WEEK 14, 2023

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN

As an apprentice, Leonardo da Vinci painted the angel on the left in "The Baptism of Christ," 1470–1475, by Andrea del Verrocchio. Oil and tempera on panel. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

SACRED ART

Leonardo da Vinci's Remarkable Touch

Paintings: one of an angel and two of 'The Last Supper'

BOB KIRCHMAN

Every year, thousands of art lovers flock to Santa Maria delle Grazie (Church of Holy Mary of Grace) in Milan, Italy, to view Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper." It is a huge mural, approximately 15 feet high and 29 feet wide. It is a rare privilege to gaze upon the work of such an important figure of the Renaissance. Sadly, only about 20 percent of Leonardo's masterpiece remains. It is a wonder that the painting has survived at all, since it was painted in what was then a new and still relatively unstudied medium (oil mixed with tempera on a gypsum preparation) and ravaged by the effects of warfare and time. What must the mural have been like to gaze upon when Leonardo first painted it?

Actually, it is also a bit of a wonder how Leonardo became the brilliant artist and multigifted genius that he was. He was the son of a prominent legal notary named Messer Piero Fruosino di Antonio da Vinci and a peasant girl named Caterina di Meo Lippi. Piero could not marry the girl because of his place in society; hence Leonardo did not fully acquire his surname. He was called Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci. (Da Vinci simply means "of Vinci," the place of his birth.)

If he had acquired his father's surname, Fruosino, he would have been expected to follow in his father's profession. As it was, the sensitive and observant young man was free to become the pupil of Andrea del Verrocchio, a Florentine painter and sculptor.

During his apprenticeship with Verrocchio, Leonardo was allowed to paint one of the angels in the work "The Baptism of Christ."

*Continued on **Page 4***

Join

Showcase Your Creativity

A platform free from violent, erotic, criminal, and harmful content

GanJingWorld.com

BOOK REVIEW

‘Character Is Destiny’

JEFF MINICK

It is a simple truth that death and time often alter our opinions of the deceased.

His political opponents and many in the press maligned Abraham Lincoln during his time at the helm of government, yet today he is regarded as one of the presidential greats. During his presidency, Ronald Reagan experienced a constant barrage of criticism blasting him, for instance, for his “Star Wars” policy, but he is now credited as a prime mover in the downfall of the Soviet Union. Abigail Adams is better known and more celebrated for her character and accomplishments in our day than in her own. Emily Dickinson lived her entire life in obscurity in Amherst, Massachusetts, yet has long been considered one of America’s greatest poets.

Death gives us pause to reconsider the deceased’s accomplishments or, in the case of Dickinson, to uncover information and material that bring reevaluation and tributes. We frequently do the same regarding our own departed family members and friends, pushing aside their foibles and remembering with admiration and affection their words and deeds. “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones,” declaims Shakespeare’s Mark Antony at Caesar’s funeral. True, yes, but then so is the reverse of that famous line.

Which brings us to James Rosen’s new biography, “Scalia: Rise to Greatness, 1936–1986.”

Of gaining a seat on the Supreme Court: “I just kept my nose to the grindstone.”

Stepping Stones to the High Court

As promised by his book’s subtitle, Rosen takes readers from Antonin Scalia’s birth, prefaced by some family information, up to the time he became a justice on the Supreme Court. Born in Trenton, New Jersey, Scalia attended a public elementary school in Queens followed by St. Francis Xavier High School in Manhattan, and another Jesuit institution, Georgetown University. After his graduation from Harvard Law School, he held a wide variety of positions, working first for the Jones Day law firm as an attorney, teaching law at the University of Virginia, serving in the Nixon and Ford presidencies, teaching next at the University of Chicago, and finally, before his Supreme Court appointment, sitting as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

Rosen provides flesh and blood to the above bare-bones summary of the first 50 years of Scalia’s life, adding a multitude of details about the man’s performance in all these capacities, and the benefits and consequences they brought both for Scalia and for those who worked with him. For his material, Rosen researched hundreds of the justice’s writings and letters, and interviewed some 70 colleagues, friends, former students, priests (Scalia was a devout Catholic), and family members.

Along with Rosen’s cordial mix of politics, law, and anecdotes, these are certainly good reasons to read this fine study of the man. Perhaps the best reason of all, however, is what Rosen reveals about Scalia’s virtues: his love of family, his ethic of hard work, and his admirable character.

Family Man

Though an only child, Scalia grew up surrounded by a clan of Italian relatives, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. His father, a doctor of philosophy and professor of romance languages, was, according to one of the justice’s sons, “pretty demanding, pretty strict.” Scalia’s daughter Meg remembered her grandfather as “incredibly critical” of his son, jeering at Scalia, for example, for simply reading the newspaper comics as an adult.

Scalia’s mother, Catherine, was the kinder and gentler parent. “She was the prototypical Italian mother,” Scalia later wrote. In an interview with C-SPAN’s Brian Lamb, he said: “That was my mother, who I only realized later devoted her life to making sure I did the right things, hung out with the right people, joined the right organizations.”

Scalia brought this importance and centrality of family to his marriage with Maureen McCarthy. Described by Rosen as “petite but fiercely independent, intellectually brilliant, and impeccably mannered,” Maureen matched her husband’s devotion to the Catholic faith and was just as principled and outspoken in her conservatism.

Married for 55 years, the couple had nine children, and Rosen includes many reminiscences of their family life in his book. Though he was often absent from home—Maureen performed the yeoman’s work of raising the children and managing the household—by all accounts Scalia was a loving and fun-loving father.

At a Federalist Society celebration in 2006, Justice Scalia asked Maureen to the podium. Rosen gives us this description of what followed:

“Mrs. Scalia smiled shyly and examined the floor as the justice described her as ‘the best decision I ever made, the mother of the nine children you see, and the woman responsible for raising them with little assistance from me. … And there’s not a dullard in the bunch!”

Nose to the Grindstone

Antonin Scalia himself was certainly no dullard, but that sharp mind was buttressed by a habit of hard work established in his childhood.

An early example of the importance of effort surely came from his father. Salvatore, more commonly known as Sam, was 17 years old when he immigrated with his parents to America. Grit, his “capacity for hard work,” and a gift for languages eventually procured for Sam a post as a university professor. For most of his life, he spent hours every day with a book in hand, often translating texts. He was, Scalia remembered, “committed to the life of the mind—much more of an intellectual than I ever was.”

Here the justice is perhaps being overly modest. From Xavier High School, for example, a tough Jesuit institution, he graduated at the top of his class. At Georgetown University, he was once again class valedictorian. He would miss that mark at Harvard Law but still graduated magna cum laude, which meant he had placed in the top five of his class.

