want us to sit back and relax and leave the driving to them. But I have news for them: we will be disobedient. Moreover, we fully intend to take control of the wheel. (Lucky for them, we believe in something they don't—tolerance. Which is why we won't run them over.)

Finally, when Ruth Bader Ginsburg was asked what her position was on gay rights and capital punishment, she declined to answer. Similarly, Roberts should decline to answer if pressed how he would vote on abortion. Indeed, it is up to all fair-minded senators to interject themselves on his behalf if one of their colleagues seeks to violate this understanding.

Eugenics, Rockefeller and Roe v. Wade

by Rebecca R. Messall, Esq.

(Catalyst 7-8/2005)

This article is taken from its fuller version in the fall 2004 issue of Human Life Review, available in its entirety at www.humanlifereview.com.

Everyone knows that the infamous Roe v. Wade opinion legalized abortion, but almost no one knows that legal abortion was a strategy by eugenicists, as early as 1939, to “genetically improve” the population by “reducing” it. In writing his opinion, *Roe’s* author, Justice Harry A. Blackmun, relied directly and indirectly on the work of these British and American eugenicists. Eugenics is easiest to describe as being the Darwin-based theory behind the Nazis’ plans to “breed” a race of human thoroughbreds. After Hitler, eugenic theorists advocated global control over who has babies, and how many. It has been called “population thinking.” America’s richest families promoted eugenicists and their many social initiatives, including *Roe*.

One of the clearest links between the eugenics movement and U.S. abortion policy is visible in the American Eugenics Society’s (AES) 1956 membership records, which includes a Planned Parenthood co-founder, Margaret Sanger, and at least two presidents, William Vogt and Alan Guttmacher. The AES had an ugly history of multiple ties to prominent Nazis in

Germany. AES members assisted Hitler in crafting the 1933 German sterilization laws. Unbelievably, in 1956—after WWII—the AES membership list included Dr. Otmar Frieheer Von Verschuer, who had supervised the ongoing “science” experiments of Dr. Josef Mengele at Auschwitz.

The AES lobbied successfully for involuntary sterilization laws in the United States, which claimed an estimated 63,000 victims. In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld those laws in *Buck v. Bell*, which was cited in *Roe*. Some states have recently extended official regret and/or apology for those laws.

The Catholic Church was, and is, the nemesis of eugenicists. Politicians in both political parties who position themselves against the Catholic Church and in favor of *Roe*, align themselves with a host of eugenic strategies and fallout—which include human embryo exploitation (nick-named stem cell research), the trafficking in fetal body parts and euthanasia. They also align themselves with the Rockefeller family dynasty, who funded eugenic scientists decades before Hitler put eugenic theories into practice and who supported many of the leaders of the American Eugenics Society.

The Rockefellers’ support for eugenics began early in the twentieth century, and included support for the Eugenics Record Office. In 1913 John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (“Junior”) incorporated a group, which became a major force in supporting birth control clinics and played a pioneering role in the modern field of population studies.

As early as 1922, the Rockefeller Foundation sent money to fund German eugenics. Of Germany’s 20-plus Kaiser Wilhelm Institute science centers, Rockefeller money built or supported three which “made their mark for medical murder” under the Nazis. One institute was for brain research. During part of Hitler’s rule, it employed Hermann J. Muller, a Rockefeller-funded American socialist and geneticist. It later

received "brains in batches of 150-250" derived from Holocaust victims. Another center, the Eugenics Institute, listed its 1935 activities as follows: "the training of SS doctors; racial hygiene training; expert testimony for the Reich Ministry of the Interior on cases of dubious heritage; collecting and classifying skulls from Africa; studies in race crossing; and experimental genetic pathology."

Junior began funding Margaret Sanger in 1924. Surely he knew of her 1922 book, *The Pivot of Civilization*. In it Sanger railed against New York's Archbishop, calling his orthodoxy a "menace to civilization." Yet she admired Sir Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics, whose ideal she called "the rational breeding of human beings." She said the Neo-Malthusians considered birth control as "the very pivot of civilization." She said, "Birth control... is really the greatest and most truly eugenic program."

When Frederick Osborn became president of the AES in 1946, the AES' journal, *Eugenical News*, published a state-by-state report on sterilizations. It also reported on the opposition by Catholic hierarchy, religious and laity. In Alabama: "Whenever sterilization bills are introduced the Catholics descend upon the capital in numbers—priests, nuns and laity—and attack the bill as "against the will of God" and "an attack on the American home." In Colorado, a 1945 bill failed passage due to "vigorous Catholic opposition." In Pennsylvania: "The Cardinal's office in Philadelphia immediately sent a letter to every legislator directing him to oppose the bill, and they were visited by the parish priests in their home communities."

Frederick Osborn was put in charge of the Population Council, a group organized and funded by John D. Rockefeller III. In 1956, Osborn addressed the British eugenics society. Osborn affirmed his belief in "Galton's dream" and proposed what he called "voluntary unconscious selection" by changing laws, customs and social expectations. To accomplish this voluntary

unconscious selection, he advocated an appeal to the idea of “wanted” children.

In 1968, when many people wrongly believed that the eugenics movement had disappeared, Osborn published a book, *The Future of Human Heredity: An Introduction to Eugenics in Modern Society*. Osborn asserted that “less intelligent women” could be convinced to reduce their births voluntarily, in order to “further both the social and biological improvement of the population.” He utilized a euphemism for racial minorities by urging that contraception be targeted to people “at the lower economic and educational level.” Osborn recommended disguising the reason for making birth control “equally available.” He said: “Measures for improving the hereditary base of intelligence and character are most likely to be attained under a name other than eugenics.”

Writing his *Roe* opinion five years after Osborn’s book, Blackmun’s first four introductory paragraphs mention nothing about the newly decreed right of privacy in support of abortion, but he does state: “population growth, pollution, poverty, and racial overtones tend to complicate and not to simplify the problem.” Blackmun directly cited the two men closely connected to the British and the American eugenics societies. Glanville Williams is cited twice. Christopher Tietze is cited three times and Lawrence Lader’s book, *Abortion*, is cited seven times.

The mystery of Blackmun’s curious opening paragraphs in *Roe* may be solved by Lader’s book, *Abortion*, which contains panicked rhetoric such as the following:

“The frightening mathematics of population growth overwhelms piecemeal solutions and timidity. No government, particularly of an underdeveloped nation, can solve a population crisis without combining legalized abortion with a permanent, intensive contraception campaign.”

Glanville Williams (1911- 1997) was a Eugenics Society Fellow in England. Before citing Williams in *Roe*, Blackmun would have seen Williams' explicit reference to eugenics:

"Contraception and Eugenics: The problem does not only concern the limits of subsistence, though this in itself is one of sufficient magnitude. There is, in addition, the problem of eugenic quality. We now have a large body of evidence that, since industrialization, the upper stratum of society fails to replace itself, while the population as a whole is increased by excess births among the lower and uneducated classes."

Before *Roe*, Ireland's future cardinal, Cahal B. Daly, had exposed Williams' anti-Catholic rhetoric:

"Examples of the technique occur on every alternate page...Christian moral teaching is 'reactionary,' 'old-fashioned,' 'unimaginative,' 'primitive if not blasphemous,' 'restrictive,' 'irrational,' 'out-moded,' 'dogmatic,' 'doctrinaire,' 'authoritarian.'

"Contrasted with it are 'enlightened opinion,' 'interesting medico-social experimentation,' 'progressive statutes,' 'empirical, imaginative humanitarianism.'"

