

# REVIEWS

## American Catholic Converts

**JOHN BEAUMONT, *THE MISSISSIPPI FLOWS INTO THE TIBER: A GUIDE TO NOTABLE AMERICAN CONVERTS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.* (SOUTH BEND, INDIANA: FIDELITY PRESS, 2014). HARDCOVER, 1014 PP, \$69 PLUS \$8 S & H. ISBN: 978-0-929891-13-2**

Walker Percy once remarked that the way to write about other people's conversions is to examine "the causes other than God's grace." This is what we find in John Beaumont's *The Mississippi Flows Into the Tiber*, an inspiring work that covers nearly five hundred eminent American converts who lived from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In each of these entries, which are in alphabetical order, we find a succinct biography and, when known, one or more causes of conversion, often in the person's own words. The entries range from part of a page to several pages, with citations from the subjects' writings. A list of sources is also provided. This book will surely prove to be an invaluable reference work, but more importantly, it is a collection of priceless testimonies, well worth pondering at leisure.

When we study these entries, we find a wide array of motives of conversion. This review will focus on only ten of them: the Church's visibility; her beauty; her universality; the Mass; the Eucharist; the Virgin Mary; the saints; the Church's continuity; her authority in spiritual matters; and the Church's moral teaching.

Virtually all these motives are related to the Church as embodied in space and time. Indeed, the first

motive is that she is plainly visible, as befits the Body of Christ; the second, that she is beautiful for her great legacy of architecture, music, art, and literature; the third, that she transcends all nationalities, ethnic groups, and social classes. Also related to her embodiment are the fourth and fifth motives: the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Eucharist. Some have been moved to study the Catholic religion by attending a single Mass and becoming aware, as Cora Stevens did, of "the presence of God." Others were drawn into the Church through devotion to the Virgin Mary or admiration for a saint.

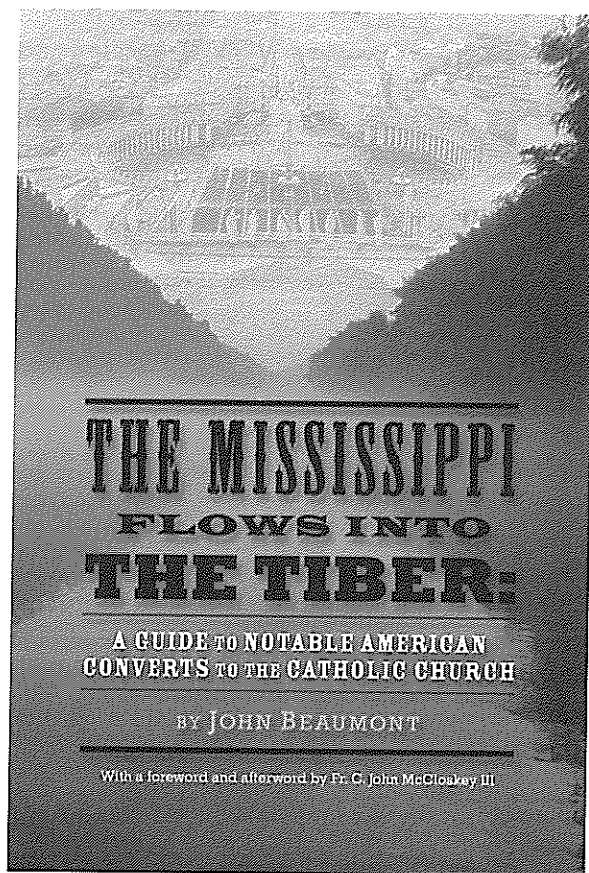
### EMBODIED IN HISTORY

Besides being embodied in the world, the Church is also embodied in history. Many have been attracted by proofs of her unbroken continuity from the apostolic age to ours; they have discovered that the early Fathers were in fact Catholic and that there was an unbroken line of popes and bishops in lawful succession from St. Peter and the Apostles to their own time. This motive is closely tied to the next one, the Church's authority. In this age of radical autonomy and subjectivity, a number have been

drawn to the Church by her claim of divine protection from error in doctrine and morals. They have realized that this authority is necessary if she is to withstand the gates of hell until the end of time. In the past 50 years, the Church has often been the lone defender of traditional morality, not least through papal encyclicals.

