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[Book Review of] *Passion of a Believer*, by Eugene F. Diamond

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will benefit most from the author's mellow pro-life philosophy enunciated vicariously by the leading characters.

—Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.
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Passion of a Believer

by Eugene F. Diamond

Liferose Press, 1105 S. St. Louis Ave., Chicago, IL 60655, 168 pp., \$7.95.

Passion of a Believer is a timely Catholic novel. It is not a pietistic or religious story in which life is sacramentalized to the virtual exclusion of the natural order — as if angelism is the human goal, not Christian humanism, as if grace, which helps make good the promise of nature, works apart from nature and not through her. Neither is it an attempt to give vent to the feelings of rebellious groups who blame their discontent on the failure of the Church to be what it isn't — a chameleon whose beliefs and moral teachings change with the times and which caters to women who want to be priests, and priests who want to be married, and homosexuals who want the seal of approval placed on their aberrant genital practices, and others who want the Church to be democratized so as to be run from the bottom up rather than from the top down. The *Passion of a Believer*, however, is not contaminated by the above trends, whether trendy or otherwise. Rather the strength of this refreshing and engrossing story is its sharp-eyed account of Catholics who are off course and how they get back on course, not through preaching or argumentation, but through what the believer is and what he does.

The novel centers about a type of Irish middle class family which unreflectively succumbs to prevalent mores which seem to liberate one from the moralistic straight jacket of an outmoded religious tradition. Along with this is the story teller's striking ability to include in its principal plot and various subplots, many of the tensions and conflicts of the post-conciliar American experience. The characters are memorable with the protagonist, Dalton, much like a Graham Greene character with his internal torments and his limitless capacity to be misunderstood. The writing is also reminiscent of Edwin O'Connor with its depictions of intra-familial conflict and cantankerousness, as well as its touches of humor. Walker Percy, the noted Catholic novelist extolled in both literary and religious circles, who had "strong fellow feelings" with the author particularly enjoyed his "portrayal of nutty nuns".

The author benefits from the insights of many years of medical practice and deep involvement in the pro-life movement for which he has been an eloquent and brilliant spokesman. The treatment of the medical themes, particularly as they relate to abortion and contraception, have authenticity and impact. He also benefits from having raised to young adulthood, through the tumultuous '60s, '70s, and '80s, a large family with its admixture of daughters and sons.

Joe Dalton is a familiar man of the times, a Vietnam veteran whose delayed vocation to the priesthood is the result of a battlefield commitment. His orthodoxy and the intensity with which he upholds it brings him into an inevitable confrontation with a modernist seminary faculty and, ultimately, into an impasse with the family he dearly loves. Other memorable characters, sympathetic and otherwise, enrich the narrative. Nuns of the "new" church, old breed Irish politicians, rogue Marine combat infantrymen, Mafia lieutenants and clerical consolers and connivers, make entrances and exits. The Dalton family has a recognizable and credible identity. There is the world-mother older sister who compromises in order to be upwardly mobile; the ne'er do-well younger brother who turns an unheroic tour of military

duty into a tawdry and venal career as a ward hack politician. Another sister is distinctly devoted to what used to pass as "middle class values" until a medical catastrophe tests her true belief system.

Dr. Diamond's book has had a particular appeal to Catholic pro-life leaders. Congressman Henry Hyde has called it "utterly fascinating, tough-minded and full of insight and understanding". Judie Brown of the American Life League describes it as "chilling, captivating and consuming". Few, if any, have recounted the effect of a firmly held position in favor of life on others in a fictional forum before and few are as capable of doing so as this gifted author. It is a book which, when picked up, is hard to put down. It is a remarkable achievement. There is a scattering of earthy language in the book. It is never used for its shock value, but rather as a felicitous portrayal of the language of the serviceman or the petty politician.

Passion of a Believer is an important Catholic literary contribution. It is a taut tale which will entertain and educate.

—Herbert Ratner, M.D.
Editor
Child and Family
