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Welcome to *The Torch*

This third issue of *The Torch* magazine features eight reviews of recent books on a variety of genres of interest to Aquinas students and which cover several disciplines, including theology, religion, education, sociology, literature, and literary criticism. They feature a novel of a father's losing and finding a son and his own worth in a global voyage of discovery, two very personal memoirs spanning 400 years between them to remind readers that faith changes everything, two proactive how-to volumes answering contemporary challenges to the faith, and three works of literary criticism on writings by C. S. Lewis, William Shakespeare, and Robert Frost, respectively.

The reviews represent those of the individual reviewers. Their generous and enthusiastic responses far exceeded my expectations. Whether glowing or guarded, affirming or agnostic, all the reviews communicate a fresh response to works likely to be of interest to the academy and the communities they serve. Because the works

are also of particular interest to this community on the Dominican Campus, they each speak in their own way to issues of faith and culture in the modern world. I would like to thank Dr. Ben Smith, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, for his recommendation of the Butterfield memoir. The other volumes have a place in my personal library, so it was easy to suggest them to a wider audience. I am grateful to Jean Marie Moles and Bryan Joyce in the Write Reason Center and to Paul Downey, Director of Communications, for producing this issue. Finally, thanks to Aaron Urbanczyk, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and Write Reason Director, for asking last fall if I would be willing to serve as this year's editor of *The Torch*. It has been a pleasure.

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The Father's Tale. BY MICHAEL O'BRIEN

San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011. ISBN-13: 9780898708158.

Reviewed by ROSE DIAUTO

The Father's Tale is a Catholic novel with rich Christian themes and an intriguing story. The author, Michael D. O'Brien, is a highly published author, having written a nine-volume series of novels, along with a few singular novels and a nonfiction book. He is best known for his novel, *Theophilus*, published in 2010. *The Father's Tale*, published in 2011, is one of O'Brien's latest novels and is an immense text of roughly 1,070 pages and forty-six chapters; but it is not as cumbersome to read as it is to carry. O'Brien simultaneously tells the story of a father's search for his lost son and the protagonist's personal search for a deeper love of the Father along the way.

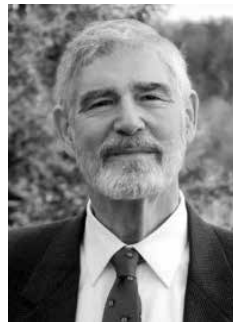
The protagonist, Alexander Graham, is a quiet widower who resides in a rural Canadian town. He is the owner of a bookshop, the Kingfisher, whose name bears great symbolic significance throughout the novel. Alex is portrayed as the quiet outsider in his close-knit town and predominantly Catholic community. O'Brien makes a point to paint Alex as the outsider by choice, the grumpy older man whose two sons are too busy to be bothered by him and who is revered but misunderstood by his community, therefore preferring the solitude of his bookstore and lonely walks through the wilderness. Father Toby, Alex's childhood friend, helps to expose the unsocial nature of the protagonist. The dialogue between these two characters is often an overt attempt at the character development of Alex, with highly personal conversations contrived to reveal Alex's back story and the brokenness the rest of the novel serves to repair. However, the relationship between the two men is endearing, two individuals who have grown up together and helped one another to find faith and comfort along the way.

The intended audience for this novel is no doubt the educated Catholic community, the wider Christian readership that enjoys big books with a transcendent message. While the plot lines could interest a number of readers, the deeper meaning of this story is rooted in an understanding of the Catholic faith. Alex's youngest

son, a university student, has abandoned his studies and joined a peculiar metaphysical cult. Upon this discovery, Alex embarks on a financially risky and physically perilous search for his child to save the boy from physical and spiritual danger. While Alex searches for his son on his long and rather episodic journey throughout Europe, he exemplifies a man deeply rooted in the traditions of the faith: daily morning prayers, regular praying of the rosary, searching out opportunities to receive the Sacraments, and charitable giving of his time, mentorship, and money to those he meets in need. However, O'Brien also inserts philosophic qualities of the faith which would be lost, with no damage to one's enjoyment or understanding of the story, on those not specifically interested in the soul-searching philosophy and theology that is addressed.

The Father's Tale follows an episodic organization. Aside from the obvious chapter divisions, the protagonist goes on a series of adventures which occur in segments. While these episodes occur in relation to one another, they could almost be read separately

with some even being omitted or shortened without the text losing its intended message and plot. Though O'Brien surely meant for the adventures undertaken by Alexander Graham to find his missing son as essential parts of the story, the structure of the events is rather repetitive. None more so than the first several trips, encompassing the first several hundred pages, in which Alexander flies to one foreign city, describes his predicament, seeks help, finds little, gets a lead,



Michael O'Brien

enters into a personal/theological/philosophical conversation with a stranger, and moves on to the next potential location of his son. In every locale Alexander Graham must emotionally and finan-

cially reassess to see if he is capable to endure any more adventures. He always manages to continue, commends himself to God, and catches another bus, train, boat, or sidewalk to his next lead.

Considering the repetitive nature of this story there is a lack of craftsmanship and subtlety in the structure of the novel. The first couple hundred pages reveal the nature of the characters, and the spiritual situations that will be addressed throughout the novel, with the following episodic events unfolding in almost the exact same way. However, this lack of craftsmanship in the story does not encourage one to stop reading, it merely pushes the reader on in an expectant way. The optimistic reader will continue to hold out hope for Alexander and pray the next adventure is not like the last.

At the end of the tale O'Brien makes a conscious effort to twist the reader's expectations. The turn of events is so drastic and rushed, occurring in the last two-hundred or so pages of this 1,000 page novel, that readers may not be able to enjoy the twist. Throughout the tale Alex's adventures and his spiritual development occur at an even and repeated pace, building toward an expectation of an even and repeated ending. The climax appears in an unlikely place, very near the end of the tale, and after the jolting twist comes crashing

down in a jarring and unnatural fifty-page conclusion.