These are the ten motives to be explored in this review of John Beaumont's encyclopedic collection of American converts, though we could approach this book from other perspectives as well. For example, throughout these pages we see the influence of certain books on conversions, such as the works of Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Newman, Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Tolkien, and Gilson. Then, too, some entered at an early age, like Marco Rubio who at 13 told his parents he wanted to be a Catholic, and others, like Wallace Stevens, waited till their deathbed. Some inched their way into the Church over the course of years, like John Sparrow Thompson, the first Catholic Prime Minister of Canada, and others converted in a flash, like Hilda van Stockum, who finished reading Arnold Lunn's *Now I See* and exclaimed, "I'm not thinking about being a Catholic, I am a Catholic."

Together, these entries also form a grand parade of North American history. We find converts who fought in the American Revolution, like Thomas Sim Lee, afterwards Governor of Maryland, and others who fought in the Civil War, like the Confederate General James Longstreet. We also find the Russian prince who became "the Apostle of the Alleghenies" Demetrius Gallitzin, and the Kentucky poet John Milton Harney. We meet the Alamo defender James Bowie, along with the "Father of Oregon" John McLoughlin. We meet Kit



Carson, Chief Black Elk, and Buffalo Bill, along with Anne Brewster, the first female foreign correspondent, Karl Landsteiner, the father of hematology and immunology, and James Roosevelt Bayley, the nephew of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and first Bishop of Newark. Here too we meet Gerty Cori, the first American woman to win a Nobel Prize in Science; Edmonia Lewis, the first African-American and Native-American woman sculptor; and Sherman Minton, a Supreme Court justice who ruled against racial segregation in 1954.

Among recent converts we find Bernard Nathanson, the "Abortion King" who coined the phrase "a woman's right to choose"; Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" of *Roe v Wade*; and Nellie Gray, the founder of the annual March for Life. Here too are persons of notoriety, as among Christ's first followers:

the mobster Dutch Schultz, received on his deathbed; Clayton Fountain, who went from murderer to monk; Mildred Gillars, dubbed "Axis Sally"; and the Communist spy Elizabeth Bentley. The Bride's arms, like those of her Spouse, are opened wide.

### THE CHURCH'S VISIBILITY

A number of converts entered the Ark when they realized that Jesus Christ instituted a visible, not an invisible Church. The historian Ross Hoffman, who converted in 1931, wrote that the early days of the Church are often thought to have a "dim historical visibility," but in fact no other phase of first-century history is "so copiously documented." Sheldon Vanauken

(1985), were struck by the presence of a "concrete visible institution," an "embodied unity" back in the apostolic age. Robert Sun-genis (1992) noted that the word "church," which appears over a hundred times in the New Testament, never denotes a "spiritual" Church. Benedict Ashley (1938), who converted from atheism, declared: the "sufficient sign" is "the moral miracle of the Catholic church, the public fact that, in spite of all the frailties and scandals of its members from top to bottom, including myself, it is one, catholic, apostolic, and holy in a way no merely human institution is or can be." Richard Neuhaus (1990) observed that Americans tend to be gnostic and imagine that "true spirituality" means transcending "institutions, authority, history," but God entered history once and for all. Russell Reno (2004) recalls that what worked on him was the "fact" of the Church, the "visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are channels of invisible grace," and Dwight Longenecker (1995), that the visible Church appeared to him as "a sacrament of Christ," a

**Some entered at an early age; others, like Wallace Stevens, waited till their deathbed.**

(1981) aptly observed that "the invisible church of the faithful" was never heard of till the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the journalist Al Kresta (1992) pointed out that the "invisibilists" deny "the materiality of Christ's Body, the Church," yet she is an "extension of the Incarnation."

Several, like Mark Brumley (1980) and Thomas Howard

"living dynamic organism empowered by the Holy Spirit." Carl Olson (1997) sums it up: God works through "physical matter" both in the Incarnation and in the Church.

### HER BEAUTY

Some converts, like Thomas Storck (1978), were "convinced"

that the Faith was not only “true,” but also “compellingly attractive and beautiful.” A few were attracted by medieval architecture: James Fry (1931) visited Europe’s cathedrals and reflected that the faith that built such “magnificent edifices” had to be from God; Robert Gordon Anderson (1950) became a Catholic while writing two books on the Cathedral of Notre Dame, in Paris; and Peter Kreeft (1960) developed “a strong intellectual and aesthetic love for things medieval: Gregorian chant, Gothic architecture, Thomistic philosophy, illuminated manuscripts.”

