

BILL MAHER'S BIGOTED BASH FEST

Bill Maher's October 25 edition of "Real Time with Bill Maher," the HBO show, was a bigoted bash fest featuring Valerie Plame and Michael Moore, and, of course, himself. Al Sharpton was also one of the panelists, but he didn't say anything untoward (regrettably, the Reverend also didn't say anything to challenge the religion bashers). More surprisingly, Britain's star atheist, Richard Dawkins, behaved himself.

Maher began by observing that Pope Francis had fired the German "bishop of bling" because he was "getting the altar boys drunk on Cristal." That no bishop was "fired" is besides the point—Maher reeks with hatred toward Catholics.

After Sharpton noted there were Christian members of the Klan who burned crosses, Plame said, "Yeah, but now there are Christian Dominionists that are just as extreme." Too bad she didn't name one. Since Christian bashers like to finger Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry as Dominionists, perhaps Plame has footage of them acting like Klansmen. She ought to apologize for her irresponsible remark.

Maher then spoke about Christians and Muslims. "Look," he said, "I'm no f***ing Catholic or Christian, but one is herpes [Christians] and one is cancer [Muslims]." Couldn't help but think that it was Hitler who once called Jews cancerous. Maher is in good company.

When Maher said that at least Christians were not killing anyone, Moore shot back, "I can guarantee to you that right now there are Christians out there tonight that want to kill you and me." He did not say how he knew this to be true, nor did he cite a single recent instance that might provoke him to

make such an accusation.

The following week, during the “Real Time with Bill Maher” episode on November 1, Maher once again mocked Catholicism. When a young boy recently sat in Pope Francis’ chair, and the Holy Father welcomed him, Maher showed a picture of the pope with his hand on the boy’s head, saying, “No, Pope Francis, I thought you were different.” Everyone in the audience knew that Maher was saying the pope is a child rapist.

“CHELSEA LATELY” LIBELS TWO GROUPS

During the October 23 episode of the E! show, “Chelsea Lately,” priests and Germans were libeled by two of Chelsea Handler’s guests, Kurt Braunohler and Moshe Kasher.

The objectionable part began with a discussion of Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, the German bishop who was suspended by Pope Francis for his opulent lifestyle.

Braunohler: “I love that the Catholic Church has like a zero tolerance policy on everything other than child abuse.”

Kasher: “It’s a German priest, so that’s a difficult set of circumstances. You know what I mean, it’s like-do I make out with that kid or do I kill that Jew.”

The remark by Kasher, which fails to distinguish between Germans and Nazis, suggests he doesn’t know the difference between those Germans who resisted Hitler—they were disproportionately Catholic—and those who followed the genocidal policies of the National Socialist Party run by an

atheist who hated the Catholic Church. Both of the guests are ignorant, but that is hardly an excuse to smear all priests and Germans.

Chelsea made an anti-Catholic remark again when she insulted the pope during the November 8 episode of "Chelsea Lately."

Speaking of the inclusion of Pope Francis on the *Forbes* list of the most powerful people in the world, Chelsea Handler said, "So, and the new pope is on the list. That's interesting since he's never had penetration. How can he be that powerful?"

Any woman who goes on TV to laugh about an abortion she once had, as Handler did with Conan O'Brien, is capable of taking an obscene shot at the pope. But it doesn't make her gratuitous quip any less offensive.

KANYE WEST'S JESUS RIP-OFF STUNT

During the middle of October, Kanye West kicked off his "Yeezus" tour in Seattle.

Kanye West apparently suffers from low self-esteem, and while his condition is entirely warranted, it does not excuse his willingness to cover his inadequacies as a performer by hijacking Christian iconography. On the opening night of his new tour, which kicked off on October 19, a tall Jesus character appeared on stage prior to West's "Jesus Walks" number. "White Jesus, is that you?...Oh, s***," West said.

Nothing that the Jesus figure said was irresponsible, but West

could not stop there. His performance also included a Virgin Mary, incense, a crucifix, etc., all trotted out to make a Catholic statement. That it was not exactly reverential is obvious.

