A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

FEBRUARY 26, 2016

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO DISARMAMENT?

ANDREW BACEVICH

ECUMENICAL ISSUE

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Commonweal

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Founded in 1924
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Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of public affairs, religion, literature, and the arts, is published biweekly, except in April, July, August, and November, when it is published monthly, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9982.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. *Commonweal* articles are available at many libraries and research facilities via ProQuest and OpinionArchives. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly print subscriptions, U.S., $65; Canada, $70; other parts of the world, $75. Special two-year rate: U.S. $108; Canada, $118; other parts of the world, $128. Add $45 for airmail. For digital and online subscription options visit www.commonwealmagazine.org/digital.

Cover design: Cecilia Guerrero Rezes
Cover photo: U.S. Department of Energy

LETTERS

Refugees, universal salvation, etc.

OPEN DOORS

I just wanted to write and let you know that I loved your recent editorial, "Don't Shut the Door" (December 18). Even though I haven't been a practicing Catholic since I was a little girl, I still love your stance on many social issues like refugees. Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do unto me." With so many of our country's leaders professing the Christian faith, you'd hope they would keep that Scripture in mind.

NICOLE CHOJNACKI
La Crosse, Wisc.

GOODNESS AND GRATITUDE

The two responses (January 29) to my article on universal salvation ("Hell, Population Zero," December 18) are good examples of how answering one question raises a dozen others. Both letters have appreciative things to say about the article while raising several questions for further consideration.

John O'Neill asks about the "moral hazard" he sees attached to universal salvation because it leaves us in a quandary: If we are all to be saved just the same, why should we struggle against evil? Why evangelize? These are good questions but they do not tell against universal salvation precisely because it is a good and has the means of warding off any hazard threatening it—recall the parable of the generous employer of farmhands in Matthew 20. The ultimate answer as to why we should struggle against evil or why evangelize is to be found in recognizing that the moral sense is a given; it is self-evident. We know that "good is to be done and evil avoided" directly; it makes its own claim on our behavior. Thus we know that to struggle against evil and to spread the Gospel are both good and to be done.

George Hunsinger emphasizes the role of prayer in bringing about our salvation and quotes 1 Timothy 2:1 to that effect; it is the "context" for verses 4 and 5 in the same chapter, in which God's will to save everyone is clearly proclaimed. Petition and gratitude, the main focus of the exhortations in the first verse, are prayers centering on a good we hope for, or one that has already been assured—in this case, the salvation of all. In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God's will be done on earth but we know it is not when, for example, one does damage to another or unjustly suppresses the truth. God's will can be frustrated on earth, frustrated in the quotidian sense where fulfillment depends on the human will, but not in the transcendental sense ("as it is in heaven") where it depends entirely on the divine. To love the sinner but hate the sin is a long-standing principle with respect to person-to-person relationships. It is a daunting prospect for anyone but especially for the obdurate sinner who, at the final moment, must get sin behind him. Resolving this dilemma in favor of the sinner does not mean that he will be saved despite himself, but that God, in his own merciful way, will bring about the sinner's conversion as the ultimate instance of loving the sinner while condemning the sin. That's something to be thankful for.

ALBERT B. HAKIM
Summit, N.J.

WITH COMPLIMENTS

I've subscribed for many years and recognize that magazines go through life cycles of richness and famine in content. For the past year or so *Commonweal* has been at the top of its cycle. The January 29 issue is an excellent example of that. Please don't let a compliment go to your heads.

LARRY BOHAN
Oxford, Md.

Union Dues & Don'ts

Labor unions can be corrupt, obstructionist, and maddeningly bureaucratic. They are also important mediating institutions—John Paul II called them "indispensable"—that serve as a counterweight and check on government as well as corporate power. In that role, unions are essential to the health of democracy, and crucial to promoting participation in the political process.

Just as important, over the past century the demands of unions for fair wages and benefits and safe workplaces were responsible for lifting hundreds of millions of Americans into the middle class. Indeed, the pressing issue of this presidential election year has been the "hollowing out" of the middle class. Few dispute the fact that the decline of the union movement has contributed greatly to the economic insecurity and powerlessness felt by so many Americans. Fifty years ago, nearly a third of workers were union members; today only one in ten is. For the past forty years, a well-financed right-wing effort has all but crippled private-sector unions. The result: Less than 7 percent of the private workforce is now unionized. Public-employee unions have remained relatively strong, thanks to the acceptance by government and unions alike of collective bargaining and binding arbitration. Today, 35 percent of public employees belong to a union, and the result has been decades of stable labor relations. But whether public-sector unions and their members will continue to thrive is now in doubt. Last month the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a case celebrated on the right for its potential to fatally weaken public-employee unions.

