

IN REVIEW

Author critiques modern papacy, credibility

Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit, by Garry Wills. Doubleday. 326 pp., \$25.

Reviewed by E. Leo McMannus
Guest contributor

This book, with the startling title and the ominous subtitle, is not the work of a fervid anti-Catholic, but of a conscientious, mature (at 66), and practicing Roman Catholic, an intellectual, a family man, a respected author of some 21 previous books — including *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, the 1993 Pulitzer Prize winner for general nonfiction — and, since 1988, when he gave up tenure in order to devote more time to writing, an adjunct professor of history at Northwestern University.

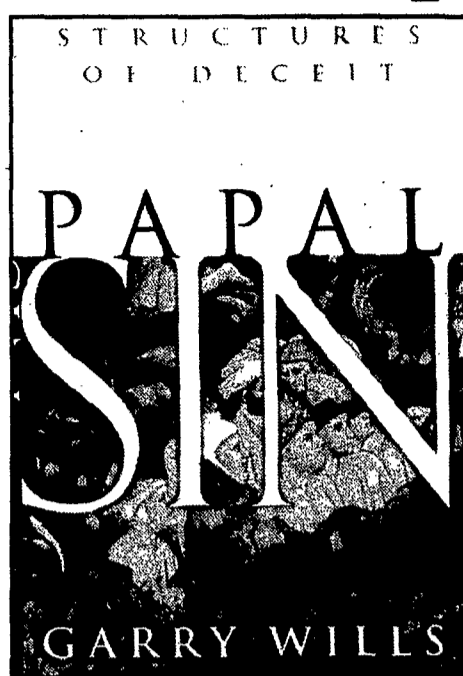
As a young man, inspired by his Jesuit high school teachers, he entered a Jesuit seminary but later withdrew. "It was eros specifically and generally," he said, with characteristic candor in a *New York Times* interview last year. He went on to Yale where he earned his Ph.D. in classics, with a dissertation on Aeschylus.

The "sin" of this challenging and controversial analysis of the modern papacy is not that of the medieval church, in which "greed, venality, the desire for wealth" blatantly predominated — at least as the Catholic poet Dante saw it — but, as Wills

sees it, not something "as clear-cut and direct as simple lying," and yet the more insidious one: dissembling and dissimulating "for the good of the church."

Thus the stratagems of concealment, whereby "freedom of discussion is outlawed," result in a "conspiracy of silence" that redounds to the church's loss of credibility. The "structures of deceit" date from the "papalization" of the faith during the monarchical papacy of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), the longest in history. As the result of Roman centralism, "loyalty to the pope," and especially to the lachrymose and beleaguered Pio Nono (as the Italians called him), shorn of his Papal States, became a popular criterion of faithfulness, so characteristic, even now, of Catholicism.

Too often, sadly, as in the instances of



clerical sexual abuse of minors, such as in Dallas, Texas, and elsewhere around the country, discussed in Chapter 12, the "good of the church" predominates and truth consequently suffers. Thus arises the "thesis of this book, that the life of church authorities is lived within the structures of multiple deceit." To avoid acknowledging its mistakes, whether of diocesan leaders or religious superiors, but especially those of popes, authority is content to foster a "pattern of untruthfulness."

"The very fact that the intellectual level of the church has been raised," says Wills, "makes it harder for a priest to swallow the scriptural fundamentalism reverted to by Rome when it claims that priests must be celibate or that women cannot be priests. The cartoon version of natural law used to argue against contraception, or artificial in-

semination, or masturbation, would make a sophomore blush. The attempt to white-wash past attitudes toward Jews is so dishonest in its use of historical evidence that a man condemns himself in his own eyes if he tries to claim that he agrees with it."

Pow! This is not the adroit touch of gracious irenics but the old-fashioned, in-your-face, polemics.

