

## **PART 3•REVIEWS**

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Wills, Gary. *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*. New York: Doubleday, 2000. 326 pp. \$25.00 hardcover.

When the philosophes attacked Christianity in the eighteenth century, they did so quite fearlessly: they disputed the Biblical narrative, they rejected the divinity of Christ, they mocked the Gospel stories, and they levied withering attacks on the clergy. Many a Catholic, including men such as Alexis de Tocqueville, never quite recovered the faith that these soi-distant intellectuals ruined.

Modern opponents of the Church like to fancy themselves courageous critics of a powerful institution, but they are in no way as bold in their challenge to the institutions of Christendom. And the Catholic Church of today is in no way the same sort of temporal powerhouse that it was in eighteenth-century France. For all their protestations of courage and speaking-truth-to-power, these critics are like Tolkien's character Wormtongue, who undermined the good by deception and guile rather than direct attack.

Papal Sin is aptly subtitled "Structures of Deceit." Wills sets out to cast himself in the mold of St. Catherine of Sienna and others who spoke fearlessly for the right and against wrong, even when it meant challenging the Pope himself. But Wills is no St. Catherine, and his book is no revelation: it is an exercise in deception.

Wills presents the book as an exposure of "dishonesties" in the Church, especially in the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II. The first type are what he calls "historical dishonesties," which he claims include the question of the Church and the Holocaust, controversies about St. Maximillian Kolbe and Blessed Edith Stein, and a nebulous charge of anti-Semitism in the institutional Church. The second type are what he calls "doctrinal dishonesties," including Wills's disputing of *Humanae Vitae*, the non-ordination of women, birth control, abortion, capital punishment, homosexuality, and the status of the Blessed Mother. In short, the book is about the usual suspects in liberal and secular attacks on the Church.

For all Wills's claims, however, the book is deceitful and unconvincing. It is also a textbook example of bad scholarship, weak reasoning, assignment of blame by innuendo, and other intellectual wrongs that a well-educated man such as Garry Wills knows better than to commit. A few examples will be sufficient to demonstrate how badly flawed this book is and why it is not worth the time of someone who wants to understand the Catholic Church, the papacy, or good scholarship.

First, Wills commits the error of conflation. He frequently conflates bad judgment by individuals with what he considers to be doctrinal or dogmatic errors made by the Church. For example, discussing the very serious issue of pedophilia committed by some priests, he conflates misjudgments by individual bishops and authorities with some kind of systematic tolerance of pedophilia that is somehow supposed to be linked to official Church teaching on the nature of sex. It is a miasma of bad reasoning.

Next, he relies on second-hand slurs and condemnations to do his dirty work. One victim is Pope St. Pius X, whom Wills charges “instituted a crackdown that has been called a form of theological McCarthyism . . .” (44). Amazingly, Wills does not see the irony in using “McCarthyite” tactics to denounce “McCarthyism.” Another victim is St. Maximillian Kolbe, who he tells the reader was denounced by *Commonweal* (!) as an anti-Semite and a believer in “the existence of a Communist-Freemason-Zionist conspiracy to subvert and destroy Christianity” (61). There is little courage in such attacks.

Third, Wills assigns guilt by association and doubt. This technique is employed throughout his attacks on Popes, ordinaries, and saints, but is most viciously carried out against John Paul II. Consider this sentence, taken from the discussion of St. Maximillian Kolbe cited above: “Karol Wojtyla was never an anti-Semite in any sense; but he shared Kolbe’s ardent devotion to the Immaculate Conception, and personally admired the undoubted heroism of Kolbe’s death” (61). As far as I can determine, this is the only case by a self-proclaimed Catholic in which devotion to the Immaculate Conception and admiration of a saint have been linked to anti-Semitism. This attack is one of the most deceptive in the book: at first glance, it seems to be a back-handed compliment; upon closer examination, however, it is clearly meant to chain the Holy Father to everything that Wills finds unacceptable in Fr. Kolbe’s life and thought.

The entire book is reminiscent of an old line among believers about self-righteousness: here is someone claiming to be more Catholic than the Pope. Here is the essence of what Wills is truly about: he is trying to paint a picture of what Catholicism really ought to stand for: abortion, artificial birth control, celebration of homosexual love, women priests.

To accomplish this task, he uses techniques that he has employed in other books. One is the close and careful misreading of a subject (in this case, St. Augustine), which he then employs as a club against his adversaries. Throughout this work, Wills wields an interpretation of Augustine (seldom a quotation) as evidence to knock down what a recent Pope has held to be the true teaching of the Church. Wills does this so often that *Papal Sin* becomes an exercise in a kind of Augustinolatry which the saint himself would reject. Another Wills tactic is to bring in details when convenient, but paint in very

broad strokes when more concrete examples would not support his claims. For example, his portrayal of the history of Church teaching on contraception misrepresents the facts in such a way that the reader is left thinking that the traditional Christian objections to artificial birth control (shared by all Christian denominations until the 20th century) are a fairly modern innovation. Finally, Wills likes to make grand claims without citations. Throughout the book, crucial arguments, assumptions, and “facts” are laid out without any supporting structure of evidence.

The structures of deceit are clearly the arguments of this book. It is hardly worth the time that a reader will spend on it, except as it may be important for Catholic social scientists to know what to say when confronted by friends and colleagues who have been misled by Wills’s misrepresentations.

Ryan J. Barilleaux  
Miami University Ohio

Riley, Patrick, editor. *Keeping Faith*. Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom Press, 2000. 207 pp. \$12.95.

Nearing sixty years of priestly service, Monsignor George Kelly has seen and heard it all. Well . . . almost all. He has certainly lived to tell a lot of what he has seen and heard. I am referring of course to his published volumes, among which *The Battle for American Church* (1979) is probably the best known. The illustrious New York priest revisited this topic in 1995. Decades earlier, there were his volumes on marriage and family life. In due course, we also received from the hand of Msgr. Kelly books like *Who Should Run the Catholic Church?* (1976), *Keeping the Church Catholic with John Paul II* (1990), and even an autobiography with the title *Inside My Father’s House* (1989).

The irrepressible Msgr. Kelly had to sit still and listen in April of 1999 to others tell what they had seen and heard when Msgr. Michael Wrenn convened a colloquium in honor of his friend. To mark this occasion, Christendom Press has produced *Keeping Faith* (2000), edited by Patrick Riley. The book features eight essay-length contributions from scholars in fields which Msgr. Kelly has written about, and several shorter pieces from distinguished academics and a letter and tribute from the now deceased John Cardinal O’Connor.