Supreme Court Justices (L–R) Associate Justice Antonin Scalia, Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Associate Justice John Paul Stevens, and Associate Justice David H. Souter at the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003, in Washington.

I LOVE SHEN YUN
SHEN YUN SHOP

ZHEN SHAN REN
WONDROUS PEN

Virtues Mightier Than Any Sword

ShenYunShop.com | TEL: 1.800.208.2384

ALL PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia speaks at the American Enterprise Institute on Oct. 2, 2012, in Washington. Scalia co-authored the book “Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts.”

Antonin Scalia, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, and Maureen M. Scalia arrive for the State Dinner at the White House in Washington on March 14, 2012.

Scalia’s long hours with the books explains these triumphs, and this same work ethic became one of his trademarks in his professional life. As described by Rosen, he often seemed a human dynamo, delivering speeches at various conferences, attending countless meetings, writing brilliant legal opinions, teaching students in his classes and the law clerks who worked for him, and still finding time for friends and family.

In 2008, Scalia said of gaining a seat on the Supreme Court, “I just kept my nose to the grindstone, and, I mean, that’s the secret.” Evidence would suggest that it was the grindstone and not his nose that took a beating.

A Good Man

“Moral character,” Rosen tells us, “was king in Sam’s eyes, prized more than intellect or wealth. ‘Son,’ he would tell Nino, ‘brains are like muscles. You can rent them by the hour. The only thing that’s not for sale is character.’”

His father drummed this lesson into the young Scalia, and the Jesuit priests at the schools he attended reinforced this message. As Rosen demonstrates, the defining feature of Xavier High was building moral character in its students. “Obedience to duty, manly honor and discipline, frank and forthright acknowledgment of error”: These are some of Scalia’s memories of what Xavier embedded in him.

The lifelong practice of such a code might leave the impression that Scalia was an austere personage, remote from others. Yet throughout Rosen’s book, we are struck again and again by the joy the man found in life and in others. He was, for example, great friends with Justice Ruth Ginsberg, who was his ideological opposite on the Supreme Court, and he taught another liberal justice, Elena Kagan, the art of hunting.

Scalia’s potential appointment to the District of Columbia circuit court required an FBI background investigation. Agents looked at every aspect of his life, from bank accounts to tax returns to interviews with friends and colleagues. He was given a perfectly clean slate, but what is most impressive are the comments made during the dozens of interviews of those who knew him. Rosen devotes four full paragraphs to citing comments such as these: “able to put people he meets at ease,” “good sense of humor … family oriented,” “a model family man, … his reputation … above reproach,” “quick witted with a warm sense of humor,” “the government could not have a better candidate for a position as a judge.”

Rosen closes his account of this FBI investigation with a remark about Antonin Scalia that most of us probably wish applied to us: “Would that every life repaid such close scrutiny with such superlative results.”

“Character,” said the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “is destiny.” We Americans should be grateful that men of character such as Scalia are still willing to serve aboard the ship of our republic.

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. He is the author of two novels, “Amanda Bell” and “Dust On Their Wings,” and two works of nonfiction, “Learning As I Go” and “Movies Make The Man.” Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

‘SCALIA: RISE TO GREATNESS: 1936–1986’
By James Rosen
Regnery Publishing
March 7, 2023
Hardcover
500 pages

TRUTH and TRADITION

In Our Own Words

The World Through a Journalist’s Eyes

“With diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.

Petr Svab
Reporter

Dear Epoch VIP,

Thank you for your continuing support—we are at your service.

My name is Petr Svab and I’ve been covering politics, courts, police, immigration, economy, and other topics during my 16 years at The Epoch Times.

It is my pleasure to work for a newspaper that stands for values I can wholeheartedly endorse and fittingly summed up in our motto of Truth and Tradition.

I believe that truth is the living world, and an infinite journey of exploration. The more topics I tackle, the more issues I delve into, the more I realize how complex, multifaceted, and enormous the world truly is. We can never dream of grasping it all, but, with diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.

Moreover, I’ve found, a journalist can open doors closed to others, give readers the facts of the story, the context that enlightens them, as well as the insights of the participants.

I remember walking the streets of West Baltimore a few years ago. My plan was just to interview some local business owners to see what the city was doing about some of its issues—from piles of trash and abandoned houses to homelessness and crime.

Within five minutes of my arrival, a man on the street noticed me and started to shout: “Guy with a camera! There’s a guy with a camera here!”

A group of young men further up the street took notice as I approached.

“Are you a cop?” asked one of them. He was a young man with wide eyes that looked like they’d already seen more than their share.

I introduced myself and my business of the day, handing the gentleman my card. The young man’s expression softened as he realized I was here to report on a story—the story of his home.

As it turned out, the young man was not only ready to share with me his insights on the local issues, but also to offer advice on where to find what I was looking for. We parted ways with a handshake.

In all my experience talking directly to the people involved in various events, **the truth seldom (if ever) favors partisan narratives—it’s much more colorful: sometimes humorous, other times tragic.**

Consider the story, for example, of Trayvon Martin. According to some, an innocent child killed by a racist man. According to others, a thug killed in self-defense. But after filmmaker Joel Gilbert retraced Martin’s last moments, weeks, and months, it turned out neither narrative was quite true. Gilbert told a story of a young man whose life was falling apart and ultimately plunged into a tragedy that nobody wanted.

So if that’s truth, what is tradition, then? For me, it is the lessons of history. It’s the distilled universal wisdom collected by our ancestors over millennia—the timeless lessons of the enlightened, the sages, and the saints. This treasure chest of the past is where we can turn to help us better understand the truth at present.

My work is to safeguard this treasure, let it live through the pages of The Epoch Times and the hearts of our readers.

While it may seem the foundations of the civilization itself are now under attack, I truly believe our readers will be best equipped to withstand the storm—through clarity and peace of heart. For whatever the future holds, I believe the path will be less treacherous for those who walk it steadily, making choices informed both by truth and tradition.

What I pledge to you is yet more meticulous research, analysis, and fact-finding. I’ll do the digging for you, while letting you make up your own mind. Furthermore, I’ll also hone my wit to give you an ever-better read along the way.

Yes, we strive to be an influential media in the world, but **I believe that our true success is measured in minds sharpened, hearts uplifted, and lives improved.**

Once again, thank you for joining us on this journey. We do live in truly epochal times, wouldn’t you say?

