

contemplare not agere or facere. The ultimate thing to be conserved is that which cannot be otherwise, as Aristotle saw. Change is not the ultimate conservative category or problem.

The last lines of Wills' book are these: "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.' And tomorrow morning, when we wake up, we must make it all over again." This might be a definition of some sort of conservatism, but it also might be a definition of hell.

These are the last words of Augustine's *Confessions*:

But Thou, being the Good which needeth no good, art ever at rest, because Thy rest is Thou Thyself. And what man can teach man to understand this? . . . Let this be asked of Thee, sought in Thee, knocked for at Thee; so, so shall it be received, so shall it be found, so shall it be opened. (Book XIII, E. Pusey, translator, New York: Carlton House, 1949, pp. 337-38)

Given a choice between the confessions of Mr. Wills and those of Augustine, we would do well to conserve Augustine, the repose over the continual remaking every morning when we wake up.

Reviewed by JAMES V. SCHALL, S.J.

The Irreverent Papacy

Catholicism and Modernity: Confrontation or Capitulation?, by James Hitchcock, *New York: The Seabury Press, 1979. 230 pp. \$12.95.*

LAST OCTOBER, as Pope John Paul II arrived in Boston, American newspapers rushed to exploit his phenomenal personal appeal. Journalists reached for their most powerful words and phrases, competing to accentuate the drama of the moment. So it was that *The Washington Post* described the Pope as "irreverent." The absurd irony of that adject-

ive evidently escaped both the reporter and his editor; they merely sought to indicate that special news value which, in the popular jargon, the word "irreverent" connotes.

One week later, the media had had enough of the Pope's brand of irreverence. Throughout his visit he had blasphemed against the reigning secular ideology, unequivocally reiterating traditional Catholic teachings. Now the *Post* quoted Eleanor Smeal, the president of the National Organization of Women (and herself a Catholic), as saying that the Pope "is literally out of touch with millions of his own people." Smeal made that statement in the presence of a few supporters and journalists, while, simultaneously, in Chicago, 1.5 million of the people from whom he was supposedly estranged shouted themselves hoarse to greet the pontiff. But again, the irony escaped the *Post*.

Why did the Pope's visit, which (*pace* Smeal) so clearly elated his followers here, cause such discomfort in the popular media? What did John Paul do to disappoint the reporters who had hailed his arrival? James Hitchcock, a professor of church history at Saint Louis University, has produced a book that answers these and many other companion questions with stunning clarity. Professor Hitchcock, the most articulate representative of moderate American Catholicism, argues that the contemporary Church is misled by a spurious vision called "the Spirit of Vatican II." As he demonstrates, that "Spirit" has little or nothing to do with the deliberations and decrees of the ecumenical council. Rather, it is the spirit of a relatively small group of influential—but unrepresentative—Church officials and bureaucrats, acting in tandem with the media to pursue their own vision of the Church militant.

Throughout the papal visit, popular attention remained riveted on the Church's position regarding sexual issues: birth control, abortion, and the ordination of women. The media saw no reason to deal with transcendent themes. This preoccupation with social issues is familiar to American Catholics; ecumenical inroads since the Vatican Council have emphasized cooperation on social concerns as

well. At their best, these efforts have demonstrated that men of differing faiths can unite to fight against injustices—a fact that is reassuring, but certainly not novel. At their worst, ecumenical projects have suppressed doctrinal and liturgical differences until a bowdlerized Catholicism meets a bowdlerized Protestantism (or Judaism), and the two together confront the secular world stripped of the very themes that make them powerful. No wonder, then, that the popular media have virtually ceased to address the transcendent claims of the Church: American Catholics have virtually ceased to proclaim them.

Ordinarily, Hitchcock notes, to “reform” an institution means to rediscover that institution’s guiding principles and to destroy whatever obstacles inhibit the institution from acting in strict accordance with those principles. The bishops assembled at the Vatican Council attempted just such a reform, and Council documents testify to the Church’s determination to recapture old fervor. But the bishops’ initiatives have been distorted, and the true spirit of the Council subverted, by liberal clerics and their non-Catholic sympathizers. Thus the “reforms” undertaken in the name of the Vatican Council have served the particular interests of that relatively small proportion of the Catholic faithful.

Writing at a pace that sometimes outstrips his ability to organize arguments sequentially, Hitchcock recites the misdeeds of the liberal clerisy: They have refused to allow liturgical practices based on anything but cold reason, and have thereby dismissed the traditions that sustained countless simple believers through the centuries. They have experimented with their own peculiar approaches to the faith, leading congregations into confusion, alienation, and occasionally even heresy. They have bowed to the secular preoccupation with the self, thus trivializing the Church by viewing it as a therapeutic community. Acting on the unsustainable assumption that every individual is endlessly creative, they have encouraged

liturgies that are alternately vapid and bizarre. In an effort to make Catholic doctrine and Scripture more palatable to outsiders, they have rendered interpretations and translations that make the Sermon on the Mount indistinguishable from a Hubert Humphrey campaign speech. While attacking the hierarchy for imposing the strictures of its authority, they have imposed their own authority heavily upon reluctant parishioners. And while decrying the injustices of capitalism, they have been hospitable to Marxist dictators and terrorists. The list goes on, and on, in Hitchcock’s comprehensive indictment.

How has this all come to pass? Hitchcock charges that the clerisy (in which he includes church bureaucrats, nuns, and parish officials, as well as priests) has acted out of concern for its own interests too often, neglecting the interests of the Mystical Body. And since he does not restrict himself to the language of the secular journals, he can even allude to the role of sin in deforming good intentions.

However, *Catholicism and Modernity* is not in its essence a pessimistic book. The Church will survive, as it always has survived. And the instrument of its survival will not be the personal magnetism of John Paul, impressive as that man is. Nor will it be simply because (is it too much to ask?) Catholics actually begin to *read* the documents of Vatican II. The Church will survive as a community of prayer, nourished by its faith. That faith—the faith that has had such a profound impact on all of Western culture—is the real focus of Hitchcock’s book. In the end, perhaps Rome must face a choice. Perhaps the Catholic Church must either reassert its traditional teachings, and suffer the loss of thousands of dissident Christians, or else accommodate those dissidents and lose the integrity of the faith. The choice, so neatly delineated in Hitchcock’s work, should be obvious.

Reviewed by PHILIP F. LAWLER