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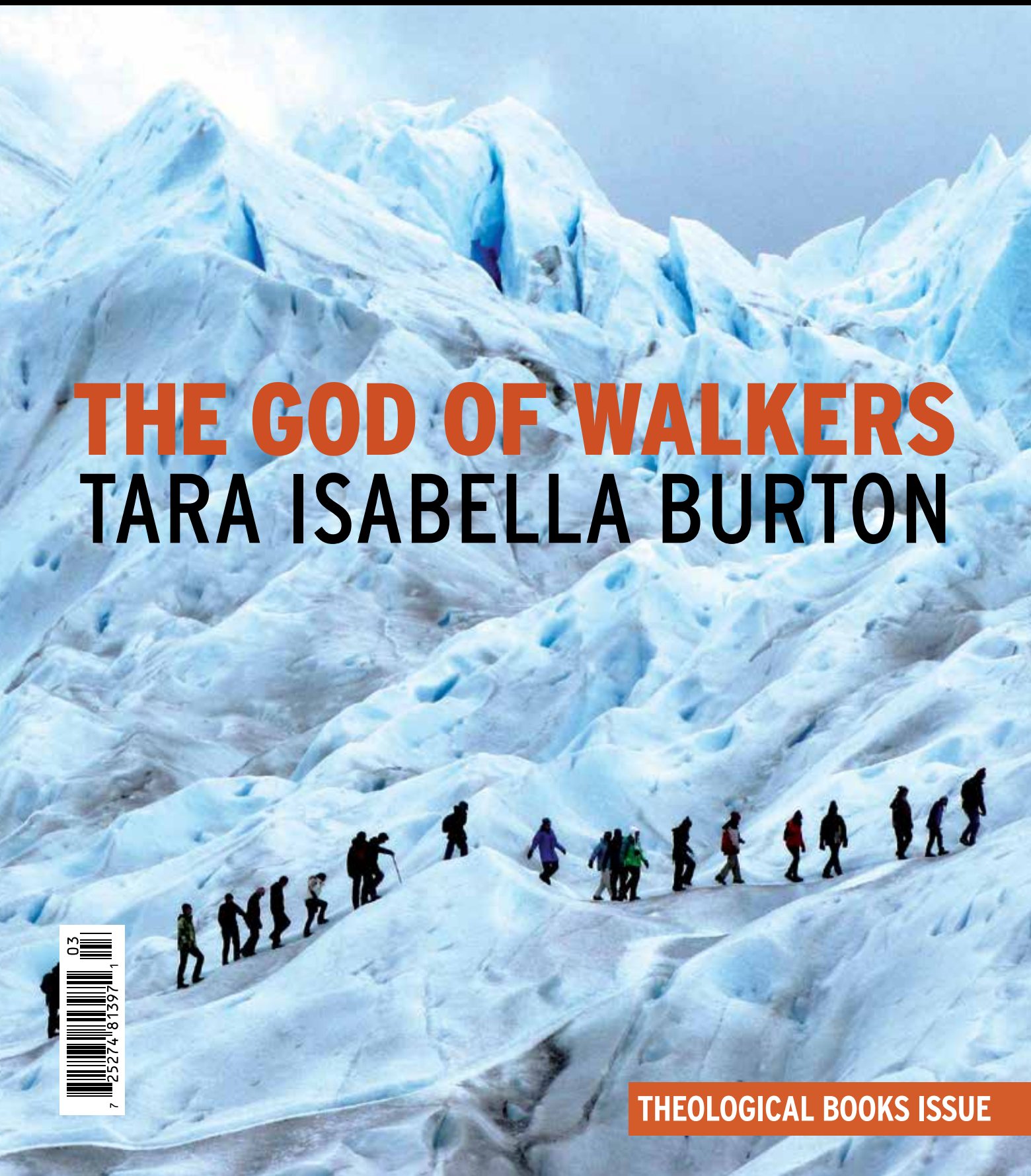

THE GOD OF WALKERS

TARA ISABELLA BURTON

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THEOLOGICAL BOOKS ISSUE

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LETTERS

The limits of loyalty, liqueur to the rescue

FAULTY FOUNDATIONS

Regarding Michael Peppard's review (Christmas Critics, December 4) of Jonathan Haidt's book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*: I don't believe all of Haidt's "moral foundations" are created equal. Fairness and caring are genuinely moral values, it seems to me, because they can be self-correcting. Especially if we think of fairness as justice and justice as respect for all persons, it seems hard to imagine having too much justice (or too much caring). One might misunderstand or misapply such a value, but in that case justice or caring itself would provide the needed corrective. But what about loyalty, authority, and sanctity? Christopher Browning's book, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, offers an admittedly extreme example of those values not being tempered by justice and caring. That is, those values are not self-correcting, individually or in combination. Those "ordinary" men slaughtered thousands of Jews in cold blood because they were ordered to (authority), their comrades were doing it (loyalty or conformity to the group), and the Jews were portrayed as vermin (sanctity). Their scores on Haidt's instrument would have been, presumably, very high for those three values. I don't doubt that many people act on those values in more benign contexts too, but that doesn't make them properly moral values. In more ordinary contexts, of course, loyalty, authority, and sanctity might contribute to human flourishing—but not in the absence of the genuinely moral foundation of respect for all persons.

A somewhat different critique is made by the eminent moral psychologists Anne Colby and William Damon in the first chapter of their new book, *The Power of Ideals: The Real Story of Moral Choice*. Both on ethical and methodological grounds, these authors subject "the new science" of Haidt and others to a scathing review.

I do find myself explaining certain behaviors by reference to Haidt's moral foundations theory, especially when, from my admittedly liberal perspective, they otherwise seem inexplicable (or unjustified) to me, as in the example above. Haidt does, it seems, get something merely descriptive right. But moral values are prescriptive, and it seems unwise to blur that difference.

DR. ROGER BERGMAN
Director & Associate Professor
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Omaha, Nebr.

HOLY SPIRITS

In "Mission Accomplished" (January 8, 2016), Lloyd Sederer gives us a touching and challenging picture of the declining Provencal abbey, Saint-Michel de Frigolet. The challenge involves both monks and mission. Consider the example of the Norbertine monks from Tuscany. One thing going for them is their historic liqueur de Frigolet, made from honey and herbs according to an old and no doubt secret recipe.

I can vouch for the liqueur: we found it in Aix on a Road Scholar program last spring. Frigolet has the color of absinthe, the weight of drambuie, the fragrance of benedictine, and the taste of strawberries. It's unlike any cordial I have ever tasted in my eighty-one years of after-dinner inhalation. So here's a challenge for the good monks of Frigolet: make the product, find a distributor and a winsome spokesman (how about Pope Francis?), and thrive. Avoir confiance, L'Abbaye de St. Michel, et bon appetit.

RICHARD H. RUPP
Boone, N.C.

Toxic Neglect

For more than a year, the people of Flint, Michigan, were exposed to drinking water contaminated with lead that had leached from the city's water pipes. The health risks, especially to children, are potentially catastrophic. Mainly poor and mainly African-American, Flint residents have every right to be outraged. How a city of a hundred thousand could be forced to live under such conditions in twenty-first-century America defies explanation. Or does it? In fact, this was less an unfortunate accident than a foreseeable consequence of our dysfunctional politics. A fixation on slashing government spending on services and infrastructure without regard to the effect on the basic well-being of citizens helped bring this crisis about.

The Flint disaster originated with a cost-cutting directive from state officials to disconnect the city from the Detroit municipal water system. Until construction of a new regional system was completed, Flint's water would come from the Flint River. Residents of Flint and their local elected officials had minimal say in this decision or those that followed. Like several other cash-strapped Michigan cities—most of them also majority-African-American and decimated by the collapse of manufacturing—Flint was under the oversight of a state-appointed emergency manager. In 2011, Republican Governor Rick Snyder broadened the powers of those managers to cancel or negotiate city contracts; sell, lease, or privatize local assets; and change municipal budgets without local legislative approval. Michigan voters considered this overreach and reversed Snyder's order by popular referendum in 2012, but six weeks later the Republican-controlled legislature enacted similar (and referendum-proof) rules. It was an emergency manager who approved the decision in April 2014 to draw water from the polluted Flint River. A year later, another emergency manager vetoed a seven-to-one vote by Flint's city council urging immediate return to the Detroit system.

At the time, it was obvious to the citizens of Flint, as well as to anyone else who cared to investigate, that something was seriously wrong with the city's water supply. And the situation would only get worse. By September 2015, a local pediatrician would report a significant spike in lead levels in the blood of children, data the state's health officials ignored. Meanwhile, the poisonous water kept flowing, with one sample tested for lead at nearly 14,000 parts per billion—twice the level legally defined as toxic waste. Complaints from Flint residents were met by the state with a cynical mix of dismissiveness and attempts to shift responsibility to city officials.

Flint officials aren't blameless. They initially backed the switch from the Detroit system to the Flint River. They also failed to use an anti-corrosive agent to limit the deterioration of the city's aging pipes. The regional office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was similarly asleep at the switch, responding with little urgency to growing evidence of contamination; the EPA's regional administrator resigned in January.

But the buck ultimately stops with the state. Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, it is the responsibility of state government to ensure that standards are met. It is hard to imagine that Michigan officials would have allowed such a crisis to go unaddressed for so long in a richer, whiter suburb. Does their inaction amount to environmental racism? Governor Snyder denies this, and it is unlikely that he or other state officials will be held accountable. The burden of establishing discriminatory intent is notoriously high, and in the forty-five-year existence of the EPA, its civil-rights division has yet to make a single such finding.

Governor Snyder devoted most of his recent state-of-the-state address to apologizing for the crisis; now he must tackle the harder job of getting lawmakers to spend whatever is needed to repair or replace the water system. Meanwhile, President Obama has declared a federal state of emergency in Flint, and the EPA has expanded federal oversight. But residents are still largely making do with bottled water.

Several questions need to be answered. Were Flint and its residents illegally deprived of representation while under the supervision of state-appointed managers? And if so, to what extent did race play a role? State stewardship of financially troubled cities need not exclude local officials in decision-making. Even in bankrupt cities, local residents are still likely to know more about local needs than outsiders. And when disaster is the result, it's the local residents, not the outsiders, who suffer. ■

Paul Baumann

The Road to Rome by Way of Macedonia

Referring to the Vatican, English Catholic apologist Rev. Ronald Knox reputedly offered this caution: "Better not look too closely into the engine room." In other words, best to behold the majestic barque of Peter from some distance, rather than exposing oneself to how the leaky vessel actually operates, for that way lies disillusionment and the road to apostasy. Sound advice, it would seem, and I've followed it religiously for nearly sixty-five years, visiting Italy twice but somehow managing to avoid Rome. (Like every literary wannabe, I'm a fool for Venice.) That came to an end in December, thanks to an invitation to a conference on the persecution of Christians held at the Pontifical Urban University just outside the Vatican. I hope to write more on that important topic in the future. But first an initial report on some encounters during my travels.

At the very start, a certain missionary zeal marked my pilgrimage, though I personally could not lay claim to any such enthusiasm. Standing in line at JFK to board our Alitalia flight, I couldn't help but notice an especially clean-cut young man in the line next to me. He was very carefully put together, wearing a sweater and neatly knotted tie under a smart-looking gray sports coat. His slacks were dark and his shoes polished; his jaw square and his brow unfurrowed. Pinned to his sports coat was a plastic badge, the sort a doctor might wear. I was intrigued, but could not make out the writing. The mystery was soon solved. Unprompted, the young man began a conversation with an older gentleman, an Italian, in front of him in line. "This is my first trip abroad," the young man said in a clear voice. "I'm eighteen years old. I just graduated from high school. I'm going to Macedonia." Needless to say, this caught my attention, since Macedonia had been in the news for having closed its borders to refugees fleeing Syria and Iraq. Was the kid serious, or merely oblivious? It seemed unlikely that he had relatives in Macedonia.

"Excuse me sir," the young man continued, the Italian gentleman now somewhat perplexed. "Have you heard of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints? You know, the Mormons? I'm from Utah, and I'm going to Macedonia as a missionary. Would you like to know more about my church?"

The old man, as well as others within earshot, smiled with benevolent amusement, but none took up the young man on his offer. I assume that when boarding a jet for a four-thousand-mile trip over a vast ocean, one's most atavistic religious instincts take hold. I certainly reach for my rosary. Do young Mormons immediately start honing their missionary pitch? Still, I was fascinated and even impressed with the teenager's forthrightness. He seemed guileless, as eager to get down to business as St. Paul was to convert the uncircumcised. At eighteen I was barely able to tie my own shoes.

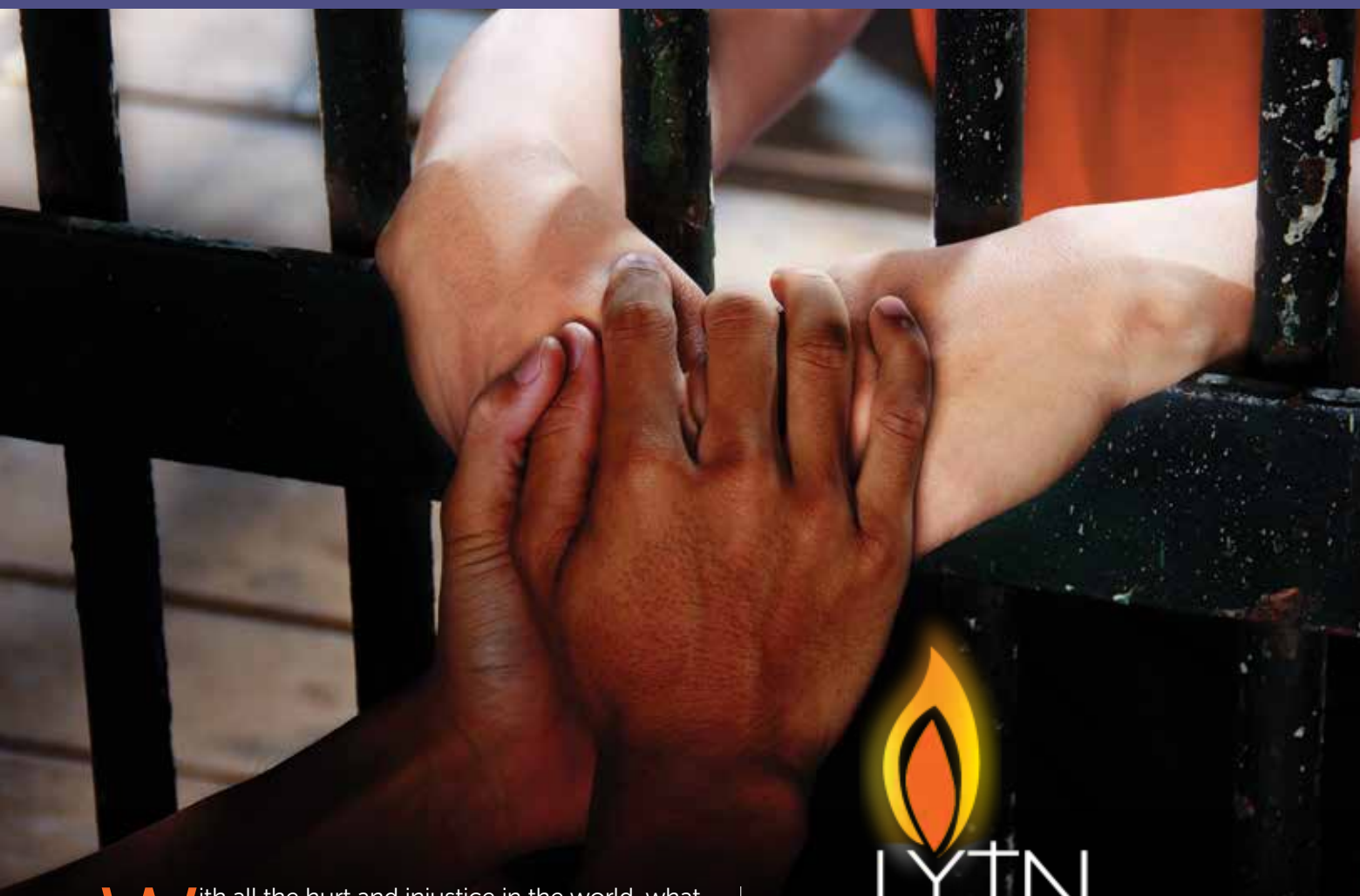
I was also humbled. About the last thing I imagine myself doing is offering a brief for the glories of the Roman Catholic Church to a perfect stranger. Although I come from a line of salesmen, that sort of "elevator pitch" is just not in my DNA. When it comes to proselytizing (ask my children), my method is to hand out copies of Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*, which of course was written when he was an Anglican. The responses have been muted.