Catholic music and art attracted others: Justine Ward (1904) promoted Gregorian Chant because it was the Church praying as a “corporate whole,” uttering the sacred words “slowly, distinctly, pensively, each syllable lingered over as though with tenderness”; Charles Rich (1933) believed that an image of Christ in a Catholic church had spoken to his heart with “ineffable fragrance”; and the sculptor Frederick Elliott Hart (1976) delved “deeper into the tradition of Western religious art” and there found the Faith. Still others entered the Ark through literature: Caroline Gordon (1947) thought her novels attained “greater depth” and were “truer to reality” after she embraced “the Church’s vision of the world and creation”; and Dean Ray Koontz found that being a Catholic enabled him to see the world as “more mysterious, more organic and less mechanical.” According to Father John Zuhlsdorf, the Church has given us a twofold legacy of beauty, art and the saints: art is “God’s beauty shining through the inanimate material creation,” and the saints are “his beauty shining out through living animate people.” In both ways the Church transfigures life and culture.

## HER UNIVERSALITY

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Carlton Hayes (1904) deplored the “zealous nationalism” of Europeans and attributed it to the “breakdown of Catholic internationalism.” Many converts have since rejoiced in the universality of the Church. For instance, Heywood Broun (1939) said he now felt “at home everywhere,” able to shake hands with “brethren of every kindred, name, and tongue.” Likewise, Jeffrey Steenson (2007) spoke of “the joy of belonging to a really, really big family.” Sensing a “new kinship” with people “in countries as diverse as Argentina, Poland, and Zanzibar,” Paul Vitz (1979) saw his conversion as linking him “to millions of people of all nations, races, and cultures.”

Many of those drawn to the Church’s universality were mo-

go to a Catholic church, and there are people of all different colors and ages, and babies squalling.”

Disillusioned with Communism, Bella Dodd (1952) wandered into Midnight Mass one Christmas eve and reflected: “Here were the masses I had sought, the people I wanted to love. Here was the brotherhood of men, cemented by their love of God.” Another ex-Communist Dorothy Day noticed that “the masses” in Catholic churches were “of all nationalities, of all classes, but most of all they were the poor.” Similarly, Dale Vree (1983) discovered that in the Church he could “emphatically affirm both the rights of labor and the ancient creeds, reject both abortion and the use of nuclear weapons, affirm both lifelong marriage and the dignity of the poor.” Peter Weiskel (1978), too, found that the Church was at once “a sanctuary for adoration and

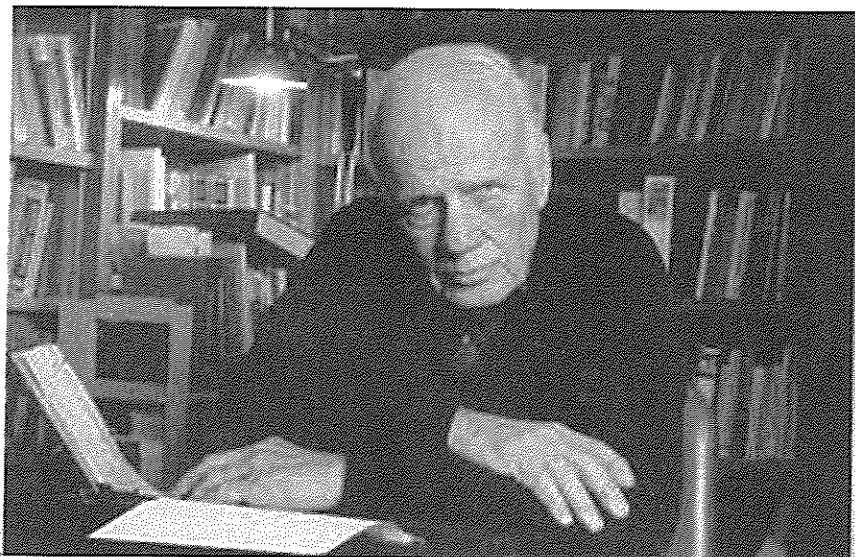
**Walker Percy once remarked that the way to write about other people’s conversions is to examine “the causes other than God’s grace.”**

