

GENESIS OF A BOOK

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

William Donohue

A few years ago, I was put in touch with an editor at Doubleday/Random House, Trace Murphy, about a book I wanted to do. After I explained to him what I wanted to write about, he gave me a polite response. Which meant, of course, that he really wasn't interested in my proposal. He took the occasion, however, to recommend a different book; it quickly got my attention.

Trace said we really need a book that discusses the contributions that the Catholic Church has made, both historically and today. He made the point, which no one can argue with, that the Church is the object of much negative news these days, and someone needs to provide an antidote. That someone, he concluded, should be me. When Trace passed the baton to my new editor, Gary Jansen, not a beat was lost.

Now it is painfully evident that we have an entire generation of young people growing up not knowing anything about the great strengths of the Catholic Church. A corrective is sorely needed. Yes, there have been a few books on this subject (some quite good), but the timing for something a bit more controversial and engaging couldn't be more plain.

One of the reasons I agreed to do such a book was that it enabled me to use much of the research I had already done. In other words, the research could be reformulated without much effort. There would, of course, have to be additional research, but that was hardly a deterrent. Indeed, it was an attraction.

The other reason I decided to write the book, *Why Catholicism Matters: How Catholic Virtues Can Reshape Society in the 21st Century*, is because it was a natural for the president of the

Catholic League. Finding the time was clearly my biggest problem.

My first book, *The Politics of the American Civil Liberties Union*, was based on my New York University Ph.D. dissertation. I reconfigured what I had written for NYU—getting rid of the academicese language favored by sociologists—and added a lot of new research. It was this book that attracted the interest of The Heritage Foundation and landed me a resident scholar position there in 1987-88. It also attracted the interest of vice president George Bush: he was running for president in 1988 against Michael Dukakis, a self-identified “card-carrying member of the ACLU.” Thus, the ACLU became one of the most contentious issues in the election. I was only too happy to supply the Bush team with inside info on the Union.

My second book, *The New Freedom: Individualism and Collectivism in the Social Lives of Americans*, was written while I was at Heritage. When I returned to La Roche College in Pittsburgh after my D.C. stint, I wrote *Twilight of Liberty: The Legacy of the ACLU*. It sealed my reputation as the leading critic of the organization. It was after I finished the book that I landed the Catholic League job in 1993.

All three books were published by Transaction Press, founded by Irving Louis Horowitz. Over the years, Irv, and his wife Mary, became dear friends. It came as a shock to learn that he died on March 21. I can honestly say that without his support, I would not be in this job today. No one wanted to publish a book that was critical of the ACLU, but St. Irv (as I called him) put politics aside and signed me up. By that time he had already turned Transaction, located on the Rutgers University campus where he taught, into the nation’s most prominent publisher of social science.

Once the Catholic League took off, several publishers contacted me, but I had no time to do a book. Then it

happened—a few years ago, I got the bug. I decided to write a book on the many culture wars I've fought; the result was *Secular Sabotage: How Liberals Are Destroying Religion and Culture in America*.

If *Secular Sabotage* explains what we do at the Catholic League, *Why Catholicism Matters* explains why we do it. Wrapped around the four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—it showcases the indispensable role that Catholicism has played, and continues to play, in the development of Western Civilization. It won't make the adversaries of Catholicism very happy, but so what? It wasn't written for them. It was written for you.

Having dedicated my previous books to family members, I reached outside to dedicate *Why Catholicism Matters* to Father Philip K. Eichner, S.M. He is the chairman of the board of directors of the Catholic League (a position he has held since the early 1990s), and the dean of Catholic education in the New York metropolitan area (his role at Chaminade and Kellenberg Memorial High School on Long Island is legendary). But much more than that, he is my mentor and my friend.

In the next edition of *Catalyst*, I will take pages 8-9 to discuss some of the topics that are addressed in the book. My hope is that it will kindle a new sense of pride in our young people, and entice those who have left the fold to reconsider their status. And, of course, I hope it makes practicing Catholics proud of their heritage. There is much to be proud about.