It was a crowded plane, and I didn't see that bright-eyed young man again. In Rome, conference participants were put up at a very posh hotel (talk of persecution could come later!) just down the hill and around the corner from the North American College. The American bishops send their most promising seminarians to the college, which historically has been a fast escalator to the episcopacy. The hotel, the college, and the Pontifical Urban University sit at the top of a very steep hill that looks down to the fabled Tiber and the rest of Rome. Frankly, by the end of my six days in the Eternal City, I wanted a cable car, or a Mormon missionary, to help haul me up and down that mountain. As it happens, each day dozens of seminarians, dressed in regulation black shirts, pants, jackets, and Roman collars, walked energetically past the hotel. It was a bit like seeing the future of the U.S. church parading before you. I envied their stamina; perhaps it bodes well for the pastoral challenges they will face in dealing with what has become a remarkably anticlerical laity. Near the end of my stay, I stopped three seminarians to ask about a tour of the Vatican conducted by students at the college. Perhaps they were new to the college, but they were uncertain regarding details of the tour. Their directions did not pan out, but I probably misunderstood them.

In any event, I eventually made it to St. Peter's on my own. It's very big, seemingly designed to overwhelm. Engine rooms can be like that. In my brief conversation with the seminarians, I did ask where they were from. Texas, Ohio, and New York were the answers. I imagine Utah is underrepresented. The three future priests I spoke with were courteous enough, but I wouldn't call them gregarious. They seemed to lack the spiritual athleticism of the young Mormon, and I had a hard time picturing them heading off to Macedonian. To be honest, I'm not sure that's a bad thing. They'll have plenty of work to do once they get back home. ■

Paul Baumann *is the editor of* Commonweal.

The summer that changed my life



With all the hurt and injustice in the world, what difference could I make? Even as a teen, that was my question. Then I found friends who shared my faith...my passion.

We had some amazing days that summer. We did some deep theology with professors, then went out and did exciting hands-on ministry. It gave me new direction for college...for life.

Today I serve God as a prison chaplain. My sense of call really goes back to that youth and theology summer program. It put my whole life in a new light.

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Cathleen Kaveny

First Things First

DON'T BLAME POPE FRANCIS FOR THE CHURCH'S DIVISIONS

Some conservative Catholics have blamed Pope Francis for sowing division among the members of the Body of Christ. But the charge is more properly lodged against one of the heroes of conservative Catholicism: the late Richard John Neuhaus.

It was Neuhaus, after all, who advanced the view that conservative Roman Catholics have more in common with orthodox Jews and Evangelical Protestants than they do with progressive members of their own religious communities. In fact, that view was an operational premise of *First Things* magazine under his leadership. This approach is based on a thoroughly distorted view of religious realities and commitments.

Does honoring Jesus as the Son of God count as a commonality? Like their conservative counterparts, progressive Roman Catholics acknowledge the divinity of Jesus Christ, and find the interpretive key to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament. Orthodox Jews do not—indeed, must not—treat Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Book of Isaiah. It would be blasphemous for them to do so.

Does living in the grace imparted by the sacraments count as a commonality? Both progressive and conservative Roman Catholics believe that God's grace is channeled through the seven sacraments. Many Evangelical Protestants do not have the same view of grace or the sacraments; they often view the Eucharist as a memorial of a past event, not a way of being present with Christ here and now.

Moreover, the Catholic sacramental imagination nurtures what is often called a Catholic sensibility—which includes a more positive view of the relationship between created nature, human culture, and redemption than many Evangelical Protestants would allow. Both progressive and conservative Catholics tend to be sensitive to the goodness of all of God's creation—despite the grave wound of sin. It is this foundational anthropological belief that accounts for the relative hopefulness of the Catholic tradition. Catholics believe that in our common political life we can achieve real good, and not merely restrain evil-doing. And while they may differ about what counts as "good" in some details, both conservative and progressive Catholics operate out of that more positive view of political life.

Neuhaus's defenders might say that he was concerned with commonalities among conservative Christians and Jews on hot-button issues: the ordination of women, contraception, same-sex marriage, and abortion. But how deep are those commonalities? Many Evangelical Protestants, for example, believe that women should never exercise authority over men, especially but not exclusively in an ecclesiastical context. But the Catholic Church officially and vehemently denies that its exclusion of women from the priesthood is based on their inferiority to men—and points to the centuries old tradition of powerful, independent women religious as evidence. Orthodox Jews may oppose abortion—but not because they believe the fetus is an equally protectable human being. Under Jewish law, full protection for a new human person is triggered at birth. But in Catholic circles debates about abortion are usually about when a human life comes into being biologically.

Ultimately, Neuhaus's focus was on nurturing these commonalities in the American political context—he was building a political movement. For a variety of partially overlapping reasons, conservative Roman Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, and orthodox Jews were inclined to vote Republican in political elections. Along with George Weigel and Robert George, Neuhaus coached Republican politicians in Catholic-speak to win national elections.

But they also urged bishops to present Catholic teaching in a way that distorted key concepts and divided the Body of Christ. The most egregious of their strategies was to present the thought of Pope John Paul II in stark, dualistic terms—which led them to celebrate Republican Catholics as warriors for the culture of life and to castigate Catholics who voted for the Democrats as minions of the culture of death. But a culture isn't reducible to a political party. And building a culture of life required far more than opposition to abortion—it also required care for the vulnerable. No American political party is the party of saints.

Some might say that his functionalist conception of religious community was motivated by a good end: his passionate desire to end abortion and restore traditional sexual morality. But here's the irony of Neuhaus's project: in treating theological belief and commitment as mere instruments of political will, Neuhaus's view of religion resonated more with Feuerbach, Marx, and Leo Strauss than with the church fathers. In separating his own church of the politically pure from the hoi polloi of the body of Christ, his ecclesiology better reflects Protestant sectarianism than Roman Catholicism. And in decrying powerful "elites" even as he went about creating his own elite force for the Republican Party, his political tactics bore more than a passing resemblance to Saul Alinsky's.

Pope Francis isn't trying to drive conservative Catholics out of the church. But he has decisively put a stop to their efforts to eject everyone else. ■

Madeleine Davies

A Loss of Nerve

WHY ISN'T THE WEST DOING MORE TO HELP SYRIAN REFUGEES?

The discovery of a Syrian passport near the body of one of the suicide bombers at the Stade de France in Paris was the "tell" that many of those opposed to admitting refugees had sought. In a speech titled "Attack on Europe," the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, whose government has already overseen the construction of a razor-wire fence to secure its border, claimed that terrorists were "mingling in the mass of people leaving their homes in the hope of a better life." Those who opened their nations' doors to refugees "did not do everything for the defence of European people."

Orbán is not alone in suggesting that European countries cannot accept more refugees without undermining their national security. Several member states are resisting the EU resettlement plan announced in September, which would use a quota system to resettle a total of 120,000 refugees throughout Europe. While media reports of the refugee crisis have tended to contrast the hostility of certain Eastern European countries with the apparent openness of their Western and Northern neighbors, there are signs that the Paris attacks have caused a more widespread loss of nerve. A YouGov poll conducted shortly after the attacks found that 73 percent of the British public believed that there should be no increase in the number of Syrian refugees admitted into the United Kingdom—up from 51 percent in September. In the same poll, 24 percent said that the United Kingdom should admit no refugees at all. In Germany, where a million migrants are expected to arrive this year, Angela Merkel has seen her once-enviable popularity ratings plummet. Footage of Germans clapping as refugees arrived at Munich's main train station became a source of national pride in September, embodying her slogan "Wir shaffen das" ("We can do this"). Today there are calls within Merkel's own party to replace *Willkommenskultur*—the "culture of welcome"—with a "culture of reason." Reports of North Africans and Arabs robbing and assaulting women in Cologne on New Year's Eve have only deepened the suspicion and anxiety.

Syrian refugees at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan

CNS PHOTO / MUHAMMAD HAMED, REUTERS

Amid these signs of panic, it is notable that France has remained steadfast in its commitment to resettlement. "The people of Syria and Iraq have fled because they are martyred by the same people who attack us today," French President François Hollande told French mayors, before confirming that his government remained committed to welcoming thirty thousand refugees over the next two years. Serbia, one of the poorest nations in Europe, and not yet a member of the EU, has also kept its borders open. The flight from violence in the Balkans in the 1990s is still recent history, cited by volunteers greeting the weary caravan of refugees now passing through their country.

Intergovernmental organizations have given short shrift to those who cite the Paris attacks as justification for refusing to cooperate with the EU resettlement plan. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), António Guterres, has said that it is "absolute nonsense" to blame refugees for terrorism. As the "first victims" of the terror in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, they should be met not with fences but with reception centers and legal routes of entry. Europeans have also been warned that in turning against refugees they will play into ISIS's strategy—one predicated on sowing fear, suspicion, and division and thereby precipitating a conflict between the Muslim world and the West.

The fact is that, like the London bombings of 2005, the Paris attacks were the work of home-grown extremists, young men who had grown up in France and Belgium. It is estimated that more than 750 people have traveled from the UK to Syria and Iraq to volunteer with Islamic militants, and that around half of them have returned. The danger, then, is already here, within our own borders.

No one is arguing that the mass migration to Europe does not bring with it security risks. The discovery that the alleged architect of the attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, had apparently been able to travel freely between Syria and

Europe has led to recriminations about the ease with which Europe's lack of internal border controls can be exploited. A German police chief has reported more than sixty attempts by extremist Islamic groups to recruit from refugee shelters, according to a Reuters report. Even among refugees, there is a sense of resignation that there may be some extremists among them. "There are of course ticking bombs coming in with the refugees," Nizar Basal, a Syrian refugee living in Germany, told the news agency. "But the question is, what will happen to us? What will people think about us? They will think we are the enemy."

Even before the Paris attacks, Europeans were frightened by refugees. There had had been rumors over the summer that among the huddled masses crossing the continent were some jihadis. The image of a tiny toddler in blue shorts washed up on a Turkish beach softened hearts, but scenes of chaos in countries struggling to deal with the unprecedented number of refugees still caused alarm. Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, the UNHCR has been issuing strong warnings that countries like Lebanon—where Syrian refugees now make up a quarter of the population—were buckling under the burden, but few in the West paid attention. It was images of bodies squashed aboard dinghies in the Mediterranean, of refugees shivering around campfires in the Balkans and lying desperate on train tracks in Hungary that finally forced European governments to recognise the magnitude of the crisis. "Unfortunately, only when the poor enter the halls of the rich do the rich notice that the poor exist," observed Guterres.

The contrast between the response in Europe—reactive, ill-tempered, and chaotic—and that of the countries bordering Syria ought to be a cause of shame. People in countries like Lebanon and Jordan have been nothing short of heroic in recent years, and they deserve both more credit and more support. Their generosity has come at huge cost. In September, Lebanon's Prime Minister told the UN that the refugee crisis was costing his country a third of its GDP. Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 refugee convention but, despite memories of a thirty-year occupation by Syria and the fact that it already hosts four hundred thousand Palestinian refugees, it opened its borders in 2011. Lebanese communities, including those in the poorest parts of the country, responded quickly, offering the refugees shelter and access to services and support. This was at considerable political risk, given the fragile demographic balance between Christians, Sunnis, Shia, and Druze in Lebanon, and the possibility of upsetting a hard-won political settlement between these groups.

Jordan, the fourth-driest country on earth, is hosting six hundred thousand Syrian refugees. Before my visit to the country this year, I read its plan for dealing with the crisis: two hundred pages of detailed projections, followed by a request to the international community for $2,991,736,900—the amount it needs to support the new arrivals and to cope with their impact on the communities hosting them. In contrast to the panic and recriminations that have characterized the response in Europe, this document, with its color-coded charts and neat tables, radiated confidence and optimism.

Jordan's plan is part of a wider regional response to the Syrian crisis, described by a UN report as a "paradigm shift." The Syria Regional Response Plan, involving Syria's neighbors (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey) as well as Egypt, combines proposals for meeting the immediate needs of refugees with long-term plans to support the communities hosting them. It is an ambitious piece of work. By the end of this year, it aims to have almost a million children enrolled in formal education, with 1,121 educational facilities constructed, renovated, or rehabilitated. The plan would also give 217,000 refugees access to employment opportunities, building on efforts that are already working, such as an organic-olive-oil facility set up in Turkey to strengthen the local economy in an area heavily affected by the crisis.

The thoughtfulness of this comprehensive response makes the failure to fund it adequately all the more tragic and short-sighted. As of December 31, the program had only 58 percent of the funding it needs. The UN has warned that, unless funding increases, 1.7 million people in the region will face winter without heating fuel, insulation, or extra blankets. Programs for a hundred thousand out-of-school children and teenagers in Turkey will have to be canceled or postponed. In Jordan, refugees have already lost access to free health care because of insufficient funding, while in Lebanon 70 percent of refugees are living in extreme poverty. In the Bekaa Valley they are burning plastic bags to keep warm, and already there are reports of people dying during winter storms.

Perhaps most worrying is the fact that 2 million Syrian children are not going to school. This number includes both refugees and children still living at home whose lives have been interrupted by the civil war. The No Lost Generation campaign, launched two years ago by a coalition of NGOs, is starting to ring hollow, and the UN reports an increase in what it calls "negative survival strategies," including child labor, begging, and "survival sex." This is not an inevitable outcome, and it is not classrooms or teachers that are missing. It is estimated that, with proper funding, half of these children could be in school within two years.

As it stands, Syrians are living in misery and, increasingly, despair. Images of skeletal bodies dragging themselves through the streets of Madaya—a besieged Syrian town described as an "open air prison" by Doctors Without Borders—are a reminder of the horrors refugees are fleeing. Desperation motivates the risky exodus to Europe. When refugees are met in Europe with hostility, they become, as the UN has put it, secondary victims of ISIS's terrorism. The attack in Paris took place just days after the death of René Girard, one of France's most celebrated intellectuals. Girard famously argued that human beings need to identify a scapegoat—"chosen only because it is vulnerable

and close at hand"—in order to dispel anger and violence, and that in doing so they sow the seeds of future conflict. We now have a chance to catch ourselves in the act of such scapegoating, and to stop before it's too late. There is still time for Europe and the United States to give refugees the welcome they deserve and, no less importantly, to provide material support to the millions who will never get beyond the Middle East. Rather than fearing them as potential jihadis, we need to understand them as the principal victims of the sectarian violence now wracking Syria and Iraq—and to treat them as such. ■

Madeleine Davies *is deputy news editor at the* Church Times.

Gary Gutting

Intellectual Maintenance

THE CASE FOR PHILOSOPHY REQUIREMENTS

When I was an undergraduate at St. Louis University, the philosophy requirement was five courses. Our professors told us stories from a not-too-distant heroic past when the requirement was as much as twelve or eighteen courses. Today most Catholic colleges require two philosophy courses. A few require three, and an increasing number require one or none. The University of Notre Dame, where I teach, is now considering a proposal from its curriculum committee to move from its current two-course requirement to a requirement for one philosophy course plus another in either philosophy or a new category called "Catholicism and the disciplines" (i.e., disciplines other than philosophy).

I think the move to less philosophy is a serious mistake for Catholic higher education. Philosophy is utterly essential for an educated Catholic, and, pedagogically, anything less than two courses is inadequate.

The pedagogical point is straightforward. Philosophy is a highly technical discipline, more like the sciences than the humanities in its complex concepts and rigorous reasoning, but one that also requires knowledge about its historical development. Further, unlike other college requirements, philosophy is hardly ever taught in high schools. We would never expect students who had no previous chemistry or history to achieve a college-level grasp of those disciplines in one course. The same is true of philosophy. There might well be, in principle, a good case for a three- or four-course requirement in philosophy. But given current trends to reduce requirements, two courses is an acceptable minimum. That will allow for a general introduction to the history and major topics of the discipline, followed by a deeper exploration of a particular topic such as ethics, philosophy of religion, or philosophy of science.

But do Catholic college students really need to study philosophy? Even the best secular schools do not require it, making philosophy at most one way of satisfying general requirements in critical thinking or ethics. There was, of course, a time when Catholic colleges taught a version of philosophy intimately tied to Catholic thought: Scholasticism, particularly the Thomism that had for centuries been the de facto and (at least since Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*) official philosophy of the church. The concepts and arguments of Thomism were so integrated into official interpretations of church teachings that it seemed impossible to understand them at a college level without a solid grounding in that philosophy.

