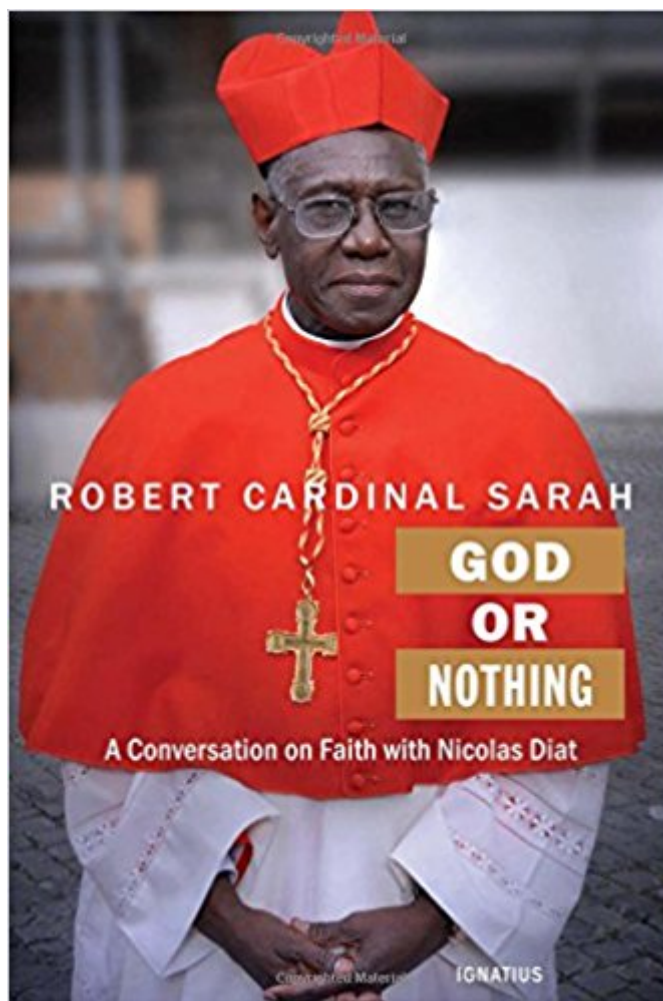


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# God Or Nothing: A Conversation On Faith



## Synopsis

"The idea of putting Magisterial teaching in a beautiful display case while separating it from pastoral practice, which then could evolve along with circumstances, fashions, and passions, is a sort of heresy, a dangerous schizophrenic pathology." I therefore solemnly state that the Church in Africa is staunchly opposed to any rebellion against the teaching of Jesus and of the Magisterium. . . . The Church of Africa is committed in the name of the Lord Jesus to keeping unchanged the teaching of God and of the Church." Robert Cardinal Sarah

In this fascinating autobiographical interview, one of the most prominent and outspoken Catholic Cardinals gives witness to his Christian faith and comments on many current controversial issues. The mission of the Church, the joy of the gospel, the heresy of activism, and the definition of marriage are among the topics he discusses with wisdom and eloquence. Robert Cardinal Sarah grew up in Guinea, West Africa. Inspired by the missionary priests who made great sacrifices to bring the Faith to their remote village, his parents became Catholics. Robert discerned a call to the priesthood and entered the seminary at a young age, but due to the oppression of the Church by the government of Guinea, he continued his education outside of his homeland. He studied in France and nearby Senegal. Later he obtained a licentiate in theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, followed by a licentiate in Sacred Scripture at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of Jerusalem. At the age of thirty-four he became the youngest Bishop in the Catholic Church when John Paul II appointed him the Archbishop of Conakry, Guinea, in 1979. His predecessor had been imprisoned by the Communist government for several years, and when Archbishop Sarah was targeted for assassination John Paul II called him to Rome to be Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In 2010 Pope Benedict XVI named him Cardinal and appointed him Prefect of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum. Pope Francis made him Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2014. "I have read *God or Nothing* with great spiritual profit, joy, and gratitude. . . . [Its] courageous answers to the problems of gender theory clear up in a nebulous world a fundamental anthropological question." Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI "There is an African moment unfolding in Catholicism, and Cardinal Robert Sarah is among its most important voices. If you want to understand the forces shaping the Church's future, you need to read this book." John L. Allen, Associate Editor, *Cruce/Boston Globe* "A remarkable testimonial of the Catholic faith in the face of many serious contemporary challenges." Raymond Cardinal Burke, Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta "A clear and firm defense of Catholic doctrine on marriage and the family." Walter Cardinal Brandmüller, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Committee for