Blackmun acknowledged the Catholic scientific view that life begins at the moment of conception, but thereafter Blackmun relied on books and articles espousing the science of eugenics. In fact, one book contains a subheading titled, "The New Eugenics," and cites two men who can be described as maniacal eugenicists who were seemingly paranoid about a deteriorating human heredity. Blackmun cited an article, "The New Biology and the Future of Man", which speaks for itself:

"Taken together, [artificial gestation, genetic engineering, suspended animation]...they constitute a new phase in human life in which man takes over deliberate control of his own evolution... There is a qualitative change to progress when man learns to create himself...a reworking of values is

required...Submission to supernatural power is not adaptive to a world in which man himself controls even his own biological future...What counts is awareness of the unmistakable new fact that in general new biology is handing over to us the wheel with which to steer directly the future evolution of man."

In March 1973, two months after *Roe* was handed down, Osborn's American Eugenics Society changed its name to the Society for the Study of Social Biology. The announcement said: "The change of name of the Society does not coincide with any change of its interests or policies." The group had already changed the name of its journal in 1968 from *Eugenics Quarterly*, to *Social Biology*. Commenting on the new title, Osborn remarked: "The name was changed because it became evident that changes of a eugenic nature would be made for reasons other than eugenics, and that tying a eugenic label on them would more often hinder than help their adoption. Birth control and abortion are turning out to be great eugenic advances of our time. If they had been advanced for eugenic reasons it would have retarded or stopped their acceptance."

This, then, is the ideological basis of the abortion industry.

Catholicism and Science

by Rodney Stark

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Popular lore, movies, and children's stories hold that in 1492 Christopher Columbus proved the world is round and in the process defeated years of dogged opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, which insisted that the earth is flat. These tales are rooted in books like *A History of the Warfare of*

Science with Theology in Christendom, an influential reference by Andrew Dickson White, founder and first president of Cornell University. White claimed that even after Columbus' return "the Church by its highest authority solemnly stumbled and persisted in going astray."

The trouble is, almost every word of White's account of the Columbus story is a lie. All educated persons of Columbus' day, very much including the Roman Catholic prelates, knew the earth was round. The Venerable Bede (c. 673-735) taught that the world was round, as did Bishop Virgilius of Salzburg (c. 720-784), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), and Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224-74). All four ended up saints. *Sphere* was the title of the most popular medieval textbook on astronomy, written by the English scholastic John of Sacrobosco (c. 1200-1256). It informed that not only the earth but all heavenly bodies are spherical.

So, why does the fable of the Catholic Church's ignorance and opposition to the truth persist? Because the claim of an inevitable and bitter warfare between religion and science has, for more than three centuries, been the primary polemical device used in the atheist attack on faith.

The truth is, there is no inherent conflict between religion and science. Indeed, the fundamental reality is that Christian theology was essential for the rise of science—a fact little appreciated outside the ranks of academic specialists.

Recent historical research has debunked the idea of a "Dark Ages" after the "fall" of Rome. In fact, this was an era of profound and rapid technological progress, by the end of which Europe had surpassed the rest of the world. Moreover, the so-called "Scientific Revolution" of the sixteenth century was a result of developments begun by religious scholars starting in the eleventh century.

Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the leading scientific figures were overwhelmingly devout Christians who

believed it their duty to comprehend God's handiwork. My studies show that the "Enlightenment" was conceived initially as a propaganda ploy by militant atheists attempting to claim credit for the rise of science. The falsehood that science required the defeat of religion was proclaimed by self-appointed cheerleaders like Voltaire, Diderot, and Gibbon, who themselves played no part in the scientific enterprise—a pattern that continues today. I find that through the centuries (including right up to the present day), professional scientists have remained about as religious as the rest of the population—and far more religious than their academic colleagues in the arts and social sciences.

It is the consensus among contemporary historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science that real science arose only once: in Europe. It is instructive that China, Islam, India, ancient Greece, and Rome all had a highly developed alchemy. But only in Europe did alchemy develop into chemistry. By the same token, many societies developed elaborate systems of astrology, but only in Europe did astrology lead to astronomy. And these transformations took place at a time when folklore has it that a fanatical Christianity was imposing a general ignorance on Europe—the so-called Dark Ages.

The progress achieved during the "Dark Ages" was not merely technological. Medieval Europe excelled in philosophy and science. The term "Scientific Revolution" is in many ways as misleading as "Dark Ages." Both were coined to discredit the medieval Church. The notion of a "Scientific Revolution" has been used to claim that science suddenly burst forth when a weakened Christianity could no longer prevent it, and as the recovery of classical learning made it possible. Both claims are as false as those concerning Columbus and the flat earth.

First of all, classical learning did not provide an appropriate model for science. Second, the rise of science was already far along by the sixteenth century, having been

carefully nurtured by religiously devout scholastics. Granted, the era of scientific discovery that occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was marvelous, the cultural equivalent of the blossoming of a rose. But, just as roses do not spring up overnight, and must undergo a long period of normal growth before they even bud, so too the blossoming of science was the result of centuries of intellectual progress.

From Ockham through Copernicus, the development of the heliocentric model of the solar system was the product of the universities—that most Christian invention. From the start, the medieval Christian university was a place created and run by scholars devoted entirely to knowledge. The autonomy of individual faculty members was carefully guarded. Since all instruction was in Latin, scholars were able to move about without regard for linguistic boundaries, and because their degrees were mutually recognized, they were qualified to join any faculty. It was in these universities that European Christians began to establish science. And it was in these same universities, not later in the salons of philosophes or Renaissance men, that the classics were restored to intellectual importance. The translations from Greek into Latin were accomplished by exceedingly pious Christian scholars.

It was the Christian scholastics, not the Greeks, Romans, Muslims, or Chinese, who built up the field of physiology based on human dissections. Once again, hardly anyone knows the truth about dissection and the medieval Church. Human dissection was not permitted in the classical world (“the dignity of the human body” forbade it), which is why Greco-Roman works on anatomy are so faulty. Aristotle’s studies were limited entirely to animal dissections, as were those of Celsius and Galen. Human dissection also was prohibited in Islam.

With the Christian universities came a new outlook on dissection. The starting assumption was that what is unique to

humans is a soul, not a physiology. Dissections of the human body, therefore, have no theological implications.

Science consists of an organized effort to explain natural phenomena. Why did this effort take root in Europe and nowhere else? Because Christianity depicted God as a rational, responsive, dependable, and omnipotent being, and the universe as his personal creation. The natural world was thus understood to have a rational, lawful, stable structure, awaiting (indeed, inviting) human comprehension.

Christians developed science because they believed it could—and should—be done. Alfred North Whitehead, the great philosopher and mathematician, co-author with Bertrand Russell of the landmark *Principia Mathematica*, credited “medieval theology” for the rise of science. He pointed to the “insistence on the rationality of God,” which produced the belief that “the search into nature could only result in the vindication of the faith.”

Whitehead ended with the remark that the images of God found in other religions, especially in Asia, are too impersonal or too irrational to have sustained science. A God who is capricious or unknowable gives no incentive for humans to dig deeply into his essence. Moreover, most non-Christian religions don’t posit a creation. If the universe is without beginning or purpose, has no Creator, is an inconsistent, unpredictable, and arbitrary mystery, there is little reason to explore it. Under those religious premises, the path to wisdom is through meditation and mystical insights, and there is no occasion to celebrate reason.

In contrast, Tertullian, one of the earliest Christian theologians (c. 160-225), instructed that God has willed that the world he has provided “should be handled and understood by reason.” The weight of opinion in the early and medieval church was that there is a duty to understand, in order to better marvel at God’s handiwork. Saint Augustine (354-430)

held that reason was indispensable to faith: "Heaven forbid that God should hate in us that by which he made us superior to the animals! Heaven forbid that we should believe in such a way as not to accept or seek reasons, since we could not even believe if we did not possess rational souls." Of course, Christian theologians accepted that God's word must be believed even if the reasons were not apparent. In matters "that we cannot yet grasp by reason—though one day we shall be able to do so—faith must precede reason," stated Augustine.