In 2006, West appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* wearing a crown of thorns with “blood” streaming down his face. The guy has some issues, and the sooner he deals with them, the less likely he will play fast and loose with Catholicism.

West is a classic rip-off artist with limited talent. It's time he asked Kim to throw him a retirement party.

JENNY McCARTHY'S CRACK-UP

On Wednesday, October 23, Jenny McCarthy cracked up on “The View” but no one seemed to notice. This was not a good sign.

Jenny went into a tizzy about the Catholic Church because her mom was once denied an annulment. The former porn star then went into detail about her mother's problems.

Jenny said her mom “cries during Communion because she watches all her friends go up there,” while she sits and weeps. She did not say if her mom stops crying after Communion, or whether she cries all the way home. No matter, she said, “I hope the pope gets smart and does something about it.”

[Jenny, listen to Bill: If you know of any shortcuts on how to “get smart,” please test them on yourself before contacting the Holy Father.]

Jenny also shared her delusional story about being in the pope's apartment. “I went to the Vatican [and] I actually went into the apartment, into the pope's apartment and I was

literally there and I'm going, oh my God, I could take a chunk of this gold cherub and feed a country." Instead, she settled for a crucifix.

Last year on a TV program known as "Access Hollywood," Jenny was more explicit. She credited a few "mafia guys" with sneaking her into the pope's apartment in 1995; she said she even tried on some of his clothes. After slamming the Italians, she took a shot at Jews: she said her Jewish friends told her to steal a crucifix as a souvenir for her mother. She did not say whether her mom wept upon receipt, or whether she hocked it to feed a country, or at least a village.

CAN'T OFFEND ASIANS AT ABC

The American Broadcasting Company recently issued an apology for a remark made by a child on "Jimmy Kimmel Live."

In a skit that aired during the end of October, Kimmel wanted to know how children felt about the United States' debt to China. "Kill everyone in China" one child said.

Lisa Berger, who is ABC's Entertainment executive vice president, and Tim McNeal, ABC's Talent and Diversity vice president, took the matter seriously. "We offer our sincere apology," they said. "We would never purposefully broadcast anything to upset the Chinese community, Asian community, anyone of Chinese descent or any community at large. Our objective is to entertain." The skit was immediately removed from all public platforms and edited out of any future reruns.

Berger and McNeal are insincere—either that or ABC doesn't consider Catholics to be a "community at large."

For years the Catholic League has contacted ABC about the vicious anti-Catholic remarks made by panelists on “The View.” Indeed, we have even taken out ads in the *New York Times* about their relentless assaults. But there have been no apologies.

Nor was there an apology for what happened on “Jimmy Kimmel Live” on April 2 this year. That’s when Bill Maher trashed the Bible, adding that both the Trinity and the Sacrament of Reconciliation were “pulled out of their [the hierarchy’s] ass in the 12th century.”

One kid makes an offensive remark about the Chinese and the diversity dons at ABC go ballistic. But ripping Catholics is okay. Wonder how ABC would react if a bunch of Chinese Catholics were insulted? That kind of dilemma would have to be resolved by a diversity summit.

What is particularly disturbing about Maher is that he gets away with insulting Catholics in front of people, either as a guest or as a host; they never challenge or upbraid him. While they are not directly responsible for Bill Maher’s behavior, their silence in the face of his offensive remarks is disturbing.

TIMES SQUARE BILLBOARD

This billboard was placed next door to Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum on West 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenue on the south side of the street. It will be on display December 9 – January 5. There are many bright bulbs, top and bottom, that will allow it to be seen all night.