Over the next fifty years, however, almost all Catholic philosophy departments moved away from Thomism, with the most successful (like Notre Dame) making their name in the American mainstream, which is dominated by "analytic philosophy," an approach at best neutral toward religion and often opposed to it (about two-thirds of analytic philosophers identify as atheists). It might then seem that today any philosophy requirement at Catholic colleges is a mistake, since philosophy is now a thoroughly secular discipline that even secular schools don't see as essential in their core curriculum.

But this line of thought misreads both the role of philosophy in the Catholic tradition and the resources that current philosophy offers thinking Catholics. Unlike some other Christian traditions, Catholicism has from the beginning insisted on formulating and defending its doctrines in terms of the best available philosophical thinking, secular or otherwise. Here, of course, the paradigmatic examples are Augustine, who adapted the pagan philosophy of the neo-Platonists, and Thomas Aquinas, who employed the newly available philosophy of Aristotle (and also made considerable use of the work of medieval Jewish and Islamic Aristotelians). Eventually, the church found Aquinas's synthesis of Christian thought and Aristotelianism the best available philosophical thinking for its purposes.

In the modern age, the church found none of the newly dominant philosophies congenial and maintained its allegiance to Thomism, although this mode of thought was becoming gradually less significant in the greater philosophical world and eventually survived almost entirely because of its connection to the church. For the first time in its history, the church gave up its tradition of thinking in light of the best available philosophy.

The claim, of course, was that the dominant modern philosophies were so opposed to church doctrines that no synthesis of the sort Augustine and Aquinas had carried out was possible. That claim becomes questionable when we think of the strong religious roots and affinities of classical modern philosophers such as Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel. In retrospect, the church's blanket condemnation of them seems more tied to their quarrels with Scholasticism than to their essential incompatibility with Catholicism.

Their philosophies were better candidates for Catholic appropriation than the naturalism of Aristotle was before Aquinas got hold of it.

The church's aversion to modern philosophy may have made sense in the mid-twentieth century, when the most influential philosophical movements were logical positivism, which saw science as the only source of truth, and atheistic existentialism. But at least since the 1960s, the analytic philosophy that succeeded positivism has not been limited by scientistic presuppositions; on the contrary, it has provided essential tools for defending and developing the entire range of philosophical positions, including traditional views in metaphysics and ethics. So, for example, some of the strongest proponents of traditional Christian philosophical positions, including Ernan McMullin, Alvin Plantinga, Alasdair MacIntyre, Peter van Inwagen, and Robert Audi (to list only Notre Dame philosophers!) have been elected presidents of the American Philosophical Association, one of the highest distinctions in the profession. Similarly, among the most prominent recent European philosophers are Paul Ricoeur (Protestant), Emmanuel Levinas (Jewish), and Jean-Luc Marian (Catholic), and even nonbelievers have been writing sympathetic books about St. Augustine and St. Paul.

By abandoning the tradition of incorporating the best of contemporary philosophy into its thinking, the church greatly weakened its intellectual strength and influence. But there can no longer be any doubt that the philosophy of the past fifty years offers rich resources for a renewal of the church's traditional alliance with philosophy. Philosophy today it is no longer a matter of a single method or vision, but of a variety of approaches that offer our undergraduates knowledge essential for the rigorous philosophical thinking Catholicism has always demanded.

It's important to keep in mind that the point of a philosophy requirement is not to teach students Catholic doctrine. That important task falls to the theology department. The role of philosophy is to introduce students to the problems, concepts, and arguments that philosophers, from Plato to the present, have developed to think rigorously about the fundamental questions of human life. This thinking employs (as St. Thomas would put it) reason "unaided" by any "divine revelation." This is in contrast to theology and other forms of "Catholic thinking," which assume and elaborate revealed truths. Philosophy does not assume Catholic doctrines but rather provides the philosophical resources needed for informed and rigorous thinking about the universal human questions to which these doctrines respond.

These resources are particularly essential today for coming to terms with secular challenges to religion, which are almost without exception philosophical. This is particularly true of the strongest challenges, which are from philosophical interpretations of scientific results. My own current undergraduate course, for example, focuses on the use of evolution to question the existence of a divine creator, psychological experiments said to undermine free will, and the claims of neuroscientists to reduce consciousness to the brain. My goal is to provide students with the philosophical distinctions and argumentative strategies—via readings from philosophical classics and contemporary discussions—that they need to intelligently assess challenges to faith.

There are, of course, many other disciplines that study important intellectual aspects of Catholicism. The history of the Reformation, a literary analysis of Dante, the psychology of religious experience, or a survey of medieval and Renaissance art can make important contributions to a Catholic education. But for reflection on the philosophical claims woven into the fabric of Catholic doctrines—views about God, freedom, the mind, and ethical values—students need training in the discipline devoted to studying them. Such training is essential for graduates of a Catholic university to deal with challenges to the faith that inspired their education.

But, a critic may urge, how can philosophy do this, given the widely acknowledged fact that the discipline provides no decisive answers to any of the fundamental questions it has tried to answer for over 2500 years? Philosophy—at least in the secular form it now takes—offers no body of knowledge capable of grounding the Catholic faith. In fact, it's more likely to undermine an immature faith.

The answer is that philosophy does offer a body of knowledge. It consists of the careful conceptual distinctions, the metaphysical pictures, and the rigorous lines of argument needed for a responsible intellectual engagement with fundamental human questions. Such engagement seldom if ever provides the foundation of our basic convictions, whether religious or otherwise. But for an educated person these convictions require what I have called "intellectual maintenance." This involves the hard thinking that enables us to understand our convictions, draw out their consequences, and see how they relate to one another. It also requires an ability to understand and evaluate opposing views, and to assess the challenges they pose to our convictions.

An immature faith may—and sometimes should—falter in the face of such scrutiny. But the roots of our convictions go much deeper than any intellectual inquiry, and gaining or losing a faith is never merely a matter of having found a new argument. Still, any faith, any set of fundamental convictions, requires intellectual maintenance. One of the great strengths of the Catholic tradition has been its deployment of philosophy as an essential instrument for understanding, developing, and defending its teachings. A Catholic college owes its students at least two courses that will ground them in this discipline integral to the religion that inspires its educational mission. ■

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'The God of Walkers'

Bruce Chatwin & the Theology of Travel

Tara Isabella Burton

In one of many meditations on wandering in Bruce Chatwin's 1986 novel-cum-travelogue *The Songlines*, the travel writer challenges the notion that real asceticism can be found only in monastic life. "The founders of monastic rule," he argues, "were forever devising techniques for quelling wanderlust in their novices. 'A monk out of his cell,' said St. Anthony, 'is like a fish out of water.' Yet Christ and the Apostles *walked* their journeys through the hills of Palestine." For Chatwin, traveling is not merely a spiritual act—it is the self's purest expression.

Of course, Chatwin (1940–1989)—one of the twentieth century's most noted fabulists—hardly seems a likely transmitter of spiritual truth. Chatwin's travel writing, which includes such classics as *In Patagonia* (1977), includes less reportage than fiction: to "do a Bruce," according to Chatwin's early employer Sotheby's, was to spin a fanciful yarn. Chatwin himself gleefully recalled "counting up the lies" in one of his travelogues. Chatwin's approach to travel writing was to consider the worlds he traveled—the Australian Outback, the wilds of South America—as raw material: a canvas on which to paint the story of himself.

Yet, scattered through the bagatelles and tall tales that characterize Chatwin's work one finds moments of profound, even aching spirituality. He casts travel not merely as an act of self-invention, but as an act of sacrifice, of "sloughing-off" the world and discovering the self anew. For most of his career, however, Chatwin could hardly be considered a Christian writer. After a brief and perfunctory flirtation with Catholicism (his wife Elizabeth was Catholic), Chatwin seems to have settled into a comfortable agnosticism. In his notebooks, he describes his life as "a search for the miraculous [in which] at the first faint flavor of the uncanny, I turn rational and scientific." Still, Chatwin's obsession with travel—with the twinned ideas of wanderlust and rootlessness—becomes a kind of theology of its own. Organized religion was useful only for those lethargic or unadventurous enough to remain in one place: "My God is the God of Walkers. If you walk hard enough, you probably don't need any other god."

Bruce Chatwin in 1982. Photograph by Lord Snowdon.

Traveling, for Chatwin, is the purest possible spiritual act. In his notebooks, Chatwin himself characterizes his lifelong search for the world's nomads—the ultimate wanderers—as a "search for God." Chatwin's own "search" ended at the foot of the Cross. Late in life, Chatwin visited the Orthodox monastery at Mount Athos in Greece, where he apparently underwent a spiritual transformation. He describes the experience in his *Notebooks* with uncharacteristic brevity and simplicity: "The most beautiful sight of all was an iron cross on a rock by the sea. There must be a God."

Nicholas Shakespeare, Chatwin's biographer, deems that

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a watershed moment that prompted a quiet, virtually private spiritual journey toward Orthodox Christianity—cut short by his untimely death from AIDS. (Chatwin's friend, then-Bishop Kallistos Ware, recalls Chatwin's desire to return to Mount Athos for formal baptism.) Perhaps it is too neat to read Chatwin's theories of the spiritual qualities of wandering as a direct precursor to his final, unfinished voyage into the Orthodox Church. Yet such moments of spiritual clarity in Chatwin's thought—in perpetual tension with Chatwin's tendency to embellish and even lie about his travels—challenge us to explore what it means to travel theologically.

When we travel, are we simply looking for an escape from the routines of work and social life? Or does the act of leaving home behind fulfill a deeper spiritual need? Of course, the idea of travel is inextricable from the language and practice of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Old Testament is dotted with wanderers and wayfarers—from Cain to Abraham; so too the New Testament, with the evangelical peregrinations of Christ and his apostles. (Indeed, Chatwin refers to the Old Testament God as a "God of the Way," linking Yahweh's preference for Abel over Cain to the former's nomadic life as a shepherd.) Those who travel may do so to expiate their sins—as Cain does, as do, on a broader scale, the Israelites in exile. At other times, those who wander do so to evangelize, to seek spiritual comfort, to mark the assumption of a new life governed by different rules (think of Christ's disciples). Travelers suspend their memberships in a given community, a given social order; they occupy a far more liminal space.

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Chatwin frames his own understanding of travel within this context—*The Songlines* teems with references to biblical vagabonds and medieval pilgrims alike. Yet Chatwin's interest is broader still. His "search for nomads" leads him far beyond the Christian tradition, from the reaches of the Australian Outback to the depths of Patagonia. In the nomads Chatwin studies he finds a cultural analogue to his own vocation as a traveler, "restless after a month in a single place, unbearable after two?" Travelers, nomads, those who wander—all such people, Chatwin argues, represent humanity in its most perfect state: a kind of moveable Eden. As Fr. Flynn puts it in *The Songlines*, "The church...was wrong to picture Aboriginals as being stranded in some dreadful limbo; their condition, rather, resembled that of Adam before the Fall."

Chatwin roots his argument in the inherent fallenness of the settled state. To be settled, he claims, is to have succumbed to the lure of material and physical comfort. Like a collector, the settled person is "protected by a stuffing of possessions from those [they] would like to love, possessed of the tenderest emotions for things and glacial emotions for people." The world of the settled self is not the end of exile—an earthly realization of the "promised land"—but rather a denial of spiritual reality. A "wayfaring stranger," as the American folk hymn puts it, lives in the material world, but is not of it.

The "wanderer in [our] soul" is the part of us that "linger[s] over such words as 'Xanadu' or 'Samarkand' or 'the wine-dark sea,'" Chatwin writes in *The Songlines*. That impulse is not a sign of neurosis, but rather evidence of our calling to something more. It is evidence of the fundamental insufficiency of the settled, worldly state. As Chatwin writes in his essay "It's a Nomad, Nomad World," it is "hardly surprising, then, that a generation cushioned from the cold by central heat, carted in aseptic transports from one identical house or hotel to another, should feel the need for journeys of mind or body, for pep pills or tranquilisers, or for the cathartic journeys of sex, music, and dance."

Like the Christian ascetics of old, Chatwin's imagined nomad "whittle[s] down" his property" in order to travel easily on the road, freeing himself from the psychic obligations of material excess. As Fr. Terrence says in *The Songlines*, "Today...men had to live without things. Things filled men with fear: the more things they had, the more they had to fear. Things had a way of riveting themselves onto the soul, and telling the soul what to do." To exist in motion, by contrast, is to be freed from the stagnancy of easy comfort, "to feel the needs and hitches of life more nearly; to come down off this feather bed of civilization and find the globe granite underfoot, and strewn with cutting flints," as Robert Louis Stevenson put it in *Travels with a Donkey*.

Yet to "come down off this feather bed" requires renunciation not merely of the material but also of the social. To leave home is to leave behind external markers of identity: one's position or social routine. In this sense, Chatwin suggests, traveling is essentially an act of pilgrimage. In *The*

Songlines, he examines the Islamic tradition of the Hadj in light of traditional Aboriginal migration patterns: "The Hadj...was itself a 'ritual' migration: to detach men from their sinful homes and reinstate, if temporarily, the equality of all men before God."

Chatwin challenges his audience to examine how the act of travel "detaches" them—presumably settled readers—from their home communities. We are who we are partly because of the familial and social order that surrounds us. On the road, we are forced to detach ourselves from familiar assumptions about who we are and where we are going.

The liberation theologian Joerg Rieger explores that sort of detachment in his book *Traveling*. He considers the act of travel to be a necessary theological corrective to the "parochialism" of a faith tradition rooted in our home churches. "Often, communities of faith respond directly to the interests of their geographical locations with little awareness of this fact and with little awareness of how parochial many of these interests are in a society where neighborhoods are structured according to racial identities and class status," Rieger writes. We conceive of a God that looks like us, like the people around us. Our theology is, consciously or unconsciously, anchored in the racial, economic, and cultural makeup of our own "settlements." To travel is to enter a liminal space—what Rieger calls "the margins"—where we are no longer bounded by borders. "For those who exchange their privileges for being on the road, narcissism is no longer an option, whether it is the narcissism of the individual, the family, the church, the nation, or of those who benefit from the global economy while billions suffer," according to Rieger.

Yet Rieger does not restrict the "exchanging of privileges" to long-term travelers, those who spend years or even decades on the road. All travel, he hints, offers the traveler the opportunity to disengage from the stagnancy of the everyday. "The power of the act of quitting should not be underestimated. Even those who merely travel in order to escape from the everyday can learn to identify with the disruptive qualities of travel, as what is disrupted are precisely the structures of dominant power."

In taking such an approach, Rieger provides us with a potential response to what is arguably the most problematic element in Chatwin's thought: his obsession with wandering is virtually without content. The place *to which* the wanderer wanders is largely immaterial. Such a view, at times, privileges the perspective of the *traveler* over and against the experiences of the people in the lands he visits. For Chatwin, the great fabulist, so prone to "doing a Bruce," those who inhabit the lands he travels are all too often objects, rather than subjects in their own right. They exist only to be altered, re-imagined, subsumed into Chatwin's overarching self-narrative. The Aboriginals of the Australian outback

SANDPIPER

He flies only to scurry along another
reach of surf where he
pricks the cold for prey smaller
than grains of prose. The freedom
to guess right is his autobiography, and as oracle
of the about-to-happen he prefers
the edges of day, dawn and sunset, and rainy hours

that never climb to noon.
He does not weary—his errands do not cease,
and his flight is a diary snapped open,
snapped shut, taking in no sweep
of mountain. Master of the hidden, witness

to the nameless, feasting on careers even
more unheralded than his own,
he cocks his wings
and darts with haphazard courage,
his virtuoso pause obvious to everyone
and secret.

—Michael Cadnum

Michael Cadnum is the author of thirty-five books, including the novel Seize the Storm.

and the gauchos of Patagonia risk becoming mere Chatwins-by-proxy. They don't tell their own stories. He has them tell his. Even in conversation with friends, he had trouble letting them get a word in edgewise. In his remembrance "Chatwin Revisited," Paul Theroux recalls that "if you told him something, he would quickly tell you he knew it already, and he would go on talking." The worst thing about "monologuers," according to Theroux, "is their utter lack of interest in whomever they happen to be drilling into." And yet "he was such a good talker that you didn't care that he alone bounced the conversational ball."

Chatwin, for all his passion for nomadism, was hardly the kind of ascetic he admires. He was, after all, an inveterate art collector and chronic overspender. At times, Chatwin's unexamined privilege—as an upper-middle-class white male adventuring among the poor—make him an unsympathetic narrator. He could also be an unsympathetic interlocutor. Any authentic theology of travel, Rieger suggests, must rest not only on the self's experience of leaving home, but also on the content of such experiences. For travel has the potential to bring the self into authentic contact with the unknown, the other. The true traveler does not only "disengage" from the status quo, but also engages with the worlds he explores. He meets shopkeepers in Istanbul, shepherds in Kosovo, locals and other travelers alike. He learns new idioms, new ways of self-expression, new truths. That is integral to developing and deepening authentic religious experience, according to Rieger. It is only when we are challenged to endure what Rieger calls the "shock of difference" that we, in turn, learn to recognize the presence of God in the world, in "other places and community." That is how we learn to dismantle the conceptions of a God we have created in our own image, and come to recognize God in the image of others.

