A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

DECEMBER 5, 2014

Sr. Mary Verita called us to attention with a question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" When my turn came, a thought came to me, unbidden: I want to be a sister like you.

— Sr. Helen Maher Garvey on sixty years of religious life

Daniel Finn on scarcity

The Editors on Cardinal Burke

Christmas Critics

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A special thanks to Senator George J. Mitchell, recipient of *Commonweal*'s fourth Catholic in the Public Square Award, for his presence and his inspiring remarks.

For a full list of everyone who helped support Commonweal Conversations, as well as videos and photos from the event, visit **www.commonwealconversations.org.**

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LETTERS

Deciding how we die

Gerald Coleman and Margaret McLean, in their article "As We Lie Dying" (September 12), make some excellent points about Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST). Kansas and Missouri health-care providers are introducing a similar program called Transportable Physician Orders for Patient Preferences (TPOPP). As someone who has been involved in providing hospice services for over thirty years, I know only too well how "woefully unprepared many people [are] for life's final transition," as Coleman and McLean write.

Like POLST, TPOPP also has its critics. I agree with the authors: the worries of these critics are unwarranted.

What I found troubling was the theoretical case of "Max" that Coleman and McLean present to illustrate the need for such advance-planning programs. In their scenario, Max suffers heart failure on the golf course. Emergency medical services are called and the EMTs attempt resuscitation. Despite the intervention of Max's wife, who arrives fifteen minutes later to show them an advance directive and plead for them to stop, the EMTs cannot do so without medical orders from a physician. As the authors state: "Max's directive was useless, since EMTs were legally required to do whatever necessary to stabilize Max—even things he would abhor—in the absence of an order from a physician."

This assertion runs counter to clearly established legal judgments made over the course of several decades. In *Schloendorf v. Society of New York Hospital* (1914), Judge Benjamin Cardozo (New York Court of Appeals and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court) wrote: "Every human being of adult years and sound mind has a right to determine what shall be done with his own body; and a surgeon who performs an operation without his patient's consent commits an assault for which he is liable in damages."

Associate Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor agrees. In *Cruzan v. Director Missouri Department of Health* (1990), she said: "A competent person has a constitutionally protected liberty interest in refusing unwarranted medical treatment." With regard to surrogate decision-making, O'Connor states: "Delegating the authority to make medical decisions to a family member or friend is becoming a common method for planning for the future." And finally O'Connor points out that "several states have recognized the practical wisdom of such a procedure [surrogate decision-making] by enacting durable power of attorney statutes that specifically authorize an individual to appoint a surrogate to make medical decisions." O'Connor asserts that her opinion is grounded in the long-standing common rule that "forced medication was a battery, and the long legal tradition protecting the decision to refuse unwanted medical treatment."

A follow-up to the *Cruzan* decision was the Patient Self-Determination Act (1990), which went into effect on December 1, 1991. That law requires health-care providers (physicians were excluded from this requirement) to give information regarding the availability of advance directives.

Advance directives have been legislated in every state. In Kansas, the Natural Death Act (1979) provided for establishing a living will whereby one is able to refuse treatment that would just prolong the dying process. This legislation states that "failure of an attending physician to comply with the decision of a qualified patient pursuant to this act shall constitute unprofessional conduct."

Kansas passed the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Decisions (DPOAHC) law in 1989. It states: "All acts done by an agent pursuant to a durable power of attorney for health-care decisions during any period of disability or incapacity of the principal have the same effect as if the principal were competent and not disabled."

The law makes it clear that no medi-

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Hearing Cardinal Burke

Schadenfreude can be a grave temptation and, if not resisted, a serious sin. There are some, both inside and outside the church, who have taken a certain glee in the fate of Cardinal Raymond Burke. Burke, the former archbishop of St. Louis, first made a name for himself as one of the American hierarchy's most outspoken conservatives and energetic culture warriors. He came to national attention for warning that he would refuse to give Communion to Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry. A canon lawyer, Burke argued that denying Communion to prochoice Catholic public officials was a cut-and-dried issue. He understands *most* things to be cut and dried. That is not, however, how Pope Francis sees things, and the pope has taken steps to sideline the cardinal. Last year Burke was removed from the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, and just last month he was relieved of his duties as head of the church's high court. Instead, Burke has been given the ceremonial title of patron for the Knights of Malta.

Burke has not taken his removal from the centers of influence in Rome quietly. He has been perhaps the most outspoken critic of the recent Synod on the Family, repeatedly charging that the synod's discussion of homosexuality, cohabitation, and the readmission of some divorced and remarried Catholics to Communion has sown dangerous "confusion" among the faithful. The church under Pope Francis, the cardinal warns, "is like a ship without a rudder." Burke insists that what the church has taught about homosexuality and marriage is unchanging and unchangeable. Look it up in the Catechism, he urges.

Popes are free to staff the Vatican with whomever they think best suited to steward the church and implement whatever program of retrenchment, stasis, or reform is needed. Burke's vision for the church calls for a defensive and rejectionist posture toward the modern world. Francis clearly thinks that strategy will result in a further eclipse of the gospel and marginalization of Catholicism. The pope's aim is to steer the church away from the culture wars and toward a joyful engagement with Catholics and non-Catholics alike. "Joyful" is not the first word that comes to mind when listening to Cardinal Burke. Many find Francis's openness a promising departure from the last two pontificates, while a vocal, entrenched minority, identifying themselves as the "orthodox," see papal initiatives like the Synod on the Family as a kind of betrayal. Some, including Burke, speak darkly about the possibility of schism.

We come to praise Cardinal Burke, not to vilify him. As Burke's apologists like to point out, Pope Francis asked the bishops to speak frankly, and that is what Burke has done. Good for him. Much of what the cardinal says is unpersuasive and unappealing, but he is not wrong to insist that doctrinal continuity and coherence are essential to the integrity of the church's witness. Nor is he wrong to remind us that knowing we will be held to high moral standards helps us live good lives.

Yet Burke sets the wrong course for the church by insisting that the questions taken up in the synod were settled centuries ago and need never be revisited. His fear of foisting "confusion" on the faithful is misplaced, especially his claim that no good can come from what the church has traditionally taught are disordered and gravely sinful acts and relationships. That gets the contemporary moral dilemma backwards. Given what the church teaches, what is perplexing for the faithful is the goodness evident in the lives of many divorced and remarried Catholics. Much virtue is also apparent in the loving relationships of same-sex couples, especially in their devotion to their children. Goodness, after all, is properly understood as a grace and a mystery. What is confounding is finding it in places where the church—or at least Cardinal Burke—claims it cannot exist.

Burke will now have more free time to challenge those who think it imperative that the church reconsider the status of the divorced and remarried as well as the nature of homosexuality. And he should. These are not questions that demand a rush to judgment. But if the cardinal wants to be credible, he should refrain from pretending that all church doctrine was cast in stone two millennia ago. The moral questions Catholics face today are as real and as difficult as those faced by the apostles; pat answers did not work then, and will not work now. "We shall find ourselves unable to fix an historical point at which the growth of doctrine ceased, and the rule of faith was once and for all settled," Cardinal Newman wrote. Bishops should deepen, not simplify, our understanding as well as our faith. Change need not be betrayal. Let the cardinal be heard, and then let the debate continue. ■

Jo McGowan

Don't Beatify Us

WHAT PARENTS OF THE DISABLED REALLY NEED

It's a strange time for people with disabilities. Among the general public in most developed countries, there is more knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of disability than ever before. Technological breakthroughs have transformed what were once disabling environments into enabling, supportive ones. New insights into how the human brain and body function have radically changed therapies, educational strategies, and the medical management of disability. The United Nations and the World Health Organization now see disability as a human-rights issue.

At the same time, and in the same developed countries, Richard Dawkins tweets that to knowingly give birth to a child with Down Syndrome is gravely immoral. Parents who get a false negative on an amniocentesis test may sue their doctor for wrongful birth and win. And, as demonstrated in a recent case in the United Kingdom, parents may legally kill a child with disability who is suffering severe and uncontrollable pain.

The case involved Nancy Fitzmaurice, a young British girl with severe developmental disabilities. Judging from all the evidence, she was doted on by her family; in photographs, from her infancy until shortly before her death, we see a happy, well-cared-for child. But complications from an operation at the age of twelve left her with intractable pain, which increased whenever she was fed.

She was admitted to London's Great Ormond Street Hospital, an institution legendary for the quality of its pediatric palliative care program. When doctors there were unable to control Nancy's pain, which her mother, Charlotte, described as "horrific, agonizing, and fearful," they agreed to withhold food; the law did not allow them to withhold water. They told Nancy's parents that it could take as long as four months for her to die—four months of what they expected to be unremitting pain. Charlotte then went to court to win the right to withhold all nourishment from her daughter, including water. She won the case. After two weeks of what must have been even more intense pain—starvation is a horrible way to die—Nancy passed away.

This happened in August, but the story did not break until early November—and then, initially, only in the tabloid press. The spin was remarkably positive, albeit emotionally high-pitched, verging on the hysterical. Charlotte Fitzmaurice was practically beatified in every account I read—her devotion to her child and the sacrifices she had made for twelve long years were always the focus. I don't doubt her devotion, but I did think it was an odd way to couch a story full of moral complexity and ambiguity.

Whatever the circumstances, however compelling the justifications, the fact remains that this is a story about a child killed by her own parents and doctors. It is difficult to imagine a similar story being written about a child who had been perfectly normal before the pain began. The parents say they made their decision because of the pain Nancy was suffering—and I believe it—but every story I've read focused not on the pain of Nancy's last days but on her disability. According to the *Daily Mirror*, "Nancy was born blind with hydrocephalus, meningitis, and septicemia. It meant she could not walk, talk, eat, or drink. Her quality of life was so poor she needed twenty-four-hour hospital care and was fed, watered, and medicated by tube."

This sort of hyperbolic language is typical of the press's descriptions of Nancy's life and it reflects the ignorance that many share about disability. Tube feeding, for example, is usually mystified and made to seem like a complex medical drama that can be managed safely only by trained nurses and doctors. In fact, it's a simple, effective intervention that an average ten-year-old can cope with (I know a bright seven-year-old who handles it with ease) and that can radically transform the life of a person who has difficulty swallowing. Once mastered, it fades into the background, much like any other kitchen miracle (making toast, preparing tea). For some reason, however, the press and the public prefer to keep disability strange and inaccessible; to make parents of disabled kids into saints—noble and long-suffering—and to accept and justify whatever actions those parents choose to take. Who can question a saint?