A JOURNEY OF CONTINUING CONVERSION

Rick Hinshaw

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

When I read *Witness to Hope*, George Weigel's seminal biography on Pope John Paul II, I found I could only absorb it a few pages at a time. So steeped was it in probing the essence of the Holy Father – his faith and spirituality, his theology,

philosophy, his understanding of the world – historically, currently, and into the future – that I soon realized if I tried to read it quickly, like a normal historical biography, I would miss so much of what it had to offer. By taking it slowly, I was better able to discern the breadth and depth of Pope John Paul's teachings, and deepen my own faith and spirituality in the process.

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

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

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

He takes us through the histories: of the concept of pilgrimage itself, from ancient and Old Testament times to Christian Holy Land pilgrimages that grew during Constantine's rule; of the practice of visiting and praying at the tombs of martyrs that in the early fourth century grew into Lenten pilgrimages to churches built above or around those tombs, and then became formalized as station church pilgrimages led

during Lent by the Bishop of Rome; of the decline of the practice, for a variety of reasons, in the early part of the second millennium; and of its resurgence in the 20th century, for which “the greatest impetus” came from American seminarians and student priests studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, who began such a daily Lenten pilgrimage in the mid-1970s, and by the turn of the century were attracting “hundreds of English-speakers from Rome’s universities, diplomatic posts and Anglophone seminaries” to join with them.

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

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

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

At the book’s outset, Weigel tells us that “The station church pilgrimage can be, and in fact is, walked on many levels.” So

too, this book can be read – and can be enlightening and fulfilling—on many levels: spiritual, historical, cultural, aesthetic, to name just a few. What makes it most compelling, however, is how the reader is transformed from a kind of outside observer of these phenomena, to an active *participant* in the spiritual pilgrimage being taken here. This Weigel does by drawing us into contemplation on how we can – and should – apply each day’s pilgrimage experience to our current times – in our individual lives, but also in our call to evangelize the Gospel in the modern world – as part of our own Lenten itinerary of conversion.

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

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

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

That resonated with me as I thought back to the guidance a priest gave me some years ago, when I shared with him how sinful feelings of anger and hostility, over what I perceived as an injustice being done to me and to others, were getting

the better of me. He advised me to spend some time in front of the first station of the cross, where Jesus stands before Pilate and is condemned to death, and to meditate on our Lord's humble acceptance of that greatest act of injustice in the history of the world. The priest wasn't dismissing my sense of injustice; he was helping me to respond to it with humility rather than anger, by following our Lord's example, reflecting on my own sinfulness, and "standing fast" against overreaction on my part to a comparatively minor grievance. Excellent guidance to follow any time, but particularly during Lent, as we meditate on Christ's suffering and death in reparation for *our* sins.

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

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

Weigel takes us through Holy Week, through what he aptly terms "the ultimate pilgrimage": our Lord's passion, death, and Easter Sunday Resurrection. The station church pilgrimage does not end there, however. It continues through Easter Week, the oft-neglected Octave of Easter, "which is really Easter extended for seven more days," he explains. Noting how Pilate, on handing Jesus over to be crucified, proclaimed sarcastically, "*Ecce homo*—'Here is the man!'" Weigel writes that throughout the Easter Octave, that is exactly what the

Church is proclaiming: that Christ, indeed, is “the man” – “the man in whom the world’s destiny is embodied”; the man “in whom humanity is reborn”, who has “overcome death, trampled the powers of hell underfoot, and restored hope to suffering humanity.”

And all who have completed this pilgrimage—indeed, all who have rediscovered the baptismal character of Lent, and so embarked on the journey of continuing conversion, should now be filled with that hope in Christ, and inspired to share it with a world so desperately in need of it.

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

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“MERRY CHRISTMAS” PINS

The women of the Catholic Daughters of Court John Paul II #2554 are back again selling their famous “It’s OK to Say Merry Christmas to Me” pins (\$1) and car magnets (\$3). Thousands of these pins and magnets have been sold over the years in all 50 states.



If you would like to demonstrate your Christmas spirit, you can order them a number of ways:

- 1) by visiting www.OkToSayChristmas.com;
- 2) by e-mailing them at OkToSayChristmas@aol.com;
- 3) or by giving them a call at 845-405-3972.