

Preface

Liberal Catholics: Damnable Heretics or More Catholic Than the Pope?

STEPHEN COLBERT: I still go to church, and my children are being raised in the Catholic Church. I was actually my daughter's catechist last year for first communion, which was a great opportunity to speak very simply and plainly about your faith without anybody saying, "Yeah, but do you believe that stuff?" which happens a lot in what I do.

TERRY GROSS: How do you deal with contradictions between the Church and the way you live your life? Which is something that a lot of people in the Catholic Church have to deal with.

COLBERT: Well, sure, that's the hallmark of an American Catholic is the individuation of America and the homogenation of the Church in terms of dogma. I love my church. I don't think that it actually makes zombies or unquestioning people. I think it is actually a church that values intellectualism. But, certainly, it can become very dogmatically rigid. Somebody once asked me, "How do you be a father . . . and be anti-authoritarian?" And I said, "That's not nearly as hard as being anti-authoritarian and being a Roman Catholic. That's really patting your head and rubbing your belly at the same time! I don't know. I don't believe that I can't disagree with my church."

—*Fresh Air: Stars: Terry Gross Interviews 11 Stars of Stage and Screen*, February 1, 2007

CONAN O'BRIEN: We've actually never talked about this, but you had a very strict Catholic upbringing.

MICHAEL MOORE: Yeah, that's true. My parents are good Irish Catholics.

O'BRIEN: Mine too. I grew up in a large family, Irish Catholic—pretty serious Irish Catholic.

MOORE: I just got married a couple of years ago and had a big Catholic wedding. It was great. You know, there's many good things about that upbringing, as I'm sure you would agree.

O'BRIEN: [shakes head "no" and scowls] Uh-um.

MOORE: [laughs]

O'BRIEN: [also laughs] Yes, there are! Yes, there are. There are some good things about it.

MOORE: There are values about how to treat people, and those are really important things.

—*Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, September 20, 1995

Under the leadership of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, the Roman Catholic Church went through a period of liberal reform during the years of the Second Vatican Council, but the substance of those reforms has been gradually reversed in the decades since. The Church became notably more conservative under the leadership of Pope John Paul II and has moved even more sharply to the ideological right due to the brief but transformative pontificate of Benedict XVI. Roman Catholics who had embraced the spirit of Vatican II and liberation theology have found themselves in a state of crisis over the transformation in religious, political, and economic thinking of Church leadership in recent years, and have been accused of being bad Catholics if they deign to vote for a progressive political candidate in a local or national election. Indeed, more liberal Catholics have found themselves feeling betrayed, religiously adrift, and accused of heresy if they break with Church teachings on homosexuality, birth control, abortion, divorce, and women's ordination. This book is about how these progressive Catholics are correct to be frustrated, and how they face a possible stark choice of either staying with the Church and trying to reform it from within or leaving the institution altogether. Or is there a middle ground? And what lessons might be learned from subversive Catholic theologians, activists, literary figures, and filmmakers of the past? How did they deal with their own conflicts between their personal beliefs and the official teachings of the Church? Can their strategies be adapted and re-created *today*? *Should* their strategies be adopted today?

Essays in this volume deal with issues related to the spiritual and political authority of the Roman Catholic Church, liberal Catholics, liberation theology, Church corruption, prominent fictional Catholics, fictional representations of Catholics as frightening immigrant figures, the question of abolishing Catholicism, and other related Catholic themes. This book is concerned with the extent to which it is possible for a modern-day person to continue to be an active member of the Roman Catholic Church despite the Church's continual advocacy of conservative politics, its troubling treatment of women—be they nuns or laity, Catholics or non-Catholics, and its role in persecuting homosexuality and perpetuating and covering up sex abuse committed by active members of the clergy.

THE PERSONAL MOTIVATING FORCE BEHIND THIS BOOK

The 1994 film *Priest* is not only about two visions of God but also about two kinds of priests—a gay conservative priest and a straight liberal priest. The film provoked a storm of controversy because both men break their vows of celibacy during the course of the film and the Church sends only the gay priest into exile. Still more shocking, while in the confessional, the conservative priest learns that a neighborhood parent is molesting his own daughter but the priest keeps the incest secret because the Church has strict rules preventing sins revealed during Confession from being made public. When one considers the two storylines side-by-side, one can see how it might have seemed like an exploitation film (akin to “nunsploitation”) upon its release, but that it can be reassessed today as remarkably prescient in light of the seemingly endless stream of Catholic sex abuse criminal cases that have come to light in the media.