Historical Sciences "Cardinal Sarah reflects on the urgent question of God, who is becoming the 'Great Absent One' for too many people." Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston

## Book Information

Paperback: 285 pages

Publisher: Ignatius Press; Sew edition (September 1, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1621640507

ISBN-13: 978-1621640509

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 171 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #19,416 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #87 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious](#) #94 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Catholicism](#) #153 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects](#)

## Customer Reviews

"No one reading this magnificent book of Cardinal Robert Sarah, a true witness of a Church marked in its history by severe persecution, cannot but be fascinated by his profound faith in Jesus Christ. . . . [The] mission countries have themselves become an invaluable source of evangelization and inspiration for the lands from which its missionaries originally came." Most Reverend Carlo Maria Viganf, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States "Cardinal Sarah shows a deep love for the Gospel, a pastor's heart for the poor, and a clear vision of the challenges that the Church faces in the post-modern world. He is an important guide for our mission of the new evangelization." Most Reverend Josf H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles "The seed of the Gospel sown in the earth of Africa produces a rich harvest! Cardinal Sarah addresses contemporary challenges with intellectual depth and spiritual insight." Most Reverend Salvatore Cordileone, Archbishop of San Francisco "An essential read for any person seeking an authentic witness to Christ in modern society." Most Reverend Samuel Aquila, Archbishop of Denver "Cardinal Sarah offers an important sacred perspective on worship, evangelization, catechesis, and discipleship." Most Reverend James Conley, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska "An inspiring book." Most Reverend Robert Vasa, Bishop of Santa Rosa, California "Cardinal Sarah's voice carries the unmistakable ring of a prophet." --Raymond Arroyo, EWTN Anchor, The World Over "In a breathtaking way, Cardinal Sarah

quotes and incarnates the wisdom of Pope Benedict: 'Ideologues will not save the world but rather, the saints and their great, gentle insights.' " --Father George W. Rutler, Author, Hints of Heaven "Sarah's clear and bold comments about the need for a profound renewal in the Church are truly refreshing and encouraging." --Father Gerald E. Murray, S.J. J.C.D.

Robert Cardinal Sarah was born in Guinea, West Africa. Made an Archbishop by Pope John Paul II and a Cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI, he was named the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments by Pope Francis in 2014.

An excellent book indeed. Robert Cardinal Sarah systematically discusses the crises our church has been confronted with in recent times and suggests the practical ways of dealing with these challenges. The book challenges all those who are the blood and the heart of the church to develop a personal friendship with God so our Christian intentions and God's will must coincide more and more perfectly. As a Catholic priest, I have been humbled by Cardinal Sarah's assertion that the real treasure of the priesthood does not lie intellectual, theological, philosophical, and exegetical formation and expertise, but in "our friendship with God." The Cardinal makes it clear that "without a priesthood according to God's heart, cleansed of human ways, the church has no future." I perfectly agree with this humble servant of Christ Jesus. This is a book Catholic Christians, particularly those in leadership, must read. It is an easy read and excellently written. I highly recommend it. Fr. Joseph Domfeh

