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[Book Review of] *Catholicism and Modernity*, by James Hitchcock

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greater public pressure would be toward relaxing the surviving abortion statutes. Legalized abortion, with no chance of another constitutional amendment to stop it, would be the end result.

Noonan's second objection to a "Mandatory" amendment is that it "would work a substantial change in duty and power within our federal system of government" (p. 184). The "Mandatory" amendment would give to the federal government basic powers which have traditionally belonged to the states. This objection seems to be the most serious in his own eyes; it is the one most emphasized.

To this I reply that such considerations pale in significance before the question of whether the government is to kill or not kill human beings. The entire nation wades in the blood of unborn babies, and Noonan is worried about the "correct" distribution of governmental power according to the framers' intentions!

Besides, a "Mandatory" amendment would not upset the distribution of governmental power. The amendment would not itself be a criminal statute, but would enjoin that the protection of existing homicide statutes be applied to the unborn. This is certainly appropriate to the Constitution.

I cannot help thinking Noonan takes this position partly because he underestimates how serious the situation is. Throughout the book, sometimes by the language he chooses, he seems to bend too far in trying to be polite to the opposition. For example, on p. 161 he claims that while abortion is accurately called "killing," those who call it "murder" exaggerate its gravity. In the legal sense, of course, abortion is not murder; but *morally*, abortion certainly is murder, the direct taking of innocent human life. Noonan's book, as a whole, seems to treat abortion as only a minor derailment in America's journey toward manifest destiny. In truth, America's destiny may be Auschwitz; America is already there with abortion, and euthanasia might be next. In this situation extreme politeness is incongruous; and to be aginst abortion, if not merely "personally," but still merely "statewise," is insufficient. Noonan is against abortion. But his strategy is an unacceptable compromise.

— Patrick Lee
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Catholicism and Modernity

James Hitchcock

Seabury Press, New York, N. Y., 1979.

This scholarly and perceptive book is perhaps the best of a succession of books written in an analysis of the great dislocation and loss of identity which have occurred in the Catholic Church since Vatican II. Although most of the documents of that much discussed council would convey a continuity with the rich traditions of 2,000 years of Catholic thought, they remain largely unread. The great post-conciliar upheaval brought what amounted to a giant non-sequitur to those traditions. The leaders of the ersatz reform claim sanction from Vatican II but they are guilty of the fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

Professor Hitchcock analyzes the elements of the current crisis with a style that is both controlled and persuasive. Reform in the Church has meant traditionally that men would be changed by religion, not religion by men. Following Vatican II, however, various spokesmen for the Church have declared that the Church's

mission was not to save man but to please him. Pastoral efforts have deteriorated to the merely therapeutic. This has been an accommodation to the emergence of a societal cult of extreme individualism which Hitchcock describes as the "Imperial Self." Priests and even bishops have construed their pastoral role to mean the endorsing of whatever happens to be current practice. The traditional pastoral aim of setting men right with God has been abandoned in a refusal to lay burdens on people's consciences. Anyone who has tried to find a basis for conversation with a recent product of a Catholic university's religious training will recognize the accuracy of Hitchcock's description of the loss of a sense of history and a failure to comprehend fully the relation of religion to eternal life.

This is a profoundly disturbing book for many reasons. It is very carefully documented and the notes have a way of building to a kind of crescendo of annoyance. It is one thing to read an occasional quote in the lay press from an *avante garde* theologian. The effect of page after page of inanities uttered by some ineloquent spokesperson for the Leadership Council of Women Religious or lighter-than-air pontifications by the most recent president of the National Federation of Priests' Councils can be nigh unto intolerable. One begins to wonder whether Catholic religious training produces only the skills of newspeak, nonsense and psychologese.

Even more disturbing is Professor Hitchcock's careful chronicling of the tendency of Catholic intellectuals to serve more and more in the role of apologists for Marxist regimes around the world. Marxism, which went into a 20-year decline during the period of Stalin's insane excesses, the bloody slaughter of the Hungarian freedom fighters and the pitiless suppression of the Dubcek regime in Czechoslovakia, has been largely rejuvenated during the past 15 years by its appeal to starry-eyed, liberal Christians. This sorry spectacle is the equivalent of a revitalization of the Nazi party by liberal Jews. Religious persecution remains a dirty little secret in the radical Christian closet. Regimes which they most admire continue to suppress religious practice both brutally and lethally. NCCB spokesmen like Brian Hehir condemn the failings of right-wing dictatorships with much breast-beating but wink at the excesses of left-wing dictatorships. "Liberation" theology in its extreme form, as Professor Hitchcock points out, becomes simply "a way of using the church with its vast network of people and institutions, and its large reservoir of moral idealism for wholly political purposes."

Certain material in this book will be shocking even to the most cynical of conservative critics of church bureaucrats. It is reported here, for example, that sermon outlines for Respect Life Week in 1972 were prepared and distributed by the president of the Liturgical Conference, who was on leave to work in the McGovern-for-president campaign. These were allegedly sent to counteract an "overemphasis" on abortion which might harm the candidacy of the pro-abortion Senator McGovern. Elsewhere we read of a document prepared by a group of American Jesuits speaking of the need for "the construction of a revolutionary social strategy for the Society of Jesus which is explicitly Neo-Marxist and Maoist."

Professor Hitchcock writes with consummate skill. He is not so much the master of the pithy phrase as the pungent thought. For example, he says, "It is one of the choicer ironies of the post-conciliar era that, as nuns seek to become priests, priests get married, and married people get divorced in greater numbers."

This is an altogether engrossing and necessary book. Expect to read it with much sad shaking of the head, some indignant kicking of wastebaskets and a constant profound yearning for the authentic renewal which Vatican II really espoused.

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