a tremendous scholarly labor in uncovering and explaining the Christian roots to the concept of Western freedom. His work deserves a wide reading among philosophers, political theorists, and historians of freedom.

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The columnist Ross Douthat sparked a fierce debate among American Catholics last fall with two op-ed columns in the *New York Times* arguing that the reforms of the Second Vatican Council had proven disastrous for the Church over the past sixty years. George Weigel’s *To Sanctify the World—The Vital Legacy of Vatican II* offers a convincing rebuttal to Douthat’s claims and argues that Vatican II remains the antidote for revitalizing the Church’s evangelical energies for proclaiming the Gospel in the Third Millennium.

Weigel begins *To Sanctify the World* by inviting Catholics today to reimagine Vatican II’s purpose and have a fresh encounter with its teachings. The book is then organized into three parts centered upon three questions: Why was Vatican II necessary? What did Vatican II actually teach? What are the interpretive keys for understanding the Council’s teachings?

In part one, Weigel refuses to accept the logical fallacy that whatever got worse in the Church and the world after the Council, was caused by the Council. Weigel instead shows that already in the nineteenth century the world was becoming increasingly irreligious and turned in on itself. Atheistic secularism was on the rise, especially in Europe. The world’s rejection of God only accelerated in the twentieth century, so that by mid-century, biblical faith was largely banished from the public square and Christendom had ended.

As Weigel shows, the Church’s initial reaction to this new situation was to condemn the ideas and principles of post-Christian modernity. At the same time, there were biblical, patristic, liturgical, ecclesiological, and literary movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that profoundly influenced the Church’s thought. As Weigel sees it, this renewal of the Catholic mind readied the Church for Pope Saint John XXIII’s surprise announcement in 1959 that he intended to summon an ecumenical council that would adopt a more positive engagement with modernity. The Church
therefore needed to be renewed from within so that she could make the Gospel compelling again to a world that had forgotten God and abandoned its faith.

In the second part of *To Sanctify the World*, Weigel examines several texts from John XXIII’s pontificate to identify the main purposes the pope had for the Council. According to Weigel, John XXIII’s chief aim in calling Vatican II was to radically recenter the Church’s focus away from itself and toward Christ, and thereby to reinvigorate its missionary energies for proclaiming the Gospel to the world. Weigel helps the reader to see that Christocentricity and evangelical mission are two themes that run throughout all of the Council’s teachings and tie them together.

Weigel then outlines key elements of Vatican II’s teachings, beginning with the Council’s four most important documents, the constitutions. According to Weigel, Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, challenges the world to open itself to the transcendent Word of God who entered human history to lead men to communion with God. As Weigel sees it, *Dei Verbum* reinforces Vatican II’s project of renewing a Christocentric Church permanently on evangelical mission. Weigel next shows that, in the face of modernity’s distorted totalitarian systems that only caused social fragmentation, Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, proclaims that the Church is a sacramental community that brings about unity and holiness, and thereby satisfies modern man’s yearning for authentic human community. Weigel then examines Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which sought to renew the liturgy so that all the faithful were fully engaged in the Church’s worship centered on Christ, even while acknowledging the legitimacy of debate over its implementation. Lastly, Weigel shows that Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, offers a Christocentric humanism to answer man’s deepest questions about himself and human history: Jesus Christ reveals the truth about the human person and is the key, center, and purpose of human history. Weigel then completes his survey of Vatican II’s teachings by showing how the remaining documents fulfill the Council’s overall project of forming a Christocentric Church fully engaged in an evangelical mission to redeem and sanctify the world.

