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Mendacity and the Magisterium

When my paternal grandmother died in 1990, I volunteered to make the arrangements for the funeral Mass. I went to the church to meet the organist and pick out hymns; later, at the wake, I sat down with a nun and selected readings. When that was done, the nun asked whether my sister and I wished to serve as acolytes at the service. I thanked her for the offer, but said I didn't think it would be appropriate. For while my grandmother had been a Catholic, I explained, my sister and I were not.

The nun fixed my eyes with a steady gaze. "I didn't hear that," she said in a near-whisper.

The message was clear. Yes, what she'd proposed was *verboten*; but as long as none of us said anything, it would be O.K.

I thanked her again, but again said no.

The encounter threw me. What, I mused, would Jesus have made of it? The answer seemed clear. When asked about the nature of God's kingdom, Jesus didn't serve up inflexible rules and restrictions; he told the parable of the Good Samaritan, the point of which was that God's kingdom isn't about separating "insider" from "outsider" but about the rejection of such distinctions. The early Christians understood this; for them, the faith was defined not by dictums and dogmas but by an overwhelming shared experience. And the nun understood, too: if she was willing to include us in the funeral service, it was because she plainly wanted to do the Christian thing. Yet had she done so, she would have been acting in violation of church law.

Today, the powers that be at the Vatican never tire of asserting that they alone possess the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Yet they have falsified their institution's history, insisted on its incapability (at its highest levels) of sin or error, and demanded its members' assent to a growing list of doctrines

that mock charity, strain credulity, and can seem not only irrelevant but inimical to that extraordinary feeling that bound the early Christians each to each. And while those leaders suppress and distort truth to maintain an image of moral perfection, theological correctness, and historical consistency, lower-level functionaries like that nun feel forced by circumstances to be dishonest, too, simply in order to get around the system and do the kind, decent—and, yes, Christian—thing.¹

How to describe such a state of affairs? The Catholic writer Garry Wills, in the subtitle of his book *Papal Sin* (2000), refers to the church's "structures of deceit."² The investigative staff of the *Boston Globe*, in the recently published *Betrayal*, uses the phrase "culture of secrecy."³ And the priest Donald Cozzens, in his new study *Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crisis in the Church*, calls it "unholy silence."⁴

Cozzens, alas, is caught in a bind. He wants to address this silence, yet he has chosen to do so within the very constraints one expects him to criticize. The result: a cautious little volume that acknowledges problems but hardly dares to frame them honestly, let alone propose serious changes. Cozzens doesn't even raise the central issue of papal authoritarianism until page 147; and he does so in the passive voice ("the leadership of the Pope has been criticized . . ."), carefully coupling this indirect reproach with overt praise ("the moral leadership of Pope John Paul has been undaunting"). Similarly, his chapter on women focuses on the sexual abuse of nuns by priests—a no-brainer—and high-mindedly entreats us to heed women's "faithful voices," yet keeps mum on women's ordination.⁵ His endorsement of *Papal Sin* and

¹ Of course, many Protestant denominations—notably (and ironically) the Baptists, whose movement was founded in reaction to institutional dogma-mongering—have also learned how to stint on charity and pile on the obligatory doctrines. It should not be concluded from my focus in this piece on the Catholic Church that I am unaware of or indifferent to Protestantism's less charitable side—which is, after all, the topic of my 1997 book *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity*.

² PAPAL SIN: Structures of Deceit, by Garry Wills. Doubleday. \$25.00.

³ BETRAYAL: The Crisis in the Catholic Church, by the Investigative Staff of *The Boston Globe*. Little, Brown. \$23.95.

⁴ SACRED SILENCE: Denial and the Crisis in the Catholic Church, by Donald Cozzens. The Liturgical Press. \$19.95.

⁵ This omission might puzzle readers who are unaware that the Pope has barred discussion of this topic; indeed, some years ago, on Vatican orders, Cozzens' own publisher, The Liturgical Press, destroyed all the remaining copies of a book by another writer in which the forbidden subject was raised.

Mark Jordan's brilliant *The Silence of Sodom* (2000), both of which explore the "unholy silence" more candidly, suggests that he'd like to say much more than he dares about the Church's mechanism of silence; but in the end, ironically, his book is a case study in that mechanism's continuing efficacy.⁶

John Cornwell has examined the Church's "unholy silence" in several books. The first, *A Thief in the Night*, though dating back to 1989 (it was reissued in paper in 2001), is worth mentioning here because it brings those structures to life with unusual vividness.⁷ Years after the death of John Paul I, whom many believed to have been poisoned, a Vatican press officer invited Cornwell to uncover the facts; yet this was easier said than done. Members of the dead Pope's inner circle had lied profusely about the circumstances of his demise; it was their insistence on sticking to their stories, Cornwell realized, that had engendered rumors of homicide. The book reads like a first-rate detective story, recounting interviews with one colorful Vatican insider after another. (The eccentricity and dissimulation on display here bring to mind another splendid murder mystery-cum-*tour de force* of local color, John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.) One can hardly imagine a franker inside look at the Vatican, which emerges here as a hothouse of rumor, innuendo, ambition, and spin—a place marked, in Cornwell's words, by "a pervasive sense of pusillanimity, a reluctance to speak out and take responsibility, a meanness of spirit." A monsignor confides: "The Vatican is a court, a place of gossipy eunuchs. The whole place floats on a sea of brilliant bitchery." Eventually Cornwell grows frustrated by the powerful odor of mendacity: "Whom could I trust in this strange little world where people seemed to play fast and loose with the truth?"

