

WEEK 13, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES
**ARTS &
TRADITION**

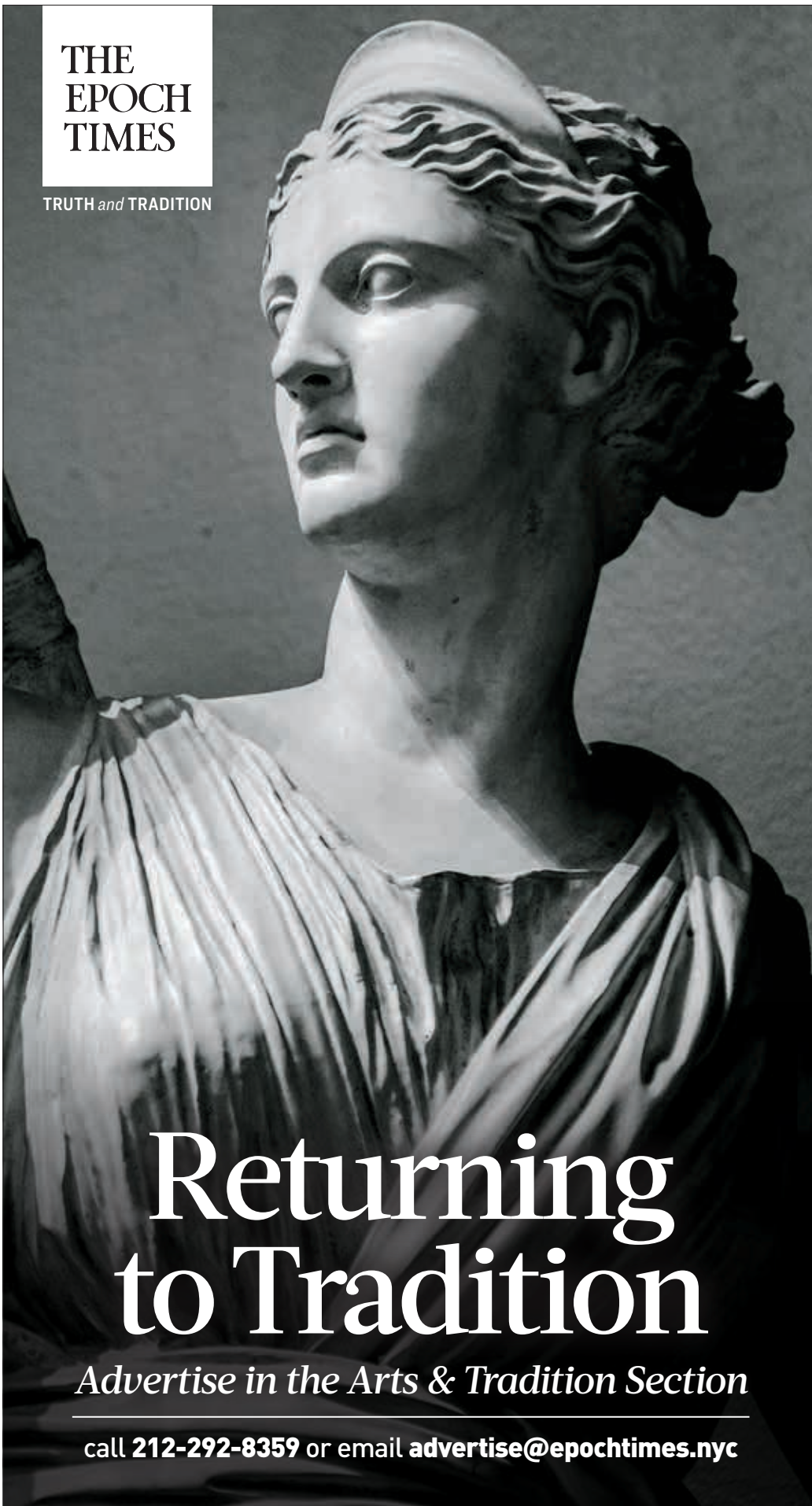
PRADO NATIONAL MUSEUM 2020



"Madonna of the Rose," 1518–1520, by Raphael. Oil on panel transferred to canvas. Prado National Museum in Madrid, Spain.

'The Prince of Painting'

How Raphael Wholeheartedly Captured Humanity...4



THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH and TRADITION

Returning to Tradition

Advertise in the Arts & Tradition Section

call 212-292-8359 or email advertise@epochtimes.nyc

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Different Strokes for Different Folks?

ARTISTS and VIRTUE

JEFF MINICK

Recently, a friend and I exchanged a few emails on artists and their arts, seeking answers to some questions she'd raised: Should artists get a pass from common standards of behavior? Are they free from the precepts of traditional morality? Is the man who writes a novel about marital love while in the meantime committing adultery a hypocrite deserving of scorn, no matter how wonderfully he writes? Is the famous film director who demands sexual favors from his female stars a criminal, a brilliant creator, or both? Here is my friend's latest position:

"I always thought that art was meant to make us better, more compassionate people. As a theater person, I've wondered why artists don't seem to embody these ideals. They seem like worse people, feeling entitled to be exempt from the standards the rest of us live by—shouldn't they be better than those everyday standards? And moreover, people excuse them as though those who make art are somehow different. Different is fine, but worse?"