tivated by what Robert Wagner (1946) called her “real democracy.” In Catholic churches, Wagner saw “rich and poor alike sitting next to each other” and members of the clergy drawn “almost without exception” from “poor families.” Similarly, Edward Dodson (1938) observed “white and black, merchant and laborer, rich and poor” kneeling at the altar “side by side.” Years later, Annie Dillard (1990) expressed the same thought, that Catholics are really “catholic”: “You

contemplation and an animator of political and social reconstruction.” Here was a “big sprawling, international” institution, Carol Zaleski (1991) reflected, where authority was found in “structures and traditions,” not in “particular personalities.”

## THE MASS

A fourth motive for conversion has been the experience of the



*Walker Percy converted to Catholicism in 1947.*

instead of standing here like tourists?" And then there is little Ellen Tarry (1922), a black girl who was placed in a Catholic boarding school when her father died; after reading *The Prisoner of Love* she "longed to march up to the communion rail and whisper, 'Here I am, please make my poor heart your abode.'"

In some cases, it was the reverence of Catholics for the Eucharist that set people thinking, as when Rudolf Lippert (1947) attended a Benediction and saw the "deep devotion" of the congregation: "It was this Real Presence, I discovered, which explained their profound reverence." Walker Percy (1947) recalled how one of his college roommates, a fellow who "seemed otherwise normal," used to get up at dawn to go to daily Mass; this was one of the memories that made "room" for the "most mysterious turning" of his life. Knute Rockne (1923) knew he was missing something when he saw all the players on his football team sacrificing "hours of sleep" to receive Communion, and Kimberley Hahn (1990) was moved to learn that Catholics, after receiving, "saw themselves as living tabernacles."

In other cases, it was Scripture or the early Fathers that brought home the truth of the Real Presence: David Currie (1993) said the Eucharist made him "fall in love with the Catholic Church," because it was the only Church in town that taught the truth as Jesus stated it, that the Body of Christ is the food "needed for eternity"; Francis Beckwith (2007) found the "Eucharistic realism" of the early and medieval Church so persuasive that this "stumbling block" was changed into a "cornerstone"; T. L. Frazier (1992) reported that he "nearly suffered cardiac arrest" when he read in the letters of Ignatius, a convert of the Apostle John, that heretics

Mass. Peter Burnett (1846), the first American Governor of California, attended a Midnight Mass in Oregon and declared he had "never witnessed anything like it before" for the "profound solemnity of the services." He felt drawn into a "closer and holier communion with the unseen world." B. Stuart Chambers, (1894) realized that the Mass meant a Love that "only the heart of a God could conceive, only the omnipotence of a God effect." Like him, Daniel Sargent (1919) "discovered there and then what a sacrifice was, and recognized this sacrifice as no invention of man, but as God's own act—Christ offering himself to God, the Father."

While attending Mass, M. Raphael Simon (1936) felt "the reverence which the Hebrews of old had experienced in the temple of Jerusalem"; at the Sanctus, he sensed the "solemn moment had arrived which in olden days came but once a year, when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies." David Mills (2001) began "to love the Catholic Church for the Mass, because in her my Lord and God came to me." And John Senior (1960), whose students founded Clear Creek Monastery in Oklahoma, summed it up well when he said that Christian culture exists mainly to perpetuate the Mass: "All architecture, art, political and social forms, economics, the way people

live and feel and think, music, literature—all these things when they are right are ways of fostering and protecting the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass."

## THE EUCHARIST

Since the Eucharist is the heart of Catholic life, it is no surprise that many entered the Church after experiencing the Real Presence. Marion Frances Gurney (1897) went to Benediction once with an Irish maid, and "With the instinct of childhood, which sometimes brings undulled perceptions to holy things, the child felt the Presence there." Perhaps the most beautiful example of this motive is Katherine Brégy (1904), who as a teenager made "shyly wistful prayers before the tabernacle in nearby Catholic churches" and soon found her visits taking on "the romance of a clandestine if supernatural love affair."