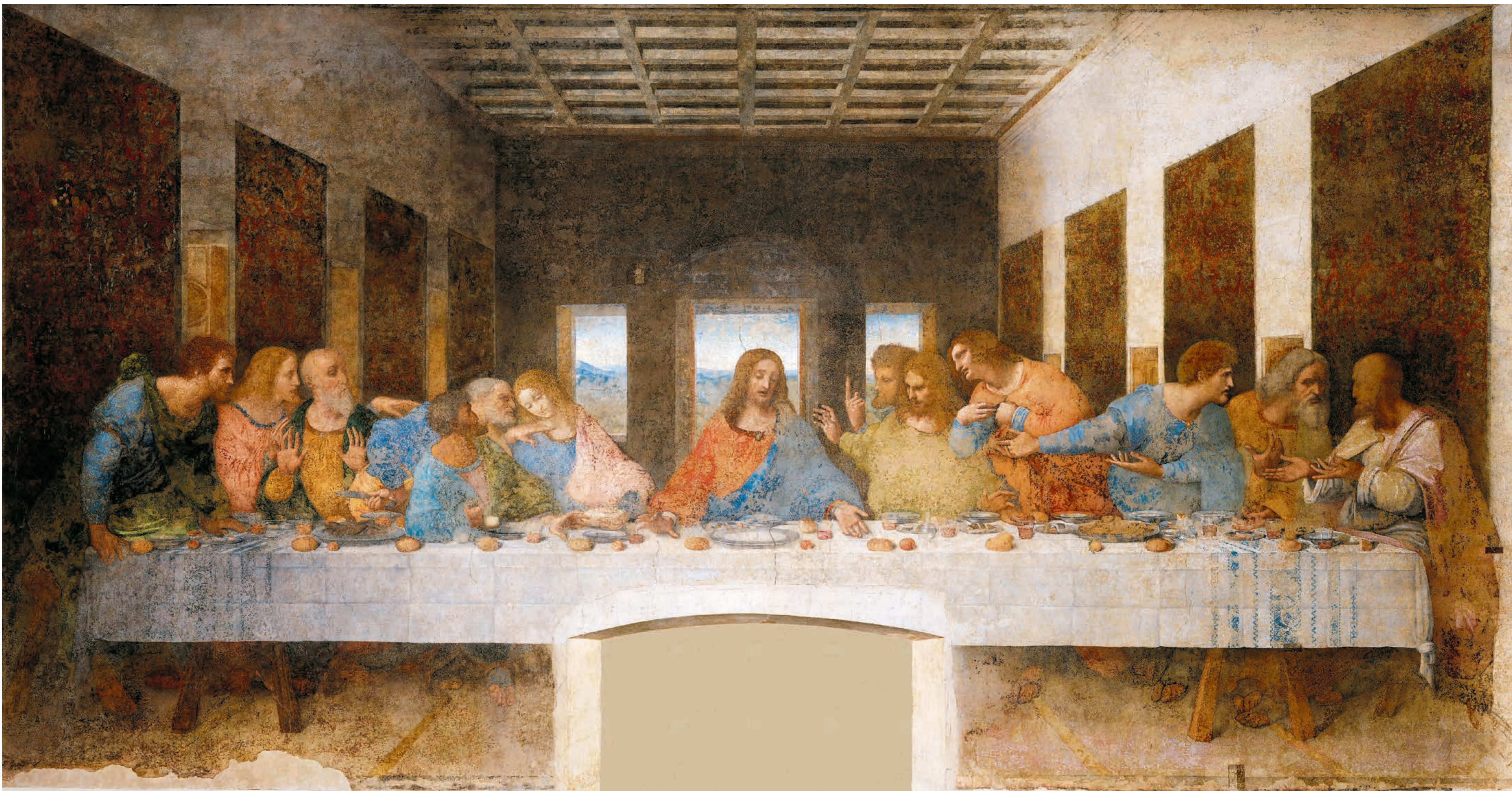
In Truth and Tradition,

Petr Svab
The Epoch Times

THE EPOCH TIMES

*Learn more at **EpochSubscription.com***

PUBLIC DOMAIN



The original painting of "The Last Supper," 1495–1498, by Leonardo da Vinci in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy.

SACRED ART

Leonardo da Vinci's Remarkable Touch

Continued from ***Page 1***

The angel on the left shows plainly the hand of Leonardo. There is a legend, though unsubstantiated, that when Verrocchio saw Leonardo's angel, he put down his brush and never painted again. What is clear is that Leonardo was the master of a smooth blending technique (sfumato) that from then on would always identify the work of his hand.

Milan's 'Last Supper'

In 1482, Leonardo went to Milan, seeking the patronage of Ludivico il Moro, the Duke of Milan. In 1492, he was commissioned to paint "The Last Supper" on the wall of the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. A common theme, the Last Supper of Christ was often requested as a painting in such a setting.

Usually, the artist would center on the celebration of the Eucharist. Leonardo, however, chose to portray the moment just after Jesus announced, "One of you will betray me" (from John 13:21). He masterfully captured the tension of the moment in the gestures of the apostles. In creating this great work, he would sometimes paint from dawn to dusk, not even stopping to eat. He labored long and hard to capture the faces of Christ and Judas.

In the end, he created a masterpiece. The painting was completed in 1498. Sadly, the foundation that Leonardo chose for his painting—gesso (the base undercoating) on plaster—would prove to be unstable over time. Just 10 years after the painting was completed, it was evident that it was deteriorating. A door was cut through the painting in 1652, taking away the feet of Jesus. In 1796, French revolutionary troops used the room as a stable. The painting barely survived Allied bombing in 1943, protected by sandbags. By the 1970s, some areas of the painting were deemed unrestorable. A 21-year restoration project, completed in 1999, was carried out to save what remained, which was only a fraction of the original painting.

COURTESY OF TONGERLO ABBEY

Tongerlo's "The Last Supper" on canvas, 16th century, by Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea Solari.

The second painting of 'The Last Supper' was almost destroyed or lost several times.

The Tongerlo Canvas

It is here, however, that history took an interesting turn. Leonardo, with much assistance from his pupils, created a life-sized copy of the original "The Last Supper" on canvas. The story of the second painting begins in July of 1499, when newly crowned King Louis XII of France invaded Milan. When he took a tour of the city's wonders, he was duly impressed by Leonardo's painting. As a conquering monarch, he wanted to take the painting back to France. He sought out architects and craftsmen to create a way to box up the wall (with the painting on it) and transfer the whole treasure by carriage. The king's project failed, being prohibitively expensive not to mention impossible, owing to the condition of the wall.

