
This book makes a significant contribution to the genre of pro-life conversion stories, which already has notable examples, such as *Won by Love* by Norma McCorvey (“Jane Roe”), *The Hand of God* by Dr. Bernard Nathanson, and *Unplanned* by Abby Johnson. Those three tell the story from different angles: McCorvey being swept up into the famous lawsuit *Roe v. Wade* by ambitious young pro-choice lawyers, and later working in abortion clinics as a low-level staffer, Nathanson being an abortion doctor and founding figure in NARAL, and Johnson being a former Planned Parenthood clinic director. In this book Browder adds her voice, presenting the perspective of a woman who was a writer for *Cosmopolitan* magazine, one of the key levers of cultural change in the 1960s and 1970s, advancing the cause of the sexual revolution and abortion rights.

*Subverted* is written with two intertwined strands: Browder’s autobiography and her critical commentary on the modern “culture of death” from which she gradually extricated herself over the course of several decades. The deep bond of love between the author and her husband, Walter, also provides a strong backbone to the story that continues right up to the final pages, recounting his death.

The autobiographical strand begins with the author’s upbringing in a small Iowa town; she felt stifled and limited by her backwater beginnings, and was captivated by the notion of trendy, wealthy, glamorous New York City. After earning a journalism degree at the University of Missouri, she jumped at the chance of becoming a staff writer for *Cosmopolitan*, no matter how small the pay or how insignificant the assignments. Helen Gurley Brown, the editor of *Cosmo*, looms large throughout the book—the chief object of critique as Browder grows increasingly disenchanted with the social revolution she was swept up in, furthered, and then broke away from. *The Wizard of Oz* is an apt allusion at this point, in that Brown is somewhat like the Wicked Witch of the West, who holds her minions under a spell. When she is doused, the spell is broken.

“Pay no attention to that little man behind the curtain” also comes to mind, in that Browder emphasizes the point that many of the articles published in *Cosmo* were partially or wholly fabricated. “Quotes” from fictitious “liberated” young professional women, who were as sexually licentious as men, were regularly incorporated into articles. Young women readers of the magazine began mimicking the behavior they were reading about, so that the need for journalistic lying was reduced. Browder recounts, from
her inside knowledge, that this culture of mendacity was deliberately fostered by Helen Gurley Brown to advance the cause of the sexual revolution. Browder says that “the sex revolution was fabricated largely from propaganda. I know because I was one the propagandists who helped sell single women on the notion that sex outside of marriage would set them free.”

For those readers who are familiar with René Girard’s thought, this book strongly confirms his basic theses. Growing up in Iowa, Browder became fascinated by what seemed to her to be the “greater fullness of being” represented by the “Cosmo girls” and the New York City lifestyle. She sold her soul to be a part of that fantasy. Slowly but surely, over a span of decades, she became disenthralled of that “romantic lie” and was led into the “Romanesque truth” of Christian faith.

The central sadness of the story concerns the decision of Sue and Walter to have an abortion during a time of financial difficulties. Their marriage was strong and they had a positive outlook on the future, but their temporary challenges, combined with Roe v. Wade’s opening up of abortion as a license with no limitations, created a situation that Sue would later come to deeply regret. They already had two children, and in the following years Sue’s growing distress over the abortion was manifested in unthinkingly setting the table for five instead of four. This part of the story also illuminates an aspect of Girard’s thought, namely the satanic nature of violence. To speak of “Satan” is the ultimate politically incorrect move in our day; yet how are we to understand a decision by a loving couple to deliberately kill their own child, with the approval of a surrounding society that commends them for making a “rational” choice to manage the difficulties of life? The author puts her finger on a deep truth when she says that a culture of death is “a culture of fear.” In one sense, every culture is a culture of death, in that human beings always die, are eulogized, buried, and so forth. Every culture has rituals and practices surrounding mortality. What Pope John Paul II meant by the “culture of death,” however, is really a “culture of killing.” Decisions by human beings to intentionally kill other innocent human beings are now accepted as normal, rational, and even “empowering.” Browder’s book recounts what happened when she was motivated by fear, and it is a clear call to the reader to avoid going down that path.

The concluding chapters of the book tell the story of the opening up of Sue and Walter’s life trajectory to a deep experience of God and to the walk of faith in community. They had both been raised in mainline Protestant traditions, with only vague attachments to church life. As they moved through the years and came to reject more and more strongly the dominant trends in American culture, they sought out church communities that would nurture their faith. Initial positive experiences with an Epis-
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copal church were helpful, but then a change in location left them with no better option than to attend a Catholic church. I say “no better option” to indicate their state of mind at the time, which was still influenced by the deeply anti-Catholic prejudices of the Cosmo world. Once inside the Church, however, it became for them a Tardis, a world that is bigger on the inside than it appears to be from the outside. The riches of the Catholic intellectual tradition opened up for them a comprehensive interpretation of history and of their own personal histories. The experience of sacramental confession, as recounted by the author, was a life-shaking experience.

I am left with only one hanging question. If the author had not been “forced” by geographical circumstances to begin attending a Catholic church, would she still be a Protestant to this day? The book itself does not provide an answer, but it is worth noting that the other three authors mentioned at the head of this review—McCorvey, Nathanson, and Johnson—all became Catholic. I cannot help but recall Girard once again—specifically his comments on “the unity of novelistic conclusions” in the wake of deep experiences of conversion.

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Stratford Caldecott’s *Not as the World Gives* offers a Christian vision of social and cultural change—of how to make the world a better place. In this respect it is no different than other utopian social theories, even Marxism. After all, for Marx the point was not simply to understand the world but to change it. So too for Caldecott, and, we must keep in mind, for Jesus Christ. But here the similarity ends. For Marx and company, the world is understood to be deficient and defective by design. There is nothing good at the foundation of this fallen world to renew it, to overcome the evil in it. Thus, man is on his own. He must use his own ideas and his own power to redeem the broken world. Autonomous man cannot accept society until it has been perfected in his own imagination and established as fact. This is to be done preferably through something like “education,” but, should that fail, through force.

For Caldecott, in contrast, man is not alone because a loving God is the source of the world, and if the world is to be redeemed it will only be in and through God’s love. We must, as it were, tap into the source of eternal