In 1977, after years of strikes and labor turmoil, the Supreme Court ruled in the *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education* decision that it was constitutional to require public-school teachers who chose not to join a union to pay "agency" or "fair-share" fees. These dues cover the union's costs for negotiating contracts for union members and nonmembers alike. The Court recognized that a balance needed to be struck between the free-speech rights of nonunion members and the so-called "free-rider" problem. Since nonunion teachers benefit from the union's collective bargaining on their behalf, they have a legal obligation to help cover the costs: they are not allowed a "free ride." The "burden" on the First Amendment rights of nonunion members was justified, the Court ruled, to avoid the damage done to unions by free riders and to advance the state's interest in peaceful labor relations.

Public-sector unions are, of course, major financial contributors to the Democratic Party. In right-to-work states where nonunion members are not required to pay fair-share fees, as many as a third of public employees opt out of union membership, draining unions of cohesion and essential resources. The *Friedrichs* case has been steered through the lower courts by a right-wing libertarian group that is not coy about its hope that in overturning *Abood* the Court will deal a devastating blow not just to the union movement, but to the Democratic Party. The plaintiffs have come up with a novel argument as well. No distinctions can be made, they insist, between the union's workplace and collective bargaining activities and its political advocacy. Everything about a teacher's job—school budgets, salaries, class size, the curriculum—is inherently political. And if that is the case, the First Amendment rights of nonunion members are violated when they are compelled to pay "fair-share" fees.

It is difficult to imagine how any organization, let alone a union, could survive if it has no way to manage a free-rider problem. Should the Court rule in the plaintiffs' favor, the likely outcome will be internal union strife and labor-management conflict. That likelihood explains why twenty-one states as well as the Obama administration joined the California Teachers Association in urging the Court to uphold *Abood*.

What is really at stake in the *Friedrichs* case is whether the right of workers to organize will be sacrificed to the current Court's contentious views regarding the First Amendment's free-speech protections. In *Citizens United*, the Court's five Republican-appointed justices ruled that restrictions on political spending by corporations were unconstitutional. Money, the Court said, is speech. If the justices' remarks at oral argument are any indication, that is the same approach they are likely to take in *Friedrichs*—whatever the consequences for unions and municipal governments.

Free speech has not, and should not, trump every other right or social good. The right of association and the dignity that follows from having an effective voice in the workplace are equally important. When unions are starved of the resources they need to defend their members' interests, workers end up with fewer rights, not more. ■

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Obama the Other

DIVISIVE RACIAL POLITICS ARE HARDLY NEW

Since Barack Obama first ran for president, conservatives have often complained of feeling unable to criticize him without being accused of racism. Obviously not all criticism of Obama is racially motivated. But a lot of it has been, plainly and shamelessly so, and that fact is important to recall as we enter a new presidential campaign marked by overt appeals to racial suspicion and resentment. I came across a pungent reminder while reading Peggy Noonan's new book, *The Time of Our Lives*, which collects her favorite commentary from her column in the *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere.

Noonan is not known for provocative outbursts; she tends rather to airy analysis and vague policy prescriptions, padded with much prim clucking over the coarsening of American culture. Fans will find this book thick with Noonan hallmarks: her cloying meringue style ("When big, serious, thoughtful things must be said, then big, serious, thoughtful speeches must be given"); her over-the-top worship of our fortieth president ("Ronald Reagan told the truth to a world made weary by lies"); her reliance on the imagined thoughts and feelings of imaginary "normal people."

But "The View from Gate 14," a *Journal* column from April 2008, is something special. She begins with grumbling about airport security in the post-9/11 world, and in particular the way aggressive security screening "reduces the status of that ancestral arbiter and leader of society, the middle-aged woman." Pat-downs for thee, but not for me! "In the new fairness," Noonan writes—and this is a complaint—middle-aged women are "treated like everyone else, without respect, like the loud ruffian and the vulgar girl on the phone."