Some years ago (1983), Msgr. Kelly published *The New Biblical Theorists: Raymond Brown and Beyond* in which he took issue with exegetes whose exclusive reliance on the historical critical method had cast doubt in the minds of the faithful on many key doctrines of the Faith and their biblical

grounding. Scott Hahn, a professor at the Franciscan University in Ohio, writes in *Keeping Faith* that we have witnessed in biblical studies a divorce between the literal and spiritual senses of Sacred Scripture. Exegetes who pursue literal-historical research have, for the most part, bracketed off the spiritual senses, according to Hahn. They have narrowed their focus, Hahn says, to train their sights on the “historical Jesus,” whom they carefully distinguish from the Christ of faith. Hahn points to theologians like de Lubac, von Balthasar and Congar, who thrived in the middle of the twentieth century on the European continent, as men who practiced spiritual exegesis as a truly critical science and spiritual art. The exegetes of today would benefit greatly, Hahn concludes, if they returned to the patristic sources in imitation of *nouvelle theologie* (de Lubac, von Balthasar and Congar) and engaged directly the original texts of the Scriptures. This course urged by Hahn will bring us once again a biblical scholarship in which faith and reason are consonant, complementary and mutually enriching. When we do arrive at a new golden age of biblical exegesis, some credit must go to Msgr. Kelly. For, in Hahn’s estimate, Msgr. Kelly is a forerunner of a new springtime in biblical exegesis.

One of the most courageous successors of the apostles in our time is George Pell, the Archbishop of Melbourne (Australia). In his essay “The Catholic Parish Priesthood Today,” he pays tribute to Msgr. Kelly and notes the latter’s *A Pastor’s Challenge: Parish Leadership in an Age of Division, Doubt and Spiritual Hunger* (1994). Pell reports a disconcerting tendency today to regard departure from the priesthood as just another career change and to downgrade the promises of life-long fidelity which flow from ordination to the priesthood. Calling mandatory celibacy a precious attribute of the Latin Church, Pell writes that the priest gives himself in and with Christ to the Church by his celibacy. The demands of this love, Pell argues, create an incompatibility with any other nuptial commitment on the part of the priest. Pell also considers the place of philosophy in the formation of candidates for the priesthood. His enthusiasm, he confesses, is for Thomistic answers to the human quest for meaning, which will enable useful dialogue with people today about the nature and purpose of human life, the reality of evil and suffering, the existence of God and the possibility of the after-life; and also enable the priest-to-be to understand the basics of our theological tradition. Pell finishes on this point by referring to philosophy, especially Thomism, as an indispensable key to reconciling the secularity of the world and the radicality of the gospel.

Pell is not the only Thomist in *Keeping Faith*. The volume also includes an essay from one of the most articulate spokesmen for Thomistic thought in the world. I am referring to the University of Notre Dame faculty member Ralph McInerny. McInerny has a long association with Kelly and both men have written in defense of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the 1990 apostolic letter of Pope

John Paul II on the nature of the Catholic University. McNerny comments that resistance to the implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is tied to dissent from Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Contending that a tradition of dissent grew up unchecked in the aftermath of *Humane Vitae*, McNerny says that it has drained from colleges and universities the loyalty to the Church that had hitherto characterized them. Suggesting that a bogus right to dissent moved quickly from the department of theology through the faculty, McNerny sees this phenomenon as opening the door to secularization in our institutions of higher learning more than any other single factor.

The secularization cited by McNerny is analyzed carefully in *Keeping Faith* by Joseph A. Varacalli. There has been the general process of secularization, Varacalli notes, taking place within the mainstream, dominant American culture. He distinguishes this kind of secularization from a "secularization from within," a term borrowed from the sociologist Peter Berger. This type of secularization allows traditional religion to survive as a hollowed out, ineffectual reality, covering over what is really unbelief. This variety of secularization, Varacalli charges, is occurring internally within the Catholic Church in America. Because of this condition, continues Varacalli, we have a Catholicity so divided within that it can barely stand erect, far less stride into the American public square and provide an authentic Catholic presence.

An index of the enfeeblement claimed by Varacalli is the ignorance of the Church's social teaching by the vast majority of Catholics. Brian Benestad in *Keeping Faith* maintains that there has been a lot of talk in Catholic universities and colleges about social justice, but very little of it has been educational. Some of the blame, Benestad insists, must rest with the American Bishops whose approach to Catholic social teaching is not rooted deeply enough in Augustine, Aquinas, the papal social encyclicals, the social teaching of John Paul II and the Second Vatican Council. If Catholics are to learn more about Catholic social teaching, Benestad declares, the usual social justice paradigm, most often used by bishops, social activists and academics, needs to be supplemented. For starters, Benestad recommends that it must be taught in season and out of season that the knowledge and practice of the faith as a whole is the indispensable condition for the reception and practice of Catholic social teaching. A second prerequisite for the renewal of Catholic social teaching, Benestad counsels, is a thorough explanation of all its major themes in dialogue with the disciplines that are an essential part of liberal education, especially political philosophy.

Two contributors to *Keeping Faith* write about birth control. One of these, William May, refers to Msgr. Kelly's book *The Catholic Marriage Manual* (1958) and judges it to have anticipated in many ways the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. May, a professor at the John Paul II Institute for the

Study of Marriage and the Family in Washington, D.C., goes on to argue that a lack of faith in the Church is responsible for vast numbers of contemporary Catholics rejecting the Church's teaching on conjugal love. This lack of faith, May contends, causes them to regard the Church as an alien body, something extrinsic to their personal selves, and her teaching, particularly on moral issues, as the imposition of arbitrary rules limiting their freedom to do as they please. The other contributor, James Hitchcock, refers to Msgr. Kelly's service on the Papal Birth Control Commission created by Pope John XXIII in 1963. A professor of history at St. Louis University and frequent commentator on things Catholic in the press, Hitchcock bases his description of the Commission's failure partly on Kelly's recollection of unstructured debates among the members and their preference for personal experiences over sound moral argumentation. Hitchcock concludes that a majority of commission members were naive about the poison of contraception and underestimated the relationship of contraception to abortion, self-chosen sterility, and other social ills.

Rounding out the major contributions to *Keeping Faith* is an essay by Kenneth Whitehead. Whitehead regularly contributes to periodicals like *Catholic World Report* and is a collaborator with Msgr. Wrenn on works critiquing contemporary catechetics. In *Keeping Faith*, Whitehead considers whether Catholic colleges can be saved in the present condition. He answers that we should not lose hope. We could be moving into a new era, writes Whitehead, where at least some Catholic colleges and universities reassess the advantages of the Catholic character so many of them heedlessly laid aside over the past generation. The reason for the hope, states Whitehead plainly, is that Catholics have a pope. *Habemus Papam!*

*Ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia.* Where Peter is, there is the Church. For nearly sixty years as a priest, Msgr. Kelly has been with the Pope. This has helped to make the genial and redoubtable New Yorker a great churchman. Those writing in *Keeping Faith* are eager to share this good news with others.

Rev. Robert J. Batule  
Mineola, New York

Vasoli, Robert H. *What God Has Joined Together: The Annulment Crisis in American Catholicism*. Oxford University Press, 1998. 252 pp. \$25.00 hardcover.

Robert H. Vasoli's book, *What God Has Joined Together: The Annulment Crisis in American Catholicism*, is compulsory reading for any social scientist studying the future of the Catholic family, which once was the touchstone of Catholicity itself.

