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A Warning to the GOP

Deal W. Hudson | Column

11/24/08

In an op-ed published after the election, former Governor of New Jersey [Christine Todd Whitman](#) wrote, "Unless the Republican Party ends its self-imposed captivity to social fundamentalists, it will spend a long time in the political wilderness."

And who are these "social fundamentalists?" In Whitman's political lexicon, they are "the people who base their votes on such social issues as abortion, gay rights, and stem cell research."

When I read Whitman's column I had three thoughts:

1. Why is she putting the label "fundamentalist" on fellow Republican voters?
2. Does she know she's also talking about Catholic voters who consider non-negotiable issues before casting their ballot?
3. Is she asking Catholic and Evangelical voters who care deeply about these issues to leave the party and declare themselves independent?

It's remarkable that someone who considers herself a leader in the GOP would go out of her way to antagonize millions of voters who have been dependable Republicans for over three decades.

Whitman and the other GOP leaders who have made post-election stabs at social and religious conservatives had better start minding their manners. Whatever happened to the "Big Tent"? The Republican Party may find itself hemorrhaging its most zealous constituency.

Did Gov. Whitman not hear the [roar](#) that went through St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center the night Sarah Palin walked out on stage? Here is Whitman's take on Palin: "Her selection cost the ticket support among those moderate voters who saw it as a cynical sop to

social fundamentalists, reinforcing the impression that they control the party, with the party's consent."

Gov. Whitman knows very well that the pro-life, anti-gay marriage conservatives don't "control" the party -- such a claim will bring laughs from anyone familiar with the inner workings of the RNC.

Really, Whitman isn't worried about control; she wants an end to the pro-life plank of the party platform. She wants to take the pro-life pressure off GOP candidates, especially on the national ticket. If the GOP abandons its public stance against abortion and gay marriage, she thinks the "moderates" lost to Obama will return.

Whitman's numbers are telling, but they don't actually support her argument. She notes that Kerry won 9% more moderate voters than Bush while Obama stretched that number to 21% against McCain. But if moderates are turned off by "social fundamentalists," why would they have cast 6.4 million more votes for the evangelical George W. Bush? Kerry was just as liberal as Obama on social issues, and mainline Protestant McCain was more reticent than Bush in discussing them.

Whitman doesn't mention what is widely recognized as the major cause of the moderate swing to Obama: the economy. In exit polls, Obama led by nine points among the two-thirds of voters who said the economy was the most serious challenge facing the country. Add to that the [increased](#) voter registration and turn-out among Democrats, deep [discontent](#) with the GOP, Democrats' targeted appeals to sections of the Republican coalition, and you have the reasons for Obama's victory.

The moderates were not casting ballots against Sarah Palin or the social and religious conservatives she represents -- this election was not a referendum

on abortion or gay marriage. How could they be when John McCain almost never brought them up?

In reality, McCain's reticence on social issues contributed to the [fact](#) that 4.1 million religiously active voters did not go to the polls on Nov. 4. If there is a warning for the GOP from the presidential election results it is this. As Karl Rove noted, "Americans aren't suddenly going to church less; something was missing from the campaign to draw out the more religiously observant."

If Whitman has her way, something will soon be missing from the entire Republican Party that will keep religious conservatives -- or should I say "social fundamentalists"? -- from serious engagement in GOP politics. Whitman is calling out a potential voting [group](#) of 30,000,000 Catholic, Evangelical, Mormon, and Mainline Protestants.

In the final chapter of my recent book, [Onward, Christian Soldiers](#), I posed this question for the future,

"Will the Democrats Get Religion, Will the Republicans Keep It?" Obama won, in part, because he successfully courted religious [voters](#) -- the Democrats successfully found religion, at least for one election cycle.

Did the GOP lose religion? No. But when over four million religiously active voters stay home there was certainly what Evangelicals call "[backsliding](#)." If Gov. Whitman has her way, the GOP will offer voters nothing different from the Democrats on abortion and marriage. If that happens, the Republican Party can wave goodbye to religious conservatives.

Deal W. Hudson is the director of [InsideCatholic.com](#) and the author of [Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States](#) (Simon and Schuster).

The Last Embers of the Fire

Anthony Esolen | Column

11/24/08

We Catholics are commonly urged to "engage the culture"; not to flee for monasteries of our own making, but to work within the institutions of mass media, mass education, mass marketing, and mass entertainment to advance the banners of Christ, our King.

I do not wish to criticize those who toil at that thankless task. Nor will I suggest that their work will be futile; no true service of the Lord can be without fruit. But I do believe we have mistaken the signs of the times. We seek to engage a culture, when there is no culture to engage. Our task is rather to revive the memory of what a culture *is*.

If that declaration seems provocative, I ask you to consider that word "culture," and to cease using it to denote the habits and fads of the masses. For the "masses" do not produce culture. The people do, when they cherish and preserve and pass along to their descendants what is most dear to them: their memorials and feasts, their music and dances and rites of passage and of courtship; their know-how, their moral laws; most important, their worship. There is no culture without *cultus*. Without a common belief in God or the gods, you do not get ancient Athens and the Parthenon atop its rocky mount. You do not hear the Psalms in the synagogue. Michelangelo does not sculpt the *David* as a tribute to the patriots of his native Florence.

Do Americans now possess a culture? Perhaps the residue of one. American children used to be taught about the courage of the Father of our country, George Washington, as he crossed the icy Delaware River to surprise the Hessians at Trenton. Not now, I assure you. That event, and hundreds like it, that helped to define for us what we were as a people, has been forgotten. Which of us knows more than a single verse of one of our national songs? Whose heart beats with pride to hear the name of William Bradford, or John Winthrop?

Listen to these lines from a song that used to be called, simply, *America*:

I love thy rocks and rills,

Thy woods and templed hills;

My heart with rapture fills,

Like that above.

How many people could now even conceive of the sentiment expressed in them?