Noonan had explicitly advocated racial profiling in other post-9/11 columns, but this one appeals more to class than race—until, having made it through security, Noonan finds herself musing on the challenges facing Barack Obama, then a candidate for the Democratic Party's nomination. "He has been tagged as a snooty lefty," she writes,

> the candidate who loves America because of the great progress it has made in racial fairness. Fine, good. But has he ever gotten misty-eyed over…the Wright Brothers and what kind of country allowed them to go off on their own and change everything? How about D-Day, or George Washington, or Henry Ford...

and on she goes, unspooling the greatest hits of America's great white men. "And Mr. Obama? What does he think about all that history? Which is another way of saying: What does he think of America?"

Why should Obama's feelings about D-Day or the Wright Brothers be suspect, and why must they be interrogated to judge his patriotism when his pride in the country's civil-rights legacy is, as Noonan has said, well known? Her implication is that Obama's "snooty" love of "racial fairness" makes him less likely to value the things that not-so-snooty righties hold dear—the things that are truly "American."

Noonan keeps digging: Republican candidate John McCain, she says, carries his love for America "in his bones." He learned it "literally, at grandpa's knee." If Noonan somehow managed to miss Obama's breakout convention speech in 2004, in which he talked of how his grandfather enlisted after Pearl Harbor and served in "Patton's army," she might have read about it in *Dreams from My Father*, his best-selling book. Obama shouldn't have had to demonstrate his emotional or familial connection to white American greatness, but he had by then, many times over. Yet Noonan goes on:

> But what about Obama and America? Who would have taught him to love it, and what did he learn was loveable, and what does he think about it all?

Noonan never insinuates, as many did and do, that Obama was not born an American or has hidden the truth about his background. Her suspicion rests on the distinction she makes between the black American experience and the full American experience. "No one is questioning his patriotism," she insists, "they're questioning its content, its fullness." In other words, is it *white* enough?

Compared to some of the ugly things that have been said about Obama, Noonan's *not our kind, dear* column may seem tame. (News anchor Brian Williams praised the same column as "a sparkling piece of journalism" worthy of the Pulitzer Prize, and *Washington Post* columnist Kathleen Parker, who wrote a very similar column about Obama's "bloodlines" in 2008, went on to win the Pulitzer in 2010.) But in its genteel way, a line like "Who would have taught him to love it?" is as frankly racist as any birther conspiracy theory. And yet, in 2015, "The View from Gate 14" was published again, selected by Noonan for a collection of her best work.

The hateful rhetoric of the 2016 Republican campaign for president has been appalling—and it's only February! But it didn't come out of nowhere. And conservatives who resent accusations of racism would do well to consider how their candidates learned to love it. ■

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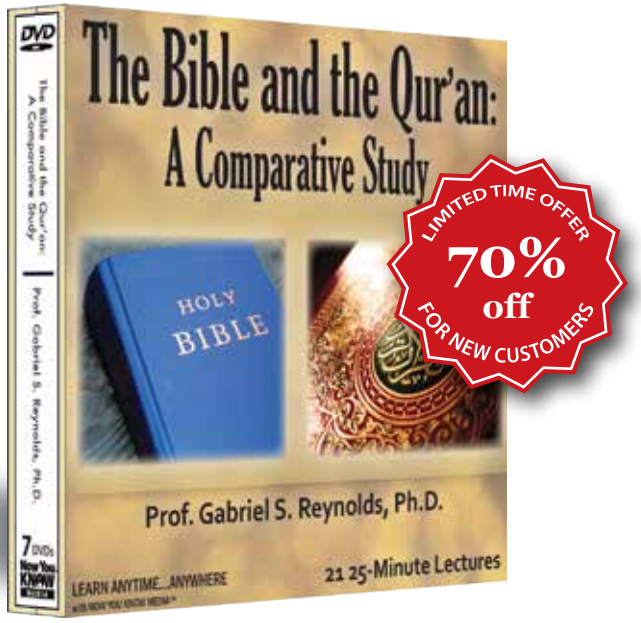

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Andrew J. Bacevich

New Nukes

TURNING AWAY FROM DISARMAMENT

Do nuclear weapons help keep us safe? Or do they threaten our very existence? Rhetorically, American presidents endorse the latter proposition, routinely expressing their commitment to nuclear abolition. In practice, however, they opt for the former, investing large sums of money to maintain and refurbish the nation's nuclear arsenal.