Louis XII was undeterred. If he couldn't bring the mural back with him, he'd find the artist who painted it and have him create a copy. A letter from the king, dated January 1507, told the high officials of da Vinci's native Florence, "We have need of Leonardo da Vinci." It is highly likely that the work on the second painting of "The Last Supper" was directed by Andrea Solari, who worked in da Vinci's studio.

In composition, it was a highly faithful reproduction of the original. Da Vinci himself probably painted Jesus and John. There are several good reasons to believe this. First, the skillful soft blending of the master is evident in these two faces—far more than in the other disciples. The distinct appearance is not unlike that of da Vinci's angel in Verrocchio's painting of "The Baptism of Christ." When the painting was X-rayed, it was discovered that these two figures appear to not have been traced from the original sketches. They appeared to have been sketched and painted directly by the master—lacking the heavy underdrawings of the others.

There is no record of where the second painting of "The Last Supper" was first displayed, although we know it must have been in the king's cherished possession for years. The painting was recorded to have been displayed later in the château of the governor of the captured regions in Galion, France. A 1540 inventory of the governor's estate describes the work.

It was purchased in 1545 by Abbot Arnold Streyters for the Abbey of Tongerlo in Westerlo, near Antwerp, Belgium. He paid the then exorbitant price of 450 gulden for it. (In the 17th century, 450 gulden would be almost $55,000 today.) Some speculate that this was done in defiance of Calvinist prohibitions against religious art. The painting is still owned by the abbey today, and offers art lovers a rare opportunity to see what the original mural in Milan must have looked like when it was first painted.

Much color and detail, now lost from the painting in Milan, is crisp and visible on the Tongerlo canvas. It was not widely known until Jean-Pierre Isbouts and Christopher Heath Brown were researching for their 2017 book "The Young Leonardo: The Evolution of a Revolutionary Artist, 1472–1499." The scholars heard of the Tongerlo painting from colleagues, and their subsequent research further served to underscore the likelihood that this work is indeed traceable back to Leonardo.

The second painting of "The Last Supper" was almost destroyed or lost several times. At one point, the monks hid it in a granary. In 1929, it survived a major fire that severely damaged the abbey. Now the canvas, well over 500 years old, is also in need of restoration. Since only a handful of da Vinci's works exist in the world today, the opportunity to preserve one of his most sacred paintings is a most worthy cause.

Visit the abbey's website for further information on the Tongerlo Last Supper Fund and restoration.

Bob Kirchman is an architectural illustrator who lives in Augusta County, Va., with his wife Pam. He teaches studio art to students in the Augusta Christian Educators Homeschool Co-op.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Boy With Baby Carriage," 1916, by Norman Rockwell. Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, Mass.

PROFILES IN HISTORY

Norman Rockwell: Up From the Ashes

DUSTIN BASS

By 1943, Norman Rockwell (1894–1978) had long been a household name. At almost 50 years old, he had become America's illustrator, telling stories of American life through his fresh and often humorous paintings. His career officially began at 15, when he was commissioned to paint four Christmas cards. While still in his teenage years, he became the art director of the Boy Scouts of America's magazine, Boys' Life.

Rockwell was one of the most prominent American artists of the 20th century. At 22 years old, he painted the first of his 322 covers for The Saturday Evening Post, which was a humorous painting of three boys two heading out to play baseball and one stuck babysitting. Rockwell's paintings were often humorous, always uplifting. He once said, "I paint life as I would like it to be."

At the height of his artistic prowess, however, life would take an unfortunate turn. At his home in Arlington, Vermont, he had built his art studio, which held all of his paintings, brushes, paints, sketches, and costumes. In the very early morning hours of May 15, 1943, his son roused him from his sleep yelling that his studio was on fire. Indeed, it was. Unable to call the fire department because the fire had cut off the phone line, he told a hired man to go to the neighbor's house and call the fire station. By the time Rockwell reached the studio, the structure was engulfed in flames. There was nothing to salvage. He acknowledged that it may have been he who accidentally started the fire by knocking some ashes from his pipe onto a seat cushion.

Despite the massive loss, Rockwell was rather stoic about it. Instead of lamenting the loss of his paintings and costumes, he lamented the loss of his numerous smoking pipes. Later that same day, however, several local men visited him and gave him some pipes, restoring one of his favorite pastimes.

Not all of his paintings were lost to the fire. His paintings of "The Four Freedoms" ("Freedom of Speech," "Freedom of Worship," "Freedom from Want," and "Freedom from Fear"), inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's speech to Congress, were on a national tour to help raise funds for war bonds. The tour raised more than $130 million (more than $2 billion today).

Rockwell was one of the most prominent American artists of the 20th century.

From the outside looking in, it appeared as though Rockwell had lost a lifetime of work. He didn't see it that way. He decided to improve upon his lot by purchasing a different lot, though still in the same town of Arlington. His new studio would provide what he considered the perfect amount of natural light and was a safe 150 feet from his large farmhouse. He returned to his work, creating hundreds of illustrations, using various locals to model for him, garnering new friendships, and collecting more pipes.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

A poster with the illustrated series of Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" for The Saturday Evening Post magazine, 1943.

Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Compassion is the best pilot to guide us through life. "Love Steering the Boat of Humanity," 1899–1901, by George Frederic Watts. Oil on canvas, 6 1/2 feet by 4 1/3 feet. Gift of Mrs. Michael Chapman (1946), Watts Gallery.

ART THAT TELLS US ABOUT LIFE

When You Need a Good Pilot: 'Love Steering the Boat of Humanity'

YVONNE MARCOTTE

It can be very dangerous to row a small boat on the high seas, especially as a storm approaches. The air becomes thick and sultry. Dense, dark thunderclouds press overhead, fierce gusts rip the sail, and high waves threaten to sink the boat. Only an experienced pilot could maneuver a small boat through a big storm.

And who said it better than Emily Dickinson in "Adrift! A little boat adrift!":

ADRIFT! A little boat adrift!
And night is coming down!
Will no one guide a little boat
Unto the nearest town?
So sailors say, on yesterday,
Just as the dusk was brown,
One little boat gave up its strife,
And gurgled down and down.
But angels say, on yesterday,
Just as the dawn was red,
One little boat o'erspent with gales
Retrimmed its masts, redecked its sails
Exultant, onward sped!

George Frederic Watts (1817–1904) created this dangerous situation in his painting "Love Steering the Boat of Humanity." The artist personified love as a stalwart pilot taking charge of the boat carrying a man, representing humanity, through the churning water. The waves appear alive as they seem to grasp at the little vessel, trying to bring it down to the depths.