Of course, this kind of authentic "theological" mode of travel has little in common with the all-inclusive Mediterranean cruises and five-star getaways that line the pages of travel magazines. Neither Chatwin nor Rieger would suggest that the kind of insularity provided by luxurious resorts—so many of them in poor countries—offers much spiritual fulfillment. Indeed, such "luxuries" do quite the opposite, promoting a corporate vision of comfort in which the same few amenities are presented in uniform ways, in environments where "it is not even necessary to know a few words of another language," as Rieger puts it.

To travel *authentically*—to leave behind the comforts of home, to embrace our own vulnerability as strangers abroad—such an act is more than a modern-day pilgrimage. It is an opportunity to look beyond one's local church-community, to come to terms with a truly catholic theology in which various perspectives provides us with a glimpse of the God that transcends them all.

Yet in Chatwin's wanderlust—and our own—it's worth analyzing the very root of our longing. The writer and theologian C. S. Lewis, after all, spent his adolescence in thrall to the idea of "Northernness": a passion for Norse myths and images that came to shape his Narnia books—a longing Lewis came to identity with the concept of *Sehnsucht*: a longing for what has never been, or can never be, in this world. In a 1959 letter to Dom Bede Griffiths, Lewis characterizes his longing as a theological one, a desire to return home to the country of God: "It is just when there seems to be most of Heaven already here that I come nearest to longing for a patria. It is the bright frontispiece which whets one to read the story itself. All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings."

At the close of *The Last Battle*, the final Narnia book, Lewis's characters do precisely that: discovering that the long dreamed-of country of Narnia is itself just a proxy for "Aslan's own country," moving "further up and further in" toward an ideal that even Narnia, with its fully-realized Northerness, could not match: a final home, which is the end of all our wanderings, in the kingdom of God. ■

It's Nothing Personal

The History of Papal Infallibility

George Wilson

The notion of papal infallibility enjoys an unhappy distinction. One of the most widely known memes of the last one-hundred-and-fifty years, it is also one of the most utterly misunderstood. The media's reporting of two recent events illustrates the issue.

First, consider the retirement of Pope Benedict XVI. After Benedict's dramatic announcement, serious and respected commentators raised such questions as "Will a resigned pope continue to be infallible?" and "What will happen if an infallible Benedict is contradicted by an infallible successor?" Questions like that may sell papers, but they show no evidence that the writers made the effort even to Google the term, "papal infallibility." More recently, take the commentary on Pope Francis's Synod on the Family. At the close of the synod's initial sessions, a columnist for the *New York Times*—an educated Catholic—blankly depicted the policy of denying Communion to civilly divorced-and-remarried Catholics as an unavoidable implication of infallible papal teaching on the indissolubility of marriage.

The bishops who promulgated the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1869 would have shuddered at such cartoonish misrepresentations of their highly nuanced creation. How egregious are those misrepresentation? Here is the original text of their decree:

> We teach and *define* that it is a dogma *Divinely* revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks ex cathedra, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding *faith* or *morals* to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in *Blessed Peter*, is possessed of that infallibility with which the *Divine Redeemer* willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves and not from the consent of the Church irreformable.

Note that the decree never uses the phrase "papal infallibility." Its language, while dense, is quite specific and explicit: under certain very limited circumstances, the pope enjoys the protection of a divine gift *that belongs in the first instance to the church as a whole*. Nowhere is it decreed that the pope is infallible; indeed, the Catholic Church has never taught that any pope is infallible. Such a formulation would make the pope a sort of Superman, irrevocably inoculated against error. But the promise of infallibility is best imagined as a transient quality attributed not to the person, but only to one very narrowly circumscribed kind of *action*. And the promise of protection from error is made, moreover, to the whole church; the papacy is never presented as being imbued with such a power in isolation from the rest of the body of Christ. When a pope defines a doctrine, the faithful can trust they are not being led into error *not* because of any inherent quality of his, but rather by a prerogative conferred on the community of the faithful by its divine Redeemer. And so, to return to the sensational questions about Benedict's retirement, the answer is that a pope can't lose what he never possessed. Benedict was no less infallible the moment he resigned than he had been the moment before—because he wasn't infallible then, either.

First Vatican Council in Saint Peter's Basilica, 1870

The catechesis concerning the doctrine of inerrancy has always emphasized the limited scope of the promise; the faithful were assured that it only applied in matters of faith

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and morals. But there exists a further, frequently overlooked limit: namely, that the promise applies to "defining doctrine"—a limiting phrase that occurs twice in the 1869 decree. This means that papal decisions of a merely practical or pastoral nature—even within the areas of faith and morals—enjoy no special divine protection. A similar distinction must be made concerning any pastoral decisions that may be taken by the pope as a consequence of last October's Synod on the Family.

Those synod participants who oppose the leadership of Pope Francis are attempting to cast the event as doctrinal. Francis, by contrast, has stressed that it is a pastoral effort. The basic question is not "What will the church teach the body of the faithful?" but rather "How will the church *respond pastorally* to individual members who experience pain and exclusion as a result of prior pastoral responses by church leaders?" In other words, nothing that transpired in the pastoral discussions at the synod comes close to falling within the realm of papal infallibility. If Francis decides that some customary practices (such as the policy of denying Communion to the divorced-and-remarried) need to be changed, his decision will be no more "infallible" than are the practices he will be revising. They will be the fallible effort not of a teacher of doctrine, but of a caring pastor trying his best to balance justice with compassion. Whether they prove effective or not will be revealed only by the quality of Christian hope and living they engender.

As for the phrase in the decree separating papal doctrinal definitions from "the consent of the church," it reflects the ecclesial realities of 1870, and must be understood in that context. Ending the decree with the earlier language situating the whole church as the primary object of the promise of inerrancy could have led an incautious reader to conclude that papal definitions lack authority unless and until they are endorsed by the body of the church. As a matter of fact, the Conciliarist movement and its stepchild Gallicanism—the belief that popular civil authority over the Catholic Church parallels that of the pope's—were grounded in the assumption that ecumenical councils were, to use the shorthand phrase of the day, "over" the pope. The fathers of Vatican I were intent on eliminating any vestige of that mentality. The definition of a pope acting in accord with the prescribed conditions enjoys, by itself, the promise of inerrancy. It needs no further authentication by a council.

The issuing of a conciliar definition does not, of course, end the story. Far from it. The actual effect of such a decree on the life of the church lies not in the language of the formal decree itself, but in what the faith community hears—in the minds and hearts, that is, of those who receive it. To appreciate that subsequent history we need to return to the debate during Vatican I.

Among the bishops at the council three groups emerged. The positions of the first two are easily summarized: for and against. In the end, most of the opposition group abstained from voting, reluctant to go on record against a teaching that clearly was going to be adopted, and the result was an overwhelming vote of 451 to 2 in favor of the definition. But it is the third position, and the rationale presented by the bishops who took it, that we need to reflect on. It points directly to the current muddle.

A sizable group of bishops believed in the essential truth of the teaching but was opposed to its dogmatic proclamation. Their argument was based on pastoral rather than doctrinal considerations. Their question was not "Is the teaching reliable?" but "What will be the *result* if we proclaim it formally?" Was it wise, they wondered, to issue a *definition*? They foresaw a worrisome outcome of the issuance of a solemn declaration—namely, that once you declared that a pope's teaching enjoyed the protection of infallibility, even under severely restricted conditions, it wouldn't be long before people began saying that *he* is infallible. At which point all those careful restrictions would evaporate, and anything a pope said—does he endorse Verdi or Puccini, oatmeal or Cheerios?—would be considered infallible.

Once the pope was viewed as infallible, it didn't take long before the faithful began to see every bishop—even every country pastor—as infallible, too. (An opinion many of those pastors were all too happy to promote.)

How prescient they were. The phenomenon they had foreseen came to enjoy its own picturesque designation: "creeping infallibility." And despite the limits laid out in the decree, the trickle-down process moved swiftly from the pope to the whole system. Once the pope was viewed as infallible, it didn't take long before the faithful began to see every bishop—even every country pastor—as infallible, too. (An opinion many of those pastors were all too happy to promote.) Contributing to this muddying was the decree's failure to specify the *mechanism* by which the promise of inerrancy that belongs to the whole church is fulfilled in the action of a pope. Does he benefit from some special revelation not accorded to others in the church? If not, how does the promise actually work?

In the absence of a conciliar answer to that question, we need to examine the theological tradition on the question. This was essentially what the council fathers did; many of the major theologians they relied on had reflected quite consciously on the question. Unfortunately, most bishops,

when they intervened on the council floor, simply listed theologians' names in a sort of florilegium of supporters: "Did X hold the doctrine of papal infallibility? Add him to the list!" Little attention was paid to the *way* such a theologian understood what he was affirming. And of course that makes all the difference. What were supporters really supporting? In fact, the line of theologians cited by the bishops as advocates of papal infallibility *rejected* the notion that the promise of inerrancy was due to any sort of personal revelation or illumination granted to the pope. Which leaves the question: In the absence of such an illumination, how is the promise fulfilled? What happens within a pope to trigger this fulfillment?

To be precise: nothing. The theological tradition posed the question differently. The writers asked, *what steps* must the pope take to arrive at an inerrant conclusion? And their answer was that he must do the same kind of research any person would have to do to determine that a doctrine had in fact always been taught by the church: pray over the Scriptures, the great Fathers, and orthodox theologians of the church. Instead of appealing to some sort of personal revelation, the theological tradition subsumed the promise of infallibility within a broader theology of general divine providence. God guides creation not through extraordinary measures, but by respecting the nature of each creature. By promising inerrancy, God is promising equally that appropriate means will be taken to achieve it. To make this point, the writers often used the analogy of farming. God may promise a farmer a fine harvest; but that doesn't absolve the farmer of the responsibility to do the work of planting, fertilizing, and watering the crop. In similar fashion, the pope must marshal evidence that a particular doctrine has already existed within the "deposit" of faith. His declaration—after adequate study—puts a seal on a process already at work, under the guidance of the Spirit, across the centuries of church life.

While analysis by a long line of esteemed theologians does not enjoy the exact same binding character as the formal definition itself, it is nonetheless a significant part of the history of the church's rumination on what it is really teaching. In the cases of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary, the only two doctrines defined since 1870, the official declaration appeals to the evidence of history, announcing that it is "Following upon the constant teaching embodied in Holy Scripture and Tradition." What we are really promised in a papal definition is the reliable assumption that the pope's immersion in the long life of the church—his prayer and study—is adequate to the task. Such theologizing has the salutary effect of taking a free-floating phantasm of papal inerrancy and anchoring it in our faith in God's protection of the church itself—and ultimately in our trust of the Spirit of Jesus.

It would be irresponsible to end this reflection without confronting a final question: What allowed the muddling of a very precisely crafted definition? How did the syndrome of creeping infallibility come to work its mischief in secular society and indeed within the consciousness of the faithful?

To blame it all on power-hungry hierarchs would be too easy; nor can we lay responsibility solely at the feet of poor catechesis. That lets you and me off the hook. The truth is that the church is a single co-creating body of teachers and the taught; even the most effective catechesis comes up against the collective psyche of those being instructed. The caricature of papal infallibility clearly has exerted a certain attraction on the minds of the faithful, appealing to an understandable but spiritually unhealthy susceptibility at work in every last one of us. We allow the boundaries of the definition to be extended—and thus perpetuate the travesty—because we lust for a kind of certitude that is unavailable to us as finite creatures. We all want to see as God sees. And yet the one infallibly true thing is that we walk not by sight, but by faith. ■

ADJUSTMENT

(dedicated to John Rawls)

by Marie Ponsot

1

Mighty planet Earth
orbits to order, its greenest blues
attractive, to make our
life-giving aerial envelope
lawful, obedient, singing.
It turns among bodies
of stars and astral junk.

Earth bears with us undismissing.
Enveloped, we hear it thrum.
We're all over it.

We think of Earth as ours. We
were raised here. Its blood-stream
slung in our knotty salted nets,
it seconds the continuous bass
of the pulse of the sphere.

2

On foot I am in
the fight of my life
facing my enemy.
I duck and fall side-
wise to the commons.

I come up at last.
At last.

A space, a narrow strip an edge:
Tiny, it's enough.
Quieter, I inch away from the war.

Behind my enemy and behind me, our
landscape, erupted, lies wide, hurt.
Now what. Here I stand (life, here saved).
He too doesn't fall. (It's disarming.)

We're at the edge, his and mine.
Our country is broken.
Broken, it smokes in the sun.

Oh. We've reached the common verge. We
overlap on it. We catch our breath and
stop bristling. We speak.

I can see him better from here.
We overlap. We word our overlap
forward from our verge.

Air holds us, fond.

Both of us are speaking and
audible on our equal overlap,

both of us Earthlings
under the hugely overlapping sun.

Marie Ponsot recently received the Aiken Taylor Award for poetry, given annually by Sewanee Review. *In 2013, she was awarded the Ruth Lily Prize for lifetime achievement by the Poetry Foundation. "Adjustment" was first printed in* Still Against War V *(2015), the annual collections of poems by Marie, her friends and former students, published each year on the occasion of her birthday.*

FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

Richard Alleva

Codgers & Kids

'YOUTH'

Paolo Sorrentino chose a deceptive title for his latest film, *Youth*. Here the word doesn't refer to a fixed stage in life but to the mysterious inner spark—as much spiritual as biological—that keeps us going. (Henri Bergson and Bernard Shaw called this "the life force.") Nor does *Youth* offer a cinematic version of the old adage "You're only as old as you feel." Instead, it shows how the strong can suddenly collapse, while the seemingly superannuated can renew themselves. Buffeted by chance, emotion, economics, and a hundred other forces, the life force can be pretty fickle.

At a Swiss hotel-spa we find a couple of septuagenarians, Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine) and Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel). The two are longtime friends and Fred's daughter Lena is married to Mick's son. Fred is a world-renowned composer-conductor, now retired, while Mick, a tough-guy Hollywood director, may be facing forced retirement because his last few movies have bombed. Mick is determined to make a final masterpiece—"my testament"—and expects to secure financing for the film once he has signed up his long-term leading lady as a box-office guarantee. By contrast, Fred is determined never to make music again, and even turns down Queen Elizabeth's request that he perform his most popular work, "Simple Songs," as a birthday present for Prince Philip. In a movie that constantly threatens to break down into a series of stand-alone, gorgeously photographed vignettes, two questions provide narrative spine and sufficient suspense: Will Mick get to make his movie? And what is it in Fred's past that prompted him to shun the spotlight?

Youth is populated mostly by codgers and kids; the middle-aged are almost entirely banished. (Exceptions: the spa's doctor and the queen's envoy, the latter an amusing turn by actor Alex Macqueen.) Aside from Caine and Keitel, there is the aging actress Mick wants to cast as his leading lady, played by Jane Fonda wearing make-up so garish that it's turned her into a geriatric Medusa. (The Fonda we've seen in recent TV series is aging beautifully. What a mortification of vanity Sorrentino has asked of her!) And the spa includes an endless parade of the wrinkled, the bent, and the wheelchair-bound. As if in counterpoint, we are also presented with a squad of twenty- and thirty-somethings: Fred's Lena (Rachel Weisz), Jimmy, a superstar movie actor (Paul Dano), Mick's staff of neophyte scriptwriters, a Miss Universe, a teen-aged masseuse,

a boy violinist, a pre-pubescent girl, a British rock star named Paloma Faith (played by a British rock star named Paloma Faith).

This is a cunning strategy on Sorrentino's part. The middle-aged are too busy—with work, sex, and their social lives—to bother with any contemplation of their life force. But the young, still on the cusp of everything, can exult in their budding strength, or feel queasy about it, or simply question where it is taking them. That may be why the young appear to older eyes to be both verdant and gauche. The fledgling scriptwriters amuse and exasperate the veteran Mick with their abundant but often silly ideas, their squabbling, and the awe in which they hold him. Jimmy, the movie star who has won world fame with a trashy superhero movie, aspires to the calm wisdom he sees in Fred, but is supercilious to other young people because he despises the blockbuster that catered to them but wasted his acting talent. And when Lena is abandoned by her callous husband, she feels she is turning into a facsimile of her mother, who was abandoned years ago by Fred. Still, the very fact that all these young people are temporarily stymied emphasizes, rather than obscures, their potentiality, their latent life force, their *youth*.

