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LETTERS

What Not to Do at Mass

I thought they all had been safely buried in my subconscious but Michael Peppard's dotCommonweal post "Starving in the Pews" (October 7) unexpectedly released a torrent of liturgical annoyances that have always bothered me. Being a priest-preacher for more than sixty years—most of those years active, some as a passive pew-sitter during illnesses, and now as retired weekend help at various parishes—I have been exposed to a variety of experiences that have made my tolerance for bad or indifferent preaching or poor liturgy quite strained. I need to get things off my chest, so allow me to present my short *arrgh!* list.

A basic peeve: you would think this is obvious but some parishes still have inadequate microphone systems. There are dead zones in some parts of the church, where people can't hear clearly or at all. These days state-of-the-art systems are a requisite.

The Mass should have its own integrity and the whole experience should stay on message. Ideally the hymns and music should reflect the readings and homily. "Danny Boy" (yes, I've heard it) at the end of Mass subverts even the most well-messaged homily and worship.

Don't make announcements at the end of Mass. Please, don't. Yet even some very progressive parishes I have served do. It simply upends the liturgy, breaks the spell. Say all went well: good music, good lectoring, a stirring homily, and a send-off hymn—and then it's all shattered by the reading of a dozen announcements. Why have bulletins? People today are literate. I learned as a pastor to cut off all announcements, urging the people to take home the bulletin. After missing some good stuff—plus having some terrific timely things in it—people learned to do so. There are some exceptions when an announcement is appropriate but this should be very seldom. Yes, close off the liturgy with a song, not commercials.

Allied with this, do not allow solicitations or recruiting. I know the Rosary-Altar or Men's Guild (noble organizations) need members, but to end Mass with announcements and an appeal once more dissipates the liturgical experience. It's like giving a magnificent lecture only to be followed by some clown who tells some really funny jokes. The audience leaves laughing and not many will remember the talk.

It's amazing no one does this, but train and re-train the lectors. Lectors range from the terrible few to the majority of the merely good to some select excellent proclaimers who do so with clarity, meaning, and intelligence. The last of these are rare. The thing is that the pastor is so happy to have volunteers that even if they can't read all that well, they're in. But so many do read poorly, with no sense of pause, meaning, and understanding. They read too rapidly. Clearly there's no evidence that they understand what they're proclaiming. Some can't be heard. Others drop words or consonants. There should be ongoing training with mentors recording them at church and helping them to improve. You would think that such a vital thing as proclaiming God's word at Sunday Mass would be top priority. It is not even bottom priority. It is no priority at all. And it shows.

Get rid of the missalettes. Save a few large-print ones in the vestibule for the hard-of-hearing, but that's it. The congregation is there to listen to the proclamation, not proofread the Scripture. Can you imagine going to a Broadway play with the script in hand and having your head

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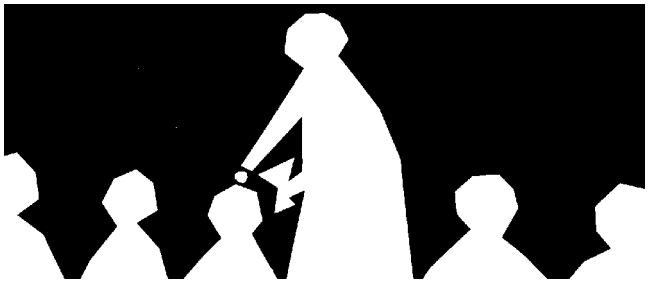
buried in its pages all during the performance? Can you imagine the dynamics of the sets, the lights, the music, and the actors all bypassed? Why do we encourage a congregation to read along with Jack and Jill instead of what we proclaim at the end: "The word of the Lord"? I have even presided at parishes where the lector actually tells the audience where to find what he or she is about to read to them. By that admission, one sees oneself as a reader, not a proclaimer.

As far as music goes, there is much admiration for the cantors and choirs who give of their time and talent to praise God. There is, however, as I have discovered over the years, often a thin line between enhancement and entertainment. While some hymns are carefully thought out and much music is appropriate, too often they both slip into television hype. I've been in parishes where the closing hymn is a rallying, over-the-top crescendo with the musician or singer's final trills practically begging for applause. And it happens. At every Mass the congregation, Sunday after Sunday, applauds the choir or folk group at the end. They don't applaud the ushers or altar servers or lectors, and not even the celebrant who may have given a stirring homily. The applause for grandstanding music that suffocates the Mass is misplaced. There are times when applause is called for, but they should be few and far between.

As for us celebrant-preachers, things are not always our fault. For example, in spite of the "in deference to the sacred liturgy, please turn off all cell phones" warning, now and then they do ring. People don't realize how much that throws you off, breaks the rhythm, the mood, the concentration. I recall that during a recent homily of mine, cell phones went off three times, two of which obviously belonged to a person hard of hearing: the rings were extremely loud. Cell phones and smartphones have reached the status of addiction. Surveys show that the average person consults his or her gadget 221 times a day—that's about every 6.5 minutes. We feel emotionally naked without them. We suffer withdrawal if we don't have them. Hey, who knows if the president or the pope may be calling? Can't keep either waiting.

I see people using them or looking at their phones as they come into church and whip them out as soon as they hit the vestibule to leave. Sadly I see priests—usually the younger ones—glued to them as they wait in the sacristy for Mass to begin. Part of our spiritual heritage is to center ourselves before an important encounter. Clear the mind. Cleanse the heart. Be open to the Spirit. But no more! Our attention is subverted 24/7. Entering



the sacred liturgy with a distracted mind is not ideal any more than entering the highway with one is.

For the strong of heart, I have a solution. (Usually the start of Lent is a good time to propose it.) For our parish, we propose, let's make an effort—yes, a Lenten effort if that helps the motivation—to leave our phones and gadgets in the car. Let's be known as the parish that does that. Your and my Lenten goal will be to achieve that and to encourage others to do the same. Leave your cell phone in the car. Just as some families have rightfully banned all cell phones from the dinner table, we will ban them from church. Leave them in your car. Give them a rest. Give yourselves over to sacred space with receptive minds and hearts.

A few more curmudgeonly grumbles: Give the bulletins out after Mass, as people are leaving. They should not serve as casual reading during the Mass. And, for heaven's sake, do the dishes after the guests have gone. I don't know of any other civilization that has you to dinner and makes you sit while the hosts bring over the basin and water and do the dishes before they serve dessert. Yet that is what often happens at the eucharistic banquet. The celebrant or deacon is doing the dishes while you wait for dismissal. And God help the congregation if it gets a priest or deacon afflicted with the "theology of the crumb" and you sit there impatiently while he vigorously scours and wipes and rewipes every vessel lest a little bit of Jesus is left over.

And, of course, improve the preaching. The most common faults I find are too little preparation, too many points, and material of interests to scholars and Egyptologists, but not to where people are on their spiritual journey. If you build words that speak to their world, they will come—but the fact is, in spite of the grandiose official words of general councils and episcopal statements, no one really cares. No one monitors parish preaching, replacing preachers (no matter how nice they are) whose second-language English is difficult to understand or removing those who belittle or offend or simply preach non-nourishing platitudes. After all, there's a priest shortage and bishops, happy to have warm bodies, are not going to scrutinize preaching too closely even if it ranks as almost the number-one reason why people leave.

The Mass should be a whole. From the greeting at the beginning to the closing hymn at the end. No detours, however interesting or entertaining.

Way back, Jack Shea succinctly summed up the experience of going to church this way:

Gather the folk.
Tell the story.
Break the Bread.
Share the experience.

To which I would add:

Keep it focused.
Keep it clean.
Keep it sacred.

FR. WILLIAM J. BAUSCH
Freehold, N.J.

ANTONUCCI

The 'Madness' of Mercy

When Hannah Arendt reviewed Pope John XXIII's journals just over fifty years ago, she shared a question posed to her by a Roman chambermaid not long after he had died. "Madam," the woman said, "this pope was a real Christian. How could that be? And how could it happen that a true Christian would sit on St. Peter's chair?" Arendt took the comments to underscore the tension between the radical simplicity of Jesus' call to "follow me" and the demands of the institutional church. After all, as the future pope scribbled in his notebook when he was only eighteen years old, taking that call seriously put one at risk of being "treated as a madman."

Pope Francis, who declared John XXIII a saint and whose own pontificate draws frequent comparisons with that earlier pope, surely understands the truth of that observation. Francis has been described in similarly unfavorable terms by his critics; some have even compared him to a real madman, president-elect Donald Trump. And even a few of his admirers, especially in the mainstream press, sometimes seem disturbed by his words and deeds, surprised by a pope who seems not only to believe but to act as though the meek really will inherit the earth. Depending on the newspaper or magazine one reads, Francis is either too reckless or too conservative, a possible heretic or a false hope. His off-the-cuff pronouncements reliably stir controversy; his openness to reform generates theological sparring and debate. Meanwhile, the usual swirl of Vatican gossip and intrigue continues apace.

In the midst of all this, one could be forgiven for not remembering that Francis himself has told us what is at the center of his papacy, the thread that holds it all together: mercy. He took as his episcopal motto *miserando atque eligendo*—"by having mercy and choosing." His apostolic exhortation, *Evangellii gaudium*, urges us never to stop seeking God's forgiveness, never to despair of being beyond the reach of God's mercy. And last year, Francis called an extraordinary jubilee—the Year of Mercy—which has just come to a close. The message could not be less subtle. It is worth stopping to reflect on what Francis has described as "the very foundation of the church's life," now, while the Year of Mercy remains fresh in our minds and Christmas is upon us.

We shouldn't be surprised that such an emphasis on mercy has been misunderstood, willfully or otherwise, and left more than one of the church's factions dissatisfied. Against a stringent conservatism, dwelling on mercy appears as a kind of antinomianism: a breakdown of rules and order in favor of freewheeling forgiveness, a weakening of morals and a soft-peddling of ethical demands. Against the more thinned-out versions of religious liberalism, it can seem too "existential," too focused on the darker currents of our lives—the "wounds" we suffer from, which need to be healed. And while mercy should be joined to hope, it is neither naïvely optimistic nor ideologically progressive. It is costly love in the midst of pain and grief, not false cheer.

Mercy for Francis is never simply a matter for individuals, a kind of privatized consolation or a form of cheap grace. He wants nothing less than to build a "culture of mercy." This can be seen vividly in the way Francis has asked us to understand *Laudato si'*: not as an encyclical that merely endorsed the scientific consensus on climate change, but as a call to conversion in how we relate to the resources we all share. "The object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces," the pope reminds us. That includes our stewardship of creation, leading Francis to suggest "a complement" to the traditional sets of seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy. "May the works of mercy also include care for our common home," he said in September, going on to demand that we "break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness" that afflicts our political and economic life and make mercy itself "felt in every action that seeks to build a better world."

As the church struggles with its own divisions, and as the United States and the world enter dark political times, Francis's message of mercy should be a light to our path. He has staked his papacy on that message, offering it as the only answer to our deepest questions and longings. In a world that "leaves so many men and women behind as it races on, breathlessly and aimlessly," he recently said, "we need the oxygen of this gratuitous and life-giving love. We thirst for mercy and no technology can quench that thirst. We seek a love that endures beyond momentary pleasures, a safe harbor where we can end our restless wanderings, an infinite embrace that forgives and reconciles."

The jubilee may be over now, but the need for mercy never ends. Neither does God's offer of it. That should be at the heart of our attempts to understand this pope—and the source of our hope in the difficult days that may lie ahead. ■

Rita Ferrone

Don't Scatter the Ashes—or Wear Them

THE BODY'S NOT A PRISON. ITS REMAINS ARE NOT A KEEPSAKE.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a statement in late October about burial and cremation that reaffirms Catholic teaching on the subject. It was approved by Pope Francis. It does not change any official teaching for American Catholics, who have had similar guidelines on this subject since 1997. Yet popular responses to the statement have ranged from astonishment to indignation. How dare church officials have anything to say about death and burial! It's an outrage!

Well, not really. I mean, religions generally have ideas about such matters, don't they? Indeed, there is a "Catholic way of doing things" when it comes to death—one that ranges from care for the dying to funeral rites to ongoing prayer for the dead and expectations of how their mortal remains are to be buried or entombed. Seen in its entirety, it forms a coherent whole. These practices and expectations are shaped by what Catholics believe.

The CDF instruction (which is very short, only eight paragraphs) contains some practical dos and don'ts, but it is basically a theological document and needs to be read as such. The disciplinary elements have been widely reported: cremation is permitted but scattering of ashes is not; keeping ashes in private homes is generally prohibited; making jewelry and keepsakes out of cremated remains is totally forbidden. These rules restrict the faithful from joining in some practices that are regarded as acceptable and even laudable in the wider culture, such as dividing up the ashes among family members or scattering them at some beautiful spot that was special to the deceased, or keeping them at home on the mantelpiece. Yet the disciplinary elements mean little if they are not grasped within the theological framework of the instruction.

That theological framework is unexceptionable. It is Christological: Christ's death has infused death itself with new meaning for those who believe; denial of death or avoidance of reminders of death is out of place. It is anthropological: the human body is part of the person and so is to be treated with reverence even after death. The body is not a "prison" of the soul, nor can it be reduced to a token or a memento of the deceased. It is soteriological: we believe in the resurrection of the body, not in reincarnation or the dissolution of the person into the cosmos. It is ecclesiological: prayer for and with the dead is part of the common life of the church. Having sacred spaces set aside for burial or entombment encourages and reminds us to pray for those who have gone before us. It is communal in a broad sense: the death of a Christian concerns not only the individual and any living relatives, but is linked with the communion of saints that reaches beyond this present generation. "None of us lives for one's self, and no one dies for one's self," for we belong to Christ (Romans 14:7). It is also scriptural: Tobit is invoked as a witness, for he was commended to God for burying the dead (Tobit 12:12). Tradition stands behind it: burying the dead is one of the corporal works of mercy.