Overall O'Brien's *The Father's Tale* is a book intended for Catholic audiences who enjoy adventure novels and tales of spiritual development. The concept is endearing: a father searching for his college-age son whom he fears has joined a controversial spiritual cult, and all the while the father comes to his own understanding of his fatherhood and the spiritual relationship he has with the Father of us all. The main character, Alexander Graham, is a man with whom many readers of this novel could possibly relate. His quest is commendable and intriguing. However, the effort at epic repetition with its contrived and disconcerting ending is not for everyone's taste. Despite its bulk, this book is a light and spiritually uplifting read despite issues with its execution.

Rose Diauto was born in Arizona and moved to Tennessee in 2007. She is currently a junior pursuing a Bachelor's in English and Secondary Education licensure. Currently, Rose also works as a Swim Academy Instructor and Lifeguard at the Gordon Jewish Community Center.

Rebuilding Catholic Culture. BY RYAN TOPPING

Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2012. ISBN: 9781933184944.

Review by SR. SUSANNA EDMUNDS, O.P.

Imagine a world in which all believe, study and practice the teachings of the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. To borrow John Lennon's words, without his sentiment: it isn't hard to do. Several well-known authors have taken the lens of Catholic teaching and gazed upon the world, including Francis Cardinal George (*The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture*) and George Weigel (*Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*). Many recent books on the New Evangelization by authors such as Donald Cardinal Wuerl and Ralph Martin also consider this question of culture. What new insight, then, is Ryan Topping seeking to offer in his latest book, *Rebuilding Catholic Culture: How the Catechism can Shape our Common Life?*



Ryan Topping

Topping's contribution is neither a new insight nor a new method. Indeed, his conclusions – learn Latin, end abortion, build beautiful churches and be open to the gift of more children – are Catholic common sense. What Topping does is make these conclusions not only logical, but attractive. His approach is pedagogical, seeking to change the reader's heart rather than his to-do list.

Based on a lecture series given by Topping in several North American cities, the book follows the *Catechism of the Catholic Church's* deliberate, thematic structure. The catechism is divided into two: the first half concerns the work of God towards men, and the second half, man's response to God. Each half is divided again in two, making for the four traditional pillars of catechesis: The Creed, the Sacraments, the Commandments, and the life of Prayer. Each of these pillars is divided again into two sections: the pillar

is considered first as a whole, and then broken into its parts and applied. Topping offers a chapter corresponding to each of these eight divisions.

Like a good debater, he begins by defining his terms. The introduction addresses the question, "Is faith compatible with free thinking?" Topping is prescient here, for this same question will begin Pope Francis' 2013 encyclical on faith. Both men agree that the limits and guidance given by faith do not restrict man; rather, "faith makes you truly human: nobler, more just, lovelier than you could have been otherwise" (xxii). The gift which elevates man to the heights of divinity without destroying anything of his humanity, faith is the ideal source as well as the fruit of truly human culture.

The first Catechism pillar considers the nature of faith. It is both a gift from God, and man's response to an encounter with the God who loves him. The Catechism then expounds upon the articles of faith as found in the Creed. Topping chose to reflect on the sources of faith, Scripture and Tradition, and the relationship between them. Then he addresses common heresies: not cultural, but Christological heresies, ever ancient and ever new. As he notes, "No Christ, no true humanism; no Christ, no Catholic culture" (29).

The section on the Sacraments in the Catechism begins with an explanation of the nature of salvation, and how God's saving action is made present to believers through the liturgy. Topping too reflects on the nature of liturgy. He transcends conservative-liberal boundaries by pointing out that in the liturgy, Christ is present, just as he was 2000 years ago: there is, therefore, no golden age of liturgy, no need to seek out past ways simply because they are past. Topping does reach "conservative" conclusions about the liturgy, but he comes to them from a heavenly, not political, perspective.

“Liturgy must seek first to show the glory of God; only afterwards do we worry whether anyone is looking” (119).

While the Catechism considers each of the seven Sacraments of the Church in turn, Topping focuses instead on the need for a sacramental worldview. Using C.S. Lewis’ description of the creation of Narnia as a springboard, Topping argues that in order for the sacraments to make sense, we must understand that nature is, in a sense, alive, and capable of communicating to us something of the reality of its Creator (p. 101). This is one of many instances in which Topping uses literature not as a mere illustration, but to express the essence of his point. In the cases where I was familiar with the reference, it was extremely effective; in other cases, I still understood the point, but its power and conviction were lacking.

The third part of the Catechism deals with moral theology. Topping here offers an essay on virtue and an essay on law. Notable in the former is his discussion on the nature of conscience. Robert Bolt’s adaptation of the life of St. Thomas More, *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) is often held up as a powerful meditation on the nature of conscience. Topping, however, is convincing in his argument that some of the language of the play reflects the exaltation of selfhood, found by Bolt in the writings of Albert Camus, rather than the Church’s understanding of conscience as presented in the Conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes* (128ff).

The Catechism concludes with the life of prayer, first reflecting on the role of prayer and its importance in our lives, and then providing a commentary on the petitions of the Our Father. Here, Topping seems to deviate from the pillars – he chooses to reflect on the nature and role of the family. However, he demonstrates convincingly that the family is indeed the first school of prayer, “a communion of persons...founded not upon abstract equality but upon a willingness to serve Christ in one another” (184). With warmth flowing from his own experiences as a father of six, Topping offers a beautiful reflection on the joys and struggles of family life, and the straight path they pave towards holiness.

The value of the family is complemented by Topping’s examination of religious life in his final essay. He focuses on just one phase from the Our Father: “Thy Kingdom come,” and explains the nature of consecrated life as an eschatological sign, pointing to something greater than this world. For all believers, authentic prayer requires true Christian hope in the world to come. This is not to be confused with optimism, described by Topping in one of his many memorable turns of phrase, as “the detritus left on the mud after the tide of Christian faith has receded...[It is] about as useful for sailing as a pile of polished stones: it retains the smell of the sea, but none of its vital motion” (210). Hope provides the energy, patience, and perspective necessary for this grand vision of Catholic culture to be accomplished.