Note the optimism that reason will reveal more and more truth as time accumulates. Saint Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) attempted in his monumental *Summa Theologiae* to fulfill Augustine's optimism that some of these "matters of great importance" could be grasped by reason. Though humans lack sufficient intellect to see directly into the essence of things, he argued they may reason their way to knowledge step-by-step, using principles of logic. This is the methodology of science.

The great figures of the heyday of scientific discovery—including Descartes, Galileo, Newton, and Kepler—actively professed their absolute faith in a Creator God, whose work incorporated rational rules awaiting their discovery. Far from being a rejection of religion, the "Scientific Revolution" was led mostly by deeply religious men acting on religious motivations.

To sum up: The rise of science was not an extension of classical learning. It was the natural outgrowth of Christian doctrine: Nature exists because it was created by God. In order to love and honor God, it is necessary to fully appreciate the wonders of his handiwork. Moreover, because God is perfect, his handiwork functions in accord with immutable principles. By the full use of our God-given powers of reason and observation it ought to be possible to discover these principles. These crucial religious ideas were why the rise of science occurred in Christian Europe, not somewhere else.

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Opus Dei: Fact and Fiction

on misrepresentations in Dan Brown's novel The Da Vinci Code
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The Dan Brown book, The Da Vinci Code, is a best-selling work of fiction that discusses a real-life Catholic organization, Opus Dei. To help separate fact from fiction, we asked officials at Opus Dei to write a short article on this subject. Herewith their reply.

Founded in 1928 by St. Josemaría Escrivá, Opus Dei (Latin for "work of God") has a mission of spreading Christ's teaching on the universal call to holiness. A personal prelature, it works in dioceses around the world, with the approval of local bishops. Opus Dei has been the subject of several myths, made popular recently by the *Da Vinci Code*.

Myth: Opus Dei has a political agenda.

Fact: The only thing Opus Dei has to say about politics is what the Church says, and many of the Church's social teachings leave room for different opinions on concrete political questions. In these opinionable matters, Opus Dei members make their own decisions just like other faithful Catholics. But you won't understand Opus Dei until you realize that politics—whether civil or ecclesial—just isn't its

institutional focus. Opus Dei's focus is on providing spiritual guidance to help people deepen their faith and integrate it with their daily life.

Myth: Opus Dei is a secret society.

Fact: The Opus Dei Prelature publishes the names of all its priests and all its international and regional directors. Like dioceses and parishes, it does not publish lay members' names. Neither do health clubs for that matter, and people surely deserve as much privacy in their spiritual affairs as they do in medical matters. Members, however, are more than happy to tell you of their membership and what Opus Dei is all about.

While we're at it, we can confirm that the Pope's spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, is a member, but we would like to dispel once and for all the rumors that Louis Freeh, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Mel Gibson are members.

Myth: Opus Dei brainwashes, coerces, or pressures members and potential members.

Fact: Opus Dei has complete respect for people's freedom. It's ludicrous to think that the Pope and bishops worldwide would support an institution that didn't. In this era of relativism, there are plenty of people who will call teaching the faith, giving spiritual guidance, and being a Christian witness "brainwashing," "coercion," and "recruiting" or "proselytism." Nowadays consenting adults are free of criticism for doing almost anything—anything apparently except trying to help people grow in their faith and practice it in their daily life.

Myth: Opus Dei makes its members practice dangerous corporal mortifications.

Fact: Each Lent, the Church reminds people that sacrifice is part of the spiritual life. To help its members follow this teaching, Opus Dei encourages them to make small sacrifices, such as persevering in their work or listening to those in need. The Catholic tradition also includes other penances,

such as fasting and the use of a cilice or discipline, as means for deepening one's union with Christ. Many saints, including Opus Dei's founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá, have practiced such penances in a heroic way. Some celibate members of Opus Dei and of other Church institutions freely follow some of these customs, though in a mitigated way. They do so subject to the advice of their spiritual director and in a way that is never harmful to their health, completely unlike the *Da Vinci Code*'s distorted representation. These kinds of sacrifices are certainly not a focus in Opus Dei, which emphasizes integrating faith with the activities of everyday life.

Myth: Opus Dei's status as a "personal prelature" cuts it loose from oversight by the bishops.

Fact: Like a diocese, a personal prelature is overseen by the Holy See. Additionally, Opus Dei receives permission from local bishops before starting apostolic work in their dioceses and keeps diocesan bishops informed about its activities. The guidance it offers its members pertains only to matters connected with its mission, which is educating people about the universal call to holiness and helping them fulfill this call in their daily life. The members of the prelature remain members of their diocese and are subject to their local bishop just like other Catholics.

Myth: With all the criticism, Opus Dei must be doing something wrong.

Fact: Every successful organization has its critics, from Coca-Cola to the Catholic Church itself. As for Opus Dei's critics, anyone who does not believe in Christ, the Church's teachings, or loyalty to the Pope could easily have "issues" with Opus Dei, since it accepts all these things. It's also common that an organization's critics have personal reasons for misinterpreting things—even with good intentions. What's more relevant than the criticism is the fact that millions of people around the world know and love Opus Dei, including the

Pope and a great number of bishops. This is because Opus Dei gives so much help to ordinary people who want to connect their faith with daily life.

For further information, contact the Opus Dei Information Office at info@opusdei.org or (212) 532-3570.

Some Prejudices are More Equal than Others

by Philip Jenkins

(Catalyst 5/2003)

For readers of *Catalyst*, expressions of anti-Catholic bigotry scarcely come as a surprise. Over the years, we have come to expect that media treatments of the Church, its clergy and its faithful will be negative, if not highly offensive, and Catholic organizations try to confront the worst manifestations of prejudice. When such controversies erupt, the defenders of the various shows or productions commonly invoke a free speech defense. These productions are just legitimate commentary, we hear, so offended Catholics should just lighten up, and learn not to be hyper-sensitive. Sometimes, defenders just deny that the allegedly anti-Catholic works are anything like as hostile as they initially seem to be. All these arguments, though, miss one central point, namely that similarly controversial attacks would be tolerated against literally no other group, whether that group is religious, political or ethnic.

The issue should not be whether film X or art exhibit Y is deliberately intending to affront Catholics. We should rather

ask whether comparable expressions would be allowed if they caused outrage or offense to any other group, whether or not that degree of offense seems reasonable or understandable to outsiders. If the answer is yes, that our society will indeed tolerate controversial or offensive presentations of other groups—of Muslims and Jews, African-Americans and Latinos, Asian-Americans and Native Americans, gays and lesbians— then Catholics should not protest that they are being singled out for unfair treatment. If, however, controversy is out of bounds for these other groups—as it assuredly is—then we certainly should not lighten up, and the Catholic League is going to be in business for a very long time to come.

It is easy to illustrate the degree of public sensitivity to images or displays that affect other social or religious groups—but how many of us realize how far the law has gone in accommodating the presumed privilege against offense? Witness the legal attempts over the last two decades to regulate so-called “hate speech.” American courts have never accepted that speech should be wholly unrestricted, but since the 1980s, a variety of activists have pressed for expanded laws or codes that would limit or suppress speech directed against particular groups, against women, racial minorities and homosexuals. The most ambitious of these speech codes were implemented on college campuses. Though many such codes have been struck down by the courts, a substantial section of liberal opinion believes that stringent laws should restrict the right to criticize minorities and other interest groups.