The boat's small sail has been ripped from the mast. It flutters heavily back and forth unfettered, almost covering the helpless figure of humanity as he holds the rowing paddles. Although his hands hold the oars, his efforts don't help much as the wind and the waves control the direction.

The sky above is almost covered by billowing thunderclouds, ominously high, quickly covering up the remaining patches of blue. At the stern of the boat, the pilot shows his determination as the wind does not seem to move him from the direction wherein he is steering. Only his strength keeps the vessel afloat and on course.

Guided by Compassion

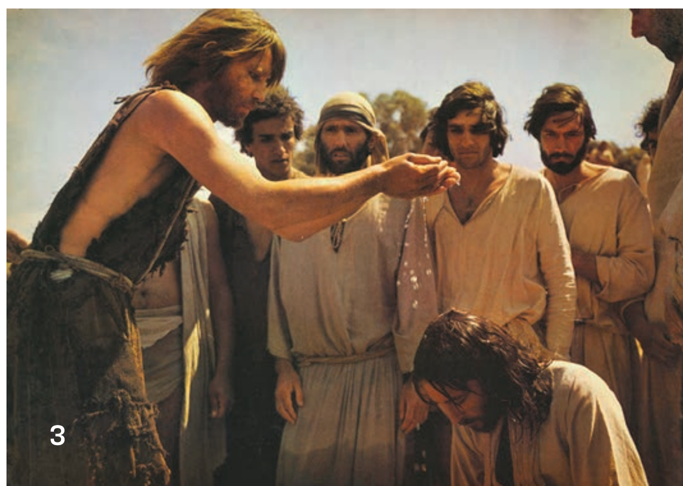
Perhaps humanity has lost its way on the high seas of life. Without kindness to guide us, we cannot find a safe harbor. Watts tells us in the painting's title that humanity is guided by love through the rough seas of life. Love—or on a higher level, compassion—offers the seafarers of life the unconditional spirit of helpfulness, generosity, and determination. This compassion is a simple but vital gesture.

The pilot has shown humanity what kindness and determination can do for the soul. Perhaps when humanity reaches his destination, he will remember the selfless act of a skilled pilot and do the same for others if given the opportunity. A blog on the Harvard Medical School website encapsulates this nicely: "When we are compassionate, we are recognizing our shared human condition."

To offer compassion to others is simple, free, positive, and healthy. When guided by compassion, we are no longer alone in this dangerous situation. Humanity then has a good chance to make it through the storm of suffering to a safe harbor.

Watts is known for painting a series of allegorical works personifying universal emotions that he wanted to be seen together. The series is called the "House of Life."

ALL PHOTOS BY MOVIESTILLS DB



1. Thomas (Bruce Lidington, L) looks at Jesus (Robert Powell), in 1977's "Jesus of Nazareth."

2. Mary Magdalene (Anne Bancroft, L) washes the feet of Jesus (Robert Powell, R) as Joseph of Arimathea (James Mason, C) watches.

3. John the Baptist (Michael York, L) baptizes Jesus (Robert Powell).

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Franco Zeffirelli's
TV Mini-Series Masterpiece

SUSAN D. HARRIS

It originally aired back in the day when Americans had three TV stations to choose from, and when every household had a designated channel changer instead of remote control. In a way, the limited channels brought the country together. From the subways to the mountains, from the rich to the poor, young and old alike, we'd likely all watched the same thing on TV the night before.

For those of us alive in 1977, whether children like myself or older family members we've since lost, it was a huge event: the first made-for-TV series depicting the life of Christ. Over 90 million viewers tuned in for the first installment which aired on Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week and the Sunday before Easter.

The first thing we heard was that beautifully haunting soundtrack that demanded our attention. Nearly 50 years later, the score that is described as "alternately majestic and quietly intimate" still sends me into a state of quiet reverence. Composed by Maurice Jarre, who had previously written scores for "Doctor Zhivago" and "Lawrence of Arabia," it infused the film with an air of mystery fit for a biblical tale.

And so it was that long before "The Passion of the Christ," and predating millions tuning in to see "The Chosen," there was Robert Powell in the title role of Jesus of Nazareth—in a film that many still consider the most inspiring depiction of Christ's life ever made.

Working in the location of Morocco and Tunisia, the cast had their faces pelted with Saharan sand flung from a wind machine, even as a cold damp wind from the Mediterranean continually knocked over flood lights. Another day of shooting found them choking from incense. "Franco wants to give the picture a feeling of age, like the old Italian paintings," Powell had explained about the director.

The Magic of Zeffirelli

That great director whom Powell referenced was the incomparable Franco Zeffirelli, master of stage and screen. Besides "Jesus of Nazareth," which many consider his chef-d'oeuvre, he directed 1968's "Romeo and Juliet," and brought other Shakespearean plays to the screen with rave reviews ("Otello" and "Hamlet," the latter of which most notably starred a young Mel Gibson.)

And of course, there was his incredible contribution to opera, bringing "La Traviata" and "Pagliacci" to the big screen, and staging such greats as Pavarotti, Domingo, and Callas. He is memorialized with plaques at each end of the Met stage proscenium "for the dozen lavish productions he created that 'shaped the history' of the Metropolitan Opera."

Zeffirelli was also a devout, anti-abortion Catholic who struggled with homosexuality after claiming to have been sexually molested by a priest as a child. In his conflicted autobiography, he wrote: ""I believe totally in the teachings of the Church, and this means admitting that my way of life is sinful."

Universal Portrayal

Of course, at the time of his work on "Jesus of Nazareth," none of this was known. As a matter of fact, the only thing people cared about was that Zeffirelli had some pretty impressive religious backing. As early screenings of the film commenced, it was praised by the Pontifical Commission for Relations with Non-Christian Religions, the National Catholic Radio and Television Center, the Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, and Campus Crusade for Christ International.

Zeffirelli gifted cinema history with an ordinary man who radiated divine energy. To convey an air of "messianic spirituality," the director instructed Powell not to blink. Resultingly, Powell's mesmerizing blue eyes conveyed the illusion that God himself was peering out at us. It was a result that Powell worked hard on.

Reflecting on his acting for the role, Powell said: "You go in as an actor and work subjectively, but the moment you start to try and play [Jesus] as a real person you lose the divinity completely. So from that moment on, I played it objectively without any recourse to giving him any particular idiosyncrasies, quite deliberately avoiding the normal human things."

Letters all said the same thing: 'It's exactly how I imagined [Christ] to be.'