Does that mean our two septuagenarian heroes spotlight the life force by having lost it (willingly, in Fred's case; unwillingly, in Mick's)? So it would seem for much of the movie. But finally Sorrentino pushes past this rather obvious schema to make a more subtle point about what keeps youth alive and what may paralyze it.

When Mick's project suffers a financial setback, at first he refuses to give up. But then he does something psychologically disastrous to himself. In a scene that evokes the climax of Fellini's *8 1/2*, Mick envisions all the actresses of his past hits performing their roles in full costume and make-up. These phantoms bring a rush of nostalgic joy to the director, but the nostalgia undoes him. After this complete vision of his past work, he can no longer imagine adding to it. It already seems to belong to the past. (Igor Stravinsky is often referred to in this movie. That genius, confronted at the age of eighty with a copy of the score of his *Rite of Spring*, said that he was bored by it, that he was interested only in his current work. Stravinsky lived to be eighty-nine and, until illness brought him down, never lost his youth.)

Fred's fate is the opposite of Mick's. He's done his best to put his career behind him, but he can't quite suppress his instincts. In a pasture near the hotel he mentally rearranges the sounds of cowbells to create a music only he can hear. From time to time he idly rattles a candy wrapper to articulate a rhythm. Finally, when catastrophe strikes a loved one, Fred mounts the podium again to conduct a tribute concert. Grief, not ambition, motivates this encore performance, but it is enough to revive, however temporarily, his life force.

In his previous films, *Il Divo* and *The Great Beauty*, Sorrentino often set his scenes in the luxuriant interiors of outrageously expensive houses or palaces, and his superb cameraman, Luca Bigazzi, luridly enhanced the color of fabrics and textiles, and shed a bronze glow on flesh. The effect was theatrical and sinister, as befitted these stories of corrupt politicians and decadent millionaires flaunting their privileges. *Youth* (also shot by Bigazzi) has a visual kinship with these films, but the photography is toned down because the main characters here aren't corrupt but simply troubled and struggling to do the right thing. The surfaces of the hotel-spa are restful rather than dazzling. (Some of the interior scenes were shot in the Hotel Schatzalp in Flims, Switzerland, the model for the sanitarium in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*.) That many of the guests are youthful and healthy serves as a charming taunt to the oldsters, as when Miss Universe lowers her gorgeous nude body into the swimming pool where our two protagonists float, eyes wide and mouths agape. Fred: "Who is she?" Mick: "God." That sort of pithiness amazed me, since Sorrentino is listed as the only writer in the credits. How did he become so at ease with English? (Michelangelo Antonioni employed a battery of American writers on his American debut, *Zabriskie Point*, and the result was dialogue for the mouths of robots.)

Of course it helps that the talk is delivered by fine actors. Keitel and Dano both rely on familiar mannerisms and inflections that fit nicely with their roles. The latter's specialty, passive aggression, here comes across as Jimmy Tree's effort to attain Buddhistic calm. Keitel's alpha-male cockiness, meanwhile, becomes moving as we discover that it's really a kind of defensiveness.

But Caine and Weisz break new ground. Weisz, always a charmer but capable of darker emotions, doesn't present her character's conflicting feelings of love and resentment in alternation; she delivers them tangled together. Caine, master of cool calculation and Cockney wit, has sometimes been challenged by the straight-on expression of plangent emotion. Not here. His Fred Ballinger is a kind of palimpsest. Before us is the old man with all his regret and compassion, but we can still make out traces of the younger Fred, whose egotism and intransigence caused his family such pain. When the conductor feels forced to explain to the Queen's envoy just why he can't perform his "Simple Songs" anymore, Caine cracks open Ballinger's shell with a rush of self-hatred and thwarted love. The fusion of actor and character is complete and produces the best kind of discomfort in the viewer—the kind Auden produced with his instruction to "love your crooked neighbor with your crooked heart."

Youth has been nominated for only one Oscar (best original song). This doesn't surprise me. A few of the most nominated films are solidly made and beautifully acted, particularly *Spotlight, Room*, and *Carol*. But most of them yield up their virtues at first viewing. Not so *Youth*. I've seen it twice and still feel I haven't gotten to its core and probably never will. A movie like this isn't immediately comprehended and therefore can't be immediately rewarded. But because of its depth and vitality, *Youth* will have a long shelf life. ■

Celia Wren

Choose Your Illusion

SYFY CHANNEL'S 'THE MAGICIANS'

Hats off to the Syfy channel for airing a fantasy saga about reading. O.K., shots of turning pages and dog-eared library cards are unlikely to dominate *The Magicians*, the drama series whose initial thirteen-episode season aired on January 25. At one point in the pilot episode the camera does scroll lovingly over a book shelf, but viewers are more likely to remember the more startling images: the apparition with a moth swarm for a head; the playing cards swirling around a room like so many trained falcons; the curious sight of a clock growing in a tree.

Still, the TV show has to be, on some level, about reading, given the source material. Lev Grossman's bestselling fantasy trilogy—*The Magicians, The Magician King,* and *The Magician's Land*—is an enthralling, funny, and often deeply moving adventure set in realms full of wizardry, including a version of twenty-first-century America. Enchantments, demons, supernatural portals, sorcery-enhanced warfare, abstruse mystical lore—these and other diverting narrative elements figure in the tale, which follows Brooklyn-raised Quentin Coldwater through his education at Brakebills, a secret university for magicians, and his sojourns in Fillory, an unearthly land populated by talking animals and other marvels.

But these ingredients of the fantasy genre ultimately turn the novels into veiled meditations on the allure and hazards of reading. Grossman's saga slyly echoes—and implicitly comments upon—two celebrated fantasy series for young readers. Brakebills is an obvious answer to Hogwarts, the school in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. But prosaic adult realities are more evident at Brakebills, where the scholarly routine is sometimes mindnumbingly tedious, and the students—skeptical, wisecracking young adults—are known to indulge in sex and alcohol. With its talking beasts and four-thrones governance structure, Fillory bears more than a passing resemblance to C. S. Lewis's Narnia. Indeed, Quentin initially encounters Fillory as a young reader enthralled by a celebrated children's-book series titled "Fillory and Further." After enrolling at Brakebills, he learns that the kingdom is no fiction, but a bona fide magical realm. But while Fillory turns out to be exciting and colorful, it's no storybook Neverland: it's full of war and suffering. The Fillory gods—twin rams named Ember and Umber—turn out to be irritating and a little ridiculous, and the population of Fillory is as subject to aging and death as any New York City commuter.

Irreverently tweaking Rowling's and Lewis's charmed vistas, and infusing them with a touch of cynicism, Grossman's trilogy acknowledges the letdown that can follow the blissful experience of plunging into books as a child. An adult reader may adore settling down with a book, when time permits, but he or she is unlikely to rediscover the thrill—the experience of total absorption—that a young reader can find in a story.

Reading (or re-reading) fantasy literature as an adult comes with its own particular autumnal wistfulness, since fantasy is about the excitement of myriad possibilities, and becoming an adult usually involves closing doors and settling for a narrow range of prospects: a specific career, a specific family, a certain degree of comfort. As if acknowledging this truth, the Magicians trilogy repeatedly weaves together moods of heady wonderment and aching disappointment. Early in the book *The Magicians*, Quentin believes he has found a magical portal to Fillory in a mysterious cupboard in a Brooklyn house; when he investigates, the item turns out to be only a liquor cabinet.

SYFY CHANNEL

Jason Ralph as Quentin Coldwater in The Magicians

It would be overly optimistic to expect a basic-cable series to capture all the humor and literary resonance in a work like the Magicians trilogy. To judge by the pilot, written by John McNamara and Sera Gamble, and directed by Mike Cahill, the TV version of *The Magicians* will be a fast-paced and workmanlike distillation of Grossman's narrative. It is a little cheap-looking: no lush, *Game of Thrones*–style visuals here. But the storytelling is sensibly thought-out. Drawing on the first two books in Grossman's series, the pilot moves back and forth between the tale of the endearing misfit Quentin (played by Jason Ralph), who enrolls at Brakebills after acing the entry exam, and that of Quentin's New York friend Julia (Stella Maeve), who fails the exam and has to learn magic in seedier circles, through a kind of sorcery black-market. At Brakebills, Quentin befriends the spell-casting whiz Alice (Olivia Taylor Dudley), and inadvertently helps trigger a magical crisis that could prove catastrophic.

The double focus on Quentin and Julia adds balance and counterpoint to the TV narrative. And the swift arrival of the aforementioned magical crisis, in the Syfy *Magicians*, could succeed in hooking channel surfers. Maybe some of those surfers will go on to discover the books. One can always hope. ■

Steven Englund

Fighting on Two Fronts

Catholic Labor Movements in Europe
Social Thought and Action, 1914–1965
Paul Misner
CUA Press, $65, 342 pp.


Emmanuel Mounier

When I was in graduate school in the late sixties, studying European history, it was a commonplace among leftists—professors and students alike—to quote Lenin in comparing the Church of Rome to the House of Lords, or the Prussian General Staff, as a bulwark of counterrevolution. Though I rarely demurred vocally, inwardly I knew it was easy enough to disprove this thesis. There was the legendary capacity of the faithful laity or rebel priests to oppose bishops (e.g., devout Catholics who fought against Franco); and in the rarefied realms of high politics and theory, one could point to such actions as Pius XI's 1926 excommunication of Catholics for reading the reactionary newspaper *Action Française*. And even hardened Communist thinkers like Antonio Gramsci conceded that serious distinctions must be drawn between the "positive" spirituality of Jesuit theorists on the rights of labor and the wholly destructive views that fascists held about the same—even though both sides hated Marxism.

Paul Misner's book is an in-depth journey through that social Catholicism whose theory and practice contradict Lenin's dictum. This is the second and final volume of a project Misner began long ago: to provide an account of "the classical age of social Catholicism," the span of history, from 1820 to the 1950s, that the philosopher Charles Taylor has called the "age of [Christian] Mobilization." Despite its title, the present book goes well beyond social and labor movements in the church to deal with papal and episcopal action vis-à-vis the great powers and ideologies between 1914 and 1965. Misner compacts a vast amount of history on his way to recounting the emergence of "a Christian *secular* conception of the world" (Maritain) and the corresponding adaptation of social institutions within that conception. All the familiar names are here (and some unfamiliar ones too)—Sangnier, Cardijn, Mercier, Pauwels, Kunschak, Nell-Breuning, Chenu, Gasperi, Suenens—along with the usual alphabet soup of organizations from the ACJF to the JEC and the JOC, from Dom Sturzo's PPI to SIPDIC, CWI, CGD, GeC and CFTC, and of course Cardinal Suhard's controversial MF—the *Mission de France*, or "worker priest" movement, which Misner deems a "new and bold approach to the problem of dechristianized swaths of the population."

Catholic Labor Movements includes an informative chapter on labor initiatives toward women, but Misner is perhaps at his best when analyzing social thinkers who sought a "third way"—a distinctly Christian alternative to liberal capitalism or Marxism. Men like Heinrich Resch, SJ, Othmar Spann, and Romano Guardini "ended up acknowledging there wasn't a viable third way in the sense of a single Catholic social order," Misner writes, and instead adapted themselves to "the rules of a pluralistic democracy"; these and other influential figures "advocated organization—association—as the main prescription to stem social deterioration and strengthen the sinews of society as a moral organism."

To be sure, the innumerable fledgling Christian labor and social initiatives throughout industrialized Europe, and their indefatigable activist-leaders, amounted to a tiny minority even in the Catholic milieu, let alone in the larger labor movement, where they remained totally submerged until after the Second World War. Between the Great War and the Great Depression, social Catholicism nevertheless managed to acquire footholds in all countries under discussion, while also taking steps to democratize its own structures

and outlook. It elected candidates to parliaments and got others named to ministries and labor relations boards. Above all, it steadfastly competed with Socialist and Communist labor movements while at the same time defending its independence from bishops and the right-wing Catholic bourgeoisie.

Misner rightly pauses long over Pius XI, who "staked his pontificate" on Catholic Action. His famous 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno*—titled to reflect affiliation with *Rerum novarum* (1891), the *fons et origo* of social Catholicism—failed to manipulate Italian fascism to serve the church's goals, as the pope hoped to do. But the text, as Misner rightly sees, is "embedded in and follows from" the deep "anti-totalitarian premises of [Catholic] social philosophy." Pius's encyclical addressed any number of threats to civilization, of which Misner lists "the Depression, the rise of Nazism, the promised world revolution of communism, and the travails of democracy." Under such pressures, Misner asserts, "social Catholicism in Italy, without its stiff defense by the pope, would certainly have come close to extinction." But it did not; and after 1945, the Catholic "socials" made up for lost time, continuing to fight on two fronts—against the hierarchy as well as the secular competition—but in the end, both Catholics and Socialists came round to finding the liberal-capitalist approach "acceptable and even congenial."

Misner is a scholar, not an apologist, yet he summons little evidence that might challenge his view of the beneficence of social Catholic action. He is quick to observe that "while the Christian unions held to the ideal of interclass harmony or cooperation, this did not prevent them from recognizing the very real class interests that employers and workers did not have in common." He further notes that Pius XI conferred the red hat on Bishop Achille Liénart of Lille, who was under virulent attack from the right for his labor sympathies. Yet he says virtually nothing about the anti-Jewish beliefs of leading social Catholics—notably, the hugely popular French Catholic youth association, the ACJF. Nor does he sift the thought of Maritain, Mounier, or other Catholic "socials" for antiliberal elements. Such seeming partiality makes the informed reader slightly uncomfortable.

But I won't close on that note. Misner rings down the curtain with the great Vatican II encyclical *Gaudium et spes*. He writes that it was "a stimulus for peace and social justice in places as distant from each other as the Poland of Solidarity and the Latin America of liberation theology," but then he adds tellingly that a half century later we have reached an era when it no longer makes sense "for Catholic workers to organize by themselves." "In a secular age," he reminds us, "one should make room for a pluralism of religious commitments."

Reading Misner on *Gaudium et spes* helps you understand more recent encyclical-sallies into the briar patch of social issues, including ecological ones. It puts you in fine mind to understand how as secular and as radical an eco-activist as journalist Bill McKibben could say of *Laudato si'*—approvingly—that "it goes far deeper than our political labels allow. It's both caustic and tender, and it should unsettle every nonpoor reader who opens its pages."

With *Catholic Labor Movements in Europe*, Misner has written a fitting sequel to his fine first volume, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* (1991). Though its prose is as dry as dust, and though it boasts few primary sources—indeed, it is not always based on the most up-to-date secondary literature—the current book comprehensively covers Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and the Low Countries, and offers as close to a complete synthesis as we are likely to have for a long time. ■

Steven Englund, *a longtime contributor, is the author of* Napoleon: A Political Life *(Harvard University Press), which won the American Historical Association's J. Russell Major Prize. He is currently writing a comparative study of political anti-Semitism in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and France.*

George Dennis O'Brien

More than a Mood

Hope without Optimism

Terry Eagleton
University of Virginia Press, $22.95, 160 pp.

Wittgenstein asserted that dogs cannot hope; they may *expect* their master's return, but they cannot hope for it. Hope depends on language. In his new book, Terry Eagleton cites Wittgenstein's remark and—although he believes Wittgenstein's view stemmed from a dislike of dogs—he agrees that hope is a function of language. *Hope without Optimism*, based on the Page-Barbour Lectures that Eagleton delivered at the University of Virginia in 2014, is a witty and insightful tour of hope's complicated linguistic terrain that carefully avoids proposing some once-and-for-all grand Theory of Hope. As Eagleton points out, hope-talk occurs in everything from common-sense expressions to extravagant claims that border on nonsense: from the phrase "hope to see you tomorrow," uttered as you leave the local café, to the phrase "hope against hope," uttered in the precincts of defeat. We know our way around everyday hope in the prose of a prosaic life, but sometimes we go beyond the everyday into poetry and prayer in order to express the mysteries of life and human values.

Chapter 1 is titled "The Banality of Optimism." "To believe that a situation will turnout well because you are an optimist" Eagleton writes, "is as irrational as believing that all will be well because you are an Albanian." The optimist, Eagleton writes, is "chained to cheerfulness" and thus lacks the "strenuous commitment...underpinned by reason" that is essential to hope. Optimism is not a choice but a temperament, a "monochrome glaze over the world," differing from pessimism only by being monochromatically rosy instead of monochromatically gray. Eagleton has no time for a work like Lionel Tiger's *The Biology of Hope* precisely because it confuses hope with a certain kind of temperament. Hope is not a mood, or even a biological condition; it is a moral perspective on life. Valium may be an optimism pill, but it does not produce hope.