Oxford University Press claims that this book reveals "the degree to which the U.S. Church has gone its own way since Vatican II on what constitutes real marriage." The author, himself a social scientist (Notre Dame), concludes that American canon lawyers "are making mockery of Christ's solemn rejoinder that no mere mortals, including well-intentioned tribunalists, can tear apart what God himself has put together." John Paul II, as late as January 21, 2000, warned the Roman Rota, the Church's central court of appeals, against espousing the presumption, "unfortunately adopted by some tribunals," that contemporary Catholics "desire a dissoluble marriage so much that the existence of true consent must instead be proven." Journalist Charles Morris, in his well-written book *American Catholic* (293), scorns as hypocrisy "the contrast between the rigid Church teachings on divorce and the enthusiasm with which dioceses hand out annulments." Peter Steinfelds (of the *New York Times*) faults Vasoli for his "top-down" ideology — "not the Gospels, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, but the pope and canon law."

On a matter of such importance, "facts" come first: the United States, with only 6 percent of the world's Catholics, accounts for 75 percent of the Church's annulments world-wide, 58,000 per annum, two-thirds of which are based on "the defective consent" of one or both of the parties, sometimes decided fifteen and more years after a marriage, even after four and more children had been born. While the Roman Rota handles only 200 appeals each year (hardly an effective response each year to the 80,000 annulments dispensed universally), it regularly nullifies almost 95 percent of the American nullities that come its way.

However, *What God Has Joined together* is more than a statistical abstract; it is a manual of present-day canonical theory and practice on annulment in eleven chapters. Chapter 1, "Profaning Marriage," details the growth of annulments from 400 formal cases (in 1968) to an average of 40,000 per annum (from 1985 to 1994), the effect on Catholics of the country's growing divorce mentality, the breakdown of the American family, theological and canonical changes within the Church, and the Tribunals' share in the profanation of Christian marriage.

Chapter 2, "Winds of Change," discusses the American Procedural Norms (APN), permitted by Rome *ad experimentum* after 1965 — especially

the use of one-judge courts (which meant the multiplication of cases) and the discouragement of compulsory appeals for pro-nullity decisions. These experiments helped create annulment-friendly diocesan tribunals.

Chapter 3, “Building on the Groundwork,” explains how the words of *Gaudium et Spes* and technical expressions like “contract” and “covenant,” “freedom and law” were changed in meaning by post-Vatican II commentators. Also, marriage as exchange of consent was altered to suggest a union with certain “rights and obligations,” then to a state in which people “exchanged selves.” This change facilitated the process of a court judging postfactum that the original consent at wedding time to enter a common life was defective, and the marriage invalid, even if a quarter-century old.

Chapter 4, “The New Jurisprudence,” covers the relationship of the Sacred Roman Rota to diocesan marriage courts, the introduction of “case law” into Catholic jurisprudence, and “the mind of the Pope” as the source of authentic interpretation of canon law. The goods of Christian marriage now embrace more than the *bonum proles, fidei, et sacramenti*: a right to “a communion of life” — or to a successful marriage — has been added to the mix.

Chapter 5, “Psychologizing Annulment,” describes the idealization of marriage; the emphasis on the psychological ingredients of a successful marriage, which cannot per se be equated with valid marriage; the role of Canon 1095 as the basis of expanded annulments (lack of reason, lack of judgment about the expectations and meaning of marriage); and the amending of the nature of marriage, changes in the nature of the marriage contract required for validity.

Chapter 6, “Systemic Abuse of Psychology,” explains the expansion of the discretion of judges to determine via psychology what the law means. But while law presumes choice, psychology tends to determinism. It also explores the role in annulments of the expert, junk science, and of defective consent and remarriage. The following is a verbatim account of one actual sentence where subjective readings, not reality, triumphed:

[The Court concedes that] many of the factors that motivated Stella to marry were good and proper. Unfortunately, the Court sees that Stella was marrying not Steve but an imagined person she “thought” would provide her with the things she wanted. Stella never really knew the Steve she was marrying. She hardly knew herself. She married to satisfy her perceived needs, not to love and accept the person of Steve. She did not truly appreciate who Steve was, nor who she was! . . . Stella did not marry the flesh and blood person of Steve. She married a manufactured image of someone who she thought could meet her needs as she perceived them to be at that time! . . .

[It] has been determined after a careful study of this case that Stella did

suffer from a serious lack of judgmental discretion. That grave lack of discretion was such that it invalidated the consent she exchanged with Steve despite the good intentions of both of them (99).

Chapter 7, “Promoting the Blueprint,” discusses the effects of “single judges” and “no appeals,” the selected use of Rota decisions, efforts at outreach to unhappy Catholics, the use of Catholic press, and the restrictions of confidentiality. It also covers Sheila Kennedy and her book *Shattered Faith*. Books on nullity were numerous, while books on the validity of marriage were few and little known. In probing for possible grounds of annulment, one Archdiocese used the following inventory, the italicized lines having no relevance to Church-approved grounds for validity:

The character of your parents, an assessment of their relationships, who was the dominant one in the home, your relationship with them. The personality [sic] of your brothers/sisters and your relationship with them. Your educational background, attitudes toward school. Your sense of accomplishment. Social activities and ease in forming friendships. Mental health problems or unusual physical problems. Any behavior problems in school. Unusual fears in childhood or later. History of dating, any other serious romances: if so, why terminated. Attitudes toward sex and related problems. Life goals and personal standards of achievement, religious practice. Number of jobs, reasons for terminating. Problems in adult life, e.g., alcohol, drugs, gambling, handling money, arrests. Evaluation of personal strengths and weaknesses: Ex. Are you sensitive to the needs of others, nervous, quick-tempered, moody, jealous, selfish, ungrateful? Would others consider you to be honest and truthful? Would others have reason to consider your conduct erratic or unpredictable, outlandish or fantastic? Would others consider you to have good judgment in everyday situations? (130).

In Chapter 8, “Screening and Docketing Cases,” Vasoli discusses the procedural and juridical mechanics of annulment. He remarks the presence of petition-friendly tribunals, the consequent high acceptance rate, the tendency to probe for grounds for annulment, the overcrowded calendars, a productivity takes on a life of its own, etc. He summarizes the difficulties as follows:

The day-to-day operations of American tribunals bear witness to the theological and canonical premises that animate the system as a whole. The wholesale acceptance of petitions in many dioceses and subsequent adjudication of the petitions by single-judge courts are causes and effects of caseload size. Ultimately, however, heavy tribunal dockets are an inevitable by-product of the conceptions of marriage, matrimonial consent, and the rectitude of nullity which now rule the American canonical roost. Revisionist marriage theology, pronullity

jurisprudence, the pastoral imperative, psychologization of the annulment process, and tribunal administrative policies have been formed into a canonical apparatus designed to euthanize thousands of marriages (143).

Chapter 9, “Tribunal Personnel,” covers the role of tribunal personnel in deciding who has been married invalidly. Judges and Defenders of the Bond are the key figures in annulment proceedings. Very few clients, however, hire their own lawyer or know their rights. Vasoli also discusses the Defender of the Bond and his credentials, and notes the problem that advocates of nullity often confront guardians of validity without qualifications.

In Chapter 10, “Respondents and the Right of Defense,” Vasoli explores the general indifference to respondents who oppose nullity. Giving someone a new chance at a happier marriage supersedes a search for the validity of the original marriage. Moreover, petitioners frequently engage in forum-shopping, and while the defense has a right to access to pertinent documents, few participants are familiar with canon lawyers or canon law.