Still, in 1994 most of the anger directed at *Priest* stemmed from the fact that it was released by Miramax, a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company, and featured several passionate gay love scenes. Enraged religious groups boycotted Disney products in a significant public outcry. Indeed, when Miramax producers Harvey and Bob Weinstein planned to release their next controversial film about Catholicism,



Liberal Roman Catholic priest Fr. Matthew Thomas (left, Tom Wilkinson), clashes with his newly assigned colleague, the conservative Fr. Greg Pilkington (right, Linus Roache) in *Priest* (1994), written by Jimmy McGovern and directed by Antonia Bird.

Miramax Films

Dogma (1999), they took pains to distance the film from the broader Walt Disney Company and shelter the parent company from similar protests.

I saw *Priest* recently because of its first-rate cast and because the writer, Jimmy McGovern, wrote one of my favorite television shows, *Cracker* (1993–1996, 2006). (By the way, *Cracker* is a deeply intellectual, religious, and political crime series about lapsed Catholic criminal psychologist Eddie Fitzgerald [Robbie Coltrane] that clearly influenced Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy.) Although I have a film aficionado's appreciation of the movie's daring and beautiful love scenes, what really interests me, on a personal level, is the fact that, theologically, I resembled the conservative priest when I was younger and I resemble the liberal priest now. Two signature scenes of the film involve brief homilies given by the starkly different priests that demonstrate their polar opposite attitudes toward sin. Both homilies resonated deeply with me.

When he first arrives at his new Liverpool parish, the conservative Fr. Greg Pilkington (Linus Roache) tells his flock that he believes that people should take responsibility for their own sins—their alcoholism, gambling, and violent acts—and stop using society as a scapegoat. When one blames society, one abdicates all responsibility to change one's life, he argues. Afterwards, Fr. Greg's new colleague, the liberal Fr. Matthew Thomas (Tom Wilkinson), says that he thought the sermon was offensive. Not long afterwards, Fr. Matthew gives his response sermon:

The creation of mankind only started on the sixth day. It hasn't stopped yet. We're taller than we were a thousand years ago. We're fitter, faster. We live longer. We're better educated. More informed. So, Creation . . . is an ongoing process. And if you interfere with it, aren't you spitting in the face of God? If you exploit your work force, don't you spit in the face of God? If you kill and maim, throw people out of their homes, turn your back on the elderly, if you shut down schools and hospitals, force people out on the dole . . . in fact, if you do anything to prevent one single human being reaching their full potential, aren't you interfering in Creation and spitting in the face of God? That's what I believe. That's my truth. That's what made me become a priest, and makes me remain a priest. The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Fr. Greg is enraged by Fr. Matthew's sermon, calling it a political speech on behalf of Britain's Labour Party. For Fr. Greg, the homily was a betrayal of Christian values and a gratuitous swipe at the social and economic policies of world leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Fr. Matthew defends himself by saying that there are two kinds of sin, personal and social, and that the modern-day Church is preoccupied with the personal and not enough with the social. Fr. Greg shouts back that "There's just sin" and demands that Fr. Matthew stop being political and watering down standards of morality in the church, both with his leftist homilies and his live-in girlfriend.

I'm sympathetic with both men, and there is truth in what they both say. Fr. Matthew was being political, but religion is inherently political, and his message was in line with the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Where Fr. Greg is being

disingenuous is in his insistence that his homily was pure, authentic Catholicism and Fr. Matthew's homily was "political." No, the political ramifications of Fr. Greg's sermon are conservative and straight out of Ayn Rand. Look to yourself. Improve yourself. Stop blaming other people and looking for handouts. A sermon doesn't get any more political, only Fr. Greg thinks that he's being a real Catholic and Fr. Matthew a fake one. Interestingly, the distinction between personal and social sin is exactly the distinction made by progressive theologian Marcus Borg in his book *Speaking Christian* (2011), and he would declare Fr. Matthew perfectly right in this case—authentic Christianity is more about social sin than personal sin. Thatcher's social, economic, and military policies affected life for legions inside and outside of her home country. An unemployed Liverpool alcoholic's sins are not on the same global or spiritual scale.