Ten years after *A Thief in the Night* came *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (1999), in which Cornwell concluded that Pius, though he made some efforts to help the Jews, did far less than he could have, largely owing to a "long-standing anti-Jewishness" that derived from "the conviction that there was a link between

⁶ THE SILENCE OF SODOM: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism, by *Mark D. Jordan*. University of Chicago Press. \$25.00.

⁷ A THIEF IN THE NIGHT: Life and Death in the Vatican, by *John Cornwell*. Penguin. \$14.00p.

⁸ HITLER'S POPE: The Secret History of Pius XII, by *John Cornwell*. Penguin. \$15.00p.

Judaism and the Bolshevik plot to destroy Christendom.”⁸ Now, in *Breaking Faith*, having investigated John Paul I’s death and Pius XII’s life, Cornwell examines the Church under John Paul II.⁹ He tries to strike a balance. On the one hand, he sympathizes with traditionalist complaints about insipid liturgy and music at contemporary services and about watered-down religious education in today’s Catholic schools. (Religion textbooks, he gripes, are filled with passages “about helping others and being nice to people”—which, while admittedly banal, are at least preferable to the religious education provided to the Catholic neighbors of my childhood, who seemed to know nothing about their faith aside from the happy fact that I, as a non-Catholic, was destined for Hell.) On the other hand, he laments John Paul II’s bullying of dissident theologians and the ways in which friends of Cornwell have been abused by the Church. A gay friend, for example, was denied Communion at his mother’s funeral Mass; a woman who had been abandoned by her husband will be considered unworthy of receiving Communion if she remarries. Anyone who is a Catholic, or is close to one, could tell similar stories.

Like Cornwell, Garry Wills is an ex-seminarian turned critic of the Church. In *Papal Sin*, he charged recent popes and other churchmen with placing subordinates under a “burden of deceptiveness”; among his themes were the Church’s whitewashing of its past crimes against Jews, its historically dishonest arguments for priestly celibacy and the male-only priesthood, and its hypocrisies about sex. Now, in the rather misleadingly titled *Why I Am a Catholic*, Wills broadens his focus to include the entire history of the Church in Rome, assailing the Vatican’s pretense that the papacy and papal supremacy are older than they are and revisiting familiar anecdotes about popes who plotted murders and fathered bastards.¹⁰ The most interesting passages, however, concern the mid-twentieth century. Wills recounts the travails of John Courtney Murray, S.J., the specialist in church-state relations whose involvement in Vatican II made him a public symbol of his Church’s promising new engagement with the modern world. Murray, who sought to diminish anti-Catholicism

⁹ BREAKING FAITH: Can the Catholic Church Save Itself?, by *John Cornwell*. Penguin Compass. \$14.00p.

¹⁰ WHY I AM A CATHOLIC, by *Garry Wills*. Houghton Mifflin. \$26.00.

and help integrate Catholics into mainstream society, eloquently refuted complaints that Catholics couldn't be good Americans because they were intolerant of other religions, opposed church-state separation, and toed the Vatican line. Yet according to Wills, ironically, Murray was secretly silenced by the Church for a good part of the 1950s as a punishment for—what else?—his tolerance of other faiths, belief in church-state separation, and failure to toe the Vatican line.

This silencing ended with the presidential candidacy of JFK, which compelled Rome, for P.R. reasons, to assume a more Murray-like pose. Yet old habits die hard. Both Paul VI and John Paul II have voiced the pre-Vatican II view that lay Catholics need (as Wills puts it) “to be protected from knowledge.” Paul VI defended his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which retained the ban on contraception, by warning that if the Church adjusted too readily to scientific advances, the “edifice of the faith” would collapse;¹¹ the current pope, for his part, has commented that “it is the right of the faithful not to be troubled by theories or hypotheses that they are not expert in judging or that are easily simplified or manipulated by public opinion for ends that are alien to the truth.” Which is another way of saying that the pope either has very little faith in the faith, or very little faith in the faithful.

One of the most controversial issues relating to the Church's “unholy silence” is, of course, its role in the Holocaust. In 1998, the Vatican issued a report, “We Remember—A Reflection on the Shoah,” which, though widely hailed for acknowledging that some Catholics had participated in the Holocaust, avoided any criticism of the Church itself, and drew a meaningless distinction between the social, cultural, and political anti-Semitism of the Nazis and the religion-based “anti-Judaism” of the Church. The latter, claimed the report, bore no responsibility for Auschwitz. *Hitler's Pope* is only one of several recent books to disagree. Another is *The Popes Against the Jews*, in which David I. Kertzer, a professor of anthropology, social sciences, and Italian studies at Brown University, shows that Pius XII's loathing for Jews was the

¹¹ The words “edifice of the faith” are a paraphrase of Paul VI's remarks by Peter Hebblethwaite, his biographer (quoted in *Why I Am a Catholic*).