God or Nothing is an interview of Robert Cardinal Sarah conducted by Nicholas Diat. Cardinal Sarah is a Guinean Cardinal Prelate and Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments. He was previously Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and President of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum (Human and Christian Development). He was born in 1945 and entered seminary in 1957. Yes, you read that right. He entered the seminary at age 12. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1969 (age 24), consecrated a bishop in 1979 (age 34), and created a cardinal in 2010 (age 65) by Pope Benedict XVI. Not that I had any doubts in Pope Benedict, but he made a wise choice picking Robert Sarah to become a cardinal. In the beginning of this book Cardinal Sarah, discusses his childhood and village, how his ancestors were all animists, and the missionary priests of the order of the Holy Ghost Fathers and the impact they had on his village and him particularly. He also discusses the nurturing of his vocation and what put him on the path to priesthood. After background on his early life and

ordination in the priesthood, we learn about his further studies in Rome, which included Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. By studying these languages he felt, he was able to read and better appreciate Scripture and commentary texts in their original languages. I agree wholeheartedly with him, and it makes me wish I had more of an ability to picking up foreign languages. The really interesting chapter to me was his opinion on all the popes during his lifetime, which so far spans Pius XII to Francis. He was honest in the distress he felt when Pope Benedict XVI resigned, but after a few days, he came to acceptance of the decision, because he knew it was a decision the former pope did not make on his own, but with the guidance of Jesus. The above paragraph only covers the first three chapters of the book. The rest of the book is where you will find the wisdom of a pastor. He discusses issues facing the world, issues facing the Church, how Christianity and morality align, etc. I found myself nodding along with everything that Cardinal Sarah said, and I am truly grateful that he is one of the leaders of the Church, and I am pleased that he has so strong a voice at the ongoing Synod. May more Cardinals be as bold and honest as him, when they speak the truth in love on who the Church is and what she believes.

Cardinal Robert Sarah was born in Guinea, West Africa (June 15, 1945). His homeland has 12 million people (85% Muslim). After independence from the French in 1958, the country was ruled by a communist dictator Sekou Toure who nationalized all the schools including the seminary where Sarah was studying. He was ordained in 1969. Under Paul VI he was selected in 1978 to be prepared to be the next bishop of the country since Archbishop Tchidimbo was imprisoned with no hope of release inside the country. Pope John Paul II consecrated Sarah Archbishop of Conakry diocese in 1979 and Tchidimbo was released and exiled. Five years later Toure died suddenly. On his desk was a list of agitators to be eliminated with Archbishop Sarah at the top of the list. Pope John Paul II called him to Rome to be Secretary of Evangelization of Peoples in 2001. Pope Benedict appointed him President of Cor Unum Africa's international relief services. Pope Francis appointed him Prefect of Divine Worship and Sacraments in November 2014. He was asked to write an autobiography but agreed instead to tell his story through this 300-page interview with French journalist Nicolas Diat. Sarah is fluent in his local mother tongue as well as French-the language of his education. The interview is reminiscent of the 1985 Ratzinger Report when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave his own less biographical but equally penetrating insights into the State of the Church in a book length interview. Ratzinger taught with measured eloquent responses about the meaning of liturgy, the loss of the sacred, the documents of the Council and the continuity of the Council in Catholic history. The

bestseller was an intellectual synthesis that turbo-charged a whole generation of literate Catholic thinkers reeling from the excesses of their clergy and bishops. He gave us a way to talk that was more than effective argumentation. He showed us the spiritual high ground, This interview with Cardinal Sarah provides a similar synthesis pointing to a higher path. But this time it is not a German professor talking. And, frankly, to untie the peculiar knots that bind the Church today, we don't need another professor. Particularly "conservative intellectuals" who seem so puzzled by the Pope from Argentina should walk for a mile with the Cardinal from Guinea. The walk is a peaceful reorientation.

POPES OF A LIFETIME: PIUS XII TO FRANCIS

Pius XII "was more of an innovator than his superficial critics would have you believe. His encyclical *Fidei donum* in 1957 on the renewal of the missions inspired in part by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (a missionary Holy Ghost Father) was written especially with a view to Africa. He was the first to consecrate African bishops, in particular, Bernardin Gantin. His interest in a native African episcopacy was real.