Fr. Greg is blind to his own political bias and thinks that he represents apolitical thinking, truth, and living life on an even keel. But conservatives like him (and like I was as a teenager) are always making this mistake out of hubris. Thanks to our corporatized mass media, we live in an age of dumbed-down national discourse, where a judge who makes decisions that bolster civil rights causes is an "activist judge" and a judge that pushes for corporate personhood and repealing every law ever passed by a Democratic president is a strict constructionist constitutional judge and, therefore, apolitical. We see that every high school civics teacher or college professor who discusses slavery, the fate of the Native Americans, McCarthyism, the deism of certain Founding Fathers, or the Kent State shootings is a revisionist historian, while those parents' groups and conservative think-tanks advocating the removal of all mention of these ideas from educational texts deem themselves patriotic, apolitical Americans.

Furthermore, many Christian conservatives ask, "What could be political about believing in maintaining fiscal responsibility and practical austerity measures in a time of enormous national debt by cutting funds only to education, the arts, health care, the post office, and social programs?"

Assuming for the moment these Christians are right and that such views are apolitical, then, in contrast, Roman Catholic comedian Stephen Colbert is *not being a good Christian*, but *merely political* and yet another preachy liberal when he says the following: "If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we have got to acknowledge that He commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it."¹ Colbert's condemnation of conservative Christian *economics* is apt.

"Of course," conservative Christians would go on to say, "the money we've saved by gutting 'entitlement' programs can now be poured into our military and fund invasions of Iran and China because those countries are scary and we need their natural resources. But how is any of this political? It is just being a good American and a good Christian!"

Here's an apt condemnation of conservative Christian *militarism* from yet another stand-up comedian, Maria Bamford: "My mom . . . is a really religious woman. I

really totally respect her and everything. She is a wonderful person. . . . *She's also very pro war!* 'Cuz that's what Jesus would do! Smoke 'em out of their holes like the gentle carpenter! He only turns the other cheek to grab another can of whup ass" (*Burning Bridges Tour* recording).

In recent years, stand-up comedians like Bamford, Patton Oswalt, Bill Hicks, Lewis Black, Sarah Silverman, Tina Fey, Jon Stewart, Dave Chappelle, and Ricky Gervais have been among the few figures remaining in popular culture who can express irony and literate opinions in a public forum. They are often afforded greater respect than those masquerading as journalists these days because the stand-up comedians are the funny truth-tellers and the reporters are the propagandists and corporate shills.

Of course, when I was younger, the very people I am praising now for their social and religious insight were those same sort of people who enflamed my righteous indignation. After all, I was once a conservative Catholic who was conditioned by his parish priest to believe that all real Catholics were conservative Republicans and any Catholic of a liberal political bent who dared to vote for a pro-choice Democrat for elected office should be excommunicated. This is the sort of notion that seems to be embraced these days by Roman Catholics in elected office, whose entrenched dealings with members of the Democratic Party border on the infamous, as their political obstructivism seems as much religiously as politically motivated. After all, John Boehner, Paul Ryan, and Rick Santorum work for God, so they must, therefore, always be on the side of the angels and must virtually never compromise with the godless party across the aisle.

While I would like to think that there is still a place in the Roman Catholic Church for me (and for people like me), I have long known that I am exactly the sort of person Church leaders such as Pope Benedict XVI want out of their clubhouse. I would never survive a "purification" purge if the litmus test is how conservative a Catholic I am using Pope John Paul II's *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a barometer. Even though I knew that Pope Benedict was always considered "a transition pope" because of his advanced age, I also knew that his brief tenure as pope did not prevent him from instituting sweeping changes in how the Church is run—few, if any, to the better, in my humble opinion. I also knew that there was little chance that Benedict's successor would make me feel any more at home than he did. This left the burning question: how long should I stay affiliated with an organization that didn't want me to be a part of it? And, if the organization is as corrupt and damaging as its detractors suggest, then why would I even want to be a part of it to begin with?

Well, ask me on any given day and I can give you any number of answers. The short answer, for now, is "I don't know." If I do, ultimately, decide to stay a Roman Catholic, it will have more to do with my mother, my wonderful Aunt Doris, J. R. R. Tolkien, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Merton, and my friends and mentors Ronald B. Herzman and Mike Shugrue than it will any pope or his deeply troubling and un-Christ-like actions and decrees.

