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Former Dominican takes on the 'inquisitor'

by Raymond A. Schroth

THE POPE'S WAR: WHY RATZINGER'S SECRET CRUSADE HAS IMPERILED THE CHURCH AND HOW IT CAN BE SAVED

By Matthew Fox

Published by Sterling Ethos, \$22.95

Matthew Fox, ordained a Dominican priest in 1967, is the author of more than 30 books and founder of movements that combine the scriptures, tradition, mystics and prophets into his personal vision called creation spirituality. It is a "green" theology in which protecting nature is considered a sacrament.

In 1993 he was expelled from the Dominicans for his failure to explain why he called God "Mother" and preferred the term "original blessing" to original sin. He then became a priest in the Episcopal church.

His latest book, *The Pope's War*, is many things. It is more tract than analysis, a case-by-case indictment of the political-religious system that covered up the sexual abuse crisis, and an exposé of the three dominant secret societies -- Opus Dei, the Legionaries of Christ, and Communion and Liberation -- that, in his judgment, fortified the concentration of power in Rome, determined to undo the work of the Second Vatican Council.



The book's strength resides in its 'martyrology' of the

'inquisitor's' enemies. The inquisitor was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Fox presents a list of 91 men and women whose careers were sidelined or ended because, in the judgment of the contemporary Inquisition, they said the wrong thing.

For the most part his narrative is based on the work of other scholars: Penny Lernoux on Latin America and liberation theology; Jason Berry on the Legion of Christ and its corrupt founder, Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado; Michael Walsh, Gordon Urquhart and Maria del Carmen Tapia on Opus Dei; and John Allen on Ratzinger's early years, but not on Opus Dei, where Fox suggests Allen was misled by off-the-record interviews with the Opus Dei leadership.

Fox's strongest criticisms are of Opus Dei, whose Latin American bishops, he claims, have been the Vatican's agents in the suppression of base communities inspired by liberation theology.

Then there's that martyrology. (Of the 91 on the list, those I know are men of absolute integrity.)

Redemptorist Fr. Bernard Haring is best known as the pioneering moral theologian who centered his ethics on the virtue of charity. Drafted into the German army in 1940, observing the 'diabolical actions of German Christian soldiers' in the name of obedience convinced him that obedience could never be a core concept in moral theology: It must be the courage to be responsible. He warned that theologians can defame theology through cowardice as well as arrogance and can distort the truth by 'striving for offices and positions or titles of honor.'

Brazilian Franciscan Leonardo Boff's story reminds the reader that liberation theology was based on the principles of Vatican II, but applied to the 'concrete and dire circumstances of Latin America in the struggle for justice and equality.' By the end of the 1970s more than 850 priests and nuns had been martyred.

Americans today who are impatient with the reluctance of the U.S. bishops to tackle social justice issues can take inspiration from the bishops of Brazil, including Pedro Casaldáliga, a poet-bishop in the Amazon jungle. Interrogated by Ratzinger in Rome, he was silenced and confined to his diocese. The reason: He declined to travel regularly to Rome because he lacked the money. Casaldáliga approved of liberation theology, he created a Mass centered on Indian and black culture, and he referred to Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador as a 'martyr.'

In Czechoslovakia in 1945, Ludmila Javorova was ordained by Bishop Felix Davidek, who had endured 14 years in a communist prison and felt compelled in conscience, after consultation with other bishops, to meet the need for priests in a desperate situation. Told in 1995 that her ordination had been 'invalid,' Javorova withdrew. She says today, 'God permitted my ordination. I wanted only to serve.'

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In one sense, Fox's book is an indictment of the man now known as Pope Benedict XVI, who, motivated by ambition, switched from a Vatican II liberal to an ecclesiastical climber. He embraced semi-fascist movements like Opus Dei for psychological and financial support, and has left a roster of broken spirits in his wake. But it is also a manifesto for Fox's own spirituality, which he argues can save the church.

The lists of myths to be discarded, treasures to be preserved and 25 steps to save us are a compilation of ideas debated in the free Catholic press in recent years. All this, plus his personal interpretations, which range from orthodox to surprising.

The 'myths' Fox would discard include: celibacy, male dominance, the centrality of the magisterium, a 'celebrity' pope, and that Jesus is the only 'son of God.' Treasures include: the paschal mystery, Incarnation, the cross, God is love, immortality, and we are all part of one another.

As there is no hope of a third Vatican council, because its would-be members have been 'dumbed down' into 'yes men,' what must we do to be saved? Rebuild the church from the grass roots; join lay organizations and hold national and international gatherings; remake worship with small home meetings and ecstatic dancing; call back former priests; limit births for ecological reasons; trust theologians; and listen to the young.

It used to be said in New York that a conservative was a liberal who had just been mugged. If so, that happened to the Ratzinger of Fox's pages. Ratzinger was once a progressive, but was traumatized when a student demonstration invaded his university space. He withdrew and calculated a conservative career that brought him to the top. But in Fox's portrait he remains a human being.

If this book were a grand opera or novel about a king, it could have one of two happy endings.

In one: An Old Testament prophet-friend confronts the king alone in his chamber and runs the events of his life before his eyes, and asks, 'What does it profit a man ...?' The king turns his face to the wall and sobs.

In the other: When Ratzinger removed Fox from teaching creation spirituality in 1988, Matthew Fox wrote him a Dear Brother Ratzinger letter that described the church as a dysfunctional family, sums up creation spirituality as compassion, and invites Ratzinger to take a year off and join him: 'Why not step down from your isolated and privileged life at the Vatican to do circle dances with women and men, old and young, in search for authentic spirituality?'

Who knows? Maybe he will.

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