Ryan Topping is convinced that Catholics in the West do not lack money or goodwill or political freedom (xxiv). What we lack, Topping insists, is confidence. What Topping has provided is a book inspiring just that. His pace is fast and his language so vivid that at times rereading is necessary; the illustrations are well-intentioned but often irrelevant; and while the Catechism provides a truly pedagogical roadmap, it is not actually an integral part of any of these essays. Yet despite all this, Topping paints a vision of Catholicism that is uplifting and empowering. We may not see a widespread transformation of culture in our time, but I am now convinced that it is worth fighting for.

In addition to numerous articles in publications such as *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Crisis Magazine* and *Catholic Insight*, Topping has written several books exploring the theology of St. Augustine. He is a Fellow at The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts (Merrimack, NH). He and his wife have six children.

Sister Susanna Edmunds, O.P., is a student of English and Secondary Education. Originally from Sydney, Australia, she has been a member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville for four years.

Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child.

BY ANTHONY ESOLEN

Wilmington, DE: ISI Books. ISBN: 9781610170747.

Review by ELIZABETH BECKER

Anthony Esolen is a professor of Renaissance English and Development of Western Civilization at Providence College in Rhode Island. One of his most recent works is a cultural commentary called *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*, published by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, in which he explores some of the ideologies with which modern society destroys the true purpose and potential of the human imagination. Some of his other works include: *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization* (Regnery, 2008); *Ironies of Faith: The Deep Laughter at the Heart of Christian Literature* (ISI Press, 2007); and his newest work, *Commentary on the Roman Missal* (Magnificat Press, 2011).

The work is organized into ten chapters of approximately twenty pages each that develop Esolen’s ten main criticisms on society’s blatant attempts to ruin the imagination’s true purpose and poten-

tial. Although each chapter has its own distinct theme, much of what he has to say interconnects with the other topics. According



Anthony Esolen

to Esolen, society maintains that children should be kept away from anything that could spark their imagination in the first place, such as allowing them to play outside or experiment with the world around them. Instead, they should be kept inside and micromanaged so that they never truly realize what they are capable of and created for as a human person. Another problem he sees in society’s treatment of the imagination is the de-genderization of sexes. Without the pronounced com-

plementarity of the sexes and the knowledge of what being a member of that sex truly means, we lose an essential component of our imagination and what it means to be a human person. Esolen also contends that modern culture's preaching of equality between the sexes is actually destroying our capacity to be creative; encouraging unisex education, clothes and interests, partnered with removing concentrated time spent with those of the same sex, leaves us unable to develop the skills and virtues that are unique to the individual sexes. Other criticisms of modern culture include: the creation of 'noise' which doesn't allow for true self-discovery, the destruction of what virtue *really* means, and denying the transcendent.

In addition, Esolen explores at some length the theme of "Cutting All Heroes Down to Size". In other words, society would like to reduce heroism and courage to just fulfilling duties. Real, concrete virtue has no place in the world modern culture would like to form because it lifts us out of ourselves and calls us to something greater. Esolen recounts the story of Fr. Jean de Brebeuf, a Jesuit missionary to the North American Indians, who was cruelly tortured by them. After being rescued and sent back to Europe for recovery, his greatest wish was to return and continue his missionary work. He returned to his martyrdom. This is exactly the kind of virtue society would like to discourage, he argues, because:

it does not matter whether a child who hears this story is a Christian... If we thought we knew what courage was, we hear of this holy priest, and we doubt again; our minds wander as if to a far galaxy, where beings dwell who seem like us but whose thoughts are like oceans to our puddles, stars to our fireflies. (Esolen 144)

In particular, modernity claims encounters like this, with danger of death, are to be avoided because they strongly impel us to rise above duty and reach for greatness; therefore, the soldier shall be belittled and children should be taught to suspect excellence (147). Thus, modern society seeks to make us content with the average, with the less-than mindset that reduces humanity to a society who

can no longer desire greatness, even if it could remember what it is.

As a professor in the field of Modern Western Civilization, Anthony Esolen is especially qualified to speak on the issues facing young Catholic families. Young Catholic families today face an especially daunting array of ideologies and philosophies that threaten their structural solidity, and Esolen clearly points out the most damaging of these. In fact, this book is especially useful for *any* parent who would like guidelines in choosing healthy literature, movies, and other forms of culture for their children. Other groups who might find this book useful are teachers and child psychologists, although this book is a cultural commentary and not a textbook.

However, one might be careful of the tone with which Esolen writes. In his enthusiasm for the truth about the imagination and the dangers threatening its full potential, he occasionally comes across as unfair towards those who perhaps simply don't know any better. In general, his uncompromising attitude towards the pitfalls of modern thought do him credit, but those more firmly entrenched in current schools of thought reading this book might take deep offense, feeling personally judged by him. The information in this book is best read with discriminating attention, mining the nuggets of wisdom Anthony Esolen gives, but discarding his tone.

Elizabeth Becker is currently a sophomore at Aquinas College majoring in Secondary English Education. Before coming to Aquinas, she earned an A.A.S. in Culinary Arts and an A.A.S. in Liberal Arts back home in Minnesota. She hopes to continue for a Master's in Theology or Catechetics so that she will be able to work teaching the Faith. When she is not doing homework, she is hanging out with friends, eating ice cream, or any other number of activities that involve friends and music.

The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest.

BY JOHN GERARD, S.J.

San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012. ISBN: 9781586174507.

Review by SISTER MARIE GENEVIÈVE ROBERTSON, O.P.