Book of Gospels is placed on cypress casket of Pope John Paul II during funeral Mass in 2005.

CNS PHOTO / DYLAN MARTINEZ, REUTERS

The instruction comes at a good time. In an age when "memorials" are conducted in place of funerals, and scattering ashes has become commonplace, the emphases surrounding death have begun to change for Catholics. Nowadays sharing memories of the deceased is all important; praying for them is less so. Deciding where to scatter ashes seems like a chance to express the personality of the deceased; laying them in a grave marked with a name, less so. Besides, who wants to be buried among the dead, anyway? To "celebrate a life" and move on is more in keeping with the zeitgeist.

It is therefore a service to the faithful that the CDF should remind us of the underlying principles of Catholic faith that can and should guide our practice. Fond memories and beautiful places that evoke those memories are fine, but they are not all that matters. ■

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Waiting by the Jesse Tree

AN OBSCURE TRADITION KEEPS CHRISTMAS OVERLOAD AT BAY

By mid-December, our calendar is full of breakfasts with Santa, town tree-lightings, and classroom Christmas parties. In the midst of all that celebrating, it can be hard to convince my kids that Advent exists at all, let alone that it's worth trying to observe. But we have a secret weapon for making Advent real. It's called a Jesse Tree.

The Jesse Tree is a kind of spiritual genealogy of Jesus, named for Jesse, the father of David, from whose line the Messiah was prophesied to come. Each day of Advent we tell the story of a biblical person or event that prepared for the coming of Christ, and hang a corresponding ornament on our tree. I learned about the tradition in elementary school, when our teachers would gather us into the hallway to sing about waiting by the Jesse Tree to welcome the king of kings and his reign of peace. It gave me an appreciation for Advent, a strong sense of salvation history—not that I'd ever heard the term—and a familiarity with important figures in the Old Testament. Those who badmouth the catechesis of the 1980s clearly never saw the IHM sisters of Scranton in action.

That was the last place I ever saw or heard of a Jesse Tree, aside from in parishes that use the term for their collections of gifts for the needy. But last year I decided I wanted to mark Advent by making one of my own. With three boys under five, I knew I had to keep my expectations low, but I figured they were so little that if we failed miserably they'd never remember it by next year anyway.

There's no set Jesse Tree curriculum, but a little searching online led me to several suggested guides, which I mixed and matched from as we went along. Preschoolers prefer animal adventures to prophecies, so for now Jonah and Daniel in the lion's den take priority over Hosea and Habakkuk. I found a lovely set of ornaments for sale on Etsy (handcrafted, just not by me). As for the tree itself, at last my four-year-old's habit of dragging home large sticks and branches paid off. Here goes nothing, I thought, as I stuck our bare "tree" in a stoneware vase and began that first night with "In the beginning...."

There were some challenges. Have you ever noticed how many stories in the Bible feature the slaughter of little boys? But I did tell a story each night, editing where necessary, and the boys took turns picking out the appropriate ornament and fighting over the best spot to hang it. We ended with a chorus of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." And—honestly—the kids were enchanted by the whole strange thing. The four-year-old and two-year-old hung on every detail of the stories, and the baby tried to join in singing. They were turning into little Bible nerds before my eyes, and I was scrambling to keep up, reading ahead after they were in bed so I would be ready for their questions tomorrow.

As the stories piled up, we drew the connections together—each time they heard about "the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob," we recalled who those men were. I also tried to make sure that they weren't hearing only about men—we talked about Abraham *and* Sarah, Moses *and* Miriam. But I found that the uneven gender representation in the Bible isn't something I could paper over without distorting the stories themselves. Even the tales of women like Ruth and Esther, who claim their own branches on the tree, are wrapped up in sexism that can be hard to contextualize for preschoolers. Grappling with the text was frustrating, but also rewarding, a Bible study I wouldn't have undertaken otherwise. The Jesse Tree worked its magic on me too.

Well, a year later, my kids have indeed forgotten the whole thing, but I couldn't wait to start all over again. Observing Advent no longer feels like a vain struggle to block out untimely cheer. I am no longer worried that our home looks bare and joyless when every other house on the block has lights on the door and a tree in the window. Come inside—be careful, the floor is a mess—and see our Jesse Tree, unlit but lovely. Thanks to its enchanting presence, Advent in our house isn't just an empty space that needs Santa to fill it. Now the waiting itself has a shape. ■

PHOTO: MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

TRUMP'S ANTENNAE

Rand Richards Cooper

CNS PHOTO / CARLO ALLEGRI, REUTERS

So he isn't gonna lock her up after all. Surprised? You probably shouldn't be. One of the pithiest insights during this year's campaign came from the *Atlantic*'s Salena Zito, who observed that Donald Trump's liberal critics (and the press) were taking the candidate literally but not seriously, while his supporters were taking him seriously but not literally. It seems clear now that any number of Trump's inflammatory campaign vows were little more than cheerleading bravado at a raucous pep rally. And come January 20, the cheerleader will be our president.

Many factors contributed to his win. Read David Cole in the *New York Review of Books*—"What James Comey Did"—and you might be persuaded that the FBI director had a hand in it. There's also the so-called "alt-right" movement and the rise of whiteness as an identity-politics force. As for Trump himself, the man was both a distraction from the main issues and a blazing expression of them. The distraction was his egregious talk and behavior, which for many people (like me) made this an election about basic fitness. It's true that Trump's loud-mouthed "political incorrectness" was a big part of the attraction for many of his supporters—but only, I recognize now, to the extent that it offered them hope that in other, more important ways he would deviate from the ruling consensus and try different measures.

To what end? The economy, stupid. This is what I mean when I say that Trump's bellicose style blazingly expressed the main issue. I keep returning in my mind to the Trump voter—a middle-aged white male—who told me how angry he gets when he sees investment commercials pitched at people tweaking the details of their comfy retirement, while he himself has lost his job, is upside-down on his mortgage, is trying to support two kids, and has no retirement fund at all.

I believe the election of 2016 will go down as the moment we grasped how starkly the past thirty years deepened class divisions in the United States, creating toxic levels of inequality. The change happened gradually, but the Great Recession and its aftermath put a big stamp on it, with Wall Street getting off scot-free, the investor class prospering via a long bull market, and the debtor class languishing. Globalization has taken its toll, eliminating jobs that helped the working class get a foothold in middle-class life, forcing people into part-time, low-paying jobs in the service economy—even as the professional class flourished.

Let's put some numbers on this. U.S. Census data for 2011 pegged median household net worth—not income, but total wealth—at $68,828, which means that fully half of all U.S. families had less than that. (Take away home equity, and the figure plummets to $16,900.) Meanwhile, median net worth in the upper quintile was $630,754. In other words, the typical family in the top 20 percent had almost ten times the wealth of the typical middle-class family. (The racial breakdown is more extreme, with median black-family net worth a paltry $6,000.) Families in the top 10 percent now command 75 percent of the nation's wealth, while the bottom 50 percent—half our nation—owns just 1 percent. And these divisions are growing. Between 2003 and 2013, median household net worth dropped by 36 percent, while increasing 14 percent in the top 5 percent of households. From 2010 to 2014, the number of American households with $1 million-plus in assets jumped by one-third, and for this group, wealth grew by 7.2 percent annually, while everyone else stayed flat. So while middle-class prospects have stagnated—at best—the period since the Great Recession has been a boom-time for the well-off. And that caps a long trend. A detailed study of wealth by Edward Wolff of New York University shows that while the top quintile experienced robust prosperity growth over the past three decades, median net worth (in constant 2010 dollars) shrank from $73,000 in 1983 to $57,000 in 2010—a 27 percent loss.

Given all this, is it surprising that Trump's angry message resonated? He roared in and scooped up the left-behind people, and it's easy to see how. Over and over he promised to do four things: scrap trade deals; beat up on China; force U.S. companies to stay here; keep out cheap immigrant labor. A lot of this message got expressed or was interpreted as xenophobia, racism, and nationalism. But in fact all of these are economic measures, and when you come down to it, "Make America Great Again" is a direct vow to push back against globalization as manifested in the evaporation of middle-class security and the glittering success of its winners.

Whether Trump is the person to do this is another question. But what's undeniable is that he was the one with the antennae to pick up the signal. Another amply supported *Times* article by Thomas Edsall, written last July, took up inequality and the phenomenon of "relative deprivation," noting that "Trump's white working-class supporters have suffered a stunning loss of relative status over the past forty years." Anyone paying closer attention to it then might have done a better job of reading the leaves of the bitter tea we are drinking now. ■

Adapted from "The Harsh Light of Trumprise," Nov. 28, 2016. Read the full version online at dotCommonweal.

Suggestions or Commands?

AN EXCHANGE ON DAVID BENTLEY HART'S 'CHRIST'S RABBLE'

Simeon Zahl

Occasionally in today's ever-rolling stream of commentary you come up against an essay that stops you short and lingers with you over days and weeks. Such was my experience of reading "Christ's Rabble" (October 7), David Bentley Hart's blistering reflection on the economic ethics of the first Christians in light of the three years he has spent on a new translation of the New Testament.

As a theologian myself, my first observation on reading "Christ's Rabble" was how transgressive it feels to watch a member of my guild wrestle directly, intensively, and creatively with Scripture. I found myself cheering Hart on as he dove right into the New Testament text, confident that of course a theologian will have a valuable perspective to offer here, biblical-studies gatekeepers be damned. And I reflected that it is a sad comment on the state of theological discourse that this move feels fresh and unexpected.

Fritz Eisenberg, Christ of the Breadlines*, 1953*

My second observation came in the second half of the essay, where Hart makes his main point: a swift, brutal exegetical case that, for the earliest Christians, wealth was not just something that becomes a problem when you desire it wrongly but is actually an "intrinsic evil"—the possession of wealth is problematic according to its nature and not just its use.

My reluctant thought was: *Damn! I think he's right.*

Perhaps some part of me had already suspected, and feared, that there may truly be something like an "essential incompatibility" between "Christianity and capitalist culture." But it isn't the sort of thought you want to think, at least not for long. Countercultural is one thing, but wealth as an "intrinsic evil"? It's the sort of idea you want to look away from, to defer, to shelve for later and hope you forget.

In "Christ's Rabble," Hart steadfastly refuses to let us defer the question, or to reinterpret it in a less radical light. To read the essay with care and with an even slightly open mind is to be confronted with an ethical possibility that is deeply uncomfortable for any twenty-first-century Christian who wishes to take his orientation from the New Testament and the witness of the early church.

And like Hart, I am not quite sure what to do with this. Is he right to frame the contemporary significance of this radical stream of early Christian ethics as a stark choice between a melancholy acceptance of modern Christian ethical mediocrity, on the one hand, and a Desert Fathers–style life of asceticism and prayer, on the other? Perhaps he is. At the very least I am convinced that all Christians should be required to just sit a while with the prospect that the rich young ruler's problem was not that he had the wrong attitude toward money, but the sheer fact that he had money at all. Hart has preached a sermon for our times—a mighty, disturbing sermon, and he has preached it well.

But the essay is not perfect. It has two flaws, in particular, that undermine some of its basic salutary power. In order to clear the way for us to hear the message about wealth and capitalist culture in all its disturbing force, Hart has to do away with two obvious counterarguments. First, Hart knows, or at least suspects, that there is another way of interpreting the biblical material he has identified, an alternative approach that can, at least in theory, acknowledge the radicalism of the early church's moral demand without leaving us in Hart's wistful despair.

It would go something like this. Yes, this interpreter might say, the moral demand is high. It is torturously, impossibly high, and this money thing is an excellent example. Indeed, the New Testament reveals an unbearable moral standard on a great many topics—we are commanded never to be angry and never to lust, for example (Matthew 5)—and that is precisely why "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Viewed through this lens, Hart's point about

Christian ethical mediocrity in the era of late capitalism can be transfigured into an argument for why salvation is better understood as preceding moral transformation rather than as enabling it ("God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" [Romans 5:8]).

For the purposes of his essay, it is vital for Hart to be able to exclude this sort of approach at the start. Otherwise his sermon would risk losing its power: it would allow some readers, armed with this "grace" waiver, to blink and look away, untroubled and unchanged in their cozy codependence with capitalism, like the jolly Protestant burghers Hart imagines.

To counter this strategy, Hart identifies such interpretations with Protestantism and argues that they go against a plain reading of the New Testament. He calls them "the magisterial Protestant fantasy that the apostle Paul inveighed against something called 'works-righteousness' in favor of a purely extrinsic 'justification' by grace." Did Paul teach this, Hart asks? "Alas," we are told, "he did not." Citing a succession of Pauline verses, Hart asserts—here I would not say that he argues—that Paul "quite clearly insisted, as did Christ, that all will be judged in the end according to their deeds."

Here we have the weakest claim in Hart's essay, a place where rhetoric has far outstripped argument. First, the claim appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. Hart does not seem to realize that there is no serious understanding of that doctrine that would have any trouble with the idea that the actual historical sins of particular human beings are really weighed and judged by God "in the end." In fact such a judgment is necessary to the scheme: it is only once this judgment has taken place that Christ's stepping in to cover those sins has meaning. Otherwise, God would not be taking sin seriously and Christ's death would not have been necessary. This is the whole point of what the Reformers called the "theological use" of the law, and it is why two of the verses he cites, Romans 14:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, have never been troubling for Protestants.

