

Double Cross

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The Code of the Catholic Church

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Theo Press

Published by Theo Press Ltd.
Suite 229, 19-21 Crawford Street
London W1H 1PJ

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ISBN 978-0-9554133-0-8

Cover design and typesetting by Mark Lee.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

For Germaine Davys
1915 – 1944

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Introduction

The renowned Catholic theologian and dissenter Hans Küng asserts that even though 'Rome has recently been asking "for forgiveness" for the monstrous errors and atrocities of the past ... the present-day church administration and inquisition are producing still more victims'.¹

People who live in countries in which the Catholic Church is powerful are rarely indifferent to her. Religion tends to bring out strong reactions. It may be its absoluteness, the underlying issues of life and death it deals with, or the history of its power which cause most people to have not only a view about religion but very often an emotional one. The Catholic Church is a worldwide organisation that offers its members spiritual and moral guidance and support. Her message is love and hope. Based on the teachings of Jesus, a power structure was built which has outlived any other political structure in the world. In addition to her religious services, the Church operates a wide range of social, educational and medical institutions throughout the world. There are countries in which the entire medical or educational infrastructures were first established by the Church and in some of them they are still run by her. Thousands of Catholic priests, monks, nuns and lay members dedicate their lives to good work inspired and encouraged by the Church. And yet, not only outsiders but also insiders believe that the Church must change and reform herself. Küng speaks of an organisation which 'deals in a despicable way with critics ... discriminate[s] so much against women ... polarises society'.² The Catholic writer and professor, Garry Wills, writes about 'Papal Sin' and 'Structures of Deceit'.³ Whereas some Catholics who are unhappy with their Church hope that she will indeed reform, outsiders sometimes attack the Church with blind hostility that almost nears religious fervour. The Church herself tries to reject writers who attack her by attempting to de-legitimise them or their motives. Insiders are described as 'bitter "ex-priests", or jaundiced "ex-seminarians"' or even worse as 'fraudulent Catholics'.⁴ Outsiders are discarded as those who do not understand the Church and simply wish to harm her.

This book deals with the Church as a power structure and not with her beliefs. It is not about Catholicism. It does not question Catholic

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theological dogma. Nor does it investigate spiritual aspects of the Catholic religion. It does not doubt the many benefits which religious people derive from their religion, nor does it doubt that many of the Catholic clergy are honest, true and loving. I am definitely an outsider. My interest in the potency of power, its use, abuse and manipulation have inspired me in my research and writing. The trigger for this work, which covers a range of issues from the Catholic Church's history, was the revelations concerning Church policy to cover up the sexual abuse of minors by her clergy. My intention in writing this book is to reflect on whether there is systemic fault inherent in the Church. Where and why is it going wrong? What in her structure and her culture causes the Church to act as she does? Is it possible to repair the defect? To this end, I set out with a wide angle which enables me to take an across-the-board approach and consider a fuller context of the Church's history, dogma and strategies. It is based on the assumption that abuse is not a single issue problem but systemic and that in order to understand it her structures and decision-making have to be examined. Unlike the faithful insiders who promote reform within the Church – because they would not consider the dismantling of the Church – I question the ability of the Church to change.

Recent fundamentalist politicians, US presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, have introduced the religious faith-weighted term *evil* into our political jargon. Ronald Reagan famously included the phrase *evil empire* in the 1983 speech he gave before the National Association of Evangelicals Convention. Here he sought to recruit religious leaders to his campaign against the Soviet Union, to which the phrase referred.⁵ Right after suicide bombers attacked the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush adopted the *evil* terminology. At the time, the US and most of the Western world, were still in shock from the attack by *Al Qaeda*, a fundamentalist Muslim group, which with its successful missions had managed to question the world's general status quo. As an adjective, *evil* is popularly synonymous with foul, nasty and malicious. However, Bush has left us in no doubt that he was using the word as a noun, as he soon defined three countries as an *axis of evil* and then proceeded to wage war against Iraq, one of the three. As a noun, *evil* has definite religious connotations. Indeed, in an off-the-cuff remark, Bush even referred to his war as a crusade, reminding his public of Church-generated wars to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim control.