¹² THE POPES AGAINST THE JEWS: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism, by *David I. Kertzer*. Alfred A. Knopf. \$27.95.

rule, not the exception, among modern pontiffs.¹² Indeed, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as anti-Semitism declined and Jewish assimilation increased in the U.S. and Western Europe, the popes (with the brief and honorable exception of Benedict XV, who reigned from 1914 to 1922) fought to preserve bigotry and separation. Why? Because they saw modernism—the rise of secular democracy—as a threat to Church power; they knew that Jewish integration and anti-Semitism’s decline were part of this development; and they recognized that one way to turn Catholics against modernism was thus to whip up prejudice against Jews. As Kertzer shows, the popes pursued this course unhesitatingly. As late as a century ago, the Holy See was promulgating the superstition that Jews used Christian blood in their ceremonies; in the Papal States, which until 1870 occupied much of the Italian peninsula, Jewish children who had been baptized by Christians were taken from their families and raised by the Church. (Kertzer recounted one such case in his 1997 book *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*.)

Anti-modernist and anti-Jewish forces were particularly busy in the late 1800s. European reactionaries spread lurid tales of Jewish conspiracy; *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was one product of this enterprise. Official Vatican publications played a key role in the campaign to demonize Jews. In 1892, for example, subscribers to *L’Osservatore romano* could read that “good anti-Semitism” was “nothing other than Christianity, completed and perfected in Catholicism”; that the Jews’ “rapacious tyranny” would soon invite an explosive reaction; and that the rising sympathy for Jews caused by the Russian pogroms proved that Jews themselves had engineered the pogroms. When, in 1889, the papal nuncio in Vienna publicly praised a Jew who had donated to Christian charities, the Pope demanded an explanation; in 1914, the Vatican journal *Civiltà cattolica* reported that Jews not only drank Christian children’s blood but also took care to murder the youngsters as painfully as possible; as late as 1923, a Polish priest, Józef Kruszynski, wrote that “if the world is to be rid of the Jewish scourge, it would be necessary to exterminate them, down to the last one.” (Two years later he was put in charge of the Catholic University of Lublin.) Even converts suffered: in 1896, a Jewish-born archbishop was “showered with catcalls and jeers” at a Catholic gathering in Salzburg, resulting in a Vatican request that he resign because his background “was stirring up too much

trouble.”

Then as now, American and British Catholics were liberal thorns in the Curia’s side. An 1899 letter from the Archbishop of Westminster to the Vatican secretary of state, begging that the Pope repudiate the myth of Jewish ritual murder, prompted an internal Vatican communication that read as follows: “The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster has thought to denounce present-day anti-Semitism, especially the matter of ritual murder, to the Holy See. It is easy to understand just how serious the matter is, if one considers the temerity of the powerful Jews of London, who, in their unchallenged rule of Europe, have reached the point of such lunacy that they would pretend to be defended by the Holy See.” Reading the Curia’s anti-Semitic rhetoric of a century ago, one is repeatedly reminded of the language used by some religious leaders today about gay people. Both hate campaigns involve the claim that “they” are rich, privileged, unpatriotic radicals who, enjoying undue media influence, are enemies both of the culture (which they are conspiring to take over) and of Christianity (which they seek to destroy). Religious leaders who targeted Jews a century ago, like those who spread antigay prejudices today, insisted that they were not preaching hate. In 1893, for example, Father Saverio Rondina wrote that “We do not write with any intention of sparking or fomenting any anti-Semitism in our country. Rather we seek to sound an alarm for Italians so that they defend themselves against those who, in order to impoverish them, dominate them, and make them their slaves, interfere with their faith, corrupt their morals, and suck their blood.”

If Kertzer’s book, despite its stunning contents, is a relatively sober archival study, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *A Moral Reckoning* is a passionate indictment that can bring to mind Zola’s *J’accuse*.¹³ In *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996), Goldhagen argued that “ordinary Germans” took part in the Holocaust because they’d been raised to be anti-Semites; in his new book, he evaluates the role of Catholic anti-Semitism in the destruction of the Jews. His prose throughout is breathless, strident, repetitious; as in his earlier book, he has gotten some details wrong and overreached in some of his arguments. But page by page, he tells us things that are horrific. Supporters of Pius XII have defended his failure to speak up for the Jews by saying that the Nazis wouldn’t have

¹³ A MORAL RECKONING: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair, by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. Alfred A. Knopf. \$25.00.

listened to him anyway and that, had he done so, he might have made things worse, not only for Jews but for Catholics as well. Yet Goldhagen points out that Danish Lutherans, who defied the Nazis and helped spirit most of their Jewish countrymen to safety in Sweden, were not punished for it. “Did Pius XII know of the Danish church’s protest?” Goldhagen writes. “Of course he did. It happened two weeks before the Germans began deporting the Jews of Rome.” Partly owing to Protestant support for Danish Jews, moreover, the latter were sent “not to Auschwitz but to Theresienstadt, where the Germans permitted Danish officials and Red Cross officials to visit them and to monitor their well-being. Ninety percent of Denmark’s deported Jews survived the war.” No such effort was made by the Pope on behalf of Rome’s Jews.¹⁴ Goldhagen’s conclusion: “That the Pope would bring danger upon himself and the Church for speaking out was then, and is now, a convenient fiction.”