The recent reprinting of John Gerard's *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest* provides today's readers with an opportunity to follow the true adventures of an undercover Roman Catholic priest in Elizabethan England. Ignatius Press finds this story of "courage and conviction" to be "most timely for our age," since it is a first-hand account of religious persecution in a civilized society (back cover). The reprinting of *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest* comes at a time when secularism threatens to stifle outward expressions of religion in the name of political correctness. While Catholics were among those being tried for treason in sixteenth-century England, today people of any faith can witness the way Gerard and other Catholics lost their rights to practice their religion freely. Even those who do not consider themselves religious can find Gerard's tale of living and hiding as an outlaw, escaping from jail and being

questioned by famous English personages to be riveting.

From his birth in 1564, John Gerard was treated as a stranger in his native country because of his Catholic faith. His father was imprisoned in the Tower of London when Gerard was only five years old. At that point he and his brother were placed in the homes of Protestants by the government in hopes that they would convert. After three years, the boys retained their Catholic faith and were returned to their father. Gerard's childhood lessons on the importance of knowing and defending his faith bore fruit as the years progressed and the English persecution of Catholics became more severe. After attending a Catholic school in Douai and Reims, Gerard returned to England only to be captured and imprisoned for two years. Gerard escaped from England back to the continent at twenty-two to pursue studies for the priesthood and to enter the

Society of Jesus. This was a calling which he and the other young men knew was likely to end in martyrdom should they return to their beloved homeland. Gerard's *Autobiography of a Hunted Priest* recounts his adventures, conversions, persecutions, joys and sorrows during those eighteen years following his return to England.

The 2012 printing of the *Autobiography* includes a more up-to-date style of English from the 1920's first translation of the text from Latin into English. Philip Caraman, S.J.'s 1988 translation is the text used in this edition of Gerard's *Autobiography*. Caraman includes sections of Gerard's text, such as disputes between active and fallen priests within the Society, which the first English translator omitted. Caraman does a wonderful job of organizing the footnotes and other background information. The short historical facts given by Caraman in the footnotes are helpful, interesting, and necessary for the reader. They are particularly useful when Gerard mentions that he spent hours attempting to convert an unnamed penitent lady of the Queen's court; the footnote tells us the woman is Penelope Rich, who inspired Sir Philip Sydney's poetry and was famous for winning the heart of many a sixteenth century nobleman (Gerard 44). More often, however, footnotes are omitted by Caraman in place of a dagger † notifying the reader that more information on that topic can be found in the sixty-seven pages of notes following the *Autobiography*.

The quick pace of Gerard's *Autobiography* keeps the reader intrigued. The frequent digressions into descriptions of his loyal friends' trials and deaths, however, reminds the reader that Gerard wrote this text only in obedience to his superiors and to inform his fellow Jesuits about the persecution he faced in England. These asides may cause the reader to lose track of Gerard's story, but they are worth the detour. Gerard makes up for lost time by giving colorful accounts of his near-misses, captures, interviews with his persecutors and descriptions of his secret yet fruitful pastoral ministry. Gerard's dark humor combined with his unshakable faith infuses a sense of levity into his work, which otherwise would have been little more than an account of dreadful circumstances. One such example of Gerard's humor is seen in his reaction to the unpleasant conditions in jail, "when the prisoners below started singing lewd songs and Geneva psalms," Gerard says he drowned out the "noise with the less unpleasant sound of my clanking chains" (94). Gerard's humor is often combined with courage and faith as he shows in his interview with the infamous English interrogator and torturer, Richard Topcliffe:

Topcliffe looked at me and glared. "You know who I am? I am Topcliffe. No doubt you have heard people talk about me?" He said this to scare me. And to heighten the effect he slapped his sword on the table...as if he intended to use it... But his acting was lost on me...When I saw he was trying to frighten me I was deliberately rude to him. (84)

In the notes Caraman adds that Gerard suffered more than he admits in his *Autobiography* from the cruelty of Topcliffe and other persecutors. An appendix at the end of the book includes further details of Topcliffe, as described by his contemporaries.

Gerard reveals his straightforward and determined attitude in the face of torture and death throughout the *Autobiography*. Modern readers in the comfort of their homes may find themselves startled by Gerard's unwavering desire for martyrdom and his

complaints that God has not yet found him worthy to die a martyr's death. Even as early as the eleventh page of his *Autobiography*, Gerard bemoans not the deaths of his three companions, but his own survival, as he recounts, "We four priests embarked, a lucky load, if I exclude myself, for my unworthiness robbed me of the crown of martyrdom. The other three all met a martyr's death for the faith" (11). Gerard repeats these desires often throughout the text. He also recounts the lives of other contemporary martyrs and saintly figures, proving that his mission and persecution were not isolated events. In his preaching of the persecuted Catholic faith, Gerard reveals the fact that Catholics were actually killed and tortured for their faith alone, and not for any supposed treason against the Queen. The following account by Gerard of his friend's martyrdom is an example of the duplicity found in the persecutors:

"Well sirs," the martyr answered, "is it really in your power to save me from death here and now, if I am willing to go to your church?" "Of course," they said, "we promise you in the King's name, you shall not die." Then the martyr turned to the people and spoke, "Now you can see what sort of treason I am condemned for. It is merely for our religion that I and other priests die." In their rage the officers cruelly cut him down where he was half-dead. (107)

This unjust treatment of the Catholic people helps to explain why Gerard's language against the Protestant persecutors is often fiery and unapologetic. As James V. Schall, S.J., states in the new Introduction to the *Autobiography*, Gerard "does not spare any sensitivity about the utter brutality of the English Protestants determined to stamp out the traditional faith of the English people" (x). Gerard continues to write about the persecution of his friends even until the last page of his *Autobiography*. Gerard writes that he escaped from England for the last time on the same day on which his Jesuit superior was martyred for his faith.

