

Introductory Remarks | James Carroll Zoom Discussion | Today's American Catholic | April 8, 2021

We are honored to have with us this evening the acclaimed author, historian, and journalist James Carroll. James is the author of twelve novels, most recently *The Cloister*, which the *New York Times* called “incandescent,” and eight works of nonfiction, most recently *Christ Actually: The Son of God for the Secular Age*, of which the *Boston Globe* said: “At once stunningly original and strangely familiar, a testament to the power of a critical, creative faith.” Other books include the National Book Award–winning memoir *An American Requiem*; the *New York Times* bestseller *Constantine’s Sword*, which was turned into a feature-length documentary film; *House of War*, which won the first PEN-John Kenneth Galbraith Award; and *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, which was named a 2011 Best Book by *Publishers Weekly*. His books that have dealt explicitly with church reform include *Toward a New Catholic Church: The Promise of Reform* in 2002 and *Practicing Catholic* in 2009. In 2012, Doubleday published *Vatican II: The Essential Documents*, translated by Norman Tanner, with introductions from James Carroll and Pope Benedict the Sixteenth.

In addition to his novels and nonfiction work, James has published a collection of poetry, *Forbidden Disappointments*, and his plays have been produced at the Berkshire Theater Festival and at Boston’s Next Move Theater. His essays and articles have appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, the *Daily Beast*, and other publications. His op-ed page column ran regularly in the *Boston Globe* from 1992 to 2015.

James has been a Shorenstein Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; a Fellow at the Center for the Study of Values in Public Life at the Harvard Divinity School; the Richman Visiting Professor at Brandeis University; and the holder of the McDonald Chair at Emory University, in addition to numerous other academic honors and appointments. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and was a member of the Academy’s Committee on International Security Studies. He lives in Boston with his wife, the writer Alexandra Marshall, and they have two grown children.

Tonight James will be speaking on his new book, *The Truth at the Heart of the Lie: How the Catholic Church Lost Its Soul*. Recent scandals in the church have reignited debates over the issue of clericalism, the role of the laity, and the need to reexamine the hierarchical structures of church governance. In *The Truth at the Heart of the Lie*, James weaves together the story of his quest to understand his personal beliefs and his relationship to the Catholic Church with the history of the church itself. He argues that the power structures embedded in clericalism pose a grave threat to the future of the church, and advocates for reform-minded Catholics to revive the culture from within by embracing anti-clerical, anti-misogynist resistance that is grounded in the spirit of Christian love.

In light of the passing of theologian Hans Küng earlier this week, the subject of the book and of our discussion tonight seem especially appropriate. “My theology obviously isn’t for the pope,” Küng once said. “[I will do theology] for my fellow human beings . . . for those people who may need my theology.” He also said, “The pope has a right to a response from his own church in critical solidarity.” Like Küng, James Carroll’s work is committed to this dual strand of deep humanism and “critical solidarity”; as he himself has said, he prefers to speak as a “conscientious objector” from *within* the church, modeling a “kind of internal exile—a poignant life on the ecclesial inner margin, that liminal space from which an eye is ever cast toward the center as toward an unforsaken home, still beloved.”

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