Yet for all Goldhagen’s attention to Pius XII, his focus here, as in his earlier book, is not on the man at the top but on those below—such as the German bishops who publicly opposed the liquidation of mentally and physically ill Christians but kept quiet about the extermination of Jews. Goldhagen contrasts various denominational *mea culpas*, investigations by corporations into their own Nazi-era crimes, and a recent exhibition by the Northern Protestant State Church of Germany detailing its own involvement in the Shoah with the Vatican’s “meager . . . and often self-exculpatory” report “We Remember.” One can only agree with his conclusion that the Church “has not even honestly addressed its past anti-Semitism” and that by even considering Pius XII for sainthood it “shows how far it is from a genuine confrontation with and understanding of its offenses, which include his.”

Perhaps the most comprehensive—and deeply reflective—recent book about these matters is James Carroll’s *Constantine’s Sword*, which traces the Catholic-Jewish relationship from New Testament times to the present.¹⁵ Carroll, a former priest, covers

¹⁴ Goldhagen notes that while the Norwegian Protestant churches, too, organized public protests against the deportations and worked together to help Jews escape to freedom, the Catholic Church of Norway “pointedly decid[ed] not to participate.”

¹⁵ CONSTANTINE’S SWORD: The Church and the Jews, by *James Carroll*. Mariner Books. \$16.00p.

every relevant major event from the Council of Nicaea to the Dreyfus affair, and examines the ways in which Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, and others influenced attitudes toward Jews. Most influential of all, in Carroll's view, was the fourth-century Emperor Constantine, whose conversion to Christianity turned an embattled, marginal faith into the established imperial religion. Yet that victory came at a terrible cost. Jesus had been a Jewish rabbi who rejected dogmatism and preached God's boundless love; Constantine, who calculated "that only a unified, sharply defined, and firmly advanced Christianity would overcome paganism," renounced tolerance of theological differences and of Judaism, turning the religion of love into a religion of law. Suddenly, orthodoxy was all. Along with this increased dogmatic rigidity came a focus not on Jesus' teachings and Resurrection but on the Crucifixion, about which Constantine claimed to have had a vision. "When the death of Jesus . . . replaced the life of Jesus and the new life of Resurrection at the heart of the Christian imagination," writes Carroll, "the balance shifted decisively against the Jews"—who were, after all, blamed for that death. "There are few things we can say with more certainty about Jesus," writes Carroll, "than that he defined his mission in opposition not to Judaism but to the imperium of Rome"; and yet with Constantine's conversion, the Church *became* Rome—a contradiction, Carroll says, with which it "has never come fully to terms."

For Carroll, ecclesiastical power helps explain why the Holocaust happened—and why so many Church leaders failed to fight it with all their might. Carroll believes it was Angelo Roncalli's wartime witness to this failure that led him, as Pope John XXIII, to convoke Vatican II, a council that for Carroll marked the beginning of the end of "Constantinian imperial Catholicism" and the recovery of a pre-Constantinian Church that neither pretended to perfection nor coveted power. Yet that transformation remains incomplete. At the end of his magisterial book, Carroll proposes another council—a Vatican III—to finish the job of turning a monarchical church into a democratic one that respects other religions, recognizing that "all that exists, and in particular all persons who exist, participate, by virtue of mere existence, in the existence of God."

Thomas Cahill, in the first fifty pages of *Pope John XXIII* (a new

volume in the Penguin Lives series), tells much the same story as Carroll, efficiently outlining the gradual magnification of the office of Bishop of Rome into the papacy, the transformation of a “vicar of Peter” who addressed his fellow bishops as “brothers” into an infallible “Vicar of Christ” who called them “my sons.”¹⁶ If anything, Cahill is even blunter than Carroll about the fact that the papacy was for centuries “a corrupt political institution”: he writes about “inconvenient popes” of the Middle Ages who “were dispatched mafia-style” and describes such events as the “Cadaver Synod” of A.D. 896, at which the fully accoutred corpse of Pope Formosus was “tried” by his successor and then cast into the Tiber. Cahill is especially good on pontifical language, which, from medieval times through Pius XII, was marked by an “allusive, refined pompousness” that was “far removed from biblical sounds and themes.”

But then came John XXIII—who wrote a prose of such biblical directness that Darius Milhaud actually set portions of his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* to music. Cahill’s summary of papal history, though it may seem to form a disproportionately long portion of this short biography, provides a background that is necessary if one is to understand how dramatic a break with the past Roncalli represented. He preached humankind’s radical unity, noting that Jesus “came to break down the barriers” and “died to proclaim universal brotherhood.” He admitted doubt, saying after his sister’s death: “Woe betide us if it all turns out to be an illusion.” And he evinced a Christ-like humility that scandalized Alfredo Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office (a.k.a. Inquisition), whose plans for Vatican II included “*schemata* condemning the modern world, affirming Mary’s perpetual virginity, declaring that there was an essential difference between priests and the rest of the baptized, condemning those who dared speak of the sinfulness of the Church, and proposing a new Profession of Faith, modeled on Pius X’s anti-Modernist oath but even more restrictive.” (John, of course, had other plans, which caused Ottaviani to pray that he himself might shuffle off this mortal coil before the council ended: “That way I can die a Catholic.”)