I have a book called *Barrett's Grammar*, published in 1854. The author, a self-promoter, purports to teach enterprising young people how to read Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and German. The book ends with chapters 2-10 of the Gospel of Matthew, in six columns, one for each of those languages, and one for English. It apparently sold 17,000 copies in its first edition -- an astounding number. In the back of the book are signatures of eminent people who supported the enterprise: President Fillmore, Henry Clay, John Calhoun, William Seward, Hamilton Fish, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and many more, from north and south, Whigs and Democrats, slaveholders and abolitionists. They were united in their devotion to both our Christian and classical heritage. That was then.

We used to make our own music. Where, now, are the songs that the generations of old sang? A few people listen to them as a hobby. A few more will listen to Stephen Foster or George Gershwin or Scott Joplin. But it is dismaying to consider what a hopping business the sale of sheet music was, a century ago. More dismaying to consider that for every person who bought it, there were probably ten others who played the fiddle or the guitar or the horn, who could not read

a measure. Gone, almost all of it, along with the local ballclubs, the block parties, the neighborhood school.

Gone, too, our pride in English and American authors. Nathaniel Hawthorne used to read Spenser's *Faerie Queene* aloud to his family in the evening. If that seems unusual, and no doubt most people could not afford an edition of Spenser, recall that Hawthorne himself became an eminent author whose works were eagerly read by Americans who could afford a book. But a novel like *The Marble Faun* is incomprehensible to us now. It presupposes a culture that is lost. We would have to know too much about the Renaissance and about classical Greece. James Fenimore Cooper, the companion of millions of schoolboys for a century, is almost as incomprehensible as Hawthorne. We can't read *The Last of the Mohicans*, because we don't know anything about the British campaign in upstate New York during the French and Indian War. The language would be too hard for us, too. Forget about Sir Walter Scott.

Our nation was *de facto*, if not also *de jure*, a Christian nation. But 2,000 years of Christian meditation upon the Scriptures -- and, yes, fighting about it, sometimes to the point of bloodshed -- have been forgotten. Girls used to wear locketts with a mustard seed encased within, as an allusion to the Gospels. Now we would be pleased to find one person in ten who could identify the allusion.

What do we love? For what would we gladly die? Joseph Pieper advises that the basis of culture is leisure -- the freedom to celebrate, to worship. But we have weekends, no holidays. Beyond that point at which we could provide for our families, we work for the sake of work, to stave off loneliness, to fill up the dead silence of a rootless life. We work, because if we do not work, we are nothing. It is work for bad reasons, and it is mostly bad work, to boot. It is not leavened by Sunday. It is not done in the shadow of eternity.

In this time -- a postcultural time of mediocrity and drabness -- the Church like a dragon snores upon her hoard of riches. It is the Catholic Church that can fan the last glowing embers of culture into a bright and glorious flame. In the coming months I should like to identify these embers, one by one, these truths or traditions or devotions that the Church, despite the best efforts of us all, has not *quite* forgotten. The first, and the most important, shall be this: *It is a good thing to remember.*

Anthony Esolen is a professor of English at Providence College and a senior editor for [Touchstone](#) magazine. His latest book is [The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization](#) (Regnery).

Thank You, Lord, May We Have Another?

John Zmirak | Column

11/25/08

This year we Americans approach Thanksgiving with ruffled feathers and quivering wattles, alert for the edge of the axe. Our country's 50-year joyride has hit the wall, and we wait for the "jaws of life." The imaginary wealth that puffed up our investments and inflated our national salary has blown like a mist back to Cloud Cuckoo Land. Apparently, a country really *can't* go on forever manufacturing nothing but weapons, funding shopping sprees with IOUs and expecting the government to wipe every child's nose. In the long run, you run out of Kleenex.

As Rudyard Kipling, who was right about nearly everything, once [wrote](#):

In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all,

By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;

But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,

And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "*If you don't work you die.*"

"Work" in Kipling's sense entailed producing things, and "thrift," as that good Victorian would have used it, meant refraining from purchasing stuff until one had accumulated the money. Conservatives used to understand such things, just as liberals once treasured liberty. As we watch the transition of power from the Pyramid Schemers to the Diversity Police, we might stop to wonder at what point we lost our collective minds. Offhand, I'd say it was around the time a music critic described Barry Gibb of the Bee Gees as a genius.

The depth of our economic collapse is still to be measured in shattered retirement fantasies, deferred dreams of college, second jobs, double-shifts, and bitter squabbling over scraps. I don't envy our incoming president, the one-term senator and longtime

"community organizer" who promised us change. Soon enough, millions may very well be cadging spare change from strangers, insulating our underheated homes with quarterly 401(k) statements, and growing potatoes in the yard.

But at least we put an end to Evil, spread freedom throughout the Islamic world, balanced the federal budget, left no child behind, preserved our constitutional liberties, captured Osama bin Laden, reversed *Roe v. Wade*, and maintained a modest foreign policy. They can't take that away from me.

Now I look forward eagerly to universal health insurance, free scholarships for the needy, the return of our troops, the disarmament of Iran, victory in Afghanistan, and the melting of racial hostilities into a single, sustained national chorus of Kumbaya. Best of luck with all that, [Barry](#).

If we want some grounds for gratitude, we won't find it in the news.

Perhaps we can find it in church. In *the Church*, I mean -- where conditions have ceased to be catastrophic, and now are merely mixed. Looking on the bright side, there were bishops all over the country who spoke out clearly on the sanctity of life. The orders that led the heresies of the 1970s are quickly dying off, while new groups like the [Fraternity of St. Peter](#) are so overwhelmed with applicants they actually have the luxury of screening them. Like Solzhenitsyn blinking back tears in Moscow, the classical liturgy of the West has returned from exile and is spreading the graces of reverence and contemplation to younger generations. Where Catholic schools are closing, homeschoolers are closing ranks, reclaiming the stern task parents once felt safe delegating: the education of their children.