As the notion of organisational structures encompassing *evil* was introduced by politicians appealing to the religious voter, we might attempt to turn the tables and ask ourselves whether what is normally perceived to be the opposite of *evil*, a religious organisation such as the Catholic Church, could, in actual fact, be institutionally *evil*. At first, this would almost seem to be a contradiction in terms. How could the

Catholic Church, which is founded on Jesus' teachings of faith, hope and love, be evil? Abusive husbands, in all likelihood, truly believe and honestly undertake to 'love and to cherish till death do us part'. The ideas espoused by Jesus were indeed all about love, faith and hope. Very soon, however, like the abusive husbands, the Church, the structure which was established around Jesus' teaching, became nasty and abusive. The nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche suggested that 'The Christian resolve to find the world evil and ugly, has made the world evil and ugly.'⁶ Was Nietzsche right? Has the Church made the world evil and ugly?

Religion, the belief in a superhuman controlling power, serves as a powerful medium which attempts to lay to rest or, at least, respond to some of the existential *angsts* of mankind. The magician who was able to convince his audience that, by following his recipe, his rules, and ultimately him, the eclipsed sun would return and thus not leave them in darkness and in the cold forever, became a powerful person in his community. The man who maintains that he has the formula which will prevent his adherents from burning in the fires of hell, will place them in heaven and, eventually bring them back to life, continues to have a following, is still able to command respect and even to discipline his followers. Religions are adept at exploiting human anxiety, human weaknesses and the centrality of the non-rational in human life. Many institutions, not only religious ones, are established to be power bases geared to bring under their control certain aspects of human behaviour as defined by their objectives. Some lobbies against the use of animals in research laboratories or against hunting are examples of such institutions. Crucial in the assessment of them is the means they employ to realise their objectives.

The use of force by agencies other than state ones is not usually tolerated by secular power holders. Force does not necessarily have to be physical. Psychological manipulation can be very powerful. The means used by religious organisations to attain and to hold on to power are sophisticated and potent: a storyline based on faith rather than facts combined with ceremonies which are designed to strike awe and instil respect in the congregation for the relevant god and, importantly also, for the human medium purporting to speak in that god's name. These are rounded off with threats of punishment unless rules – as set out by the hierarchy of the religious organisation – are followed.

The Catholic Church draws her strength from her claim to be God's vehicle, in fact God's unique vehicle. From early on, the Church was tremendously successful in her marketing efforts, eventually persuading most of the Western world to become members. Although schisms at various stages in her history brought about the establishment of competing Christian Churches, she is still considered a leading force in matters of

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spiritual and moral guidance. The Church's success and her seminal impact would not have been possible if human nature was not receptive, even susceptible, to decisiveness on one hand, and to the proffering of hope on the other. Human frailty is the basis of the Church's prosperity and she is adept at spreading *angst* and deepening guilt. Having instilled fear, the Church proceeds to offer love and hope.

To deepen her hold and further her interests, the Catholic Church has developed political mass. Initially, heads of state were targeted and either personally caught by religion, or made to understand that there was enough of a Church-bound population in their countries that they could not afford to disregard the Church. This enabled the Church to infiltrate her own teachings into states' legislation. In return, Christianity taught that obedience to the ruler was a duty imposed by God.⁷

The Catholic Church enjoys a special status around the world. In addition to the political power she has gained in many countries, thereby influencing state legislation, the Church runs the State of Vatican City which, as an independent state, enjoys all the trappings of statehood. These include diplomatic immunity for those it nominates as diplomats, tax advantages and membership of various international organisations (such as observer status at the United Nations and membership of the Bank for International Settlements). The pope doubles as head of the Church and head of State. This status is unique to the Catholic Church. No other religion benefits from having the powers of a sovereign state. In addition to this exceptional status, many countries have granted the Church special rights including exemption from tax, exemption from army service to her priests and the right to keep information, revealed in confession, confidential, even where reporting that information would prevent a crime. Although some countries have granted rights to other religious organisations too, the Catholic Church is the largest global and centralised religious structure.

The close juxtaposition of 'vice' and 'vicar' in the dictionary is almost emblematic of the allegations of sexual abuse by Catholic priests in positions of trust and authority, which have hounded the Church for many years. The increasing number of disclosures about sexual abuse within the Catholic Church snowballed in the first months of 2002. The developing freedom of the press in the Western world in the last decades of the twentieth century has brought issues to the public domain which, for many years, had been kept hidden by the powerful Church. The decline in the power of the Church has enabled questions, which previously had only been whispered, to be openly discussed. And the questions asked were not solely about the Church's sex scandals.