Admittedly, it is rather disconcerting that Cahill, while consis-

¹⁶ POPE JOHN XXIII, by *Thomas Cahill*. Viking Penguin. \$19.95.

tently frowning on traditionalist Catholics, finds several opportunities to smile on Communism. He tells cozy stories about the Khrushchevs, denigrates Pius XII's anti-Stalinism, cheers John XXIII's neutrality in the Cuban Missile Crisis and Pier Paolo Pasolini's Marxian vision of Jesus, and puts the words "Free World" in quotation marks.¹⁷ These particulars are all the more dismaying because Cahill's book is otherwise highly admirable, recounting Roncalli's story with elegance and wit, and bringing to life a man of whom an incredulous Italian chambermaid once exclaimed to Hannah Arendt: "*Signora*, this pope was a real Christian. How is that possible? And how could a real Christian ever get to sit on Saint Peter's Chair? Didn't he first have to be made a bishop, then an archbishop, then a cardinal, before he finally got elected pope? Didn't anyone have any idea who he was?"

Inevitably, the many recent critiques of the Church—and, in particular, of its role in the Holocaust—have spawned a reaction. Yet neither Ralph McInerny's *The Defamation of Pius XII* nor Justus George Lawler's *Popes and Politics* puts many dents in the critics' arguments.¹⁸ McInerny, according to his dust jacket, "restores Pius XII to the rank of hero" and "demolishes the ludicrous charges against him." In reality, McInerny (a philosophy professor at Notre Dame and author of mystery novels featuring one Father Dowling) avoids directly addressing those charges. He employs the lame gambit of saying that he doesn't need to answer them because they "have been conclusively refuted." He repeatedly credits Pius with saving 860,000 Jewish lives—a figure arrived at by attributing to him every virtuous act performed by any Catholic, anywhere in Europe, at any time during the war. He makes other excessive claims. (To support his assertion that "the work of the Church" was not "confined to its hierarchy and clergy," he quotes an Occupation-era complaint by a pro-Nazi French journalist that "every Catholic family shelters a Jew.") And

¹⁷ Cahill, alas, isn't the only foe of Vatican absolutism to turn accommodating in the face of far more brutal autocracies. Carroll, in *Boston Globe* columns earlier this year, equated the American effort to liberate Iraq with Saddam's tyranny; and some years ago (as Ralph McInerny reminds us) Wills passionately defended the Stalinist writer Lillian Hellman.

¹⁸ THE DEFAMATION OF PIUS XII, by *Ralph McInerny*. St. Augustine's Press. \$19.00. POPES AND POLITICS: Reform, Resentment, and the Holocaust, by *Justus George Lawler*. Continuum. \$24.95.

he inadvertently strengthens his opponents' case by citing in Pius's defense some exceedingly modest gestures—for example, the fact that a Jewish scholar escaped Nazi extermination by being hired in 1939 “to work on old maps in the Vatican library.”

On the question of Pius XII's silence, McNerny keeps contradicting himself—arguing variously that Pius *did* speak out, notably in Christmas messages that McNerny says make clear references to the Jews (though he feels obliged to italicize the relevant phrases, which are anything *but* clear); that Pius didn't speak out because he knew “a more perfervid rhetoric would harm the very ones one sought to help” (why, then, did he repeatedly express explicit concern for Poles?); that he didn't need to speak out because “he spoke through the deeds of his nuncios and bishops”; that he “was whiplashed between the desire to condemn eloquently and the prudence urged on him by those under the oppressor's heel”; and that, well, “Pius, like all of us, was fallible.” Which is the whole point—yes, he *was* fallible; but though he headed an institution that claimed to represent ultimate truth and charity and that, on pain of eternal damnation, demanded repentance by its humblest members for even the smallest of sins, Pius equivocated shamefully after the war about his Nazi-era conduct and allowed himself to be celebrated as a hero of the Jews.

If I haven't already made it clear, there's plenty in McNerny's book for Jews to take offense at. To bolster the claim that Pius helped Jews, McNerny includes in this category Jewish converts to Catholicism, and approvingly cites a claim that Pius “began with the fate of baptized Jews” only because their need was greater, as “Jewish relief organizations were often unaware of them.” He quotes a cardinal who praised such converts for exhibiting a “Christian heroism” that “edifies the Jews of the Mosaic rite”—and he quotes it not because he recognizes it as staggeringly offensive but, apparently, because he considers it an example of the hierarchy's friendliness toward Jews. He compares Pius's record favorably with that of various Jews, noting that Jewish financiers dealt with Hitler, that Palestinian Jews held negotiations with Adolf Eichmann, that “the record of non-European Jews in rescuing fellow Jews from Hitler was spotty,” and that Jewish relief workers, unlike Pius, restricted their efforts to their co-religionists. He argues that the canonization of Edith

Stein, a Jewish-born nun who died at Auschwitz, “seals the solidarity of Catholics and Jews”—utterly ignoring the legitimate outrage that the canonization caused among many Jews. And he deals in sheer fantasy, stating that the sheltering of Jews was “a tradition in wartime France” and citing a German military report that includes references to both the “extermination of Polish priests” and “the removal of all local Jews” in support of his claim that “in Poland, Jew and Catholic had their brotherhood brought home to them by the Nazis.”