The testimony of Lucile Hasley (1930) is equally stirring. While visiting the Log Chapel at Notre Dame University, she asked the priest giving her the tour, "If Catholics really believe that God is really and truly present on their altars, why don't they crawl into church on their hands and knees?" Suddenly she realized that she was thinking: "Why aren't we on our hands and knees, right this minute,

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stayed away from the Eucharist because they would not admit it was “the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins and which the Father in his goodness afterwards raised up again”; and Leroy Huizenga (2011) became convinced that John 6 spoke of the Eucharist as the “medicine of immortality” and Paul, of “our real participation in the body and blood of Christ.” The “real heresy of our age,” Marshall McLuhan (1937) said, was “gnosticism,” or the denial of the natural world. He believed the Eucharist was its “ultimate refutation.”

Other sacraments, too, have attracted people to the Faith. Bernard Nathanson (1976), after overseeing around 75,000 abortions and performing around 5,000 himself, was “gripped by despair.” Influenced by Karl Stern’s *Pillar of Fire* and talks with C. John McCloskey, he finally received Baptism. Felix Robinson (1952) converted after learning that the Church alone considered marriage a sacrament, something that made marriage “primarily a spiritual vocation” and allowed children to be “willingly born.” Confession has drawn its share of converts: Levi Siliman Ives (1852), the first bishop to be reconciled since the Reformation, deplored the lack of any “instituted method among Protestants for the remission of post-baptismal sin”; similarly, James Akin (1992) noticed that Protestants made no use of Christ’s gift to the Apostles of the power to “forgive sins.” Horatio Storer (1879) gave credit to the sacrament of Confession for the rarity of abortion among Catholic women, while Gene Fowler (1950) was pleased that Catholics could always find a confessional nearby into which they could go “with feelings of trepidation, but emerge therefrom with a deep sense of peace and forgiveness.”

The concreteness of Catholic worship has drawn many into the fold. On Holy Thursday 1904, Elizabeth Kite joined “a procession to kiss the feet of the crucified Jesus,” a devotion harking back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. As she kissed the crucifix, she found herself transformed: “what had happened was the miracle of Belief—a pure gift from the heart of Jesus.” Similarly, Lars Troide (2008) realized that “the sign of the cross, the incense, the rosary beads, the Hail Mary, the bells, the Latin” all made sense because they raised the soul to God, but the clincher for him was prayer for the souls in Purgatory: “It makes such sense that almost no one at death is pure enough to be in the presence of God, and that a spiritual purification is necessary.” He found “joy” in praying for his deceased wife and hastening her entry “into the Beatific Vision.”

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### THE VIRGIN MARY

Perhaps the most charming conversion wrought through the Virgin Mary is that of Francis Fitzpatrick (1936). As a youth he wandered into a Catholic church out of curiosity and saw people praying before a statue. Immediately he went into the rectory next door to tell the pastor he had now seen Catholics worshipping “idols.” The priest explained that statues were prototypes of “real people in Heaven” whose intercession the Catholics were seeking. Then he showed him how the Hail Mary came straight out of Scripture. Fitzpatrick recalled that this was “the beginning of my falling in love with the Blessed Mother.” It led to his conversion and ordination: “No one can trifle with the Mother of God. If he will love her, she will have him.”

Asking Our Lady for guidance has often had a powerful effect. A

case in point is St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1805) who, having lost her mother as a child and being comforted to know “that the Blessed Virgin was truly her mother,” asked Mary to guide her to the “True Faith.” Likewise, Susan Emery (1874) asked the Virgin’s help and shortly afterwards opened a volume of sermons belonging to her Irish servant and came across these words of St. Ambrose: “Show me Peter, and I will show you the Church.” She believed that her “cry for help to the Blessed Virgin” had been “manifestly answered.” Walter Jones (1974) traced his conversion to seeing a fellow cadet at the military academy praying the rosary on his knees, while Lee Atwater (1990) traced his to a Catholic nurse who asked if she might pin a Miraculous Medal on his clothing.

Not all of those touched by the Virgin Mary led exemplary lives. After winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954, Ernest Hemingway (who considered himself a Catholic from 1918) traveled to the shrine of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre to thank Our Lady and left his prize medal there as a gift. More surprisingly, Louis Budenz, (1945), the editor of *The Daily Worker*, was speaking one day with Fulton Sheen and defending Communism, when Sheen bent forward and said, “Let us now talk of the Blessed Virgin.” Budenz recalled being immediately “conscious of the senselessness and sinfulness of my life as I then lived it.”