A Change in Perspective

Her questions set me to thinking about those writing workshops I entered into in my mid-20s, not the ones that meet in a classroom—I only once joined a writing workshop, and left after a month—but those individual tutorials that come from studying writers considered masters of their craft. In my younger days, poets like Dylan Thomas and Edna St. Vincent Millay, novelists like Ernest Hemingway and Evelyn Waugh, and scores of others were my teachers. Their instruction taught me sentence rhythm, the use of adjectives and adverbs, paragraph length and arrangement, and a host of other technical skills.

and on goes my list of authors whose works I have treasured but whose behavior was often abominable. Now let's return to my friend's email.

Looking for Answers

Is art supposed to make us "better, more compassionate people"? One would certainly hope so. Great art should make us more fully human, adding to our store of thoughts and emotions, connecting with us, inspiring us, and turning our thoughts and emotions heavenward, metaphorically speaking, rather than plunging them into the depths of hell.

Is it also true that many artists, especially the moderns, by whom I mean artists from the mid-19th century onward, feel "entitled to be exempt from the standards the rest of us live by"?

Certainly many artists—and by artists I mean everyone from actors to writers—have abided, as far as we know, by traditional standards of morality. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, most of the writers who fit into this category possessed a religious sensibility, authors such as Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, Sigrid Undset (despite the irregularities of her first marriage), Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Walker Percy.



Emily Dickinson's poetry embodied a religious sensibility. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.



Ernest Hemingway may strike us as a romantic figure, but many of us would abhor much of his behavior in his later years.

Double Standards

Here she raises two important points, one overtly, the other covertly.

We do indeed condone the behavior of some artists whose misdeeds might land a barber or bricklayer in the clink. A classic example would be Michael Jackson, who long before his death was suspected of molesting children.

When I mentioned Jackson's sickening predilections to a musician friend, his reply was, "Well, he was one of the greatest stars of all time," as if that honorific excused the performer's transgressions against law and decency.

The covert point, perhaps unintentionally made by my friend, has to do with standards. Not so long ago, society imposed a set of standards that if broken brought repercussions. Drunks and drug addicts were scorned or pitied, vices like pornography were practiced in secret, those who cursed were considered vulgar, and lewd public behavior



VIACHESLAV LOPATIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

PUBLIC DOMAIN

would bring a police officer to your door.

Are We Getting What We Deserve?

Today, those standards lie in a hospital bed in the intensive care ward. In my own lifetime, we have witnessed the demise of character and proper behavior not only in the arts but everywhere: in our politics, on social media, in the burgeoning pornography industry, in our contempt for human life, in the violence of our public rhetoric, even in our dress and demeanor. "Let it all hang out" seems the motto of our present age, with Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way" serving as its anthem.

The arts can create change in a culture—think of Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin"—but just as often, the arts reflect that change. A culture once largely Christian is today adrift on a stream of relativism, where values are what we declare them to be, where the transcendent has given way to such gods as materialism,

sexuality, group identities, and extreme individuality. Art and culture feed off each other, together producing these alterations.

In other words, the "ideals" and "standards" to which my friend refers remain valid, but the spirit of our permissive age and many of our artists reject them.

Not so long ago, society imposed a set of standards that if broken brought repercussions.

Nietzsche in Retrospect

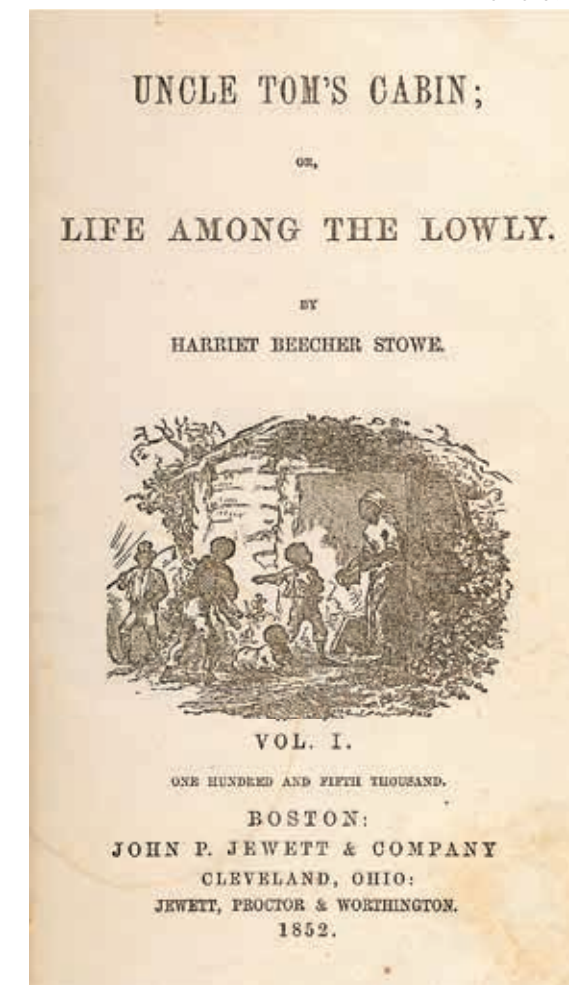
But here is the good news: Those ideals, those virtues, remain. They are entities all their own, and they exist whatever we moderns may declare to the con-

trary. Truth, Goodness, and Beauty may be ignored or corrupted for a time, but they always triumph in the end.