But what about the other texts Hart cites in support of his reading? These, too, are hardly as devastating as he seems to think they are. The presence of eschatological "judgment by works" passages in Paul (above all Romans 2:1–11 but also 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 and Philililippians 2:16) is well known and has been the subject of an enormous scholarly literature. It is widely recognized that what makes these texts interesting is not that they "disprove" the idea that Pauline soteriology involves an extended polemic against "works-righteousness"; rather, it is the fact that they share intimate space, most famously in the first three chapters of Romans, with an account of God's grace as an "incongruous" gift precisely to those who do not deserve it.

To take just one very recent example, John M. G. Barclay's opus *Paul and the Gift* discusses this issue extensively along the way to providing a nuanced and compelling answer to the very old question of how to relate Romans 2:1–11 to the material around it in Romans 1:18–3:20. According to Barclay's interpretation—which may or may not be right but in any case represents something like the state of the art on the question—in describing the "judgment by works" in Romans 2, Paul is almost certainly presupposing his own theology of justification apart from works.

The missing link, in Barclay's view, is that here Paul is taking the effective and ethically transformative activity of the Spirit, itself a consequence of the "incongruous" gift of justification, for granted. In other words, "works" do not save us, but those who have been saved without works will nevertheless demonstrate some approximation of such works at the final judgment due to the transformative work of the Spirit within them; otherwise the passage is blatantly self-contradictory.

And Barclay's position cannot be dismissed as simply a case of Protestant special pleading: the Jesuit Joseph Fitzmyer, for example, makes almost precisely this argument about Romans 2:1–11 in his commentary on Romans in the Anchor Yale Bible series.

(My focus here has been on Romans 2:1–11 because it is Hart's strongest example. The others are weaker: Philippians 2:16 draws on a race-running imagery that Paul completely subverts in Romans 9:16 ["It depends not on human will or running but on God who shows mercy"], and in 1 Corinthians 3 even those whose works are worthless are still saved—an argument against Hart's point rather than for it.)

But what of the second obvious caveat to Hart's position, what he calls the "common sense" position that the New Testament's problem is not with the acquisition of wealth in and of itself, but with a "spiritually unhealthy preoccupation with it"? According to this view, money itself is not the problem. It is the human heart, that "factory of idols," that makes money problematic.

This approach has a long theological pedigree, and it too be must be parried for Hart to make his point to maximum effect. In Hart's telling, it is a position that goes back at least to Clement of Alexandria's distinction between "poverty that matters" (i.e., spiritual poverty and its dispositional effects) and poverty that does not matter ("actual material indigence"). For Hart, this distinction represents a form of ethical compromise that is better explained by political and socio-economic expedience than by the actual teaching of the New Testament; in the end, its function is to allow the rich to stay rich.

The problem is that again Hart has failed to mention a very significant counterargument. It may well be that this particular kind of Christian account of wealth and poverty begins with Clement, but if so the sources of Clement's distinction can be located squarely within the main stream of New Testament ethical teaching. Most obviously, the Sermon on the Mount provides extensive support for the view that what is most ethically significant before God is the motivation of the heart rather than the performance of the righteous deed—this is why anger is equivalent to murder, and lust to adultery.

We find the same theme expressed in Christ's denuncia-

tions of the Pharisees, most notably the unequivocal claim that it is the heart, as the source of evil intentions, rather than outward behavior, that is the true source of uncleanness (Mark 7:14–23; Matthew 15:10–20). And a version of this ethical approach is also at work in Paul's identification of the fruit of the Spirit primarily with affections and motivations rather than with specific behaviors (Galatians 5:22) and in his ethical prioritization of love over martyrdom—indeed over the giving away of possessions (1 Corinthians 13:3). If Clement's differentiation between spiritually significant poverty and actual material poverty is ethical sophistry, then it is a Christian sophistry. As an ethical concept its roots are just as early, and in their own way just as radical, as Jesus' comments about the rich young ruler.

It would seem that a more accurate way of describing the ethical world of the New Testament would be as one where eschatologically informed moral radicalism—for example, about wealth as an intrinsic evil—is interacting with a separate and distinct ethical theme of the moral priority of right desire and action over right behavior, and where the relation between these two streams has not yet been fully resolved. Both teachings can probably be located in the ministry of Jesus himself, as well as that of St. Paul. Perhaps in the end one must swallow up the other, but I don't think so. To conclude this would be to impose premature closure on issues the early church has left open, jagged, strange. Understood this way, eschatologically informed moral radicalism is but one component, however important, in a larger dialectic. It is but one major dimension in an early Christian moral vision that is pneumatologically and contextually dynamic—though admittedly a dimension that we prefer to sweep under the rug.

Given these not insignificant problems, what are we now to make of "Christ's Rabble"? Yes, it is framed in terms of an unnecessary and unpersuasive contrast with an imagined Protestant alternative; and, yes, it fails to mention the other side of the New Testament ethical story, the one where motivation does seem to matter more to God than what is actually done. But none of this finally sets aside Hart's fundamental point in its sheer disturbing power. We do not need to say everything at once, and it is often the role of the preacher—dare I say the theologian?—to draw our gaze in the clearest possible terms to uncomfortable truths about ourselves, truths about the compromises we are constantly making between faith and comfort or ambition, faith and the ocean of consumerist noise in which we are all drowning. Few such truths are more uncomfortable in the present cultural moment than the prospect of an "essential incompatibility of Christianity and capitalist culture." I for one am grateful for Hart's sermon, though I didn't want to hear it.

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David Bentley Hart

My thanks to Simeon Zahl for his scrupulous reply to my article; it is surely the best attempt at a theological riposte that I have seen. Even so, Zahl's case is a very winsome example of precisely the sort of traditional Western Christian reading of Paul—and, through Paul, the Gospel—that I regard as objectively false.

But some of the disagreement between us is simply a misunderstanding on Zahl's part. Because I mentioned the issue of judgment by works in my article, he assumes that my concern was what we must do to be saved. But the issue never occurred to me. For one thing (and please don't tell anyone), I am a universalist, who believes Gregory of Nyssa's reading of Paul to be the most persuasive. For another, all Christians believe that salvation is something objectively achieved before and beyond anything we can do. So, when I speak of judgment, I have in mind only that final discrimination described in 1 Corinthians 3, between those whose accomplishments in this life will merit a reward and those who will be saved "as by fire" when their accomplishments are instead burned away. (Paul certainly mentions no third

Fritz Eisenberg, The Lord's Supper, *1953*

STONES AT LATE EVENING

There is barely enough
light
to pray
much less
obey the instinct to feel
the drying texture
of the schizophrenic face
of those in windows
or by the water's edge.

An Indian prophet
in a white dress
sits by the pool
looking at nothing

in particular
gratitude

The stones are quiet
to say
the less.

—William Meyer

William Meyer lives in Beaumont, Texas.

class of persons.) My concern was entirely with the question of how Christians are called to live.

Zahl also suggests that I do not understand the doctrine of justification by faith. In fact, I understand it all too well. Principally, I understand how very badly it has been misinterpreted in much Western Christian thought, and how often that misinterpretation has made it possible for the clear and explicit commands of Christ and the Apostolic Church to be reduced in the minds of many Christians to the status of mere helpful suggestions, or even reminders of our moral incapacity (Calvin's scriptural commentaries exhibit a positive genius for this). The moral perfectionism of the New Testament may not be a method for attaining salvation; but it is a quite unambiguous prescription for achieving the holiness that is the very substance of being saved. Moreover, I would not even grant the accuracy of the language of "justification by faith"; a better rendering would be along the lines of "vindication through faithfulness," or perhaps "correction through fidelity" (the very word "justification" has been so misused down the centuries as to have lost all value). As for John Barclay and Joseph Fitzmyer (both fine scholars), their interpretations of the first two chapters of Romans are in many respects the sort of procrustean readings that become necessary only when misguided presuppositions create false difficulties.

I would also caution Zahl against complacent talk of "works-righteousness," simply on the grounds that when Paul speaks of "*erga*" he is most often talking not about moral deeds, but about ritual "observances" or "practices," such as circumcision or keeping kosher. If we fail to recall this, we can easily be beguiled into the sort of error Zahl makes in reading Jesus' remark on "what defiles a man" as a distinction between outer works and inner disposition, when in fact it is a distinction between acts of ritual purity and good works ("what comes forth" from us).

Not that I imagine I, an Orthodox Christian, can sway many of those raised in the theological and spiritual grammar of Western tradition away from centuries of "Latin" errors; but I can make my own solitary evangelical appeal directly to Zahl. I encourage him to clear his mind of the notion that the New Testament's moral language is fraught with tensions or unresolved paradoxes or provisional antinomies. Yes, alongside scriptural condemnations of wealth, there are equally strong—even stronger—condemnations of the corrupt promptings and idolatrous longings of the human heart. But this does not oblige us to imagine that the latter in any sense mitigate the objective force of the former; they merely carry the significance of those moral edicts ever deeper into the soul. However great its "theological pedigree," the approach Zahl defends is without scriptural support; but, more to the point, it is devoid of any logical necessity. That Christ ascribes the deepest wellsprings of evil to the heart and its most inward longings in *absolutely no way whatever* implies that the outward acts of the hands are of so secondary an importance that the *clear, explicit, repeated* moral commands of the New Testament can be taken as anything other than clear, explicit, repeated moral *commands*. This entire way of thinking is nothing but the illicit substitution of an "instead" for what should be read quite simply as an "also." Zahl writes of the New Testament's "eschatologically informed moral radicalism" but also of its "distinct ethical theme of the moral priority of right desire and action over right behavior," and then speaks of a "relation between these two streams" that "has not yet been fully resolved." But there really isn't anything to resolve. Zahl imagines that there is only because his dogmatic and spiritual formation has made him believe that there must be. The moral radicalism of the New Testament—which encompasses all the acts of a Christian, and which also penetrates into the very depths of the heart—is all of a piece: one reality, one form of life, one law of the Kingdom. And no one should presume to introduce division where none should be sought, and none can truly be found. ■

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Henri Nouwen in New Haven, circa 1981

PHOTO: JIM FOREST

Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit

Understanding Henri Nouwen

Michael Higgins

Two decades ago, on September 21, 1996, while on the way to St. Petersburg to shoot a documentary based on his acclaimed spiritual meditation, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen—priest, writer, professor, and pastoral mentor—died of a heart attack in his homeland of the Netherlands. His friends and countless admirers were stunned. Prolific author of more than three dozen books, and a much-called-upon speaker and preacher, Nouwen was a large presence in Catholic circles and a growing influence in Protestant ones as well. His loss was felt not only in his immediate community but around the world.

I knew Nouwen slightly, having had two memorable personal interactions with him in the 1980s. Asked to establish an adult education and pastoral information structure at my new university (St. Jerome's in Ontario), I was seeking an inaugural speaker for the opening of the university's Centre for Catholic Experience when my dean, Peter Naus, sug-

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gested his close friend Henri Nouwen, then a professor at Harvard Divinity School. Though my awareness of Nouwen was limited to his early book, *Thomas Merton, Contemplative Critic*, which I had found superficial, I did not demur; after all, I was untenured, new on campus, and the dean was Nouwen's friend and a big name to boot, so it seemed a good thing to do.

And it was. Nouwen's address—a dramatized homily titled "The Spirituality of Peace-Making"—was informative, skillfully constructed, and masterfully delivered. But what most impressed me was his request, prior to his talk, to spend some time in our chapel. The interval of prayer and solitude set a tone, a disposition, that flowed into Nouwen's presentation in the packed hall. He asked the gathered multitude to join him for several minutes of Taizé hymns, after which—moving about the dais with awkward strides—he spoke with the passion of a televangelist, eschewing academic jargon, delighting in the anecdotal, and not once referring to a text. It was performance art, and he was very good at it.

Many in the crowd were "groupies," for whom anything Nouwen said was nectar. Others were Mennonites intrigued by the "peace-making" dimension of his title. Still others were clergy unsure of his orthodoxy, or students attending as a class assignment. The most skeptical listeners were any number of professors unpersuaded that Nouwen was a serious scholar—refreshingly unconventional, yes, but lightweight and not really suited to a university setting. For my part, while the good opinion of my senior colleagues mattered to me, I could not but be impressed by a speaker who held a big audience enthralled for seventy-five minutes.

My second encounter with Nouwen occurred on the occasion of the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of Dean Naus and his wife Anke, both of whom traced their friendship with him back to Nijmegen University in Holland. Nouwen had witnessed their marriage and later baptized their three sons, and now he led a festive and sacramental celebration of their anniversary. I was struck by Nouwen's awkwardness in the moments when he wasn't presiding ritually, and realized how shy he was, an introvert in an extrovert's clothing. At one point in the evening, he found his way to my table and planted himself beside me. Looking at me with an unnerving intensity, he launched into a series of questions about who I was and what I thought—a raft of existential queries, almost an interrogation, that clashed with the evening's festive mood. I responded tentatively, and felt relieved when he moved on to zero in on someone else.