Eagleton is more than just a linguistic explorer tracing the various tropes of hope; he is also (more or less) a Marxist concerned with the course of political history and the ultimate fate of humankind. Optimism, he believes, is not only banal; it can be dangerous. He suggests that in the United States optimism is a "state ideology" that explains the irrationality of our politics, foreign and domestic. In contrast to the forced cheer of American boosterism, Christianity and Marxism—Eagleton's two great visions of the world—both reject optimism. Despite prophesying a positive future in the Kingdom of God or the classless society, there is no straight and easy path from today's dereliction to the happy ending. In Christianity salvation breaks in unpredictably and passes through the Cross. For Marx, history doesn't always progress smoothly from one stage to the next; revolution breaks the pattern of the past.

Terry Eagleton

The second chapter, titled "What Is Hope?," does not try to answer that question. Instead, Eagleton explores how talk of hope intersects helter-skelter, positively and negatively, with expressions of desire, emotion, decision, faith, and love. Hope is one of the escapees from Pandora's box. Is it curse or cure? For Aquinas hope is cure, a theological virtue derived from faith and charity. On the other hand, T. S. Eliot in a Christian mood cautions against hope: "wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing." Not only can hope be misdirected; it can be sheer illusion. Alexander Pope says that "Hope springs eternal from the human breast," but it is a hope always unrealized—as the less quoted second line of the couplet affirms: "Man never is, but always will be blest." Vershinin in Chekov's *The Three Sisters* sums up the malaise that infects the country house and humankind: "We are not happy and we cannot be happy, we only want happiness." Best, then, to reject hope outright and to obey the Stoic injunction: Expect nothing.

Still, for all the crossings and confusions in the language of hope, some guidelines emerge. We may hope in vain, but not unreasonably. I may desire to be Elvis, but I cannot hope for that outcome. Hope as a species of *rational* desire qualifies as an Aristotelian virtue to be cultivated. While hope and desire are both directed at the future, Eagleton writes that hope is "more narrationally inflected than desire." I may have lots of fleeting desires, but when I hope I adopt a certain attitude toward the future. Eagleton notes a "performative" aspect of hope. "I promise" is the paradigm case of performative language. When I say "I promise," I have performed the deed—made a promise no matter what

my inner feelings or intentions. When I say "I hope," I issue a promissory note toward some positive future.

Chapter 3, "The Philosopher of Hope," abandons the highways and byways of hope to concentrate on one philosopher, Ernst Bloch, and his grand theory of the subject. Bloch offers a manic theory of hope in a Marxian vein—and Eagleton wants no part of it! A *grand* theory indeed: Bloch's book about hope runs to almost fourteen hundred pages and is written in a style that Eagleton characterizes as "intellectual bulimia." Bloch is the rare Marxist philosopher who is interested in Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* because he believes that hope is fully embedded in nature itself. Eagleton labels it "mystical materialism" and compares it to the theology of Teilhard de Chardin. Nature in its ever-changing course is always realizing progress. Eagleton says that such a view actually devalues hope. If progress is written into the code of the cosmos, there is no need for the individual to "perform" hope.

Bloch's notion of hope-in-nature accounts for "the conceptual obesity" of a work that sweeps everything in history from Pythagorean number symbolism to modern fascism into the expression of fundamental hope. Eagleton makes a telling comparison between Freud and Bloch. Both thinkers claim that the *fundamental* object of hope is other than what it appears: for Freud what we really desire is buried in the past; for Bloch it lies ahead in the remote future. According to Bloch, even fascism is a (dangerous) expression of fundamental hope for the Marxist vision. There are clear echoes of Augustine's assertion that—whether we know it or not—the true aim of all our present desires is God. Hence Eagleton's conclusion that Bloch "is in search of a form of Marxism that would rival the depth and scope of religion."

The final chapter, titled "Hope against Hope," returns Eagleton to his home territory of literary analysis. Beyond simple hope for good weather tomorrow, there is "radical hope": Shelley's urge "to hope till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates." Tragedy is the exemplary case of radical hope. "[T]ragedy cuts deeper than pessimism...because its horror is laced with an enriched sense of human worth." Eagleton offers extended analyses of *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as examples of hope emerging from ruin. The versions of the Lear story that came before Shakespeare—as well as the much-scorned eighteenth-century revisions of the play—fulfill our normal hopes: the good guys win. Lear recognizes the love of Cordelia before it's too late, while she defeats the forces of her dissembling sisters. What hope could there be in Shakespeare's play when the old king emerges with the dead Cordelia in his arms crying: "Howl, howl, howl, howl!" Kent's following line could well echo the dismay of the audience: "Is this the promised end?" Eagleton's comment is on point. The death of the leading characters does not "undermine the integrity of the poetry that records them.... [T]he play's own artistry stands in judgment on any too facile disenchantment." Wittgenstein was right: hope has to do with language. When language rises to the beauty of Shakespeare's poetry, a sublimity beyond death and defeat has been performed. There is hope beyond hope.

Reading Terry Eagleton is always a delight; reviewing him is daunting. I appreciate his rejection of Bloch's Cosmic Marxism, which hangs every historical event onto some theoretical peg. But Eagleton also risks literary overload. I am glad that Doris Day got a mention. I had a pleasant moment of *Schadenfreude* considering Eagleton's example of someone entertaining the forlorn hope of finding North Korean dictator Kim-il-un in a gay bar in Denver. Getting everyone from Abraham to Slavoj Žižek into 176 pages is an achievement no short review can hope to match. Best to read the book and enjoy! ■

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Maria Bowler

A Text that Can't Be Tamed

The Good Book

Writers Reflect on Favorite Bible Passages

Edited by Andrew Blauner

Simon & Schuster, $27, 320 pp.

When it comes to the Bible and its place in our culture, Americans seem deeply ambivalent. Our nation's history brims with biblical rhetoric. Hollywood films based on Bible stories, like Darren Aronofsky's blockbuster *Noah*, continue to draw reliable crowds. Classes at secular universities dedicate themselves to studying the Bible as literature. Yet a book that reflects on the Bible for a general readership? That can be a pretty hard sell.

In *The Good Book*, edited by Andrew Blauner, thirty-four writers engage biblical texts ranging from the whole of the Psalms to a single parable. Most of these contributors are public figures—journalists Cokie and Steven Roberts, the Rev. Al Sharpton—or professional writers like Pico Iyer, Lydia Davis, and A. J. Jacobs; some have explored biblical subjects before. The essays are wildly heterogeneous in tone and method, somewhat like the Bible itself. *New Yorker* writer Avi Steinberg tries a "thought experiment" about the true character of the snake in the Garden of Eden. Georgetown sociologist Michael Eric Dyson writes about present-day Ishmaels in light of the Trayvon Martin case. Paul Elie's piece (initially published in *Commonweal*) sails between John's Gospel, a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, and St. Augustine. We even find a new poem by Robert Pinsky and a short story by Colm Tóibín.

Adam Gopnik's introductory essay sets out to convince those skittish about religion that they might want to read Scripture. His humanistic reading casts the Bible as a book "populated by people," both chronicling and enacting the irrepressible human attempt to make meaning. Gopnik's effort to defend the possibility of transcendence without offending scientific rationalism is limited by his belief that human sensibility is all there is—a tough row to hoe, especially when you're writing about a text that claims to say something about the sacred. In case we might be the kind of reader who takes any of that too seriously, he reminds us that the Bible's miracles "are of the same kind and credibility as all the other miracles that crowd the world's great granary of superstition."

Gopnik's dilemma hints at why much of this collection necessarily struggles with how to read the Bible. Is the Bible a living, breathing text, or a shard of our history best kept behind museum glass? Can its stories be distilled to a message and discussed in polite company? What to do with its explicit embrace and hallowing of the miraculous? The most instructive and rewarding aspect of reading this collection is watching its contributors wrestle with a text, a history, and a weight of import that they can't tame. This is still the Bible, after all, looming heavily in even the most secular North American imagination, whatever each writer might believe about its credibility. The Bible remains stubbornly bigger than their attempts to encapsulate it.

Detail from Eve *by Albrecht Dürer, 1507*

Behind these attempts lurks a question: Does the Bible actually matter or not? In an essay appropriately called "The Bad Book," novelist Robert Coover takes the boldest stance, arguing that the Bible does matter—and that humanity is worse off for it. In Coover's view, holy books are inherently dangerous. "All the world's heavies," he writes, "needing to hang on to what they've got while pushing their enemies' noses in it, find books like this one the perfect tool for suckering a mob." Perhaps not a convincing stab at explaining the vast phenomenon of religious violence, but it is certainly a passionate one.

Another novelist reaches a very different estimate. In "Long Road Home," Tobias Wolff writes about forgiveness in his meditation on the parable of the prodigal son. Though he addresses the story's theme, he's also interested in investigating the point—and the power—of using stories in the first place. For Wolff, theology can provide abstract assurances of God's love and mercy, but parables put flesh to those bones. A father waits for his returning son and runs to meet him. "This is beyond anything that precept can express—the image of that father, looking far down the road, recognizing his son even in this distance."

My favorite piece is journalist James Parker's essay on Psalm 139, the intimate psalm that reads: "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away." The prospect of an inescapable God unnerves Parker, yet it is not strange to him. He remembers how his mind felt on the party drug Ecstasy, and how a panic attack after a bad trip altered his perception of reality, showing him something like the abyss. "This is not theology, I should say, or philosophy, because I'm quite sure I have no aptitude for either," Parker writes. "This

is my experience." Do his experience and the psalmist's experience speak to each other? Parker understands that the psalmist isn't a propagandist, but a person. "I'm beginning to sermonize," he corrects himself at one point. "I mustn't do that. The psalmist doesn't sermonize. The psalmist makes his report." Where some other writers seem happy to find a "teachable moment" in the texts they engage, drawing forth lessons about family or community, Parker seems humbled by the ideas he encounters in Psalm 139; he does not share the complacency of those who, while deploring the alleged didacticism of the Bible, treat it didactically themselves.

The most successful essays in *The Good Book*, such as Parker's, are serious even—or especially—when they are uncertain. Thomas Lynch's essay, "Miracles," recalls his Catholic upbringing and notes that "the less observant I became, in belief or devotion, the better the 'good' book seemed to me." With this in mind, he asks us to reconsider what a miracle might be. He attends the funeral of his friend Seamus Heaney, a poet who celebrated what Lynch (another *Commonweal* contributor) calls the "everyday and deeply human miracle, void of heavenly hosts or interventions." What about the Gospel story of the paralytic man who was lowered through a roof to receive Jesus' healing? Lynch thinks about the story's nameless people who carried the man, even as he himself, a poet and undertaker by trade, accompanies Heaney's body in the hearse from Dublin to Derry. A very earthbound essay, Lynch's effort nonetheless shows great reverence.

If some of the essays in *The Good Book* prove less than fully satisfying as interpretations of their chosen passages, they at least offer us an invitation to take on the task ourselves. *The Good Book* records the efforts of diverse readers working to make sense of the Bible—a book at once too foreign and too familiar—and in the process, treating it as though it could still somehow speak. ■

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Terrence W. Tilley

Variety Incarnate

The Revelatory Body
Theology as Inductive Art
Luke Timothy Johnson
Eerdmans Publishing, $25, 256 pp.

In this book—his twenty-fifth, by my count—the ever-prolific Luke Timothy Johnson provides an important alternative to the "theologies of the body" on offer among those thinkers and writers elaborating themes fashioned by John Paul II more than three decades ago. Where John Paul and his followers employ a deductive method in theology that does not consider what relevance actual bodies might have to the theological task, Johnson inductively teases out the significance of various sorts of bodies for understanding what God might be saying through them. All the bodies God created are, in fact, a source for divine revelation.

The book's title alludes to a key theme in Sandra Schneiders's *The Revelatory Text*: that Scripture does not contain divine revelation, but participates in it. So do human bodies. Thus we have to interrogate the body as attentively as we do Scripture in order to find out what God is doing and saying through it. Johnson's first two chapters argue against John Paul II's approach to theology, advocating a more nuanced and attentive reading both of Scripture and of actual bodies. He excoriates the late pope's "flat, surface reading" of biblical texts, and finds John Paul's focus on controlling the body too narrow a basis for a viable theology of the embodied self. The papal position was developed to provide a theological argument for the prohibition of so-called artificial birth control. Such an *a priori*, deductive theology of the body, Johnson asserts, shows a "deep lack of interest" in the experience of married couples in general and women in particular. Nor can it attend to what God is doing in either bodies or texts, since it deduces theological claims from axiomatic propositions.

The third chapter takes on an opponent from the other end of the spectrum: the blinkered, reductionist materialism and secularism that distort contemporary life. If we accept these anti-theistic views, Johnson warns, we risk being enslaved by instruments created to liberate us, and can end up diverted by mindless entertainment, lost in our own egos, or imprisoned in scientism. More positively, Johnson shows how the Divine Spirit can reveal Godself through the human spirit. Key to his argument is the notion that the human spirit is defined by its bodily ability to communicate with, and thus enter into, other bodies. Like human communication, divine revelation is a communicative act. God communicates with us through the bodies God created.

Johnson then outlines a phenomenology of the body at play; in pain and in passion; at work; and aging. He reflects on the Scriptures (often scanty, confusing, or self-contradictory on the topics examined here), and on his own and others' experience. In doing so, he provides a firm footing for a bodily theology. In actually attending to what gay and lesbian bodies tell us about the God who created and ordered them, rather than simply deducing that they are "intrinsically disordered," Johnson shows us how to develop a more capacious theology, one that recognizes the divine in and through all bodies.

Insights abound in these pages. Johnson writes that while "[p]lay provides the most visible evidence that structure and freedom are not opposed but mutually dependent," when play is married to commerce, as in professional sports, it can become an exploitative form of work; pay defeats the point of play. He views the passions favorably, not as torrents needing to be dammed by the exercise of the mind and will: "to ignore the possibility of pleasure in our life's activities is to miss part of the truth that our bodies can teach us." Pleasure and suffering are more than theological difficulties, he notes; as bodily conditions they can be revelatory. Just as the cross has long symbolized God's presence with us as we suffer, perhaps *jouissance* reveals the divine, too, since God is love.

From the cover of The Revelatory Body

Johnson's best insights come in two chapters. "The Exceptional Body" surveys ways in which different abilities, anatomies (e.g., intersexuality) and sexual orientations, long viewed as aberrations to be ignored, repaired, or condemned, can be revelatory. A nuanced reading of scriptural texts assists the project of taking different kinds of bodies as clues to God's love (an extension of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's insights in *The Dignity of Difference*). If God made us, then God made us rather diversely. The simplistic binaries of deductive theologies conceal the variety of God's creation and blind us to what God reveals through the medley of creation. All bodies at all points on the bell curve—not just the middling norms—show us something of God's love.

And the chapter titled "The Aging Body" certainly rings true to this sixty-eight-year-old reviewer. Taking the aging body seriously means accepting that what we gain in wisdom as we age is offset by our loss of mental and physical agility. And it means reminding ourselves that "it's okay" that we will die. We ache; our eyesight dims and our senior moments are more frequent; we become glad to walk where once we delighted in hours of full-court basketball; our friends and lovers die on us: these are harbingers of our future, when we will leave this mortal coil and be enfolded in the love of God.

If *The Revelatory Body* has a major flaw, it is that it spends too little time drawing out theological insights from its descriptions of the body. A few paragraphs scattered throughout a book do not constitute "an inductive theology." Johnson's exploration of the body at work is rather limited in perspective, focused primarily on his own work as a teacher and scholar. And reflections on the "sick body," the "injured body," and "warriors' bodies" would make useful additions. Illness and the debility it can bring, after all, differ significantly from the deficits of aging or pain. Injuries can devastate, changing abilities profoundly. And what happens to soldiers in and after battle—and what our society fails to do for these soldiers—is a topic begging to be addressed.

But it's unfair, perhaps, to ask an author to write a different book. The book Johnson actually has written should be read by anyone wearied by the stilted and sterile ruminations of the deductive "theology of the body" now taught in many seminaries and dioceses. Graciously written, *The Revelatory Body* opens a door to a better body theology. If it does not get very far through that door, it is nonetheless a fine sketch, letting us glimpse how the created body reveals the Creator Spirit. One hopes Johnson and others will continue to develop this inductive art, reminding us that the God who created us all loves variety. ■

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Michael West

Religion's Dangerous Idea

Shakespeare and Abraham

Ken Jackson
University of Notre Dame Press, $27, 184 pp.