By that measure, my husband and I are saints too. Our severely disabled daughter is twenty-five now, and we've been caring for her for almost half our lives. But, public opinion or press squawking to the contrary, that doesn't make us the last word on what is in her best interest. Like anyone else, we sometimes lapse into self-interest and sheer exhaustion. That is precisely the point at which we rely on everyone else to remind us why we are here and what this is all about. We need to hear again about all the amazing new ways the world has discovered for our daughter to be a part of it. We need to be reminded that she is fearfully, wonderfully made and that she is OK as she is. And if she's in pain, we need help to accept that we all suffer pain at times and that we get through it. We get through it with the help of a community—and *only* with that help. And perhaps others need help to remember that "community" means them. We are all in this together. What the parents of kids with disabilities really need is support, not beatification. ■

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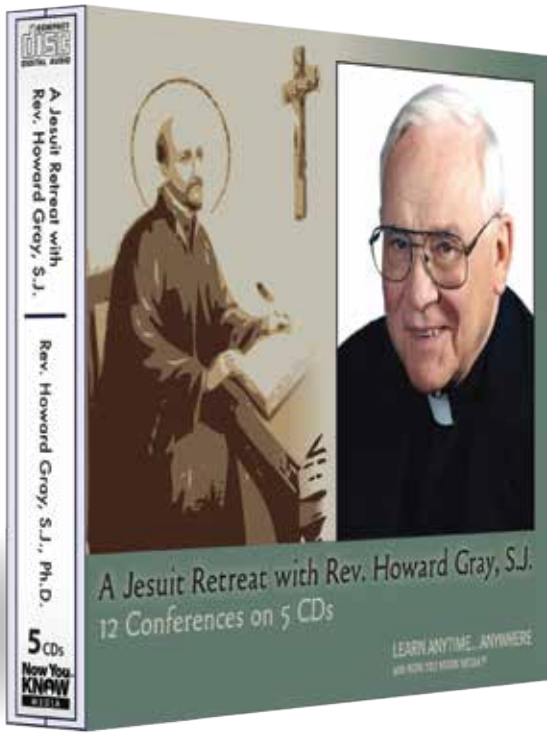

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Daniel K. Finn

Understanding Scarcity

HOW BEING POOR IS LIKE BEING TOO BUSY

Mainstream economics is famous for its assumption that people are rational maximizers, acting in their own interest in predictable ways. And indeed for some purposes this assumption is helpfully predictive—for instance, in estimating how much Americans would cut back on driving if Congress were to add a $1 carbon tax to a gallon of gas. But in other, more complicated situations it presents a misleading and inaccurate model of human behavior. In recent years the subdiscipline of behavioral economics has begun addressing this shortcoming. Small-scale experiments are conducted just about anywhere—in college cafeterias, suburban malls, or farm villages in India and Africa—carefully tracking the actions of participants in situations both hypothetical and real.

Last year's *Scarcity: Why Having So Little Means So Much* (Times Books), co-authored by Harvard economist Sendhil Mullainathan and Princeton psychologist Eldar Shafir, summarizes a large body of findings assessing how the experience of scarcity reduces cognitive effectiveness. In the process the book lays out strong—and surprising—similarities between the poor, who lack income, and the busy, who lack time. Applying psychological insights to economic life, the authors illuminate the difficulties facing both groups.

The first step toward grasping this book's implications is to recognize how powerfully our frame of reference affects our decisions. Experiments demonstrate that while many people will drive an extra half-hour roundtrip to save $40 on the purchase of a $100 DVD player, few will take the same detour to save $40 on a $1,000 computer. If we were perfectly rational, we would recognize that we're saving the same amount of money in either case; but we are affected by the fact that $40 doesn't seem like much when we're making a big purchase. Would you negotiate to save a final $40 while buying a car? Probably not—though a $40 difference in your bill at the grocery store would be a big deal. The frame of reference, in other words, has powerful effects. In the context of scarcity, every last dollar looms large.

Mullainathan and Shafir show how scarcity captures the mind and leads us to "tunnel"—to focus obsessively on conserving what we're short of. In one experiment, participants were invited to play an invented video game, Angry Blueberries. Modeled on the smartphone app Angry Birds, the game rewarded players for using digital blueberries to hit waffles flying overhead. Some players were given six blueberries per round and others three. Those with six scored more points, of course, but those with only three took more time before shooting and were more accurate. Scarcity led them to "tunnel," focusing on saving blueberries in order to compensate for the shortage. Similarly, we all know the experience of becoming more productive as a deadline approaches. Scarcity focuses the mind.

But while tunneling can help us address whatever problem we're focusing on, the downside is that we're less able to attend to all the *other* things that may be going on while we focus on the most pressing. This "tunneling tax" seems to be the best explanation for why a leading cause of death among firefighters is traffic accidents. The authors recount the death of a firefighter who forgot to buckle his seatbelt, causing him to fall out of the fire truck when the door opened during a turn. Firefighters are trained to be careful, but an intense focus on getting to the fire leaves less psychic attention for safety en route. Similarly, poor farmers in India generally don't buy crop insurance for the next season—even when it's 90 percent subsidized—because they are so focused on paying the bills today.

The authors use the notion of "bandwidth" to capture this phenomenon. We've all experienced the frustration of our computer slowing down when it is trying to do lots of things simultaneously. So too with each of us. Technically, bandwidth in humans entails both cognitive capacity (solving problems, retaining information, reasoning logically) and executive control (planning, paying attention, impulse control). Operationally it determines how well (or poorly) we process our tasks. Scarcity, whether of time or money, taxes our bandwidth. You may have a pressing project at work but must attend an unrelated meeting—where you

end up being not much help, because your attention keeps wandering back to the project. You're simply not thinking as well as usual.

This effect has surprising consequences. In one experiment, the authors had subjects engage in a two-stage process. Participants were given a hypothetical problem: your car needs $150 of repairs, and you don't know how long it can go before breaking down. They were asked to discuss how they felt about this and how they'd decide what to do; then they took a test measuring their cognitive capacity. Participants had provided personal information, allowing researchers to divide them into upper and lower income groups. It turned out that the "rich" and the "poor" groups performed equally well on the cognitive test. But when the scenario was altered to a $1,500 repair bill, the poor group did substantially worse, scoring an equivalent of 13–14 IQ points lower than the rich group.

The conclusion is that the stress of scarcity reduced their ability. To understand this finding, it's important to keep in mind that—according to a 2011 study—fully half of all Americans say they could not come up with $2,000 in thirty days even if they needed it. For half the people in this country, in other words, a $1,500 bill for car repair is a calamity. The bandwidth tax generated by such scarcity lowers cognitive capacity. Basically, if you have to think nonstop about money, you can't think about much of anything else—at least, not very well.

Eager to know whether this principle holds true in a very different culture, Mullainathan and Shafir turned to rural India. Many Indian farmers are paid just once a year, at harvest time. Thus they tend to be "rich" for a few months, and then very poor in the months preceding the next harvest. Testing farmers in these "rich" and "poor" periods yielded the same result: poverty reduces cognitive capacity. Thus what might look like an irrational refusal to buy very cheap crop insurance may be attributable to the way capability drops when the mind is captured by scarcity. Similarly, a good number of corporate mistakes in the United States are caused when a very busy manager, pressured by time and facing an issue of secondary concern, makes an errant decision.

An important insight here concerns "slack," or the room to maneuver that gives you a sense of abundance—as when, for instance, we switch from a small suitcase to a larger one because we want to pack something that won't fit. This room to maneuver—this cushion—makes for a fundamental difference between the poor and the relatively affluent. Almost every time I shop for groceries, I pass an individual or a couple standing in the canned-goods aisle intently comparing the coupons they're holding with the prices displayed on the shelf. They're counting pennies. While I don't buy lobster at the grocery, I don't have to be so careful—and can even splurge sometimes. I have slack, and they don't.

Slack highlights the interesting comparison between time and money. Most of us who are very busy—who experience a scarcity of time—nonetheless typically have something we're working on that we can put off. We have a lot of balls in the air, and that can be daunting. But we also know that if we let one hit the floor, the damage likely won't be serious. For the poor, the stakes are much higher and the downside of failure more serious. The utility bill is unpaid for two months and the current bill threatens to cut off the electricity. The car needs repairs, the preschooler needs new shoes, and the rent is past due. There is no slack for the poor, and this makes their scarcity so much more debilitating than ours. It takes its toll on cognitive capacity—which in turn leads to bad decisions, decisions that often exacerbate poverty. Poverty is relentless.

One lesson to take from the work of Mullainathan and Shafir is that we ought to be more sympathetic toward the mistakes made by the poor—whether the poor across town or on the other side of the planet. If we recognized that in their situation we ourselves would be less cognitively capable than we are in our affluent lives—less able to cope with daily challenges—we might realize how big the payoff can be for, say, subsidized daycare for the poor. Relieving time-scarcity improves other decisions by freeing up bandwidth.

The authors point to other policy implications. They argue, for example, that the current sixty-month lifetime limit on welfare support under the government's TANF program is founded on a fundamental misunderstanding of poverty. Given the tunneling effect of scarcity, the poor don't much notice long-term deadlines. Far better would be a rule limiting support to x months every y years. How big x and y are will depend on the generosity of the law, but nearer and more frequent deadlines seem likely to work better.

As for the Indian farmers, providing direct aid may be less important than setting up a financial instrument that would transform once-a-year payments into twelve monthly ones, effectively reducing the bandwidth tax in the months prior to harvest. And since the unpaid portion over the year can be invested to pay a return, each payment could be slightly larger than one-twelfth of the original value of the harvest and still generate enough to pay the cost of the financial services required. Currently the poor lack access to trustworthy financial institutions and won't risk signing on to such a scheme. But international aid organizations could provide such services—or, even better, could promote them locally and guarantee their fiscal credibility until they gain the farmers' confidence.

Mainstream economics has been the target of many criticisms in recent years, some of them well founded. The rise of behavioral economics, as exemplified by Mullainathan and Shafir in their fascinating and provocative book, holds the promise of an economic science that is both more realistic *and* more helpful. ■

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‘I Want to Be a Sister’

A Life in Religious Community

Helen Maher Garvey

It was the spring of 1941, in the quaint village of Hempstead, Long Island. The Great Depression had darkened the lives of many, but the shadow of war had not yet struck, and in the immaculate first-grade classroom of Sr. Mary Verita Riordan, BVM, pictures of the Guardian Angel and the boy Jesus cast a peaceful light on fifty squirming first-graders. Alphabet letters on the cork board, word families on charts, and phonics displays revealed a world of primers and pre-primers. Life in this classroom was all about printing neat letters and sounding out hard words. It was about reciting the Hail Mary, bringing your peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch, and finding a friend during recess. It was about being a Catholic kid from a large family at a time when the center of life was the parish, the family, the neighborhood.

On this spring morning Sr. Mary Verita, who could have been a poster nun for vocation brochures—had vocation brochures been necessary in those days—called us to attention with a question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Anxiety tightened our grips on the balls of clay we held in our grubby hands. This question was larger than phonics drills and addition sums. Around the room, up and down the aisles, as Sr. Mary Verita summoned each student, children murmured “teacher,” “doctor,” “fireman.”

When my turn came, a thought came to me, unbidden: *I want to be a sister like you, Sr. Mary Verita*. But I knew instinctively that it was not proper to voice that lofty thought, and so promptly I lied, “I want to be a secretary or a teacher.” It was the standard roster of options for women of that day, except that I failed to include “nurse.”

So where did that suppressed “I want to be a sister like you, Sr. Mary Verita” originate? Where do the desires that direct your life find their source? And how and when do they assert themselves through all unlikelihood and doubt?

These questions hovered in the background as I grew

PHOTO (FROM THE *WOMEN & SPIRIT* EXHIBITION) COURTESY OF THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF THE HOLY FAMILY

through the middle years of family dinners, Monday afternoon novenas of the Miraculous Medal, tumbling games in the neighborhood, and summer vacations. Grammar school melted into high school with the Dominicans at St. Agnes. Sodality, the junior prom with Joe O’Connor, a marvelous losing Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) basketball team, friends on and off the bus, all played parts in the life of an American child. But in the background the question continued to hum. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” As senior year beckoned, the answering voice inside me grew stronger. “I want to be a sister. I want to be a sister like you.”

And so, after talking to a supportive sister and receiving a recommendation from my pastor, after explaining my choice to friends, aunts, and passersby, after obtaining all the items in the clothing list, and after the wrenching farewell to my family, I boarded a train headed for Chicago. By the time I reached Mt. Carmel on the banks of the Mississippi in Dubuque, Iowa, I knew how homesickness felt. Mt. Carmel was home to about one hundred novices and fifty postulants, in ages ranging from seventeen to thirty-five. For me, as

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PAR RUM PUM PUM PUM

The ox knoweth his owner and
the ass his master's crib.
Isaiah 1:3

The erstwhile holy father in a book
on the infancy of Jesus, Christ the Lord,
debunked the angels we have heard on high
and banished beasts from the Nativity.
those manger scenes and creches notwithstanding,
those figurines of lowly animals,
their steamy exhalations warming the babe,
more myth, so says the pope, than scriptural.
My jack ass, Charles, has begun to mope
around the haggard, inconsolable
as that giant Canaanite and erstwhile saint
who shouldered Christ across the river once,
downsized, alas, to "Mister" Christopher,
by another pope, who some few years ago
consigned him to the hinterlands of faith.
As for Charles, my gelded, piebald ass,
who's borne such burdens as were his to bear,
on Sundays carting Christians off to Mass
much as a forbearer bore Mary hence,
fat, gravid with God's Lamb to Bethlehem,
the way lit by a guiding star's bright light
now dimmed some by the magisterium.
The time I've spent with asses was well spent
and taught me reticence, humility,
and reverence for their meditative lives;
whereas my time with hierarchs has wrought
little but wariness at the ways of men
who claim to have such eminence and grace
and proud dominion over lesser beings
for whom the heart keeps time: par rum pum pum pum.