At last, when we're done sifting through all the tainted rubble of our mistakes, it is things like this that are left us, the things that God gave us and has not taken away. The love that's woven of self-sacrifice for a cause, a spouse, or a son. The exquisite tapestry of natural Creation, whose vitality so far resists our waste and willfulness. The marble altars and stained glass left us by our forefathers. The symphonies and polyphony great men composed, the novels and poems they sweated to write -- let us blow off the dust and revere them. The enclaves of freedom and order remaining in America, and what real wealth outlasts the winnowing. The gorgeous Art Deco lobbies of New York City, the well-ordered farms of Iowa, the missions still standing in San Francisco, the libraries (if not always the faculties) of our Catholic colleges.

None of this have we earned, but we have received it. And we can pass it on, if we make the effort. We must do a better job. We've lost the luxury of laziness, spent all our surplus and eaten half the seed corn. We are entering the lean years. It's no time for grandiose

fantasies, or projects of mass redemption. (You want change? Start with that diaper.) Like our countrymen in New Orleans after Katrina, we stand in the wake of a flood that washed away our vanities, our necessities. We squint in search of a rainbow.

Tough times will test spoiled souls like mine, and some of us will snap. We've all got to pray for each other, and for ourselves. And for the virtue of forbearance. We are walking the stony path our grandparents trod, through the thorns that made them the "Greatest Generation." In other countries, the Great Depression drove men to war and genocide. But not in America. The memory of that is grounds for hope. And for that I give thanks.

John Zmirak is author, most recently, of the graphic novel [The Grand Inquisitor](#) and is Writer-in-Residence at [Thomas More College](#) in New Hampshire. He writes weekly for [InsideCatholic.com](#).

Monsters, Moralists, and Happiness

Mark P. Shea | Column

11/26/08

Here's a recent piece that asks the musical question, "Hitchcock: Monster or moralist?"

In moments like that I most miss the common sense of G. K. Chesterton, who wrote:

The modern world is not evil; in some ways the modern world is far too good. It is full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone.

We live in a world that has taken the virtue of catholicity from the Church -- which really does have room for an astonishing variety of fish in the Great Net -- and made it the *only* virtue. In so doing, it has created what Pope Benedict XVI calls the "dictatorship of relativism." The basic notion behind the dictatorship of relativism is that all religions and philosophies are equally superior to the Catholic faith.

Meanwhile, partly in reaction to the dictatorship of relativism, and partly due to the long Puritan heritage of the English-speaking world, we have also developed the astonishing notion that a moralist is automatically a moral person, which is exactly like saying that somebody who complains about loud music is Beethoven.

And so we arrive at the incredible spectacle of a newspaper article, written by grown-ups, that asks:

Was Alfred Hitchcock a sexual monster? Or was he, as the French film makers Rohmer and Chabrol once

claimed, a moralist whose films are steeped in Roman Catholic themes?

Why on earth is this an either/or question? Caravaggio was a great artist and moralist steeped in Roman Catholic themes. He was also a very nasty man. St. Augustine was a profound moralist who prayed, "O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet."

Some of history's greatest moralists have been monsters, and vice versa. Osama bin Laden is a rigid moralist with very definite views of sexual purity. Communism was an intensely moralistic system with very definite views about social justice. Cromwell was profoundly moralistic as he slaughtered what he considered to be the inferior and lazy Irish Romanists at Drogheda. Robespierre the Incorruptible conducted the Reign of Terror in the utter assurance of his righteousness.

I'm not saying I think Hitchcock was a moralist or a monster. I have no interest in the question. I'm simply saying that anybody who proposes these things as two utterly irreconcilable extremes is a fool who knows nothing of human beings, nor of the true nature of evil.

Postmodernity has forgotten that evil is always parasitic on the good. Nobody wills evil ends. Everybody, including the devil himself, aims for some good (existence, power, intelligence, etc). What makes their actions evil is not the end they seek but the disordered way in which they try to achieve it.

A moral illiterate hears that and interprets it to mean, "Even evil people mean well." If the moral illiterate is feeling warm and fuzzy, he applies this by saying stuff like, "See! Even the serial killer is just a little boy who meant well. What he needs is understanding!" If on the other hand the moral

illiterate is more in the mood for polemics, he responds with, "So, you're saying that Hitler meant well! Next thing, you'll be telling us the Jews had it coming!"

Both these approaches are, as I note, an *illiterate* reading of the Christian moral tradition.

Here's the deal: A thief seeks a good end -- wealth. It does not follow that he "means well" when he steals. Anybody can seek a good end. In fact, everybody does. In *fact*, nobody can *not* will a good end. Which is to say, nobody can not will their own happiness. Even the suicide seeks happiness (peace, relief from suffering, etc). But the suicide, like the thief, tries to achieve that end by immoral means. This is true all the way to the bottom of sin. That great icon of evil Hitler was, like all monsters, aiming for various good ends he thought would bring him happiness (power, order, etc.). However, he sought these things in a profoundly disordered way via murder on a massive scale. He did not "mean well." He meant to steal good ends and attain happiness by profoundly evil means.

Indeed, it is precisely because they are in the business of shouting down their screaming consciences that deeply evil people can be profoundly moralistic. They can go on and on about the goodness of their ends exactly *because* they know in their hearts that they are using deeply evil means to try to achieve those ends. Just listen to the Nazi agitprop on the "decadent Jew."

It's all about moralism, even as it's working itself into a frenzy of mass murder. Moralism untethered from the justice and *caritas* of God -- that is, from the rightly ordered pursuit of good ends -- is the most powerful engine of destruction, evil, and death in the universe. The devil himself is a strict moralist, first tempting you and then relentlessly accusing you of sin like a school marm every time you slip up. Temptation and accusation are his two principal weapons.