For those readers left wondering after Gerard's swift mentioning of famous persons and grand English manors, the notes and appendices found at the end of this Ignatius Press edition of *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest* will come as a welcome reply to their questions. The last third of the book is comprised of historical notes, nine sections of appendices, and an index. The research supports the authenticity of Gerard's *Autobiography* and gives curious readers further details about places and people mentioned by Gerard. The supply of secondary sources such as *Secret Hiding-Places* and a description of Gerard by Topcliffe himself "in his own abominable spelling" provide an intriguing continuation of the *Autobiography* once Gerard's account has finished (Appendix I). One of the appendices describes a house and hiding place used by Gerard. The hole where the priest hid for days was found by excavation to be perfectly intact and exactly where Gerard had described it. Another interesting feature is a small blueprint depicting the location of the "hiding hole" in relation to the rest of the manor.

John Gerard's *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest* is recommended to the Christian, the historian, the adventurer, and those readers of our time who wish to live for what they believe in.

Sister Marie Genevieve Robertson, O.P., is currently working on a Master of Education in Teaching and Learning (M.Ed.) degree at Aquinas College. She is originally from Mobile, AL, having obtained a bachelor's degree in French Education from Auburn University in 2010. Sister Marie Genevieve entered the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia of Nashville, TN in 2011 and plans to teach students at the secondary level in the near future.



Father John Gerard, S.J.

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith.

BY ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD

Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012. ISBN: 978884527388.

Review by CHRISTA NIPPER

The cover lies. Crown and Covenant's edition of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* binds Rosaria Butterfield's memoir with a verdant background, spring slowly infusing overhanging autumnal leaves with its green life. No pastoral scene, no butterfly transformation fills the pages in between. Instead, the former LGBTQI advocate accounts the traumatic upheaval and painful reconstruction of her life. She describes the gory spiritual death of a postmodern lesbian professor, herself, and the equally difficult birth and growing pains of a feeble dependent being called a child of God.

First published in 2012, the book consists of only five chapters and one-hundred-forty-eight pages. Butterfield organizes the chapters chronologically, outlining her radical transition in an informal tone suited to the genre. While the memoir does progress chronologically, the professor emphasizes scripture and related thematic developments throughout. Thus, the lessons Butterfield has learned and consequently expresses in this book, written for spiritual instruction and encouragement, transcend the sequence of traumatically-providential events it chronicles. Nevertheless, the basic storyline gives the reader structure and begins in 1997.

Rosaria Butterfield, at the time the memoir begins, taught English and Women's Studies at Syracuse University, gave lectures on gay and lesbian studies around the country, and lived with her partner, T. While researching the Religious Right in America, a subject on which she intended to draft her second book, Butterfield received a letter from Pastor Ken Smith, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor. The "Big Life Questions" he asked in a critical but non-judgmental manner in that letter resonated with the professor, prompting her to reach out to the pastor.

After two years of mentoring from Ken and his wife, Floy, Rosaria began attending church. Confronted with the truth of the Gospel, convicted of her radical shortcomings, she converted. Her life quickly fell apart. "When I became a Christian," she explains, "I had to change everything—my life, my friends, my writing, my teaching, my advising, my clothes, my thought, my speech... conversion put me in a complicated and comprehensive chaos" (26-27). The writer joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church and overhauled her life; still tenured as a professor, she abandoned her book, a critique of the Religious Right, instead delivering her first Christian lecture and exposing herself as a fledgling believer.

The next stage of her memoir recounts that she fell in love with a seminarian, R, got engaged, and planned to take a two-year research leave so that she could live with him once they were married. Unfortunately, his struggle for assurance in faith caused him to break off their engagement. Nevertheless, the English professor transferred to Geneva College for a year. There, under the mentor-

ship of Bruce Backensto and the support of her Christian community, Rosaria developed as a Christian and as a Christian professor. At this point, she met her future husband, Kent Butterfield. Once married, they adopted four children and moved to Purcellville, Virginia, so Kent could pastor. The new mother struggled through two failed adoptions and the alienation of one of her daughters. As the memoir concludes, Rosaria was enjoying a simple life, home-schooling her children.

While Butterfield rightfully thematizes the evolution of faith and the complete transformation of the Christian, she also develops tension between the themes of antithesis and synthesis. Concerning antithesis, the former lesbian insists upon the complete opposition of the Christian and non-Christian worldviews. The two, she insists, are mutually exclusive. When Rosaria delivered a speech at her university that revealed her new faith, she experienced intense alienation. All five dissertation committees she served on



Rosaria Butterfield

asked for her resignation, and she became the laughing stock of the LGBTQI community. In becoming a Christian, she betrayed all those who trusted in her. After her speech, B, head student of the LGBTQI initiative, mourned on Rosaria's office chair. He asked how she could betray their community, how she could be sure she wasn't a lesbian (50). Stalling, she returned the question: how did B know he was gay? B's response frames the rest of the memoir. He boldly replied: "Rosaria,

I am a gay man because the LGBT...community is the only safe home I have, a home made safe by you" (50). Instead of appealing to his attraction to men, B attributed his choice of lifestyle to his love of the community which fostered it. The world had rejected and abused him while the LGBTQI community welcomed and nurtured him.

Butterfield's memoir is more than a cathartic exercise; the professor has a lesson to teach. Just as the love of LGBTQI community enticed B to adopt and remain in his lifestyle, true charity and love can draw men and women to the church. The church must protect its purity—church leaders must not permit all acts; however, Rosaria uses her memoir to illustrate the power of a community that welcomes the down-trodden and makes sacrifices to build them up. The writer emphasizes the responsibility of every Christian to love the weak, herself making a safe home for the rejected by adopting orphans into her family.

While Butterfield's work can encourage believers in charity and would be suitable for Christian book clubs, her ideal audience ex-

tends beyond Christian circles. Because of Rosaria's respectful, yet critical treatment of her former community, those who identify as queer can broaden their perspective about the LGBTQI community without fear of insult. Also, the writer preserves some of her postmodern ideas and terms, mentioning shifting communities of discourse and deconstructivism; consequently, those interested in philosophy or theology might be interested in Butterfield's postmodernist-influenced explanation of Christian teachings.

