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Martin Luther Would Be Proud

By Gary Shirley

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Not again, thought Tom Parker. Not another homily about how we should embrace life from conception to natural death. Not another reminder that God is the Author of all life. Please don't warn us again about the evils of contraception and abortion. Is all this really necessary? Why does the Church feel this overwhelming need to invade our private lives?

Driving home from church, Tom complained to his wife Linda, "Don't these priests understand the harsh reality of living in today's world? They stand up there and tell us to welcome children into our lives, but they don't have to face the difficulties of raising them nor foot any of the bills. Do they have a clue what college costs these days? Why is the Catholic Church so out of touch with American life? When will these guys wake up to how society has changed, thanks to great social programs, progressive laws and quantum leaps in technology? Catholics don't need to hear this stuff over and over again."

While he drew his next breath, Linda managed to squeeze in a solicitous, "Yes, dear." She hoped that if Tom knew someone was actually listening, he would be satisfied and let it ride. Only a moment of treasured silence occurred. A different response soon came from the back seat. "So, Tom, you think the Church is out of touch with the times, eh? You actually believe that good Catholics don't need to be reminded of the truths of the faith," came the return volley from his brother Jeff. Both Jeff and his wife Rose had been listening attentively to Tom's spleen venting.

Jeff always loved to antagonize his older brother all through their boyhood, especially when Tom went off on one of his tirades. Visiting from Colorado, Jeff and Rose were only in town for the weekend. He wanted the visit to be a pleasant one but Jeff couldn't resist the chance to spar with his big brother like they used to do. Since he had been certified as an RCIA catechist in the past year, Jeff had some insights into the faith that he was anxious to share. Tom would be a tough sell, because Jeff knew his brother's faith formation pretty much ended with the eighth-grade CCD program. Baiting his brother, Jeff asked, "So, Tom, what's incredulity?"

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The response from Tom was more treasured silence. Carrying the torch, Jeff responded, "The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that, 'incredulity is the neglect of revealed truth or the willful refusal to assent to it.'" He added, "Incredulity is just this side of outright heresy, Tom." Not quite making the connection, Tom said, "So... I go to Mass every Sunday, but because I complain about the homily I am a heretic?" "Of course not," said Jeff, "but think about the priest's message. He was trying to remind the faithful that, agree or not, we must follow the Church's teachings. To do otherwise makes us, in effect, Protestants."

Jeff continued, "Remember, the so-called 'Reformation' in the fifteenth century was born of protest against the Catholic Church. That mindset of protest has infected Christianity ever since. It has essentially morphed into an attitude of, 'I'll believe what I agree with and discard the rest.' Many Catholics accept the Church teachings that they agree with, like maybe the Mass, the Eucharist, or certain rites and traditions. Then they secretly or even flagrantly protest against the things that have

not earned their agreement. Think about it, Tom. Personal agreement is now the de facto standard by which we measure our faith life. Disobedience has become the norm. It's wrong and it is the cause of many good Catholics going astray. "

Seeing that he had everyone's rapt attention, Jeff went on. "Contraception is a classic example. Millions of Catholics think they can freely engage in contraceptive practices while still living a sacramental life. They pretend that they do not know what the Church teaches or act as if some unwritten latitude exists as they brazenly dissent. Believe me, brother, I've heard all the rationalizations in my short time as a teacher – 'Oh, I don't agree with the Vatican on that,' or 'What does the Pope know about married life?' or 'The Church is just trying to keep women barefoot and pregnant.' Meanwhile these very same people line up for Holy Communion every Sunday, resolute in their sin. I sit in the pew and watch in amazement. Are they Catholics going forward to receive the Lord in the Eucharist or are they Protestants who simply find the Eucharist acceptable theology?"

"Wait a minute," snorted Tom, "You are really hammering your fellow parishioners awful hard. Being a catechist doesn't make you judge and jury." Experienced with the underlying meaning in Tom's tone, Jeff responded, "Listen carefully, big brother, because I'm not hammering the people but their actions. Only God holds the judgment seat on each person, but we must not be afraid to judge actions and to address those actions that are sinful." Before Tom could respond, Jeff continued, "The Catechism nails this very attitude when it states in the section on mortal sin, 'Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of sin.' By pretending not to know or by obstinately refusing to find out the truth, we think we are fooling God," said Jeff. "We might fool our priest, our friends and our family, but we cannot fool God. In reality we are actually deepening our state of sin. Imagine the civil parallel: if I pretend to be completely ignorant of paying income tax, then do I really believe that the IRS will let me slide in the end? Of course not! In reality, for every year I avoid paying taxes the penalties grow exponentially. Should God operate with different logic? Why do we think God went to all the trouble to teach us the right way through Moses, the prophets and Christ himself only to assume that he'll let us slide in the end? For this to occur we would have to re-mold God so that he becomes a Being of pure mercy devoid of justice. It's logically and theologically absurd."