I mention these two instances because they illustrate the richly faceted dimensions of Henri Nouwen, a Pierrot-like figure with many masks: a solo artist and yet needy companion; a man born for the stage and yet deeply unsure of his own authenticity; a marvel and a misfit; a Joseph with a many-colored dreamcoat. In his ability to turn personal vulnerability into spiritual exploration lies the broad appeal his writing made—and continues to make—to his devoted readers. Nouwen addressed other people's pain by nakedly sharing his own; he spoke of our "woundedness" because he knew what that meant in very personal and even visceral terms. Whether counseling students, attending to the sick and the dying, or comforting the despairing, Nouwen drew from the well of his own anguish. He saw in his own pain a conduit of grace, a generative source of compassion and ground of human solidarity, an opening to heal others. "What to do," he wrote, "with this inner wound that is so easily touched and starts bleeding again?"

> It is such a familiar wound. It has been with me for many years. I don't think this wound—this immense need for affection and this immense fear of rejection—will ever go away. It is here to stay, but maybe for a good reason. Perhaps it is a gateway to my salvation, a door to glory, and a passage to freedom.

Born in Nijkerk, Holland, in 1932, Nouwen was the eldest of four children. Especially close to his mother, Maria, he proved deeply pious, and resolved to be a priest at an early age. Educated at the minor seminary at Apledoorn and the major seminary at Rijsemburg, he was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Utrecht in 1957.

Postwar Holland, deeply damaged by the Nazi occupation, had managed to recover much of its energy and prosperity, and the highly stratified Dutch society that flourished for centuries—a Catholic entity paralleled with a Protestant one, in which discrete religio-politico-social realities co-existed—had been restored as well. Jurjen Beumer, author of *Henri Nouwen: A Restless Seeking for God*, writes that the 1950s in the Netherlands "were industrious years, but they were also very traditional."

> Norms and values, traditions and customs, all reverted to their proper places, both in the church and in society. In contrast to what many had hoped for during the war years, the political and religious establishment tried to return to conditions as they had existed before the war. The confessional pillars—Roman Catholicism and Protestant Christianity—were rebuilt as if there had been *no* war. Everyone fell back into the same familiar camp.

This is the confessional orbit in which Nouwen was educated for priestly ministry, in which he was ordained, and which shaped his theological outlook. All the more surprising, then, that he should choose to study the social sciences—psychology, in particular—rather than accept his ordinary's request that he study one of the sacred sciences in Rome. Nouwen was deeply conservative, and while by no means an intellectual pioneer, he was curious, keen on knowing more about human motivation and the role of the affective in our lives; and if not dissatisfied with, he was at least cognizant of, the limitations of his seminary training. And so he asked the man who ordained him, Cardinal Bernard Alfrink, for permission to do graduate work at the Catholic University of Nijmegen.

At Nijmegen Nouwen was introduced to phenomenological

psychology, an approach that appealed to his immense capacity for empathy, and would define his approach to spiritual writing, interlacing Scripture and prayer with psychological insight and practice. Peter Naus, who was his classmate and shared his interest in phenomenology, recalled that

> Henri understood the motto of phenomenology—"go back to the thing itself"—as a summons to retrieve, relive, the original experience.... He thinks and feels as a phenomenologist and not as a behaviorist; as a clinical psychologist he was trained to get into the experience of the patient. To the degree that he was successful in mapping out that experience from the inside, he was able to allow his readers to discover, to recognize, themselves.

In time Nouwen would make another request of Alfrink—to seek a two-year residency at the Menninger Clinic for Religion and Psychiatric Research in Topeka, Kansas. While in the United States he would devour the work of the Presbyterian minister and innovative psychologist Anton Boisen, whose notion that every client is a "living human document" and whose application of the case method in pastoral education—deploying one's own personal wounds as an opening to healing and integration—had a profound impact on Nouwen's thinking.

Invited after his Menninger fellowship to join the newly established Department of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame, Nouwen began an association with American higher education that would last the next two decades. After a short return to Holland, where he pursued an advanced degree in theology, Nouwen was back in the United States, teaching at Yale Divinity School, where he would remain for ten years before taking up a much shorter tenure at Harvard Divinity School. He would also teach at Boston College and at Regis College in the Toronto School of Theology.

Over these years Nouwen became a seasoned and much sought-after academic. But at root he was not an academic at all: although he enrolled in two doctoral programs, he never completed the work; and although a prolific writer, he was at heart a popularizer, bypassing scholarly publications to write for a non-professional audience. Students, in large numbers, enrolled in his classes; doctoral candidates sought his mentorship and counsel; and he found the rhythm of university life conducive to writing. But he was never entirely at home there. The highly specialized focus and intellectual detachment of the professional academician discouraged him, and the institutional indifference to pastoral and spiritual formation dismayed him. In *Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, Ecstasy in Christian Perspective*, he lamented the university's emphasis on competition and ambition, the way it turned what should be a school of love into a school for success. As an indication of how uncomfortably the mantle of the academic sat on Nouwen's shoulders, one need only glance at the requirements for his popular course on the spiritual life and spiritual direction, a course he taught at several institutions. The syllabus he used for the Harvard version requested "faithful presence in all class and small group meetings," and went on to specify:

> The primary emphasis will not be on information but on formation; the assignment will be to write a commentary or diary on the Gospel According to Luke; the spiritual commentary or diary will be read by at least three persons; the small groups will have a composition of no more than eight and will meet once a week for ninety minutes; an extensive bibliography will be provided consisting of Spiritual Direction, Western Mysticism, Eastern Christian Spirituality, and Ignatian Spirituality; but only Luke will be required reading; every class member should have a spiritual friend but not drawn from the class itself; no grade will be given.

Students, in large numbers, enrolled in Nouwen's classes; doctoral candidates sought his mentorship and counsel; and he found the rhythm of university life conducive to writing. But he was never entirely at home there. The highly specialized focus and intellectual detachment of the professional academician discouraged him, and the institutional indifference to pastoral and spiritual formation dismayed him.

It's not exactly your standard course description, and it implies what Nouwen found lacking in standard college teaching. In a frank letter to students who took a condensed version of the course at Boston College, he reflected on his departure from Harvard and the special affirmation he came to feel at the Jesuit institution:

> As some of you might know, my semester at Harvard Divinity School had not been easy for me and had led me to the decision that, in order to remain faithful to my vocation, I had to leave Harvard Divinity School and look in new directions. This decision did not come without moments of self-doubt and depression. Against this background, our time together at Boston College was a real healing experience.

Nouwen's disenchantment with university life was partly attributable to his innate and persistent restlessness. That restlessness led him to experiment with vocations. He was postmodern in his disregard for boundaries, even though his efforts to define new directions spurred an habitual mixture of anxiety, self-scrutiny, and even self-reproach. Yet his venturesome and questing imagination propelled him forward. Three years into his Yale professorship, and

partly in an attempt to implement the wisdom of his spiritual father, the psychiatrist-abbot John Eudes Bamberger, he headed north to the Trappist Abbey of the Genesee near Rochester, New York, for a seven-month sabbatical. His goal was to explore contemplative terrain while maintaining a journal—*The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery*—that sought to emulate Thomas Merton's *Sign of Jonas*. The *Diary* lacks Merton's polished literary style and broad learning. But it underscores with arresting immediacy Nouwen's conflicted personality and his struggle to balance the contraries of his life: solitude and community; silence and communication; labor and stillness.

At the end of his stay in the monastery, Nouwen confessed that some of his goals had eluded him, including his hope that "my restlessness would turn into quietude, my tensions into a peaceful life-style, and my many ambiguities and ambivalences into a single-minded commitment to God." This disappointment did not prevent him from revisiting the monastery for a second sabbatical in 1979, the fruits of which were published as *A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee,* a compilation of anguished implorings and poignant self-disclosures that possess something of the tone and timbre of Gerard Manley Hopkins's "terrible sonnets," those poems of exquisite pain and darkness. Nouwen would write that "my whole being seemed to be invaded by fear. No peace, no rest; just plain fear: fear of mental breakdown, fear of living the wrong life." And he would ask: "Am I doomed to die on the wrong side of the abyss? Am I destined to excite others to reach the promised land while remaining unable to enter?" Such disquieting questions hint at dark cliffs of despair.

After stepping down from his position at Yale in 1981, Nouwen began another quest for a meaningful ministry, in yet another effort to quell his inner disquiet. This time it wouldn't be a monastery—Bamberger had discouraged his romantic thinking about the cloistered contemplative life—but a displacement more radical, more fraught with personal risk, and more turbulent than any he had yet tried. From October 1981 to March 1982 Nouwen lived and worked in Bolivia and Peru as a guest of the Maryknoll community. His time there was profoundly unsettling and forced him to reexamine his understanding of evangelization, poverty, ecclesiology, and social justice. He was, to use the language of liberationists and educators, *conscientized*.

Though he already possessed a sharp sensitivity to justice issues (years before, at the Menninger Clinic and new to the United States, he had driven to Alabama to participate in the Selma civil-rights march), the visceral quality of his new experience left him both reeling and inspired—a classic Nouwen response. The political insecurity, economic disparity, military menace, and *barrio* hopelessness that became his daily diet as a novice missioner underscored both his personal feelings of inadequacy and his awareness of the difficulty any outsider faced in trying to effect change. But he was resolved to learn, attend to the aspirations and despair of his new congregants, and absorb both the pains and joys of the local culture and its people.

Nouwen's Latin American journal, *Gracias*, meticulously records his impressions, his insights, and his emotional tumult. Visiting the Museum of the Inquisition in Lima, with its bloody history of torture and oppression, he sees "a powerful reminder of how quickly we human beings are ready to torture each other and to do so often in the preposterous assumption that we are acting in the name of God," commenting further that this "can only be a reason for repentance and humble confession and a constant reminder that what we now condemn with strong voices was an intimate part of the church's daily life only two centuries ago." He excoriates a devotional history that he finds reprehensible, legacy of a self-lacerating Spanish spirituality imported to the New World with the Conquistadores and their zealous friars. Escorting American friends around Lima churches, he is appalled by the detailed, often surgical, depictions of the suffering Christ. One friend is so repulsed by the blood-spattered horrors that she leaves to wait outside, but Nouwen dives further in, asserting in his journal that "the nearly exclusive emphasis on the tortured body of Christ strikes me as a perversion of the Good News into a morbid story that intimidates, frightens, and even subdues people but does not liberate them." Then, typically, he proceeds to interrogate himself: "I wonder how much of this has been part of my own religious history, although more subtly. Maybe deep in my psyche I too know more about the deformed Jesus than about the risen Christ."

Concluding that the conventional Christ of his Dutch seminary training and the Jansenist-tinged spirituality of his homeland had diminished his Christology, Nouwen sought greater understanding of the Jesus of the liberation theologians, and came away armed with a new awareness of the fecundity of thought and spirituality in Latin America. The onsite student of liberation theology became sensitized to regional political turbulences and their genesis, and familiar with such key concepts as the *communidades de base*, the preferential option for the poor, and the centrality of such biblical texts as the Exodus and the Magnificat. Meanwhile, even as he assayed the world's evils, Nouwen continued to war with his own demons of depression, self-loathing, and loneliness. His diary records his sense of himself as "an outsider, someone who doesn't have a home, who is tolerated by his surroundings, but not accepted, liked but not loved,...a stuttering, superfluous presence." One especially striking entry, in February 1982, observes that "every time I slip into another depression, I notice that I have given up the struggle to find God and have fallen back into an attitude of spiteful waiting."

Finishing his sojourn in Latin America (he would return briefly to Guatemala to spend time with a priest-friend, John Vesey, who had replaced a murdered missionary, an

experience that inspired *Love in a Fearful Land*, his eloquent tribute to a suffering people and their brave pastor), Nouwen settled back into the academy. Well aware that his gifts as a missioner were modest, and unable to learn Spanish despite his fluency in Dutch, English, and German, he sagely concluded that "if I have any vocation in Latin America, it is the vocation to receive from the people the gifts they have to bring us and to bring these gifts back up north for our own conversion and healing."

The last vocational phase of Nouwen's life saw him serve as co-worker, pastor, and chaplain for Daybreak, the Toronto-based L'Arche home. He undertook his new duties with the customary mixed feelings of inadequacy and dread, curiosity and hope. It was here, however, among the mentally challenged, the emotionally handicapped, and the marginalized, that Nouwen would at last find a place to still his heart, a spiritual oasis he could call home. He would remain a member of the community for his final decade of life. It was a fertile time for him, with a cascade of books, speaking engagements, visits, and new friendships; but it was also the period of his most acute emotional breakdown, a crisis that had been building for years and reached its crescendo in Toronto.

Nouwen was gay, and it was a source of anguish for him. A product of a culture and time—to say nothing of an ecclesiastical regime—that engaged in collective denial around homoerotic desires, he was also personally passionate and theologically conservative: in short, an emotional breakdown just waiting for a trigger. That trigger came in the form of a friendship with a L'Arche co-worker toward whom Nouwen felt a suppressed sexual feeling, an attachment that grew from an infatuation and demanded more. As he wrote in the diary that would become *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*:

> This deeply satisfying friendship became the road to my anguish, because I soon discovered that the enormous space that had been opened for me could not be filled by the one who had opened it. I became possessive, needy, and dependent, and when the friendship finally had to be interrupted, I fell apart.

Caught in an emotional maelstrom that reduced him to a shattered state, with outbursts of uncontrollable sobbing, he fought for inner calm and resolutely set about putting the blocks of his life back together again. The friendship couldn't be what Nouwen needed it to be; it had to be recalibrated, and in time it was. Out of the morass of conflicting feelings, and via several months of intensive therapy, emerged a healthier if still fragile Nouwen. And once again, his personal crisis informed his writing. Through this at times devastating chain of events, Nouwen lived the paschal cycle, as he so often did in his life.