In any event, as I was placing the finishing touches upon this book, something interesting happened.

Pope Benedict resigned.

The unexpected resignation, which was ostensibly due to Benedict's advanced age and health, provoked a strong reaction from Catholic progressives in both the clergy and laity who had hoped that his successor would be a reformer equally committed to coming clean about the Church's role in the sex abuse scandals, reforming and reconsidering its actions related to the scandals, and advocating more progressive politics and theology within and outside of Catholicism. One thoughtful, sensitive reaction came from an unexpected source—film critic and cultural commentator Roger Ebert. "How I am a Roman Catholic" (March 1, 2013) is one of the last blog entries Ebert composed before his death on April 4, 2013. Sympathetic to a pope he saw as beleaguered, Ebert described how his Catholic childhood shaped his liberal views on social issues, his love of literature and film, and his discomfort with how the Republican Party has laid claim to Christianity. Among the most notable revelations in the essay is that Ebert is more culturally Catholic than spiritually Catholic, as he does not believe in God, and that he is philosophically pro-life and against abortion even in the cases of rape and incest, but he does not believe that banning abortion is a viable option.

Other assessments of Benedict in the media—both mainstream and independent—were more critical of him than Ebert. On February 28, 2013, the day of Benedict's resignation, *Democracy NOW!* broadcast Amy Goodman's interview with Matthew Fox, a former Dominican priest who was banned from teaching theology in 1988 by Benedict (then still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) and later expelled from the order. Now an Anglican and founder of University of Creation Spirituality, Fox has been a frequent and harsh critic of Benedict, suggesting archly that the former pope felt sickly and tired and needed to retire because it takes a lot of energy to cover up so much crime within the church and to be so morally bankrupt. Fox, author of the book *The Pope's War: Why Ratzinger's Secret Crusade Has Imperiled the Church and How It Can Be Saved* (2012), made many stark claims about the extent of the corruption within the Church while being interviewed by Goodman. He said:

. . . history and cheerleading of popes, what I call papolatry, will not cover up the facts. This has been the most sordid 42 years of Catholic history since the Borgias. . . . I think it's really about ending that Church as we know it. I think Protestantism, too, needs a reboot. I think all of Christianity can get back more to the teachings of Jesus, a revolutionary around love and justice. . . . And that's why there's been such fierce resistance all along from the right wing. The CIA has been involved in, especially with Pope John Paul II, the decimation of liberation theology all over South America, the replacing of these heroic leaders, including bishops and cardinals, with Opus Dei cardinals and bishops, who are. . . . frankly [members of] a fascist organization. . . . [Opus Dei] is . . . all about obedience. It's not about ideas or theology. They haven't produced one theologian in 40 years. They produce canon lawyers and people who infiltrate where the

power is, whether it's the media, the Supreme Court or the FBI, the CIA, and finance, especially in Europe.

Although Fox is not someone inclined to be objective on the subject of Benedict, the fact remains that the former Catholic raises two important questions: 1) has the Roman Catholic Church been so corrupt throughout its history that it has lost its right to speak on behalf of Jesus of Nazareth? and 2) should the Church be abolished immediately, before it commits still more outrageous acts in the name of a God it no longer truly represents or serves? Current, observant Roman Catholics avoid asking themselves such difficult questions at their peril. The substance of Fox's message, and his warning, has given me much food for thought. Certainly, Fox's belief that all of Christianity needs to "reboot" to realign with Jesus's original message of peace on earth is one that I am sympathetic with. In fact, it is the same premise underpinning the previous book on religion and cultural studies that I edited, *Godly Heretics: Essays on Alternative Christianity in Literature and Popular Culture* (2013). That text examines how great thinkers of the past, including Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, Friedrich Nietzsche, Leo Tolstoy, and George Bernard Shaw believed that the original, humanitarian spirit of Jesus could be recaptured by a renewed and reinvented Christianity.