Artists—and other public figures like politicians, sports figures, and celebrities—may think of themselves as variations of Nietzsche's Übermensch, beings who, no longer bound by traditional values, are free to flout convention and make their own rules. But a remnant—and I believe that remnant to be a majority of our people, however silent—recognize the iniquity when they see it.

As long as that remnant exists, as long as the banner of virtue remains aloft, the hope for the restoration of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty remains alive.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



(Top left) Goodness, truth, and beauty will triumph. The Renaissance fresco by Raphael in the Stanza di Raffaello of the Vatican Museums.

(Top right) Some books can change a culture. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" contributed mightily to the awareness that slavery was an evil institution. The title-page illustration by Hammatt Billings for "Uncle Tom's Cabin." First Edition: Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1852.

Is art supposed to make us 'better, more compassionate people'? One would certainly hope so.

What Our Readers Say:

It's the only sane newspaper amidst all this insanity.
STAN K., PASTOR

It's bringing morality back to newspapers.
LISSA T., BUSINESS OWNER

It's the only paper that I know of right now that actually gives you the honest, old fashioned journalism.
DRUEL, BUSINESS OWNER

You're presenting the facts and letting the reader decide.
TERRI B., BUSINESS OWNER

Everything I read in it is fair and balanced, compared to other newspapers.
JUNE V., RETIRED BANKER



THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH AND TRADITION

Subscribe @ ReadEpoch.com



Become a Published Author with Dorrance. We want to read your book!

Trusted by authors for nearly 100 years, Dorrance has made countless authors' dreams come true.




Our staff is made up of writers, just like you, and we are dedicated to making publishing dreams come true.

Complete Book Publishing Services

FIVE EASY STEPS TO PUBLICATION:

1. Consultation
2. Book Production
3. Promotion
4. Distribution
5. Merchandising and Fulfillment

Call now to receive your **FREE Author's Guide**
877-655-4006 or www.dorranceinfo.com/epoch

'The Prince of Painting'

How Raphael Wholeheartedly Captured Humanity

LORRAINE FERRIER

Beauty, goodness, and righteousness—the glory of God and our true human nature—can all be found in Raphael's art. That's why, even in 2020, 500 years after Raphael's death in 1520, his art still has the ability to uplift us and give us hope. And that's why Raphael's art is still relevant and much needed in this world, when all around us can seem anything but good.

Raphael's paintings and drawings in particular connect us with our inner worlds in a way that brings us back to our own goodness. Or at least his art reminds us of our best selves.

"Raphael connects us with the angels of our better nature," said Matthias Wivel, curator of 16th-century Italian paintings and drawings at London's National Gallery of Art in his 2018 talk "Raphael: The Renaissance Virtuoso."

Raphael's art can do this because Raphael wholeheartedly captured humanity—whether in a simple sketch or a finished painting. Anyone experiencing his artwork cannot help but be a better person for it.

Honoring Raphael

To mark the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death a monumental retrospective, the "Raphael 1520-1483" exhibition at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It features 120 paintings and drawings by Raphael and a further 84 works, such as ancient Roman artifacts, Renaissance sculptures, codices (volumes of manuscripts), and more, to enable us to understand Raphael and his oeuvre.

The exhibition explores Raphael's incomparable draftsmanship and painting, and also Raphael the architect and keeper of antiquities—showing the "universal artist" that 16th-century art historian Giorgio Vasari believed him to be.

Organized by the Scuderie del Quirinale and Florence's Uffizi Gallery, the exhibition took three years to plan involving an array of art experts. Marzia Faietti and Matteo Lafranconi curated "Raphael" with the assistance of Vincenzo Farinella and Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro.

Many of the exhibits are on loan from world-renowned institutions. Three of Raphael's Madonna paintings return to Italy for the first time since being exported overseas: "The Alba Madonna"

from the National Gallery of Art in Washington; the "Madonna of the Rose" from the Prado in Madrid, Spain; and the "Tempi Madonna" from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, Germany. Raphael's two portraits of popes—Julius II, and Leo X with the cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi—have never before been seen under one roof.

One of the many exhibition highlights is a letter to Pope Leo X in which Raphael and his friend Baldassare Castiglione explain the intention of the ambitious project Raphael was working on in the few months leading to his death: an archaeological project to re-create the glory of Rome region by region.

The exhibition follows Raphael's artistic endeavors back in time, from his death on April 6, 1520, through three distinctive periods of his life—from Rome to Florence, from Florence to Umbria, and to his Urbino roots.

The Scuderie exhibition opens as Raphael's life ends: with a full-sized replica of his tomb at the Pantheon. His grand tomb gives visitors an idea of the high esteem in which he was held, both in life and death.

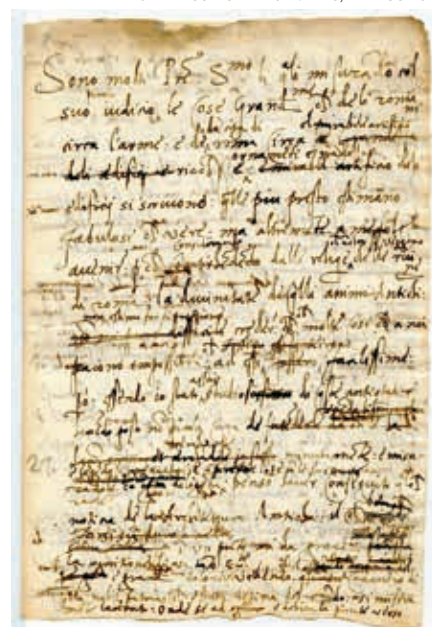
Through Raphael's Art

Whether he paints sublime, sweet Madonnas or popes in sumptuous ceremonial dress, Raphael's paintings seem to somehow transcend time, culture, and iconographical language, so anyone can connect with the essence of his paintings.