The many vocations of Henri Nouwen were his way of channeling his energy to maximize the good he could do. They were a mark of his restlessness, his muddled and messy compulsion to serve the Word; and also of his pioneering pastoral imagination. Nouwen wrote in his posthumously published *Sabbatical Journey: A Diary of His Final Year*: "I am convinced that it is possible to live the wounds of the past not as gaping abysses that cannot be filled and therefore keep threatening us, but as gateways to new life." He would be the wounded healer, for others as well as for himself.

Nouwen's legacy as a writer includes scores of books and translations, and thousands of letters. He could be sentimental, cloying, and crushingly needy, as in his "letter" to journalist Fred Bratman, *Life of the Beloved*, where his penchant for labored expressions of affection is in abundant evidence ("Deep friendship is a calling forth of each other's chosenness...our lives are unique stones in the mosaic of human existence"). But he could also be measured, penetratingly observant, and on occasion luminous, as in the epilogue to *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*, reflecting on the seeming capriciousness of God's grace: "It is dark agony. It is following Jesus to a completely unknown place. It is being emptied out on the cross and having to wait for new life in naked faith."

One struggles to place Nouwen. Theologians have difficulty situating him within one of the organic spiritual traditions. Catholic intellectuals see him as a cult figure, the darling of suburban matrons. Psychologists have reservations about his methodology and academic pedigree. And pedagogues find his inspirational teaching style problematic. But his readers—and there are legions of them, including Hillary Clinton, who cites him as a chief spiritual influence—love him unconditionally. Some of his books, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* principal among them, will have lasting power; and for those who met him, listened to him preach, or became his disciples, the effect of his life and ministry has proved ineradicable.

In this twentieth anniversary of his death, it is instructive to see him in a new light, as postconciliar prophet of a reformed presbyteral model. Nouwen was a universal pastor, uninterested in the squabbles of ambitious clerical careerists, detached from the more toxic of ecclesiastical controversies, and committed to prayer as the only antidote to priestly irrelevance. His frankness around issues of sexuality and his willingness to disclose emotional fragility make him important at a time when many bishops promote a discredited neo-Tridentine model of formation. Nouwen was a loyal, integrated, and doctrinally conservative priest. With his openness and undisguised vulnerability, the model of formation he exemplifies will set a mature standard for contemporary ministry.

In the end that may prove the final and most significant of his vocations. Nouwen liked to quip that the initials "J. M." of Henri J. M. Nouwen meant "Just Me." A generous dollop of Just Henri in this Bergoglio pontificate would be a great anniversary gift to the church. If we dare. ■

Richard Alleva

No Refuge

'MOONLIGHT'

Moonlight is a blazing iceberg of a movie. Blazing because of the passion that informs every shot, an iceberg because so much of its meaning resides beneath the surface events on screen. This is a film of Jamesean ambiguity, though Henry James wrote of American millionaires and heiresses touring Europe, while writer-director Barry Jenkins sets forth a story of African Americans in a Miami neighborhood teetering on the edge of squalor. The rewards for a viewer's close attention to every scene and shot are the same as those for any patient reading of James's serpentine sentences: images get planted in the mind that gradually link up to form a picture of the hero's destiny.

Jenkins breaks his story down into three chapters, titled "little," "chiron," and "black." In the first we meet Chiron (pronounced Shy-RON), a child of ten or eleven who is stuck with the nickname "Little" because of his size and timidity. (The boy who plays him, Alex Hibbert, has eyes as big as supermoons.) Home holds no emotional relief from the schoolyard bullies who torment him: his mother Paula alternates between spasms of possessiveness and bursts of fury, and her later descent into drugs and prostitution ratchets up the misery. Then an Afro-Cuban drug dealer, Juan, takes the boy under his wing. In any conventional movie, Chiron would soon become the man's messenger boy and apprentice dealer, but something very different happens here. Juan and his girlfriend Teresa behave like the best of adoptive parents as they feed, shelter, and nurture the kid, with no strings attached. Though Juan occasionally dispenses wisdom that is strictly gangsta—never sit with your back to the door, for you never know who's coming in—another bit of his advice is shrewd and reverberates throughout the rest of the movie: "You're gonna have to decide for yourself what you want to be. Nobody's gonna do that for you." And this mysteriously links up with a curious anecdote Juan recalls from his own childhood: as a street kid he often roamed about at night, and an elderly lady dubbed him "Blue" because that was the color his skin appeared to be in the moonlight. (The film is based on a Tarell Alvin McCraney play titled *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*.) If that nickname was the result of an optical illusion, isn't the "Little" that his peers have pinned on Chiron just as superficial? The boy may be physically slight, but how large is the spirit within him? Enough to overcome the label?

Juan is a brawny man, and the actor Mahershala Ali endows him with an easygoing vitality that reminded me of Robert Mitchum in his prime. So you can understand why the drug dealer looms up as a role model for the boy he treats kindly. How much more poignant it is, then, when this father figure falls from grace. And the fall is bound to come once Chiron comes to connect his mother's erratic behavior with the crack she's smoking, which is supplied by Juan. Certain ambiguities in the script actually amplify the poignancy rather than cloud it. For instance, when exactly does Paula become a prostitute and addict? In her initial scenes she seems sober enough, but soon she's hustling her son out of their apartment so she can turn her next trick. Have we ever really seen her sober? But this ambiguity makes us share Chiron's confusion. Even when he hadn't yet identified drugs as his mother's problem, he'd already seen her as a bewildering, withholding figure (though Naomie Harris's superb performance mitigates her character's bad mothering with believable pathos). As for Juan, does he never beat people up or even kill them in pursuit of his trade? That we aren't shown Juan's sinister side actually strengthens the drama because it forces us, for a while, to share Chiron's rosy view, making it all the more sad when the truth finally sinks in.

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The second section of the film is titled "chiron." Since that is our protagonist's real name, this might seem to signify that, now an adolescent, he's growing into and firming up his identity. Alas, it does not. No mentor is now at hand. Juan has disappeared. (Another ambiguity: when Paula remarks that she hasn't seen Juan's girlfriend "since the funeral," are we to assume it was Juan's?) Chiron, now played by Ashton Sanders, has grown into a tall, stringy teenager but he's still called "Little" by a bully, Terrel, who seems to have made it his mission to torment the outsider. And Paula, still heavily into drugs, snatches away his pocket money and makes him feel smaller than ever. Only Kevin, Chiron's only friend, shows him any support or affection. Eventually the friendship becomes sexual.

And here again an ambiguity makes us share Chiron's confusion. Kevin has always come across as very straight, but was all his boasting about the girls he'd conquered a front? Is he really attracted to Chiron, or is their physical intimacy just a one-off gesture of pity? Chiron can't figure it out any more than we can, but there's no ambiguity about his desperate need for somebody to stand by him.

That need is betrayed when Kevin, during a sort of informal gang initiation instigated by Terrel, punches Chiron out. School authorities want the victim to report the perpetrators, but Chiron won't denounce Kevin and instead takes his own brutal revenge on Terrel, a violence that lands him in juvenile detention and changes his life forever. These episodes are saturated with a sense of doom that the director achieves with camera movement and music. As the bully Terrel moves toward his brutal mischief in the schoolyard, the camera stays on him in one lengthy traveling shot as he distributes fistbumps to pals, threats to rivals, and insults to victims, striding relentlessly onward as the music swells ominously. A couple of scenes later, it is the battered Chiron we see in relentless motion, as he heads for a classroom where Terrel sits and again the music warns us of impending violence.

In the third chapter, "black," the film reaches, tentatively but tenderly, for healing and renewed growth. "Black" is the nickname that Kevin once gave Chiron when they were still little kids. The macho tag was meant to rebrand someone who was taunted as a sissy. But the adult Chiron (now played, with stony reserve, by Trevante Rhodes) no longer needs such help: he's now a gym-buffed, glowering drug dealer in Atlanta. We see him conduct his business with an underling, and his sleepy strength is pretty frightening. But a phone call from Kevin, from whom he hasn't heard since the classroom violence, brings him back to Miami, where he establishes a new relationship with Paula (now so deep into rehab that she's more of a counsellor than a patient), then comes face to face with his only friend and worst betrayer. This confrontation, in the diner where Kevin cooks, is composed of small talk that says nothing, and stares, silences, grins, and grunts that say everything. Both men are reaching for each other through a thick cloud of mutual unknowing. Kevin (slyly underplayed by André Holland) has achieved a relatively normal life with a fair share of happiness derived from fatherhood. Yet something gnaws at his spirit, and he can only guess that it has something to do with his betrayal of Chiron all those years ago. How can he make amends to the silent man sitting in front of him, who says so little even in reproach? As for Chiron, he may only now be discovering how much Kevin shaped his destiny. The viewer who comes to this scene expecting the sort of resolution in which the hero's recognition of his repressed homosexuality gives him a new lease on life will be disappointed. No such easy answers here. Instead, there's a wealth of compassion, and a hushed apprehension of the minefields unavoidable in every human life. Wordsworth wrote, "The child is father to the man." *Moonlight* shows us that a desolated child may be father to a stifled man. ■

Bernard G. Prusak

Holy Cities

THE CONTEMPLATIVE WHIMSY OF BRIAN WHELAN

In her book on Jerusalem, the religion writer Karen Armstrong notes that "in Hebrew the word for 'holy' (*kaddosh*) means 'other,' 'set apart.'" A holy city, in turn, is somehow other than, and set apart from, other human settlements. What distinguishes a holy city, Armstrong goes on, is that it's a site where "lost wholeness" is recovered: where heaven meets earth, the divine mends the brokenness of human life, and life transpires in joyful abundance.

This is the vision of Second Isaiah, through whom God proclaims his plan "to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight" and his promise that "no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress" (65:18–19). This is also the vision of John in Revelation, who, echoing Isaiah, sees "a new heaven and a new earth" and "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

For five years now, my family has lived with a painting titled *Holy City* by the Irish artist Brian Whelan. I came to know Whelan's work through an exhibition he co-curated, "The Quiet Men: London Irish Painters," which visited Villanova University in 2010. The cityscapes and "inscapes" of London, where Whelan was born (in 1957) and raised, are recurring subjects of his work. But Whelan is also a novelty these days: a religious painter, whose Catholic faith shows through both in the choice of subjects and in the sensibilities he brings to biblical stories, saints' lives, and holy cities.

Whelan's website includes a number of apt quotations about his work. The poet Seamus Heaney calls Whelan's painting "bold and commanding." A Brother Vaughan of the Society of Saint Francis remarks that "it's as if a medieval stone mason had been given a box of paints." And I've always been taken by Sister Wendy Beckett's assessment of Whelan's art as "clear, strong, prayerful work, with joy at its center," and her intuition that "God has His hand on Brian."

Not at all the cliché of the brooding artist, Whelan is an affable man who loves conversation over a pint. His work exudes playfulness. Take, for instance, the way he deploys not only vibrant paints, but the gold, silver, pink, blue, and green tin foils of candy wrappers. These come both from sweets he eats while working and from a family in Paris who, he writes, "send me an envelope every month or two full of gold paper from their daily bar of Belgian chocolate." When I look closely at my own family's *Holy City*, I can see the contribution made by Galler chocolate. In other paintings, I've seen similar contributions from Hershey, including Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.

A major work of Whelan's is currently on display at the Washington National Cathedral. Another *Holy City*, comprising nine panels, it measures nine feet high by twelve feet across. This work is installed in the cathedral's north transept. A number of Whelan's smaller works are on display as well, in the seventh-floor tower gallery. My favorite is a depiction of the moment in Luke's parable of the prodigal son "when he came to himself" and realized that his father's hired hands had it better than he did (15:17). Whelan paints the prodigal son surrounded by pigs. One pig, with a nasty-looking set of bared teeth, has wiggled under his legs. Others look at him quizzically. Most just look deeply stupid, busily chewing carrots and fish bones. The son meanwhile looks to the sky, which is full of silvery gray clouds, and brings his hands together in a worried, almost prayerful gesture—as if a little afraid or perhaps embarrassed to ask for forgiveness. His complexion is notably the same as that of the pigs all around him, and his toothy frown is also distinctly porcine. Has the comedy

Brian Whelan, Holy City, *2010*

of the prodigal son's plight ever found such wonderful expression? With its profound whimsy, the painting typifies Whelan's narrative art. In Sister Wendy's terms, it is clear, strong, and prayerful: Whelan has entered into Luke's story and meditated on it. And, finally, there is joy at the painting's heart.

Whelan has observed that his holy cities are "probably the only paintings I do that do not have a narrative" but are, instead, "contemplative." And indeed, the *Holy City* in the cathedral's north transept demands extended contemplation. It can't be comprehended in a glance; it can hardly even be photographed. And looking at a photograph of it isn't all that helpful, anyway: there's just too much to behold, as in a detailed aerial photo of, say, the town or city where you live. Whelan's website links to a brief video, produced by the Washington National Cathedral, of the painting's installation, accompanied by some reflections by the artist. But the painting needs to be seen in person; there's no other way to do it justice.

Brian Whelan, In the Beginning

Whelan has been painting holy cities for about fifteen years; he reports that the *Holy City* in the National Cathedral took him two years to complete. It is not meant to be Jerusalem—even the new Jerusalem—or Rome or Mecca or Santiago de Compostela or, he has written, "any Holy City that exists in today's world." Instead, Whelan writes, "This is my aspirational vision of what a Holy City looks like."