Finally, Chapter 11, “Appellate Review,” Vasoli explains how Second Instance Courts merely rubber stamp first decisions. Where is the Defender of the Bond? He also notes that the Rota reverses 95 percent of American defective dissent decisions, and that Appeal judges are inadequately trained.

Because this review is intended to be read mostly by social scientists, this writer will reduce his editorial comments to three words: Read this book. A Jesuit reviewer indicts Dr. Vasoli for his “vitriol,” the result, he thinks, of local Indiana tribunals declaring his fifteen-year marriage null and void (a decision overturned later by the Rota). From the first moment he came my way, however, I never encountered “hate” in his personality, although the loss of his children still remains a sore point. The way in which he uncovered a competent canon lawyer in Rome to handle his appeal was a story in itself. Vasoli’s language is sharp at times, and judgmental, but no different than the tribunalists who resent his criticism of canonists. By the time he decided to write for the history books, Vasoli’s passions on the subject, whatever they were, had ample time to cool. And his rise to expertness about the American annulment scene is the only “hot” dimension to his present persona. The Vasoli report may not be the last word on this subject — and his judgments should be evaluated, by bishops especially. Still, he lances a major ecclesial sore point, and the Church cannot afford to leave the toxin untreated.

Let me conclude with a little parish priest nostalgia, and one doctrinal observation.

Very early in my parish priesthood — now almost sixty years ago — I acquired canon lawyer friends, and continue to have those who still live. Whenever we sent a distressed soul “down” to the tribunal in our young days,

we chose our JCD carefully — usually one who could ferret out an invalid marriage if it came his way. And we hoped the best for our unhappy people, no differently from our canon lawyers, but we and they lived with the results.

Then the mentality of jurists changed. During the 1950s one well-known jurist told this story rather proudly to anyone Who would listen: a Broadway mogul — not a Catholic — came to his office asking to marry an Irish chorus girl, although he was married already to a co-religionist. After an hour-long interview, ending with news that a Catholic marriage was out of the question, the headliner asked: “Would it help if I knew somebody?” “Who do you know?” asked the priest. “Jim Farley” said the petitioner. Assured that Farley enjoyed a great Catholic influence, especially with the local Cardinal, Mr. Broadway gushed enough enthusiasm to ask: “What will the Cardinal do, after Farley talks to him?” The jurist replied, “His Eminence will call me and I’ll tell him you do not have a case!” A dozen years later the tribunalist resented having that story told because, by then, he was a prime activist among canonists of the “love is dead, marriage is dead movement.”

Questionnaires occasionally come to me from tribunals, one of which told a Vasoli tale on its own. The petitioner was known to me from his boyhood. I had married him, watched him develop his own family of seven, and become a heavy drinker. Eventually I counseled him and his wife when their disagreements became bitter. Years later, a questionnaire from a small diocese arrived, informing me that my former altar boy had petitioned for the nullity of his 25-year-old nuptial bond. I returned the questionnaire with the advisory to the local tribunal that grounds for nullity did not exist in this case and that, if the case continued, I wished to appear in person before the court as a matter of justice. I never heard from them again. The annulment was granted anyway, and the man’s mother later was moved to ask me, “How could the Church do this?” During the 1980s about a half-dozen cases on their way to Rome found excuse to come my way. All of these annulments were de-nullified by the Roman Rota.

Now to the doctrinal question.

Annulment-friendly tribunals are another effort since Vatican II to modernize the Church by implying (sometimes denying) that its major preachments are not necessarily true. Secularists profess no faith in Christ or the Church at all. Self-proclaimed Catholic reformers, realizing that the American culture has gone the French Enlightenment way, somehow think that Catholicity will become more credible if its doctrinal claims about the supernatural are muted, e.g., the ongoing presence of God and Christ in its sacraments. The words can remain the same, but their meaning, it is said, must be made more understandable to unbelievers and to Catholics who find Christian marriage hard to live. Vatican II may have called the Church “the

sacrament of salvation,” but this concept must be re-interpreted symbolically. Baptism is a rite of entry to the Christian community, not exactly the cleansing of original sin. Confirmation confers new status in the Church, but not so much the gift of the Holy Spirit. Anointing the sick has become a quick fix of encouragement, especially in the middle aisle, not so much identifying with the suffering of Christ. Forgiveness of sin preferably should be a group process rather than the result of a face-to-face meeting with a priest with authority from Christ to absolve sin in his name. Real Presence occurs when Catholics gather around an altar more than in a host or cup. The priest and pope are community leaders acting in concert with their people, not Vicars of Christ acting solely on their own, and with divine authority. And, then, there is the sacrament of marriage, which comes into being not when a couple exchange vows till death do them part (at that moment they may not fully grasp the presence of Christ), but after experience has solidified their relationship. And, then, maybe not.

This inversion of priorities is only part of the Catholic story that has been playing out for thirty years in diocesan households. When Christ found his Father’s house turned into a center of personal gain or self-enrichment, instead of worship, he cleaned house (John 6). We moderns take malefactors in stride, and demonstrate annoyance otherwise — at thousands who actively challenge the annulment of their marriage, at those who criticize liturgical translations or abuses, at pastors who insist that Church law must be obeyed, or college presidents who demand that Catholic theology be taught in accord with the mind of the Church, at those who insist that the state of grace is necessary for the worthy reception of Holy Communion. Given this state of affairs, God in his heaven will likely be the one to clean his house in his own good time.

*Sic transit gloria ecclesiae Catholicae.*

Msgr. George A. Kelly

Robbins, John W. *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church*. The Trinity Foundation, 1999. 326 pp. \$19.95 paperback.

*Ecclesiastical Megalomania* offers a critical analysis of Catholic economic and political thought. The book is well written, with an animated and participatory style that draws the reader. It is divided into short, easy to read chapters that are fairly self-contained. The content of the book is poor, however. It fails to meet the basic requirements of any critical analysis: to represent the ideas to be analyzed fairly, and to criticize them logically.

Dr. Robbins misrepresents Catholic social teaching. The most fundamental error occurs when he equates economic need with economic equality: “not only is private property at some times inexpedient, it is at all times of inequality (which is apparently indistinguishable from need) manifestly unjust” (40). He then argues against collectivization, as if Catholic social teaching promoted it. Because the treatment of private property is central to Catholic social teaching, this flaw contaminates the entire book. Like Don Quixote he spends the rest of the book fighting against the giants of his own imagination.

In addition, there are many statements that are false. He states that John Paul II has not explained how the Catholic “Church-State doctrine of property differs from that of the Marxists” (41). He claims that Roman Church-State economic thought encouraged the development of liberation theology (77) and that John Paul II supported it repeatedly (102). He states that Catholics support every mother becoming a welfare mother (88). He asserts that private property is not a natural law right in the Catholic tradition (59). He contends that the principle of subsidiarity is not a restraint on state power (152). All of these statements, and many more of the same ilk, are false. Whatever he is arguing against, it is not Catholic social teaching.