A Pope

Take a quick glance at Raphael's "Portrait of Julius II." Everything on the surface points to Julius's position as pope. He sits on a throne, dressed in papal red velvet and white satin or silk, his hands adorned with gems. We see the symbols of his papacy—the keys to the church—on the green background, yet what emanates from the picture is his humanness. For as we look closer, we see

STATE ARCHIVES OF MANTOVA/COURTESY OF THE MINISTRY OF HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, AND TOURISM



Letter to Pope Leo X from Baldassare Castiglione, 1519. Ink on paper. State Archives of Mantova, Italy.

Julius the man deep in thought. It's almost as if we've caught him unawares. His lips are pursed in concentration, and he seems to be shifting in his seat as if uncomfortable. His left hand tightly grips the chair arm as if to steady himself, and his right hand lightly holds a handkerchief. This is Raphael connecting us to the man who heads the Roman Catholic Church. It's almost as if Raphael is reminding us that Julius is God's representative here on earth, a human just like us.

A Knight

In "The Knight's Dream (Hercules at the Crossroads)," Raphael chose to interpret an epic poem his father had written for Federico da Montefeltro, the duke of Urbino. Raphael's father, Giovanni Sanzio, was a writer and painter at the court of Urbino, and he'd written the poem based on the myth of Hercules at the crossroads. Sanzio's poem is the only version where the soldier is asleep, according to the website of The National Gallery, London.

In the painting, a young soldier named Scipio sleeps in the shade of a bay tree, unaware of the choice he has to make when he wakes. A lady stands on either side of him: On the left is Virtue and on the right stands Pleasure. Raphael paints Pleasure with a gentle allure; her hair is loose, and she wears pastels and daintily holds up her dress up. Raphael had drawn Pleasure with a lower-cut dress but decided on this version that still convincingly conveys the vice of Pleasure. What

Pleasure offers is all things of ease and beauty, while Virtue, in her modest attire, offers learning and valor—a harder but more rewarding outcome.

A Madonna

Look at any of Raphael's sweet Madonna paintings that he's so famous for. In "The Alba Madonna," in the left of the painting, the innocence of childhood curiosity exudes from the toddler who will become St. John the Baptist. John looks up to the right expectantly at the Christ child, who steadies the cross that John holds.

Appearing wise beyond his years, the Christ child shows a detachment from earthly, sentimental love, because he knows he's on earth for something greater. He puts one foot tentatively on the earth, perhaps suggesting that he's in the world but not of the world.

While John wears a fur for warmth, the Christ child wears and wants nothing of this world, except to teach others to follow God. Take away the classical Roman costumes and we could simply be looking at a family portrait of a mother and her charges in a tender, playful moment in nature. Raphael makes this scene relatable to us all.

Clearly, Raphael paints a religious scene in "The Alba Madonna," but what seems to come forth in many of his paintings is a harmonic tension between the spiritual and the earthly—the divine and the human realm.

Practice Makes Beauty

Harmony in art doesn't just happen. Look at some of Raphael's drawings and you can see how he reworked many of his figures. Some drawings show where he slightly shifted the angle of a head or an arm ever so slightly so that each figure is coherent with the other elements in the eventual painting. Take one of those elements away and the whole composition falls into discord. That's what makes Raphael an exemplary draftsman of groups of figures, as seen in his exceptional "School of Athens" at the Vatican.

Born in Urbino in 1483, Raphael was immersed in art from a very young age. His father, on seeing his son's artistic talent, was said to have sought out an apprenticeship for him. Sanzio visited the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, whose apprentices included Pietro Perugino and Leonardo da Vinci.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



CABINET OF THE UFFIZI GALLERIES/ COURTESY OF THE MINISTRY OF HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND TOURISM



Self-portrait, 1506–1508, by Raphael. Oil on poplar panel. Gallery of statues and paintings at the Uffizi Galleries, in Florence, Italy.

BAVARIAN STATE PAINTING COLLECTIONS, MUNICH



"Madonna Tempi," 1507–1508, by Raphael. Oil on panel. Old Picture Gallery, Bavarian State Painting Collections, Munich.

craftsmen in his workshop as he would've treated his own children, and it seems they returned that love. "He was never seen to go to court without having with him, as he left his house, some 50 painters, all able and excellent, who kept him company in order to do him honor. In short, he lived not like a painter but like a prince."

Raphael's goodness, imbued in faith, spilled over into his paintings. His art is full of beauty that not only the eyes can see but also the heart can feel. That's why Raphael's art endures—as through his brush, he painted the language of the soul.

The "Raphael 1520-1483" exhibition runs through June 2. To find out more about it, visit ScuderieQuirinale.it

(Above) "The Alba Madonna," circa 1510, by Raphael. Oil on panel transferred to canvas. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

(Left) Portrait of Pope Julius II, 1512, by Raphael. Oil on panel. The National Gallery, London.