In *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*, Rosaria Butterfield courageously tells her conversion story. She leaves her readers with a simple mes-

sage, a message that makes her memoir profound. Everyone needs the love of a community; every child needs a home. The first task of the Christian is to love.

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The Gospel According to Shakespeare. BY PIERO BOITANI

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. ISBN: 978026802235-8.

Review by SR. MARIA THUAN NGUYEN, O.P.

In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, the American literary critic Harold Bloom says that “there is no ‘real’ Hamlet as there is no ‘real’ Shakespeare: the character, like the writer, is a reflecting pool, a spacious mirror in which we needs must see ourselves (96).” In other words, for Bloom at least, Shakespeare’s art is a window into humanity; his art shows man to himself by portraying specific human actions. Given that Shakespeare lived in a society where Christianity was assumed, it is no surprise that Shakespeare’s vision of the human person was influenced by Christian themes. Commenting from a very different perspective, in *The Gospel According to Shakespeare*, Piero Boitani, a professor of literature at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” offers a series of reflections on the Christian life as appropriated by Shakespeare’s later plays. He asserts that “from the second section of *Hamlet* onwards, Shakespeare is engaged in developing his own Gospel” (Preface xi). According to Boitani, Shakespeare’s later plays communicate his good news of the possibility of fulfillment and happiness on earth for man—a testament that translates the Gospel into human terms. Boitani posits that although Shakespeare’s allusions to Christian themes of forgiveness, transcendence, and restoration are faint, he argues that by paying attention to the sacred and non-sacred texts referenced in the plays, readers can catch a glimpse of Shakespeare’s vision of man’s life on earth as a foreshadow of the beatific vision.

For Boitani, Shakespeare’s gospel begins in the second half of *Hamlet* (xi). In his first chapter, Boitani argues that the evangelical message of *Hamlet* consists of abandoning oneself to one’s providence. When Horatio attempts to convince Hamlet to renounce his challenge with Laertes, Hamlet says, “There is a special / providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ‘tis / not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be / not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all” (*Hamlet* 5.2.215-18). Boitani then compares this to passages in the gospels of Matthew and Luke: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground un-

perceived by your Father” (Matthew 10:29) and “You must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Luke 12:35). Thus, according to Boitani, through the play *Hamlet*, Shakespeare communicates his own rendition of the gospel message of submission to Providence and preparing oneself for death (21). Although Boitani makes an interesting point, his argument does not seem to be strongly supported by the play itself. Shakespeare’s use of biblical allusions does not mean that Shakespeare necessarily intended to communicate an explicit Christian message, and the passage that Boitani references can be accounted for by acknowledging that Christianity shaped Shakespeare’s worldview. Except for the following passage, “There is a special / providence in the fall of a sparrow” (*Hamlet* 5.2.215-216), Boitani does not offer any other Biblical passages in the play that allude to abandonment to Divine Providence, rendering Boitani’s argument unconvincing.

Boitani makes another thought-provoking argument when he compares King Lear to both Job and Christ. Boitani says, “Shakespeare rewrites the Old Testament with the New, but does so in his own way, juxtaposing Christ on Job and, with extreme tragic presumption, Lear on both” (31). Lear reaches profound understanding of the truth and becomes a prophet-like figure after losing everything. Lear’s suffering leads to patience, and he is later given the gift of restoration and resurrection (Boitani 34). Lear’s new life begins when he sees Cordelia’s blessedness (*King Lear* 4.7.59-70). His newfound wisdom, attained only after great sorrow and purification, “is communion; it is a fully human wisdom, sublimed and purified by acceptance” (Boitani 36). Together, Lear and Cordelia are Christ-like figures who are in harmony with God. They, like Christ, take upon the evils of the world and offer themselves as a sacrifice (Boitani 38). Boitani claims that through *King Lear*, Shakespeare communicates the Christian message of endurance and acceptance of one’s suffering. The transfiguration denied to Lear will come to its culmination in later plays such as *Pericles*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest* (Boitani 39). Again, Boitani’s analysis is interesting, but his claim that Lear is a Christ-figure seems to misrepresent the play. King Lear, although he does come to wisdom at the end of the play, seems to be more of an example of human depravity than a redemptive figure. Lear has endured great suffering and is



Piero Boitani

offered a type of reconciliation through that suffering, but he does not offer himself as a sacrifice the way Christ does. Christ suffers because of man's sin and offers himself in order to redeem man. Lear, on the other hand, brings upon his own suffering when he disowns Cordelia (*King Lear* 1.1.117). However, Boitani's analysis, while it distorts Lear's character, does highlight one of the reasons why this play continues to endure. Lear's deficiency, which leads to great sorrow, transcends all cultures and time periods. His coming to wisdom through suffering is, in a sense, the story of man's suffering.

Boitani's most noteworthy contribution is his analysis of the role of music in Shakespeare's later plays. According to Boitani, the happiness of Shakespeare's gospel consists of the splendor and glory of the small and ephemeral things. "This kind of glory is beauty, the *pulchritudo* of the world and human beings... In the romances, such beauty often takes the form of the *kalokagathia*, the indissoluble union of the good and the beautiful" (Boitani 127). Shakespeare, integrating both Greek and biblical ideals of beauty, shows the wonder and majesty of human transfiguration and transformation. He does this through his use of music. In Shakespeare's later works, music plays "an evocative, enchanting, celebrator, restorative role" (Boitani 129). Music signals and communicates the beauty of human reconciliation. It highlights the themes of transcendence, resurrection, and epiphany that imbue Shakespeare's later romances (Boitani 129-131). This is perhaps Boitani's most convincing argument because it is the one most directly based on evidence from the text. In his passages about music, Boitani beautifully illustrates how Christian themes have shaped Shakespeare's art as well as acknowledges how other schools of thinking such as Platonic philosophy and Greek mythology have also influenced Shakespeare's plays. Boitani points out the importance of considering the role of music without flattening the multi-dimensional nature of the text, which calls to mind that Shakespeare's plays cannot be analyzed through one optic.