Sometimes, his interpretations take on the fancy of creative fiction: after quoting *Laborem Exercens* 43, which notes that the need for planning for unemployment ought not lead to “one-sided centralization by the public authorities”, Dr. Robbins interprets the opposite in the very next paragraph: “In any case, the Roman Church-State advocates and intends to participate in the centralization of power” (91). On page 61, he equates the term “liberal sociopolitical system” from the same encyclical to mean “a limited constitutional republic” in the American sense. In summary, the book displays a high level of ignorance of the context and meaning of terms as used in Catholic social teaching.

Perhaps these problems of interpretation arise from Dr. Robbins’ confidence in his own ability to judge which portions of Catholic social

teaching are honest and which parts are disingenuous. For example, quotes that appear to lend support to Marxism and totalitarianism are to be believed as representing the “Roman Church-State” tradition; however when “the Roman Church-State seems to defend private property at times, it uses the term in an equivocal manner” (59). Of course, no proof is provided; but again on page 62, Dr. Robbins confidently tells us that “concern for human poverty is not the Vatican’s primary motive [for statements in *Populorum Progressio*].” How does he know?

But misrepresentation only goes so far, so the book contains a long list of depreciatory allegations without bothering to prove them. There are portions in the book where the fallacy of repetition (repeating the conclusion as its proof) so densely populates the text that there is no logical argumentation left at all. Among other incongruous allegations we find the following: “the semi-defense of property . . . leads the Church to endorse fascism and reject Communism” (57), “the doctrine of subsidiarity is one of the Roman Church-State’s subterfuges to achieve big government” (155), “the Roman-Church State was in no position to ask any questions about economic development, for its own teaching and hegemony were the cause of stagnation, poverty and suffering” (62).

The third most common element of the book, besides unproven allegations and misrepresentations, are logical fallacies. Among them, the most popular is that of guilt by association. Catholic social teaching is credited with an impressive list of allies and accomplishments. Communists, socialists, and fascists are the usual suspects (did the cold war end yet?), but on page 81 Protestant mainline denominations that “had also abandoned both Christianity and capitalism” become Catholic allies to form the Progressive movement in the United States. Catholics are also the architects of the New Deal, responsible for the growth of government expenditures, the graduated income tax (ouch!) and for evil social programs like social security. In particular, Catholic social teaching is dangerous because it promotes a long list of rights including the right to quality education, to food, to clothing, to medical care, and the like (85-86). The book has the flavor of a conspiracy theory novel, particularly when he quotes favorably Nino Lo Bello’s delusions of millions of “papal James Bonds, or pontifical 007s” (189).

Sometimes the logic just defies description and enters the twilight zone. For example, he argues that the right to health care in the Catholic tradition will serve as the rationale for enslaving portions of the citizenry to ensure a continuous supply of physicians and nurses (94). Can you imagine the hordes of priests kidnapping young children to send them to medical school? With Sancho Panza we say to Dr. Robbins, they are not giants but windmills.

In the final analysis, Dr. Robbins presents a number of beliefs and positions that most Catholics, Protestants and secular humanists will find

objectionable. He believes that the brief chapter 13 of Romans divinely sanctions unregulated capitalism, the absolute (and he means absolute) right of private property, and the American form of government prior to its contamination with the New Deal (46-52). He also believes that the concept of inalienable rights is incompatible with justice (155). He identifies Christianity with capitalism (52), Fundamentalism with Protestantism (158), and offers us the dichotomous choice to be good Catholics or good Christians (25).

Unfortunately, the book overflows with hatred for the Catholic church, referred to throughout as the Roman Church-State or simply Romanism (128). All the elements are present: derogatory terms, a whole chapter dedicated to how Catholics subvert the American republic, and the obligatory identification of the Pope with the antichrist. In page 115 we are told, “the antichrist can be heard in the encyclicals of the present pope.” All of the references are steps to the climax: “If and when it [the Catholic Church] regains its full power and authority, it will impose a regime more sinister than any the planet has yet seen” (195).

As a scholar, Dr. Robbins fails to detect the contradictions in his presentation of his own extreme beliefs. If the right of property is absolute and expropriation always wrong (35), how can he praise the historical expropriation of the vast holdings of the Catholic Church by Protestant states (15)? If inalienable rights are incompatible with justice, how can the American republic be the embodiment of Romans 13? If his approach is Biblical, why does he not quote Acts 4:32 (a reference to early Christians not claiming anything as their own and sharing everything), or Jesus’ own words (in Mt. 19,16-30) regarding the dangers of the accumulation of wealth in the encounter with the rich young man? Are we to believe Jesus supported unregulated capitalism and American constitutionalism, and only those systems of economic and political thought? Does the King James Bible say that wealthy capitalists will enter Heaven easily and we Catholics missed it?

Finally, Dr. Robbins laughs at Catholics in several passages (e.g., p.14 or p.18) for our naive belief in the “fallible” Pope rather than in the Protestant tenet that the Scriptures interpret themselves. Yet his own wild interpretation of Romans 13 provides Catholics with ample proof that free interpretation simply does not work, for to read capitalism and American republicanism in a 1st century scripture is simply Dr. Robbins’ opinion, and it is not the Word of God.

Guillermo Montes, Ph.D.  
University of Rochester

Roy, Jody M. *Rhetorical Campaigns of the Nineteenth-Century: Anti-Catholics and Catholics in America*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999. 200pp. \$89.95 hardcover.

This is volume 71 in a series called “Studies in American Religion.” It reads much like a doctoral dissertation. The author continually tells us what she is going to tell us, then tells us what she promised to tell us, and finally tells us what she did tell us. Apparently judges on degree committees, who are supposed to read theses, need considerable consideration. The repetition is excessive and at times seems to just provide filler. But the book is well worth reading, mostly clear in style, and provocative of much reflection.

The history of these campaigns from 1830 to 1860 is well known to historians of American religion. But Roy zooms in on the literature of attack and defense to analyze the rhetorical strategies of each side, and their influences upon one another. Looking closely at the detailed contents of the anti-Catholic literature is most revealing, and, of course, very sad.

Large scale immigration of Catholics from Europe grew apace throughout the 19th century. Already by 1850, Roy says, Catholics constituted the largest denomination. Quite understandably the existing population, all Protestants of one kind or another, mostly from countries largely Protestant, became apprehensive.

Immigrants other than Irish continued to use their native language, like most first generation immigrants always have and still do. So the foreign born were conspicuously so, and questionably American. But if the religious affiliations had been reversed, no doubt a similar, if not identical, apprehension would have been felt.

Protestants began questioning Catholics’ moral integrity when very cleverly composed narratives of disclosure about sexual immoralities in convents and monasteries were published. Roy points out precisely why such fictions possessed so much credibility for Americans who knew no Catholics personally. Even fictional ex-nuns and ex-priests make good copy. Add sex, and it’s page one.

Then Samuel F.B. Morse went ballistic with a Papal political conspiracy theory whose bare bones he supposedly discovered in European whispers. He, of course, filled out the skeleton with flesh. Anti-Catholic organizations arose and soon, also, anti-Catholic political parties. “Know Nothings” became notorious. Roy notes, however, a puzzling incongruity between the fearsome threats felt and the never more than mild reforms sought.

The response on the part of the Catholic Hierarchy was, she judges, purely passive. Over those 30 years they recommended patience, living so as to reassure the critics and to disabuse them of their baseless stories, fears, and

conspiracy theories. And the very submissiveness of Catholics to episcopal recommendations buttressed Protestant fears of a highly organized and controlled body of infiltrators.