Fox was not the only commentator on Benedict's legacy to insist that it was time for the Church to renew and reinvent itself. A few months before his stinging interview was broadcast, another divisive interview—this one with former Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini—was made public in Milan's leading newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. The late Martini reportedly asked that the interview be published posthumously, presumably because he had the temerity to suggest that the Church was "200 years out of date." He observed that, "Our culture has aged, our churches are big and empty and the church bureaucracy rises up, our rituals and our cassocks are pompous. The Church must admit its mistakes and begin a radical change, starting from the Pope and the bishops. The pedophilia scandals oblige us to take a journey of transformation" (Day 2012).

Not long after Benedict's resignation, a new pope was named whose election would likely have been a disappointment to Fox and Martini. Though he has a populist streak, claimed he didn't want to be pope, and suggested that atheists may find a place in heaven, the newly enthroned Pope Francis I has cryptically spoken of seeking to crush a gay lobby within the Vatican and has been seen as more of a spiritual reformer of the Church than a practical one open to doing a real "house-cleaning" of sex abuse cover-up perpetrators. A *TIME Magazine* papal ordination commemorative issue, "Pope For a New World: Pope Francis" (2013) includes a number of articles critical of the former Jorge Mario Bergoglio's political past, his gender, and a prediction that he will have a hard time reaching mostly independent-minded American Catholics. Some voices raised in the special issue strike a more positive note, such as essayists who are pleased that a Jesuit has finally become pope and that Bergoglio is the first pope to choose the name Francis. (These articles include

“Argentina’s Dirty War” by Uki Goñi, “The Life of a Jesuit” by Fr. James Martin, “Women Have Waited Long Enough” by Sr. Florence Deacon, and “America’s Restless Flock” by Tim Padgett.)

While the tone of several of contributions mirror criticism published elsewhere that the new pope is already disappointingly conservative, Pope Francis won some left-leaning friends by attacking the social and economic consequences of unchained, unregulated capitalism throughout the world. As *Washington Times* journalist Cheryl K. Chumley reported on May 22, 2013, Pope Francis has begun his tenure by urging a global move away from material gain and toward charity. Lambasting the “dictatorship of the economy” and the “cult of money,” Francis observed that, “A savage capitalism has taught the logic of profit at any cost, of giving in order to get, of exploitation without thinking of people . . . and we see the results in the crisis we are experiencing” (Chumley 2013).

The speech, along with others he has made since becoming pope, suggests that Pope Francis is not as much a reformer as he was *hoped* to be, but that he may be more of a reformer than I *expected* him to be.

It may be too soon to tell.

But was the pope being an authentic Catholic by criticizing austerity economics and “savage,” unregulated capitalism, or was he *merely being political*?

This is the question, broadly applied, that concerns me: Where does politics end and where does authentic Christianity—and authentic Catholicism – begin?

This book was inspired, in part, by my realization that I was very, very wrong to believe that only conservative Catholics are real Catholics and that my parish priest was wrong to try to brainwash me into believing that permanently. That is the inspiration for my commissioning this anthology, but there is, of course, more to the book than that. Despite how topical these issues are—especially in light of the current, headline-making conflict between a segment of liberal American nuns (Sister Simone Campbell and the Nuns on the Bus) and popes Benedict XVI and Francis I over birth control, homosexuality, poverty, and President Obama’s health-care overhaul—they are also nothing new. While some conservative Catholics find the notion that Michael Moore considers himself Catholic alternatively hilarious, offensive, and hypocritical, Moore is not the first liberal Catholic who was greeted with jeers and accusations of dishonesty. Indeed, intellectual and progressive Catholics throughout history have garnered similar treatment. There is a long and august history of progressive Catholics that is not often examined, and this book deals with some of those key figures in literature, history, and popular culture, from the age of Dante up until the present day, with Kevin Smith, the writer-director of the perennially controversial films *Chasing Amy*, *Dogma*, and *Red State*. Among the Catholic iconoclasts examined in this book are Thomas Merton, Madonna Ciccone, Galileo, Graham Greene, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Evelyn Waugh and fictional Catholics Michael Corleone and Rosemary Woodhouse.

