

MOTHER ANGELICA'S GREATEST GIFT

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Mother Angelica built the most powerful Catholic media empire in American history, one so towering that it really has no rival anywhere in the world. The Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) is, without doubt, her greatest gift. It is a tragedy that she is not in better health—she is 92—to see the extent of her contribution.

There are any number of Catholic media enterprises: television channels, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, wire services, and Internet sites. Some are local, others are regional, and a few are national. They vary greatly in style, quality, and philosophical leanings, but none can compare with EWTN. It is in a class of its own.

EWTN is surely known to Catholic League members, but some may not know about its reach, or the excellence of its programming. Ably led by Michael Warsaw, the CEO and chairman, and an impressive governing board, EWTN is the premier Catholic media outlet in the nation.

The “TN” in EWTN is misleading: it is much more than a television network, though that was its first media foray; it remains its most influential outlet. My favorite show is hosted by Raymond Arroyo: “The World Over” is the flagship program on the network. Full disclosure: Raymond is a member of the Catholic League’s board of directors, as well as being my personal friend.

“The World Over” is a live show on Thursday night; it airs at 8:00 p.m. ET. Fortunately, those who miss it can catch it over the weekend when its encore editions air. Raymond begins each show with a roundup of world events: he misses nothing and his

delivery is, well, Arroyoesque. He has just the right sense of humor, balance, and wit. It is not easy to educate and entertain simultaneously, but he pulls it off every week with precision.

Unlike some other TV hosts, Raymond never “wings it.” He is well prepared for each guest, refusing to rely on his native abilities, considerable though they are. His range is enormous: he covers the humanities and theology with the same degree of dexterity that he handles political and cultural issues. And woe to guests who try to pull the wool over his eyes—he can be devastating.

Doug Keck is the president and chief operating officer of EWTN. He also hosts a weekly show, “Bookmark,” that features Catholic authors. Doug is a skilled interviewer—he is one of the best I’ve ever encountered—and he always facilitates a professional exchange with his guests. Father Mitch Pacwa, who is one of the most interesting priests I have ever met—he is a pistol—has a one-hour weekly show that is fascinating. Of course, EWTN wouldn’t be EWTN without a sampling of Mother Angelica’s previously recorded gems.

Al Kresta and Teresa Tomeo are just two of the featured radio talk-show hosts who grace EWTN’s dial. Both are as competent as they are feisty. The *National Catholic Register* is EWTN’s weekly newspaper, and it does a fine job. With veteran journalists such as Joan Desmond and Edward Pentin, the *Register* has become a well-respected Catholic organ. Pentin, in particular—he is the Rome correspondent—is willing to challenge the conventional wisdom, providing a great service to readers. Also, EWTN’s acquisition of Catholic News Agency has only made it stronger.

The Catholic community needs to be better educated, especially these days, and that is where EWTN comes in. We live in an increasingly hostile environment: attacks on the Church emanate daily from all levels of government, the media, the

entertainment industry, and education. Unless we are armed with accurate information, lay people can't affect the culture the way they should.

This is the beauty of EWTN: it has an arsenal of information at its fingertips. And unlike some other Catholic media outlets, its fidelity to the Magisterium is never in question, making it an extremely reliable source. How sad it is that there are more than a few Catholic journalists who openly reject the teachings of the Catholic Church. That kind of disloyalty is not tolerated at EWTN.

EWTN can give us the ammo, but it is up to us to produce. It cannot be said too strongly that it is not enough to be knowledgeable—we have to be willing to engage. I was told decades ago by the great political philosopher Sidney Hook that being right was one thing, but if we do not have the courage of our convictions to follow through, all is lost. He was right. Too many people on our side think life is a popularity contest. It is not. It is about doing the right thing. What is even worse is when people who are in a position to change things play it safe and do nothing.

So, yes, EWTN can give us the tools we need to do battle, but no host or journalist can give us the moxie we need to finish the job. That is up to us. Mother Angelica, after all, did not succeed because of her prescience and media prowess alone—she had the guts to stand up to those who revile us. God bless her.