—Thomas Lynch

for any college freshman, new friendships, experiences, and learning soon overcame the initial strangeness. But my life was not just like that of a college freshman; it was an introduction to a vocation, an introduction to a spirit and to a way of life. Our postulant mistress instructed us in the essence and the culture of religious life. We were mostly eighteen-year-olds, eager and unsophisticated, at times wacky, always looking for whatever news from the world might seep through the big wooden doors of the Motherhouse. Yet we understood, most of us, that we were called to a different life—a life of consecrated celibacy and one of ongoing mystery, revelation, and love.

To be sure, for a young person this vocation included some weird customs and practices. As true devotees, full of mystical longings and youthful ideals, we defended such customs because they surrounded a core reality that we desired, and provided a means toward a life of prayer and service. In spite of separation from family, in spite of wearing heavy serge in summer—even in spite of retiring at 8 p.m. while music glided through our windows from the calliope on the Mississippi River—we believed.

In September 1955, after making vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, I landed, somewhat anxiously, at St. Ferdinand Convent on the northwest side of Chicago. My family, typical New Yorkers, thought I might just as well be in China. But this was my home now. It was here, in the large residence in a typical working-class Chicago parish, that I learned the rudiments of teaching. Mentoring me, the sisters of my grade level sat down in the community room every Sunday morning to help me hammer out lesson plans for the week, using Cathedral Basic Readers and Sadlier's mental arithmetic problems. My class of sixty lively, inquisitive, and lovable kids provided the setting for my early formation as a religious and as a minister.

Over the years the setting changed, but the process of learning from students, parents, and sisters continued, in Antioch, Illinois; Fort Dodge, Iowa; and on Long Island. Along the way, a new force rocked the foundations of this tidy world. Rumblings of change swept the church landscape as news of a special event arrived at my fifth-grade classroom in Antioch one day in 1960. That was the day that our pastor, Fr. Alfred J. Henderson, wrote the words "Ecumenical Council" on the blackboard.

I recall at the time finding the news of a council interesting—a nice diversion from multiplying fractions, a good segue into lunchtime—but not too exciting. How wrong I was! Little did I know how profoundly this event would transform the lives of women religious. The life of sisters of that time expressed and followed a deep meaning, but it also presented clear contradictions. We followed a monastic rule while serving an apostolic enterprise. This dualism expressed itself in many practices that separated us from the world: educating young people while not having access to TV news; abstaining from going out at night; visiting with family once a year, and then only with a companion; wearing habits to distinguish ourselves from ordinary women. We were cut off from the world, but for the most part contentedly immersed in typical routines—getting up at 5 a.m., meditating, going to Mass, meeting the school bus.

In the midst of this serenity, the thunderclap of two documents exploded from the halls of the Vatican: *Perfectae Caritatis* (On the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life) and *Gaudium et Spes* (On the Church in the Modern World). These council documents challenged religious to renew their lives in the light of the Gospel, the signs of the times, and the unique charism of their congregations. The pages of these documents offered an inspiring call. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men

[and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

To many a sister involved in teaching or nursing, this mission might have seemed like a break in tradition, a discontinuity with her practice of religious life. But this "new thing" had roots in the heart of religious life as I had come to know it. It echoed the 1809 rule of the Daughters of Charity, whose spirit requires "no monastery but the houses of the sick...no cloister but the streets of the city." It resonated with the advice of Mary Frances Clarke, founder of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who counseled, "When you see a very poor and neglected one, look upon her with love, and be kind to her, and the poor little one will be grateful and will love you, and when she learns to love God, she will love him for your sake."

This "new thing" embodied the founding spirit of many religious congregations over the centuries. Originally, the founders of apostolic religious congregations focused on those people on the margins of society, and over the years, women religious continued to minister with devotion to the poor. But as canon law restricted the activities of religious, as the United States Catholic population moved into the middle class, and as religious habits—once the ordinary dress of poor women—became fossilized, structures calcified. Vatican II's call for a renewal of religious life was indeed a return to the origins of Gospel freedom and mission, updated to embrace a globalized world and a systemic approach to justice.

The twentieth-century process of renewal began as early as 1943 with Pius XII's encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, encouraging the study of Scripture. Later, in the 1950s, the creation of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW)—later the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)—prepared the way for the *aggiornamento* culminating in the council. Mandating a chapter of renewal for each congregation, the council documents found eager responses from most women religious. Formerly an event characterized by confidentiality and compliance to rules, the chapter of renewal became an assembly of women engaged in a search for meaning. Truth, open debate, and exploration of issues of the moment shattered age-old customs.

Such explorations, I learned, could be disorienting and even painful. Conflicting values sparked controversy. I remember well a debate about ministry choices. Some participants felt that empowering a sister to make decisions about her ministry recognized her maturity and respected her person. Others believed that such a practice would destroy the corporate witness of the congregation. Heated exchanges inflamed and confused the issue. As in most major decisions, there was truth on both sides, but at the time, we were too close to the question to understand that.

In such moments naïveté and hurt walked together with exhilaration, joy, and commitment. The process both thrilled and scared women religious, rocking the foundations of religious life. The effort to rediscover the true spirit of that

Dolores Bundy, OSP, at a 1970s religious vocation conference

life triggered profound changes in the governance of congregations. Through many difficult stages, governance became more open to dialogue; gradually, a *Robert's Rules of Order* method yielded to a process of discernment and consensus. On the local level, leadership by the superior shifted to group decisions made at house meetings. At first those decisions related to ordinary household matters such as schedules and events; later, the agenda came to include matters of social justice, such as participation in protest marches for peace or civil rights.

Everyone made mistakes and learned painful lessons. (After one house meeting I remember a sister, who preferred a decision by a superior to the tediousness of group deliberations, declaring, "We have gotten rid of superiors, and they have come back in new and more terrifying forms!") On the local level there was the excitement of reading and discussing church issues. I can remember leaving school at dismissal time to travel to Union Theological Seminary to hear Hans Küng speak, and another time Yves Congar. We were also struggling with the far more practical issue of the change of dress. Many a sister-in-law or parish friend spent hours in the convent helping us redesign habits into black suits—perhaps the most unfashionable outfits ever to see the light of day.

This change in apparel mirrored far more profound changes for women religious in the late 1960s and early '70s. For those who needed the discipline of order and security of certitude, the new environment seemed chaotic. Yet many others embraced the challenge of a renewed life. Possibly each sister experienced those opposite emotions at different times. At any rate, the changes opened some sisters to a decision to leave religious life. It was truly not the same congregation we had entered years ago, and you had to make a choice.

PHOTO (FROM THE *WOMEN & SPIRIT* EXHIBITION) COURTESY OF THE OBLATE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE

For my part, during this post–Vatican II period I lived in a local house full of dynamic people who welcomed renewal. We read; we attended workshops; we participated in summer-school programs; we invited speakers to the house. I was a junior-high teacher who, in January 1969, became principal of a Catholic school. The school was torn by political conflicts; sisters had engaged students in interracial programs that ignited fears among some parishioners and caused profound tension. While the principles of social justice underlying these programs remain fixed in my heart, in retrospect I see we clearly failed to understand that in an organization, it is not enough to embrace a just cause. There must be respect for all points of view, a faithful dialogue, and a willingness to negotiate. We sisters lacked much of this, and when our congregation withdrew from a parish that both we and the parishioners loved, nobody won.

One night during this turbulent time, as I was leaving a Lenten service in the parish church, I met a parishioner who told me about a program for educators at Columbia University's Teachers College. That simple encounter proved life-changing. I applied, and eventually was awarded a scholarship to the Program for Educational Leadership. I remember with special gratitude Larry Cremin, author of *American Education*, who taught me deep respect for the public-school system and the dedicated teachers who commit their lives to it. In addition to our studies on educational leadership, our group took a stance on the major issue of the era, demonstrating in Washington, D.C., for the end of the Vietnam War.

As I completed my degree at Columbia, I prepared to return to my great love: elementary education. In 1972, I became principal of a school where I spent some of the happiest days of my life. We were a young faculty who loved the kids and one another, and enjoyed the everyday work of running a multiracial school with a large population of children from poor families. There were challenges aplenty: finances were always a concern, and the violence of the surrounding area could intimidate. Meanwhile I also participated in the governance of my congregation, serving on boards and committees. In December 1975, I was elected to the council of my congregation, and later to the presidency.

Leadership is often described as a burden, but on most days I found it a joy. I loved working with our sisters, my companions in leadership, as well as the leaders of other congregations. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) was and is a source of encouragement, strength, and solidarity in the mission of renewal. Whether it was a process for assigning cars, a way to address patrimony (funds owned by sisters), or a sensitive personnel issue, we helped one another.

That solidarity helped us navigate an event I still recall with a shudder of discomfort. One cold gray afternoon in December 1984, I returned to my office after a week of retreat at a Trappistine monastery. I was rested and eager for the pile of mail that had accumulated during my absence. As I flipped through the Christmas cards, I noticed an envelope with a return address from the Vatican's Congregation for Religious (formally, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Apostolic Life).

The letter was no Christmas card! It was the Vatican's response to a full-page advertisement published in the *New York Times* two months earlier under the title "Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion." Paid for by a group called Catholics for a Free Choice, and signed by sixty-seven prominent lay Catholics, two priests, two brothers, and twenty-six nuns, the advertisement asserted in bold letters that a "diversity of opinion regarding abortion exists among committed Catholics."

The letter from the Congregation for Religious—also sent to many other leaders of congregations—began by reminding me of the church's position on abortion. It then requested that I direct a member of our congregation who had signed the advertisement in the *Times* to make a public retraction—or face dismissal from the congregation. Reading this directive, I was so upset that a reliable witness tells me that I flung my briefcase across the living room. Whatever one thought about the wisdom of signing the ad, for Rome to demand such subservience from women religious epitomized authoritarianism and censorship.

Within a week, leaders who had received the same message gathered in the LCWR offices in Silver Spring, Maryland. The dilemma before us was not how to think about what the law should do about abortion or the tense political debate, especially among Catholics, surrounding that issue. I, for one, was not involved at all in the politics of the situation, which were focused on statements made by New York's Cardinal John O'Connor about Geraldine Ferarro, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, who was Catholic and prochoice. Rather, our first concern was with the appropriate exercise of the office to which we had been elected, and with ensuring a fair hearing for members who had signed the ad in question. With dialogue we understood that the prevalent intention of the sisters who signed the ad was not the promotion of abortion, but the desire for pastoral help for those women who saw abortion as their only solution to a desperate situation.

The challenge was in respecting the rights of the members to express their conscience while also defending our congregations against reprisals for not dismissing those sisters.

Before this matter was settled there would be thirty lengthy conference calls, seven meetings with the apostolic delegate, two meetings with the prefect for the Congregation for Religious, and innumerable meetings between individual congregational leaders and signers. The issue dragged on for many, many months. Ultimately, all but two of the women religious who had signed the letter did declare that they had not intended to promote abortion. The other two voluntarily left vowed religious life. None of the signers made a public retraction and none was dismissed from her congregation.

The episode signaled a solidarity among women religious that would only deepen over the years.