There were two other Catholic responses, however. John Hughes, the archbishop of New York, stood up and publicly defended Catholics. Both in person and in writing he tried to stem the tide of the untruths and antagonism they aroused. He spoke at many public meetings, arguing that texts used in the public schools defamed Catholics and misled Protestants. And when his efforts had little success he strongly promoted a parochial school system across the country.

Orestes Brownson, a convert to Catholicism and noted man of letters, criticized both Catholic responses. Foreign born Catholics were not assimilating fast enough, he thought, and parochial schools were a divisive and insular refusal to assimilate. Roy seems to agree. But it was only incidental that parochial schools were also temporarily instruments expressing and retaining languages and customs from home countries. We know now that old country ties evaporate with second and third generations. Parochial schools were not designed primarily to preserve foreign features.

Nor were they purely passive responses to the majority's false views. I grew up in a small Mississippi river town of 750 with only two Catholic families. I was often taunted, spit on, tormented, and positively persecuted, because my parents sacrificed to take us an hour away every day to a city with a parochial school. When my father started a Boy Scout troop, the Protestant minister who became his assistant scoutmaster was soon sent packing by his congregation. My father's family never played passive.

I submit that Brownson's rejection of Hughes's parochial school initiative was too idealistic. Let us all, he urged, climb into the public forum and convert all these rumor mongers so that this country will have a church sufficiently organized and socially strong enough to serve as a genuine mediator between authority and anarchy, between political institutions seeking too much power and individuals seeking too much freedom. He said no Protestant church could fill that role, and thought that "we [Americans] have more to fear from democracy [he meant rampant individualism] than from all other causes combined" (180)

Roy does not like any of the three Catholic responses she describes. But her criticism often goes too far. The hierarchy was purely passive, and later parochial. And, "In short, Hughes spoke to Catholics as a distinct and separate community within America" (196). Say what? Although she concludes, she does not argue, that Brownson sought "an America dominated and controlled by the Catholic Church" (185).

Understandably, although she never mentions it, any motto like "Hello, MAC" (Make America Catholic) was inflammatory for apprehensive

Protestants. But how does a Church defend itself against the *National Enquirer*? One gets the impression that Bishops should have filed hundreds of lawsuits all over the nation before Protestant judges who also read the *Enquirer*. Roy calls the disapproval of mixed marriages parochial. She means religiously, not ethnically or racially, mixed. Actually, no matter what tactic was used to defend Catholics from falsehood and even, at times, violent persecution, Roy finds a way to argue that the tactic's style, or format, or implications, or even content inadvertently served as more fuel on the fire. It's as if, because guilty people deny the deed, innocent people dare not.

Roy does not ask if the Protestant experience of continual church breakups and multiplication of sects was not socially depressing and politically fearladen for them — if divided, they did not feel weaker and more vulnerable before the Other. But the answers she gives to what she does ask needed to be given.

Richard J. Rolwing  
Reynoldsburg, Ohio

Kass, Amy A. and Leon Kass. *Wing to Wing: Oar to Oar: Readings on Courting and Marrying*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000. 640 pp. \$25.00 paperback.

### “Life Forevermore”: The Problem of Marriage

Marriage in America is in ruins. Marriage rates decline while divorce rates rise. Cohabitation without marriage becomes an increasingly acceptable option. Teen pregnancy, especially among minorities, skyrockets at an alarming rate. Births out of wedlock are common. While we pay lip service to family values, we breed a culture of selfishness through “self-help” books, publicized pre-nuptial agreements, and sanctioned greed. Intellectuals attack nature and tradition, smugly describing all human endeavor, including love, in terms of politics and power. Broken couples attack each other physically on talk shows for our entertainment. Everywhere men and women are portrayed as means for our gratification and use. We foster voyeurism through web-cams, pornographic sites, and the newest lines of fashion. And we watch and enjoy with shameless satisfaction “real-life” shows such as *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* and *Temptation Island*.

Could the situation be any grimmer?

Possibly. Cultural decline, especially as it disintegrates traditional customs and

mores, shows no signs of stopping. Still, marriage usually manages to muster help even in its darkest hour, which is perhaps itself a testament to the naturalness of the love between man and woman so cynically attacked in academic circles. Ironic then that marriage finds its staunchest modern defenders in two members of the academy.

Amy and Leon Kass teach at the University of Chicago, and Leon Kass is known widely for his thoughtful biblical commentary and contributions to bioethics. Together, the Kassess teach a course on love and courtship, encouraging their students to think deeply on all matters nuptial. Their new anthology, *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar* (a title taken from Robert Frost's poem, "The Master Speed," written for his daughter's wedding), is a series of "readings on courting and marrying," collected out of their experiences with this course. They include a great variety of works, ranging from the Bible to Shakespeare to modern social criticism, all directing the reader toward a serious consideration of courtship, marriage, and the moral life. Seven sections, each introduced by the editors, divide the readings according to the central questions addressed: "Where are we now? Defenses of Matrimony"; "What about Sex? Man, Woman, and Sexuality"; "Is This Love? Eros and Its Aims"; "How Can I Find and Win the Right One? Courtship"; "Why a Wedding? The Promises of Marriage"; and "What Can Married Life be Like? The Blessings of Married Life."

The Kassess wage war against the dissolution of marriage with what may be the most powerful cultural ammunition: our literary and philosophic heritage. Nearly every reading is drawn from the great texts of western civilization, rendering the collection a sort of liberal education in miniature. Extending William James's principle that an education in books will, "teach you how to recognize a good man when you see one," these readings engender not only the ability to recognize a good soul, but the means and reasons for a life well lived in the company of that soul. The voices of our western tradition raise questions and invite reflection about love in a way that nothing else in our culture can. In short, the youth of America "lack a cultural script whose denouement is marriage," and great authors answer the call.

Many of the readings are well known. Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet*, and the stories of Isaac, Jacob, and Abraham from Genesis, all great literature by any account, build the foundation. No less familiar are Aristophanes' account of the circle-men and Socrates' discussion of eros in the Symposium, as well as excerpts from Rousseau's *Emile*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

The editors still leave room for some sparkling little surprises. Charles Darwin's rather practical fact sheet listing pros and cons of marriage, in "This is the Question," makes for good advice: "Cheer up — one cannot live this solitary

life, with groggy old age, friendless and cold and childless staring one in one's face, already beginning to wrinkle." While the introduction notes that Darwin, "was a rational and careful man, methodical, it seems, even about matters of the heart," this reader finds his notes ironic: Where is the discussion of reproductive fitness? Can love conquer nature? Is marriage truly consistent with the principles of natural selection? Perhaps the Kasses put the passage in precisely to deliver a subtle message.

The inclusion of Major Sullivan Ballou's letter to his wife Sarah only a week before his death at the battle of Manassas was a grand stroke. The heart-rending message from Ballou ends with a heartfelt appeal:

But, oh Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you, in the gladdest days and in the darkest nights—always, always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.