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### THE SAINTS

Living examples of holiness have brought many into the fold. Take the case of Erasmus Darwin Keyes (1866), who was inspired by a priest he met in the American wilderness, “a cultivated gentleman in the prime of life” who was “con-

tent” to labor fourteen years among Native Americans. Likewise Daniel Sargent (1919), who had volunteered for the ambulance corps of the French army in 1916 and had witnessed how French priests behaved under fire as they ministered to dying men, exclaimed, “I had caught sight of the divinity of the Church.” Similarly, in the 1832 cholera epidemic in Philadelphia, William Horner (1839) was so “impressed with the work of Catholic priests and nuns” that he “wanted to know more of the faith which produced such works.”

Sometimes the saint was not a doer but a sufferer: Joyce Kilmer (1913) used to stop to pray for the gift of faith in the Church of the Holy Innocents, in New York, but when faith came it did so “by way of my little paralyzed daughter. Her lifeless hands led me. I think her tiny feet still know beautiful paths.” Mary Agnes Tincker (1855) traced her conversion to seeing a Catholic priest “tarred-and-feathered by a mob of Know-Nothing agitators.”

According to William Starr (1861), the type of holiness found in the Church has no parallel among “the most devout souls” outside her “fold.” One such saint who died in Rome on April 16, 1783, was the beggar Benedict Joseph Labré. Within three months of his death there were 136 miraculous cures. The Congregationalist minister John Thayer, who was in Rome at the time, set out to investigate and disprove these miracles, but instead “found himself convinced by the evidence” and entered the Church on May 25 of that year.

A visit to a saint’s shrine has sometimes triggered a conversion. Frances Parkinson Keyes (1939) was in St. Anne of Beaupré in Canada when, “in one blinding flash, my whole life was transformed,” while Fulton Oursler (1943) was stand-

ing at the shrine of St. Bernadette, in St. Francis of Assisi Church in New York, when “Any doubts or reservations he had about becoming a Catholic evaporated.” Sometimes the life of a saint has wrought the same change: after reading the life of St. Francis Xavier in a little book belonging to his Irish servant girl, Virgil Barber (1818) asked himself, “How could a religion that formed such men be a mere human institution?” The black author Elizabeth Adams (1982) converted after reading the lives of Rose Hawthorne and Father Damien of the Lepers, while Katherine Anne Porter (1906) collected biographies of her favorite saints, Joan of Arc, Ursula, Teresa of Avila, Anne, and Catherine of Siena. The writings of saints, too, have sometimes proved life-altering. Paul Thigpen (1993), while reading Augustine, Catherine of Siena, and John of the Cross, sensed that these works were “doorways into a communion with the saints who had written them. I felt their presence as I read; I even found myself talking to them, though my theological training told me that such conversations weren’t permitted.”

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### THE CHURCH’S CONTINUITY

Although she has undergone development over the course of two millennia, the Church has essentially remained the same. Inspired by this “massive historical fact,” Peter Kreeft (1960) has spoken of the Church as “the same old seaworthy ship, the Noah’s ark that Jesus had commissioned . . . the whole ark itself, still sailing unscathed on the seas of history!” This fact caused Sophia Willard Ripley (1847) to exclaim: “Here is a Church that is immortal. She has withstood the treason of her own children and the pride of her unworthy servants.”

Our Lord promised that the Church would never fail, but what about the evil deeds of some of her leaders? “If they proved anything,” Duane Hunt (1913) replied, “it was that the Catholic Church is indestructible.” A “mere human institution” would be crushed by now, but Christ’s Church “is continuous from Him to the present day and will be continuous until the end of the world.” The more Avery Dulles (1940) studied this matter, the more evidence he saw of the Church’s continuity: “Through the dark ages and enlightened, through ages of fervor and ages of corruption, under saintly popes and ordinary popes, the treasure of the faith had been preserved intact.” As the Gospels showed, Christ had established the Church “to keep His doctrine incorrupt and to carry on his work of sanctifying souls,” so He and the Church were “two facets of a single mystery.” Likewise, Robert Wilken (1994) declared that the Church he had joined was “continuous through history going back to the Apostles” and “the most significant thing that the Incarnation brought about.” While reading Newman’s Essay on the Church’s continuity, Dave Armstrong (1991) “experienced a peculiar, intense, and inexpressibly mystical feeling of reverence for the idea of a Church ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic.’”