As long as we struggle with concupiscence in the flesh, we will continue to be the sort of creature who is, at once, something of a monster and something of a moralist. Neither can deliver the happiness we are made to seek. Only the intervention of the grace of God in Christ can lift us off that karmic wheel and into the happy life of the Trinity where we can see and (please God) live what vastly transcends mere moralism: sanctity.

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Into the Purple

David Warren | Column

11/26/08

Among my most vivid memories of my father is being with him in Toronto, nearly 40 years ago, in the moments before he delivered a speech to a design convention. We were having coffee in the Colonnade, my beloved father and I. He had of course written his speech, which was supposed to be about trends in industrial design. That's what had been advertised -- plausibly, for Jim Warren was, at the time, a practicing industrial designer, with foreign and teaching experience. He was a former president of the Association of Canadian Industrial Designers, just the sort of guy to tell you about design trends. There would be an audience of, as he put it, "Self-consciously modern and progressive people, entirely in favor of trends in design." They would be easy to please.

My father had just decided to throw his speech out. It had suddenly struck him that design trends were garbage. There is good design, and there is bad design -- the trends may swing either way. But more to the point, there was a world out there, full of people buried under consumerist junk. We were at the peak of the hippie movement, of "turn on, tune in, drop out." Papa was no kind of hippie -- spitfire pilots from World War II make unconvincing hippies. Yet he was countercultural.

He wanted to say that we should forget about trends, in design or anything. We need to think about truth instead. We need to think about questions of life and death. We need to take responsibility for the world we have inherited and are leaving to our children. We need to get into a position where we can answer for ourselves, where we have thought through what is important and discarded what is not important. That was what he wanted to talk about, and as his speech would be starting in another few minutes, he would wing it.

I also spoke with my father after the speech; he was fully aware it had been a disaster. He had been earnest and articulate, but one could actually feel the

annoyance of the audience at being subjected to a sermon about the good, the true, and the beautiful -- when they had come to hear about design trends.

I said the speech was a disaster, but I was impressed that Papa didn't care. He was actually pleased with what he had done. He had said what he wanted to say, and if nobody much liked that, then tough for them.

This behavior was very much in character. It helps to explain why, at various points in my childhood, our family was rather poor. My father had a gift for finding new jobs -- which was good, for he also had a gift for losing old ones. Indeed, he had the wonderful gift for complete candor, as I was reminded recently reading one of his old CVs, in which he frankly reported how each of his several previous adventures in conventional employment had come to an end.

The most impressive entry was where he explained that he had not, in fact, been fired from his last job, at the Smith & Stone company. He had, however, felt obliged to quit, after making a silly miscalculation on some industrial tooling that had cost the company a few hundred dollars. Typically, that was for a product -- a polyethylene bicycle carrier -- that went on to make a few million dollars when the company sold the rights to it around the world. And typically, my father's share in that brilliant success, the direct result of his own original handiwork and refusals to compromise, was zero.

Also, typically, he never whined about that. In all my memory of him, there is not a single instance when he regretted what might have been. To the end, he accepted fate, and at the end, when I last saw him struggling to breathe in that little room in St. Joseph's

Hospital, and our eyes met, there was a look of benignity in his face such as I cannot describe.

I have stressed the paradox of victory in defeat, but it would not be fair to my father's memory to depict him only as a Don Quixote, tilting at windmills, even if that is what I most admired. He was no respecter of rank in persons, but rather a stalwart friend and a man for all seasons. Most boys rebel against their fathers at some stage; I failed to do so. There was actually no moment in my life when he was not my hero -- and that is not grief speaking; I know it to be true. He was a man who was very gentle and kindly, droll and amusing, instinctively gallant, who loved to act a part. A man forgiving of faults and slights, dutiful, unselfish; indeed, recklessly generous, even to total strangers. A family man, an ardently loving husband and father. He had a quick temper, too, which disappeared as he grew older, and the power to shut everyone out when he was reading or thinking; and likewise, the power to listen when you came to him -- to you, and only to you.

My father was not religious by disposition, though he was by implication. He was of a generation that was shy to speak about last things. There were many subjects he never mentioned, and yet his views could be known.

A week ago, three days before his death, I gave him a very Catholic crucifix. He could not speak in words anymore, but he chose to wear it, in his last moments of lucidity, and was still wearing it at his death. The last photograph taken of him, through my sister's Blackberry, shows not only the cross, but the face of the man who wore it. A painter might call it a face of St. Simeon:

Lord, the Roman hyacinths are blooming in bowls
and

The winter sun creeps by the snow hills;

The stubborn season had made stand.

My life is light, waiting for the death wind,

Like a feather on the back of my hand

Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,

According to thy word.

Death is the end of the road in this world, as it crosses the frontier into the world to come -- the world we see only in distant glimpses -- the purple in the mountains, far far away.

There was a moment in the mountains of Abbottabad, Pakistan, when I was very young, about six. My father gave me a plum from the market, in its deep purple, freshly washed. I beheld it: I thought there was magic in my father's gift. The color was that of the deep dusking sky. When I bit into it, I thought it must be a plum from heaven -- the original and perfect, immortal.

Christ, you will recall, was nailed up with a couple of thieves. One of them railed at Him, saying, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." The other rebuked the first, saying, "Dost not thou fear God?" And then this good thief asked of Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

This event happened about the sixth hour -- midday, and yet darkness was descending over the hills of Judea, for the Light was passing out of this world. That purple.

I will honor my father, in the spirit of the commandment. And I will remember the answer of Jesus from the Cross, given to a sinner, as the darkness encroached upon them: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

David Warren is a Canadian journalist who writes mostly on international affairs. His Web site is www.davidwarrenonline.com.