In the wake of this drama, I was elected president of LCWR in 1986. Throughout my three years as LCWR president I encountered further tensions between women religious in the United States and Vatican representatives. At issue were aspects of the renewal of religious life that were apparently considered "radical feminism" by Roman officials—though "radical feminism" was never defined. In the years and decades since, this tension has only intensified, culminating in the Vatican's doctrinal assessment of LCWR (2008) and the apostolic visitation of women religious in the United States (2009). Both inquiries challenged the renewal of religious life and the leadership of women religious congregations—and ignited a storm of protests from Catholic laity who respect the numerous movements for justice and peace originated by U.S. sisters. Others may have questioned, "When did the 'good sisters' become the 'damn nuns'?"

Respectfully countering the allegations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, LCWR drew attention to the flawed process and the false information contained in the charges. Individual congregations responded to the survey of the Congregation for Religious with courtesy and resolve—hosting Vatican representatives but deliberately not responding to inappropriate requests for information. Though neither conflict has been decided as of this writing, Pat Farrell, OSF, speaking as president of LCWR in 2012, echoed the thoughts of women religious around the world when she said of the Vatican's actions, "They can crush a few flowers, but they cannot hold back the springtime."

When I left the leadership of my congregation in 1992, I ministered in a diocesan office serving parish councils and the diocesan pastoral council. I discovered a place where women were respected as equal partners. Whenever there was an issue relating to my department, the bishop asked for my advice. Whenever there was an issue related to the entire diocese, he consulted the staff, the presbyteral council, and the diocesan pastoral council—and heeded their direction. These were challenging but rewarding years as the ecclesiological consequences of the Second Vatican Council continued to elicit both hope and resistance in the American Church.

In 2004 LCWR asked me to coordinate an exhibit about women religious, later named *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*. I had no experience with exhibitions, but I accepted nonetheless, and soon our newly formed LCWR History Committee began an exciting and surprising journey, working to illuminate how Catholic sisters have helped shape the history and culture of the United States.

With the support of a design team, generous donors, and archivists around the country, we mounted an exhibition telling the story of the leadership of Catholic sisters in

Sisters of Mary of the Presentation arriving from France in 1902 to offer aid to immigrants in North Dakota

education, health care, social services, and justice advocacy. We undertook this journey in order to share the untold story of Catholic sisters in America, women often shrouded in mystery and obscured by stereotype. We told the story of people like Mother Cabrini, who helped immigrants and started a prison ministry; Marianne Cope, OSF, who spent her life tending the victims of Hansen's Disease in Hawaii; and Mother Mary John Hughes, PBVM, who in 1880 in Aberdeen, South Dakota, sent this advertisement to potential members of her community:

> We offer you no salary; no recompense; no holidays; no pensions, but much hard work; a poor dwelling; few consolations; many disappointments; frequent sickness; a violent or lonely death.

These women and thousands of others exemplify the mission of Catholic sisters. Thanks to the fruitful collaboration between the LCWR History Committee and the project's design team the exhibition had its grand opening in Cincinnati in May 2009. The process of realizing this dream summoned inspiring examples from down the ages: the commitment of the sisters in Galveston who died while protecting orphans in the great hurricane of 1900; the leadership of Sr. Marie Thérèse Farjon, OSU, who wrote to President Thomas Jefferson to protect the property rights of her congregation following the Louisiana Purchase; the peacemaking of the nurses in the Civil War. As we Catholic sisters, script writers, film producers, and others put the exhibit together, we sat at the feet of our ancestors, inspired and guided by their own acts of community.

For me, the making of *Women & Spirit* and all that it entailed was an unmerited treasure, an adventure in community. Such community is needed now more than ever.

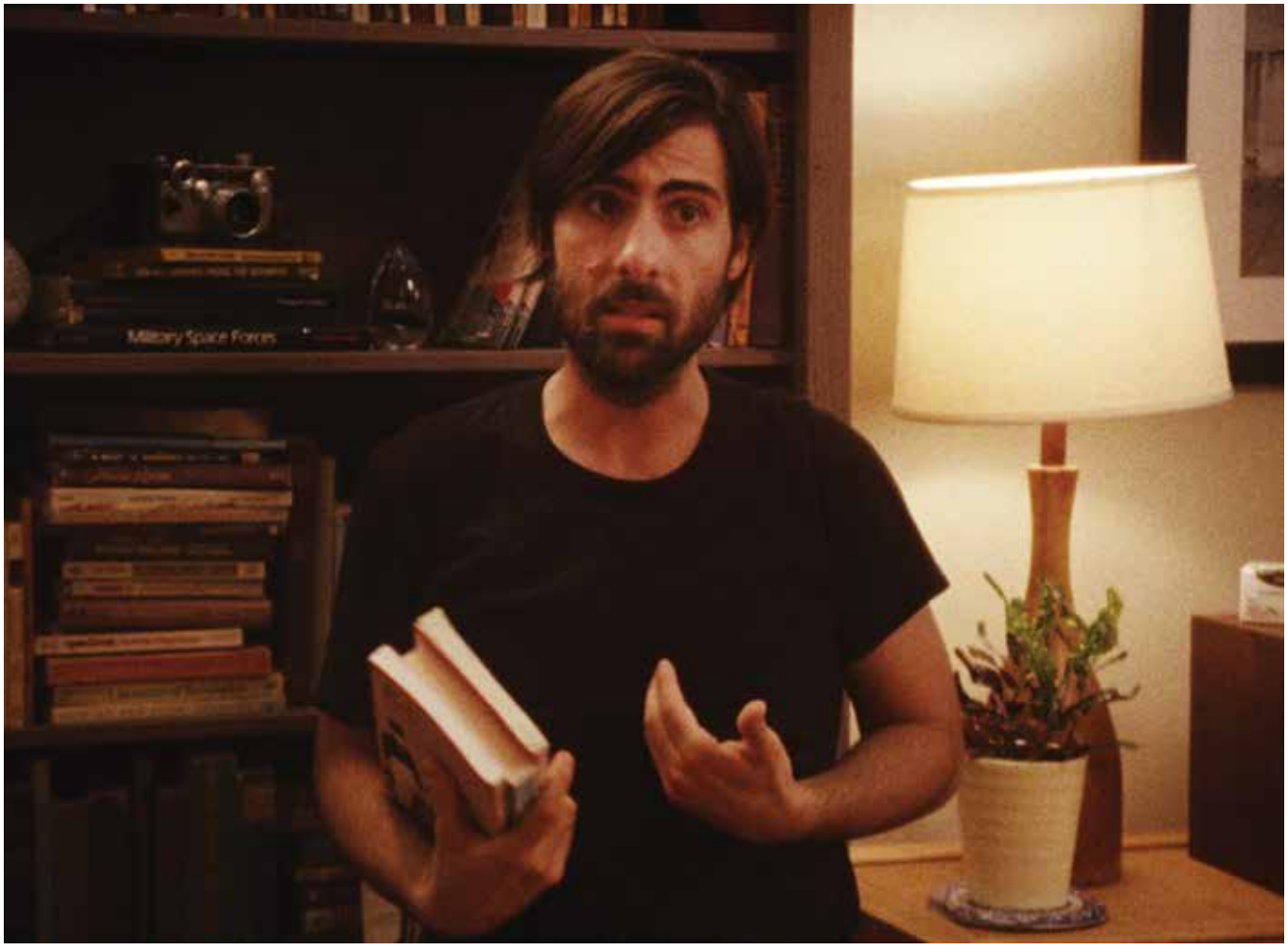
PHOTO (FROM THE *WOMEN & SPIRIT* EXHIBITION) COURTESY OF SISTERS OF MARY OF THE PRESENTATION

In recent years, Catholic sisters have suffered the loss of cherished institutions, a decline in our numbers, and a steady rise in conflicts with the church. The Carmelite sister and theologian Constance Fitzgerald has likened the current situation of women religious to the "dark night of the soul." All of us, she writes, are "encumbered by old assumptions, burdened by memories that limit our horizons, and, therefore, unfree to see God coming to us from the future."

People often ask us about that future. Do you have any novices? Will your congregation survive? There is no simple answer to these questions. History tells us that the 1940–60 era was an anomaly in terms of vocations to religious life. No other time in history witnessed comparable growth in the number of women religious. Another factor is that Catholic families are having fewer children, and therefore may not be eager to encourage a vocation to religious life that might preclude grandchildren. And, of course, the culture does not support a life of celibacy. But the deeper truth may be less easily uncovered. Perhaps God is doing something new with this way of life. Perhaps religious life, as we know it, has to die in order for a new form of commitment to arise. Is the Spirit breathing something transformative, something prophetic into the fabric of religious life, something our imaginations cannot yet fathom? An essential charism in the life of the church, religious life continues to unfold, to renew, to surprise.

For me, this future evokes the memory of that old question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" How did that simple question, stored in the jumble of long-gone memories, illuminate a life? And where does the answer—"I want to be a sister like you"—originate? Where do this childhood desire and this mature desire find their source? I remember, years ago during the controversy over the abortion ad in the *New York Times*, driving back alone to Dubuque in twenty-five-below-zero cold after a tense meeting with signers and congregational leaders at the Chicago Cenacle. I was afraid to stop lest the car fail to restart and strand me. "How did I get here?" I wondered.

"And for all this, nature is never spent," wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins; "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." I understand now that the source of my childhood desire and my mature desire are one—the Holy Spirit. "I want to be a sister, just like you." This "you" is no longer an idolized young sister, but rather the person of Jesus Christ, whose Spirit moving in our church calls me and every woman religious to heed a basic summons: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." ■



JASON SCHWARTZMAN IN *LISTEN UP PHILIP* DISTRIBUTED BY TRIBECA FILM

Rand Richards Cooper

Insufferable

'LISTEN UP PHILIP'

Sometimes rave reviews of dreadful movies seem like a conspiracy to lure you into the theater and force you to endure the same misery the reviewers did. How else to explain the enthusiasm for *Listen Up Philip*?

There is no end of films about failed and/or troubled writers—from comic to horrific, *Sideways* to *The Shining*—and for good reason. The plight of the tormented writer sets art and ambition clashing, in the process generating violent energies that often engulf those around him. The novelist played by Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* attempts to murder his family literally; others do it psychologically and emotionally.

Alex Ross Perry's iteration of this popular trope stars Jason Schwartzman (*Rushmore, The Grand Budapest Hotel*) as Philip Lewis Friedman, a young writer whose second novel is being published, and who exists in a perpetual boil of petulance. The film follows him around New York City as he berates former friends and lovers for their lack of faith in him and verbally abuses his girlfriend, Ashley (Elisabeth Moss, from *Mad Men*), a successful photographer who seems bafflingly resistant to the recognition that Philip is a toxic dork. Eventually, finding the city insufficient for his needs, Philip accepts an invitation from a famed but lonely older writer, Ike Zimmerman (Jonathan Pryce), to spend a creative interlude as a guest at his country retreat. This would be like inviting bubonic plague into your home, except that Ike is almost as poisonous a person as Philip himself, so vain that even in praising the younger writer—"I loved your book"—he can't refrain from pointing out that "of course, I had achieved considerably more than you by now."

Listen Up Philip: How do I dislike thee? Let me count the ways! First, and

simplest, is the problem of Philip himself. To use the technical psychological term, our boy is a selfish, pompous ass. Why would you want to spend two minutes with him, let alone two hours?

This problem is not new; it confronts any writer or filmmaker who sets out to portray a deeply unlikable protagonist. The solution isn't new, either: Make him interesting! One obvious influence on Perry are the films of Noah Baumbach, whose *The Squid and the Whale* (2005) traced a family's miseries to the black hole of narcissism and rage created by the father, a failed writer. Played by Jeff Daniels, the father cultivates in one of his sons the adulation that the literary world has denied him, and it's scary to watch him turn the boy into a snob and a fraud, mindlessly spouting his own opinions. That scariness is key; Baumbach takes what would otherwise be an insufferable bore and redeems him, dramatically anyway, by exploring the consequences of his interactions with others. In *Philip*, however, characters don't interact; rather, they stand morosely in the same space and trade enigmatic remarks like "I want you to contextualize my sadness," then wander off to feel sorry for themselves. The film is perilously static.