The Holy City of Whelan's imagination contains synagogues, churches, and mosques of various styles and sizes, identified by stars, crosses, and crescents, themselves often gleaming gold, silver, and the occasional green—that tin foil again. These houses of worship, many bulging forth with the appearance of volume, are arranged higgledy-piggledy, nestled together and leaning against one another like the buildings in a medieval hill town. They appear to have grown up together, like plants in a lush, well-watered garden—an impression fostered by the many trees of various colors and hues likewise nestled in among the buildings. Crowded and colorful, the whole work pulses with life.

There's no telling the time of day in the Cathedral's *Holy City*. There is a sun, there is a rainbow, there is a moon (or maybe two moons), there are night stars, there is a comet shooting out of what appears to be an eyeball in the sky. There is so much energy and kaleidoscopic movement that the boundary between day and night has been undone. What's more, the heavens and the earth embrace: the painting's buildings and trees appear taken up into the cosmos; or perhaps stars have come down to earth, for example in the radiant blue pool at the painting's center, the painting's only truly still point.

I asked Whelan whether he imagines that anyone lives in his Holy Cities. He answered yes: though every building is a house of worship, they are all places of hospitality. It's noteworthy in this regard that there is a figure of a pilgrim—identified by his scallop shell, the emblem of Saint James the Greater and badge of the pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela—in each of the nine panels. How fortunate, or blessed, this pilgrim is. He has come to a place of peace and shelter, and will surely find welcome, comfort, and rest. In Whelan's vision of a holy city, the old order of distrust, violence, and tears has passed away. A new creation—hardly possible, nearly incredible, beyond our wildest dreams—beckons.

You can see more of Whelan's paintings at *www.brianwhelan.co.uk*. The exhibition "Holy City: A Pilgrimage of Sight" will be on display at the Washington National Cathedral on Wisconsin Avenue until January 30, 2017. ■

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Philip Connors

A World of Wounds

The Moth Snowstorm
Nature and Joy
Michael McCarthy
New York Review Books, $27.95, 272 pp.

In 1954, when Michael McCarthy was seven, his mother was institutionalized for mental illness. With his father absent as a radio officer on the *Queen Mary* and his family life shattered, he and his brother were sent to live with their aunt and her husband on a cul-de-sac in the English suburbs. It was there, at their home in Sunny Bank, where he was privy to a vision that changed his life: a blooming buddleia bush swarmed by butterflies.

In that moment began a lifetime of engagement with the natural world, an engagement fueled by joy and wonder and charmingly recounted in this book of memoir, reportage, and natural history, which opens with that vision and ends with a tribute to his mother and a call to action. Among the species that would captivate him over a life spent writing as an environmental journalist were not only butterflies but moths, sparrows, kingfishers, cuckoos, hares, and dolphins, as well as tree blossoms, early wildflowers, and the crystal-clear chalk streams of southern England. Each of them is given its lyrical due in the course of *The Moth Snowstorm*, but it is the metaphor expressed in the title that gives the book its poignancy and its pathos.

There was a time in postwar England when an evening automobile journey in summertime would reveal "moths...in such numbers that they would pack a car's headlight beams like snowflakes in a blizzard" and "at the end of your journey you would have to wash your windscreen, you would have to sponge away the astounding richness of life." Others of McCarthy's generation recall it fondly, although such a spectacle is essentially unavailable in England today, thanks to agricultural poisons and habitat loss. McCarthy cites authorities who estimate that half the wildlife of his native country has been wiped out by human activity since he was a boy, and moths have been especially hard hit. Nonetheless, McCarthy writes, "It was to this world, the world of the moth snowstorm, that I pledged my youthful allegiance."

For students of the American conservation movement, McCarthy's story—early trauma and confusion assuaged by devotion to nature—will sound familiar. Consider the four leading lights of the American conservation movement from around a century ago: John Muir, Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and Aldo Leopold. Muir suffered a bout of temporary blindness from a stray metal shaving when he was a young man. Soon after he recovered, he set out on a journey during which he slept outdoors for weeks at a time, seeing up close the glorious beauty and diversity of wild flora and fauna in America, an experience he recounted in *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*. That journey ignited his love for landscapes, which found its highest expression in his defense of Yosemite. Roosevelt's mother and young bride died on the same day. He came back to the living world on his ranch in the Dakota Badlands and later became our greatest presidential champion of national parks and forests, creating at the stroke of his pen many millions of acres of public land. Roosevelt's most devoted adviser in conservation matters, Pinchot, who founded the modern Forest Service, lost the one great love of his life at age twenty-six and spent the next four decades attempting to commune with her ghost via séances. He was the scion of a timber baron, an American aristocrat of sorts, but he craved time in the woods for the peace it brought his tumultuous soul. And Leopold, widely considered the father of modern ecological thinking, and undeniably the founder of the discipline of wildlife management, was struck by a kidney ailment on a long horseback trip in northern New Mexico, when he was in his twenties. He nearly died of organ failure; he spent years recuperating. Afterward he almost immediately made a proposal to create the world's first wilderness area, off limits to roads and human machines, in the Gila River headwaters country of New Mexico.

What accounts for these transformations, the fruits of which offered subsequent generations ample protected landscapes on which to encounter the wild in America? McCarthy offers one possible explanation: that the natural world, despite our increasing estrangement from it, still offers the human imagination an unequaled experience of wonder and joy, of the sort capable of assuaging the pain of loss.

There is an irony at the heart of the book, and it lies in the fact that the pain of loss is now a planetary phenomenon, felt by all who care about nonhuman life. But the losses are of the very things McCarthy points to as capable of soothing our sorrow. The magnitude of the human enterprise and the immensity of our appetites have put wildlife at risk of a die-off poised to dwarf anything seen in our recorded history as "fellow voyageurs...in the odyssey of evolution," to use Leopold's resonant phrase. Global warming, deforestation, ocean acidification, agrochemicals, and other forms of pollution, collectively gathered under the banner of the Anthropocene: these

threats place the very life of the planet as we have known it in peril.

McCarthy does not flinch when assessing the scale of the devastation. He visits a tidal estuary in South Korea now severed from the sea by a great wall for the purpose of "reclamation," with incalculable effects on migratory shorebirds. He travels back in time to tell the story of the great Thames River salmon run, which was severed by shipping locks and suffocated on a tide of human sewage. He investigates the decimation of London's sparrow population, which underwent precipitous decline for unknown reasons, although reasonable scientific minds speculate that the chemicals in non-leaded gasoline may have wiped out their food sources to the point where the birds—highly social creatures—chose species suicide over an impoverished community life due to radically dwindling numbers.

Confronted with these casualties of the human enterprise on planet Earth, McCarthy argues that "sustainable development" and "ecosystem services" economics—essentially, placing a dollar amount on fundamental life processes performed for millennia by forests and rivers and such—are insufficient to save us from our excesses. What we need is a reawakening of human delight with the natural world, "defence through joy," as he puts it. His "new kind of love" for the beauty of nature would be one that recognizes "that there is an ancient bond with the natural world surviving deep within us, which makes it not a luxury, not an optional extra, not even just an enchantment, but part of our essence—the natural home for our psyches where we can find not only joy but also peace, and to destroy which, is to destroy a fundamental part of ourselves." It is difficult to see what makes this attitude new, though. It was felt, for instance, in many indigenous cultures, including among Native Americans of various tribes, whose rituals expressing joy in nature were deemed primitive by the so-called civilized world, and whom we largely exterminated, losing in the process a vast cultural memory of how to live in some semblance of harmony with the land.

Instead of trumpeting his argument's novelty, McCarthy would be better served by admitting its revivalist nature. Leopold touched on many of the same issues seventy years ago in his classic *A Sand County Almanac*, whose first part is one long paean to the delights of phenology—the study of plant and animal life cycles. Later in the book he defines a "land ethic": "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." We did too little to heed him then, and we mostly continue to ignore him now. We have come some distance in extending the fruits of human rights—call it the "human ethic"—to women, people of color, and those whose gender and sexual orientations fall outside the dominant paradigm, although there is much work still to be done in each case. We have done appallingly little in extending a similar system of ethics to the nonhuman world.

McCarthy writes beautifully of certain of his loves, perhaps none more so than what the English call waders and Americans call shorebirds: "Spindly-legged, nervy, refined, they epitomize elegance on the one hand, and on the other, wildness; they will not come to your garden, sit on your fence, hop on your lawn or sing for their supper; they remain in their own wild places, eternally untameable." His empathy and appreciation for the great pageant of nonhuman life radiates from every page, which is why it stopped me short to read the following early on: "I will explore why, remarkably, we as humans may love the natural world from which we have emerged, when the otter does not love its river, as far as we know."

I will spare readers the barnyard epithet I scribbled in the margin next to that passage, but I will hazard a guess that the otter does indeed love its river, and were we privy to the precise quali-

ties of that love, its depth and its varieties of feeling and expression, we might be less inclined to dam or pollute that river. Less inclined, perhaps, but by no means universally averse: for some among us, the feelings of an otter are as nothing compared to the imperatives of economic growth and human wants. But that is different from saying the otter has no feelings at all for its environment.

"One of the penalties of an ecological education is to live alone in a world of wounds," Leopold once wrote. The intervening decades have offered an ecological education to a much wider range of the human population, such that the penalty is no longer to live alone with the weight of bitter knowledge. The penalty now is to feel helpless to forestall the damage everywhere evident from actions taken by our species decades and centuries ago, actions still ongoing, even accelerating. Perhaps McCarthy is right, and joy and wonder channeled into political will can stave off preventable violations of cherished rivers, mammals, birds, insects, and plants. Maybe a universal apprehension of peace and love and harmony among creatures will do what the environmental movement has so far failed to do: curb our anthropocentric greed.

I would not bet a dollar on it. To paraphrase Charles Bowden, we have not figured out how we might have less but be more, and with 11 billion of us slated to occupy the planet before long, we are going to have to get by with less if we want to avoid reverting to Noah's Ark: two of everything saved for the purpose of memorializing what was lost. What will remain of our natural inheritance once the last drop of oil is burned, the last wisp of gas is fracked? There are those who would just as soon see the possibility of a joyful encounter with wild nature extinguished forever. They have great wealth and great power—and they may yet get their wish. The rest of us can whistle past the graveyard, or stand and fight. ■

Philip Connors *is the author of two books,* Fire Season *and* All the Wrong Places.

William H. Pritchard

Frenemies

The Feud

Vladimir Nabokov, Edmund Wilson, and the End of a Beautiful Friendship

Alex Beam

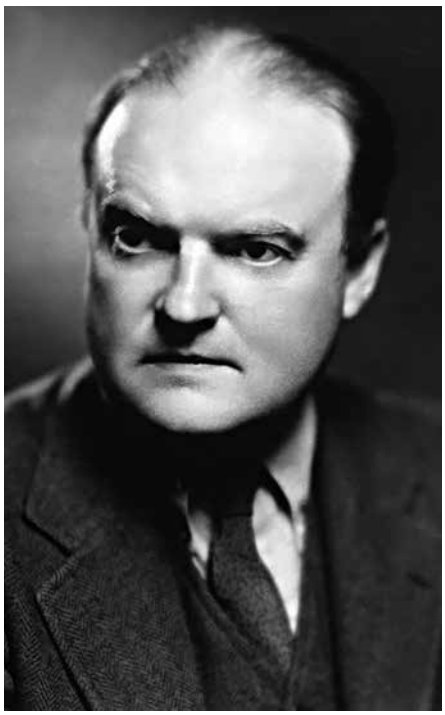
Pantheon, $26.95, 224 pp.

In the final act of *Hamlet*, our hero reflects on dispatching to their deaths Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have foolishly colluded in the king's attempt to do him in. Hamlet tells his friend Horatio that the pair of knaves got what was coming to them, since "'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes / Between the pass and fell incensed point / Of mighty opposites." Journalist Alex Beam has been bold enough to write a short book about the struggle between two mighty literary opposites of the last century: the critic Edmund Wilson and the novelist Vladimir Nabokov. By subtitling his book "The End of a Beautiful Friendship," Beam produces a witty take on things, since any "beautiful friendship" between two such aggressive, combative literary masters can't but end by making "beautiful" an ironic word.

That relationship began in 1940 with a letter from Nicolas Nabokov, Vladimir's cousin, hoping that Wilson could help find places for Vladimir to publish. When Vladimir himself wrote a bit later, Wilson as literary editor of the *New Republic* was able to commission a review for the magazine, and also recommend to Nabokov other possible publishing venues. As Beam suggests by way of explaining how the friendship of the two writers came about, Nabokov, new to this country and in need of money, was "flattered to have Wilson as audience and promoter," while Wilson was charmed by the brilliance of this new Russian voice.

When they met soon afterwards, Wilson's career was at its peak. His book about socialism and revolutionary thinking, *To the Finland Station*, had recently appeared, and he was turning out substantial essays on writers such as

Vladimir Nabokov



Edmund Wilson

Flaubert, Dickens, Henry James, and, most pertinently, Pushkin. (Earlier he had brought out *Axel's Castle*, his introduction to the "symbolist" writers, Yeats, Eliot, and Proust.) A major motive for his learning Russian, Wilson said, was to read Pushkin, and his relation with Nabokov had much to do with their mutual commitment to that language and its premier poet. Five years older than Nabokov, Wilson had a professional reputation; Nabokov was striving to build up a comparable one as a novelist. So their coming together was fortuitous indeed.