(Right) "The Knight's Dream (Hercules at the Crossroads)," also known as "An Allegory (Vision of a Knight)," 1504, by Raphael. Oil on panel. The National Gallery, London.



MUSEO E REAL BOSCO DI CAPODIMONTE/COURTESY OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE, ACTIVITIES, AND TOURISM



ANGELE DEQUIER/LOUVRE MUSEUM, DIST. RMN-GRAND PALACE



(Left) Moses kneeling in front of the burning bush, circa 1514, by Raphael. Cardboard and heightened with white on 23 joined sheets of paper, perforated for dusting. Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, in Naples, Italy.

(Right) Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione, 1513, by Raphael. Oil on canvas. Paintings Department, Louvre Museum, Paris.

ALL IMAGES IN PUBLIC DOMAIN



As a lesson in the demands of revolution, Abigail Adams stood with her 7-year-old son John Quincy Adams and watched the Battle of Bunker Hill. "The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill," 1786, by John Trumbull. Gift of Howland S. Warren, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE

Mothers and Sons:

Abigail Adams and John Quincy Adams

JEFF MINICK

On battlefields around the world, soldiers have cried out for their mothers as they lay dying. And memorably, Abraham Lincoln once said, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." In our series "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle: Mothers and Sons," we will look at a number of famous men strongly influenced by their mothers. Not all these women were angels, but their love, disposition, and sense of principle left an indelible stamp on their sons.

Abigail Adams was one of only two first ladies who were both wife and mother to a president. (The other was Barbara Bush.)

Abigail Smith Adams (1744–1818) was the daughter of William Smith, a Congregational minister, and his wife Elizabeth, who hailed from the prestigious Quincy clan, a family well-known in the Massachusetts colony for its involvement in politics. Schooled at home by her mother, and given free run of the large libraries belonging to relatives, including that of her father, the largely self-educated Abigail became one of our most erudite first ladies in our history.

A Marriage of Heart and Mind

In 1764, Abigail married her distant cousin, John Adams, a lawyer and part-time farmer whose star was on the rise. To this couple were born six children, four of whom found the grave before their mother's own death from typhoid.

From all evidence, John and Abigail loved each other, and Abigail served as John's closest adviser, so much so that during the couple's White House years some of her husband's enemies referred to her as "Mrs. President." She had studied history, particularly that of the Greeks and Romans, and was an ardent supporter of the American Revolution and an early advocate for the rights of women, especially in the field of education. Her voluminous correspondence reveals a quick and lively mind very much acquainted with the politics of the day.

Because John was so frequently absent from home, away on the business of the Revolution and its aftermath, Abigail shouldered many responsibilities: supervising work on the farm, managing the household accounts and investments, and overseeing the education of her children, including that of her son John Quincy Adams (1767–1848), who would one day become the sixth president of the United States (1825–1829).

'Great Necessities Call Out Great Virtues'

Both John and Abigail constantly exhorted their children to practice virtue, to live up to their family's heritage, to study hard, and to learn from the world around them. Though young John Quincy spent several years away from his mother while on diplomatic missions with his father to Europe, Abigail nevertheless continued instruction



(Left) A portrait of Abigail Adams in later life, by Gilbert Stuart. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Middle) John Quincy Adams, 1796, by John Singleton Copley. Bequest of Charles Francis Adams, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (Right) John Quincy Adams, 1818, by Gilbert Stuart. White House.



through her correspondence as to how to live the virtuous life. When the 12-year-old was reluctant to go on a second trip across the Atlantic, Abigail encouraged him to make the expedition with these rousing words:

These are the times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised, and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities which would otherwise lay dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman.

Here is an appeal to daring and valor more commonly associated with a mother of ancient Rome than of America.

“My mother was an angel upon earth.

John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States

Education and Exhortations

Both Abigail and John Adams, and some tutors, directed John Quincy in his studies, stressing in particular the importance of history and philosophy, so that at a young age he was translating works by such writers as Thucydides, Plutarch, and Aristotle. On his return from his European excursions, where at the age of 14 he had served as a French translator on a diplomatic mission to Moscow, John Quincy entered Harvard University and delivered a stellar academic performance.

In his 2002 biography "John Quincy Adams," historian Robert V. Remini writes of Abigail that here "was a feisty woman of remarkable intelligence and determination, a woman of high moral standards who set goals for her offspring that they spent

their lives trying to achieve." Even after her son's graduation from Harvard, Abigail kept up a continual stream of reminders and injunctions to John Quincy to do his best in all things, to avoid vice, and to bring honor to the family name.

On at least one occasion, Abigail gave her son a more direct learning experience than he might have wished. As Remini tells us, June 17, 1777, found Abigail and her 7-year-old son watching the Battle of Bunker Hill, in part so that he might witness firsthand the cost of patriotism and the demands of revolution. Long afterward, John Quincy recollected the horrors of this spectacle and "the tears of my mother and mingled with them my own" over the battlefield death of Dr. Joseph Warren, a close friend of John Adams. Here was a harsh lesson for a boy with only one foot out of the nursery.

A woman of deep faith, Abigail impressed upon her son the importance of Scripture and Christian virtue. When John Quincy first sailed to England at age 10, as Remini tells us, "Abigail admonished him to 'adhere to those religious sentiments and principles which were early instilled into your mind, and remember that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and actions.'" Throughout his life, John Quincy read from the Bible in various languages and eventually became a leader in the American Bible Society, which today remains the largest distributor of Bibles in the world.