But if these provisions had been upheld in the courts, what would they have meant for recent Catholic controversies? One typical university code defines hate speech “as any verbal speech, harassment, and/or printed statements which can provoke mental and/or emotional anguish for any member of the University community.” Nothing in the code demands evidence that the offended person is a normal, average character not over-sensitive to insult. According to the speech codes, the

fact of “causing anguish” is sufficient. Since the various codes placed so much emphasis on the likelihood of causing offense, rather than the intent of the act or speech involved, the codes might well have criminalized art exhibits like, oh, just to take a fantastic example, a photograph of a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine.

The element of “causing offense” is central to speech codes. At the University of Michigan a proposed code would have prohibited “any behavior, verbal or physical, that stigmatizes or victimizes an individual on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, creed, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, handicap, or Vietnam-era veteran status.” “Stigmatization and victimization” are defined entirely by the subjective feelings of the groups who felt threatened. In 1992, the US Supreme Court upheld a local statute that prohibited the display of a symbol that one knows or has reason to know “arouses anger, alarm or resentment in others on the basis of race, color, creed, religion or gender.” The implied reference is to a swastika or a burning cross, but as it is written, the criterion is that the symbol causes “anger, alarm or resentment” to some unspecified person. These were precisely the reactions of many Catholic believers who saw or read about the “Piss Christ” photograph, or the controversial displays at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Other recent laws have taken full account of religious sensibilities, at least where non-Catholics are concerned. Take for instance the treatment of Native American religions, and the presentation of displays that (rightly) outrage Native peoples. In years gone by, museums nonchalantly displayed Indian skeletons in a way that would be unconscionable for any community, but which was all the more offensive for Native peoples, with their keen sensitivity to the treatment of the dead. In 1990, Congress passed NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which revolutionized the operation of American museums and galleries by requiring

that all Indian remains and cultural artifacts should be repatriated to their tribal owners. As a matter of federal criminal law, NAGPRA established the principle that artistic and historical interests must be subordinate to the religious and cultural sensibilities of minority communities.

Even so, museums and cultural institutions have gone far beyond the letter of this strict law. They have systematically withdrawn or destroyed displays that might cause the slightest offense to Indian peoples, including such once-familiar displays as photographs of skeletons or grave-goods. In South-Western museums today, one commonly sees such images replaced with apologetic signs, which explain gaps in the exhibits in terms of new cultural sensitivities. Usually, museums state simply that the authorities of a given tribe have objected to an exhibit because it considers it hurtful or embarrassing, without even giving the grounds for this opinion, yet that is enough to warrant removal. When disputes arise, the viewpoint of the minority group must be treated as authoritative. Just imagine an even milder version of this legal principle being applied to starkly offensive images like those at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. If Native religion deserves respect and restraint on the part of commentators—as it assuredly does—why doesn't Catholicism merit similar safeguards?

Beyond the legal realm, time and again we see that media outlets exercise a powerful self-censorship that suppresses controversial or offensive images, whether or not that "offense" is intended: and again, this restraint applies to every group, except Catholics. Over the years, the film industry has learned to suppress images or themes that affect an ever-growing number of protected categories. The caution about African-Americans is understandable, given the racist horrors in films of bygone years, but the present degree of sensitivity is astounding. Recall last year's film "Barbershop," in which Black characters exchange disrespectful remarks about such heroic figures as Rosa Parks and Martin

Luther King, and more questionable characters like O. J. Simpson and Jesse Jackson. Though this was clearly not a racist attack, the outcry was ferocious: some things simply cannot be said in public. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton led an intense campaign to delete these touchy references.

And other social groups have learned these lessons about self-censorship. Asian-Americans and Latinos have both made it clear that the once-familiar stereotypes will no longer be tolerated, and Hollywood takes their complaints to heart. By the early 1990s, too, gay groups had achieved a similar immunity. When, in 1998, the film "The Siege" offered a (prescient) view of New York City under assault by Arab terrorists, the producers thought it politic to work closely with Arab-American and Muslim groups in order to minimize charges of stereotyping and negative portrayals. Activists thought that any film depicting how "Arab terrorists methodically lay waste to Manhattan" was not only clearly fantastic in its own right, but also "reinforces historically damaging stereotypes." As everyone knew, Hollywood had a public responsibility not to encourage such labeling.

Yet no such qualms affect the making of films or television series that might offend America's sixty million Catholics. Any suggestion that the makers of such films should consult with Catholic authorities or interest groups would be dismissed as promoting censorship, and a grossly inappropriate religious interference with artistic self-expression. The fuss over whether a film like "Dogma" or "Stigmata" is intentionally anti-Catholic misses the point. The question is not why American studios release films that will annoy and offend Catholics, but why they do not more regularly deal with subject matter that would be equally uncomfortable or objectionable to other traditions or interest groups. If they did so, American films might be much more interesting, in addition to demonstrating a new consistency.

If works of art are to offend, they should do so on an equal

opportunity basis. If we have to tolerate such atrocities as “Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You”—recently revived as a Showtime special—then why should we not have merry satires poking fun at secular icons like Matthew Shepard or Martin Luther King? If, on the other hand, it is ugly and unacceptable even to contemplate an imaginary production of “Matthew Explains It All,” poking fun at victims of gay-bashing, then why should we put up with Sister Mary? Some consistency, please.

Let me end with a suggestion. By all means, let the Catholic League continue to report offensive depictions of Catholics and their church. But to put these in perspective, always remember to record these many other controversies, in which other groups succeed in enforcing their right to be free from offense. Only then can Catholic-bashing be seen for what it is, America’s last acceptable prejudice.

Philip Jenkins is Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University, and author of the book The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice.

Why Do We Need More Saints?

by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R.

(Catalyst 6/2002)

This question is one that is often heard by those involved in proposing the causes of Servants of God for beatification or canonization. It is asked even more frequently since Pope John Paul II has become known as the pope who has canonized the most saints in history.

Because I am the promoter of the cause of the Servant of God Cardinal Terrence Cooke, the beloved Archbishop of New York who died in 1983, I am vitally interested in this question: "Why more saints?" November, the month of All Saints, is a good time to consider this question.

Holiness and the Spirit

The first reason that we have saints is because the Holy Spirit has guided the Church since its earliest days to identify among its members those who can serve as models in following the path of Christ. The saints are guides to holiness. They illustrate how the grace of God takes hold in the life of a poor sinner and turns that person into—well—a saint.

Since the very early days of the Church, Christians have been advised to pray to the martyrs and other saints and not for them—to use the words of Saint Augustine. All Christian Churches which existed before the Protestant Reformation always invoked the saints and still call upon them today asking for their intercession.

Holy Example

For example, in the case of Cardinal Cooke there are many reports of assistance that people believe they have received from God through his intercession. In some cases of physical cure these reports may eventually be examined as part of the process of evaluating miraculous favors through his intercession. Some of these cases are astonishing. Although this aspect of the process of beatification is the one that receives the most popular attention, it is, in fact, the good example of living the Christian life by the Servant of God in his particular time in history that is really most important. For instance, in a time of theological upheaval and social unrest, Cardinal Cooke gave an example of humble, patient, and faithful commitment to the Gospel and to all the people of the flock that he served and, in fact, to all the people of New York. For this reason the whole city appeared to go into

mourning during his final days and at his funeral. One particular incident comes to mind. I was recovering from heart surgery and took a taxi to the Cardinal's funeral. The Jewish taxi driver spoke very directly to me as I got out of the cab. He said, "My wife and I knew the Cardinal. It made no difference to him that we were Jewish. Everyone was the same to him. Mark my words, Father—the Cardinal was a saint."

That simple remark sums up a heroic life of suffering terminal cancer in silence for years, of patience with severe and unjustified criticism, of prayer and a deep devotion to Christ and Our Lady at a time of great disedification when many lost their way. Amazingly, Cardinal Cooke worked at least sixteen hours a day, seven days a week for nine years with terminal cancer. He never complained. In fact, a bishop close to him said, "He never even yawned."