And yet, Wills says, "I am not attacking either the papacy or its defenders.... The truth, we are told, will make us free. It is time to free Catholics, lay as well as clerical, from the pressures of deceit that are our quiet modern form of papal sin...the quieter corruptions of intellectual betrayal."

Thus Wills, the Catholic academic, having mined the works of respected Scripture scholars, theologians, and the ancients, has no diffidence in scrutinizing the modern papacy, and studying the effects of the "papalization" of the past century and a half.

He does this in 326 pages, dividing his subject, after his illuminating introduction, into four sections, apportioning among them 21 chapters, each with an average of 14 pages, together with a helpful 10-page index: I, the Historical Dishonesties, as he calls them, consisting of four chapters on the church's treatment of the Holocaust; II, Doctrinal Dishonesties, the largest, consisting of 11 chapters on the church's "biased" attitude toward such subjects as contraception, celibacy, the role of women, the treatment of sex, the priestly caste (the longest, with 19 pages and 60 endnotes), homosexuality, Marian politics, and abortion; III, the Honesty Issue, consisting of three chapters that feature two of Wills' heroes, John Henry Newman and Lord John Acton; and IV, interestingly entitled *The Splendor of Truth*, consisting of three chapters that culminate in the truth written about by Augustine and found incarnate in Christ.

Despite the bold scope of *Papal Sin*, its strident tone, and even its somewhat overwrought style, its author might well have been intended by the Irish bishop, Brendan Comiskey of Ferns, who when speaking several years ago at a conference of the laity in Dublin observed, perceptively, that the church "has most to fear from its unloving critics and its uncritical lovers. What the church needs is loving critics."

And Garry Wills is one of them.

...
E. Leo McMannus, a native Rochesterian, lives in Venice, Fla.

Assistant compiles cardinal's homilies, talks

By Mary Claire Gart
Catholic News Service

CHICAGO — In October 1996, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago was asked to consider compiling some of his major texts for future publication. The subject came up again the week before he died in November of that year.

"Al, you'll have to do that for me," he told Precious Blood Father Alphonse Spilly. It's no wonder, then, Father Spilly says, that "it's a very emotional thing for me to actually hold the volumes in my hands. Carrying out his wishes was a long endeavor, but a labor of love."

Father Spilly, Cardinal Bernardin's special assistant for 12 years, spent more than three years re-reading some 450 major talks and 1,600 homilies to choose what he calls "the essential Bernardin."

Now in bookstores, the 1,400-page "Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin" was published in two volumes by the Liturgical Press of Collegeville, Minn.

The first volume includes official docu-

ments issued during the cardinal's tenure as archbishop of Chicago (pastoral letters, reflections, statements and synodal interventions) and selected homilies, most never before published.

The second volume includes texts that dealt specifically with the life of the church and the life of society. Among the issues treated are peacemaking, the need for a consistent ethic of life, health care, Catholic-Jewish dialogue and the Common Ground initiative.

In a foreword to the book, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles says what is most striking about these writings is their profoundly personal tone.

"Authenticity rings through every one of his words," he wrote.

Father Spilly believes the 85 homilies, arranged according to the liturgical year, will be the most popular part of the book.

No matter what the occasion or the subject of the talk, Cardinal Bernardin was "a real wordsmith," according to Father Spilly.

The cardinal would edit the talks several times, whether they were written by himself or one of his staff. Most, however, even-

tually went through Father Spilly's computer.

Sometimes the cardinal would remind his assistant to "read the text aloud to be sure his tongue didn't trip over words." The trouble was, Father Spilly laughed, "we had different tongues."

The collection also shows that Cardinal Bernardin took enormous interest in his teaching role, said his former assistant. "And he was not afraid to take on controversial issues."

"Cardinal Bernardin played a significant leadership role in the Catholic Church, and I'm convinced that interest in his thought will continue well into the new century," said Father Spilly, who is now director of the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

He also is a first cousin to Father William V. Spilly, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Rochester. Both were raised in St. John the Baptist Parish in Whiting, Ind.

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