Ten Things for Which I'm Grateful This Thanksgiving

Deal W. Hudson | Column

11/27/08

With the long and exhausting political season we've just had, it's easy to forget to offer thanks for the many blessings God has given us. Here are ten things about InsideCatholic.com's first year for which I'm grateful. Please feel free to add your own causes for gratitude in the comments section (about anything, not just the Web site!):

1. I am thankful to commenters for providing a daily occasion for self-examination and growth in humility. I always look forward to the little -- and often ingenious -- zingers waiting for me in the comments section. It helps me to see myself as others see me, which is not a bad spiritual exercise.

2. I am thankful to Bill Donohue for having as much angst as I do after reading the morning news. Just about the time I am wondering if the world is going to spin off its axis, I get a Can-you-believe-this? e-mail from Bill who just read the same damn nonsense in the *New York Times*.

3. I am thankful to Brian and Margaret for editing out all my heated rhetoric and over-the-top verbal shots. They say you will always regret what is said in the heat of battle, and the same is true of a writing frenzy. Calmer heads prevail on the editorial staff of InsideCatholic, saving me from sounding like a caricature of the "hyper-conservative Catholic."

4. I am grateful to [Bob Reilly](#) for continuing to [expand my musical horizons](#), even if he has a deaf ear to Korngold. Bob likes counterpoint, and lots of it. If a melody goes on for more than four bars, he starts looking at his watch. One day, though, a melody from Korngold, Delius, Finzi, Vaughn-Williams, or Richard Rodgers will penetrate all that brain matter and knock him off his feet.

5. I am thankful for Kate Wicker's [article on breastfeeding](#) for creating a lively -- and lengthy --

discussion in the comments section. I knew the moment I saw the cover photo that everyone would read the article through its lens -- and oh boy, was that a busy and amusing day on the site!

6. I am grateful to the game of golf for its constant reminder that I'm in the right profession. I have dreamed the middle-aged male dream of competing against the pros, but every time I think my game has risen a notch, the wind blows the sand back in my face, and I'm just another kid with a stick and a ball having fun.

7. I am thankful for my 2004 Cadillac CTS for providing a quiet place away from home and dogs to hold radio interviews. Since Daisy, our Goldendoodle, joined forces with Drumstick, our Westie, the sound of barking permeates the house at regular intervals, especially when provoked (as when anyone walks down the sidewalk).

8. I am grateful to Mark Shea for drawing fire away from me and my unnecessarily earnest political columns. I thought *I* had the gift for finding the hot buttons of my interlocutors. Then I started [reading Mark regularly](#) . . . he makes me wonder if I'm holding back some primordial fire that I'm afraid to unleash.

9. I am grateful to Rev. Frank Pavone for letting me look at the playlist on his iPod. I promised never to reveal what I saw, but I *will* say that we share the same bad taste in old pop music. Still, I'm glad to know that, for all his reputation for fire and brimstone, Father Pavone has a sentimental streak.

10. I am grateful to Zoe and [her food activism](#) for inspiring me to reaffirm my commitment to Big Macs. The very idea of "slow food" gives me the creeps. Purgatory will surely require me to sit at dinner with Zoe and her friends, watching them take one hour to eat the salad, cutting the lettuce into little pieces,

eating and chewing them one by one. Thus will my vice of impatience be burned away by the time dessert is served.

To all who visit InsideCatholic.com, read our articles, follow the blog, and leave your thoughts and comments, I wish you and yours a blessed Thanksgiving.

Deal W. Hudson is the director of InsideCatholic.com and the author of [Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States](#) (Simon and Schuster).

American Anti-Catholicism

Rev. Dwight Longenecker | Column

11/28/08

Last week, Greenville, South Carolina -- the buckle of the Bible Belt -- made national headlines for the second time in two weeks. The [first story](#) involved Rev. Jay Scott Newman and his comments in his parish bulletin about Catholics who voted for Obama. The second was the [announcement](#) that the fundamentalist Bob Jones University had issued a public apology for its racist past.

I happen to be connected to both stories: I'm on the staff of Father Newman's parish, and I'm a graduate of Bob Jones University. How I managed to exit the school in 1978 and return to Greenville nearly 30 years later to be ordained as a Catholic priest is a story in itself, but the coincidence of the two news items in two weeks highlighted the question of anti-Catholicism in our country: Father Newman's statement elicited vitriolic anti-Church statements in some cases, and Bob Jones University is infamous not only for its past racism but its strong anti-Catholicism.

I was a student at Bob Jones University in the mid 1970s when the first black student was admitted. I was there in 1978 when Pope Paul VI died, and I heard Dr. Bob Jones Jr. speak his now famous words: "Pope Paul VI, archpriest of Satan, a deceiver and an anti-Christ, has, like Judas, gone to his own place." I remember students who were training to be Baptist preachers returning to campus bragging that they had visited a local Catholic church and spit in the font, then prayed for deliverance for all the devil worshippers who went there every Sunday. Every year we had the chance to hear Ian Paisley, the fiery Northern Irish Presbyterian preacher, deliver blistering attacks on Catholics during his annual American preaching tour.

This was the stuff of old-fashioned Protestant anti-Catholicism, rooted in centuries of misinformation, black propaganda, and sincere misunderstanding. This was the anti-Catholicism in which the pope was the anti-Christ riding on the back of that great whore of

Babylon, the Catholic Church. It fed on Lorraine Boettner's *Roman Catholicism*, that classic collection of calumnies, lies, and half-truths. As fundamentalist youths, we read the sensational Jack Chick tracts. These riveting comic books portrayed the Catholic Church as a pagan, cookie-worshipping cult, complete with crazed priests, murderous popes, and the bodies of illegitimate babies buried in tunnels under convents. It was juicy stuff -- completely paranoid and ridiculous, but juicy nonetheless.

[In this ecumenical age, such traditional Protestant bigotry](#) is dying out. More and more, Evangelical Christians are coming to realize that the "old old story" of God's love for a dying world and the saving work of Christ on the cross is now most fully and vigorously told by the modern Catholic Church, as so many of their own churches are buying into the secular, morally indifferent agenda of the world around them. Marcus Grodi's *Coming Home Network* reports an increasing number of Evangelical pastors coming into the Catholic Church; it might not be long before Bob Jones University itself issues a statement apologizing for its anti-Catholicism.

