

a decade of defeat for advocates of gay marriage, which had formerly been rejected by voters in every state where it appeared.

What Is Marriage? probably won't persuade those who voted for same-sex marriage. Still, it is a valuable resource for those of us who believe marriage is worth defending, and their well-reasoned and logical defense of conjugal marriage will aid those of us who need to craft our own arguments on why marriage needs to be defended. *What Is Marriage?* serves as a guide for us in that task and provides an invaluable resource for fighting the battle to save marriage.

Anne Hendershott

Franciscan University of Steubenville

James Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012. 584 pages.

"Of making many books there is no end." These words of Ecclesiastes seem particularly appropriate with regard to the number of church histories there are out there. Is there need for yet another one? What can one more work add to the field? In the case of this work, *History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium*, the answers to those two rhetorical questions would be "Yes" and "Plenty," respectively. Hitchcock brings his impressive combination of scholarship and faith to the kind of project that is the fruit of an academic in the mature years of his career. It is a big work on a big subject, and succeeds impressively. The book is comprehensive and magisterial, but at the same time approachable to the average reader, and manages the difficult task of providing a fresh approach to a very traditional subject.

History of the Catholic Church weighs in at a comfortable fourteen chapters and 580 pages (concise considering its subject matter). Its writing style is learned but neither complicated nor pedantic, appealing primarily to a popular audience but not without use for an academic one. The work is well-suited to serve as a textbook: It is written in short, self-contained passages, and each page has several index terms in its margins. Footnotes are few and explanatory in nature, with sources listed in a bibliography at the end, and there is a comprehensive and useful index. The style of exposition is narrative and (broadly) chronological, covering in turn the New Testament era, early Imperial Rome, Christian Rome, the Patristic

and post-Roman period, the formation of European Christendom, the rise and fall of Byzantium, the Renaissance, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, Modernity (the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries), and the present era, which consists of Vatican II and afterwards. There are also special chapters dedicated to the spread of Christianity during European colonialism, with particular attention paid to the English-speaking regions of Canada, Australia, and the United States. As such, *History of the Catholic Church* serves the useful secondary function of being a short but comprehensive history of Western civilization while being a history of the Catholic Church.¹

All very well and good, but what sets *History of the Catholic Church* apart from any of the dozens of works like it, and makes it worthy of the reader's attention? Besides the content, which is well-researched, well-presented, and quite up to date,² there is the overall tone of the work. It is, quite simply, a *Catholic* work. Hitchcock makes it very clear from the introduction that he rejects the all-too-popular conceit that one must be a non-believer to be able to write a credible study of a religious subject. Rather, he writes with a genuine belief in, and affection for, his subject, which gives the whole effort a warm and appreciative tone. This does not mean that he sacrifices scholarly rigor in any way, nor does it mean that the work overall is in any way pietistic or triumphalist—neither is the case. Instead, Hitchcock has surveyed the totality of Catholicism, and come away liking what he has found. He does not spare criticism of the Church where such is warranted, but neither does he allow the book to turn into an angry polemic against its subject, as such works sometimes do.

In particular, Hitchcock writes with an appreciation of both Tradition and traditions. His is a historian's Catholicism, with awareness that some Catholic things are not accretions or aberrations, but rather organic developments, and should be celebrated as such. On the other hand, he does not praise as evolutionary developments some things that are popular now, but may, in fact, constitute aberrations of Catholic standards. A fine example is the treatment of practices of both abortion and contraception: Hitchcock is quite good at demonstrating Catholicism's deep historical opposition to these practices, however fashionable they may be these days. He is similarly good with sometimes-controversial issues of doctrine, such as papal authority, the sacraments, or purgatory, consistently noting throughout the work the early development of such teachings.

The work also has a strong intellectual-history component, and Hitchcock is very careful to examine some of the significant intellectual developments in the eras he considers, particularly where these have either challenged Catholicism, or where Catholics have made contributions to

them. As one might expect, this makes the complementary interrelation of faith and reason in Catholicism a major theme of the work. Furthermore, Hitchcock's deep perspective makes it possible for this work to be intriguingly critical of some modern verities. While appreciating some aspects of nineteenth-century Liberalism, he does note how much its early adherents were allied with forces opposed to the Catholic Church, making it possible to wonder whether it is the unqualified good that many moderns make it out to be. Or, consider the modern shibboleth of religious toleration—is it truly the cornerstone of a free society, or a contributing factor to widespread religious indifference?

Hitchcock's treatment of the Second Vatican Council at the end is especially interesting in its nuance: His overall assessment is a sober one, which avoids both the reactionary condemnation *and* the mindless adulation of the Council that one so often gets in works like this. Indeed, it is just this tone of appreciation and balance that makes *History of the Catholic Church* such a good work. Histories of the Catholic Church are so often relics of their times and their authors' agendas: sometimes condemning the modern era in favor of an idealized portrait of the Church of the past (usually the medieval or early Christian era); sometimes condemning the Church of the past to produce a Whig-style history celebrating the Church's arrival at a bold new Progressive/Protestant/Modernist/"Relevant" (take your pick) present. Rather, Hitchcock avoids both extremes, and produces a work that is traditional, respectful of tradition, and warmly appreciative of its subject. It will doubtless become a very useful tool in the New Evangelization.

Notes

1. If there is any difference between the two: this reviewer being among the camp who believes that the history of the Church *is* the history of Western Civilization.

2. This reviewer was particularly gladdened to see the likes of Marianne Cope and Kateri Tekakwitha identified in the text as *saints*, showing just how current this work is!

Christopher Beiting
Holy Cross College