Holy Heroes

Here was an ordinary though talented man who accepted an extraordinary responsibility and did his very best. When I first spoke to the members of the congregation, or office, in Rome that oversees the causes of the Servants of God, they reminded me that we are not seeking to prove that Cardinal Cooke was perfect but rather that he was heroic. He was. I've been privileged to know three or four people who are likely to be canonized. I can say that the example of the heroic virtue of Father Solanus Casey O.F.M. CAP., Mother Teresa, Father Walter Ciszek, S.J., and Cardinal Cooke taught me more than anything I ever studied in books. To know the saints and Servants of God is to see the Gospel come alive in one's own time. Our times certainly need this example and that is the answer to the question, "Why do we need more saints?"

For more information please write to Sister Rose Patrice Sasso, O.P., Cardinal Cooke Guild, 1011 First Avenue, New York City, NY 10022.

Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., is the Director of the

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This article appeared in the *Magnificat prayer book*.

Fulton Sheen, Catholic Champion

by Thomas Reeves

(Catalyst 6/2002)

When American history textbooks mention Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen at all, it is briefly and in connection with the allegedly “feel good” Christianity of the 1950s. To some Americans, Sheen was merely a glib, superficial television performer and pop writer who blossomed briefly on the national scene and rapidly disappeared.

Many orthodox Catholics have a clearer understanding of Sheen, for more than a dozen of his books remain in print, several anthologies of his writings are for sale, and his television shows and tapes continue to be popular. The Eternal Word Television Network regularly features Sheen videotapes. Moreover, an effort is underway, formally inaugurated by the late Cardinal O'Connor of New York, to have the Archbishop canonized.

In preparing *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (Encounter Books, 2001) I discovered a brilliant, charismatic, and holy man who has been underestimated by historians, largely overlooked by the contemporary mass media, and forgotten by too many Catholics. Indeed, I came to the

conclusion that Fulton J. Sheen was the most important Catholic of twentieth century America.

Sheen was born in tiny El Paso, Illinois, in the north central part of the state, in 1895. His father was a modestly prosperous farmer in the Peoria region, his mother a hard-working and popular farm wife and mother of four boys. The Sheen children were gifted with high intelligence (one, Tom, had a photographic memory), trained to work hard (for most of his life Fulton would work a nineteen hour day, seven days a week), and encouraged to advance themselves through education. The parents also stressed the importance of their Catholic faith. The Sheen boys went to parochial schools, and the family attended church regularly and said the Rosary together nightly.

Fulton excelled in his school work from the start, and was an extremely popular youngster. Rather short (five foot seven) and slim, he was unable to compete effectively in athletics and so poured his energy into becoming a skilled collegiate debater. His beautiful speaking voice, penetrating eyes (inherited from his mother), pleasing personality, and outstanding academic preparation proved effective in competitions.

From Fulton's earliest years, there seemed to be a consensus of opinion in the family that he would become a priest. After graduating from St. Viator College in Bourbonnais, Illinois, he went to seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. From there he went to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. to earn a doctorate in philosophy. After ordination in 1919 and receiving two degrees from CUA in 1920, Sheen went to the prestigious Louvain University in Belgium. Here he earned a Ph.D. in philosophy with the highest distinction and was invited to try for a "super doctorate," the *agregé en Philosophie*. He was the first American ever to receive such an offer. Sheen earned the honor in 1925, again passing with the highest distinction. He transformed his dissertation into a

prize-winning book and won the respect and admiration of G. K. Chesterton, among others.

After a brief and successful stint in a slum church in Peoria (a test given by his bishop to see if he would be obedient), Sheen became an instructor at Catholic University. He was to remain on the CUA faculty, teaching philosophy and theology, from 1926 until 1950.

While proving to be a popular professor, Sheen's interests were primarily off-campus. After writing two scholarly books, he began publishing a lengthy list of more or less popular books and articles that would earn him honors and praise throughout the country. In 1928, he went on the "Catholic Hour," a nationally broadcast radio program. He quickly became the program's most popular preacher and for more than two decades was asked to preach during Lent and at Holy Days. Vast quantities of letters and financial donations poured in on "Catholic Hour" officials whenever Sheen spoke.

Sheen was soon in demand throughout the country and Western Europe as a preacher, retreat leader, and teacher. He preached annually at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where he packed the huge church and received much attention in the press.

Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, one of the most powerful figures in the Roman Catholic Church, took Sheen under his wing after World War II, and in 1948 invited him to join a world-wide tour and assume the bulk of the journey's preaching duties. The two men greatly appreciated each other's talents (the Cardinal was a superb administrator and fund-raiser), and in 1950 Spellman had Sheen named to head the American branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Church's principal source of missionary funds. The appointment came with a miter, and in 1951, Sheen was consecrated in Rome. Sheen flung himself into his new duties, revealing his great skill as a fund-raiser. He continued to produce books, articles, and newspaper columns at an

astonishing rate, and accepted invitations to preach throughout the country and across the world. Sheen's personal success at winning converts—the list included writer Clare Boothe Luce, industrialist Henry Ford II, and ex-Communist Louis Budenz—attracted national attention. Unmentioned in the press were the thousands of average Americans who came into the Church because of Sheen's efforts.

When, in 1951, the Archdiocese of New York decided to enter the world of television, Sheen was a natural choice to appear on screen. The initial half-hour lectures were broadcast on the tiny Dumont Network, opposite big budget programs by comedian Milton Berle, "Mr. Television," and singer-actor Frank Sinatra. No one gave Sheen a chance to compete effectively. Soon, however, Sheen took the country by storm, winning an Emmy, appearing on the cover of Time magazine, and entering the "most admired" list of Americans. In its second year, "Life Is Worth Living" moved to the ABC Network and had a sponsor, the Admiral Corporation.

Sheen's talks, delivered in the full regalia of a bishop, were masterful. He worked on each presentation for 35 hours, delivering it in Italian and French to clarify his thoughts before going on television. He at no time used notes or cue cards, and always ended on time. The set was a study with a desk, a few chairs, and some books; the only prop was a blackboard. A four-foot statue of Madonna and Child on a pedestal was clearly visible. Sheen's humor, charm, intelligence, and considerable acting skill radiated throughout the "Life Is Worth Living" series, captivating millions eager to hear Christian (only indirectly Catholic) answers to life's common problems.

Some of Sheen's talks and writings dealt with Communism, which the Bishop, a student of Marxism and a personal friend of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, thought a dire threat to the nation and the world. But at no time did Sheen appear with or praise Senator Joe McCarthy (he had little use for politicians of any

stripe) or directly support the Second Red Scare, which swept through the country during the early 1950s.

Sheen was also a student of Freud, and was consistently critical of Freudian psychology. Sheen's best-selling book, *Peace Of Soul*, presented his views on the subject forcefully. At about the same time, the bishop wrote a powerful book on the Virgin Mary, *The World's First Love*, followed a few years later by an equally impressive *Life of Christ*.

For all of his concerns about worldly issues, Sheen was above all a supernaturalist, who fervently believed that God is love, that miracles happen, and that the Catholic Church best taught the divinely revealed truths about life and death. As he put it in *Peace Of Soul*, "nothing *really* matters except the salvation of a soul."

Still, Sheen was not a plaster saint. Vanity was a constant problem for him, and he knew it. As both priest and bishop, Sheen lived and dressed well and enjoyed the publicity he received in the media and the applause of adoring crowds. Perhaps more serious was an offense that was not discovered until twenty years after his death: while a young teacher at Catholic University, in order to expedite his academic career, he invented a second doctorate for himself.