McInerny clearly doesn't get it—and doesn't want to. In his closing chapter, after angrily denying a series of charges that no one has ever made (“Pius XII was *not* responsible for the Holocaust”; “Pius XII did *not* belong to the Gestapo or the SS”), he broadens his topic radically by reviling “the treachery of dissenting theologians” and mocking Allen Tate's lament that his infant child (born of a second, non-church marriage) was denied a Catholic funeral. Disgustingly, he compares criticizing Pius to suggesting that the Protestant pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed for his courageous resistance work, was a Gestapo double agent. And he compares the Holocaust at length to abortion, noting that while the Holocaust lasted only a few years, “the scourge of abortion has been going on for more than a quarter of a century. . . . We are all Nazis now.” His arrogant contempt for anyone who dares to find fault with any leader of the Catholic Church (which he calls “the only sane voice in a mad world”) gives us a better sense of the current state of traditionalist Catholicism than Wills, Cornwell, Carroll, and Cahill put together. In one word: chilling.

In some ways Justus George Lawler, a Catholic writer and editor, could hardly be more different from the blunt and vulgar McInerny: *Popes and Politics* is a pretentious hodgepodge of irrelevant historical and theological references, obscure and tortured arguments, and painfully strained efforts to be witty. Yet Lawler, like McInerny, dances around the charges made against Pius XII, choosing instead to fixate on inconsequential errors and word choices and to sneer at heartfelt personal anecdotes. As McInerny imagines exposés of Bonhoeffer, so Lawler fantasizes about exposés of David Ben-Gurion. And Lawler shares McInerny's gift for minimizing the Holocaust with mind-boggling insensitivity, pointing out that “the Christian evils” were, after all,

“perpetrated during what is in the light of eternity a relatively brief segment of human intercourse.” At times, both McNerny and Lawler seem determined to demonstrate by example that anti-Semitism in the American Catholic Church is alive and well.¹⁹

After reading all the above-cited books, one doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry at a title like *Goodbye, Good Men: How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church*.²⁰ The book, written by Michael S. Rose, is a compendium of complaints by traditionalist ex-seminarians about the purported anti-traditionalist—and gay-friendly—stance of U.S. seminaries. It’s full of sneering references to “feminine” seminarians, “queens” in “pink silk,” and so forth, all of whom, of course, are liberals who support “the militant homosexual agenda.” These persons are consistently contrasted with the traditionalist “good men” of the title, also known as “healthy heterosexuals.” These “good men,” Rose argues, have it bad. Not only must they endure seminaries with gay mafias; they also have to cope with “hostile nuns” who are witches (literally) or who are biding their time waiting for the Vatican to let them become priests, or both. And they have to deal with seminary officials and teachers who do everything possible to drive them—the “good men”—out.

Reading the testimonies of these “good men,” one is reminded of young people one has met who think they’re orthodox but whose faith is so undeveloped, ill-informed, and insecure that even the mildest sacristy humor strikes them as sacrilege. Most of Rose’s interviewees are anonymous, and one hardly knows what to make of their mostly unconfirmed accounts of seminary teachers who banned rosaries, discouraged praying, encouraged the reading of *Playboy*, or—in the manner of a “Communist re-education camp”—sent “good men” to psychotherapists to quash their obedience to the Pope. Tales of snitching, spying, and

¹⁹ Many of us, of course, know this from personal experience. The celebrant at my father’s funeral in 2000, a middle-aged priest who was presumably unaware that the survivors were all Protestant, delivered a fervently nasty homily on the theme that only Catholics enjoy the hope of heaven; and as if this weren’t bad enough, his account of the Crucifixion was vilely, stunningly anti-Semitic. My father would have been appalled. If it had not been his funeral, I would have walked out.

²⁰ GOODBYE, GOOD MEN: How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church, by *Michael S. Rose*. Regnery. \$27.95.

secret plots abound. Some of it sounds far-fetched; yet it's not hard to believe that "structures of deceit" exist, in some form, in progressive as well as traditional Catholic environments, and that some seminaries are as fiercely orthodox in their heterodoxy as others are fiercely orthodox in their orthodoxy. (I wouldn't even be surprised if there are nuns who are witches, though how they would explain themselves theologically is beyond me.) But Rose's dream of a golden time before gay and/or effeminate priests is just that: a dream. Would Pius XII—who, as Mark Jordan reminds us in *The Silence of Sodom*, was terribly effete—have passed Rose's manliness test? Would Cardinal Spellman (an official portrait of whom shows him, in Jordan's words, "decked out in layers of lace and watered silk, with an ermine mantle and train," and who was very upset "when the pope ordered the cardinals to shorten their trains from ten yards to two")?

Would Jesus?

It's not just homosexuals who get Rose's goat. Every mention of women in ecclesiastical authority is accompanied by a sneer; the contempt for other faiths, too, is reflexive and palpable. Rose's biggest *bête noire*, however, is Catholic theological education. It's hard to believe that even a staunch traditionalist could object to some of the things Rose rants about—courses in modern biblical scholarship; reading lists that include books by "dissenters" like Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx and even (gasp) Protestant theologians; and professors who admit that St. Peter was never actually a pope. One interviewee laments that a classmate "lost his faith because of a Christology course we were all required to take." Education does it again! This book raises vital questions: Should priests be kept ignorant of basic historical facts that many public-school children learn in the fifth grade? Is it proper in a twenty-first-century democracy for accredited church-run schools to teach history that has been falsified to fit this or that theology? Rose's apparent answer to both questions: yes.