This continuity has had an application for the interpreting of Scripture. John Lawson Stoddard (1922) pointed out that the Church had been guiding her flock for sixty years before the New Testament was completed and for “more than three hundred years before the Canon of the New Testament was definitely fixed.” Since then, there had been “no suspension of her life, no break in her history, no term of silence in her teaching.” More recently, John Wright (2008) has urged that the



New Testament “cannot have more authority, cannot be trusted more than the Church who wrote it, compiled it, protected and transmitted it, interprets it and teaches from it.” And Laura Garcia (1981) has argued that if Scripture were our only guide, then each of us would have to know enough Greek, Hebrew, and Near Eastern history to decide, when faced with new theological opinions, what Scripture really taught; but it is doubtful that God left “the essential doctrines of the faith so inaccessible to the average layperson and so open to revision.”

Another aspect of the Church’s continuity is her stable moral doctrine in the face of a licentious world. James Kent Stone (1869) rejoiced that the war of infidelity against the Church confirmed her identity: “Surely this undying hate of the world is a sign which cannot be misunderstood. To be hated of the world is a note of the Church. ‘If the world hate you, know ye that it hated me before you.’” Joseph Sobran (1961) also rejoiced that the Church remained “consistent” in her moral teaching despite “the world’s strident demand that she change along with it.” Although “powerless, hardly able to keep her own flock in line, and betrayed by many of her shepherds,” the Church was still a “threat” to the world because she disturbed “dormant consciences.” Sobran, too, thought the world’s hostility was proof of the Church’s “divine origin and authority.”

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## HER AUTHORITY

A number have entered the Ark because the Church dared to exercise authority in matters of faith and morals. A great example of this daring comes from Christopher Huntington (1937), who was in Germany in the mid 1930s and heard Cardinal Faulhaber, in Cologne Ca-

thedral, attack what the Nazis stood for. Huntington saw in this “the awful magnitude of the Church’s claim,” but also saw that the “true Church” could not “claim less.” As Thomas Emmet (1864) put it: “No other body has ever dared to claim, as the Catholic Church has, from the beginning to the present time, to have been vested directly by our Lord with the power to teach as His representative on earth.”

Scott Hahn (1986) asked, “How many churches are even applying for the job of being the pillar and foundation of truth?” He replied, “I only know of one. I only know that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that it was founded by Christ; it’s been around for 2000 years and it’s making some outlandish claims that seem awfully similar to 1 Timothy 3:15.” In like manner, Marcus Grodi (1992), when he read in Irenaeus that “the truth” is “easily obtained from the Church” because the apostles “deposited with her most copiously everything which pertains to the truth,” realized that “the single most important issue was authority.”

The alternative to Church authority is private judgment. As Caryl Coleman (1868) found out, the more one studied “the history of private judgment, the source of heresy and schism,” the more one saw that the Church “must of necessity be endowed with a continuity of authority and doctrine, or it could not be of God.” In Scripture, the Church was invested with authority at the commissioning of Peter. As Jeffrey Steenson (2007) has explained, Christ there used “three verbs in the future tense”: “I will build my Church”; “the gates of hell will not prevail”; and “I will give you the keys of the kingdom.” The future tense showed that the commission was not meant to end with the “historical Peter” but “anticipated” the entire history of the Church.

Then, at the Council of Jerusalem, in Acts 15, the Church exercised her authority. As Mark Shea (1987) has explained, all those attending the Council were circumcised, and nothing was clearer in Scripture than that circumcision was “required by God for ever and ever.” Yet the Council decided: “No, we don’t need to do this anymore.” Why? Because they interpreted Scripture “in the light of the Apostolic tradition; and the Church has continued to do that to this day.” Without “ecclesiastical authority,” Benjamin Wiker (1987) noted, none of the creeds would exist. In the Church’s “claim to speak with authority” Ian Hunter (2006) saw the “last refuge” against “the all-corrosive acid of postmodernism.”

Church authority is often exercised through a pope. James Kent Stone observed (1869) that the papacy “does not contain in itself any apparent principle of life and growth, and yet it continues to put forth the signs of immortal youth after empires have fallen and passed away.” A good example was Pope John Paul II. In him Helen Hull Hitchcock (1984) saw a “clear sign that the Holy Spirit truly was with this Church,” and Jeffrey Rubin (1984) rightly called this pope “a moral Colossus” who “bestrode the world” and showed “the matchless potential of this great office for world spiritual leadership.”