An Angel on Earth

Some historians speculate that Abigail's insistence on high standards, her constant advice, and her repeated reminders to be virtuous built resentment in John Quincy and warped his personality. Certainly as he aged he became cold, austere, and dour to the point that some thought him misanthropic, a man of politics who knew not how to play the political game. As Remini writes of his run for reelection to the presidency, "even efforts to get him to mingle with the people and smile and wave at

them failed repeatedly."

Perhaps Abigail had a hand in shaping John Quincy's distaste for the crowd and for politicking, but if so, he never acknowledged any resentment of her. Indeed, as James Traub writes in his biography "John Quincy Adams: Militant Spirit," "Never, throughout his life, would John Quincy Adams speak of either of his parents with anything save love and devotion."

From boyhood, John Quincy kept a diary, writing at times for hours a day and creating a treasure house of historical reminiscences. In 1815, when Abigail, often in frail health, was stricken with typhoid fever, John Quincy, then serving in Washington as Secretary of State and believing that his mother had already died, recorded these thoughts in this diary:

My mother was an angel upon earth. She was a minister of blessing to all human beings within her sphere of action. Her heart was the abode of heavenly purity ... She had known sorrow, but her sorrow was silent. She was acquainted with grief, but it was deposited in her own bosom. She was the real personification of female virtue, of piety, of ever active and never intermitting benevolence. Oh God! could she have been spared yet a little longer!

When he received confirmation of his mother's death, John Quincy wrote "There is not a virtue that can abide in the female heart but it was the ornament of hers."

An inscription on John Quincy Adams's casket read in part: "Having served his country for half a century, and enjoyed its highest honors."

A good amount of credit for that service and those honors goes to Abigail Smith Adams.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C., Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See Jeff-Minick.com to follow his blog.



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

'I Still Believe': Faith-Based Healing Wholesomeness

MARK JACKSON

One look at the title, "I Still Believe," and you know this story about a musician and his devotion to healing his young wife is a faith-based (and in America that means Christian) movie.

I used to despise these things. There's currently a ridiculously lopsided skew of Rotten Tomatoes critics against this movie, versus the general public who are overwhelmingly for it. I've changed my mind about faith-based movies. Wanna hear why? I'll talk about why later.

This is the true story of the early years of tremendously successful Christian singer Jeremy Camp, who's sold millions. Have you heard of him? I hadn't. Doesn't matter.

It's 1999. Young Mr. Camp (played by K.J. Apa of "Riverdale") is an aspiring singer-songwriter-guitarist from Lafayette, Indiana, starting Bible college in California.

Jeremy is there to seek out (and maybe get mentoring from) his idol, Jean-Luc (Nathan Parsons), a successful alum. In this collegiate Bible bastion, the students love them some Christian rock concerts, like, constantly, it would appear.

Very soon, Jeremy's up on stage, strumming and crooning for Jesus, where he beholds a young blond beauty raising her palm heavenward, and it's instantaneous smitten-ness for both of them. This would be Melissa (Britt Robertson). And you know, forthwith, that their twitterpatedness shall be epic. Why? Because these are two extremely good-looking people.

Problem is, mentor Jean-Luc's got a thang for sweet Melissa too. Can you say love triangle? Will it cause uncomfortable situations? Eh, not really, because Jeremy has dark-browed, lantern-jawed, young Superman-ness about him, Melissa has blond Supergirl-ness, and Jean-Luc doesn't

'I Still Believe'

Director
Andrew Erwin, Jon Erwin

Starring
Britt Robertson,
Gary Sinise, K.J. Apa,
Shania Twain,
Melissa Roxburgh,
Nathan Parsons

Rated
PG

Running Time
1 hour, 55 minutes

Release Date
March 13

★★★★☆



(Left) Shania Twain and K.J. Apa play mother and son in "I Still Believe."

(Below) Gary Sinise (L) plays the father of Jeremy Camp (K.J. Apa).



K.J. Apa and Britt Robertson as a young married couple.



K.J. Apa plays the Christian songwriter Jeremy Camp in "I Still Believe."

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIONSGATE

have any of these things.

What's slightly weird is that Jean-Luc, who's already got a recording contract, is still hanging around campus like Matthew McConaughey's Wooderson in "Dazed & Confused" hanging around his old high school. You almost expect Jean-Luc to deliver a French-accented version of Wooderson's monologue: "That's what I like about these high school girls, man. I get older; they stay the same age. Yes they do."

Except, while that's some community-college-attending-townie-who-hits-on-high-schoolers amusing filthiness, Jean-Luc is deeply Christian. And you know what? It's kind of a relief that he's not the French Wooderson. It's a relief that he's a righteous dude, trying to do good with his music. Like I said, more on this later.

We never learn what the two lovebirds are studying, or much about them. We do realize that K.J. Apa's not yet a skilled enough actor to pull off being that handsome and playing someone so isolated, corn-fed, and inexperienced with girls that he'd be that awkward. Problem is, mentor Jean-Luc's got a thang for sweet Melissa too. Can you say love triangle? Will it cause uncomfortable situations? Eh, not really, because Jeremy has dark-browed, lantern-jawed, young Superman-ness about him, Melissa has blond Supergirl-ness, and Jean-Luc doesn't have any of these things.

