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Rachel Weeping and Other Essays on Abortion

James T. Burtchaell, C.S.C.

Andrews & McMeel, Fairway, Kansas, 1982.

As an alumnus of Notre Dame, I have had many reasons to be embarrassed about the role of my alma mater in participating in the pro-life movement. Since hosting a national Planned Parenthood meeting on campus, the university, through its board of trustees, has steadfastly refused to issue a public statement in condemnation of abortion, this despite the fact that Harriet Pilpel, the high priestess of pro-abortion litigation, stated after the aforementioned ill-advised campus conference, that she "did not know what the University's position was on abortion." Father Hesburgh, who gave the entire Catholic community many occasions for pride during the civil rights movement of the 1950s, responded to criticism of the university's failure to recognize the movement to re-establish civil rights for the unborn in the 1970s by issuing his intemperate "mindless zealots" critique of pro-life activists. Pro-life Notre Dame faculty, like Prof. Charles Rœe, have been called on to disavow patently incorrect press releases from under the golden dome about the alleged non-involvement of the Rockefeller Foundation in anti-life bankrolling. Even the much-heralded Notre Dame abortion conference (described by Dr. Matt Bulfin as "the mountains giving birth to a mouse") tried to present a sanitized version of the abortion debate in which well-known fence-straddlers and mugwumps (e.g., Colman McCarthy) were called on to present the pro-life view. Father Hesburgh chose the occasion to fire off another salvo against pro-life politics by creating a mythical straw man candidate who "disagrees with us on every social issue except abortion." Wearing by what appeared to be a calcified lack of comprehension, pro-life scholars turned to academicians largely from secular institutions to assume much of the leadership in defining issues and attacking fallacies.

Against this background, *Rachel Weeping* comes upon the scene with all the impact of Henry V exhorting the demoralized troops on St. Crispin's Day. Rev. James Burtchaell, C.S.C. is a senior member of the theology faculty at Notre Dame and served as the university's provost for seven years. Father Burtchaell is not unknown to readers of *Linacre*. His splendid essay on infanticide, "How Much Should a Child Cost?" (*LQ*, 47:54 [1980]) was an example of controlled righteous anger and gave some indication of the strong intellectuality and documentation brought to fruition in this new book. In his preface, Father Burtchaell states his intention to be "fair though not neutral, thorough if not exhaustive and provocative even when not agreeable." None can question his thoroughness, the various chapters being supported by some 700 footnotes and references. In choosing the subjects for his essays, he has eliminated all possibility of being neutral and unprovocative. His five essays include testimony from women who have had abortions, a devastating dissection of the standard arguments for abortion, a linking of abortion to the Holocaust mentality, a historical likening of the anti-abortion movement to the anti-slavery movement, and an endorsement of the concept of the slippery slope from abortion to infanticide. It is impossible to treat subjects like these without being provocative. It is impossible to be an advocate for the reality of linkages between the abortion movement and other systematic killings without abandoning neutrality. Burtchaell succeeds admirably.

The book is sometimes ponderous in its documentation and it is unlikely that anyone would want to go beyond *one* of the essays at a single sitting. In all, it will be most useful as a reference rather than as a handbook. For those looking for a

succinct and quotable summary of Burtchaell's position, his last chapter consists of his article written as an anti-abortion contribution to the *Ann Lander's Encyclopedia* in 1978. Here is a lucid and hard-hitting essay which is more personal than professional, and highly effective.

In general, the chief merit of the book is in its compilation of argumentation from many sources. There is nothing here that has not been heard before from one or more of the myriad authors whom he gives credit in his long index. It is nonetheless an important and valuable book.

Old sergeants of the pro-life movement will be most excited, however, to recognize the telltale signs of an incurable fervor in the author's writing. James Tunstead Burtchaell has taken up the battle for the duration. Unborn children will be grateful for such a formidable champion.

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A Crisis of Truth

Ralph Martin

Servant Books, Box 8617, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48107, 1982, 245 pp., \$10.95.

Every Catholic who shares pastoral responsibility — from the pope to the parents of families — knows that the Church today is undergoing a crisis of faith and of fidelity to God's word. Like a person afflicted with a suspicious tumor, we are tempted to ignore our experience and hope it will heal by itself. In *A Crisis of Truth: The Attack on Faith, Morality, and Mission in the Catholic Church*, Ralph Martin draws on scripture, the documents of Vatican II, and the teachings of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II to diagnose this crisis and outline a prescription for the cooperation all of us owe to the Spirit's healing work.

Martin is a Catholic layman who has served on the staff of the national secretariat of the Cursillo movement, been a leader in Catholic charismatic renewal, founded *New Covenant* magazine, and directed the International Communications Office for the charismatic renewal in Brussels from 1976-1980. He has published several other books and lectured throughout the United States on the situation he addresses in the present work.

Martin begins by focusing on facts which are not news, but which are being widely ignored. There is a crisis of truth in the Catholic Church. The authority, clarity, and accessibility of God's word are called into question. Sometimes Catholic truth is flatly denied. More often it is rendered ambiguous, presented selectively with some essentials omitted, subjected to distorted "reinterpretations," or crowded out by theological speculation and unauthentic "development." Many Catholic scholars deny the inerrancy of scripture and set aside the Catholic standard for its interpretation under the guidance of the Church's teaching authority.

Jesus' unique claims are widely questioned and Christianity is put on the same level as other world religions. Such christology is leading to syncretism and a decline of missionary effort. The "spirit" of Vatican II is invoked for this development, although the Council's own documents give no support to any theory which would detract from the uniqueness of Jesus as the sole mediator between God and man, the second Adam who restores fallen humankind, and the heavenly king through whom all things are to be restored to the Father.