In Genesis 22 it is Abraham, as much as Isaac, who finds himself in a bind. Commanded by God to kill his son, Abraham can devote himself either to God or his son, but he cannot do both. In *Shakespeare and Abraham*, Ken Jackson argues that this "Abrahamic situation" provides a source for Shakespeare's meditations on the ethical, religious, and political challenges posed in some of the playwright's early plays.

Abraham, in Jackson's stark reading, is not a tragic hero forced to choose between two goods, compelled against his will to sacrifice his son in the hope of being rewarded by God. Instead, Abraham points to the possibility of offering a truly generous gift, a gift for which one would hope for nothing in return: he is thus "simultaneously a murderer and a man of God." Troubling any easy conflations of "love of God and neighbor," Jackson's reading of Abraham suggests that a fully generous love for both is an "impossible possibility." Indeed, much of modern thought has loudly chosen one of the horns of this dilemma and rejected the other: opting for neighbor over God, this world over the next, the nation state over the church, "secularism" over "religion," or—as those British bus advertisements for atheism used to say—"enjoying life" over "worrying" about God.

In Jackson's reading, the Abraham story helps generate these distinctions by suggesting "the misanthropy implied in any true faith," in which responding to the call of the wholly Other (God) entails ignoring the call of the other (other people). Yet the Abraham story also collapses distinctions between the "religious" and the "secular." Because Abraham must give all and expect nothing in return (God makes no promises and never tells Abraham why he must sacrifice Isaac), "Abraham must act religiously but without a divine presence or even any sense of divine presence."

Jackson brings this reading of the Abrahamic situation to Shakespeare, arguing that in his plays "Shakespeare sought dramatically, but still religiously...the impossible other, the Abrahamic gift." Shakespeare's drama points toward a more profound religion than whatever form of Christianity Shakespeare himself may have believed in or practiced. Yet this religion is, paradoxically, a "secular" one: a religion "constituted primarily by a desire to give oneself absolutely to the 'other' that cannot be known, a desire that may determine institutionalized monotheisms [i.e., Christianity, Judaism, Islam] but is not equivalent to any of them, a desire that is inextricably intertwined with a secular or existential worldview."

Jackson shows us a Shakespeare sallying forth on "Abrahamic explorations" in six of his early plays. His pious but weak Henry VI, for example, is read "in terms of the patriarch [Abraham] whose commitment to a divine 'Other' compromised his responsibilities to this world." *Richard II*, in turn, shows Shakespeare turning to the Abraham story to think through problems of political theology, such as "divine right and sovereign legitimacy." A helpful chapter also outlines the various ways the Abraham story has been interpreted in Christianity and Judaism, showing in particular that Paul's reading of Isaac as Christ is "rabbinical" inasmuch as it follows an earlier Jewish tradition of reading Isaac as "the model for sacrificial atonement or redemption."

Jackson's approach yields some startling results. When Aaron the Moor, the villain of *Titus Andronicus*, refuses the command to kill his son in a play in which multiple child sacrifices have already occurred, this act "should not be seen as compassion at all," Jackson argues, but rather as an instance of someone refusing to offer the "true Abrahamic gift." Jackson also argues that the combination of generosity and misanthropy in one of Shakespeare's

most inscrutable and contradictory characters—Timon of Athens—is determined by the Abrahamic situation. Timon's attractive generosity in the play's first half is driven by the same impulse as his repulsive misanthropy in the second: a desire for "the pure gift without exchange."

So although *Shakespeare and Abraham* is in some sense about Shakespeare and religion, it should be clear that Jackson is not particularly interested in, for example, whether Shakespeare was or wasn't Catholic. Jackson is hunting larger game in this book, pushing "down through Christianity to the religious passion underlying Christianity: the Abrahamic desire to give absolutely, completely." More important for Jackson than Shakespeare's "actual, personal faith" are his plays, which "point…beyond Christianity and outside Western metaphysics. Shakespeare's profound and devout Christianity" thus resembles what Jacques Derrida called a "religion without religion," which is produced by "the religious passion underlying religion": the desire to give completely, without hope of reward or exchange.

This idiosyncratic understanding of "religion" leads Jackson to make some bold claims that will not be immediately welcomed or even recognized by some literary scholars. For one, Jackson argues that the academy's current interest in the marginalized "other" is itself religious. Again drawing on the thinking of Derrida, Jackson argues that this "critical, seemingly secular and ethical interest in the 'other'...is inextricably tied to a religious understanding of the 'Other' beyond being." Jackson finds all the interest in the non-Western, non-normative "other" not so much misguided as insufficient. Insofar as scholars perceive themselves in the "other" (considering themselves marginalized, oppositional, non-normative), this interest is still "geared toward the self" of Western metaphysics.

On the other hand, Jackson's distinctive approach to "religion" leaves out quite a bit: it cannot discern what particular religions do and are, how they work, and what might be at stake in religious particularity. Distinctions between Christianity and Judaism fall out, for example, leading Jackson to read Shylock's forced conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* as a mere "procedural gesture having little to do with Shakespeare's religion or religion writ large." Jackson is generally dismissive of "the trappings of a particular tradition." For all Christianity's insistence on generosity, Jackson believes it is marred by Gospel notions such as "treasure in heaven" and a "Father which seeth in secret" who "shall reward thee openly." For Jackson, this economic relationship lacks generosity: you might do good deeds, but only because you hope God will pay you back.

Despite its lack of interest in Shakespeare's actual Christianity, however, Jackson's work is especially welcome in the hothouse world of literary studies, where religion—when it isn't reduced to political and economic forces—is all too often treated as just another social context. At its most bracing, Jackson's approach to religion makes it something to be approached with the utmost seriousness, with a respect for its dangerousness and its capacity to unsettle and exceed comprehension. Built on a faith which is, in Jackson's words, "painfully aneconomic and unrewarding," this is the ascetic, break-from-the-world Christianity found in T. S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" and the writings of the desert fathers. This kind of Christianity tends to downplay other aspects of the faith: the Incarnation, the celebration of God's presence in the world, the building and maintenance of institutions, and the sense of joy, comfort, and rightness with the world encapsulated by Hilaire Belloc: "Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine, / There's always laughter and good red wine." Jackson gives us a Shakespeare who refuses these consolations and who, longing for the wholly Other, seeks to give without reserve. ■

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Lawrence Cunningham

From Hollywood to Patmos

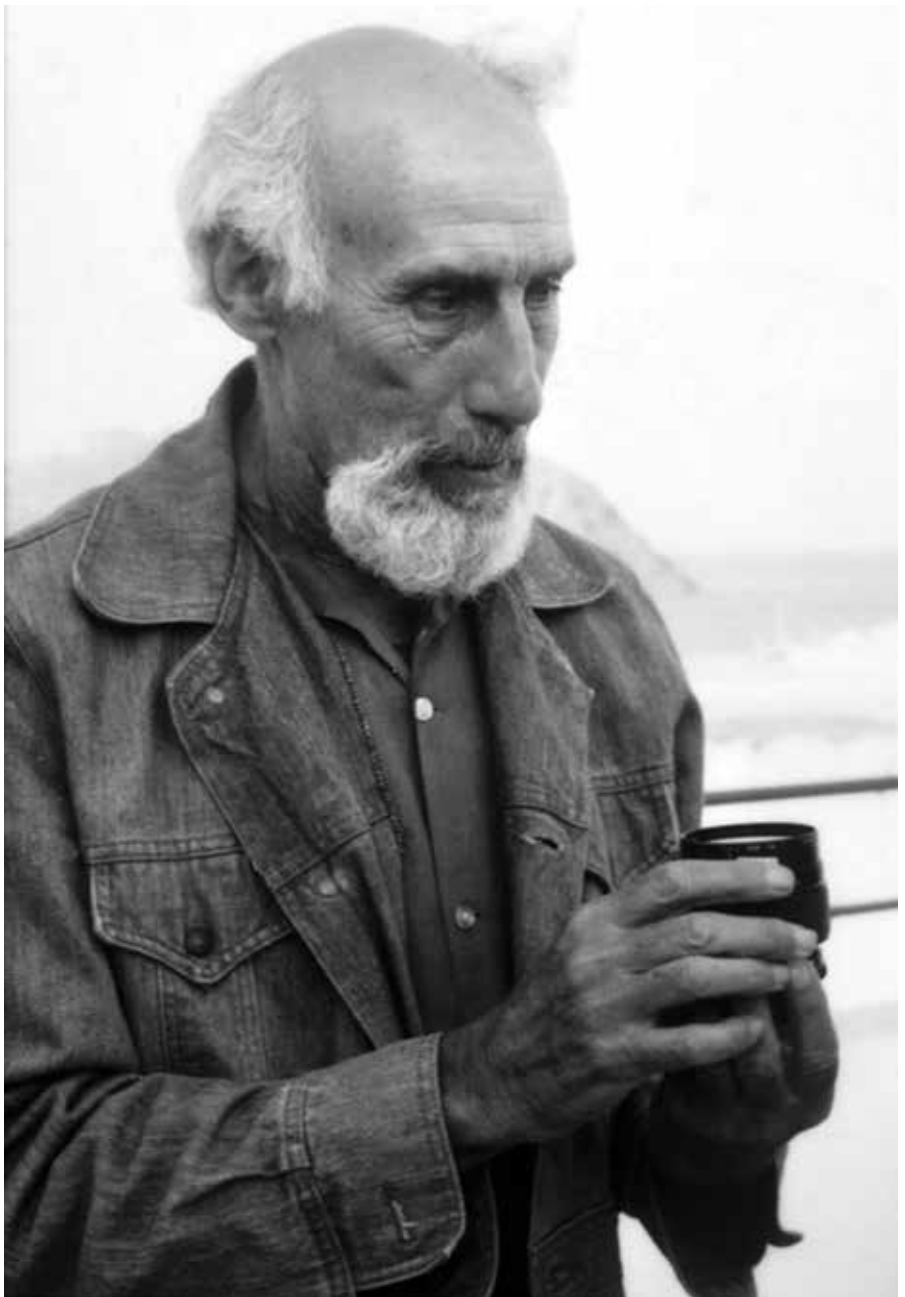
Pure Act

The Uncommon Life of Robert Lax

Michael N. McGregor

Fordham University Press, $34.95, 472 pp.

Robert Lax (1915-2000) is today best known in this country as Thomas Merton's closest friend. Having met when they were both students at Columbia University, the two exchanged letters until Merton's death in 1968. It is the purpose Michael N. McGregor's new biography of Lax to move him out from under the shadow of Merton's powerful personality and give him his own place in the sun. This is not an easy thing for an American biography to do, both because Lax spent so much of his adult life outside the United Sates and because of his commitment as a poet to seeking the purest and sparest language possible, a commitment that makes his hermetic poems a challenge for many readers. While Lax enjoyed a certain measure of fame in Europe during his lifetime, it was only late in his life that his writings found a place in the American literary scene.



ROBERT LAX IN 1992. PHOTO BY NANCY GOLDRING

After Lax graduated from Columbia in 1938, he got off to a promising start. He landed jobs at the *New Yorker* and *Time*, and even spent some time as a scriptwriter in Hollywood. But a lifelong restlessness led him away from the well-beaten path of literary success. He traveled with a circus, lived for a short while in Paris and then in a poor neighborhood of Marseilles. He spent some time at a religious retreat near the shrine of La Sallette in France, and eventually settled—if that's the right word—on the Greek island of Patmos. Finally, old age and illness brought him back to his upstate hometown of Olean, New York, where he died in 2000.

Born into a largely nonobservant Jewish family, Lax was baptized a Catholic in 1943. Ed Rice, who was Merton's godfather, was also Lax's. In the early 1950s, Rice founded *Jubilee* magazine, for which Lax served as a "roving editor" from Europe. That job was one of a number of threads that kept him somewhat tied to the American scene. He also kept up a correspondence with Mark Van Doren, the legendary Columbia professor, and thanks to his friendship with the graphic designer Emil Antonucci (who did a lot of work for *Commonweal* over the years), Lax's great long poem *The Circus of the Sun* was published in this country. During all his years abroad, he wrote constantly. His poetry became gradually more pared-down, more minimalist. While he found sympathetic publishers in Europe, he remained little known and little published in this country, garnishing a certain reputation among better-known poets such as John Berryman (another classmate at Columbia) and John Ashbury.

McGregor got to know Lax by accident on a trip to Greece when someone on Patmos told him of the greatly admired American who lived on the island. McGregor sought him out and over the years they became friends. In fact, a fair amount of this biogra-

phy frames itself around McGregor's many visits to Patmos and the time he spent with Lax doing the things Lax loved most: walking around the island, swimming, and spending time in his modest home drinking tea, discussing books, sharing poems, and at times, sitting quietly. Toward the end of his life, Lax depended on McGregor to assist him with his papers and to help him return to upstate New York before the end of his life. Lax's way of life, which McGregor observed in Patmos, had been established decades before: "living simply among those at the bottom of society, watching and writing down his observations, offering peace and whatever else he could to those in spiritual or physical need." There was something almost monastic about it; it was in some ways similar to the life that Merton lived. Not surprisingly, Lax was, like Merton, a lifelong pacifist.

The title of this book derives from some lines Lax once wrote, obviously under the influence of the Thomism he learned during his Columbia days. God is pure act with no potency within Him, while everything else in the universe is in potential: on its way to pure act and thus on its way to unity with God. To really see something is to grasp that it is oriented toward pure act—which is to say, toward God. Perceptive critics were able to grasp this fundamental philosophical orientation in Lax's austerely minimalist poetry. Mark Van Doren said that Lax expressed the "purity of the object and reverence in the beholder."

Both Lax's way of living and his poetics raise the question of his religious orientation. Lax never rejected his Jewishness after his entrance into the Catholic Church. He continued reading deeply in Jewish sources and was a close reader of Martin Buber. McGregor cites a long journal entry from late in Lax's life where he writes that it is important to find the "right" religion and the right culture, but even more important "is the progress you make—the progress you find you can make—once you have found it." The end, however, is to get beyond being a "good" Jew or Catholic in order to become a "contemplative, yes to be a mystic, yes." In that context, Lax loved the line of Teilhard de Chardin: "Everything that rises must converge."

McGregor wants to see Lax in his own right, and, true to that aim, he has written an intellectual biography that is as full and fair as one could expect. As a longtime reader of Lax, I learned a great deal from this finely researched book. It is not perfect: it is stronger on Lax the poet and essayist than on Lax the spiritual writer. On the latter topic one should consult Steve Georgiou's *The Way of the Dreamcatcher* (2002). But Lax the poet deserves the attention he gets here, and the poetry, now mostly overlooked, is a good way into Lax's mysticism. ■

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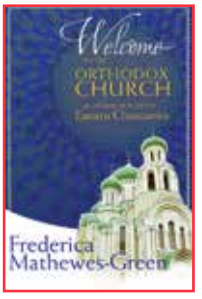
RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Luke Timothy Johnson

Welcome to the Orthodox Church
An Introduction to Eastern Christianity

Frederica Mathewes-Green
Paraclete Press, $19.99, 361 pp.

Converts make excellent apologists. They are enthusiastic about the new thing they have embraced, yet retain insider's knowledge of the thing they have left. They can therefore address questions that interested outsiders might have about their new allegiance, because the same questions were both asked and answered in their own process of conversion. Frederica Mathewes-Green is such an enthusiastic apologist. She and her husband converted to Orthodoxy from the Episcopal tradition in 1993. While her husband has served as a pastor, she has become a highly visible and articulate spokesperson in a variety of media, including six previous books on Orthodoxy.



This treatment is animated by the conviction that "Orthodoxy is not primarily a religious institution, but a spiritual path." Rather than approach this tradition through its historical development or its distinctive theological convictions—though an impressive amount of this sort of information is conveyed—she focuses on Orthodoxy as a path to God, with a specific focus on forms of worship and prayer. She understands that the experience of a religious path is the necessary precondition to true understanding: "the best way to understand anything is not to read about it, but to experience it firsthand." Her goal, then, is not to replace such first-hand experience but to entice readers to such personal engagement.

The device she uses to draw her reader progressively into the intricacies of the tradition is to begin with the most visible appurtenances of worship: the arrangements and furnishings of a typical Orthodox church. In an inviting and highly personal style, she leads her imaginary tourists into the deeper significance of architecture and furnishings, moving easily, for example, from the production of icons to convictions concerning theosis. Along the way, she carefully and charitably points out the ways in which Orthodoxy has a very different emphasis than Western Christianity (especially Protestantism) on such key topics as Christology and salvation. She observes that "Catholic and Protestant look a lot alike from an Eastern perspective."