It also persistently forecloses its own most promising meanings. One expects, in a film about solipsism, some insight into solipsism—where it comes from, how it works, how it sustains itself. But you won't find it here. Again by way of comparison, Noah Baumbach's *Greenberg* (2010), charting the travails of a failed rock musician who returns to his LA stomping grounds to housesit for his wealthy brother, portrayed a narcissism that mixes arrogance and paralyzing insecurity in equal measure. Immured in his brother's huge house, Greenberg (Ben Stiller) writes crackpot letters of complaint to various companies whose products and services have pricked his majestic annoyance. Is he delusional and paranoid, or just narcissistic and selfish?

Such questions signal that a film has succeeded in piquing our curiosity. Greenberg is obnoxious, but he's accessible in his deep woundedness; and Baumbach, capturing his slow float through alienation, delivers an affecting portrayal of anxiety. Nothing in Perry's film, however, gives us any similar reason to be interested in Philip, much less to care about him. We get no sense of his writing, or of his interest in anyone else's. (At least Jeff Daniels's character was a pompous ass who quoted Dickens.) Philip seems to carry with him almost nothing but his own self-pitying story of having been slighted by all those who ever failed to recognize and praise his talents; obsessed with evening the score, he struts around town, bragging and blasting, blasting and bragging. Perry shrinks both Philip and Ike to caricature while failing to hit any significant targets: we get all the reductions of satire, with none of the rewards.

Even worse than the protagonist is the film itself—underwritten, desultorily plotted, and shot in a jittery handheld style with facial shots so close that the focus blurs; I kept jamming myself back in my seat, trying to get farther away. Minor characters are introduced and then clumsily dropped, like a younger writer Philip is going to profile for a major magazine, who later commits suicide—a death seemingly deployed solely to cue a particularly nasty remark by Philip. Blandly unbelievable situations are passed off as trenchant satire, as when Philip, given a creative-writing job at a tony college, flatly tells his class he has no idea how to help them, and stands before them in sulky silence. Meanwhile, a voiced-over narration (by Eric Bogosian) drones on and on, telling us in cloyingly diagnostic terms exactly what Philip and others are experiencing. The narrator's stilted platitudes, which *New York* magazine critic David Edelstein wittily described as sounding like a cross between an eighteenth-century moralist and Rod Serling describing alien life forms, sound like a parody of bad writing. Presumably the intention was some kind of penetrating irony, but the reduction of characters and their motives to diagrammable banalities seems perfectly of a piece with the film's lack of interest in creating anything remotely resembling a complex human emotion.

One scene—one moment, really—highlights the severity of the problem. Elisabeth Moss, a terrific actor who struggles like a fish in the net of this film's limitations, gets a phone call from Philip, who after bailing out on her is attempting to weasel his way back into her life; hanging up on him, she sits and tries to get hold of herself, and we see a series of protean emotions flash across her face. There is more revealed human need—and more acting—in those thirty seconds than in all the rest of the movie. Perry has undertaken a risky gamble, making a film about jaded people that is itself jaded, and the result is a tedious and misguided farce.

To close the circle on this review, let me spend an aggrieved moment looking at the tricky way a critic can take a film's vices and alchemize them into virtues. Here is the *New York Times*'s Manohla Dargis on *Listen Up Philip*'s annoying camerawork: "Even as it grates, the visual style proves a seamless fit for this story because the embodied camerawork—you intuit the person behind the machine with every tremor—is as much an assertion of authorship as [is] the film's on-and-off narrator."

Embodied camerawork? Assertion of authorship? Manohla, say it ain't so! This kind of shifty move recalls me with dread to fiction-writing classes I have taught, where some too-smart kid would mount a high-flown and impressive aesthetic defense of this or that glaring fault in his story. If I were to alchemize *Listen Up Philip*'s flaws into gold, I might comment that "the overall—and brilliant—effect is of a purposeful casualness, as if the film we're seeing were a rough first draft by one of the writers it satirizes." See how this game is played? Welcome to the Emperor's New Clothes School of film criticism!

The problem with bad ideas is they can be marshaled into an argument and made to sound so convincing. A film, however, is not a set of ideas, but an experience. And *Listen Up Philip* is one of the most dissatisfying experiences I've had in a while. ■

Christmas Critics

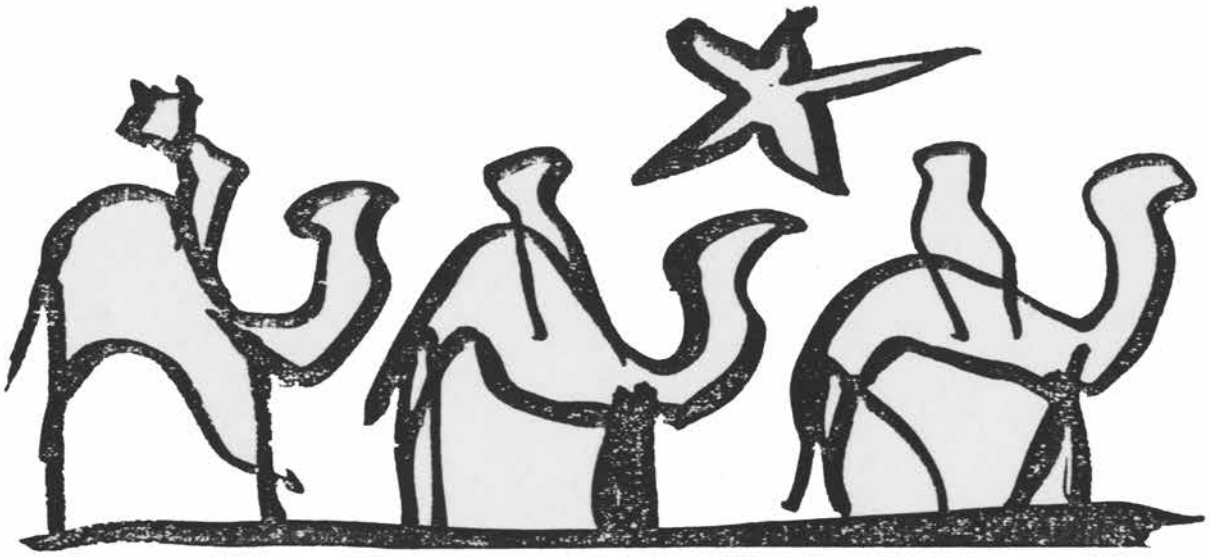
Priscilla McMillan

Current tensions between Russia and the West have struck echoes of the Cold War, reminding us both how distant the era has become and how substantially it continues to shape our world. Three books comprise a miniature study of this vexed and fascinating period in modern history.

Readers seeking to understand Russia and Ukraine will find plenty to enlighten them in Serkhii Plokhii's **The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union** (Basic Books, $32, 520 pp.). Plokhii, professor of history at Harvard, has already written extensively about the long and difficult history of relations between Russia and Ukraine. But Plokhii believes the sources of the current crisis lie nearer at hand, in the dissolution of the USSR. He begins his book with the August 1991 coup attempted by military, Communist Party, and KGB officials seeking to unseat Mikhail Gorbachev. Though the coup failed, subsequent events brought down not only Gorbachev, but the Soviet Union itself. Against the wishes of both Gorbachev and the leader of the Russian Republic, Boris Yeltsin, Ukrainians overwhelmingly voted for independence in a December 1991 referendum. Following many months in which the USSR had endeavored to persist via a looser association of its republics, the departure of its second largest member spelled the end of the Soviet state.

Anyone who has followed the news in the past year knows that Vladimir Putin has called the demise of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century." As Plokhii reminds us, a quarter-century ago no one was more unhappy to see the end of the "evil empire" than President George H. W. Bush and his secretary of state, James Baker. The two had worked out important agreements with Gorbachev and his foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, on nuclear weapons and other issues; they liked and trusted their Soviet counterparts and hoped to conclude more such agreements. In one of those ironies of history, they would have preferred to see the Soviet Union continue to exist indefinitely, and did what they could—in vain—toward that end.

Few Americans know more about the behind-the-scenes realities of the Cold War's endgame than Robert Gates. Most visible as secretary of defense under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, Gates had a prior and less visible career in the Central Intelligence Agency, where he rose from his entry-level job as a Soviet analyst in 1969 to become director in 1991. Published eight years ago, Gates's **From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War** (Simon & Shuster, $18.99, 608 pp.) lays out his insider's view of the agency's role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. He defends himself against charges that his CIA overestimated Soviet military power and the threat it posed. He does concede that agency intelligence overstated the size of the Soviet economy and its ability to carry the burden of colossal military expenditures. The CIA was correspondingly slow to perceive im-



CHARLOT

minent Soviet collapse, though Gates asserts that the agency was planning for such a contingency two years before it happened—considerably more warning than Mikhail Gorbachev got.

From the Shadows dishes out enjoyable insights into public figures of the era. Of Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, Gates notes that "he wore his ego lighter than most," though on the same page he tells an amusing story about trying to shield Brzezinski from prying journalists during a free hour on a trip to Egypt, sensing that the NSA boss "wanted to be alone with his thoughts"—only to have Brzezinski smilingly rebuke him for having "got between him and a TV news crew." As for Carter, Gates describes him as the most intelligent president he served, and credits him with initiating the arms buildup that ultimately brought the Soviets to their knees.

Much of the book is devoted to Gates's time in the Reagan White House and the menagerie of characters who competed for the president's ear. Of these the most reckless was CIA Director William Casey, the no-holds-barred Cold Warrior who promoted the arms-for-hostages deal that nearly brought down the administration. In the end, it was Secretary of State George Shultz—whom Gates somewhat sourly describes as the best bureaucratic infighter he ever saw—who, along with Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, managed to convince a reluctant Reagan that the Iran-Contra affair had been "extra-Constitutional." By persuading Reagan to utter those words publicly, Gates and Weinberger probably saved his presidency.

Moving from the political to the cultural arm of the Cold War, Peter Finn and Petra Couvee's **The Zhivago Affair** (Pantheon, $26.95, 358 pp.) takes us back to the Moscow of 1958, when Boris Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for *Doctor Zhivago*. In the Soviet view, Pasternak had sinned doubly—first by showing a lack of enthusiasm for the revolution in his novel, and second by illegally sending it to Italy for publication. As Finn and Couvee tell the dramatic story, Pasternak had been subjected to crude pressure from the Soviet literary establishment to recall the novel, which he had sent by courier to Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a wealthy publisher and Communist Party member, in Milan. So certain was Pasternak that he might be forced to recall the book that he instructed Feltrinelli through an intermediary not to believe any message from him unless it was written in French. (Pablo Mancuso's *Inside the Zhivago Storm: The Editorial Adventures of Pasternak's Masterpiece*, published last year, provides the most complete account to date of the novel's publication in the West, and includes all the correspondence between Pasternak and the steadfast Feltrinelli.)

Initially thrilled by the Nobel award, Pasternak sent a telegram of acceptance to the Swedish Academy, describing himself as "immensely grateful, touched, proud, astonished, abashed." But the hyenas were already circling. Following angry meetings, one of them attended by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, the author was expelled from the Union of Writers and threatened with expulsion from the country; attacks on him filled newspapers and radio, and nearly all his old friends, including some of the most famous writers in Russia, fearfully turned their backs on him. Demoralized, Pasternak renounced the Nobel Prize. He considered suicide; he wrote to Khrushchev, begging to be spared deportation. He died less than two years later.