John XXIII "The Cathedral at Conakry was elegant. At the time of the first discussions about liturgical reform, Archbishop Tchidimbo returned to Conakry and ordered the destruction of the baldachin (a canopy) and the main altar. We were angry, incredulous at this hasty decision. I can attest that the botched preparation for liturgical reform had devastating effects on the Catholic population particularly on the simpler people. The liturgy is not a political object that we can make more egalitarian according to social demands; how could such a strange movement produce in the life of the Church anything but great confusion among the people. Nevertheless the idea of John XXIII was extraordinary; at the seminary as we studied the various constitutions, we were awestruck by the work of the Fathers. I am convinced that Pope John wished that the faithful would experience great intimacy with God. He wanted believers to enter into deeper spirituality; indeed the spiritual vision of man is the source of his program of reform. His concern about adapting to modern times never caused him to forget the transcendental necessity of evangelization work. And so his denunciation of "prophets of doom" is correct. The fight against Soviet Communism and its expansion around the world was so difficult that it gave rise to a form of defeatism. Some circles did not believe sufficiently in the power of Christ. Paul VI had to deal with extraordinarily difficult upheavals. Many priests left the priesthood. Convents emptied out and many nuns set aside their habits. Little by little the Spirit of the age caused the disappearance of the sign that God's hand had been placed on those who had devoted their lives to the Lord. There was a widespread impression that even among the consecrated persons the presence

of God was forbidden! For the Pope this meant terrible suffering. His sorrow did not prevent him from standing firm. JOHN PAUL I God gave those few weeks in the summer of 1978 a marvelous brilliance because John Paul I had the smile, simplicity, and the radiance of children. His gentleness was so profound that it became a dazzling purity. Given the impurity of some even in the Church, I think he did not die in vain. JOHN PAUL II All those very productive years can be traced back to the three pillars of his interior life which were the Cross, the Eucharist, and the Blessed Virgin, Crux, Hostia, Virgo. His extraordinary faith found its foundation only in the most ordinary tools of the Christian life. BENEDICT XVI The cultures of the Polish philosopher and the German theologian, the athletic ascetic and the "Benedictine" professor were different. Yet the popes met in the depths of their spiritualities. Maybe some people inside and outside the church never accepted the fundamental insights of Benedict XVI. As early as 2005, he was lucidly aware of the situation. During the Mass of his inauguration, did he not ask, "Pray for me, that I may not flee for fear of the wolves." In thinking about him I hear these words, "I have fought the good fight I have finished the race I have kept the faith." The pope had reached his decision on his knees before the Cross. Benedict XVI resigned from his office with the conviction that this was keeping with God's will. All his life he had sought God; once again God showed him the way. POPE FRANCIS In Deus Caritas est, Benedict XVI writes that "at the origin of being a Christian there is not an ethical decision, a philosophical or moral idea, but an encounter with an event, a Person." Pope Francis rightly refuses to give a pervasive place to moral questions without minimizing them, however. He considers that the most important encounter is with Christ and his Gospel; the Holy Father acts like Benedict who tried to distinguish morality from the essence of Christianity. John Paul II himself explained that the path marked out by the Divine Law is not a moral police ordinance but the mind of God. Pope Francis is not afraid to say that the greatest threat is "the gray pragmatism of daily life of the Church in which all appears to proceed normally while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small mindedness. A tomb psychology develops which turns Christians to mummies." Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end they generate only darkness and inner weariness and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate. For all this I repeat, Let us not lose the joy of evangelization. ON PRIESTLY FORMATION A seminarian is first and foremost the work of the priests who have accompanied him | the priests who accompanied me insisted on the interior life. I understood that the greatest way to be with the Son of God made man was still the liturgy. At the Mass, the priest is face to face with God. The Mass

is the most important thing in our lives. And the Divine Office, the breviary, prepares us for it. I remember how enthralled I was when I saw the Holy Ghost fathers walking every afternoon reading their breviaries. I never tired of watching them with a sense of awe. Every day the Holy Ghost fathers lived by the rhythm of the Divine Office, Mass, work, and the rosary, and they never shirked from their duties as men of God. How many times I was gripped by the silence that reigned in the church during the fathers' prayers. They seemed to be listening and conversing with someone in the semi-darkness of the church lit by candles. There is a true heroism, greatness and nobility in this life of regular prayer. Man is great only when he is on his knees before God.

