

# WHY CATHOLICISM MATTERS

Religious and ethnic loyalties are important to me. I am proud to be Catholic and proud to be Irish. I am also very proud to be an American. But pride absent an intelligent appreciation of one's roots quickly descends to tribalism, and that is not good for the individual or the society. For example, we need to know why it is rational to be proud of our religion. This is one reason why I wrote *Why Catholicism Matters*. And by "we," I don't mean just Catholics. I mean everyone.

There is much to be proud of. Down through the ages, the great philosophers have written widely on the quest for the good society. While it has never been achieved (and given the reality of original sin it can never be fully realized), it is nonetheless true that trying to craft the good society remains a noble enterprise. But we need to the right recipe. Fortunately, it has been available to us for two millennia: the teachings of the Catholic Church provide all the ingredients we need.

Well, if the Catholic Church is so great, what about the sexual abuse scandal? I get this all the time. The short answer is this: every priest who failed us did so because he followed his id, not his vows. Had he followed the teachings of the Catholic Church, he could not have sinned. But we all do. That's why popes go to confession—they're human. In other words, beginning with the apostles, some of our teachers have failed us. However, the teachings manifestly have not. The distinction is crucial.

Name something that makes for the good society and invariably it will be shown to have Catholic roots; at the very least, Catholic embellishments can be ascertained. Take the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. It speaks to a vision of society where justice, domestic tranquility, the common defense of the people, their general welfare, and the blessings of liberty

reign supreme.

Justice is one of the cardinal virtues, and no institution has a better record in tending to the needs of the dispossessed than the Catholic Church. Domestic tranquility is not dependent on the police, but on the ability of people to police themselves; here the cardinal virtue of temperance is key. The common defense must allow for just wars, and the proper exercise of another cardinal virtue, namely fortitude, is a must. The general welfare of the people is best served by adopting the teleology, or ultimate purpose, of Catholicism—a “focus on the other.” And without the most senior of all the cardinal virtues, prudence, the blessings of liberty, properly understood, can never be achieved.

From the founding of the first universities, to the triumph of the Scientific Revolution, the role of the Catholic Church has been seminal. Indeed, when it comes to understanding why Europe and North America have been home to almost every technological breakthrough in history, there is no better road map than the one Christianity affords. Moreover, the Church’s contributions to art, architecture and music have proven to be legendary.

The section on prudence begins by discussing the Catholic Church’s role in the makings of a free society. Freedom was not born in Greece—it was a byproduct of the Church’s opposition to temporal powers. By contrast, so unknown was freedom to the Chinese and Japanese that they did not have a word for it until the nineteenth century. To be sure, slavery was a universal institution that was not condemned initially by any civilization or religion, though no entity did more to prudentially undermine it over time—through the promotion of natural law and natural rights—than the Catholic Church. Contemporary challenges to freedom, such as the false idea of abortion as a “right,” have similarly been resisted by the Church.

Justice for the strongest has never commanded the resources of the Catholic Church, but justice for the weakest most certainly has. In this regard, the role of nuns has been pivotal. Whether by founding schools, foster care homes, asylums, hospitals, hospices, and the like, or by personally tending to the psychological and emotional needs of men, women, and children, nuns, along with priests and the laity, have a track record that has no equal anywhere in the world. Reaching out to the diseased, and to the stranger, especially immigrants, has always been a staple of Catholic social teachings. That many Catholics have made good on those teachings is a story that should make all Catholics cheer.

It took tremendous fortitude for Pope Pius XII to fight the Nazis, and no leader in the world won the plaudits of Jews, during and after the war, than he did. It is important to set the record straight—there have been so many lies told—by recounting all the brave words and deeds that this great pope delivered. Similarly, we need to give Pope John Paul II all the praise he deserves in helping to destroy communism in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe. The historical evidence is clear: Pius XII and John Paul II have secured their place in the annals of freedom. Few world leaders, and no religious ones, did more to combat totalitarianism than they did.