Such words inevitably sensitize and stir the souls of some readers. But one wonders whether the struggle Ballou speaks of, between duty to his country and duty to his family, could be felt deeply, if at all, by youth in our culture? Might these youth, who live in a society where social status, careerism, and plain greed outweigh marital commitment, be entirely desensitized to the call of Ballou's letter? This collection works from the assumption, right or wrong, that they are listening and are able to be persuaded.

Other excerpts round out the work. Allan Bloom's cogent commentary on "Relationships" still speaks true after fourteen years. Kant's short excerpt, "On Shame and Love," from *The Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, may surprise some readers — who might not otherwise ever read Kant — with its insight into Genesis 3:7. And the Kasses' own essay, "The Marriage Name," may be the most serious modern response to the essentially feminist rejection of sharing the groom's family name.

All in all, *Wing to Wing: Oar to Oar* fills a vacancy that cannot otherwise be filled, as much as modern culture might try with self-help advice, psychiatric counseling, and talk-show hosts. The book provides, in this sense, the basis for a "cultural script" about courtship and marriage. While it is a surprise that such a collection has not until now been compiled (marriage having been in collapse for a good while now), we are lucky it was done by these authors and in this manner. Few understand better the urgency of the dissolution of marriage, and even fewer realize that the keys to the problem have all this time been sitting under our noses. They are the texts of our great tradition. Kudos to the Kasses for dusting them off and offering them up anew.

Rob Schebel  
Des Moines, Iowa

Dombrowski, Daniel A. and Robert Deltete. *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 158 pp. \$19.95 hardcover.

In order to set this “liberal” Catholic defense of abortion by Daniel A. Dombrowski and Robert Deltete in context, it is useful to see just where their defense of abortion is going. Because abortion is part of a culture of death, as John Paul II so aptly names our contemporary ethos, it is not an isolated attitude but one that belongs to a whole cluster of beliefs and practices. The authors spell this out in the chapter entitled a “Defensible Sexual Ethic.” It is presented as a response to what they see as a restricted view of sexuality stemming from Augustine’s contention that only sexual relations within marriage engaged in for the purpose of procreation are moral. That is in fact an oversimplification of Augustine’s view, since he described such acts as “without fault” but affirmed the goodness of marriage of which conjugal intercourse is an integral part. And the Church has moved far beyond Augustine’s admittedly restrictive view of marital sexuality, particularly with John Paul II’s concept of the nuptial meaning of the body.

Dombrowski and Deltete categorically reject the Church’s unbroken teaching on the inseparability of the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal relations. They describe this 2000-year old view as “at the very least counterintuitive to most reflective and morally sensitive Catholics, and . . . perhaps, misguided” (80). It belongs to what they call the “perversity” argument which opposes abortion because it is associated with sex outside marriage. And, of course, the authors do not oppose sex outside marriage. They go so far as to claim that “a rich spiritual life is not necessarily hindered by and may actually be enhanced by premarital sexual relations, which, as we have argued, can be either moral or immoral” (86). The morality depends on whether such relations are mutually “agapic.” The perversity view they call both “too restrictive” and “too permissive” because it gives carte blanche to have a “fertilized egg” (82). And that leads to overpopulation! Homosexual relations, which are agapic, can also be moral(86).

It would be unwise, however, to dismiss the authors’ arguments out of hand. They represent a serious attempt to locate endorsement of early abortions in the Catholic tradition and some both in and out of the Church could be misled. The authors also have credible academic credentials. Both teach in the philosophy department at Seattle University. In addition Deltete has a background in the history and philosophy of physics and cosmology.

The Church’s opposition to abortion, they charge, rests on two arguments, the ontological and the perversity view of sex. They admit that the perversity view, which holds that abortion is wrong because it is associated with

sex outside marriage, is no longer accepted. So they concentrate their attack on the ontological argument, according to which a person comes to be at fertilization. They claim to be strictly in line with Augustine and Aquinas, both of whom endorsed delayed hominization, the position that a spiritual soul is infused only when the fetus has been sufficiently developed to receive it. They call this fact “one of the best kept secrets in the history of Catholicism” (3). Further they assert that the ontological position only came to the fore as a result of mistakes in 17th century science and is based on a dualist view of body and soul.

The authors describe their own view, which follows that of Daniel Maguire and Joseph Donceel, as a “neoclassical version of dynamic hylomorphism” (8). They also employ a related version of the interests principle. Interests are essential to rights and the capacity of conscious awareness is essential for the possession of interests. Crucial to their arguments is that, although the fetus is undoubtedly human because it has human genetic material, sentiency is necessary for personhood. “A fetus,” they state, “becomes a human being in the moral sense of the term (i.e. it would be wrong to kill it) at the approximate point when it acquires the ability to survive outside the womb” (14).

Dombrowski and Deltete claim that both Augustine and Aquinas held that the fetus in the early stages had the same moral status as a plant (15). “Along with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas we believe that sentiency is a necessary condition for receiving a human soul” (16). They acknowledge that Aquinas’s science was defective but praise his hylomorphic principle, which, in their interpretation, leads inevitably to the position of delayed hominization and therefore the licitness of “abortion” in the early stages of pregnancy because, although human, the fetus is not a person. They cite Shannon and Wolter that fertilization is a process and the “central nervous system is ‘critical’ from a moral point of view” (43) and that only develops in the second trimester.

The delayed hominization argument has been ably refuted by a number of moral theologians and philosophers, among them Patrick Lee and William E. May. It is significant that neither they nor any other orthodox scholars are cited in the extensive bibliography, in case, perhaps, they pose too great a threat to inquiring readers. May in his excellent book, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life*, formulates several cogent arguments to show that personhood begins at fertilization. Contrary to the authors’ asymmetrical time argument, it is the same person from fertilization to natural death no matter how much the outside physical appearance changes. May soundly refutes the authors’ contention that Aquinas did not condemn abortion in the early stages of the fetus. On the contrary May states, “All Christian writers, including St. Thomas, absolutely condemned all deliberate abortion whether the embryo/fetus was ‘formed’ or not.”

To refute the position that the zygote is human but not a person until sentience, May points to a difference between a radical capacity and a developed capacity. A radical capacity can be called active when its principle of development is within and passive when its development is triggered by outside forces. The fetus possesses an active radical capacity and therefore, is at no stage not a human person with the radical capacities of intellect and will. May also attacks the authors' argument that there is so much natural wastage of embryos, God could not infuse a spiritual soul in every embryo that ends in miscarriage. May questions the numbers given by the authors and points out that most embryos lost to miscarriage are not embryos at all but clusters of cells which have never formed adequately to be infused with a spiritual soul. He also cites John Finnis's distinction between a right and a liberty, which puts the mother's so-called right to abortion in perspective.

Finally, while Dombrowski and Deltete admit that the second century moral treatise, the *Didache*, condemned abortion as homicide from conception, they point out that was not uniformly the official position of the Church. For example in 1588 Pope Sixtus V declared abortion at any stage homicide but in 1591 Gregory XIV returned to the delayed hominization position, which was only formally called into question by Pius IX in 1869. Then the 1917 code of Canon Law enshrined it (92). They conclude by declaring that "Catholic teaching on abortion is not governed by papal infallibility" (90). May categorically disagrees, stating that "Pope John Paul II clearly affirms that the teaching of the Church on the grave immorality of abortion has been infallibly proposed by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church." He cites the relevant section in *Evangelium Vitae* (no. 62).