Despite Boitani's in-depth knowledge of the plays, this work is not as scholarly as one would hope. At first glance, it may seem that Boitani views Shakespeare as a type of Dante (an artist who did have an explicit spiritual message), and his analysis seems to force a Christian interpretation on Shakespeare's later plays. However,

considering Boitani's purpose and audience, this is not a judicial assessment. In his preface, Boitani says that his work is to be like "a classroom step-by-step *lectura*" (Preface xiii). Thus, it would be unfair to read Boitani's slim volume of one-hundred and fifty-six pages the way one would read Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Boitani's purpose is not to provide a scholarly assessment of Shakespeare's later plays but to reflect upon a master playwright's literary development from a Christian worldview.

In general, Boitani amplifies how Shakespeare's art touches upon the human person's desire for the transcendent. His work is both engaging and accessible to all readers, and his easy-to-read summaries of the plays make this a useful source for high school educators. Although some of Boitani's arguments seem forced, those who have not been exposed to or would seek meditative reflection on Shakespeare's plays may find his work enjoyable and beneficial.

Sister Maria Thuan Nyugen, O.P., is a member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia. Before entering this community, she was a teacher at a Catholic grade school in Oklahoma City. She is currently in the M.A.T. program at Aquinas College and will be certified to teach secondary math and English.

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Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis. BY MICHAEL WARD

New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780199738700.

Review by COREY MAYNORD

Valiantly attempting to bring to light the hidden sources of inspiration used by C.S. Lewis in the renowned *Chronicles of Narnia*, Michael Ward, in his book *Planet Narnia*, shows the entire repertoire of Lewis's works to demonstrate striking evidence that the heavens of the Middle Ages were used as Lewis's outline for the *Chronicles* and other works. Using scarcely perceived clues and shadowed evidence, Ward introduces a side of Lewis that is at once intriguing and foreign to many modern scholars. Sharing a unique perspective with Lewis (both Anglican and philosopher), Ward is in a distinct vantage point to study and understand arguably the greatest writer of the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis.

Michael Ward is an Anglican Priest currently Chaplain of Oxford's St. Peter's College. Previously he has also served as chaplain to Peterhouse at the University of Cambridge. His most impressive feat, however, is that he was warden of the Kilns from 1996 to 1999. This played home to Lewis for a great duration of time stretching from his purchase of the property in 1932 up until his death in 1963. Ward is also a senior research-fellow at Blackfriars and co-edits the *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*. Ward also is professor of Apologetics at Houston Baptist University.

There are many ways in which one might attempt to understand this work of Ward. However, one only need go so far as the fifth chapter of his book, attempting to unify the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* with the ancient Sun-god Sol, to understand Ward's thesis. Using the poetry, writings, and personal library of Lewis, Ward makes a strong case for his thesis that C.S. Lewis was inspired by the seven heavens of the medieval world (popularly known as the Ptolemaic universe). Beginning with the *Magician's Nephew*, each book is structured around the medieval thought of a corresponding planet. For example, *The Horse and His Boy*, according to Ward, is correlated with the planet Mercury including themes of fire, metal, and light. This thesis is now shared by the likes of N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham (Church of England), who states the book is, "[u]tterly convincing and compelling", which is proudly displayed on the back jacket of the book. Indeed, Ward is scrupulous in his use of sources and in bringing them together with poise and scholarly maturity.

However, it is not clear that Ward has proven his case. Even within the fifth chapter, which this writer deems the most convinc-

ing, the evidence is often stretched past what is acceptable. Furthermore, in the opinion of this writer, the concept is in opposition to the intention of C.S. Lewis in writing the *Chronicles*, which were intended to be a children's series with Christianized themes pointing children in the direction of conversion. However, as Lewis was a scholar of the middle ages, it is no surprise that general themes from that era emerge. Ward also gives a beneficial account of this in his copious references to Lewis's *The Discarded Image*. This small but important work details much of medieval history and gives a good insight into the mind of Lewis on these topics.

Whilst *Planet Narnia* is often riveting and stirs the emotions, particularly those of excitement and intrigue, it is cyclic and monotonous, following the same general format throughout every chapter; however, it should be noted that this is a form many scholars use to stress the importance of their findings. In this author's opinion, the entire work could have easily been placed within the first four chapters of the work, reducing the book by half.

In toto, this scholarly work of Ward is an admirable and noble attempt to unlock the long-buried mystery of uniformity in the *Chronicles*. This writer perceives that the work will produce a conversation that will endure for many years to come. This work does serve an important role in that it is encouraging new-found attention to the works of C.S. Lewis, and Ward himself is doing much to convert a new generation of Lewis scholars. Michael Ward has attempted a celestial undertaking by going where no man has been before.

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Dr. Michael Ward

The Art of Robert Frost. BY TIM KENDALL

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780300118131.

Review by SISTER MARY LEO NORDMARK, O.P.

Despite a library's worth of analyses and criticisms, the works of Robert Frost remain some of the most ambiguous, impenetrable poetry ever written. Each reading reveals new depths, and yet his writings are not simply open to free interpretations. Frost had set meanings behind his poems, and spoke harshly of those who misunderstood his ulteriority: "I hate to think I cant [*sic*] count on people to know when I am being figurative and when I am not being" (Frost, qtd. in Kendall 4). In this hazardous mine field of hidden yet particular nuances, Professor Tim Kendall boldly steps forth to attempt a grasp on Frostian poetics. In his book *The Art of Robert Frost*, Kendall approaches the New Englander Frost from the perspective of an 'old' Englander. Kendall defends this supposed disadvantage with Frost's own words, that he "had never seen New England so clearly as when he had been in old England" (Kendall 10). As professor and head of the English department at the University of Exeter in Great Britain, Kendall is particularly known for his studies of Sylvia Plath, as well as his more recent books and talks on twentieth-century war poetry. Now venturing out with Frost, Kendall turns to the reader and echoes the poet's words, "You come too" (Frost, "The Pasture" ll.4, 8). His book is a path, a journey in which he guides us in Frost's footsteps in an attempt to reach the man himself.