As friends they were close enough for one to ask the other a favor: Wilson inquiring about Nabokov's teaching position at Wellesley and whether there was any chance of Wilson's taking up such a position (no chance, was the answer); Nabokov wondering whether he might fill in for Wilson as a *New Yorker* reviewer (also no, since the editor had already filled the spot). They each found pleasure, particularly Nabokov, in teasing the other, especially in relation to the Russian language, where Wilson was an amateur. Nabokov was critical of Wilson's too-uncritical attitude toward the Soviet Union; his own excellent characterization of Leninism was "a pail of the milk of human kindness with a dead rat at the bottom." By implying that the political change from czarist Russia to the Leninist Soviet Union had meant the sudden replacement of oppression by glorious freedom, Wilson, said Nabokov justly, was ignoring the brief years of liberal democracy—during which Nabokov's father was a government official—swept away by the Communist state.

Not content with being a superb critic, Wilson had aspirations toward writing fiction as well. An early novel, *I Thought of Daisy*, was followed in 1946 by *Memoirs of Hecate County*, a collection of tales with enough explicit sex in them to get the book banned in New York State. (Nabokov praised this justly forgotten novel, saying that he'd read it at one sitting.) To extend the erotic atmosphere, Wilson sent Nabokov a document from Havelock Ellis's six-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, about the adventures of a young man. With *Lolita* beginning to occupy his imagination, Nabokov was grateful for the account, which Simon Karlinsky (editor of the Wilson-Nabokov correspondence) said provided further stimulus for the *Lolita* project. Yet when *Lolita* was finished and sent to Wilson in 1954, the latter's response was at best lukewarm. He admitted to having read only half the book, thought it was one of Nabokov's weaker efforts and told him so in a letter. Thus began the downturn in what had been an upbeat relationship.

For Nabokov, *Lolita* brought fame and fortune, enabling him to retire from teaching and devote himself to completing a massive translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, garnished with commentary amounting altogether to four volumes. Alex Beam describes this work, with its 1,895 pages, as "a doorstop composed of unequal parts hubris, genius, philosophical research carried to proctological extremes, heedless and needless provocation, often but not always informed by an exquisite literary sensibility." Of those 1,895 pages, the translation itself took up only 257; a 92-page appendix justifying Nabokov's choice of prosody and diction for his translation didn't convince many reviewers that what seemed to them a misbegotten treatment of Pushkin was in fact genius. And especially not Wilson. In a July 1965 review in the *New York Review of Books*, Wilson claimed that Nabokov's "virtuosity in juggling with the English language" had resulted in "an addiction to rare and unfamiliar words," resulting in a translation Wilson judged uneven and banal.

Nabokov of course fired back, and the last hundred pages or so of Beam's account rehearse in exhaustive detail the ramifying circumstances, reviews and counter-reviews, vituperation, insults, and witty putdowns (most of the wit is Nabokov's) of a long-simmering feud. Beam doesn't take sides, but stays above the battle in a detached, ironic, humorous way. In the process, his own obtrusive wit, too loud and pointed for its own good, often gets him into trouble. Take for example, that phrase "philosophical research carried to proctological extremes." Really? Proctological? Wilson didn't just harshly criticize Nabokov's translation, he "carpet-bombed" it. In the five years Nabokov lived after Wilson died, he "tap-danced on his old rival's tombstone." When Robert Lowell intervenes to defend Wilson in the magazine *Encounter*, Beam calls it "putting his patrician paw in the barrel." Harvard University is a place "where self-regard like mother's milk flows through the hallways," while Cornell is "the moose jaw of that Ivy League." Beam's book is peppered with "catchy" slang like "hooha," "kooky," "frenemy," and "kerfuffle," and with verbs that are sometimes too active: Nabokov gets space in *Encounter* to "kiss off" Lowell; Wilson, solicited for unpaid income tax, "continued to stiff the IRS." One paragraph is kicked off by a single word, "Ugh." At a couple of points Beam even decides to ad-

dress his two warriors directly, as in "But really, Vladimir," or "God bless you, Edmund."

Why all these verbal fireworks? My hunch is that, in the presence of two such formidable writers as Wilson and Nabokov, Alex Beam wanted a piece of the action, as it were, and decided to make us aware of his presence by showing that, for all the genius of his subjects, he was in charge. When he chooses to, he writes an authoritative and relatively straightforward prose, as when near the book's end he sums up the Wilson-Nabokov relationship as originally a two-way street, Nabokov benefiting from Wilson's connections with the literary world, and Wilson enjoying "the intellectual banquet of Nabokov's capacious knowledge of Russian and European literature."

Over time, Beam continues, the relationship mattered less to both men:

> Nabokov found his own, wider audience. Editors came to him, he didn't need an intermediary. Wilson, alternately indifferent to and fascinated by the tidal wave of Nabokov's post-*Lolita* fame, started to lose interest in the friendship. After all, Russian and Pushkin were just two of his many enthusiasms.

Yet this was not quite the last word. The year Nabokov died, 1977, a retired British diplomat, Sir Charles Johnston, published a translation of *Onegin* with rhyme and meter in the Pushkin stanza—a masterly introduction to the poem for one, like me, who has no Russian, but also a translation that defied every conviction and rule that Nabokov had brought to bear in his version of the poem. A few years later, Johnston in an interview made remarks that provoked Dmitri Nabokov—the writer's son, translator, and steward of his literary estate—into angry retort, after which Johnston replied in kind, and then Dmitri likewise. The protagonists might have been gone, but the feud lived on. ■

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Alexi Sargeant

A Touch of Woody Allen

Shylock Is My Name

Howard Jacobson
Hogarth, $25, 290 pp.

Lorenzo, the young Venetian with whom Shylock's daughter Jessica elopes in The Merchant of Venice, is given some of the most beautiful lines in all of Shakespeare when he describes the music of the spheres sounding unheard from within human beings: "such harmony is in immortal souls, / But while this muddy vesture of decay / Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it." In Howard Jacobson's novel *Shylock Is My Name*, the Lorenzo role belongs to a lunkish, twice-divorced footballer suspended from his team for throwing a Nazi salute on the field. Jacobson's contemporary England is all decay, no harmony.

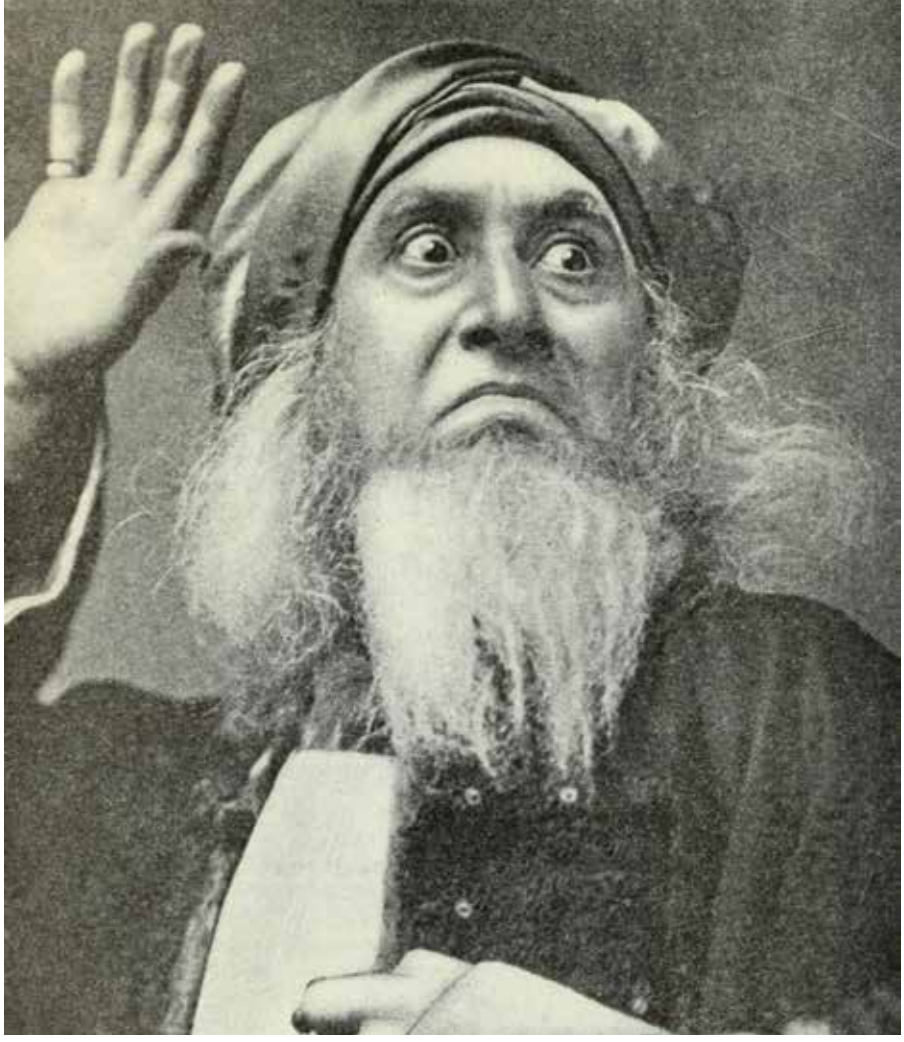
Shylock Is My Name is both a retelling of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and a sequel to it. Jacobson's characters are modern counterparts to Shakespeare's, but the novel also carries the original story beyond the bounds of the play—at least, for one character. We meet Shylock himself, still wandering the earth centuries later, mourning his runaway daughter, and evading a forced conversion to Christianity. Shylock's presence is one of the most fascinating parts of the book, but it does make it mostly a companion piece to the play rather than a novel that can stand on its own.

Jacobson's counterpart to Shylock, a Jewish art collector named Simon Strulovitch, doesn't seem very surprised when he runs into the original Shylock in a graveyard: "Of course Shylock is here, among the dead. When hasn't he been?" Strulovitch is there to visit the grave of his mother; Shylock is there for his wife Leah. Though she is dead and he is (perhaps?) immortal, they keep up a lively conversation in any graveyard or garden Shylock visits. Strulovitch invites Shylock into his home, and the older man settles in with disturbing quickness.

Strulovitch gradually grows into his role as an implacable modern Shylock under the ambivalent tutelage of the original. For his part, Shylock wavers between playing Mephistopheles and trying to dissuade Strulovitch from pursuing vengeance. In the supreme irony of the novel, Shylock even expands on Portia's famous "quality of mercy" speech. But the other characters in the novel never meet their counterparts from the play, and their resemblance to those counterparts is not always very deep.

There's a touch of Woody Allen in Strulovitch: an artsy neurotic weirdly obsessed with his own teenage daughter, Beatrice. He has good reason to question her taste in men, but he seems, like many of Shakespeare's fathers, to want to be her whole world. He's distracted from her rebellion, however, by the strange new friend he's made. Strulovitch is constantly observing Shylock, never quite sure if he fears or envies the other Jew. Has Shylock been kept immortal by the world's obsessive anti-Semitism? Or is it the ambivalent fascination many Jews feel toward the character that keeps him wandering this world, as passages like the following one might suggest?

> Strulovitch looked long into his guest's fierce, melancholy eyes. His own were undistinguished, a pearly, uncertain grey, the color of the North Sea on a blustery day. Shylock's were deep ponds of pitted umber, like old oil paint that had somehow—not by restoration, more by inadvertent rubbing—regained its sheen. They were dark with that Rembrandtian darkness that holds light. Ironic that when Strulovitch looked into them he felt as though he were in the crypt of a church. We are not the slightest bit alike, he thought, except for in what we feel for our daughters. So what was it Gentiles saw that told them they were both Jews?



Portrait of Ermete Novelli as Shylock

Jacobson's prose is sharp, precise, and peculiar. It's also liberally seasoned with Shakespearean references. There's lots of humor in the book, but much of it is implicitly threatening. Shylock and Strulovitch agree: "no joke is kindly meant." A barrage of circumcision jokes clue us in to the strange course the plot will take.

Strulovitch's conflict with D'Anton, the counterpart to Shakespeare's Antonio, grows first from petty slights and subtle expressions of the latter's genteel, soft-spoken, and always plausibly deniable hatred of Jews. The two first cross paths at a local council meeting, where D'Anton turns the council against Strulovitch's proposal to convert an historic house into a gallery of British Jewish art, named in honor of his parents. "A Morris and Leah Strulovitch gallery of Jewish art, here?" D'Anton asks, and then suggests that the proposed museum is not "culturally apt" for Yorkshire. "Strulovitch, who didn't like the way D'Anton pronounced his parents' names, saw his proposal turn putrid. It hung in the air of the council chamber like a malign presence." D'Anton is a Wildean aesthete who enjoys using refined mockery to make outsiders aware of their status. He cultivates unrequited loves and requited hatreds in equal measure.

The book riffs on a common interpretation of *Merchant*—that before Shylock finally demands Antonio's heart to settle his loan, there is at least a hint that the "pound of flesh" referred to in their contract has to do with circumcision or castration (often conflated by Christians in Shakespeare's time). In this reading, Shylock jocularly threatens Antonio with a sort of forced conversion (circumcision) before he himself is finally sentenced to a deadly serious one. The conflict between Strulovitch and D'Anton, by contrast, remains entirely below-the-belt. Strulovitch demands that either Beatrice's boyfriend Gratan or one of Gratan's friends undergo circumcision. Otherwise Strulovitch will reveal that Gratan's friends helped set him up with Beatrice while she was still underage. Strulovitch knows all along that D'Anton is the only real candidate to be Gratan's proxy, so he leaves his enemy with a hard choice: disgrace and prosecution or the bris.

