

The best books Catholic Culture staff read in 2023

By Thomas V. Mirus ([bio](#) - [articles](#) - [email](#)) | Jan 16, 2024

It's time for the Catholic Culture staff's roundup of our favorite things we read in the past year. This time we have lists by Dr. Jeff Mirus, Phil Lawler, Dr. Jim Papandrea, and Thomas Mirus.

Dr. Jeff Mirus

Looking back over the books I liked but did not find time to review already this year, I find that my favorites are those that turn our expectations upside down by making what at first glance seems to be a predictable topic into a richly rewarding spiritual, intellectual and even at times emotional experience—and are packed with sound guidance as well. Here are four of them, plus my usual tip for a good mystery series:

[Building a Civilization of Love: A Catholic Response to Racism](#) by Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers (Ignatius Press 2023; 252 pp. Paper \$18.95, ebook \$12.32)

A common first reaction to this title is that committed Catholics are considerably less likely to be guilty of racism of any kind than most other identifiable groups, because of their firm commitment to the concept of a universal Church. But when we think of both how often people are guilty of racism and how often anti-racist sentiments turn into ideologies which damage just about everybody, one begins to wonder if what we really need is a strong Catholic look at racism after all. That's what Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers delivers in a book which combines a close look at racism with a close look at anti-racist distortions which too often provide a cover for other goals, including anti-Christian goals. So here's a book which covers not only prejudice and racism along with the Church's historical response to racism, but also the related distortions of Critical Race Theory, Liberation Theology, and the Black Lives Matter movement. In the end, Burke-Sivers offers not only one Catholic response to racism but perhaps the ultimate Catholic response in the form of an Afterword by Michael Heinlein giving the stories of six Black Catholics who are on their way to canonization.

[Life-Giving Wounds: A Catholic Guide to Healing for Adult Children of Divorce or Separation](#) by Dr. Daniel and Bethany Meola (Ignatius Press 2023; 322 pp. Paper \$18.95, ebook \$12.32)

Let me say it once again: Divorce is child abuse. Unfortunately, participation in this abuse can be imposed by one spouse against the will of the other—who may be, at least on the whole, innocent. Moreover, considering how hard it is for someone outside a marriage to make judgments about those within the marriage, it is inadvisable for the rest of us to pick targets and throw stones. Nonetheless, whenever divorce occurs in a marriage with children, the children suffer not only deeply, but typically well into adulthood, and perhaps for all of their lives. That is why it is so valuable to have this new book, which is subtitled “A Catholic guide to healing for adult children of divorce or separation”. Dr. Daniel and Bethany Maola, both graduates of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, are the founders of Life-Giving Wounds, a Catholic nonprofit apostolate devoted to the healing of adult children of divorce or separation. The book covers the wounds divorce inflicts on its children, wounds of broken identity, wounds to their faith and to their own vision of marriage, wounds of unhealthy family dynamics, wounds of false guilt, wounds of anxiety, anger and sin. This book faces incalculable suffering and helps those who experienced it to transform it into new life in Christ.