The authors of this book, one a former Moscow bureau chief of the *Washington Post* and the other a teacher at St. Petersburg State University, seem to have interviewed every living witness to the Pasternak affair. As a correspondent in Moscow who attended Pasternak's 1960 funeral, I can attest that they have faithfully evoked the frightening atmosphere of those days. Access to long-classified material has helped them tell the story of how the CIA covertly published softbound Russian-language copies of *Doctor Zhivago*, sized to fit into a jacket pocket, and

smuggled them into the USSR. Thanks in no small part to Soviet bungling, the novel became a huge bestseller in the West—and precisely the Cold War artifact the Russians had feared all along.

Priscilla McMillan *is the author of* The Ruin of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Birth of the Modern Arms Race *(Viking) and an associate of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard.*

Michael Walsh

Back in rather less fraught days in the Middle East—1994 to be precise—William Dalrymple journeyed from Athos to Egypt in the footsteps of the sixth-century monk John Moschos. The account of his travels, *From the Holy Mountain*, is one of the most accessible guides to the ancient Christian communities of that region. Dalrymple lives for much of the year at his farm outside Delhi, and his subsequent books have described the history and the culture of the subcontinent. On the dust jacket of **Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839–42** (Vintage, $17.95, 560 pp.), his publicist has quoted a puff by Salman Rushdie: "a scholar of history who can really write." Perhaps more telling, to a historian's command of many sources in a variety of languages Dalrymple adds a journalist's ability to pick out the seemingly incidental detail that brings a story to life. In this instance it's the story of Britain's first invasion of Afghanistan. That happened in 1839, and it wasn't Britain but the (British) East India Company—technically a private enterprise—that ran a good deal of what would eventually become an empire. Like General Motors and the United States, however, what was good for the East India Company was judged to be good for the United Kingdom, and national troops were practically indistinguishable from the company's. It was the beginning of the "Great Game," an undeclared war between Britain and Russia for control of central Asia. The invasion was a complete disaster. After some success, the British army was entirely destroyed as the Afghanis united under the banner of the Prophet. Had this somewhat overlong but nevertheless enthralling book been available to NATO's generals and their political masters before the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, they might well have had second thoughts.

Full disclosure: I know Peter Brown, the author of **Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD** (Princeton, $24.95, 792 pp.). (I also know Dalrymple, albeit only very slightly: we were filmed by the BBC discussing saints in the crypt of England's only pre-Reformation Catholic church, while being wined and dined courtesy of a neighboring hostelry.) For six of my nine undergraduate terms at Oxford, Brown (now a professor at Princeton) was my tutor, and we had subsequent dealings, now long ago. But I make no apology for recommending his latest volume. Books such as *The Cult of the Saints, The Body and Society,* and, of course, *Augustine of Hippo* have fundamentally changed the way we think about Christianity from 400 to 800 AD. His new book will do likewise, but it is particularly important because of its relevance to two debates within the church: one about wealth and how to handle it, and the other about clerical celibacy. The celibacy of the priesthood, Brown argues, was not imposed from on high. Instead it came from below, insisted on by the laity who were handing over their riches for sacred purposes. This is so formidable a tome—530 pages of text, another hundred or so of notes—that many will assume it is for scholars alone. That would be a mistake. It is for all, as one reviewer put it, who want to understand a culture that has had such a lasting impact on our own. And, I would add, it is for all those who throw about the phrase "the Constantinian Church" as a term of abuse. As both Dalrymple and Brown demonstrate, there is a great deal to be learned from history, but you have to read it with care.

Eve Harris's **The Marrying of Chani Kaufmann** (Grove Press, Black Cat, $16, 384 pp.) was a first. I had never before read a novel because of a recommendation in a homily, nor had I read one that explored tensions within the Orthodox Jewish community. The priest suggested the book because it is partly set in the area of London that my parish serves, and also because the priest said it was funny. There were indeed laughs to be had, especially in the earlier pages, but the novel became darker as the story unfolded. Chani is a feisty young lady from a poor family whose much-loved but remote father is a rabbi, her mother much put-upon. She is determined to marry for love. Baruch is a rather wimpish young man with a boorish mother trammeled by concerns of status and a wealthy businessman father who is more sympathetic. Baruch, too, wishes to marry for love. Chani is that love, which is unfortunate because the feeling is not reciprocated. Not that, within the community, Chani's feeling greatly matter. Despite the best efforts of Baruch's mother, the marriage goes ahead, and though it all but ends in disaster on the wedding night, Baruch and Chani face the future with hope. That cannot be said of all the characters populating Harris's book. For one rabbi's wife, the strains of living the life of an Orthodox Jew prove too much: she walks out. The detailed description of that life and its rituals forms the narrative's particular fascination. Harris has taught in Israel, but she drew most of her inspiration from teaching in an all-girls (naturally), ultra-Orthodox Jewish school in London. She now teaches in an all-girls Catholic convent school, also in London. I think I can guess which one and await with trepidation *The Marrying of Brigid Flanagan*.

Michael Walsh *has been a frequent contributor to the London* Tablet, *and has broadcast regularly for the BBC, Al-Jazeera, CNN, and other networks. He has translated, edited, or written some thirty books, and is currently revising* The Oxford Dictionary of Popes.

Molly Redden

I'm betting that **Americanah** (Alfred A. Knopf, $26.95, 477 pp.), the discomfiting and captivating 2013 novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is already in the stack of books you plan to devour in the near future. Adichie's story—about immigration, the shifting properties of race, and the ferocity of young love—has notched accolades from just about every book reviewer in the country; it doesn't need my recommendation. I mention it mostly because reading *Americanah* has revived my love for a 2007 work of fiction titled **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears** (Riverhead Books, $19.29, 228 pp.).

Written by Dinaw Mengestu, *Heaven* is the story of a man who flees Ethiopia as it erupts into bloodshed only to start an aimless second life in a Washington, D.C., neighborhood on the crest of gentrification. *Heaven* doesn't share much DNA with *Americanah*. Its tone is one of delicate regret, not triumph, and the protagonist is more withdrawn than fierce. But *Heaven* confronts from an opposing angle the same question that animates some of *Americanah*'s most transfixing passages: What is it like to walk around in an America that holds no promise for you?

The central character of *Heaven*, Sepha Stephanos, knows the answer. Stephanos belongs to the class of literary figures for whom the American Dream is not just elusive; it might as well have fangs. Seventeen years in America have taught Stephanos that assimilation calls for a string of unacceptable sacrifices—namely, the willingness to flatten his textured memories of Addis Ababa into the immigrant rags-to-riches fairy tale that Americans expect to hear. (He'd probably have to stop having long imaginary conversations with his father, who was murdered in Ethiopia, to boot.) Stephanos maintains a fragile balance between his not-quite-former and not-quite-current lives until he meets Judith, a white woman who moves between two

HOLY MOTHER & CHILD BY STEPHEN B. WHATLEY / CNS

similarly fractured worlds with vastly more confidence. A gorgeous story unfolds in the space between belonging and alienation, bolstered by Mengestu's unmatched empathy and masterful command of dialogue.

As for escapism, I've been relying on a completely different set of books: Matt Fraction's **Hawkeye, Volumes 1 & 2** (Marvel, $10.99, 136 pp., each). Fraction brings to his comics wit, levity, and a patient approach to storytelling that eludes most authors of serialized material. Here he follows his protagonist, the master archer Clint Barton (a.k.a. Hawkeye), as he tangles with international criminal syndicates and scuffles with the track-suited legion of Russian mobsters who rule Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood. Along the way, Barton picks up some hapless but entertaining strays for friends. *Hawkeye* is deeply tender toward its screwup hero, and the misfits that Barton pulls into the book's orbit broaden his canvas in winning ways. That tenderness is pure Fraction, who is one of the best comic-book writers working today.

Fraction's collaborator and illustrator is the brilliant David Aja, who imbues the action in *Hawkeye* with sound, speed, and movement. Perhaps it's been a while since you've laid hands on a comic book. There are no "Pow!" "Ziff!" fistfights in *Hawkeye*. But there are plenty of trick arrows. There is also Aja's magical ability to conjure up conversational noise on the page—crosstalk between friends, peals of laughter at a poker game. Aja's style is noirish, exacting, and perversely beautiful. His vision of New York is that of a metropolis perpetually lit by failing fluorescent lights. The fire escapes and micro-kitchens have never looked dingier, but the backdrop is homey, not brooding.

Zip through the first collected volume of *Hawkeye* so you can bask in volume 2, "Little Hits." "Hits" follows Barton down a familiar path: the superhero who drives away the people closest to him. Fraction tells the story out of sequence, which would feel weary in the hands of a less nimble writer. And he can't resist having some "aha!" fun with

this device—so *that's* why he was on the roof! Yet that narrative technique also allows the reader to see how we compulsively replay the intimate moments that precede personal calamity, as if reliving old humiliations through memory could overwrite history. The final chapter—stick with me here—hails from the perspective of a mutt named Pizza Dog as he roams Barton's apartment complex. "Hits" is worth reading just to witness a homicide, a funeral, and the detonation of an adult friendship through the wordless, screwball, and surprising observations of a dog (provided the dog is scripted by two of the cleverest collaborators in comics). It's the best story told by a canine who likes junk food that you'll read all year.

Molly Redden *is a reporter in the Washington Bureau of* Mother Jones.

Spencer Tracy & Ernest Hemingway with some friends at a bar in Havana, ca. 1955

Paul Lakeland

I think a lot of us turn to reading old favorites around Christmastime, maybe a volume of Dickens or P. G. Wodehouse, though I do know one person who goes a-wassailing with Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* under his arm. But if going back to something isn't your thing, as it's not often mine, you might try the vicarious satisfaction of Patricia Meyer Spacks's delightful book **On Rereading** (Harvard, $25.60, 304 pp.). Her yearlong self-imposed task of rereading dozens of books from her earlier life shows clearly that the book doesn't change, we do, and that's why rereading can be revealing, even at times disturbing. We meet the book again, but it's our younger self who is actually confronted. And it is this encounter between who one was and who one is, mediated by a text that itself doesn't change, that makes the whole thing so fascinating.

Spacks goes through a lifetime's reading and provides chapters on books she should have liked but didn't—and in some cases still doesn't—and on "guilty pleasures," where Jeeves and Wooster show up, though this is surely one of the most innocent of guilty pleasures. Beware, you may be enticed into rereading—and so into meeting your younger self.

Olivia Laing might be a little young to look back on a lifetime of reading, but she is obviously an old soul with a wise head—and an encyclopedic knowledge of botany. This is clear from **To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface** (Canongate, $15.95, 304 pp.), in which she recounts walking the length of England's River Ouse from source to estuary. This was the river in which Virginia Woolf drowned herself in 1941, and she and her husband Leonard are never very far from the reflections on literature, history, and the flora and fauna of Sussex that are the book's main feature. But *To the River* is also graced by an element of autobiographical frankness: Laing is evidently working through the end of a failed romance and regretting the loss of a very good job. I don't know what happened to her love life, but I am pretty sure that she no longer needs the job. This book is a charmer, and she has followed it up with a similar mix of literary figures, travel, and history in **The Trip to Echo Spring: On Writers and Drinking** (Picador, $26, 353 pp.). Here she crisscrosses the United States on the trails of John Cheever, Tennessee Williams, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Carver, and other writers for whom alcohol was sometimes a muse and sometimes a demon. Among the most moving accounts is that of the Iowa Writers' Workshop encounter between an aging Cheever and a much younger Carver, though one doesn't know whether to laugh or weep at the tale of their buying Scotch (half a gallon) at nine o'clock in the morning.

Richard Rodriguez's latest volume of essays, **Darling: A Spiritual Biography** (Viking, $26.95, 256 pp.), takes us in an altogether different direction. Do not look for the linear approach of standard memoir; this is more a loosely connected compilation of essays, all written since 2001. In his luminous prose Rodriguez examines the relationship of the three Abrahamic religions, Las Vegas, God, love, cancer, César Chávez, the im-

pact of AIDS on his friendships, and faith—not necessarily in that order and not always separately from one another. My favorites among the essays are the complex prose-poem on love—which is both too painful and too beautiful to summarize—that gives its name to the title of the collection, and his eulogy for the age of the newspaper, "Final Edition." He admits he still subscribes to three national dailies but as he picks them up he notes their thinness, observing that "the three together equal what I remember" in any one of them in years past.