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Clearly intrigued, and impressed with Jeff's insights, Tom said, "Are you saying that good Catholics can actually deepen their state of sin by following their conscience instead of a Church teaching that they find difficult or confusing? If you are, then where lies the hope of the Christian life? Where, indeed, is the mercy?" With a quick glance at Rose, who was enjoying the dialogue, Jeff responded, "Two issues, Tom. First, I am drawing that fine line between truly not knowing a certain teaching of the faith versus knowing the teaching in your heart and ignoring it willfully. This distinction is crucial. Do you think there's a Catholic out there who does not know that the Church is against all forms of artificial contraception? Yet, millions of Catholics wantonly disobey this teaching. How about capital punishment? The Church has come out in the Catechism and in the media against the taking of human life for any reason, including those on death row. The position has been made clear many times. Now, poll your fellow Catholics the next time an execution is scheduled. The result? 'Kill the guy,' many will say. 'An eye for an eye...' and all the usual clichés will come easily off the tongue. Where's the support of the Church's teaching? Where's the deference to her authority? Where's the obedience? If the Church does not possess the one truth, who does? Once again we have "protestantized" the faith. Pick any teaching of the Church, it really doesn't matter which one – from the executive who thinks "white" lies are acceptable business practice, to the feminist who refuses to acknowledge the sacredness of new life, to the student who insists that the cheating he does now is offset by the good he will do as a doctor in the future. In each case, they know in their hearts that they are doing wrong but to absolve

themselves they vilify Holy Mother Church for solemnly reminding them of Christ's call to perfection."

"Sounds to me like it's better to not know the faith at all and plead ignorance at the feet of God when I die," remarked Tom. "Sure, Tom," responded Jeff, "and Our Lord should have just sat under a palm tree eating dates and not bothered to teach his flock. That brings me to the second issue – never forget that we have an obligation to form our conscience. This obligation is serious, it is difficult and it is lifelong. We cannot hide behind the, 'I'm following my conscience' defense when we fail to properly form that conscience. We have the resources to meet this obligation in the form of the Deposit of Faith. The Bible, Catechism, writings of the Fathers, Saints, Doctors and Councils all provide insights into the wisdom of the ages, ably presented to us by our bishops, priests and deacons. With these profound resources we are equipped to handle life's moral and spiritual challenges. The problem is that most Catholics attempt to get by with an eighth–grade understanding of the Church's teachings or, worse, they adopt society's spin on the profound issues of our day. That's like turning to a Ford dealer to discuss the virtues of owning a Chevy," Jeff concluded.

Rounding the curve into his subdivision, Tom seemed pensive. Jeff read his brother's face and asked, "What is it, Tom? Are you still convinced that your pastor was wasting his breath today?" "Quite the contrary," replied Tom. "I now realize he was doing his job by keeping us aware of our Christian obligations. Like many in the congregation, I put up my personal filter screen to block what I did not want to hear. It's always easier to sit in the pew and mock the message." He continued, "I feel somewhat overwhelmed by the work I need to do to raise my level of understanding. What do you recommend?" Jeff, sensing his brother's sincerity, replied, "I recommend we start with a pot of Linda's excellent Colombian coffee, then we'll crack open that beautiful Catechism you have in your study. You know... the one still in the shrink wrap," he teased, as only a brother could do.

Gary Shirley, his wife, and three children are members of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Kennesaw,

Georgia, where Gary serves as catechist in the adult education program.

Can We Handle the Truth?

By Gary Revel

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Most people in America are busy with the details of achieving their goals and making their own place in the world. They have little time for themselves and don't want to spend it on some lost cause that most people don't care about. So it is with the injustice of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Even though most don't believe James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King Jr. or at least not by him–self, they also don't have the time to try to figure it out. Some would say they just don't care; so what's the use of making a movie of the story of my investigation of Martin Luther King Jr's assassination?

What good will it do to have a full–length feature movie presented throughout the nations theaters that explores this matter when nobody has the time to care about it in today's environment? This is a question that I have asked myself for years; and continue to ask. Many believe very strongly that the story needs to be told and it needs to be told in just such a motion picture. Some believe that it is a story that has historical importance and is best served by being written in conjunction with a treatment of the civil rights movement and presented in a non–fiction literary work. Still others tell me that it should be a TV movie done in the tight commercial presentation that is best suited for today's contemporary television audience. Some would like to see it as a documentary or docu–drama. There are also those that just don't care about anything related to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and would rather everyone just quit talking about it.

If it is to be done in a film there are those that believe it can only succeed if it is a big budget, major studio production with the top producers, writers, and stars directed by the hottest new director. Others believe it can only be done independently with lesser–known talent and production entities.

There are also those who believe that the music is the key to the success of the film. The song I wrote in 1977, "They Slew the Dreamer" is now published by Sony Music. Sony has an opportunity to bring a successful music project to bear via the marketing of the movie. It's a little like which came first the chicken or the egg, and so the question; which should come first the music or the movie? The truth is, the music came first.

Of course to many, none of this should matter at all, a good cover–up deserves to stay covered. Real conspiracies are never to be known about; only conspiracies that cover up other conspiracies have a right to reach the light of day. What the people don't know can't hurt them, right? Only time will tell whether or not the story of my investigation of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. is ever told. If it isn't then maybe it's because it is too much of the truth and we just can't 'handle the truth'.

Born, June 29, 1949, in Florala, Alabama, United States of America. Wrote songs and taught him–self guitar, formed Rock 'n Roll band at 15. Graduated High School in June 1967, Holmes County High School, Bonifay, Florida, USA. Served in U.S. Navy, 1967–1969 during Vietnam War Era. Story of his

MLK Assassination Investigation optioned by Producer–Director–Writer William Sachs.



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