Whatever Powell did, it worked. It was as if he created the template of a universal Jesus that reached out to touch the hearts of believers and unbelievers alike. Powell himself said that he believed the film had "such a hold on the culture" because it reached a vast audience and because the filmmakers were so "non-specific" in their approach to Jesus. He went on to say that they'd received tens of thousands of letters all saying the same thing: "It's exactly how I imagined him to be."

Vision on a Windswept Day

It cannot be overstated that most of the cast were among the biggest names: Laurence Olivier, Christopher Plummer, Peter Ustinov, Anne Bancroft, Michael York, Rod Steiger, James Mason, Anthony Quinn ... ; the list goes on.

One of my personal favorites was Ernest Borgnine. No one who has seen the movie can forget his statement of faith as the Roman centurion speaking to Jesus: "I am unworthy that you should enter under my roof. I know that if you say the word my servant will be healed." But a story that wasn't widely reported was Borgnine's real-life spiritual experience on the set.

In an article that he wrote for Guideposts in 1989, he gives a detailed description of a mystical vision he had while filming the crucifixion scene. Since the camera was focused only on Borgnine, neither the cross nor Powell had to be present. Instead, Borgnine was instructed to look at a chalk mark on a piece of scenery as though he were looking at Christ. He wasn't ready. He was uneasy. He asked for someone to read from the Bible the words that Jesus spoke on the cross. Director Zeffirelli obliged.

As Borgnine considered in his mind what the centurion would have thought and felt, he looked up and saw the face of Christ, "lifelike and clear."

"It was not the features of Robert Powell I was used to seeing, but the most beautiful, gentle visage I have ever known. His face was still filled with compassion. He looked down at me through tragic, sorrowful eyes with an expression of love beyond description."

He heard Christ's final words: "Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Then he saw Christ's head slump to one side and knew he was dead. "A terrible grief welled within me and, completely oblivious to the camera, I started sobbing uncontrollably."

By the time they yelled "Cut!" Borgnine noticed fellow actors Olivia Hussey and Anne Bancroft crying too. He added: "Whether I saw a vision of Jesus that windswept day or whether it was only something in my mind, I do not know. It doesn't matter. For I do know that it was a profound spiritual experience and that I have not been quite the same person since."

Many of us haven't been quite the same since that movie. This Easter, why not consider revisiting this great movie, or introducing it to someone who's never seen it?

Get out the popcorn, dim the lights, and listen as that majestic music rises to prepare us for entering that supernatural world of our dreams ... where we see the manger, the ministry, the crucifixion, and the empty tomb.

Perhaps when we get to the other side, God will show us the original footage, but for those of us still trapped in this mortal coil, it may be the closest thing we've got.

Susan D. Harris is a conservative opinion writer and journalist. Her website is SusanDHarris.com

LITERATURE

Facing Our Failures

KATE VIDIMOS

When we fail, our natural desire is to hide from our failures, hoping they will disappear. Yet in his short story "The Last Leaf," O. Henry demonstrates through a young woman named Johnsy that no matter what we have done, we can heal ourselves from our worst sicknesses by facing our failures.

Johnsy (or Joanna) lives with her new friend Sue in the New York neighborhood of Greenwich Village. Finding that they have much in common, these two young women decide to share a studio and make a living through art.

They befriended an elderly artist who lived on the floor beneath them, Old Behrman. He was "a fierce, little old man" who did his part to protect the young artists a floor above.

However, in November, pneumonia visits the village and infects Johnsy, who already had a weak constitution. The doctor informs Sue that Johnsy has a one-in-ten chance of survival. "And that chance is for her to want to live," he says. If she believes that she will get well, she will have a far better chance.

After speaking with the doctor outside, Sue goes back in to see Johnsy and finds her counting the leaves of an old ivy vine. She counts backward as the leaves fall one by one to the ground. The sickness has greatly affected Johnsy's mind: "When the last [leaf] falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days."

Hearing Johnsy say this, Sue realizes that her friend has succumbed to the sickness and her fate. Johnsy has given up on herself and her dreams. Her courage has left her, she does not want to live, and she has abandoned all hope.

Redeeming Oneself

A rainstorm ensues that night. The next morning, Sue wakes to find Johnsy's eyes wide open. Johnsy immediately orders the window blinds to be pulled up: She wants to see the ivy vine. To her astonishment, one last leaf remains! Twenty feet above the ground, it still bravely clings to the branch. The two are astonished, for the wind and rain beat against it all night.

With the help of this single leaf, Johnsy realizes her mistakes. She recognizes that she has failed to appreciate life and its beauty: "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die." She is determined to get better.

Through Johnsy, O. Henry shows us that when we admit our mistakes, we can redeem ourselves. Even as Johnsy was on the edge of death, she found the strength and courage to face death and get well.

It is through sins and struggles that greatness is born.

What Johnsy was not aware of, before Old Behrman passed away, was that he did his part to give her hope.

Whenever our worst failures appear before us, we must face them bravely. We must acknowledge our weaknesses and be willing to change.

Henry shows, as Oscar Wilde says in "A Woman of No Importance," that "every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future." As we survey our many failures (with their varying degrees of severity), we should remember that struggles, sins, and temptations are part of our journey.

It is through sins and struggles that greatness is born. We, too, can look to the future, face our failures with courage, and rise above them.

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate from the liberal arts college at the University of Dallas, where she received her bachelor's degree in English. She plans on pursuing all forms of storytelling (specifically film) and is currently working on finishing and illustrating a children's book

CHANDRA RAMSURRUN/ SHUTTERSTOCK

The story centers around the last leaf of autumn.

TV DOCUSERIES REVIEW

Was It Government Overreach or Legal Enforcement?

MICHAEL CLARK

ALL PHOTOS BY NETFLIX

Law enforcement storming the Branch Davidian compound in "Waco: American Apocalypse."

The Branch Davidian compound in flames in "Waco: American Apocalypse."

Thirty years ago, first the United States and then the rest of the world watched in guarded fascination for the outcome of a 51-day standoff at the Branch Davidian Compound in Mt. Carmel, some 20 or so miles northeast of Waco, Texas.

Inside the compound was David Koresh, a guy who not only believed himself to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ but was able to convince well over 100 followers of the same.

Outside were throngs of ATF and FBI agents, with each agency providing conflicting information to a hostage negotiating team that nervously relayed this to a rightfully suspicious Koresh.

All Parties Armed to the Teeth

There have already been five features or TV films on this subject, you might ask yourself if another is really necessary, and the answer is "yes." Two of those efforts are dramatizations and the remaining three are documentaries, all produced within seven years after the event; hardly enough time for objective, clear-eyed analysis.