Sheen could also be difficult at times when his authority was challenged. In the early 1950s, he and Cardinal Spellman, a very proud man, engaged in a bitter feud largely over the dispersal of Society funds. The struggle led to a private audience before Pius XII, who sided with Sheen. In a rage, Spellman terminated Sheen's television series, made him a local outcast, and drove him from the Archdiocese. In 1966, Sheen became the Bishop of Rochester.

Bishop Sheen had been an active participant in the Vatican II sessions in Rome and thoroughly endorsed the reforms that

followed. He tried to make his diocese the bridge between the old and new Catholicism, enacting sweeping reforms and making headlines in the process. Without administrative skills, Sheen alienated many in Rochester, and in 1969 he resigned and returned to New York.

During the last decade of his life, while battling serious heart disease, Sheen continued at a breathtaking pace to travel, speak, and write. During the course of his more than 50 year career in the Church, he wrote 66 books and countless articles. No other Catholic figure of the century could match his literary productivity. (Book royalties and television fees went almost exclusively to the Society. Sheen estimated that he gave \$10 million of his own money to the organization he headed.)

In October, 1979 Sheen met John Paul II in the sanctuary of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Thunderous applause greeted their embrace. The Pope privately told the 84-year-old Archbishop that he had been a loyal son of the Church. Nothing could have been more pleasing for Fulton Sheen to hear. He died on December 9, in his chapel before the Blessed Sacrament.

Thomas C. Reeves is a fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute and the author of several books, including A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy. His latest book, America's Bishop, is the definitive biography of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. It is published by Encounter Books.

The Lie of Maria Monk Lives

On

by Robert P. Lockwood

(Catalyst 9/2001)

She was one of the most famous imposters in the history of the United States, yet her story can still be found in the bookstores and is widely available on the Internet. Maria Monk was the 19th century woman who claimed to be a nun that finally escaped after years of torture and sexual degradation at a convent in Canada.

Her book describing her horrendous tale, commonly referred to as *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, took America by storm in an era when Nativist anti-Catholicism was about to explode in riots and the growth of the Know-Nothing anti-Catholic political party. While *The Awful Disclosures* did not cause 19th Century anti-Catholicism in America, it was a popular propaganda tool to spread hatred of the Church. (The formal title of the 1836 release was *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk as Exhibited in a Narrative of Her Life and Sufferings during a Residence of Five Years as a Novice and Two Years as a Black Nun in the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal*).

Since its first release in January 1836, *The Awful Disclosures* became a staple of anti-Catholic literature and appears never to have been out of print in 165 years. Originally released by a dummy corporation set up by Harper Brothers Publishing of New York to keep it an arm's-length away from what was considered salacious material, it sold an estimated 300,000 copies before the Civil War. It was second in sales at that time only to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Since the 19th Century it has been reprinted by an endless number of publishers and has sold untold millions of copies. A 1997 paperback edition, for example, was released in England

by Senate, an imprint of Random House in the United Kingdom. The earliest edition was published in the 19th Century by T.B. Peterson of Philadelphia.

Tales of sexual perversion in the Catholic Church were common enough prior to the appearance of *The Awful Disclosures*. But Maria's extraordinary fabrication would soon outshine all the competition. *The Awful Disclosures* begins with Maria's birth, background and early introduction to Catholicism. Though Protestant, she attended schools taught by nuns who instructed her on the "evil tendency" of the Protestant Bible. Converting as a child, she claimed to be introduced to offensive sexual questioning by priests in the confessional. Despite this, she decided to become a nun. Yet even as a novice, she wrote, the priests "heard me confess my sins, and put questions to me, which were often of the most improper and revolting nature, naming crimes both unthought of and inhuman."

After four years as a novice, Maria reported that she decided to flee and entered into a hasty marriage. But changing her mind, she returned to the convent to prepare for taking her final vows. After taking her vows she was told that "one of my great duties was to obey the priests in all things; and this I soon learnt, to my utter astonishment and horror, was to live in the practice of criminal intercourse with them." She was also told that because of this, infants "were sometimes born in the Convent, but they were always baptized, and immediately strangled." She was then forced to submit to a night's orgy with three priests.

And so her tale goes on, containing all the classic elements of anti-Catholic literature. Disloyal and disobedient nuns were kept in dungeons in a cellar. Some were murdered outright and in one scene she detailed the death of a nun suffocated under a mattress at the order of the local bishop. Lime was poured over the pit in the basement where the remains of the strangled infants and recalcitrant nuns had been thrown. A "subterranean passage to the seminary" allowed priests to come

and go as they pleased without being seen by the public. Money was extorted from naïve parents, and nuns were taught to perfect the art of lying to cover the sins of the convent. Tortuous penances were commonplace, including “drinking the water in which the Superior had washed her feet.” The Superior “would sometimes come and inform us that she had received orders from the Pope to request that those nuns who possessed the greatest devotion and faith, should be requested to perform some particular deeds, which she named or described in our presence, but of which no decent moral person could ever venture to speak.” She even claimed that arms and ammunition were hidden in the convent and smuggled out for use during election riots in Montreal.

Discovering that she was pregnant by a “Father Phelan,” she decided to finally flee the convent. She escaped to New York but was pursued everywhere by agents of the Church until rescued by brave Protestant ministers. There the story ended with the warning: “The priests and nuns used often to declare that of all the heretics, the children from the United States were the most difficult to be converted; and it was thought a great triumph when one of them was brought over to the ‘true faith.’”

It was a fabulous tale and also an out-and-out fraud exposed as such almost immediately. According to the mother, as a child the girl had been rammed through the ear with a pen and had been uncontrollable since, engaging in wild fantasies. Her mother had committed Monk to a Magdalen Asylum under Catholic auspices in Montreal. That was her only formal contact with the Catholic Church. She left the asylum after becoming pregnant. She then, at age 18, hooked up with a William Hoyte of the Canadian Benevolent Society, a Protestant missionary association with a strong anti-Catholic approach to its work. Hoyte took her to New York where she met a group of rather unscrupulous Protestant clergymen. Whether Monk’s story was her invention or that of the ministers is not clear, though

certainly the ministers – most notably Rev. J.J. Slocum – were the actual writers. Advanced notice of the book appeared in the popular anti-Catholic newspapers of the era, particularly one published in New York called *The American Protestant Vindicator*. (Its editor would eventually distance itself from the story when it became more and more clear that the book was a fabrication).

The book was such a success upon release that Slocum and Monk immediately became embroiled in lawsuits with the other ministers for a cut on the profits. But nothing seemed to dampen the public's enthusiasm for what they saw as the first real portrayal of convent life. Rave reviews appeared throughout the Protestant press and the small Catholic community could do little but protest that it was a hoax. But cracks in her story quickly began to appear. Two Protestant clergymen traveled to Montreal and reported that the Hotel Dieu was nothing like the physical description given in Maria's book. A Protestant journalist investigated the story and pronounced it a complete hoax. All critics, however, were dismissed as Jesuits in disguised or bribed by the Church. In Canada, the story had enraged many, both Protestant and Catholic, as the Hotel Dieu was actually a widely respected charitable hospital and convent whose nuns had recently served heroically during a cholera epidemic.

Maria Monk did nothing to aid her cause. She disappeared in August 1837, only to resurface again in Philadelphia where she claimed to have been kidnapped by priests. It was discovered, however, that she had simply run off with another man under an assumed name. Another book was published under her name that year, claiming pregnant nuns from Canada and the United States were being hidden on an island in the St. Lawrence River.

In 1838, Monk became pregnant again, though she claimed it was a Catholic plot to discredit her. She married but her husband soon abandoned her. In 1849 she was arrested for pickpocketing at a house of prostitution. She died a short time later at age

33 in either a charitable house or, as some claimed, in prison. The child of that last marriage published a book in 1874 telling the story of Maria's final days as well as her own conversion to Catholicism.