While Shakepseare's play is about a conflict between Christians and a Jew, Gratan's friends are merely gentiles, not Christians. Shylock takes note of the change between Shakespeare's time and ours and muses, "Christians are so anxious to accommodate the modern.... Before long there will be none of them left, the long interregnum will have come to an end and we'll be back with just pagans and Jews." But this difference also makes the novel much flatter than the play. Jacobson's goyim are not interested in questions of heavenly harmony or in an order of mercy that stands above their financial pursuits. Shylock and Strulovitch can have an impassioned discussion about the meaning of kosher laws, but there's no Lorenzo to invoke the Eucharist in his image of the stars as "patens of bright gold." In any case, such lyricism would be out of place in the world Jacobson presents, which is unremittingly bleak. Belmont, which functions as a haven in the play, is absent from the novel, where everything is smeared with the same tawdriness.

Shylock complains at one point, "These Jews! They don't know whether to cry for me, disown me, or explain me." A fascinating trilemma, but in Shakespeare's hands the story was full of characters who raise such profound questions. Jacobson shines a spotlight on Shylock and his strained relationship with Jewry, but consigns the other players to the outer darkness.

The book's prose is well wrought and its plot enjoyably twisty. Although much of its appeal comes from the way it revisits the questions of *The Merchant of Venice*, even readers unfamiliar with the original play will find Jacobson's Shylock a scintillating character. But they will likely be disappointed to discover that all the other characters are little more than the two-dimensional placeholders of a farce. ■

Alexi Sargeant *is an assistant editor at* First Things.

Thomas Lynch

The Weight of Bodies

The Work of the Dead
A Cultural History of Mortal Remains
Thomas W. Laqueur
Princeton University Press, $39.95, 711 pp.

"Why?" a priest asked me years ago, "Why is it they always call you first?" I was calling to set the time of a funeral for the coming Saturday, which would further beset a churchman's schedule already stuffed with duties and detail.

"Why do they always call you first?" he asked again on the way to the cemetery in my hearse that Saturday morning, when his attention to the graveside rubrics would make him late back to headquarters, where the newborn baby to be laved and claimed, the new bride and groom with their vows and fineries, the weekly penitents and evening Mass attendees would all be waiting. Thus the lamentation of the parish priest: that he is pulled in all directions at once, and to be present to the needs of some makes him missing in action to the needs of others.

"Well, Father," I told him, "it's because we answer the phone." And it was and remains so: the 3 a.m. phone call most likely to be answered is not to the church, the therapist, the bank or insurance company, the accountant or doctor—each of them buffered by business hours and answering machines. The "first call," as we undertakers call it, is reliably answered at the funeral home, where someone who knows what to do is up and waiting, or sleeping with an ear cocked to the call for help when someone dies.

"And why is that?" the good priest continued.

"Because, Father"—and you can try this at home—"we humans can live with a broken heart; and we can live with a shaken faith; but we cannot live with a corpse on the floor."

In the early going we do not need liturgy or sympathy or therapy or pharmacy so much as we need someone to help with the heavy lift: to get the dead off the floor and out the door, whether from the E.R., the O.R., the ICU or hospice ward, kitchen or bedroom, bathroom or backyard.

The work of the dead falls first to the living—the shoulder and shovel work required to get the dead where they need to go because only by the honorable completion of these tasks do the living get where they need to be.

Thomas W. Laqueur's richly annotated, indexed, illustrated, and thorough-going study of Western Europe's management of mortality could be a companion volume to Sandra Gilbert's equally ambitious and nearly as lengthy *Death's Door* (Norton, 2006) or to the art historian Robert Pogue Harrison's *The Dominion of the Dead* (University of Chicago, 2003), a study of humankind's etymological connection to the humus, the dirt, whence we arise and whither we return. Harrison ruminates on the space, occupied by religious impulse, between mortality and the mortal who has ceased to be, between the idea of death and the dead.

And what does Laqueur mean by "the dead"?

Michiel Sweerts, Burying the Dead, *circa 1650*

They are those whose bodies are treated as dead—buried, burned, tossed into the sea, left for birds to eat—but who remain powerful in the imagination of the living under very different assumptions about what or where they really are, whether they are anything, or whether they have efficacy in the world of the living. The dead, in short, are a powerful category of the imagination, and the corpse is their token, then and now. And as such, they—the corpse and whatever the dead are or are not—play an important role in the affairs of this world. It appears to be impossible to live for long with the stark sophism of Diogenes [who ordered his dead body discarded without ritual or regard], whatever one might believe. The work of the dead—dead bodies—is possible only because they remain so deeply and complexly present and because they share death with its other avatars: ancestors, ghosts, memory, history.

Of course, the dead, and the work they do by pressing the living to consider some of the signature questions of our species—"Is that all there is?"; "What comes next?"; "Are we all alone?"; "Could it happen to me?"—and several others of the existential sort, have been increasingly dismissed, distanced, disappeared, estranged from the living, to whom they used to be "so deeply and complexly present."

More and more, our funeral customs treat the corpse like a nuisance to be disposed of with dispatch rather than sacred remains to be borne on its journey "home." In a book, co-authored with the theologian Thomas G. Long (*The Good Funeral*, 2013) this reviewer argues that the fashionably ubiquitous "celebration of life," which has increasingly replaced the requiem and obsequy, is notable for its dismissal of the corpse, in trade for uplifting music, hobby-themed memorial knick-knackery (the golfer, the gardener, the biker, or bowler), Hallmarky theology, and no real work because the corpse is notably nowhere to be found. It is the mortuary equivalent of a baptism without the baby or nuptials without a bride or groom. The modern funeral cannot bear the incarnate, according to Long, because we have "lost our eschatological nerve."

Our disenchantment with the corpse, according to Professor Lacqueur, is coincident with, and correlated to, the increased preference for an industrial efficiency in the burning of bodies, which have been demoted and downsized to "just a shell." For those to whom the body is "just a shell," the directive to "just cremate me," makes a sort of minimalist sense, and in both cases the operative word is "just." What such a mindset seeks riddance of is the burden and the bother of the grave and its gravitas, the heavy lifting required to shift the dead from one place to another en route to whatever heaven our faith used to lay claim to.

The work of the dead, whether they are buried or burned, in cultures where the dead still matter, takes longer than in those that regard the dead as debris. Which may be why the ten-hour burning of the Hindu and Buddhist dead in the East morphed into the blast furnace efficiency of one- or two-hour cremations of the British at Woking Crematorium or the first American cremations in Pennsylvania, in the 1870s.

The epigraph to Chapter 10 ("Disenchantment and Cremation") of this often-astonishing text, is an excerpt from the *Times* of London in 1874, describing the disposition of one Lady Dilke.

> The body of Lady Dilke, who died five weeks ago in London, was burned on the 10th inst. at Dresden. The ceremony was performed in the furnace recently invented for burial purposes by Herr Siemens, and the relatives of the deceased lady permitting strangers to be present, a large number of scientific men attended the experiment. When the company had complied with Herr Siemens' request to offer up a mental prayer, the coffin was placed in the chamber of the furnace; six minutes later the coffin burst; five minutes more and the flesh began to melt away, ten minutes more and the skeleton was laid bare; another ten minutes and the bones began to crumble. Seventy-five minutes after the introduction of the coffin into the furnace all that remained of Lady Dilke and the coffin were six pounds of dust, placed in an urn. The brother-in-law of the deceased was present.

In this, one can see the final stage of the secular science wresting control and custody of the dead from the church: the temple of the Holy Spirit reduced to a lightweight, portable, divisible remnant to be scattered hither and yon as the kin folk, not the clergy, see fit. *The Work of the Dead* is nothing if not a history of how the churchyard gave way to the public cemetery, which in turn is giving way to the crematory, which has, not incidentally, no clerical gatekeeper. If the church wants to reassert its place in the care and disposition of the dead, it must boldly declare that a faith whose claims are based on an empty tomb ought to reacquaint itself with the weight, the gravity, of bodies.

The way to Christianize cremation, which accounts now for nearly half of U.S. dispositions, is to embolden Christians to draw nigh the fire in the way they've always drawn nigh the open ground. This may require a bolder or less beleaguered clergy than we currently have, to make the time to go the distance with the dead—to see, in the flames hissing at the back of the retort, a version of those uraeuses of flame that coiled over the apostles on that first Pentecost, as emblems of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. ■

Thomas Lynch'*s most recent books are* The Sin-Eater—A Breviary *and* The Good Funeral, *co-authored with Thomas G. Long. He has taught in the Department of Mortuary Science at Wayne State University, the Graduate Writing Program at the University of Michigan, and at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.*

Make Patriotism Great Again

Harold Bordwell

George Berkeley (1685–1753), the Anglican bishop of Cloyne in County Cork, Ireland, was one of the most interesting men of his age, perhaps of any age. He was the philosopher who argued—he called it "common sense"—that matter did not exist, and that the objects we perceive are really "collections of ideas." When James Boswell, the biographer of Samuel Johnson, said to his hero that Berkeley's opinion was impossible to refute, Johnson kicked a large stone, saying "I refute it thus." Yet Johnson thought Berkeley "a profound scholar, as well as a man of fine imagination," as Boswell recorded in 1763 in his classic biography of Johnson. And almost two centuries later, Bertrand Russell, while rejecting as "a complete mistake" Berkeley's belief that "only minds and mental events" exist, nevertheless judged him to be "a very attractive writer, with a charming style."

Bishop Berkeley's major book is *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, but he is also the author of a much more accessible and still timely work titled *Maxims Concerning Patriotism*. Though his *Maxims* may be one of his minor works, it stills makes for interesting reading today, for patriotism, then as now, calls up a number of strong emotions and inspires both heroism and mischief. Bishop Berkeley's maxims are correctives to the abuses of patriotism.

All the usual villains are there in his forty-two maxims, plus a few surprises: those who love money and power; those who cheat at cards; those who sullenly love no one; those who say there is no such thing as an honest man; those who rage, rail, and rave. None of these people, in his opinion, can be a patriot. He also cautions the reader to watch out for "gamesters, fops, rakes, bullies, stockjobbers: alas! what patriots!"

But Bishop Berkeley was far from being a naysayer only. He saw the value of patriotism. Patriots, he writes, are those who wish and work for the public good, who never barter public money, who admit that honest men can differ, and who consider themselves part of the whole. While occasionally vague and sententious—"Where the heart is right, there is true patriotism"—he can also be incisive, as in Maxim 41: "A patriot will esteem no man for being of his party."

Samuel Johnson is the author of the best-known remark on the subject of patriotism. According to Boswell's report, it was on April 7, 1775, in a London tavern, that he uttered his famous remark that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Boswell goes on to write that Johnson "did not mean a real and generous love of our country, but that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak for self-interest." (It is to Johnson's credit that he also said to Boswell: "Sir, you have but two topics, yourself and me. I am sick of both.")

Bishop Berkeley's maxims befit a philosopher and a man of faith. Johnson's remark is the more memorable, but Berkeley's

forty-two maxims have the rightness of long reflection. "To be a real patriot," he writes in Maxim 15, "a man must consider his countrymen as God's creatures, and himself accountable for his acting towards them." It is encouraging, I think, when an official of a church hangs his chasuble on a hook for a while and looks at life without benefit of his official position. We also need to hear from that other part of a person in authority, the individual lurking beneath the miter.

The *Maxims* were first published in 1750 and were then said to be written "by a lady"— his wife may have contributed to them. Berkeley was then nearing the end of a very full life, which had included, in 1728, an abortive attempt to establish a college in the Bermudas "for the Christian civilization of America." He also lived for three years in a house near Newport, Rhode Island, now called the Whitehall Museum House and open to the public. His mind never seemed to rest, whether he was investigating Irish social problems or inquiring into the virtues of tar water. Here indeed was a bishop for all seasons, who in Maxim 7 wrote that "it is impossible [that] a Man who is false to his Friends and Neighbours should be true to the Public." Amen to that. ■

Harold Bordwell *is a retired editor living in Evanston, Illinois.*

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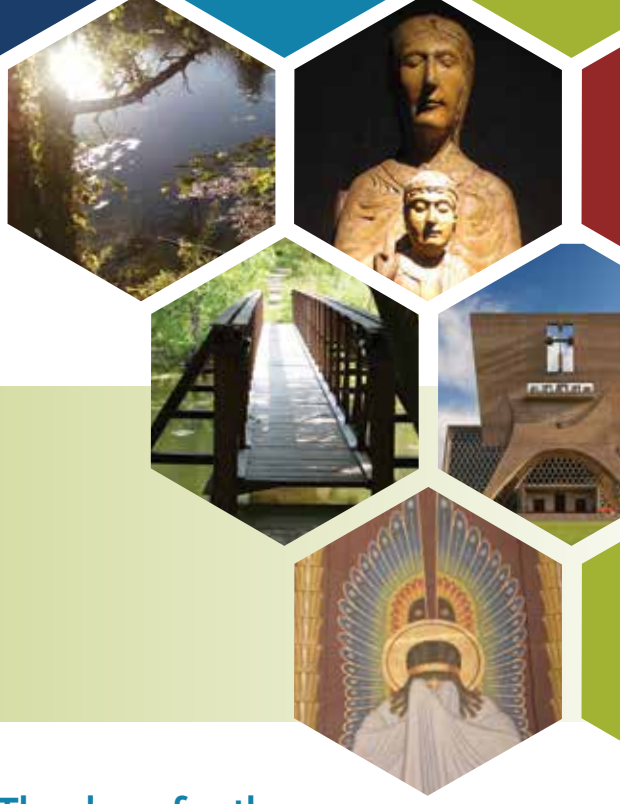

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