Does this mean that anti-Catholicism is dead? I fear not. While the old-fashioned Protestant variety is dying out, a new and equally virulent form is rising up, evident in three different manifestations.

The first is from people who actually call themselves Catholics. The dissenting Catholics in our church have, for the most part, worn a friendly face. They couch their disobedience in polite terminology. They "respectfully disagree with the Holy Father," or "they are listening carefully to the teaching of the Church, but they are also listening carefully to their own consciences." This deceitful dissent will soon die out: As the radical Catholics see their own agendas

withering for lack of interest, and as they observe the increasing youth and influence of the faithful Catholics, their true colors will be revealed. If they have not done so already, those dissenting Catholics will remove themselves from the Church. Their failure will focus in anger, their frustration will surface as rage, and they will move from being dissenting Catholics to outspoken critics of the Church.

The second category of the new anti-Catholicism will involve a fresh kind of Protestant revolt. The new Protestant anti-Catholicism will not be from backwoods preachers, with their colorful imagery of whores and dragons, but from the urbane practitioners of suburban, liberal Protestantism. The liberal Protestants who endorse women's ordination, homosexual "marriage," and the whole liberal agenda will become increasingly impatient with Catholicism. Already they sneer at a religion that "demands blind obedience to a medieval monarch." Their frustration at what they perceive to be the Catholic Church's stance on contraception, abortion, women's rights, and homosexuality will lead them to call for Catholicism to be restrained because it is divisive and fosters hate and intolerance, opposing the "New World Order."

In his 2003 book [The New Anti-Catholicism](#), Philip Jenkins describes the third purveyor of the new anti-Catholicism: the secular hedonistic population in the United States. Jenkins recounts a few incidents to illustrate the point: In New York in 1989, a gay activist group demonstrated in St. Patrick's Cathedral. They interrupted Mass, forcing the archbishop to abandon his sermon, and threw condoms around the church and desecrated the Host. In 2000, twenty ski-masked members of a "feminist autonomous collective" interrupted Mass in Montreal. They spray-painted

slogans on the walls of the church and altar, tried to overturn the tabernacle, stuck used sanitary napkins on pictures and walls, threw condoms around the sanctuary, and chanted pro-abortion slogans.

These are a few of the most extreme examples, but Jenkins shows how the anti-Catholic attitude that fuels these extreme protests is woven, both subtly and blatantly, throughout the American media and educational culture. Jenkins isn't a Catholic, so his work is all the more powerful for its objective position.

In *Tortured for Christ*, his account of imprisonment under the Communist regime in Romania, Protestant pastor Richard Wurmbrandt observed that, in prison, there were no divisions between Catholics and Protestants -- all were simply Christian brothers. As our society shifts and introduces new forms of anti-Catholicism, Catholics should be prepared to forge new alliances. We may find that our best friends used to be our worst enemies.

Conservative Evangelicals share many of the same values that we as Catholics have always proclaimed. We need to be open-minded, build bridges with those who distrust us, and work together in the fight for a culture of life. Who knows -- Bob Jones University might yet introduce a "Fellowship of Bob Jones Catholics," and I could be their chaplain.

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The Good Dr. Donne

Tom Howard | Column

11/28/08

Beethoven, Shakespeare, and the rest -- how we extol them. "Oh, I do love his 7th Symphony so much!" Or, "Oh yes -- 'To be or not to be. . .' -- so powerful. So immeasurably profound."

The thing about all of this, of course, is that once one has graduated from school, the chances of one's returning to the works of these gentlemen are sparse. When was the last time (even you music lovers who pride yourselves on having got beyond the golden oldies) that you listened -- really *listened* --to Beethoven's Fifth?

In any event, among such works we would certainly find John Donne's sonnet, "Batter my heart, three-personed God." When was the last time you mulled *that* one over? It offers the occasion for some salutary and brisk self-examination -- an exercise that ought to be on the (daily?) agenda of any good Catholic.

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You

As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;

What's this? Ah: I am so besotted and slatternly that Your efforts to flag me down are far too gentle. You merely knock at my door, or breathe on me like a wooer, or illumine me with comfortable words from Scripture, or try to patch things up here and there. You are going to have to hammer on me if I am ever to start from my habitual torpor. (It's worth noting here that a very sharp awareness of one's own sluggishness is at work in these sentiments. Donne, not being modern, thinks of his condition as sinful unless grace intervenes. He is not merely "broken": he's guilty of the sin of Sloth -- one of the Seven Deadly ones, remember.)

That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend

Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

The penitent warms to his task here. Dear Lord, don't merely knock: You are going to have to break down the door and throw me down (very brisk stuff here). Don't just breathe: *blow*. And as for shining -- it will take the fire of Your Love to rouse me. As a matter of fact, my condition is so pitiful that You are going to have to make me new. Tinkering won't quite do the trick.

If one is at this point inclined to palliate things by remarking that, well, of course Donne was a Puritan -- he wasn't. He was a very Catholic-minded Anglican. The Puritans hadn't tipped their hand yet.

I, like a usurped town to another due,

Labor to admit You, but oh! to no end;

I am like a town that owes fealty to God but that has been conquered by a usurper and owes its taxes to the wrong lord now. In other words, without Your grace, Sin has me in thrall. I make attempts to let You in, but it's useless. I'm too feeble. Has any one of us ever found it a bit wearying even to pray? Or to keep our minds focused at Mass? There's so much else beside *the Lord* that crowds our thoughts

Reason, Your viceroy in me, me should defend,

But is captived and proves weak or untrue.

Sheer Reason, Your good gift, which should be ruling my thoughts and behavior in Your name, turns out itself to be in chains and unable to save the situation. It can even deceive me. It looks as though Grace is called for.