What's slightly weird is that Jean-Luc, who's already got a recording contract, is still hanging around campus like Matthew McConaughey's Wooderson in "Dazed & Confused" hanging around his old high school. You almost expect Jean-Luc to deliver a French-accented version of Wooderson's monologue: "That's what I like about these high school girls, man. I get older; they stay the same age. Yes they do."

Except, while that's some community-college-attending-townie-who-hits-on-high-schoolers amusing filthiness, Jean-Luc is deeply Christian. And you know what? It's kind of a relief that he's not the French Wooderson. It's a relief that he's a righteous dude, trying to do good with his music. Like I said, more on this later.

We never learn what the two lovebirds are studying, or much about them. We do realize that K.J. Apa's not yet a skilled enough actor to pull off being that handsome and playing someone so isolated, corn-fed, and inexperienced with girls that he'd be that awkward.

And all we learn about Melissa is that she knows a lot about astronomy, galaxies, nebulae, and waxes Hallmark poetic about these being the paintbrushes of the Creator. Man, that's some corny corn pone right there. But you know what? It's also... just... not.

Dying Girl Movie

That's what almost all young romance movies are nowadays: dying girl movies. The girl's gotta die. Or the boy. But mostly the girl. This one checks that box with vehemence. If you like this kind of thing, you'll shed many a tear.

And I'll now run my usual litany about how it's been hip for quite some time in America to call such a thing a tear-jerker. I don't agree that all sad stories are manipulative. Americans love to find this all very distasteful and be outraged that sad movies make us cry. "OMG, it jerked my tears." The emotion of sadness is what the sad mask with the downturned sadness mouth, of the dual theatrical masks, signifies. Sadness, people! Go cry! It's good for you. Cathartic, they call it. But Americans don't like to feel their feelings. With so many of us addicted to antidepressants, it's a small wonder that sadness is resented in America.

Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. What about the supporting cast? Gary Sinise and Shania Twain play Jeremy's parents, but Lieutenant Dan (that's the only way I can think of Sinise since "Forrest Gump") has nothing to do except say some dad stuff, and they don't let Shania sing. If Shania's in your movie, let her sing a couple of bars, fergoodnessakes.

Apa's set to break into higher-profile roles. He's sort of a mix between a young Josh Hartnett and Jim Halpert of "The Office," except that he radiates decency instead of the latter's sarcasm. When he sings of his love for God, and of his fiancée, and asks his audience for their healing prayers regarding her dying girl status, it's touching. Britt Robertson is always wonderful and falls into the same category of across-the-board adorableness as Amy Adams, Emily Blunt, and Lily James. Here, she takes the dying girl role and makes it the core that fuels the emotional momentum of "I Still Believe," sort of like Iron Man's glowy chest thingy. Yes, "I Still Believe" is a Christian movie, but there's no proselytizing, although there are numerous lyrics about faith and forgiveness. "I Still Believe" is kind of a movie version of singer Gavin DeGraw's lyric: "For the young lovers, taking the hill, One plants the flag while the other is killed, When the wine pours we raise our cups, Young love is sacrifice, young love is tough, Young love is innocent, young love is us." Gag me with a spoon? You know what? Not so much, actually.

I don't agree that all sad stories are manipulative.

Why I View These Movies Differently

There's another Gavin—stand-up comedian Gavin McInnes—who does a bit about moving from the city to the suburbs and being floored by how much more wholesome life is there. If you've lived in Manhattan for the 10 years it takes to be dubbed a "true New Yorker," you know he's got a point.

After 30 years of Manhattan living, I find I've become strangely warped. To preface all of this, let me state for the record that I am a man of faith. Like, unshakable faith. Which comes from having been a seeker: searching for 40 years, turning over every rock. Einstein did a similar thing in science and ended up at the same conclusion—the divine exists. Yup. The divine is real. And I am obviously as smart as Einstein. Most advanced scientists eventually conclude that the exquisite order, so readily apparent in the cosmos, can only come from a vast intelligence.

However, living in New York, cynicism accumulates like lint in the washing machine of one's soul. This cynicism-lint gathers in the corners of the subconscious due to the undetectable dust particles of materialism, but that'd be a long explanation. Suffice it to say, for years now, I've loathed Christian movies and Christian music, even though they're talking about the same stuff I believe in. It's just the presentation I object to, not the content.

But when I go and let it wash over me, deep down, my soul aligns with Britt Robertson talking about the divine—having personally witnessed the power of prayer healing people, like, to the point where doctors at prestigious hospitals said they'd never witnessed anything like it in the history of the hospital. Seen that happen at a few different hospitals, actually.

Other critics are outraged that there aren't any people of color in this film. I'm of color myself, but this materialist thinking, that every kind of person should be in every film, doesn't concern me here, because the divine that's talked about in the film is for everyone.

Hollywood once made an attempt to uphold moral standards. That's all been changed by the creeping accumulation of materialist thought-lint obscuring the fact that all art originally depicted gods. Go to any museum. All the early stuff—it's all gods and saints. Art is meant to uplift. Faith-based films, albeit heavy-handedly, attempt to heal. So why trash them? They always have their hearts in the right place. Besides, people are not stupid; they know what they like and why they like it. Just take a look at that Rotten Tomatoes score.