This book is not an “orthodox” Catholic book but was written in the spirit of historians and cultural critics, such as Marina Warner, Katherine Brown Downey,

Frederick S. Roden, Maria LaMonaca (a.k.a. Maria Wisdom), Darren Middleton, Garry Wills, Mary Gordon, and Ruth Vanita. It is also in the spirit of writings, speeches, and arguments made by Catholics who have written liberation theology tracts, as well as by notable Catholics, past and present, who are known outside of academia and the Church, such as Andrew Greeley and James Alison and the late Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. There have been at least two books that deal with similar themes on a broad canvas, including the female-centric text *The Catholic Church and Unruly Women Writers* (2007) edited by Jeana Del Rosso, Leigh Eicke, and Ana Kothe, and the exclusively British-literature-concerned book *The Pen and the Cross: Catholicism and English Literature 1850–2000* (2010) by Richard Griffiths. A memoir written from a similar perspective worth noting is *Radical Reinvention: An Unlikely Return to the Catholic Church* (2012) by Kaya Oakes. Mary Jeremy Daigler's *Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church* (2012) is exactly what the title suggests it is, and should be of interest to almost anyone reading this book.

The number of books being released this year alone – by the publisher of this book alone—on the subject of Roman Catholicism in the 21st century evidences that the past and future of the Catholic Church has generated much contemporary scholarly interest. As of my writing this, I have learned of the future releases of *Why the Catholic Church Must Change: A Necessary Conversation* (2013) by Margaret Nutting Ralph; *American Catholics in Transition* (2013) by William V. D'Antonio, Michele Dillon and Mary L. Gautier, and *Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict Is Changing Congress and American Democracy* (2013) by William V. D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch and Josiah R. Baker.

The nature of the Catholic sex abuse cases, how long they have gone on, how damaging they have been to people's lives, and how systemic the corruption and cover-ups have been within the church are dealt with in a number of notable books and films. Books on the subject include *Boys of the Cloth: The Accidental Role of Church Reforms in Causing and Curbing Abuse by Priests* (2012) by Vincent J. Miles and *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: The Catholic Church's 2,000 Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse* (2006) by Thomas P. Doyle, A.W.R. and Patrick J. Wall. Three documentary films about the abuse cases include *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God* (2012) directed by Alex Gibney, *Deliver Us from Evil* (2006) directed by Amy J. Berg, and *Twist of Faith* (2004) directed by Kirby Dick. A television drama called *Our Fathers*, directed by Dan Curtis and starring Ted Danson, Christopher Plummer, and Brian Dennehy, was released in 2005.

In addition to books on Catholic history, politics, and sociology, there have been a number of books published in recent years concerned with the Catholic theological tradition in literature and popular culture. There have been books written about individual Catholic writers and the extent to which their religious beliefs are orthodox. The collection *Dante and the Unorthodox* (2005), edited by James Miller, examines Dante's anticlericalism, female prophet figures, and the pagans that he places in heaven in the *Commedia* (one of whom, ultimately, may be Virgil, should Beatrice's

prayer on his behalf be heeded). *Dante and the Unorthodox* also deals heavily with the writings of T. S. Eliot, which is why he is not covered in this text. A similar book has been written about the influence of the Wycliffite heresy on Chaucer and his contemporaries: Andrew Cole's *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (2008).

This book's inclusion of American texts differentiates it from Griffiths's survey, though there is a striking interest in British authors in these pages as well, primarily because my two main fields of research interest are film and British literature. The focus on predominantly male subversive thinkers demonstrates that not all male Catholics are establishment, pro-patriarchal figures. It also complements the work done by Del Rosso, Eicke, and Kothe, who focus on female subversive Catholics. In other respects, this is a fairly groundbreaking text. There are no others that I am aware of that deal with works of both literature and popular culture specifically through the lens of Roman Catholic heresy, orthodoxy, liberation theology, and progressive politics. In focusing on Catholicism in particular, the book benefits from a focus that other books lack because they are more generally focused on "Christianity," or "progressive" versus "fundamentalist" Christians, in such broad strokes that the resulting argument is overly nebulous, generalized, and compromised. The question this book asks is: What are the possibilities for Catholic faith and thought suggested by contemporary Catholic fiction? And how are these questions raised in a contemporary context similar to those asked by Catholics for hundreds of years?

While many anthology owners cherry-pick which essays they read based on the table of contents, or read the chapters out of order, I have placed these chapters in a deliberate order that would reward the reader who begins at the beginning and reads through the entire text.