This book investigates various areas in which the Catholic Church has been, and still is, active and reveals that the Church has used her power sometimes illegally, often immorally and always undemocratically and

without any transparency. It further demonstrates that such conduct is inherent in the culture and the structure of the Church. None of the situations described are one-offs. There is continuity in the misbehaviour and similarity in the cover-up which have not changed over centuries.

Manipulation and distortion are notoriously employed by the 'wicked'.⁸ Religion exploits such means too. Without indulging in the question of whether religion is, as Marx suggested, opium for the masses, there is no doubt that religious leaders are often able to exert strong influence over their followers. The Catholic Church, which has a history of urging her flock to blind obedience, has made proficient use of propaganda devices which were geared to impress the senses. Catholic ceremonies involve a high level of theatricality, music, incense, and often within powerful architecture. As a result, Church members are sometimes damaged and act in ways which are harmful to themselves and to others. In such situations, the matter becomes a public concern. Police officers around the world collaborated with the Catholic Church in hushing up sexual assaults by Catholic clergy. Time after time, at the request of local bishops, police would 'let the Church deal with the matter', and even keep paedophile assaults out of the police files. Every police officer who colluded with the Church in such hush-ups was not only acting illegally, he was also directly responsible for the suffering of additional victims of the abusive priest he had shielded. The likely explanation for such deviation from their role and general commitment to values of law and order is the informal power of the Church, the awe in which she is held and the psychological subordination *vis-à-vis* the Church hierarchy. This also explains the refusal of Massachusetts lawmakers, seventy-five per cent of whom were members of the Catholic Church, to include clergy in a 1983 bill requiring a very wide and inclusive list of professions (police officers, teachers, doctors, social workers etc.) to report suspected child abuse. The Church objected and her members obliged.⁹

Even at the price of curtailing free choice, society sometimes protects itself from activities and organisations which it considers contrary to the public interest. Laws which make the wearing of seat-belts compulsory or prohibit various drugs are examples of attempts to protect us from ourselves. Speed limits and the setting of noise levels and of pollution levels which may not be exceeded are imposed to protect us from each other. There is a growing tendency to legislate in various areas of consumer protection, to safeguard us from unwittingly being taken advantage of by commercial enterprises. Much of that is concerned with ensuring the availability of information about the products and services we are being sold. Attention is also drawn to the possible abuse through environmental conditioning at decision-making points. There is a view that we should be safeguarded from buying products we would

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otherwise not have bought, when shops surround us with music and scent which alter our state of mind. There is an awareness and a wariness of psychological manipulation. We tend to be more vigilant nowadays, in regulating advertising, to ensure that it does not exert undue influence over its target population. Such regulation is liable to touch on issues of free speech and general liberal concepts.

We may have to consider legislation which will safeguard society from undue influence by the Church. It sometimes takes substantial traumatic experiences to bring about change. In some US states, under present legislation a policeman who sees two men in the street, one holding an open beer can, the other holding a pistol, will let the man with the pistol walk on and arrest the man with the open beer can. The alcohol lobby in the USA has not yet succeeded in doing away with the remnants of the alcohol prohibition years (1919 to 1933). The gun lobby, on the other hand, has been successful in preventing anti-gun laws from being passed, although calls for such legislation regularly arise whenever some brutal murders make the national news in the US. The clerical sex abuse and Church cover-up scandals have changed the attitude of some legislators with regard to the extra-territoriality of the Church.

How evil must a structure be before we decide to close it down? Should the fact that occasional popes have moved in positive directions be enough to save the Church? Jonah Goldhagen is not alone in considering the Church to bear responsibility for the deaths of many Jews throughout much of her history. However, Goldhagen suggests that 'the Church though populous, is weak ... and is politically incapable of enforcing its wishes on its members and those over whom it would like to gain suzerainty'. He concludes that 'these limiting features reduce the likelihood of physical danger resulting from the Church's doctrines, the parallel organisational structure that embodies them and its practices'.¹⁰ He may be mistaken in his assessment. Catholic doctrine concerning contraception, for example, contributes directly to the spread of AIDS and the deaths of people who to this very day continue to be instructed, convinced and prevented by the Church from using condoms. Thousands of women continue to die each year from botched back-street abortions in countries where, due to Church influence and pressure, abortions are not made legally available. The Church may no longer have armies at her disposal, but she still is very powerful in playing with the minds of the faithful. Especially vulnerable are the uneducated, the poor and those living in less developed countries.