The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk was important in that it popularized so many of the anti-Catholic stereotypes that would persist in the American consciousness well into the 20th Century. Monk painted a Catholic faith based on medieval superstition, inquisitorial tortures, crafty "Jesuitical" manipulation, suppression of the Bible and oppression of liberty. It was a Church foreign to democratic ideals eager to convert and undermine America. It would engage in any act, including murder, to pursue its nefarious ends. Soon and for decades to follow various state legislatures and local authorities would pass "convent inspection laws" in order to search for nuns held against their will. In the 1890s, the American Protective Association (APA) would claim that caches of weapons were hidden in convents and Catholic Church basements for an uprising on the feast of St. Ignatius Loyola.

Maria's story is still popular and available in the more virulently anti-Catholic fundamentalist bookstores as well as on the Internet. More important, however, is that much of today's secular anti-Catholic stereotypes prominent in the news media, the arts and entertainment are simply Maria's inventions stripped of their religious pretensions. The Church as oppressive of women, interested only in power, prudish but at the same time secretly lascivious, a threat to freedom and choice, and Catholics as ignorant dupes of medieval superstitions, are commonly accepted caricatures of Catholicism in conventional wisdom. *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* is still with us today, not just in sleazy corners of the Internet, but in many of the prejudices of the cultural elite.

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The Jubilee Year “Request for Pardon”

by Robert P. Lockwood, Catholic League Director of Research

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On Sunday, March 12, 2000 Pope John Paul II made a unique and historic “request for pardon” for the sins and errors of Christians both throughout the centuries and in the present. The Holy Father saw this as the culmination of the Church’s “examination of conscience” for the Jubilee Year. The goal of such a public act of repentance is a “purification of memory.” As the Holy Father explained in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* the Jubilee Year should be the occasion for a purification of the memory of the Church from all forms of “errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act” in the past millenium.¹ At the same time, the responsibility of Christians for the evils that exist within our own time must be acknowledged as well.

The “request for pardon” is made in the understanding that “all of us, though not personally responsible and without encroaching on the judgement of God, who alone knows every heart, bear the burden of the errors and faults of those who have gone before us.”² This papal act of atonement for past sin is an intensely spiritual act, meant to seek forgiveness from God and allow Christians to enter the new millennium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith.

Unfortunately, we live at a time where Truth is rarely

recognized, and where the spiritual nature of this public confession made by the pope for the entire Church was misconstrued, misunderstood and twisted to meet political or ideological agendas. Particularly when events in history are raised, "the simple admission of faults committed by the sons and daughters of the Church may look like acquiescence in the face of accusations made by those who are prejudicially hostile to the Church."³ There have been public responses to the papal apology that confuse repentance for wrong actions with accusations of doctrinal error, or make demands for apologies not required in the historical or cultural context of the events of the past.

The Papal Atonement

At the special Jubilee Mass for the first Sunday of Lent, Pope John Paul II, gave his expression of regret for the entire Church for the following⁴:

1. "Even men of the church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the truth."

The pope explained that "in certain periods of history Christians have at times given in to intolerance." He asked that we "seek and promote truth in the gentleness of charity, in the firm knowledge that truth can prevail only in virtue of truth itself."

"Recognition of the sins which have rent the unity of the Body of Christ and wounded fraternal charity." The pope asked forgiveness for the breakdown in Christian unity and that "believers have opposed one another, becoming divided, and have mutually condemned one another and fought against one another."

3. "In recalling the sufferings endured by the people of Israel throughout history, Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people

of the covenant.” The pope acknowledged that we are “deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer.”

4. “Repent of the words and attitudes caused by pride, by hatred, by the desire to dominate others, by enmity toward members of other religions and toward the weakest groups in society.” Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness because “Christians have often denied the Gospel; yielding to a mentality of power, they have violated the rights of ethnic groups and peoples, and shown contempt for their cultures and religious traditions.”

5. “Offenses against...human dignity and...rights (that) have been trampled; let us pray for women, who are all too often humiliated and emarginated.” At times, the pope explained, “the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic differences.”

6. “Especially for minors who are victims of abuse, for the poor, the alienated, the disadvantaged; let us pray for those most defenseless, the unborn killed in their mother’s womb or even exploited for experimental purposes by those who abuse the promise of biotechnology and distort the aims of science.” How many times, the pope asked, “have Christians not recognized (Christ) in the hungry, the thirsty and the naked, in the persecuted, the imprisoned and in those incapable of defending themselves, particularly in the first stages of life.” He asked forgiveness for “all those who have committed acts of injustice by trusting in wealth and power and showing contempt for the ‘little ones.’”

Reaction and response

For the most part, reaction to the papal request for pardon was positive, if one-sided. Most secular editorials – and

commentators from various faiths and denominations – commended the Pope for acknowledging the “errors of the Roman Catholic Church over the last 2000 years.” Yet, they failed to see that at the heart of these errors is the fact that Catholics have faltered when they have become caught up in the culture of their day. Failing to see the world through the eyes of faith, they were caught up in the spirit of their times. The errors that the pope acknowledges are sins that come from the culture, not from a faith lived in unity with the Gospels. Too many commentators seek to imply that the derivation of these errors is the faith itself, rather than a failure of living up to the demands of faith. These sins are the errors Christians share with all mankind that find their roots in society, history and the culture, not in the Gospels: violence in defense of belief, corrosive divisiveness, anti-Semitism, intolerance, racial, gender and ethnic discrimination, and oppression of the poor and defenseless.

The negative secular response to the papal apology can be summed up from an editorial in the March 14, 2000 *New York Times*. “As long as (the Church) was burdened by its failure to reckon with passed misdeeds committed in the name of Catholicism, the Church could not fully heal its relations with other faiths. John Paul has now made it easier to do that. Some of the things (the pope) did not say bear note. The apology was expressed in broad terms. It was offered on behalf of the church’s ‘sons and daughters’ but not the church itself, which is considered holy. Nor did John Paul directly address the sensitive issue of whether past popes, cardinals and clergy – not just parishioners – also erred. The pope’s apology for discrimination against women is welcome but difficult to square with his continued opposition to abortion and birth control, and to women in the priesthood. Regrettably, he made no mention of discrimination against homosexuals. Another noted omission was the lack of a specific reference to the Holocaust...(and) the failure of Pope Pius XII to speak out against the Nazi genocide.”

These charges should be reviewed individually:

*As long as it was burdened by its failure to reckon with past misdeeds committed in the name of Catholicism, the Church could not fully heal its relations with other faiths.

This is a misunderstanding of the purpose of the papal apology. It is also a failure to see the wider benefits to all faiths, and non-faiths. The purpose of the papal atonement for past sin is to allow Christians to enter the new millennium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith. In the *Times* statement there is a direct implication of a one-sided nature to the wrongs of the past, an acceptance of an anti-Catholic interpretation of history rooted in post-Reformation and Enlightenment propaganda rather than an accurate and objective understanding of the past. Additionally, while the papal apology is certainly given without equivocation, "it is hoped that they will be carried out reciprocally, though at times prophetic gestures may call for a unilateral...initiative."⁵ In regard to other religions, "it would also be desirable if these acts of repentance would stimulate the members of other religions to acknowledge the faults of their own past."⁶

*The apology was expressed in broad terms.

