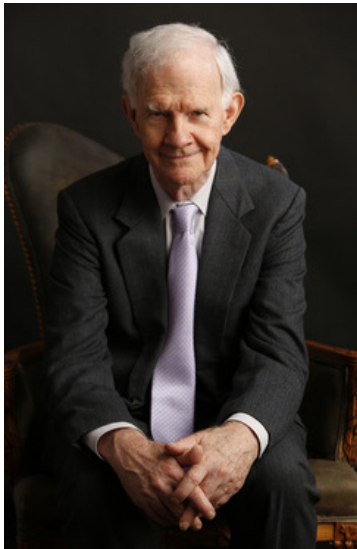




MODERNIZING THE CHURCH: Spotlight on Gabriel Moran

In *Missed Opportunities*, religion scholar Gabriel Moran offers an accessible roadmap toward a more modern and inclusive Roman Catholic Church



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Veteran author Gabriel Moran's *Missed Opportunities: Rethinking Catholic Tradition* responds in part to what Moran calls “the greatest crisis” facing the church since the Protestant Reformation. A theological scholar and professor emeritus at New York University who has worked for decades with the Roman Catholic Church's educational programs, Moran advocates for a modernized church that is deeply rooted in tradition but that also comprehends and respects the complex issues facing practitioners in the contemporary world.

“The election of Pope Francis raised hopes that there might be a new spirit of reform,” Moran says. “He did make some symbolic changes and asked some fundamental questions.” Nonetheless, Moran feels that further questions need probing. Is it possible, for instance, for the church to take a more nuanced stance on abortion? What should the church's position on “corporate personhood” be? How should the church interact with the environmental movement? In *Missed Opportunities*, Moran explores these questions in hopes of sparking dialogue. “The church has been badly split for decades,” he says. He wrote this book to “open a conversation across the divide.”

One focus for Moran is the language the church uses. He advocates in the book for “language that is consistent with the long tradition of the church” and that also “makes sense for people today.” The church, Moran says, should do away with “language that obstructs conversation” around controversial issues.

For example, Moran traces the history of the church's teaching on abortion, which once distinguished between early abortions before “ensoulment, or personhood,” and later abortions, which were viewed as homicides. In the past half century, the bishops have radically changed the language around

this teaching to address only when life begins, which leaves no room for compromise on matters of public policy.

Moran also doesn't avoid controversial subjects such as the church's treatment of homosexuality. He asserts that the church's problem isn't with how it tackles homosexuality but with how it views sexuality in general. “The church,” Moran says, “need not endorse all the sexual changes of the past century, but on its own principles it could accept that human sexuality is for more purposes than reproduction and that women should no longer be second-class members of the church.”

Although Moran has a scholarly background, *Missed Opportunities* isn't intended for academics only; he says the book will be useful to many Roman Catholics and that it's written to be accessible to any reader. Moran also hopes that general readers will recognize the importance of the subject matter, as the church is, he says, “a public institution of considerable influence.”

Ultimately, Moran hopes the church can evolve in two basic ways. First, he says, he would like to see the church “stand for the best of humanity,” which in his thinking would entail “resisting environmental destruction, state execution of prisoners, and oppression of poor people.” Second, he would like to see the church “provide a sense of community” as it did in the past. To achieve that, Moran says, “a radical reorganization is needed in order to make the church a gathering of actual communities that would resemble the earliest Christian community.”

Moran hopes *Missed Opportunities* will help point the way toward a Roman Catholic Church that is responsive to today's world and fosters an open and accepting vision of religious education. “The world, and especially the United States,” Moran says, “needs education in religion, by which I mean people attaining an intelligent practice of their own religion and an understanding of the religions of other people.”