Rose's subtitle, *How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church*, naturally brings to mind Lord Acton's famous line "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." As both Wills and Carroll remind us, this aphorism's original context was a critique of papal absolutism. (Acton was a Catholic.) Surely the corruptive effect of power is the principal lesson of the recent church

scandals. Yet George Weigel, a supporter and biographer of John Paul II, does a breathtakingly audacious job, in *The Courage to Be Catholic*, of trying to spin the whole shabby business in the opposite direction.²¹ In his reading, bishops aren't the guilty parties in the sex-abuse crisis: they're the victims. To be sure, Weigel acknowledges—briefly and vaguely—“some bishops' inept and irresponsible response to grave sins and crimes” (as if ignoring, pressuring, threatening, bullying, and lying to victims of clerical abuse were not itself gravely sinful and criminal). He concedes instances of “episcopal misgovernance,” but attributes it to “fear,” “misguided compassion,” “a misplaced faith in the expertise of therapists,” “inadequate, and in some cases incompetent, legal counsel,” and “bad counsel from . . . communications staffs.” Weigel knows he can't get bishops off the hook entirely, but he minimizes and spreads around their responsibility as much as he dares.

In Weigel's topsy-turvy world, the bishops' main failing was not arrogance but its antithesis: passivity. They lacked “the courage to be countercultural”—to stand up to the modern world. In Vatican II, to be sure, the Church had sought to have a “dialogue with modernity that did not involve the Church choking on some of the modern world's most noxious fumes” (no mention, of course, of the Church's fumes); but instead, “the sexual revolution hit the Catholic Church with the force of a hurricane.” The sex-abuse crisis was the inevitable result—a consequence not of secretiveness (in the Church) but of openness (by gays). Yes, that's actually Weigel's argument: that the societal sea change that has enabled gay adults to live more open lives is what caused the sex-abuse crisis. Now, to some of us, it's obvious that when a priest furtively gropes a minor, it's an act out of another era; it belongs to a mindset shaped by intense social stigma and marked by profound shame, self-hatred, and self-deception. Such acts remind us that over the last generation, while more and more gays have left the closet, the Catholic priesthood has remained, in large part, a sinkhole of repressed and twisted sexuality. Weigel argues that “a man who declares himself to be ‘gay’” doesn't belong in the priesthood, but that one “who recognizes that his homosexual desires are disordered” might be acceptable. You

²¹ THE COURAGE TO BE CATHOLIC: Crisis, Reform, and the Future of the Church, by *George Weigel*. Basic Books. \$22.00.

couldn't get it more backwards if you tried.

Anyone swayed for an instant by Weigel's arguments is advised to read *Betrayal*, a distillation of the *Boston Globe's* first-rate reporting of the sex-abuse crisis. The book concludes that the crisis was made possible by an "ecclesiastical climate of dodged facts and phantom rules." Not to mention a seemingly endemic hubris and callousness: the authors cite Cardinal Bernard Law's comment that a boy of six was partially responsible for his own molestation²² and a district attorney's description of the Boston archdiocese as "probably the most arrogant crowd our office ever dealt with. . . . What really struck me . . . was that there was never any concern shown for the victims." Likewise, Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly says that "what really offended" him "was knowing how the Church had been harsh on and intolerant of people who had done things which, by comparison, paled in significance. Look at the way the Church treats divorced Catholics. . . . Look how intolerant and tough they were on gay people." Noting that "no major denomination has had a problem of the scale that has plagued the Catholic Church," the authors quote a researcher: "There are absolutely no Protestant equivalents. You don't have rapacious serial predators, and the Protestant establishment doesn't tolerate it the way the Catholic establishment has."

Among the unexamined assumptions in Weigel's book is that the sexual abuse of children by immature, institutionally protected priests is something new. *Betrayal* makes it clear that it isn't. We read of a man, now in his eighties, who was molested by a priest in 1927 but never told his parents: "No one would believe you in those days. The priests were everything." Even when word got out, civil authorities gave the Church special treatment. But

²² Law is not the only Catholic cleric to hold this belief. Michael Kelly wrote in the *Washington Post* (March 20, 2002) about a sermon in which his parish priest argued that while Church leaders were guilty of "a crime of silence," sex-abuse victims were guilty too. "Yes, those little boys who suffered the vile and evil gropings of Father John J. Geoghan and his fellow sexual criminals in collars—they too shared in the crime of silence," commented Kelly sarcastically. "This was the first time I ever wanted to get up and leave a church out of disgust." Kelly's conclusion: "This is about the systematic corruption of an institution. This is about the church as a hierarchy and a whole betraying the faith and the faithful in the most serious fashion imaginable. It is about a massively powerful institution using its power to conceal and effectively perpetuate—knowingly perpetuate—crimes (and sins) of the most evil nature against the most innocent and vulnerable of the souls who trusted the church."

no more: *Betrayal* cites a confidential 1985 Church report on priestly abuse warning that “our dependence in the past on Roman Catholic judges and attorneys protecting the Diocese and clerics is GONE.” Why? *Betrayal* spells it out: “The children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of immigrants who would never dream of challenging anything a priest did now demanded not just answers from their Church leaders but accountability.” (In a sense, then, modernism—Weigel’s bugaboo—is responsible for the sex-abuse scandal; for the end of lay submissiveness means that crimes which once would have been successfully hushed up are making headlines.)²³ *Betrayal* also quotes an activist who—in a proposal even more ambitious than Carroll’s Vatican III—seeks “to enlist half of the world’s Catholics . . . in an international congress of laypeople . . . that would debate policies and then represent the positions of the faithful in shaping the future of their church.” As we say in Norway, *lykke til*.