Yet dearly I love You, and would be loved fain,

But am betrothed unto Your enemy.

Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,

The sad thing is that, in spite of all, I do love You, and want very much to be loved by You, but I seem to have betrothed myself to Satan. Again -- violent sentiments these; but Donne was speaking from a mind saturated with Scripture, the Fathers, and the saints. Surely it's not quite that bad? But we need to consult sources more ancient than modern counseling if we are ever to make it to the dread precincts of holiness. Well then, grant me a divorce from this false spouse; undo my shackles; break the knot with which I have fastened myself to the enemy.

Take me to You, imprison me, for I,

Except You enthrall me, never shall be free;

Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

Heigh-ho. Prison again? Yes. It's the ancient and rich notion that bondage to God is the very, and only, state of true freedom. All else is illusion, like an *ignis fatuus* luring us mortals eventually into the dungeons of hell.

But what's this about chastity? Well, sin has fouled me. I have lost my virginity a thousand times over -- not only in Eden, but by choices without number that I myself have made. And unless You, Lord, purify and ravish me with the fire of your Love (remember Bernini's sculpture of St. Teresa?), I will never be pure enough to enter with Holy Church into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

A memorable sonnet, to be sure. But also, perhaps, a jolting reminder of the ancient and never-outdated exercise of fierce self-examination.

Tom Howard is retired from 40 years of teaching English in private schools, college, and seminary in England and America.

The People behind the Politics

Joseph Susanka | Review

11/22/08

The immigration debate is singularly polarizing in our political climate today. From cries for "compassionately conservative" acceptance of those immigrants doing the jobs "Americans won't do," to Tom Tancredo's *insistence* that "the pope's immigration comments may have less to do with spreading the gospel than they do about recruiting new members of the church," the positions have grown so extreme that there no longer seems room for honest debate. Those uncomfortable with either the "open borders and amnesty" or "deportation and walls" positions often find themselves without a political home, unable to engage an issue they feel calls for more ethical nuance.

And yet, this is exactly the inflammatory backdrop writer/director Thomas McCarthy chose for his latest offering, *The Visitor*, a quiet little film about a quiet little man overcome by a quiet, deep suffering. Walter Vale, a professor of economics at an anonymous Connecticut college, is struggling to cope with the passing of his dearly beloved wife. Affected by her death in ways that he seems unable to comprehend, he has allowed a crippling apathy to steal over his waning years. Delivering his lectures in a dull, disengaged monotone, ignoring requests for assistance from his students, he is a man going through the motions.

When Walter is called upon to deliver a presentation at a New York conference, he plans to head to his long-dormant apartment in the city and spend the evenings listening to music and ostensibly working on his new book. But the apartment is nowhere near as dormant as he was expecting; Tarek Khalil, a young Syrian musician, and Zainab, his Senegalese girlfriend, have been squatting there for months. This is too much even for mundane, mild-mannered Walter to take, and his first instinct is to demand they leave immediately; but once he discovers that his insistence will relegate them to a life on the street, he relents.

Walter's unusual gesture of generosity quickly bears fruit, as his unexpected houseguests slowly begin pulling him out of his apathetic shell. Zainab cooks and cleans, the three of them attend the night club where Tarek and his musician friends play, and the young Syrian even begins to teach Walter the *djembe* (a skin-covered, ethnic drum that is played with the bare hands).

But this new-found energy and hope is brought crashing down when Tarek is accosted in the New York subway and taken into custody. Walter assumes that the entire affair is simply an honest mistake, but he soon discovers that Tarek is an illegal alien who applied for and was denied political asylum several years ago, and is now in very real danger of being extradited. To make matters worse, Zainab (also an illegal) is hysterical with concern, yet unable to visit Tarek for fear of being caught herself. And now Tarek's mother, Mouna (illegal herself), arrives unannounced to investigate her son's sudden radio silence.

Able to travel to and from the detention center uninhibited, the professor becomes Tarek's link to the outside world, bringing him encouragement and love from his family and friends, as well as hope for his release. As the situation grows increasingly frustrating, Walter begins to recognize the transformative power of serving rather than being served, and of striving to live a meaningful life rather than settling for a passive existence. Walter's burgeoning transformation coincides with Mouna's appearance; his growing attachment to her provides some of the film's most unexpectedly charming moments.

McCarthy's extraordinary abilities as a writer and director, displayed so marvelously in his first film (the subtle and charmingly quirky *Station Agent*), are certainly put to the test here. A story that revolves so

essentially about the topic of illegal immigration brings some significant built-in difficulties, and one might well wonder if his quiet storytelling-style would survive such a politically charged topic. Thankfully, those doubts are largely ill-founded here; whereas most directors build their political films around the message (see "Stone, Oliver"), McCarthy is more focused on his characters than on their ideologies. And while there are a number of moments where he veers into pontification -- for instance, using the flag, Ellis Island, or the Statue of Liberty in ways that could be considered either snidely sarcastic or, at the very least, unhelpful -- the majority of the time he stubbornly refuses to deal with the public-policy implications of his story.

Much like his work on *The Station Agent*, McCarthy is far more interested in the particular people he is creating than in the stereotypes or political principles they may embody. And while he is not above occasional commentary, the majority of the film is evenhanded and fair-minded, if not without bias. Interestingly, McCarthy does not lay the blame for Tarek's problems squarely on the failure of the American immigration system, as one might have expected from standard Hollywood fare. Walter's ardent soapbox moments decrying the unfairness of Tarek's imprisonment are cast against Mouna's revelation of another facet of her

son's predicament, casting a more complex light on his situation.

