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**On being obsessive
 FATHER GEORGE W. RUTLER**

Blessed John Paul II once submitted to an interview with the respected journalist Vittorio Messori, who asked him if he was perhaps "obsessive" in his preaching against abortion.

There was a time — and perhaps with improvements in our schools that time will come again — when schoolboys memorized, among other famous classical lines, the expression: "Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam." It was the exasperated call, in the second-century B.C. Senate of the Roman Republic, for the conquest of Carthage in what is now Tunisia. "Furthermore, I say that Carthage must be destroyed." The senator Cato the Elder ended each of his speeches that way, so that it became an inside joke, and his fellow senators chanted it along with him as a kind of ritual.



Churchill said that a fanatic "is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject." In *David Copperfield*, the gently simple-minded Mr. Dick was obsessed with writing about the head of King Charles, and "King Charles' Head" has since become a cipher for all sorts of monomania. But Cato was not a futile fanatic, and his obsession was vindicated, albeit some three years after his death, when the heart of the North African empire was indeed destroyed, in flames for days.

Various studies of keys to success in assorted enterprises agree that constant devotion to one goal is crucial. Thomas Edison experimented repeatedly to find the right material for an incandescent light bulb and finally discovered the properties of a carbon filament only after trying hundreds of other materials, including human hair. Was he obsessive? He called it "stick-to-it-iveness" and said that genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration. "Keep your eyes on the prize," in the words of a folk song. On a loftier plane, the Savior said: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

There are those who would stifle the Pro-Life cause by calling it a single-issue obsession. Few would say that about the Abolition movement or the struggle against child labor, even though such worthy causes did attract a fair share of distempered monomaniacs. But slaves and children have to be born first, and so the protection of life from conception must rank first among all dedications of philanthropy.

Blessed John Paul II once submitted to an interview with the respected journalist Vittorio Messori, who asked him if he was perhaps "obsessive" in his preaching against abortion. The Holy Father replied: "The legalization of the termination of pregnancy is none other than the authorization given to an adult, with the approval of an established law, to take the lives of children yet unborn and thus incapable of defending themselves. It is difficult to imagine a more unjust situation, and it is very difficult to speak of obsession in a matter such as this, where we are dealing with a fundamental imperative of every good conscience — the defense of the right to life of an innocent and defenseless human being."



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THE AUTHOR

Father Rutler received priestly ordination in 1981. Born in 1945 and reared in the Episcopal tradition, Father Rutler was an Episcopal priest for nine years. He was received into the Catholic Church in 1979 and was



sent to the North American College in Rome for seminary studies. Father Rutler graduated from Dartmouth, where he was a Rufus Choate Scholar, and took advanced degrees at the Johns Hopkins University and the General Theological Seminary. He holds several degrees from the Gregorian and Angelicum Universities in Rome, including the Pontifical Doctorate in Sacred Theology, and studied at the Institut Catholique in Paris. In England, in 1988, the University of Oxford awarded him the degree Master of Studies. From 1987 to 1989 he was regular preacher to the students, faculty, and townspeople of Oxford. Cardinal Egan appointed him Pastor of the [Church of Our Saviour](#), effective September 17, 2001.

Since 1988 his weekly television program has been broadcast worldwide on EWTN. Father Rutler has published 17 books, including: [Cloud of Witnesses — Dead People I Knew When They Were Alive](#), [Coincidentally: Unserious Reflections on Trivial Connections](#), [A Crisis of Saints: Essays on People and Principles](#), [Brightest and Best](#), [Saint John Vianney: The Cure D'Arce Today](#), [Crisis in Culture](#), and [Adam Danced: The Cross and the Seven Deadly Sins](#).

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