

PREFACE

Are You Catholic?

“Are you Catholic?” was the first question Tom Monaghan asked me.

“No, not anymore,” I told the billionaire Catholic philanthropist.

Monaghan shrugged and said no more about it, so we got down to business: the first interview for his biography.

This wasn’t an authorized biography. Monaghan wouldn’t have any control over the final product. With that condition, it understandably took months for him to make up his mind. But when Monaghan finally agreed to cooperate, he gave me almost everything I wanted: ten extended interviews with him plus access to almost all his top people. He did rule some people and topics off-limits. When I asked to interview his wife and family, he said no, and when I asked about his wife and family, he said nothing.

Otherwise Monaghan answered everything I asked as frankly and honestly as he could, though he wouldn’t speak ill of the living and only very rarely of the dead. Naturally there were things about himself he didn’t know, couldn’t know, or wouldn’t let himself know. In that way, he was no different from anyone else.

In almost every other way, Monaghan was like no one else, and the story he told sounded like it came out of a Dickens novel. From his brutal childhood through his tumultuous business career and his extraordinary ambition to build a world-class Catholic university, Monaghan dreamed big dreams, set impossible goals, and achieved great things, all while trying to live so his soul would go to heaven when he died.

Whether it did or didn’t wasn’t up to me. I wasn’t there to make the case for Monaghan’s soul. I was there to record his dreams and accomplishments, to tell his story in his own words and let him speak for himself.

He wouldn't be the only one speaking. Like most rich and powerful men, Monaghan had a huge number of friends and enemies, and while some wouldn't talk, most were eager to praise or bury him. True or false, they were witnesses to his life, and their testimony would be heard, though if it proved false, they'd be called on it—just like Monaghan.

In the end, whatever Monaghan might've hoped for when he agreed to cooperate, I got to tell his story the way I thought it should be told: critically but compassionately and with as much fairness and objectivity as I could muster. So in the interests of full disclosure, let me answer Monaghan's first question more completely.

I was baptized a Catholic shortly after I was born and educated at Catholic schools from kindergarten through high school. I left the Church after I graduated, went back after I got married, and left for good after I got divorced. Years later I read the Bible a few times, then the works of the Church Fathers and the Gnostic scriptures, then the founding documents of most of the rest of the world's religions, and several shelves of books on religion after that. These days, my relationship with God is between me and God.