As a lefty sort of gay Catholic, Rodriguez can be expected to be acerbic about some aspects of the church, and he does not disappoint. Criticizing it for denying him "genuine affective complementarity," he says: "What I will not countenance is that the church denies me the ability to love.... If that is the church's position, the church is in error." It would be good to know if the era of Pope Francis changes anything for him. But the most reassuring sign of his spiritual health does not lie so much in the wisdom and profundity of the best of these essays as in his decision to dedicate the book to the Sisters of Mercy. Obviously his head is screwed on correctly.

Finally, back to another youthful writer, albeit one telling the story of a dead man. The gifted young ecclesiologist Massimo Faggioli took time off from theology last year to pen a wonderful brief biography, **John XXIII: The Medicine of Mercy** (Liturgical Press, $12.95, 154 pp.). Most of those who remember Pope John and all of those who know him only as a name focus naturally enough on the revolution in the church's self-understanding that he ushered in; relatively few know how and perhaps why he reached that point. But those who wish to know more and do not have the time to read the fine but lengthy work of Peter Hebblethwaite (*John XXIII: Pope of the Century*), written over twenty years ago and revised in 2005, now have Faggioli's brief one hundred and fifty pages. Faggioli covers the whole span of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli's long life, giving equal attention to each phase of his development. Though short, his book is not in the least superficial. Faggioli had access to much recently published material from the pope's diaries, and he has succeeded in producing a work that is at once appealing and learned. Not a word is wasted, and you can read the whole thing while the turkey is roasting.

Paul Lakeland *is the Aloysius P. Kelley, SJ, Professor and Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Fairfield University. His latest book is* A Council That Will Never End: Lumen Gentium and the Church Today *(Liturgical Press).*

Joe Fassler & Margot E. Fassler

In his poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Walt Whitman took comfort in what he called "the certainty of others"—his faith that subsequent generations would see what he saw and feel as he did. "I am with you, and know how it is," he wrote. "Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt."

In **10:04** (Faber & Faber, $25, 256 pp.), Ben Lerner's evocative second novel, the unnamed narrator—like Lerner, a poet who has won major prizes—

walks through Whitman's Brooklyn, no longer sure this is so true. Whitman's symbols of permanence and endurance have been hijacked and remade by the cultural shifts and technological ruptures of the twenty-first century: while cataclysmic storms, the result of climate change, threaten to destroy power grids, everyone seems blithely transfixed by the iPhones or iPads in their hands. As the narrator makes his own passage across the East River, hurtling in a metal subway car toward a city beaded with electric light while listening to Rihanna trilling tinnily on someone's headphones, the reader must ask if Whitman's "I am with you" is still a plausible reality. Lerner conjures a compelling vision of what it means to live now, examining our ties to the past and the forces that threaten to sunder us from it.

It's safe to say most chefs don't write about agriculture as well as they prepare food, but Dan Barber, James Beard Award–winning chef of Manhattan's Blue Hill, is an exception. If Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* helped spark the farm-to-table movement by giving America a hard look at where our food comes from, **The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food** (The Penguin Press, $29.95, 496 pp.) shows how that movement might grow up. Barber demonstrates how the favorite meals of today's supposedly progressive foodies—hunks of pastured meat and organic staple crops—aren't environmentally or economically sustainable. Instead, he argues, farmers should "grow nature"—cultivate crops and raise animals that will sustain the land in the long run. If this means chefs must find out how to popularize obscure or unconventional foods, Barber's ready to do it. In four sections—"Soil," "Land," "Sea," "Seed"—he explores how ecological symbiosis brings out the most exquisite flavors from the world's properly cultivated abundance, and holds the key to the future of agriculture.

"You have no idea how shocking it is / to a small child / when something continuous stops," writes Louise Glück in the title poem of her new collection, **Faithful and Virtuous Night** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $23, 80 pp.). The poem's speaker, a man looking back on his boyhood, is only describing how troubled he feels when his aunt's sewing machine suddenly ceases. But it's an emblematic detail: Here, Glück complicates the notion of death as a hard, end-stopped line. Voices speak from beyond the grave, if one learns to listen closely; death descends like a dream, and characters rise again with the sun. Certainly, Glück takes us on the journey to the end of *something*—the collection is filled with allusions to one-way travel, pilgrimages, and questions that haunt us in the night. We may not know where we're going, but we get there. This is an affecting collection from the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *The Wild Iris*.

N. T. Wright's defense of the psalms as the authentic Christian songbook (**The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential**, Harper, $22.99, 213 pp.) advocates weaving these texts into the spiritual fabric of every life. Wright explains that the psalms provide a door for entering into God's world of time, space, and matter. Accordingly: the psalms are multilayered, and through their poetry and music, link the past to the present, calling humans to "live at the intersection of God's space and our space," and to stand in the temple of today as well as in the cosmic temple of the future. They celebrate the glorious physicality of creation, of matter, as Wright calls it. The personal and the pastoral come together in the final sections of the book, as Wright explains how the psalms are agents of change for those who know them and sing them in worship, a reflection of a covenant of faithfulness, God to human, human to God.

Roy M. Anker provides a series of essays on well-known films in **Catching Light: Looking for God in the Movies** (Eerdmans, $27, 412 pp.), and a guide for study and reflection in **Of Pilgrims and Fire: When God Shows Up at the Movies** (Eerdmans, $18, 264 pp.). Well written and carefully conceived, both are useful helpmates to viewing films at home, in the classroom, or on retreats and in pastoral exercises. The films covered in both books are often (but not always) the same, but the treatments are different. In his essays, Anker works with the multiple ways that cinema, itself dependent on light, treats light, especially as it signifies grace and sustains revelation. Anker's appreciation and knowledge of music is central to his essay on Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colors: Blue* (1993), but is also evident in many of the other essays in this collection. In *Of Pilgrims and Fire*, Anker moves from being a critic with a theological bent to being a teacher, carefully leading us through each of the films he discusses. Each entry concludes with post viewing comments, questions, and short synopses of work by other critics.

Joe Fassler *graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and lives in Brooklyn. He has written for the* Boston Review, Electric Literature, *and the* Atlantic, *where he runs the "By Heart" series.* **Margot E. Fassler** *is the Keogh-Hesburgh Professor of Music History and Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame. Her most recent books are* Music in the Medieval West *and its accompanying* Anthology *(Norton).*

CHARLOT

Ingrid Rowland

In 1953, the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities and Senator Joseph McCarthy were already well into their notorious crusade against Communists and alleged Communists in American society, and playwright Arthur Miller knew that he might eventually come to their attention for more than the Pulitzer prize he won for *Death of a Salesman* in 1947 (they would catch up with him in 1956). He had already begun to think about the Salem witch trials of 1692 as a way of addressing what it means for a community, any community in any era, to disintegrate. The Puritans called this lapse into suspicion and betrayal "breaking charity," and in Salem Village charity was certainly shattered when a group of young girls began to behave strangely and accuse their neighbors of bewitching them. Nineteen people would hang and a twentieth would die under torture, pressed to death by boulders, before the madness abated; then it faded as quickly as it had come into being, leaving behind the wreckage of farms and families. The playwright's initial thoughts about Salem took on an added urgency when his friend Elia Kazan, the brilliant Greek-American director, decided to supply names to the committee in order to preserve his own Hollywood career. "Had I been of his generation," Miller would later write, "he would have had to sacrifice me as well."

The resulting play, **The Crucible** (Penguin Classics, $14, 143 pp.), opened to lukewarm reviews, but soon it would be regarded as a classic. The script deliberately alters some historical facts, but it is based on the author's own research with the trial records in Salem and Boston, and it shows how profoundly Miller understood the combination of specific historical pressures and the perennial human motives that made this fractious town split apart. As a perennial favorite for amateur troupes, *The Crucible* has gained a reputation for slightly creaky earnestness, but a production this summer in London's Old Vic theatre held audiences riveted for nearly four hours of harrowing tragedy. The young director, South African Yaël Farber, famously compels actors' bodies to extremes of agility and endurance, but she also knows how to draw out their souls; under her daring guidance the English cast created a powerful ensemble piece that dispelled any idea of creakiness. Miller turned the gruff pronouncements of the Salem farmers into an elegant language, carefully stylized in order to suggest a remote place and time without sounding archaic (though lead actor Richard Armitage would note that some of his lines were a challenge to deliver credibly). Played in the round, the play's concentrated plot took on all the inexorable focus of a Greek tragedy.

I had begun rereading *The Crucible* before I saw the London production in late June, and moved on to some of Miller's other plays, as well as his beautifully written autobiography, **Timebends: A Life** (Grove Press, $18, 656 pp.), before seeing the production again in late July. Despite the hysteria of the proceedings it describes, the play is suffused with a quiet dignity, both in silent reading and in this memorable production. *The Crucible* may have been conceived at a particular, difficult moment in U.S. history, but it has no less urgency now. Fanaticism, panic, terror, and betrayal are as sadly familiar today as they were sixty years ago, but Miller also shows that heroism comes in many guises. *Timebends* was a great help toward understanding what Miller was thinking about at the time, and afterwards; his musings on the reasons for *The Crucible*'s timelessness are right on target. And of course the great love of his life was not the troubled, ambitious Marilyn Monroe (whose studio-imposed name contrasted so starkly with *The Crucible*'s obsession with naming and clearing names), but Inge Morath, the photographer he married in 1962.

Irving Finkel's official title is Assistant Keeper of Antiquities at the British Museum. In this capacity, he watches over, and studies, its vast collection of clay tablets from the Middle East, inscribed with the system of little wedges we call cuneiform script. Invented by the Sumerians, taken up by the Babylonians, continued by the Assyrians, cuneiform records include the code of Hammurabi (which Finkel suggests may be more of a symbolic creation than a functional set of laws), a boasting list of the atrocities committed by the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II in his conquering tour of Syria, and a hitherto unknown version of the story of Noah's Ark. This last is the subject of Finkel's captivating tale of **The Ark Before Noah** (Anchor, $17.95, 432 pp.). Tracing the story back to its Sumerian origins, we learn that the original Ark was probably envisioned as a gigantic coracle—a circular transport boat that plied the rivers of Mesopotamia from remote antiquity until the dawn of the twentieth century, woven of reeds and coated with pitch. Finkel

speculates about which animals might have been included, where Mount Ararat is really located, and teaches his readers enough about cuneiform to whet the appetite for more. He recommends cuneiform as part of everyone's curriculum, and with such a teacher, the prospect sounds irresistible, no matter how nasty a customer Ashurnasirpal seems to have been.

Speaking of Noah's Ark, in a year when the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard garnered widespread attention for the English translation of his massive autobiography, *My Struggle*, it is worth noting that the first of his works to appear in English was **A Time for Everything** (Archipelago, $20, 499 pp.), which begins in a Norwegian forest in the sixteenth century, but then shifts to the days just before the Flood, telling the story of Noah from the point of view of his neighbors. In these days of strange weather and global warming, Knausgaard's imaginary Holy Land sounds all too real.

Another watery novella to come out in recent English translation is Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's haunting **The Professor and the Siren**, newly reissued by NYRB Classics ($12.95, 104 pp.). Lampedusa is best known for *The Leopard*, his novel about Sicily just after Italian unification, with its famous line, "Everything has to change in order to remain the same." Lampedusa's family palace in Palermo was destroyed by Allied bombs in World War II; he knew that some things could also change irrevocably. The same combination of wistfulness and hardheadedness that gives *The Leopard* its charge also emerges in *The Professor and the Siren*, where the professor is almost certainly a version of Lampedusa himself. The siren, on the other hand, is a savage little creature who tears into raw fish with her sharp teeth. ■

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cal provider, including EMTs, can perform a medical procedure without the patient's informed consent. If "Max" himself told the EMTs to stop, they would have to do so. It is also clear that this right can be delegated to an agent to engage in proxy decision-making on behalf of the patient. Failure to comply with an agent's directions on the part of the medical provider can result in both civil and criminal liability.

