



Being Catholic Now: Prominent Americans Talk About Change in the Church and the Quest for Meaning

Kerry Kennedy

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For Kerry Kennedy, who grew up in a devoutly Catholic household coping with great loss, her family's faith was a constant source of strength and solace. As an adult, she came to question some of the attitudes and teachings of the Catholic Church while remaining an impassioned believer in its role as a defender of the poor and oppressed.

"Generations ago," says Kennedy, "the search for spirituality came predefined and prepackaged. [The Church] not only gave us all the answers, it even gave us the questions to ask." Now many of the old certainties are being reexamined. In an attempt to convey this sea change, Kennedy asked thirty-seven American Catholics to speak candidly about their own faith—whether lost, recovered, or deepened—and about their feelings regarding the way the Church hierarchy is moving forward.

The voices included here range from respectful to reproachful and from appreciative to angry. Speaking their minds are businesspeople, actors and entertainers, educators, journalists, politicians, union leaders, nuns, priests—even a cardinal. Some love the Church; some feel intensely that the Church wronged them. All have an illuminating insight or perspective.

Kerry Kennedy herself speaks of the joy of growing up as one of Robert and Ethel Kennedy's eleven children, of the tragedies that eventually befell her family, and of how religion was deeply woven through good times and bad. Journalist Andrew Sullivan talks about reconciling his devout Catholicism with the Church's condemnation of his identity as a gay man. TV newswoman Cokie Roberts recalls the nuns who taught her and "took girls seriously when nobody else did." Comedian Bill Maher declares, "I hate religion. It's the worst thing in the world"—and goes on to defend his bold assertion. Writer Anna Quindlen depicts a common parental challenge: passing along traditions and values to a younger generation sometimes deaf to spiritual messages.

Through these and many other voices that speak not only to Catholics but to all of us, *Being Catholic Now* redefines an ancient institution in the most contemporary of terms.

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