The book is divided into three sections. *Part I, Cafeteria Catholics vs. Orthodox Catholics: Literary Models of Roman Catholicism*, includes essays from literature professors whose views of subversive Catholicism are informed by their readings of classic European literature, including works by Dante, Graham Greene, Oscar Wilde, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Evelyn Waugh. *Part II, Catholicism and the American Culture Wars*, includes essays by historians, sociologists, and film specialists about how key figures in the public eye—from Catholic political activist Dorothy Day to controversial filmmaker Kevin Smith—have been at the center of the debate between what social values a Roman Catholic should be "allowed" to have and promote. *Part III, A Roadmap for Reform*, includes one essay by Dan Wood. A coda for the book, "*Roma Locuta Est, Causa Finita Est: Power, Discursivity, and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy*," considers how progressives might work to actively change the structure of the Church instead of merely waiting and hoping for a more progressive pope to come to power and change the Church for them.

The introduction to the book, "Meeting Madonna and C. S. Lewis Again, for the First Time," is simultaneously a discussion of the intersection of politics and religion, a personal essay about my transformation from conservative to liberal Christian, and a cultural studies examination of the five radically different Christians who most

influenced my religious transformation: Marcus Borg, Dante, Galileo, C. S. Lewis, and Madonna Ciccone.

In the first essay, “Dante: Cafeteria Catholic?,” Ronald B. Herzman explores how Dante Alighieri has come to be regarded as the most orthodox of Catholic thinkers despite his frequently unorthodox religious views and penchant for placing popes and Franciscan friars in hell in *The Divine Comedy* (a.k.a. the *Commedia*). Herzman posits that Dante is actually a far more revolutionary thinker than his reputation suggests and argues that many contemporary priests, the former Pope Benedict included, might be very relieved that Dante isn’t alive today to condemn *them* to perdition in a twenty-first-century follow-up to his *Inferno*.

Darren Middleton’s “Graham Greene, Believing Skeptic” explores the theological convictions of the author of *Brighton Rock* and *The End of the Affair*. Greene’s beliefs were always evolving, but Middleton sees him as a member of “the tribe of Thomas” because he probed the religious assumptions of his day and yet still professed faith in the divine. Middleton examines Greene’s contemporary relevance, his understanding of doubt’s relationship to faith, and his troubling images of God in his writing.

In “Wild(e) Religion: The Legacy of Oscar Wilde for Queer Theology,” Frederick Roden examines how conservative Catholics have recently attempted to lay claim to the legacy of Oscar Wilde, embracing him as a repentant, chastened queer figure. This move, understandable in light of the Church sex scandals and recent strides made by the gay rights movement in marriage equality, is troubling to Roden, who sees Wilde as representing a very different—and far more progressive and subversive—legacy for Catholics and members of the LGBTQ community.

Kathryn Inskeep’s essay, “Queering the Eucharist: Gerard Manley Hopkins’s ‘The Blessed Virgin,’” explores how the devoutly religious poet imposed nineteenth-century anxieties about gender upon the medieval Eucharist, making the body of Christ the site for sexual and sacramental desire. According to Inskeep, this desire is assuaged by the poet’s subversive process of queering of the Eucharist that involves not only the feminization of—and consumption of—Christ’s flesh but also the poet’s supplanting Christ in the virginal Mary’s womb. In this respect, Hopkins, a figure who is often respected by members of traditional, establishment Catholicism, shows a revolutionary way of viewing the Eucharist while ostensibly occupying a traditional position within the Church hierarchy as a celibate, possibly closeted homosexual, priest.

Adam DeVille’s “Holy Fools in Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* and *Helena*” explores the unexpected appearance of the Eastern European figure of the holy fool, or *iurodivyi*, in Evelyn Waugh’s novels. DeVille demonstrates that the inscrutable characters Sebastian Flyte and dowager empress Helena of Rome are holy fools who manifest a pedagogical foolishness that teaches others that the mystery of life in Christ cannot be captured by the categories of modern rationality or reduced to the conventions of bourgeois respectability. Indeed, Christ is endlessly unpredictable and filled with an unfathomable love that is often comprehensible to only the most childlike and uncomplicated of minds. The essay shows how Waugh, sometimes considered a stodgy, “old school” Catholic, drew religious inspiration from outside the Roman

Catholic Church and focused on some of the more subversive—if not, strictly speaking, overtly “political”—aspects of the image of the holy fool.