When I began providing hospice services in south central Kansas in the early 1980s, I regularly encountered EMTs who insisted on providing life-sustaining services for our patients when they were inadvertently called, often by a panicked family member (or a golfing partner!). When given indication by the agent in a duly executed DPOAHC to stop the medical intervention, they insisted they were legally required to continue, even against the patient's wishes or those of a proxy decision-maker. When asked to provide the state statute authorizing them to do this unwanted medical intervention, they were never able to do so. I do not believe there is any state that could enact such a statute and have it pass constitutional muster. The EMTs were relying on locally established policies or following long-standing practices.

Granted, when EMTs are called, the presumption is that they are to do whatever is necessary to save the patient's life. The decision to call EMS generally implies that informed consent is being given for medical interventions. However, once the EMTs are given clear indication to stop, not just by a physician or a physician-issued DNR order, but also by a duly appointed agent, they are legally required to do so. The EMTs in our county in south central Kansas are aware of this. No medical provider is above the Constitution.

What if someone fraudulently presents himself as a duly appointed legal agent? Kansas law (as is likely with other states) makes it clear that the medical provider is not liable for any adverse outcomes for following the directives of such a person: "Any person who falsifies or forges the declaration of another, or willfully conceals or withholds personal knowledge of the revocation of a declaration, with intent to cause a withholding or withdrawal of life-sustaining procedures contrary to the wishes of the declarant, and thereby, because of such an act, directly causes life-sustaining procedures to be withheld or withdrawn and death to be hastened, shall be guilty of a class E felony."

In the theoretical case of Max and his heart failure on the golf course, as Max's golf partner, I could present myself fraudulently to the EMTs as a physician and tell them to stop medical interventions resulting in Max's death, thereby saving me from having to pay off a hefty bet, since Max was beating me so overwhelmingly in our golf match! In such a case, liability for Max's death would rest with me, not the EMTs.

More seriously, Max's advance directives do not work only in the hospital setting. They are especially needed outside of hospital settings: the home, workplace, and yes, even the golf course. This is not to say programs such as POLST and TPOPP and DNRs are not beneficial. My conviction is the more we can do to prepare ourselves for life's final transition, the better.

THOMAS A. WELK, C.PP.S.
Wichita, Kans.
The writer is director of professional education and pastoral care at Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice.

THE AUTHORS REPLY

We understand the POLST form as a necessary complement to the legally tested advance directive, which is best suited to acute or chronic care settings rather than the golf course. In the hospital, Max's desire not to be resuscitated—as indicated in his directive and voiced by his agent—would have been known by those who cared for him.

Advance directives are, as their name suggests, documents made *in advance*, asking people to anticipate their future medical circumstances and decisions; everyone over the age of eighteen should have one. POLST is designed for the seriously ill, those with chronic progressive illness, and the medically frail in the here-and-now, not the future if-and-when.

The recent report from the Institute of

Medicine, *Dying in America*, notes that POLST forms are in force wherever a person may be, from the hospital to the golf course. A valid POLST must be followed by all health-care professionals, including emergency medical services technicians, "who in an emergency, cannot interpret a living will or take orders from a health care agent." The variety of advance directive formats and the inability to determine quickly their validity makes them cumbersome and generally unusable in a nonhospital setting, illustrated by Welk's "hefty bet" scenario.

Max's situation is an emergency, allowing for medical intervention without explicit informed consent. No established relationship exists between Max and the responders. They do not know Max's wishes with regard to resuscitation, a treatment always provided unless a patient opts out through a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order. Here in California, local emergency medical service (EMS) agencies must recognize and accommodate a person's desire to limit prehospital intervention with an authorized prehospital DNR form, an approved DNR medallion, or a valid POLST indicating DNR. Although advance directives may be honored by a single EMS agency, they may not be honored by the agency a few miles away. The only way Max could assure that his wishes would be honored on a golf course in California (and likely elsewhere) is to have a prehospital DNR, a DNR medallion, or a valid POLST specifying his desire to forgo resuscitation.

Welk's reminder that "the more we can do to prepare for life's final transition, the better" elicits a hearty "amen" from us. Max would have been better prepared if he had had a completed, available POLST form in addition to the advance directive tucked into his wife's purse.

GERALD COLEMAN & MARGARET R. McLEAN

CORRECTION

In your ninetieth-anniversary issue (October 24), my brother, Richard Hayes, is misidentified in a group picture of staff members in the article by William Pfaff ("Trying My Hand," page 11). He is named as Carlton Hayes rather than Richard Hayes.

Richard was theatre critic of *Commonweal* from 1952 to 1961. He also taught at New York University and other New York universities in the field of theatre and dance criticism. He died suddenly in 1990 at the age of sixty-one. He was always proud of his connection with your fine and much-needed publication.

Carlton Hayes was a well-known Catholic professor of Spanish history at Columbia for many years (much older than Richard). Carlton also served as Ambassador to Spain during, I believe, World War II. I can understand the error made; it was a number of years ago.

DONALD HAYES
New Rochelle, N.Y.

THE EDITORS REPLY

Nostra culpa, and thank you.

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The Last Leap

Michael E. DeSanctis

Years ago, when my kids were hardly more than babies, we'd play a game together called "Trust Daddy." The rules were simple. Climbing to the fourth or fifth step of our foyer staircase, they'd hurl themselves into the air—flying squirrels in PJs—certain they'd land safely in my arms, where I'd smother them in kisses. Adding to the game's high drama, I'd sometimes place my arms behind my back before they'd jump and dare them even more to fling themselves at me, fearless of the possibility I'd ever fumble in my role as kiddie-catcher and let them meet the hardwood floor beneath us.

It's a miracle kids survive the bumps and bruises of childhood at all, let alone the threat of injury that accompanies the silly variations on roughhousing invented by their dads. Lately, however, I've wondered whether I wasn't inadvertently teaching my children something important about life, faith, and the divine fatherhood of God just by playing with them in a goofy sort of way—the province of fatherhood, I suppose—when their mom wasn't watching. What brings this to mind is the recent death of my own father, a retired banker who spent decades dodging the worst effects of diabetes only to succumb in the end to some sneakier aspects of the disease.

Shortly before his death, my dad called my siblings and me and our mom together for what turned out to be a combination board meeting and domestic ritual, during which he calmly laid out a road map for his final journey toward death. The setting was a tiny intensive-care room at the very hospital where he'd been born eighty-five years earlier—where we'd all been born, in fact—a stone's throw from the church where his funeral would be held just days later. Presiding from his bed as he always had at the head of the family table, my father imparted to us a combination of wisdom and faith as matter-of-factly as possible. He knew from the tumult unfolding in his body that death was just around the corner and wanted his loved ones to embrace that fact without illusion, like the numbers in a bank statement: real, fixed, non-negotiable. Sitting on his lap the whole time was a page from a diocesan newspaper bearing an essay by syndicated author Ron Rolheiser, OMI, titled "Guidelines for the Long Haul," which my father read aloud like the contents of a solemn epistle. "Be grateful," he implored us, quoting Rolheiser. Love freely. Live humbly. And "stay within the family," an injunction not to go it alone in this earthly life but to remain in the fold, the community, the church that knows us by name and upholds our sanctity. "Your mother and I began this family out of love," he concluded with words of his own. "Now it's up to you to remain in that love and preserve the bonds that have sustained us."

His final wishes established, my father spent the last of his days involved in what were essentially two versions of a game of trust—one that placed me and my sibs in the roles of trusting children, confident he was in complete control of the scene and eager to spare us unnecessary pain, and another that cast *him* as a child again, ready to fling every part of himself toward the outstretched arms of the God he believed awaited him just beyond his final breath. In the end, after all, the experience of a Christian death amounts to an act of trust, which is just another name for faith. We trust, among other things, that these incredibly short and often confusing lives of ours really *do* have meaning, that even the greatest of our sins pale in comparison with the vastness of God's love, and that our souls are meant to soar beyond the confines of PJs or hospital gowns or flesh itself. It's nothing more than a round of "Trust Daddy" our Father God invites us to play with him as death approaches, an invitation to leap headlong into the very Mystery that has kept our hearts beating for a lifetime but ultimately calls us beyond the safety of staircases and our fear that graves and gravity really do have the final say on the course of our being. ■

Michael E. DeSanctis *holds dual appointments in the School of Communication and the Arts and the Department of Theology at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania. He is the author of* Building from Belief: Advance, Retreat, and Compromise in the Remaking of Catholic Church Architecture *(Liturgical Press).*

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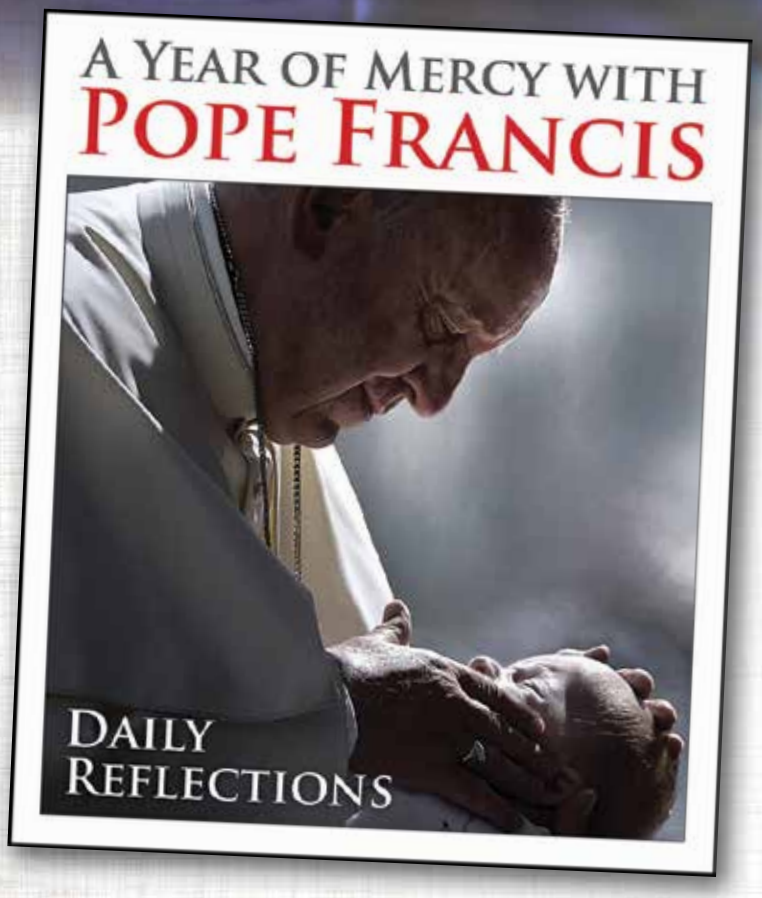

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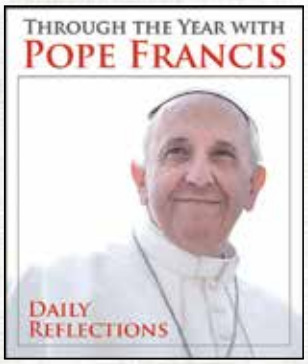
KEVIN COTTER is a missionary with FOCUS (the Fellowship of Catholic University Students), where he serves as the Director of Curriculum and Web. As the creator of PopeAlarm.com, Kevin notified over one hundred thousand people about Pope Francis' election via text and e-mail. He holds an M.A. in Sacred Scripture from the Augustine Institute and lives in Denver, Colorado, with his wife, Lisa, and their young children.



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