**PRAYER AND THE VIRGINAL SILENCE OF NIGHT**

Recall that for a long time prophet Elijah remained hidden in a cave before hearing the soft whisper of heaven. Yes, I will say it again, prayer consists in the first place of remaining silent for a long time. We must often nestle close to the Virgin of silence to ask her to obtain for us the grace of loving silence and interior virginity, in other words a purity of heart and a willingness to listen that banishes any presence except God's. The Holy Spirit is in us but we are often filled with orchestras that drown out his voice. There is no spiritual fruitfulness except in a virginal silence for a long time I have thought that prayer can take shape only in the night. In darkness we are illumined only by God. Like Jacob, and the monks, it is important to learn to pray in the middle of the night, while all creation is seeking sleep. Prayer at night plunges us back into the darkness of the death of Jesus.

**POVERTY AND DESTITUTION**

We must be precise in our choice of words. The language of the UN and of its agencies who want to suppress poverty, which they confuse with destitution, is not the language of the Church of Christ. The Son of God did not come to speak to the poor in ideological slogans. In the fight against destitution there is one fundamental dimension which consists of restoring to man his vocation as a child of God and his joy in belonging to the family of God. The Son of God loves the poor; others plan to eradicate them. What a lying, unrealistic almost tyrannical utopia!

**AN AFRICAN BIOGRAPHY SHAPED BY ANIMISM, THE HOLY GHOST FATHERS AND A CROSS OF SUFFERING**

The God of my ancestors is the Creator of the universe and all that exists. He is the Supreme Being, ineffable, incomprehensible, invisible, and intangible. Yet, He is at the center of our lives and permeates our entire existence. The Holy Cross missionaries; they were completely consumed by the fire of God's love. They had exceptional human intellectual and spiritual qualities, but they all died very young. The Church in Guinea experienced a terrible way of the Cross. Dictatorship drove the people to exhaustion, lies, brutality, mediocrity, and spiritual poverty. The entire young nation was transformed into a valley of tears. I thank the missionaries



who made me understand that the Cross is the center of the world, the heart of mankind and the place where our stability is anchored.

Only the cross stands, and the world revolves around it.

**BLACK MASSES AND THE DEVIL** (on Pope Francis calling the liturgy of pedophile priests a black Mass)

“The Pope gave mature reflection to the full scope of such a comparison. How can a priest who has attacked an innocent child with such extraordinary violence then celebrate Holy Mass. After committing such a serious sexual crime, the priest can no longer carry the consecrated Host in his hands. If he continues to celebrate Mass, he has made a pact with the devil. A pedophile act ontologically affects the very being of the priest, consequently the priestly bond that attaches him to Christ is gone. The breach is so extreme that he can no longer enter into communion with Jesus. Francis decided to denounce black masses so as to flush out the devil and bring his misdeeds into the light of day. Francis deserves our thanks and gratitude for his courage. The devil will seek his revenge.

**TWIN DEMONS: ISIS AND GENDER IDEOLOGY**

At the Synod on the Family in October 2015, Cardinal Sarah made an intervention understanding he was addressing many European and American bishops who had made their own pact with the Evil One in condoning consenting homosexual acts.

“A theological discernment enables us to see in our time two unexpected threats (almost like two apocalyptic beasts) located on opposite poles: on the one hand, the idolatry of Western freedom; on the other, Islamic fundamentalism: atheistic secularism versus religious fanaticism. To use a slogan, we find ourselves between gender ideology and ISIS.

