



# The Conduct of Saints

*Christopher Davis*

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The Conduct of Saints is a battleground on which power, God, sex, and the Devil collide in the impoverished city of Rome during May and June of 1945. The German occupation of the Eternal City has ended, the war in Europe is over, the Bomb has yet to fall on Japan, and Rome is under the jurisdiction of the victors - the American, British, and French Allied Control Commission.

An American Vatican prelate and lawyer, Brendan Doherty, is involved in two crusades. With his horror of capital punishment, he means to avert the execution of the Nazi collaborator Pietro Koch. As Devil's Advocate, Doherty intends also to prove the hypocrisy of Alessandro Serenelli, the man who, forty years before, murdered the child martyr, soon to be canonized Maria Goretti. Converted by a vision, Serenelli has spent his life, in prison and out, in promotion of the beatification of his victim.

Memory-tormented, hard-drinking, a moral street fighter for what he is sure is right, both angry and compassionate, Doherty feels guilt for having done too little to save the city's Jews from Auschwitz. He engages in his causes and quarrels with Rome's pre-dolce vita, postwar society - people both fictional and, like Alessandro Serenelli, Maria Goretti, Pietro Koch, Pius XII, and film director Luchino Visconti, historical - until the priest comes to a reckoning with himself and with the serene, unshakeable saint-maker Serenelli.

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