Tim Kendall

Kendall's *The Art of Robert Frost* follows Frost chronologically throughout his first four collections of poetry, as well as a few of his later poems, in order to uncover the foundational movement of Frost's art. He provides over sixty poems with commentaries, as well as introductions to the individual collections. His book can therefore be read simply for the poems themselves, for critical commentaries, or for an overall look at Frost. Kendall alludes to this underlying artistry when he states the book's priorities, which are "first, to produce a reliable text [of Frost's poems,] and, second, to pursue the same journey which Frost claims for all great poetry: 'It begins in delight and ends in wisdom'" (11).

This journey is threaded along each commentary and throughout the entire book. For Kendall, the path is most discernible in Frost's revolutionary masterpiece, *North of Boston*. The collection introduces a dramatic shift in Frost's writing style. Where his first collection, *A Boy's Will*, focuses on poet solitude, *North of Boston* is by-and-large a collection of conversation poems, or what Frost called, "this book of people" (qtd. in Kendall 174). From "The Pasture" to "Good Hours," Frost seeks out companionship, only to discover the tragedy of a poetic vocation – "no matter how passionate his attempts at understanding, he must remain an outsider condemned only to enjoy brief and tantalizing glimpses of [others'] lives" (176). After the disappointing sales for his next collection, *Mountain Interval*, Frost was pulled back into good public standings with *New Hampshire*. In it, he takes on the role of editor,

adding footnotes directing the reader to other poems, "so that the effect is of a shared inspiration, the poems commenting on each other in ways which are mutually illuminating" (251). The poems themselves reflect the poet's longings for community. The last section of Kendall's collection, entitled "Later Poems," brings to the forefront the underlying dualism in Frost's poetry through descriptions of a kind of spiritual and poetic darkness and dryness. Finally, Kendall leaves the reader, with a Frostian smirk, in the disturbing conclusion, "Frost's most devastating joke on his readers is that he leaves us with reason to be fearful over whether, by becoming his disciples, we have been saved or damned" (383).

The task Kendall has undertaken in forming this book can easily be underestimated. While readers have seen many anthologies and many commentaries and many biographies, rarely has a critic undertaken an anthology and commentary that is its own biography. Not only does Kendall explicate each poem, but he manages to pick out the threads woven through the entire work, in a search to find the real Robert Frost. His brief commentaries do not attempt an exhaustive analysis of the poems, but rather seek to open the doors and invite the reader in to make his own journey through Frost, from delight to wisdom. In this way, Kendall balances the many nuances of Frost with his direct meaning – a feat few Frost scholars have achieved. This balance is essential for a proper analysis of Frost as a whole: "As far as Frost was concerned, the best 'literary appreciation' was that which traveled far enough, but no farther, and in the right direction. This he considers to be 'the ultimate refinement'" (Kendall 4). Kendall aptly guides the reader down the Frost-ed path, pointing out birches bent with ice and tufts of flowers spared from the scythe, oven-birds chirping and clumps of houses with a church, without distorting or stripping them of Frost's glistening snow. He can thus approach the fundamental concepts driving throughout Frost's poetry, such as the "pleasure of ulteriority" (Frost, qtd. in Kendall 3), the movement from solitude to community, a dualistic world, and the unique vocation of the poet.

Kendall's attempt to pick out Frost's threads is not without its detriments, however. He leaves himself open to interpretive criticism, and even mockery, by staking high claims – no less than a firm grasp on the spirit of Robert Frost. His own controlled selections conveniently exclude poems that might seem a distraction, such as the humorous "Departmental" or "One More Brevity." The only humor Kendall actually allows of Frost takes much digging to reach. With this anti-Frostian sobriety, Kendall interprets Frost's later poems as signs of a dying faith, an abandoning to hell and a despairing embrace of atheism. For example, Kendall reads the poem "Desert Places" as "an expression of the impossibility of faith – faith in God and, more desperately, faith in self" (351). This is a direct break from preceding scholarship, which analyzes the poem as an understanding of man's desperate need for God, precisely because of a self-distrust. But even this claim would be permissible, if Kendall did not get so wrapped up in pushing for Frost's despair that he forgot to analyze the poem. The commentary is almost en-

tirely a refutation of religious readings, without any thesis to further poetic discussion. It therefore acts as a distraction from the overall movement of his work – discovering the art of Robert Frost.

Despite its undue sobriety, Kendall's *The Art of Robert Frost* possesses incalculable value for the modern reader. His two goals are met, though perhaps not in the way in which he intended. For indeed, he has provided a reliable text of Frost's poems; and yet more, he has set off with us down overgrown paths and up snowy hills to find Frost himself. But during the journey that promises such beauty and delight, the reader sees the truth. As he plunges into the uncharted forest of Frost's ulteriority, seeking out the elusive

traces of the poet, his shoes become worn, his face frozen, and his coat torn; and when he finally reaches the man, Frost is no less of a mystery to the tired traveler. The difference is not in Frost, but in the reader, who has grown in wisdom, if not in understanding.

Sister Mary Leo Nordmark, O.P., was born in Portland, Oregon, and is now in Nashville as a sister of the Dominican Sister of St. Cecilia. She is currently studying for a bachelor's degree in English Education to teach grades 7–12. Sister is also in training for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for young children.



Authors (left to right): Sister Marie Geneviève Robertson, O.P., Sister Mary Leo Nordmark, O.P., Christa Nipper, Elizabeth Becker, Rose Di-auto, Sister Maria Thuan Nguyen, Corey Maynord, and Sister Susanna Edmunds, O.P.

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