In passing, the authors note that it was the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 that finally determined the Church's insistence that life begins at conception. No Catholic treatment of abortion can be complete without the perspective of revelation. John Saward shows beautifully in his book *Redeemer of the Womb: Jesus Living in Mary*, how Christ consented to become an embryo and in doing so sanctified every stage of human life. His human and divine natures united at the moment of his conception within Mary's body. He became the person Jesus, true God and true man. According to Dombrowski and Deltete, he would simply have been a plant until the second trimester of Mary's pregnancy.

Mary Shivanandan, M.S. S.T.D.

Zoller, Michael. *Washington and Rome: Catholicism in American Culture*. Translated by Steven Rendall and Albert Wimmer. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999. 278 pp. \$35 (hardcover), \$20 (softcover).

Writing in the spirit of Alexis de Tocqueville, Michael Zoller, Director of the Center for American Studies and Chair of Political Sociology at Bayreuth University in Germany, provides, with both its inherent strengths and weaknesses, a distinctive “outsider’s perspective” on the American Catholic and religious experience. Readers will find Professor Zoller’s social history, covering the years from 1492 through 1993, extremely valuable for three reasons. First, he provides a vast amount of useful information and data derived from a judicious mix of qualitative and quantitative sources. Second, he generates many intriguing (and, of course, debatable) insights about the myriad events, processes, and individuals studied. For example, and contra the understanding of many traditionalists, he argues (correctly, I believe) that “the presumed religious orientation of the immigrants and their native countries . . . (around the turn of the twentieth century) . . . seems to be largely a retrospective illusion” (133). Rather, Professor Zoller contends, it was the impressive and effective institutional presence of a mid-twentieth century Catholic Church in America that effectively socialized the European immigrants and their children into the Catholic faith. In a second example, this time contra the progressive orientation, Professor Zoller questions (again, correctly, I believe) the religious authenticity of the politicizing of the Catholic Church during the 1970s and 1980s by a left-wing “new class of church mice” (200). In this regard, he does an excellent job of demonstrating the connection between the Bishops’ Bicentennial Program with its centerpiece, the Detroit “Call to Action” Conference (1976) and such statements as “The Challenge of Peace” (1983), and “Economic Justice for All” (1986). He claims, furthermore, that Catholicism has now self-corrected from its leftward veer and is back to charting a more centrist course. His volume is replete with hundreds of other such intellectually stimulating and controversial observations and claims.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Professor Zoller provides an important and comprehensive theoretical interpretation of the American Catholic experience that deserves a respectful hearing and much reflection and discussion. It is one that rejects both the Americanist progressivist and Romanist restorationist perspectives and is closest to, on the American scene, the reformist impulse of the Catholic neo-conservatives, Michael Novak, George Weigel, and Father Richard J. Neuhaus. It is one that sees the American Catholic Church, at its best, as an institution opposed to all “extreme” positions, able to navigate and constantly move toward “la via media,” and center itself squarely between loyalty to Rome and America.

Embedded as it is in a Protestant (and now increasingly secular) milieu, Professor Zoller starts off his analysis by claiming that while American Catholicism theoretically represents a “cultural improbability,” it has historically and basically, up to and including the present and all things considered, been successful in its religious and social mission. Professor Zoller accepts the idea that American society represents an exception to the positive link, more manifestly obvious in Europe, between modernity and secularization. As he states, “recently, even authors who earlier described America as a 'secular city' have again begun to quote Tocqueville’s prediction that religion would not merely survive but flourish in America” (x). Key to Professor Zoller’s analysis is the claim that the increased individualism of American life is not antithetical to the Catholic faith. As the author asserts, “religion takes a detour through the consciences of individuals, and its influence increases in the degree that it 'rules people’s hearts.’ Individualism has put an unmistakable mark on America’s religious culture, and one may therefore ask whether it has actually weakened American political and religious institutions or — on the contrary — strengthened them” (x). Professor Zoller’s answer to his own question is ingenious. He argues that individualism has furthered both universalism and a greater attachment to the Catholic faith given the demonstrated ability and desire of individual Catholics to draw upon what he sees as the impressive cultural and institutional resources of the Catholic community. After stating that “the opposition between individualism and so-called communitarianism is not a real opposition at all” (245), Professor Zoller continues: “social and religious individualism furthers rather than hinders the development of comprehensive perspectives. Thus American Catholics have made their self-conception manifest in increasingly larger and more abstract entities. They have expended their loyalty beyond the extended family, first to the ethnic group and its religion, and then to the nation and their own denomination. At the same time, their concrete conduct of their lives outside their jobs has been oriented toward ever-smaller communities that they have chosen . . . [the Catholic] . . . advantage over other Americans and especially Europeans is that in taking the next step, they can rely on the concept of the church to bring together their abstract self-identification and the concrete communities in which they live” (245-6).

How, relatedly, does Professor Zoller handle the argument that contemporary American Catholics have assimilated excessively into an ever-more secular American society? As he himself asks, “how can a Catholicism so comfortably established in society still create enough distance to ensure its separate identity”(209)? His answer is that “this kind of distance . . . [is] . . . no longer produced by the marginal position of Catholics, but rather . . . by conscious fashioning of its own institutions” (209). Thus, because Professor

Zoller believes that Catholic institutions, structures, and organizations are presently shaping — in the main, at least — individualism into a correct appropriation of the faith, he can speak of an authentic Catholic American road to Rome (248) and the possible emergence, in the not-to-distant future, of what Father Richard J. Neuhaus means by a “Catholic moment” (243).

There is, interestingly, a strong affinity between the overall thesis of *Washington and Rome* and my published doctoral dissertation, *Toward the Establishment of Liberal Catholicism in America* (University Press of America, 1983), a book, by the way, that Professor Zoller, in his Annotated Bibliography, claims represents one of “three exceptional books that must be consulted to understand important aspects of the history of American Catholicism and the phases through which it has passed” (256). Suffice it to say that, as readers of my *Bright Promise, Failed Community: Catholics and the American Public Order* (Lexington, 2000) will confirm, I reject Professor Zoller’s overall thesis and my earlier and similar argument. In short, the Catholic infrastructural network called by myself and others a “Catholic plausibility structure” has been so battered in the post-Vatican II period as to make the claim that individualism is presently being shaped and channeled by the Catholic faith simply untrue for the large majority of American Catholics. To take just one example, Professor Zoller’s claim that the Catholic laity “are obedient when the Bishops take a clearly Catholic position — as in the case of abortion” (245) is simply not the case; just ask the majority of Catholics who voted for the pro-abortion Vice-President Albert Gore in the 2000 Presidential election! Under present-day conditions, i.e., *sans* an intact and orthodox Catholic plausibility structure, the present acceleration of individualism is simply a recipe for promoting secularism. Read Professor Zoller’s important and worthy volume and decide for yourself if “early” or “later” Varacalli is more on the mark.

Joseph A. Varacalli  
Nassau Community College S.U.N.Y.

**PART 4•PUBLIC AND CHURCH AFFAIRS**