FILM REVIEW

A Capably-Crafted Crime Drama With Thrills, Chills, and Spills

IAN KANE

Crime-drama films can be tough to pull off. Because they're typically set in a real time and place, they have to portray their stories realistically, with believable acting and good directing. Many fail in this regard, such as my last review on the crime yarn "Spenser Confidential," where it was oh-too-obvious that we were watching actors playing characters. However, it doesn't necessarily take a large budget to suspend a viewer's sense of disbelief, as with the new gritty film "The Informer," directed by Andrea Di Stefano.

Based on the 2009 crime novel "Three Seconds," written by a Swedish-author duo consisting of Anders Roslund and Borge Hellstrom, Stefano's new film is chock-full of all sorts of mystery and deceit, as well as plot twists that are usual for the genre.

Actor Joel Kinnaman plays Pete Koslow, an ex-special operations soldier and ex-convict who is also a member of the Polish cartel in New York City. Koslow intends to snitch on his underworld boss, known as "the General" (Eugene Lipinski), and thereby send him to prison for a long time.

In order to do so, he teams up with FBI agents Wilcox (Rosamund Pike) and Montgomery (Clive Owen).

However, during what is supposed to be a grand, final drug deal, all hell breaks loose when one of the gangsters on the scene murders an undercover New York City detective. The General gets wind of the killing and offers Koslow a deal: If Koslow will voluntarily go back to prison and act as a drug dealer for him, the crime boss will supposedly make sure that the ex-con's family remains safe. Meanwhile, the FBI agents believe that this plan fits their own agenda because Koslow can also inform on the various criminal activities going on from within prison.

The film revolves around Koslow's dealings within the prison as well as how he eventually plots a prison-break in order to reunite with his family. Although the storyline starts off decently enough, the plot becomes a little murky in the second act, and from there on through to the ending. Luckily, both the film's direction and acting are so con-

summately performed that these few, minor cinematic missteps are forgivable.

Actress Ana de Armas is excellent as Koslow's wife, Sofia, and you can really feel both her fear and concern for her husband and daughter. Unfortunately, her character's role is small, so we don't learn much more about her other than her relationship to Koslow. Likewise, Lipinski doesn't receive the screen time that his character deserves. And when he does show up, he isn't given many lines to work with.

Thankfully, Kinnaman's performance as ex-con Koslow is handled with considerable aplomb. He embraces his role as a man who is desperate to get out of the fix he's found himself in, as well as to ensure that his family remains safe from the clutches of the mob. You can almost feel his rage boiling just beneath his rather eerily quiet countenance. When violence does erupt at a few junctures during the film's one-hour, fifty-three-minute runtime, it isn't overly gory or needlessly savage, but rather fits each scene well.



Ana de Armas is excellent in the role as Pete Koslow's wife.



ALL PHOTOS BY THUNDER ROAD PICTURES

'The Informer'

Director
Andrea Di Stefano

Starring
Joel Kinnaman, Rosamund Pike, Ana de Armas, Clive Owen

Running Time
1 hour, 53 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
March 13 (USA, limited)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Kinnaman's performance as ex-con Koslow is handled with considerable aplomb.



(Top) Actor Joel Kinnaman and director Andrea Di Stefano on the set of "The Informer."

(Above) Clive Owen and Rosamund Pike in "The Informer."

The way in which the film ends will probably divide audiences. Its ambiguity probably won't suit some tastes, at least those who seem to require that things be wrapped up neatly, with every single plotline clearly explained.

But for those of us who appreciate nuance and subtlety over pomp and spectacle, "The Informer" is a suspenseful, deftly constructed crime drama that should appeal to fans of the genre.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

How to Share The Epoch Times With Your Friends and Family



As an Epoch VIP, you're passionate about the traditional journalism and in-depth reporting you get in The Epoch Times. You've even sent us ideas on how to spread the word. Here are some of the best suggestions from readers like you!

Request FREE Newspapers to Be Sent to Your Friends*

Submit the names and shipping addresses of your friends. You can request FREE newspapers for as many friends as you want. The Epoch Times will send the newspapers on your behalf for free.

Newspaper Sharing

Simply pass your copy of The Epoch Times, or a section of it, to someone

else after you've read it. Consider neighbors, friends, family, relatives, co-workers, teachers, golf buddies, and your boss.

Newspaper Placement*

Place a copy of The Epoch Times at places where people typically wait such as doctors' offices, dentists' offices, hotel lobbies, airline terminals, barbershops, and beauty salons. Also consider placing copies at community centers, company cafeterias, break rooms, coffee shops, gyms, churches, automobile dealerships, or in your car.

Bumper Stickers*

Put a bumper sticker on your car plus ask friends and family to put stickers on their cars as well.

Getting the Word Out

Word-of-mouth is always a great way to spread the news about The Epoch

Times. Talk it up at your local library, meetings, birthday parties, special events, and with friends and family over the holidays.

Using Email and Social Media

Use technology to share stories from The Epoch Times. Forward our daily email MORNING BRIEF to friends and family. Share postings from our Facebook site and YouTube channel. Simply copy the URL and then send it with a brief note such as: "Here's a story I thought you'd like to read."

Displaying Your Poster

The Epoch Times SPYGATE poster has become legendary—so consider posting it on a wall at your home or office. When friends or business associates ask, explain what the poster is about and how they can get their own copy.

Not a subscriber yet?
Visit ReadEpoch.com
to learn more

THE EPOCH TIMES

* We are working on a website where you can order FREE newspapers for your friends. We'll let you know as soon the website is ready.