Mathewes-Green then moves from liturgical setting to consider the form of worship, using the actions and prayers of the liturgy in the same way she used church furnishings, to provide a basis for the discussion of Orthodox history, theology, and always, piety. In the last, and to my mind least satisfying part of her book, she moves outside the church to the Orthodox community, tracing a believer's path from baptism to funeral. I don't know if my sense of letdown in this section is because of a lapse in Mathewes-Green's powers of exposition or an unexpected oddity in the Orthodox sense of "community": the positive emphasis on prayer and personal transformation, it appears, is fundamentally individualistic; the reader gets very little sense of Orthodoxy as social body or as an effective and transformative social presence in the world.

The Harp of Prophecy
Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms

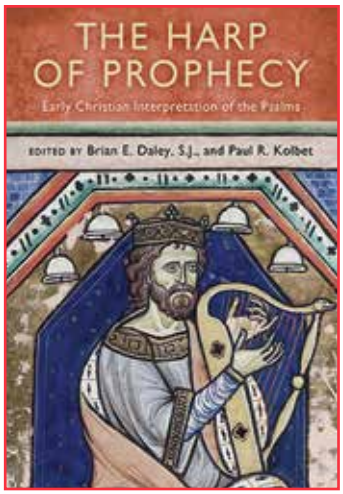
Brian E. Daley, S.J.
and Paul R. Kolbet, editors
University of Notre Dame Press, $39, 332 pp.

Recovery of patristic biblical interpretation over recent decades has been an unequivocally positive contribution to the renewal of theology. The pioneering work of von Balthasar, de Lubac, Danielou, and others before and during Vatican II prepared the way for an even more vigorous, extensive, and detailed analysis and appreciation of patristic exegesis among contemporary scholars. It also helped provide a way past the theological road-block imposed by the hegemonic historical-critical method of the academy. Given the importance of the Psalms for the writers of the New Testament and in subsequent Christian thought and prayer, it is surprising that sustained scholarly attention to patristic interpretation of them has been so neglected. But the twelve scholarly essays that originated in a conference at the University of Notre Dame in 1998 and were then gathered into this volume compensate considerably for the delay.

The collection provides readers with a range of patristic authors (from Origen to Maximus the Confessor) and approaches to the Psalms. After an overview of the use of the Psalms in early Christian life (Brian Daley), and the suggestion of a patristic—and rabbinic—solution to the hermeneutical problems posed by the imprecatory Psalms (Gary Anderson), two essays focus on the ascetical appropriation of the Psalms by Athanasius (Paul Kolbet) and Evagrius (Luke Dysinger). Three provide distinct readings of Psalm 45 by Basil

(Nonna Harrison), Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine (David Hunter), and the representatives of the Alexandrian and Antiochean traditions of interpretation, Cyril and Theodore of Mopsuestia (Ronald Cox). Two essays concentrate on Augustine's hermeneutical principle of the *Totus Christus* (Michael Cameron and Michael McCarthy). Finally, the distinctive approaches of Theodoret and Maximus are examined respectively by John O'Keefe and Paul Blowers.

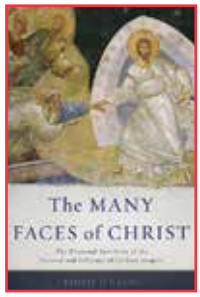
For scholars interested in the history of theology and biblical interpretation—if these can actually be distinguished—each of these studies is worth reading, even when the tiresome academic preoccupation with gender, politics, and social theory occasionally intrudes. Two impressions drawn from the collection: (1) the influence of Hellenistic moral philosophy and rhetoric on the fathers is everywhere evident: there is direct continuity between the moral discourse of Greco-Roman popular philosophy and the ascesis of Athanasius and Evagrius; (2) the long-standing distinction between the Alexandrian and Antiochean schools of scriptural interpretation is real and valid, but also needs to be qualified by careful attention to individual interpreters: the case of Theodoret is particularly instructive. The only essay in the collection that is almost unreadably recondite and technical is the effort by Ronald Heine to reconstruct Origen's prologue to his Caesarean commentary on the Psalms. But as the full set of scholarly notes indicates, all of these studies—with the exception of Daley's straightforward survey—are clearly directed more to other experts than to the general reader. A fine bit of lagniappe, however, is provided by an appendix listing all early Christian commentaries on the Psalms, together with available English translations.



The Many Faces of Christ
The Thousand-Year Story of the Survival and Influence of the Lost Gospels

Philip Jenkins
Basic Books, $27.99, 307 pp.

It turns out that the popular mythologists of Christianity are wrong both in root and in branch. In an earlier book (*The Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Went Wrong*), Jenkins showed how very unhistorical the quest for the historical Jesus was: contrary to claims made by scholars like John Dominic Crossan, apocryphal writings do not give privileged access to knowledge about the human Jesus. Now Jenkins, a prolific Baylor University professor of history, sets out to demolish the other side of the popular myth peddled by Elaine Pagels, Bart Ehrmann, and many others. The apocryphal writings generated from the second century on, these revisionists claim, were totally suppressed by the church through the process of canonization, and remained largely unknown until their recovery by modern scholars. Jenkins argues convincingly that many apocryphal works not only survived but continued to be highly influential within Christianity for a thousand years.



Part of his proof relies on the evidence for a wide transmission of apocryphal writings. Many of these texts are found in multiple translations, suggesting an equally extensive popularity in different areas of the Christian world. Canonization of the Old and New Testament did not lead automatically or necessarily to the destruction of other texts; it simply relegated them to the secondary position of private reading rather than public proclamation. Ethiopia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Armenia, Central Asia—even Ireland and England—provide tantalizing clues to the survival and use of both New and Old Testament apocrypha. So do the traces of apocryphal accounts discernable in the works of medieval dualists such as the Bogomils and the Albigensians, and the clear use of New Testament apocrypha in the depictions of Jesus in Muslim and Jewish writings. Early apocryphal texts serve as sources for *The Golden Legend*, the best-selling book of the high Middle Ages.

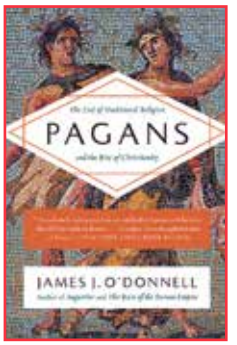
Survival, then, is clear; but what about influence? Jenkins develops the case that the apocryphal gospels and acts were of critical importance for shaping the medieval image of Christ. The attention paid to the nativity of the Christ child in ecclesiastical art owed everything to the depiction of him in *The Protevangelium of James*, which was appropriated in the later *Infancy Gospel of Matthew*; the stories of the boy Jesus as wonder-worker and helper in Joseph's carpenter shop come entirely from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. More strikingly, the widespread image of the triumphant resurrected Christ as the harrower of hell (as in Langland's *Piers Plowman*) comes from the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*.

Even more impressively, apocryphal gospels influenced piety and doctrine concerning Jesus' mother. *The Protevangelium of James*, rather than the canonical Gospels, is a primary source for convictions concerning the Immaculate Conception as well as the perpetual virginity of Mary. Similarly, the tradition that Mary was assumed bodily into heaven owes everything to such apocrypha as *The Six Books Apocryphon* (fourth century) and *On Mary's Death* (fifth to sixth century). And although Mary Magdalen is officially understood in medieval Christianity as a repentant sinner, the *Golden Legend* continues the emphasis of earlier apocrypha by memorializing her as "fellow to the Apostles" and a powerful preacher of the good news.

Jenkins makes a convincing case that popular piety during the thousand-year span of Catholic Christianity (500–1500) did not eliminate but rather cherished and elaborated apocryphal traditions, and that the true period of repression was not the notorious fourth century, but the Reformation, when the principle of *Sola Scriptura* demanded the abandonment of all the legendary and miraculous elements that so enlivened medieval Christianity.

Pagans
The End of Traditional Religion and the Rise of Christianity
James J. O'Donnell
HarperCollins, $27.99, 288 pp.

The process by which an imperial world supported by Greco-Roman religion gave way to one dominated by Christianity has been treated many times and from many different perspectives. O'Donnell's distinctive point is that "paganism" is entirely an invention of Christianity—a definition of the "other" that paralleled fourth-century Christianity's own ideal of unity (see the Nicene Creed). Before those outside of orthodox Christianity were defined as "pagans," there had only been, in O'Donnell's term, "traditional religion" of a highly variegated sort. His claim is, so far as it goes, manifestly true: practitioners of Greco-Roman cults did not call or conceive of themselves as "pagan," nor was there a singular structure of belief or practice that could be called "paganism." But O'Donnell's point also immediately reveals his analysis as one shaped by the academic study of religion and ritual popularized by the University of Chicago historian Jonathan Z. Smith. Consequently, the first part of the book seeks to display the traditional character of Greco-Roman religion, treating side by side such topics as public festivals, polytheism, prophecy, sacrifice, and religious skepticism. O'Donnell knows his way around the sources, translating most of them himself, and provides many good individual observations in what is basically an introduction to Greco-Roman religious phenomena. Especially in this section of the book, though, the author's tone is distracting: his diction vacillates between scholarly and pop-sophomoric ("frenemy"?), and—in accord with contemporary fashion—he cannot see any religious impulse of Augustus as anything but politically self-aggrandizing. It is not at all clear whom O'Donnell regards as his readers. Scholars will not learn much new, and beginners are liable to be put off by a fairly consistent note of distance from, even disdain for, the religious phenomena O'Donnell describes. His treatment of sacrifice, for example, combines the contemporary abhorrence for the slaughter of animals with a complete lack of sympathy for the ancient instinct that led people to destroy their most prized possessions to please or appease the gods.



O'Donnell's choice of ancient authors is sometimes surprising, revealing perhaps the tastes more of a trained classicist than a religionist. Treating Cicero in detail nicely sets up the author's later comparison between the Latin orator and the Christian rhetorician Augustine—quite a good and convincing comparison—but if O'Donnell's purpose was to show the religious impulses of aristocratic Romans, the *Discourses* of Aelius Aristides or Dio Chrysostom, and the *Moralia* of Plutarch, would have provided even greater insight.

The second half of the book follows in form O'Donnell's argument that Christianity had a historical character lacking in traditional Mediterranean religion: Christians simultaneously saw themselves as something new with respect to the ancient covenant with Israel while also displacing "paganism." The presentation here is therefore straightforwardly chronological. O'Donnell leads us through Diocletian and company, to Constantine and sons, to "the first Christian emperor" Julian—the title is typically meant to provoke—to the decisive Christianization of the empire under Theodosius I, and the rapid disappearance of paganism. For even casual students, this is fairly well-known territory, but O'Donnell proves a deft and reliable tour-guide. His insistence on the process being gradual rather than instantaneous is a valuable reminder. He concludes with a sustained and substantive reading of Augustine's *City of God* as a deliberate and self-aware imitation of Cicero's *Laws*. The jokiness that marred the first section of the book is here less evident. It is replaced, unfortunately, with a fussy pedantry applied to ancient sources and received scholarly opinions alike. O'Donnell gives so much attention to getting small points right that he comes close to obscuring the sense of historical sweep that he wants readers to grasp. ■

A Vigil

Cyndia Rios-Myers

I wasn't challenged by any one person to do it. No one said, "If you are a good Catholic, you would volunteer your rosary and one hour of your time to this very worthy cause." And yet that thought had crossed my mind. I could always revisit the idea at some later date, so I put it aside. But one day after Mass, my devout husband told me that he wanted to sign up for an hour of silent protest outside of the abortion center. I understood, of course.

As I was waiting for him at the sign-up table, a woman with kind eyes spoke to me. She asked if I, too, would like to volunteer my time to pray for the unborn. I asked if it was a hostile protest; she said no. I asked if there would be people protesting our protests; she said it wasn't likely. I knew I'd have no problem standing for an hour. I knew I could get through four rosaries in an hour. So I did it—I signed up for an hour, alone.

My husband asked me if I was ready for this. I told him I wouldn't have volunteered if I weren't. I admitted to being a bit apprehensive, but I'd brave it out. Still, he worried about me, and told me he would happily take my hour so that I wouldn't have to do it. He suggested that I sign up instead for a "group time" instead of going by myself during the early evening. Even the coordinator who scheduled the protests agreed it would be better for me to be with a group, at least the first time. Still, I insisted I could do it alone. Part of me wavered. It would have been easy enough to agree with my husband and the coordinator, or to postpone. But I couldn't do that. My mother goes to viewings, wakes, cemeteries, prisons, and hospitals to pray rosaries for whoever requests them. My maternal grandfather built a Catholic church and a cavalry on his farm—by hand. I come from a long line of people who don't sit things out.

CNS PHOTO / MARIO ANZUONI, REUTERS

So, thirty minutes before I was due at the abortion clinic, I got off my couch, grabbed my rosary and left. I knew where I was going, even before I saw the place. I'd gone to Google Earth to look at the area where I would stand and pray my rosary. I even picked out a spot where I could park for that hour. After arriving, I slowly approached the stretch of sidewalk where I would keep my solitary one-hour vigil. Then I began to pray, whispering Hail Marys and Our Fathers.

While praying, I reflected on my past. Through both research and experience, I knew that Planned Parenthood offices aren't out there just to end the lives of the unborn. They are there to counsel women who are in a scary spot. They are there to provide birth control as well as treating individuals with STDs. I knew that, in their own minds at least, the girls and women entering the clinic were not doing any evil; they were frightened, and perhaps desperate.

I know these things, because many years ago, I visited an abortion center. Twice. I didn't go there to accompany someone. I had two abortions. I was eighteen and involved with a bad man whom I could not say no to. I didn't yet know that abuse is not always delivered by punches, kicks, and slaps. All I knew was that my relationship with him was devouring my soul, and I had to end it. I terminated my first pregnancy, and that should have been lesson enough. But it wasn't. I stayed with the bad man and got pregnant again. He blamed that one on me. After my second abortion, I got away from him, but the damage was done. The guilt and horror of what I'd done turned part of my soul black; I'd carry that forever.

Standing outside the abortion clinic, I prayed for specific things. I prayed for the souls of the babies whose lives were ended. I prayed for the women who had the abortions. I prayed for women in relationships that cost them their happiness, safety, and their sense of self. I prayed for myself, too. I did not have to pray alone—not for too long. The lovely young woman who had helped me sign up for the hour's vigil showed up to keep me company. It was great to have someone to talk to. I didn't tell her what I'd done, but I did tell her what I know. I know there is no malice in the people who go to abortion centers; there is fear, heartbreak, loneliness, and guilt. Sometime later, a homeless man joined us and we all prayed together.

I know that women seeking an abortion don't need me to hold a sign saying that they are doing evil things. But maybe if they see me praying, they'll pray themselves. Maybe some of them will think about the Blessed Virgin Mary and how hard her unplanned pregnancy was. Maybe they'll think of her son and see him in their own unborn children. I can't undo what I did, but I can at least share my story, and stand for an hour, and pray, for whoever needs my prayers. So that is what I will continue to do. ■

Cyndia Rios-Myers *is a freelance writer in San Diego, California.*

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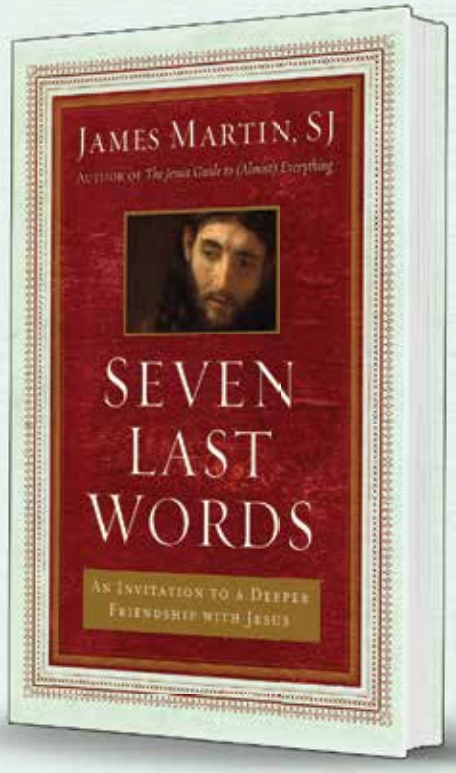

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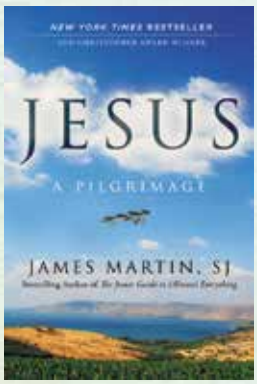

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