For the new Netflix docuseries "Waco: American Apocalypse" director Tiller Russell ("Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer") has a distinct advantage over of all other productions, thanks mostly to the gifts of passing years, sober reflection, balanced rearview mirror observation, far superior technical tools, and (most importantly) recent interviews with those present at the time.

The three Davidian interviewees include Heather Jones, Kathy Schroeder, and David Thibodeau, who was one of the few to flee the compound after it had caught fire. The final child to be released during the siege, the now late-30s Jones is shown going through a gamut of emotions as she listens to a recording of the final conversation with her father, a USPS employee (also Koresh's brother-in-law) who, through pure dumb luck, was tipped off by authorities prior to the initial raid.

Of these three, Schroeder is the most interesting, but not always in a good way. Still believing that Koresh was the Messiah, her story regarding her turning her three children (and later herself) over to the authorities is the glaring example of law enforcement and the negotiating team purposefully speaking with forked tongues.

After the children were released, Schroeder's ex-husband (who had joint custody) swooped in and whisked away their two eldest. Preying on her vulnerability by questioning her dedication as a mother, Schroeder was coerced into leaving under the guise of reuniting with her youngest boy. This did happen but was short-lived as she was taken into custody on the same day and charged with a litany of crimes that she, in all likelihood, didn't commit.

The series reveals many facts buried for decades by law enforcement and the government.

'Waco: American Apocalypse'
Docuseries

Director: Tiller Russell
Running Time: 2 hours, 22 minutes
MPAA Rating: TV-MA
Release Date: March 22, 2023

★★★★☆

Toward the end of the siege, the FBI employed "agitation" techniques in an effort to hasten surrender, something the negotiators strongly protested. This included blasting disquieting sound effects, tortured animal noises, and the like at 130 decibels around the clock.

In the early morning of the final day (April 19), the FBI announced over loudspeakers that (incendiary) tear gas canisters would be placed inside the compound, while repeating over and over the line "this is not an assault" which, of course, it was.

Not long after, tanks began tearing down the walls of the building in the hopes of forcing those inside to flee, which never happened. The same can be said for multiple fires which started at the same time in different parts of the structure. It was never made clear who or what started the fires, and Russell was wise not to make his own conclusions and instead left it up to the viewer to determine culpability.

Did Koresh Break the Law?

Was Koresh a delusional provocateur? There's little doubt he was, but that's not illegal. Is it illegal for Texas residents to possess multiple firearms? No, and that includes .50 caliber rifles that can pierce tanks. Is it illegal to own hand grenades and machine guns? Yes, but there was no evidence of either being found in the rubble after the fires had subsided.

Koresh was also suspected of sexual child abuse; however, there is no credible or sustainable testimony to support those claims. Koresh did freely admit to fathering children with multiple of-age women (while only being legally married to one) which, while distasteful, amoral, and reckless, is still not illegal.

The highest praise that can be lavished upon any documentary is its success in presenting opposing views without any appearance of bias, and "Waco" does so in spades.

Amendments Under Siege

Presented in three episodes, "Waco" reveals many facts buried for decades by law enforcement and the government regarding the justification of the siege in the first place. What is put on display here should deeply trouble every American that subscribes to the U.S. Constitution.

The first, second, and fourth amendments all came under attack during the late winter of 1993 in Waco and, like 82 Davidians (including 28 children), none of those rights survived.

In my opinion, the scariest take away from this horrific event was how it could have easily been avoided and, worse, how the collective rights of law-abiding U.S. citizens under the Constitution in 2023 are still being threatened.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

The Story of an Extraordinary Salesman

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

In 1868, J.R. Watkins bought the manufacturing rights to a liniment and then started making it in the kitchen of his home in Minnesota. Soon he built a thriving multiproduct business in the United States and Canada, on the back of an army of door-to-door salesmen.

In 1955, Bill Porter joined the Watkins Company and went on to become, at one time, its top seller in all of Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and California. For over 40 years, he sold its detergents, soaps, and fabric softeners. He was its only door-to-door salesman, even when the company had as many as 44,000 salespeople using more contemporary, phone or online, selling platforms.

Steven Schachter's movie is about Bill (William H. Macy). His mom, Mrs. Porter (Helen Mirren), convinces him as he starts his first job that he'll be a fabulous salesman like his late father.

Why is any of this heroic? Schachter shows you.

Bill has suffered since birth from cerebral palsy. Nearly everything about him is off. One hand hangs stiffly by his side, like he's wielding a weapon behind his back. His other hand carries a weighty sales satchel.

He hunches forward as if an imaginary telephone book is dangling from his chest, ready to keel over if you so much as flip a page. He limps. His ears stick out, like boom bars at a gateway. His cheek bunches sideways in a half-smile that's anything but.

His gnarled face garbles his already strained speech, as vowels and consonants jostle their way out of his mouth. He prepares his paperwork (checks and the like) on a typewriter, with the one good finger of his one good hand.

Bill uses patience and persistence to cope with repeated, often rude, rejection.

Words his mother wrote in ketchup inspire Bill Porter.

'Door to Door'

Director: Steven Schachter
Starring: William H. Macy, Helen Mirren, Kyra Sedgwick
MPAA Rating: PG
Running Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes
Release Date: July 14, 2002

★★★★☆

TURNER NETWORK TELEVISION

Bill Porter (William H. Macy) rings many doorbells, in 2002's "Door to Door."

As you soak in the staggering challenge ahead when Bill leaves for his first job interview, his mom overstates his strengths, saying "You look like a million," and understates his weaknesses: "It takes people a wee bit longer to warm up to you. Just be patient, and persistent."

Those words become his motto. Not only does he get a job, but he also excels at it. Grabbing a bite when he's tired and hungry, he smiles on seeing that his mom has scrawled ketchup lettering on his sandwich: "PATIENCE" on one slice, "PERSISTENCE" on the other. Bill uses both qualities to cope with repeated, often rude, rejection.

Yes, he's occasionally put off by a barking dog or squabbling neighbors. Nothing else deters him, certainly not the words "no," "not now," or "never again." He loves his job. It gives him meaning, and earns him independence and respect.

Bill may be selling stain-removers all right, but the stain he's fighting is prejudice-stained perceptions about what the differently abled can and can't do. After a whole day's effort and countless rejections, he makes one sale. One! What does he excitedly tell his mom? "I made a sale!"

At a diner, Mrs. Porter deals with bullies (mocking Bill's awkwardness), using ketchup, again, to make her point. She's telling Bill that when you use what you have, you worry less about what you don't have.