In part three of *To Sanctify the World*, Weigel offers interpretive keys for understanding Vatican II’s teachings. Unlike prior ecumenical councils that issued creeds, doctrinal definitions, anathemas, and the like, Vatican II’s documents lack precise authoritative keys to fix their meaning and prevent them from being misinterpreted. As a result, two groups emerged in the post-conciliar period that misread the Council’s teachings. Progres-
sives maintain that the Council set an agenda for reforming the Church grounded in “the Spirit of Vatican II” that went beyond the Council’s actual teachings, and Traditionalists reject Vatican II altogether for issuing doctrines they hold are illegitimately opposed to the Church’s prior tradition. Oddly enough, Weigel notes, both groups share a common belief that Vatican II attempted to reinvent Catholicism in discontinuity with the pre-conciliar Church.

Weigel argues that the pontificates of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI give the Church the authoritative keys needed for understanding Vatican II’s teachings. Both popes were men of the Council—John Paul as a bishop and Benedict as a theological expert—and both were dedicated to the full implementation of Vatican II. As Weigel recounts, John Paul throughout his twenty-seven-year pontificate tirelessly promoted the teachings of Vatican II, and the apogee of these efforts was the Great Jubilee of 2000. In preparation, John Paul expressly linked the success of the Church’s evangelical mission in the New Millennium to an ever more faithful implementation of Vatican II. Benedict as prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith worked in tandem alongside John Paul in implementing the Council. Weigel also points to Benedict’s first Christmas address in 2005 as a signature moment of his papacy, where he taught that Vatican II must be read according to a hermeneutic of reform in continuity with the Church’s past, and not according to a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture, to become an increasingly powerful force for renewing the Church and revitalizing its evangelical mission.

But out of all the moments in the pontificates of John Paul and Benedict, Weigel points to the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops as the Master Key for a right reading of the Council. Called by John Paul to assess the implementation of Vatican II, the 1985 Synod affirmed that Vatican II was “a grace of God and a gift of the Holy Spirit.” As Weigel points out, the Synod identified the central and most fundamental idea of Vatican II is that the Church is a sacramental communion of disciples intimately united to God and each other in Christ and sent on a redemptive mission for the salvation of the world. Weigel then points to the Synod’s greatest fruits, the issuance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which provides a much-needed authoritative source of the Church’s teaching in the post-conciliar period.

Weigel concludes To Sanctify the World by arguing that, if the Council’s promise is yet to be fulfilled, it has more to do with the failure by Catholics to put Christ at the center of the Church’s life and work. With this in mind, Weigel calls upon Catholics to commit to a deeper conversion to Christ: “If the teaching of Vatican II could be summed up in a single
sentence, it would be this: *Christ is the center*—of history, of the cosmos, and of the quest for an authentic humanism that creates human community in freedom and solidarity.”

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In *The Politics of the Cross: A Christian Alternative to Partisanship*, historian Daniel K. Williams argues that the political choices that American citizens make should ideally be more informed by Christianity than biased by their political allegiances (7). While claiming that voting for any political party is not necessarily morally wrong in-and-of-itsel, Williams nevertheless asserts that the particular votes that American Christians cast have to be informed by their Christian faith.

In *The Politics of the Cross*, Dr. Daniel K. Williams actually does evince a nuanced and somewhat idiosyncratic understanding of American history and American culture. On the one hand, he claims to be pro-life in a manner similar to many members of the Republican Party (118). He also defends the institution of marriage in his book (160). In fact, Daniel K. Williams asserts that the promotion of the institution of marriage will be a gesture that will help to improve the economic lot of the United States’ economically disadvantaged citizens (193, 249). At the same time, however, Dr. Williams nevertheless also adopts progressive views on economic issues in the United States. For instance, he generally defends an “equality-of-outcome” worldview over an “equality-of-opportunity” (171). While taking a stand against abortion, he nevertheless states that giving economic assistance to working-class women and other poor women is more effective in reducing the amount of abortions in the United States than making abortion illegal (118, 116). Furthermore, Williams not only suggests that the particular advocacy of free-market economics that many on the American Right have has been somewhat ineffective in improving the moral state of American society but also seems to suggest that the general American conservative tendency to defend both the family and the church from the clutches of American government has not been particularly effective in assisting the economic lot of the United States’ less wealthy citizens.