Islamic massacres and libertarian demands regularly contend for the front page of the newspapers. (Let us remember what happened last June 26!). From these two radicalizations arise the two major threats to the family: its subjectivist disintegration in the secularized West through quick and easy divorce, abortion, homosexual unions, euthanasia etc. (cf. Gender theory, the Femen, the LGBT lobby, IPPF ...). On the other hand, the pseudo-family of ideologized Islam which legitimizes polygamy, female subservience, sexual slavery, child marriage etc. (cf. Al Qaeda, Isis, Boko Haram ...)

Several clues enable us to intuit the same demonic origin of these two movements. Unlike the Spirit of Truth that promotes communion in the distinction (perichoresis), these encourage confusion (homo-gamy) or subordination (poly-gamy). Furthermore, they demand a universal and totalitarian rule, are violently intolerant, destroyers of families, society and the Church, and are openly Christianophobic.

“We are not contending against creatures of flesh and blood ... We need to be inclusive and welcoming to all that is human; but what comes

from the Enemy cannot and must not be assimilated. You can not join Christ and Belia. What Nazi-Fascism and Communism were in the 20th century, Western homosexual and abortion Ideologies and Islamic Fanaticism are today.

### ON RUSSIA

The best example of the disappearance of the head on battles of the past is still the Russian Orthodox Church. After so much violence, so much destruction, it is now at the center of the debates, reversing the movement of insidious atheism that has carried off almost all of Western Europe. Orthodoxy has allowed the Russian nation to avoid the traps so that now it is a country that makes significant room for God and faith.

### VATICAN II AND THE CHURCH

Joseph Ratzinger understood quite accurately the fact that Pope John XXIII wanted first of all to respond to the challenge for the modern world-receiving God as He manifested Himself in Jesus Christ. Here are the words of Pope John at the opening of Vatican II.

The serious problems confronting the world after almost two thousand years remain unchanged. Jesus Christ is ever resplendent as the center of history and of life. Men are either with Him and His Church or else they are without Him, or against Him.

From the start of Vatican II, although concerned about aggiornamento, the renewal of the Church, and the reunion of Christians, the Pope strongly emphasized that the Council's chief task was to reveal God to the world, to defend and promote doctrine. That is why the church while rejoicing in the admirable inventions of human genius and in the progress of science and technology had to remind mankind that beyond the visible aspect of things, the primordial duty remains to turn to God.

For John XXIII, the Council was first of all an encounter with God in prayer, with Mary like the apostles in the upper room on the eve of Pentecost.

In order to see that everything at the heart of the conciliar documents was centered on and oriented toward God, Benedict XVI invited us to reflect on how they are ordered. He says the architecture of the documents has an essentially theocentric orientation beginning with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

Before all else in the Church there is adoration and therefore God.

now if there is one reality too often left out of consideration, it is certainly the consubstantial relationship of the liturgy and God. The foundation of the liturgy must remain the search for God . . .

The Council spoke to mankind about this God who is the God of all, who saves all and is accessible to all. Vatican II intended to subordinate its discourse about the Church to its discourse about God and to propose an ecclesiology along theological lines. The Council does not consider the Church a self-enclosed reality but sees her in terms of Christ.

### GOD OR NOTHING

The estrangement from God is not caused by reasoning but by a wish to be detached from him. The atheistic orientation of a life is almost always a decision by the will. Man does not want to reflect on his relationship with God because he

intends himself to be God. His model is Prometheus, the mythological figure who stole the sacred fire so as to give it to men; the individual embarked on a mission to appropriate God instead of adore Him....This so called "Enlightenment" man. The individual-king who aspires more and more to independence and autonomy tends to forget God. A man must not be turned in on himself. Precisely the opposite orientation assures him of balance and life. If we are faithful always directing our soul to the divine light we will become luminous in turn, as the flowers take on a resemblance to the Sun. The normal orientation will produce order, balance, tranquility and peace. "I received this book in October 2015 from a seminarian in Washington DC. Copies were given by Apostolic Nuncio Vigano to seminarians and those training for religious life during the visit to America by Pope Francis. What a Gift!

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