

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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WHAT ARE YOU READING?

We chat about many things. Even when we narrow the topic to “Church”, there remains a wide variety of appealing topics. Sometimes our church chat revolves around what we are reading: books, articles, on-line items, or even bulletin announcements.

Here are three churchy books I have read and chatted about recently. I recommend all three, though they are not related. They are all available through Amazon.

1. I just finished *Whistle: Tom Doyle’s Steadfast Witness for Victims of Clerical Sexual Abuse* by Robert Blair Kaiser who died this past Holy Thursday after a distinguished long-term career advocating for progressive causes within the Church.

The book follows the life of Fr. Thomas Doyle, the renowned canon lawyer who continues to champion the rights and dignity of clerical sexual abuse victims. His consistent message is that the victims themselves are the courageous heroes of this centuries old debacle when they speak out and share their truth.

To those of you who feel you have heard enough about clerical sex abuse and the cover-up by our hierarchy, I still suggest you read this book. It is a jack-hammer, relentless chronology of a sordid reality infesting the core of the institutional church, and it will add some insider details you probably don’t know. In particular, *Whistle* will expose the tactics and mind-set of the bishops and popes who denied and deliberately blocked any attempt to seek justice for victims and honesty from our institutional church.

There is also more focus than I have seen before on the role that diocesan lawyers played in this whole squalid mess. Another highlighted dimension: the frightened leaders of the “treatment centers” to whom the bishops sent their pedophile priests warned the pope and hierarchy early on that the “treatment” wasn’t working. The bishops and popes ignored the warnings.

Whistle is a must-read in the same way that Elie Wiesel is a must-read for anyone serious, or even curious, about the Holocaust. And for the same reason: we must never forget. Or think that it is over –especially the culture that spawned the cover-up.

2. *Jesus Christ, Peacemaker: A New Theology of Peace* by Terence Rynne introduces us to a side of Jesus that many of us missed. Far from the common notion that Jesus avoided the political and social turmoil of first century Israel, Rynne demonstrates that Jesus was deeply involved in the seething unrest of his times and culture. Jesus' commitment to non-violence is complete, even as he firmly and boldly confronts tangible evil.

This excellent, solidly researched but reader-friendly book, clarifies the profound nature of Jesus' peacemaking mission. In particular, he emphasizes the public dimension of the peace-creating core of Jesus' life and message. He demonstrates how the Jesus approach has real, practical results in current and recent world conflicts, outlining its effectiveness on the large scale in India, South Africa, Poland, Philippines, and, in the USA, with Martin Luther King. Rynne has contributed a valuable piece to Christian thinking, and the appendix demonstrates applicability on many levels in our real world.

He has expanded peace from the necessary but cozy confines of our own hearts and put it in the non-violent streets of change.

The non-violent, peacemaking mission of Jesus has been co-opted and sanitized by the just war theory. Rynne points out that some of the principles, and some actions following those principles, may be "reasonable" in some circumstances, but don't claim those principles and actions are Christian. The church's accommodation to those principles is a rejection of the Jesus message and his demonstrated life and death. A steadfast commitment to non-violence is the only way to gospel integrity. Just war is a path to more war, even when it may halt a current bloody conflict. It is not a path to the gospel.

3. My third recommended book is a change-up, and I mean that literally, in the baseball sense. *Baseball as a Road to God: Seeing Beyond the Game* by John Sexton, the President of New York University, is a passionate analysis of the game and a lighthearted but serious insistence that baseball parallels and even leads to experiences that accompany our spiritual journey.

Regardless of your faith perspective or the depth of your spiritual life, this book introduces two seemingly different experiences (baseball and spirituality) and invites you to look more closely in the hope that you will see and feel some convergence between them. Hold baseball in your left hand and your spiritual life in your right hand for nine innings (chapters in the book) and then, after the game, see if your right and left hands are joined.

My guess is that you will accept and delight in that co-mingling.

In any case, read away! And chat about it.