As a structure which cultivates political and other power bases, the Catholic Church has compromised her original values and is considered by some to have lost the purity of commitment exemplified by Jesus, whose teaching and whose life, after all, form the basis of the truth

which the Catholic Church purports to proclaim. She could have been wonderful. She could have promoted values of love and respect, been at the forefront of the bettering of human rights, of racial equality, sexual equality, democracy, freedom, liberalism, equal opportunities regardless of sex, sexuality, race, religion, social strata or wealth. Social norms, political norms and human rights in many Western countries have undergone substantial advancement. It would be wrong to pass judgement on previous generations solely on the basis of present-day standards. Yet, would one not have expected the Church to be and to have been at the forefront of positive change, at the forefront of the struggle to abolish slavery, the forefront of the opposition to colonialism, the forefront of enlightenment, and the forefront of the move towards democracy? Instead, at the time when there were slaves, the Church actually owned slaves. When Spain and Portugal sent their respective navies to capture new lands, subdue their populations and steal their riches, the Pope determined which areas should be conquered by Spain and which should be colonised by Portugal. To stop people from reading any new ideas which might enlighten them, the Church compiled a list of prohibited books.¹¹ In 1864, Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) condemned the notion that the Roman Pontiff ought to ‘come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization’.¹²

Indeed, more often than not the Church was a bulwark against progress. Although now pro-democracy, the Church was, historically, a regular bed-fellow of dictators and still collaborates with questionable regimes, provided they are Church-friendly. The Church was at best a follower, never a leader of enlightenment. Whilst the Church still had temporal power, and as late as the 1830s, she executed people who tried to revolt against the ever-higher taxation which the Holy See demanded,¹³ whereas, in the 1970s, the Vatican transferred its assets outside Italy to avoid paying Italian withholding tax.¹⁴ The fact is that new progressive ideas were conceived and did get promoted, often at great risk to their initiators, but progress came from other corners of society and not from the Catholic Church. Instead she participated in wars and ran her own torture chambers to persecute those who would not accept her authority. She locked Jews in ghettos and deprived them of their most basic human rights. She still objects to the freedom to use contraceptives, to women’s rights to end unwanted pregnancies and to equal rights for homosexuals. When smallpox inoculations were first developed, the Church prohibited their use,¹⁵ just as she now prohibits HIV-infected persons from using condoms.

With that track record, the Catholic Church still expects to be considered by the whole world as a symbol of and spokesman for ethical principles. She demands and has been given rights to participate in various United Nations forums, and energetically attempts to influence political

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life in Europe, the United States and wherever else she can because, it is maintained, the pope is the spiritual leader of more than a billion Catholics and a moral spokesman for the entire world. Indeed, millions of Catholics were brought up to look up to the pope as their moral guide. And yet, how dismal is the Church's record. Should we allow the holders of this record to continue wielding influence? Should we let those who so easily sink to evil continue to cause suffering?

This book investigates topics which are central to assessing the question 'is the Church inherently evil?' The Church's attitude to non-Catholics is examined, starting from her missionary and evangelising activities by means which often could – at best – be defined as 'not-Christian'. In this context the use of the crusades and of the Inquisition as instruments to combat heresy are also explored. Other wars which the Church instigated or was party to, often had purely materialistic motives. Many of these wars took place in the most corrupt periods in the Church's history. The book also examines other forms of corruption in the Church up to twentieth-century financial scandals. The relationship of the Church with Jews and her responsibility for the Holocaust are evaluated in separate chapters. Two areas of major significance, the Church's attitude to sex and sexual abuse within the Church, are each investigated.

This book is not about the Church's culpability, shame or scandal in any one particular area. It focuses on the Catholic Church as a structure that has failed. It has failed its own ideals, it has failed its hierarchy, it has failed its members and it has failed the rest of humanity. Significantly it is a dangerous structure. If she is evil, what is it in the structure of the Catholic Church which causes her to be so? Why has it caused so much alienation? Why has a Church which is supposed to be about life caused so much death? Where has she gone wrong? Is there a way out?

Part One
The Church and Power