At one point in *Breaking Faith*, Cornwell observes in passing that Catholic progressives outnumber traditionalists. This is indeed true in the U.S. and Europe, the parts of the world on which he focuses. Yet the future of Catholicism, and of Christianity generally, lies south of the equator, where traditionalism is way ahead numerically. This is the topic of *The Next Christendom* by Philip Jenkins.²⁴ Back in 1996, Jenkins published *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis*, in which he suggested that clerical sexual abuse had been sensationalized, and its extent exaggerated, by the media. He was spectacularly wrong there, of course, but this time, I fear, he’s absolutely right. His thesis is that, owing to the widespread secularization of society and liberalization of Christianity in the U.S. and Europe, many people fail to recognize that Christianity is not receding but growing as a worldwide force, that its center of gravity is no longer in the West but in the “global South,” and that its dominant theology is decidedly illiberal.

²³ It’s striking, by the way, how modernism, that Number One enemy of nineteenth-century popes, remains the bugaboo of their spiritual successors—the chief difference being that it’s now personified for them not by Jews but by women and open homosexuals.

²⁴ THE NEXT CHRISTENDOM: The Coming of Global Christianity, by *Philip Jenkins*. Oxford University Press. \$28.00.

Liberal Westerners have also paid insufficient attention to population trends. Europe is shrinking; the Third World is booming. In 2050, the only Western nations among the world's twenty-five most populous will be the U.S. (#3), Russia (#14), and Germany (#23); by 2015, the list of the world's ten largest urban conurbations will include not a single Western city. Before long, then, the inhabitants of the rich, secular, liberal West will find themselves heavily outnumbered by the overwhelmingly poor Third World masses, most of them highly conservative Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, or Muslims. (Jenkins makes the additional observation that Europe itself may not remain secular and liberal for long, thanks to the influx of Muslim and conservative Christian immigrants.)²⁵ Some, to be sure, have already seen the writing on the wall. The wake-up call for my own denomination, the Episcopal Church, came at the Lambeth Conference in 1998, when the bishops of the Anglican Communion—an overwhelmingly African and Asian institution of which the Episcopal Church forms a measly 3 percent—resoundingly approved an antigay resolution. Publicly, some African bishops voiced support for Zimbabwean tyrant Robert Mugabe, whose thugs had imprisoned and beaten homosexuals. Liberal U.S. bishops—who were accustomed to being in the majority in the Episcopal House of Bishops and to being esteemed by their sub-Saharan colleagues, whose dioceses depended heavily on their largesse—were shocked at this revelation of the true nature of their communion, and of their own ultimate insignificance within it.

Catholicism is in similar straits. Liberal Catholics in the U.S. and Europe fault John Paul II for being out of touch with his Church; but they're the ones, alas, who are out of touch. Their Church's future, whether they like it or not, is in the hands of their Third World co-religionists, who share the current Pope's lack of affection for democracy, pluralism, and church-state separation. And the Pope knows this—as do the like-minded cronies with whom he's packed the College of Cardinals, and who

²⁵ For more on this topic, see my essay "Tolerating Intolerance: The Challenge of Fundamentalist Islam in Western Europe," in *Partisan Review*, Summer 2002, pp. 338–354.

²⁶ The question of who will be the next pope is at the center of *Conclave: The Politics, Personalities, and Process of the Next Papal Election*, by John L. Allen, Jr. (Doubleday Image, \$12.95p.). It is a useful handbook for the next papal election, explaining the practical details—what a pope does, how a conclave works, and who the participants and principal candidates are.

will choose his successor.²⁶ “In the traditionalist view,” explains Jenkins, “adapting to become relevant or sensitive to the needs of Western elites would be suicidal for the long-term prospects of the Church. It is the so-called traditionalists, rather than the liberals, who are playing the political game of the new century.” This is why there will almost certainly be no Vatican III, no international lay congress; it’s why urgent, noble books like *Constantine’s Sword* seem destined to be not blueprints for the future but sad relics of the faded hopes of the past.

Yet the changes ahead may not all be to the traditionalists’ liking. While Catholic clergy in Africa, for example, love the idea of an all-male hierarchy, celibacy holds little appeal for them. (Jenkins reports that rapes by African priests are commonplace.) Furthermore, Third World Christians (whether Protestant or Catholic) tend to be syncretists, mixing Christian beliefs and practices with elements derived from ancient native religions—ancestor worship, animal sacrifices, spiritual healing, polygamy. “The newer churches,” observes Jenkins, “can read the Bible in a way that makes [Third World] Christianity look like a wholly different religion from the faith of prosperous advanced societies of Europe or North America.” So wildly unorthodox is their theological thinking, indeed, that they may inadvertently end up succeeding in the task that liberal American and European Catholics have failed at: namely, breaking the back of the Church’s dogmatic rigidity. A century from now, then, Catholicism may be a more formidable force than ever—but it may also differ from today’s religion in ways no one can now imagine or predict.