As his mom ages, ails, and has to be admitted to a care home, she feels like a burden on him. Bill's arranging her room; she's sitting on the bed, fidgeting with her glove. Then the camera zooms out to frame only her, lost in her thoughts, her guilt at being unwell, her anxiety over his future without her.

Caring Salesman

Charmingly, Bill takes customers into his confidence: "Can I be candid with you?" even when he's suggesting something as engrossing as a new line of bleaches.

They end up confiding in him, and he becomes a repository of knowledge about neighborhood bonds being built or broken. For all the brain damage he's suffered, he becomes a kind of emotional super-neuron carrying "signals" of feeling, seamlessly from one neighbor to the next, bringing them closer to each other, not just to him.

To Bill, customers are more than a "sale"—they're human first. He sees beyond their gruff exteriors, their scowling impatience, their weary smiles. They're flawed like him, only differently, and he treats them with the respect they deserve.

But like so many in need (orphans, the aged, or terminally ill), not just differently abled people, Bill sees an offer of help as a sign of pity or charity. To him that's an affront, not affection. When the doctor warns Bill that if he doesn't stop walking all those miles, his worsening spinal stenosis will cripple him, but he just keeps going. He's too proud to sit around and collect "disability" on account of his condition.

Only later does he realize that sometimes an offer to help may be nothing more than a response to a need. It's not an admission of inferiority unless we make it so. For love has two sides. It's fine to love. It's better to also be comfortable with being loved back.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Biopic About a Man's Unwavering Faith

Peter Marshall travels from Scotland to America to answer God's call

IAN KANE

Spearheaded by incredibly insightful and entertaining films such as "Jesus Revolution" and TV series like "The Chosen" (both starring the outstanding actor Jonathan Roumie), it's great to see that faith-based films are becoming more and more popular in recent years. Part of their allure is that while they contain Christian references and values, they aren't necessarily preachy, and therefore appeal to wider audiences.

Some fantastic faith-based films from the Golden Age of Hollywood paved the way for these more modern films. Director Henry Koster's 1955 production "A Man Called Peter" is a biographical account of the life of the Scottish-born Reverend Peter Marshall (played by Richard Todd). The screenplay was written by screenwriter Eleanore Griffin and based on a book of the same name by Peter's wife, Catherine Marshall.

As sea vessels of various types move up and down a busy river port, a female narrator opens the film with the following: "This is Glasgow, Scotland. The year is 1915. This is the story of a man and his close friendship with God. His name—Peter Marshall. As a boy, his home was in Coatbridge, nine miles away, but his heart belonged to the sea."

Marshall (Peter J. Votrian as the young Marshall) tried to smuggle himself onto a boat, such was his desire to be out at sea. A policeman hauls Peter back to his home in the town of Coatbridge, just east of Glasgow, where he is chided by his hardworking stepfather for his attempted boat-boarding hijinks. It is then that Peter decides to go to work and save up enough money to pay back his stepfather for rent. But God has other plans for the youngster's future.

Years later, we find Peter working in a lumber mill, where he barely makes enough to pay his stepfather for room and board, and for night classes. One night, while leaving the Glasgow Technical School, Peter walks home through an extremely dense fog bank that has drifted in from the sea. Along the way, he feels a presence somewhere nearby. "Who is it?" Peter calls out while scanning his immediate surroundings.

Moments later, he trips and nearly falls off a steep cliff. He looks back to see that his foot had snagged on the exposed root of a tree. He realizes that the root miraculously saved his life, and during the epiphanic experience, he views the traumatic event as a sign from God. When he gets home, he cheerily confides in his mother, Mrs. Findlay (Jill Esmond), that God wants him to become a minister.

Peter proceeds to work double shifts at his mill job in order to save up enough money to leave his "beloved Scotland" and travel by ship to the United States. When he arrives in New York, all he has is $50 and his faith. And that's all he'll need while he awaits further instructions from God, or as he puts it, "orders from the chief." Soon God leads him to Decatur, Georgia, where he eventually graduates from the Columbia Theological Seminary.

After graduating, Peter is given the choice of ministering at two separate churches in Georgia: a large one in Atlanta, and a much smaller one in the "lovely little town of Covington." He is called to the larger church in Atlanta, which is plagued by debt and has a dwindling congregation. His unusual gift of oratory draws large throngs of people to the struggling church.

One of the people in regular attendance is Catherine Wood, a senior at the nearby Agnes Scott College. Catherine fell in love with Peter from the first time she heard him speak, and romance blossoms. After the young newlyweds return from their brief honeymoon, they face various trials and tribulations together, challenges that not only bolster their love for each other but also strengthen their devotion to God.

One of the things that most impressed me about this film is that it tells its story simply, and never comes off as preachy or lecturing. The entire first act unfolds like a heartfelt, beautiful romance that is suitable for the entire family.

The acting is exceptional, with brilliant performances by Richard Todd and Jean Peters, both of whom are convincing as Peter and Catherine Wood Marshall, respectively. The film's excellent cinematography, by director of photography Harold Lipstein, and rousing score (courtesy of composer and actor Alfred Newman) only heighten the heartwarming story, and by the time the ending credits rolled, I was wearing a big, feel-good grin.

"A Man Called Peter" is an exceptionally crafted gem of a movie that is sure to inspire people to be good-hearted toward one another. Its sensibilities should appeal to a wide variety of folks, not only Christians. It's a splendid, family-friendly, real-life tale of two selfless people who cared for others.

You can watch this film on Apple TV, Vudu.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality.

A splendid, family-friendly, real-life tale of two selfless people who cared for others.

'A Man Called Peter'

Director: Henry Koster

Starring: Richard Todd, Jean Peters, Marjorie Rambeau

Not Rated

Running Time: 1 hour, 59 minutes

Release Date: April 1955

★★★★½

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX FILM CORPORATION

Peter Marshall (Richard Todd), in 1955's "A Man Called Peter."

Peter Marshall (Richard Todd) and Catherine Wood (Jean Peters).

Gather

Your Event Platform, Without Censorship!

As a Gather member, you can:

FIND an event

JOIN an event

HOST an event

Tutorial and FAQ are available.

ATTENTION: CANCEL CULTURE HAS BEEN CANCELED

From convention centers to college campuses, people are being sidelined from events and conversations, simply because they hold a different opinion.

Welcome to the reawakening of freedom of assembly!

GreatGather.com is a platform created **by The Epoch Times** for events that spark real conversation **without censorship!**

We're all about building a place where we can all get together and exchange ideas freely, the same way our forefathers did in town squares and agoras long ago.

Join the conversation now at

GreatGather.com