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## HER MORAL TEACHING

In the last 50 years, the moral teaching of the Church has spurred many conversions. Hadley Arkes (2010) saw her as a “sign of contradiction” for the age, due to her “moral witness, especially on the sanctity of human life and on marriage and sexual morality.” E. Michael Jones (1973) wrote, “During the entire post-World War II period

in the United States, the Catholic Church opposed the main article of faith in secular humanism, namely, sexual liberation." She stood out against the "sexual revolution," which was the "rationalization of sexual vice, followed by the political mobilization of the same thing as a form of control." In a similar vein, Leroy Huizenga (2011) pointed out that when we deal with sexuality, we are dealing with "matters of public concern" and the "common good." In sum, sexuality is far from being an issue of "privacy rights."

Quite a number of converts have entered the Church because of her teaching on contraception. One such person was Robert V. Young (1974), who said that *Humanae Vitae* was "instrumental" in bringing him and his wife into the fold, "not only because the teaching is true, but because it was so plainly the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the Vicar of Christ." They realized

age-old Christian teaching rooted in Scripture." David Mills (2001) recalled that contraception "ranked high" among the things that drew him and his wife into the Church; and Jay Richards asked himself why Christians had opposed contraception before the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had then let themselves be influenced by a culture "increasingly hostile to fertility and chastity."

Others entered the fold because of the Church's stand against abortion. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1995), formerly a Marxist and radical feminist, finally understood that "Abortion devalues and debases women's bodies—strips them of their character as temples of the Holy Spirit" and confirms "their status as objects to be used." And Jennifer Ferrara (1998) converted when her church "decided to cover the cost of the abortions of their employees" and refused to offer any "authoritative stance on

others say that sex is uncontrollable, the Catholic Church alone replies, "No, man is free. All Christians are called to chastity, and what they are called to do, they can do." A case in point is actor Kevin O'Brien (2000), who says he "struggled with the Church's teaching on some of the sex issues," but once he began praying the rosary and trying to obey the Church's teaching, he found that "whole new worlds of grace opened up."

All the converts listed in John Beaumont's inspiring compilation have impressive credentials. Although they are not mentioned in this review, these credentials may be found in the biographies provided in *The Mississippi Flows Into the Tiber*.

In conclusion, Chief Black Elk, an Oglala holy man who fought in the Battle of Little Big Horn and was injured at the Wounded Knee Massacre, entered Mother Church in 1904. He embraced the Catholic religion as "the full revelation of the Wakan Tanka" (Lakota for God), and declared that the "spiritual experiences" of the Lakota people had "prepared them for Christ." Here we find another aspect of the Church's continuity: She completes and fulfills the natural religions that have existed since the dawn of time. Black Elk was confident that he was being true to his heritage, that the "essence" of Lakota practices could be found in Catholic worship. Four hundred Lakotas followed him into the Church. Around the same time, Frederick Joseph Kinsman (1916) visited a cathedral in Philadelphia and had a "vivid sense of the Church as a great Mother, very wistful and very tender." Find one other American institution that can make this claim.

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ANNE BARBEAU GARDINER

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that "flesh and blood did not teach" this doctrine to Pope Paul VI, "nor was it his own rather retiring character that furnished the fortitude to proclaim this sign of contradiction to a hostile world." Another such person was Steve Wood (1990) who, when he shared a prison cell with Catholics involved in Operation Rescue, learned from them that the abortion holocaust was the "direct result" of the contraceptive revolution. He then started to wonder why "the Catholic Church alone" held the "line" in this "vital area." Like him, Scott Hahn (1986) was "bothered" by the fact that the Catholic Church alone upheld "this

a single matter having to do with sexual ethics or the sanctity of human life." She understood then that "Christians cannot do without a magisterium that interprets Scripture in the light of the great Tradition of the Church." Similarly, when his girlfriend's father forced her to have an abortion, film producer Jason Simon Jones (2003) got involved in prolife work, lamenting that ever since the sexual revolution arrived, "we have almost forgotten how to form families or what they are."

In its moral teaching the Church strongly defends free will. To quote Harry Crocker (circa 2001): When