While the film is not without its flaws -- like *The Station Agent*, its ending is almost brutally abrupt, leaving the audience with the unsatisfying image of Walter pounding away on his *djembe* in the bowels of the New York subway -- it is its willingness to confront the complexity of its story that really resonates. McCarthy's amazing grasp over the quiet yet complex details of his characters is precisely what makes his work so compelling. It is these same details, far more than the broad strokes of the story, that make the film a fascinating addition to the debate. It serves as the cinematic reminder of the words of Archbishop Charles Chaput, who speaks of the "bitterly concrete" details of this complex issue, and [reminds us](#) that "as Catholics, we need to think seriously about the human cost of the continuing immigration debate." And it is McCarthy's stubborn insistence on the accurate portrayal of the story's human aspects that makes it so truly memorable.

Joseph Susanka writes from Lander, Wyoming.

Vampire Love

Joseph Lickona | Review

11/25/08

It's hard to write about *Twilight* without writing about the hysteria. But I'll leave the Googling to you, dear readers, and keep to what I actually saw: girls lined up, a couple hundred deep, at around 9:15 last Thursday night -- for the midnight show on Friday. Lots of *Twilight* T-shirts, a few reading "Team Edward." Another read "Fang Banger," and adorned the top of a girl whose neck bore a couple of ersatz bite wounds. Nothing too over-the-top, but still -- why?

Presumably, because they had read and adored the book upon which the film is based, along with its three sequels. And why did they adore the books? Because they were on Team Edward.

But before we get to Edward, let's pause a moment over the object of his affection: Bella Swan, played by Kristen Stewart. *Twilight* director Catherine Hardwicke told *New York Magazine*, "We first had Kristen, because I fell madly in love with her in *Into the Wild*. I thought she was amazing and so expressive of that longing and that desire." Amen, Ms. Hardwicke. Stewart's turn as a trailer-park beauty who falls hard for rambling pilgrim Chris McCandless was so affecting as to be unnerving. She looked at him with such pure hunger: hunger for love, for affection, for welcome attention, for what he was and what he could offer her. He was this beautiful thing come into her life, and she responded by offering herself in the best, most complete way she knew: lying down and taking her clothes off. When McCandless declined (after a moment of understandable hesitation), she wasn't so much hurt and humiliated as she was baffled and sad: *Isn't this what men want?*

Well, yes, it is -- unless your man is a pilgrim who understands that the human connection brought on by sex will compromise his freedom. Or, as in the case of *Twilight*, unless your man is a vampire. In that case, he doesn't want to have sex with you; he wants to suck your blood until you die. But the character of the desire is the same: overwhelming in its ferocity, all-consuming.

He wants it more than anything in the world, because, don't you know, you're special. You're the one that he loves. And the real wonder of it is this: That's the same reason he doesn't take what he wants.

Why be on Team Edward? Because of the way that he loves you -- er, I mean, the way he loves Bella. For Edward, Bella *is* special: He can read every mind he encounters, but he can't read hers. Her secret does not lie open to him, because she has not revealed herself. (Hello, mystical sexual metaphors!) He's got superpowers, so he not only makes her *feel* protected, he really protects her -- from a runaway van, from dirty-minded guys, and best of all -- with nothing more to aid him than the strength of his love -- from his own desire.

According to the literature, modern sex is complicated. Sometimes it's just rubbing together and feeling good; sometimes it's deeply meaningful; sometimes it's all sorts of things. In such a world, having your hero moan, "I want you so badly; I still don't know if I can control myself" is downright strange. *Dude, what's your damage?* But when you make your lover a vampire, when you make the desire for sex into a desire to kill -- well now. Suddenly, unchecked lust is dangerous again, and the old rules apply once more. When Edward comes to meet Bella's Dad (the town's chief of police), the man is actually cleaning a shotgun. Hilarious -- but here are these hundreds of girls, lining up to see a guy who loves a girl so much that he won't have his way with her. These are the girls who laughed when Mom asked Bella, "Are you being safe?" *Well, no -- I'm dating a vampire. But then again, yes -- I'm being so safe that I'm avoiding the near occasion of . . . bite.*

Of course, love *isn't* safe, especially when you love someone supernatural. But part of the fun of *Twilight* is the way the story takes that supernatural aspect and

sinks it into the everyday. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that once you're in love, everything everyday takes on a supernatural aspect. Climbing a tree, playing baseball, listening to music -- it's all so much more than ordinary. Love itself becomes supernatural -- which it kind of is, if you believe the Gospels. The sort of thing that allows a person to transcend nature and, say, lay down her life for another.

Which brings us back to Bella. Early on, Edward identifies himself as "the world's most dangerous predator." That makes Bella the prey; she even goes so far as to refer to herself as a stupid lamb -- stupid for loving a lion. Despite this, the film doesn't cotton to the notion that, in the sexual arena, the man is the aggressor, the woman the helpless victim, with no appetite of her own. When Edward goes in for the first kiss, he tells Bella not to move. Translation: *Be the passive recipient of my passion*. It doesn't work, and later, Bella's own desire provides the film's true climax.

It's not all sex and self-denial. Some of the rest of it is good, some less so. The bad guys felt a little like afterthoughts, and the big final battle was jumbled-bordering-on-incoherent. Bella's thawing relationship with her father was well-played -- she comes to live with him at the film's opening, while her mother travels

with her new husband, a ballplayer. But the dynamic with Mom, while clearly significant, is underdeveloped to the point of being distracting when it does appear.

The high school stuff was better. It felt real and childish -- a long way from the glossy bitch-wit of *Mean Girls* or *Heathers*: awkward conversations, made more awkward by interruptions from oblivious classmates, busy being the stars of their own shows. The fumbling with nascent sexuality. ("I like this one," says a girl about her dress, "it makes my boobs look good." But then a guy compliments them, and she's embarrassed.) The awful irrelevance of learning about cell mitosis in the face of true love. Most of all, the way that the teenage mind can say, "It doesn't matter; I trust you," when your beloved tells you that he's killed people.

Matthew Lickona is a staff writer for the San Diego Reader and the author of the 2005 memoir [Swimming with Scapulars: True Confessions of a Young Catholic](#). He lives in La Mesa, California, with his wife and children.