The *Times* and other commentators failed to note that the pope has specifically addressed many of the issues to which the apology referred in general. In 1982, the pope referred to the "errors of excess" in the Inquisition; the 1998 Vatican document on the Shoah made clear the moral shortcomings within Christians that contributed to the Holocaust; in 1995, the pope, in discussing the Crusades, outlined errors and expressed thanks that dialogue has replaced violence; in 1987 the pope acknowledged that Christian missionaries too often helped carry out the cultural oppression of native peoples; the pope decried in a 1995 letter the historical discrimination against women and expressed regret that "not a

few" members of the Church shared in the blame.⁷ The *Times* and other commentators demanded a laundry list of apologies based on prejudicial interpretations of history. While the pope "forgives and asks forgiveness," there is no acknowledgment on the part of these commentators of the biases, conceits and hatreds that have often driven their commentaries on the Church. While the pope's apology asks for no reciprocity, it would do well for institutions such as the *Times* to examine objectively their own motivations in their attacks on the Church and the historical prejudices in which they are rooted.

*(The apology) was offered on behalf of the church's 'sons and daughters' but not the church itself, which is considered holy. Nor did John Paul directly address the sensitive issue of whether past popes, cardinals and clergy – not just parishioners – also erred.

This is a two-fold misunderstanding. First, there is a real distinction between a theological understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, which is holy, and its members that are sinners. Second, the *Times* and other critics are making the common mistake of identifying "the Church" with the hierarchy. "Sons and daughters" of the Church refers to all baptized members of the Church, not "just parishioners."

*The pope's apology for discrimination against women is welcome but difficult to square with his continued opposition to abortion and birth control, and to women in the priesthood.

The papal apology dealt with errors and faults of Christians in their actions in the past and present. These errors were most often rooted in failure to live out the demands of the Gospels in particular historical circumstances. The *Times* and other critics are confusing repentance for certain wrong actions in history with admissions of doctrinal error. The *Times* uses the papal apology as an opportunity to demand that the Church change doctrinal truths for a secular agenda. What the apology could not be, and was not intended to be, was

an apology for Church doctrine. The apology that the pope did issue, however, was for any inadvertent cooperation Christians may have given that contributed to the persistence in our own time of a culture of death that allows the weak and defenseless, particularly the unborn, to be abused at the hands of the powerful.

*Regrettably, he made no mention of discrimination against homosexuals.

The papal apology was not meant as an endorsement of a contemporary ideological agenda. The apology makes clear that "Christians have been guilty of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic differences." No person should be subject to discrimination and if any in the Christian community cooperate in discrimination, they are in error. However, the Church has always taught that homosexual acts – not homosexuals – are inherently sinful. The *Times* implied that such teaching involves "discrimination against homosexuals." It does not. Again, the *Times* demanded admission of doctrinal error and that Church teaching succumb to an ideological agenda. Such is neither the sum nor substance of the papal apology.

*Another noted omission was the lack of a specific reference to the Holocaust...

As the recent document on the Shoah made clear, the Holocaust was "the result of the pagan ideology of Nazism, animated by a merciless anti-Semitism that not only despised the faith of the Jewish people, but also denied their very human dignity. Nevertheless, it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts."⁸ That document made clear the need for repentance among Christians for anti-Semitic attitudes that contributed in any way to the Holocaust. The papal apology strongly asserts that "Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their

number against the people of the covenant.” However, it would be an unhistorical leap for the pope to assent to contemporary anti-Catholic propaganda that attempts to identify the Church with the Holocaust. It is a historical fallacy – an insult to the memory of the Holocaust – to utilize this ultimate 20th century evil as a tool against the Church and to thereby mitigate the evil that was pagan Nazism.

*...(and) the failure of Pope Pius XII to speak out against the Nazi genocide.

The alleged “failure” of Pope Pius XII “to speak out on Nazi genocide” is a faulty interpretation of both the historical reality and a papacy that saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. The actions and tactics of Pope Pius XII and the Church saved far more Jewish lives than the Allied armies, Allied governments, the Resistance, the Red Cross, other churches and other religions, or any other then-existing agency of any kind worldwide combined during the war. The actions of Pius XII hardly need an apology.

Conclusion

The difficulty in such an unprecedented event by Pope John Paul II is that too often history is clouded with the prejudices and presumptions of those commenting and reporting on it. As evidenced in the *Times* editorial on the papal apology, history has often been twisted and reinterpreted for ideological purposes. What is assumed to be objective historical understanding of events is often 19th century – and 20th century – anti-Catholic propaganda that has been sanctioned over time as objectively correct. It is conventional wisdom, not historical fact. Careful and objective historical analysis – free from the prejudices of the past and present – needs to guide our understanding of the past. The Church is “not afraid of the truth that emerges from history and is ready to acknowledge mistakes whenever they have been identified, especially when they involve the respect

that is owed to individuals and communities. She is inclined to mistrust generalizations that excuse or condemn various historical periods. She entrusts the investigation of the past to patient, honest, scholarly reconstruction, free from confessional or ideological prejudices, regarding both the accusations brought against her and the wrongs she has suffered.”⁹

Pope John Paul II’s historic act of atonement is a witness to guide Catholics into the third millennium. Bigoted commentary, historical distortion, demands for doctrinal abandonment, and anti-Catholic prejudice will not detract from this unprecedented jubilee “request for pardon.”

SUMMARY POINTS

*The Holy Father saw this “request for pardon” as the culmination of the Church’s “examination of conscience” for the Jubilee Year. The goal of such a public act of repentance is a “purification of memory.”

*This papal act of atonement for past sin is an intensely spiritual act. It is meant to seek forgiveness from God and allow Christians to enter the new millennium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith.

*Particularly when events in history are raised the admission of faults committed by the sons and daughters of the Church may look like acquiescence in the face of accusations made by those who are prejudicially hostile to the Church.

*There have been responses to the papal apology that make demands for apologies not required in the historical or cultural context of the events of the past.

*Many secular commentators have failed to see that at the heart of many of these errors is the fact that Christians have faltered when they have become caught up in the culture of their day.

*These sins are the errors Christians share with all mankind and find their roots in society, history and the culture, not in the Gospels.

*There is a direct implication in some commentary on the papal apology of a one-sided nature to the wrongs of the past, an acceptance of an anti-Catholic interpretation of history rooted in post-Reformation and Enlightenment propaganda rather than an accurate and objective understanding of the past.

*While the pope “forgives and asks forgiveness,” there is no acknowledgment on the part of secular commentators on the biases, conceits and hatreds that have often driven their comments on the Church.

*Critics are confusing repentance for certain wrong actions with admissions of doctrinal error. What the apology could not be, and was not intended to be, was an apology for Church doctrine.

*The papal apology was not meant as an endorsement of a contemporary ideological agenda.

*It would be an unhistorical leap for the pope to assent to contemporary anti-Catholic propaganda that attempts to identify the Church with the Holocaust. It is a historical fallacy – an insult to the memory of the Holocaust – to utilize this ultimate 20th century evil as a tool against the Church and to thereby mitigate the evil that was pagan Nazism.

*The alleged “failure” of Pope Pius XII “to speak out on Nazi genocide” is a faulty interpretation of both the historical reality and a papacy that saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. The actions and tactics of Pope Pius XII and the Church saved far more Jewish lives than the Allied armies, Allied governments, the Resistance, the Red Cross, other churches and other religions, or any other existing agency of any kind worldwide combined during the war. The actions of Pius XII hardly need an apology.

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FOOTNOTES

1*Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (December, 1999) International Theological Commission.

2*Incarnationis mysterium* (November, 1998) Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000

3*Memory and Reconciliation* (Introduction)

4Summarized and excerpted from Catholic News Service, *Text Forgiveness* (March 13, 2000)

5*Memory and Reconciliation* (6.3)

6Ibid.

7Summarized from Catholic News Service, “Mea culpa, tua culpa: Vatican hopes others inspired by apologies,” John Thavis (March 10, 2000).

8*Memory and Reconciliation* (5.4)