In “*Chasing Amy, Dogma, and Red State: How Kevin Smith’s Spirituality Speaks to Generation X*,” John Kenneth Muir examines Smith’s trilogy of iconoclastic, religious-themed films. Muir sees these three films as products of a liberal Catholic writer-director whose rebellious perspective and narrative edginess helps make theology palatable and relevant to the lives of members of his disaffected generation.

Kate Henley Averett’s “The Catholic Worker Ethic and the Spirit of Marxism” is an examination of Dorothy Day’s attempts to blend the sensibilities of Marxism with Roman Catholicism, eschewing Marxism’s adherence to atheist doctrines and calls for violent revolution and authoritarianism. Although conservative Catholics have seen the merging of Marxism and Catholicism as improbable, if not impossible, Day argued that it is, in fact, harder to reconcile Christianity to capitalism. In her writings, she demonstrates how capitalism is, in essence, an evil philosophy that promotes endless conflict, atheism, emotional isolation, hatred between peoples, institutionalized oppression, and thievery.

Thomas Aiello’s “*Rosemary’s Baby* and Cold War Catholicism” compares Maria Monk’s 1836 anti-Catholic book *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* to Ira Levin’s 1967 best-selling horror novel. Both books are informed by Gothic genre tropes and have surprisingly similar plots, but they are notable in their portrayal of the root of the evil infiltrating and eroding the bedrock of American society; the early nineteenth-century secret evildoers were Catholic immigrants, while the late twentieth-century secret evildoers were Satanists who served as symbolic stand-ins for atheists and communists. In comparing these texts, Aiello demonstrates how, during the Cold War, Protestant America mitigated its formerly hostile attitude toward Catholics, choosing instead to regard members of the problematic Christian sect as unlikely allies against the godless Red horde. In this way, Catholics—who were once considered dangerously “unruly” immigrant figures—were granted status as legitimate, “white” Americans because they were less “scary” than the more “communitistic” Asian and Eastern European immigrants who followed them.

“The Tragedy of Power in *The Godfather* and *Star Wars*” by Douglas Williams considers how both film sagas are morality plays concerning Darth Vader’s and Michael Corleone’s improper use of wealth and power. Williams sees the corruption of both characters as a warning to American patriarchs and oligarchs who jealousy guard their wealth and political influence instead of thinking of the welfare of all Americans—and the welfare of all of the peoples of the world. Drawing upon additional works by Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, and Andrew Carnegie, Williams uses these nine films as a vehicle to ask “the greatest moral question of our age: ‘What is one’s duty to others beyond one’s self or one’s family?’” In focusing on Michael Corleone, this essay considers one of the most famous fictional representations of a Roman Catholic antihero in American culture, and is especially concerned with Michael’s attempts to redeem himself through confessing his sins to a saintly pope trapped within an otherwise corrupt Church.

Dan Wood offers a roadmap for reforming the Church in his essay, "*Roma Locuta Est, Causa Finita Est*: Power, Discursivity, and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy." Employing feminist theory and the social and literary theories of Michel Foucault to the problems of Church authority, corruption, and alienation from its own followers, Wood argues that Catholics should not wait and hope for a progressive pope to appear once more but take collective action to reform the Church *now*.

Together, these interdisciplinary essays confront some of the most pressing, most controversial issues facing contemporary American Catholics. They offer examples of how poets, authors, philosophers, theologians, artists, novelists, and filmmakers of this generation, and of generations previous, have confronted similar issues in their own times and—in some instances—provided possible models for how Catholics can respond to the Catholic Church of the present day. Can a modern-day Catholic be, like Dante, simultaneously a Cafeteria Catholic and more Catholic than the pope, as Herzman argues? On the other hand, would the wisest of modern-day Catholics be the ones who decide, ultimately, that the religion is not worth trying to salvage, and that it should be abolished, as Fox believes? Should modern Catholics behave, ostensibly, as orthodox Catholics above reproach from conservative forces but hide secret desires that clash with the teachings of the establishment Church, as Hopkins does? Or should they actively, vocally strive to reform their religion in the present day and save the Roman Catholic Church from itself? Such questions are raised in these pages, and all that remains is for the individual reader to decide if any definitive answers to these questions can be reached.

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NOTE

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