Temperance is a virtue that self-governing people need to inculcate if moral anarchy is to be checked. Here again, the teachings of Catholicism have proved indispensable. By offering a realistic interpretation of liberty, one that is grounded in our responsibilities to others, the Church offers a practical guide to the creation of a free society. The importance of marriage and the family, and a healthy appreciation of sexuality, beckons us all to give Catholic sexual ethics serious consideration.

These are just some of the subjects that bear examination. By moving from papal encyclicals to their faithful

implementation, the reader learns how critically important the Church has been in world history. Priests, the religious, and the laity have bequeathed a stunning legacy, one that contrasts sharply with the failed record of secularism.

By comparing the Church's efforts to that of secular theorists and practitioners, we see ever more clearly why the Catholic voice must be heard in the third millennium. For example, had the secular idea of positivistic law, or law posited by government, prevailed after World War II, Nazis who obeyed orders by killing innocent Jews, Catholics, and others could not have been prosecuted. To do that, the Nuremberg courts had to turn to natural law, a concept that has been embraced by Catholicism for centuries. Similarly, government programs to help the poor have often created more poverty; when compared to Catholic programs, they look even more enfeebled.

The democracies, especially the U.S., fought fascism and communism, but without the efforts of the Catholic Church their ultimate demise would have taken longer to achieve. The secular approach to liberty, one that prizes individual autonomy, has delivered a lot less freedom to its adherents than those who have followed the Catholic approach. Indeed, it has spawned a condition closer to moral anarchy.

Hopefully this book may inspire us to turn to the great heritage of Catholicism as a platform for societal renewal. As indicated, the right recipe for the makings of the good society are right in front of us. There is no better time to show why Catholicism matters than right now.

### **WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT WHY CATHOLICISM MATTERS**

Bill Donohue's *Why Catholicism Matters* offers a fresh and compelling look at how the teachings of the Catholic Church continue to provide the best guide for a healthy, happy society. Using the four cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance – as a springboard, this insightful

book delves into the issues facing the Church and the broader community, and shows how the Church is at the cutting edge of providing solutions to those issues. *Why Catholicism Matters* should eliminate the tired stereotype of the Church as being little more than a nagging nay-sayer. On the contrary, it reveals that the Church, and Dr. Donohue himself, give an emphatic YES! to all that is good, noble and uplifting in the human person.

**His Eminence Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan**

One can rarely finish a commentary by Dr. William Donohue and remain unfazed. In these days of sharp attacks against the Catholic Church and her teachings and values, Bill can be counted on to weigh in, full-blast, and get the attention which our position too often finds ignored in the secular media. In *Why Catholicism Matters*, readers of every persuasion will find much to inform, deliberate, and, invariably, take issue with. For that, and for his unapologetic commitment to our Faith, I am personally grateful to Dr. Bill Donohue.

**His Eminence Edwin Cardinal O'Brien**

*Why Catholicism Matters* is an important contribution at a critical time. As a preeminent voice defending the Church, Dr. Donohue eloquently explains the beauty and importance of Catholic faith. On the canvas of the cardinal virtues, he presents a true and beautiful portrait of the Church that will benefit all people of faith."

**His Eminence Donald Cardinal Wuerl**

TV audiences know Bill Donohue as a scrapper; a vigorous defender of the Catholic faith in his public role as leader of the Catholic League. But he's also a gifted scholar and, as *Why Catholicism Matters* demonstrates, a thoughtful, vivid and compelling writer. This is a must-read book for anyone who wants to understand the role Catholics need to play in recovering key Christian virtues and renewing American

society.”

**Archbishop Charles J. Chaput**

With religious freedom under assault from many directions, what better moment to be reminded of Catholicism’s wisdom, glories, and multi-faceted contributions to the common good? And who better to remind us than that tireless defender of the Catholic faith, Bill Donohue? Donohue is a treasure and his book is a gem.

**Mary Ann Glendon, Harvard Law Professor**

Bill Donohue has spent much of his life defending the Catholic Church – in his latest work he joyously celebrates it. This tour of the Church’s forgotten virtues and the many gifts She has given society reminds us all why the Faith remains the prime mover in our time. It also demonstrates why Donohue matters!

**Raymond Arroyo, Host of EWTN’s “The World Over”**