This gap between aspiration and actual practice has become so well-established as to elude serious notice. In American politics, nukes have long since come to occupy white-lie territory where no one really expects words and actions to align. It's like promises to simplify the tax code or streamline government. In such matters, officials say things that all parties know to be untrue, even as if by informal agreement they and we sustain the pretense of believing otherwise.

Consistent with this tradition, President Barack Obama, early in his first term, announced "clearly and with conviction" his intention to pursue "a world without nuclear weapons." Now late in his second term, he has unveiled plans that point in quite a different direction.

With remarkably little fanfare, the administration is embarking upon an ambitious, long-term program aimed at enhancing U.S. nuclear striking power. Upon its completion, roughly expected to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of Hiroshima, U.S. forces will possess a vastly improved suite of nuclear ordnance and delivery systems. New stealthier, missile-firing submarines, new land-based ballistic and air-launched cruise missiles, new long-range bombers, and steerable, "dial-a-yield" bombs will endow the United States with nuclear capabilities of unprecedented precision and flexibility. The new nukes will stand in relation to those they replace as a smart phone stands in relation to an old IBM mainframe computer.

Such wonders will not come cheaply, of course. The projected price tag of this makeover, marketed under the anodyne label of "nuclear modernization," is somewhere in the vicinity of $1 trillion. Only rarely, of course, do actual costs of Pentagon programs conform to such initial estimates. With overruns all but inevitable, the final bill will be considerably higher.

The argument in favor of modernization goes like this: (a) deterring others from nuking us requires that we be able to retaliate in kind, with would-be adversaries having no shred of doubt that the United States can and will do just that; (b) reliance on crude weapons designed decades ago to blow up whole cities could raise doubts about whether the United States can or will follow through on such threats; hence, the imperative of (c) fielding advanced systems that are more reliable, more accurate, and less indiscriminately destructive. In sum, rendering hitherto useless weapons more usable holds the key to ensuring their continued non-use.

U.S. Peacekeeper missile

USAF PHOTO

According to this logic, inaction or even delay invites Armageddon. As one proponent of modernization warns, "A crippled U.S. nuclear force would embolden enemies, frighten allies, generate international instability, and undermine U.S. national security. In other words, it would risk ruining the world that currently exists." Whereas "crippled"—i.e., aging—weapons pose dangers, new weapons bolster credibility, the coin of the realm in nuclear strategy. Besides, as Defense Secretary Ashton Carter once reassuringly put it, nuclear weapons "don't actually cost that much."

The argument against nuclear modernization runs like this: (a) suspicions by would-be adversaries that the United States—known to engage in preventive war—might actually be seeking a first-strike capability will undermine rather than reinforce deterrence; that prospect, along with (b) the difficulty of actually discerning whether the U.S. nuclear arsenal has averted Armageddon, increased its likelihood, or been more or less beside the point, suggests that (c) there might be better ways to spend a trillion bucks. As one critic puts it, no matter how precise or sophisticated, nuclear weapons will remain "useless against the military challenges we face today." As such, replacing the existing arsenal with a new and improved version qualifies as "reckless, wasteful, and downright dangerous."

Credibility comes into play in bringing others around to accepting U.S. nuclear intentions as benign. Were the United States a stay-at-home, minding-our-own-business kind of country, arguing that the world's most capable nuclear power seeks even greater capabilities simply to ensure that such weapons will never (again) be employed in anger might possess a certain plausibility. Given the manifest U.S. penchant for clobbering those it fears or dislikes, however, persuading others that imparting utility to hitherto useless weapons signifies a deep-seated desire to avert their employment becomes a tall order.

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In any event, it will fall to our next commander-in-chief to affirm, modify, or deep-six the course that President Obama has set. Given the money involved and given the sharp disagreements among national security experts regarding the program's wisdom or necessity, one might think this an issue worthy of discussion by candidates keen to demonstrate their presidential bona fides.

A trillion-dollar plan to reverse climate change, colonize Mars, or build a transcontinental high-speed rail network would no doubt provoke a lively back-and-forth among the various presidential contenders. A trillion dollars for nukes? Not so much. In fact, the issue has attracted less attention than ethanol subsidies and generates less heat than arguments about elementary-school curricula. Only infrequently have candidates touched on nuclear matters and even then their comments have tended to be perfunctory or banal—staking out the sort of position that is easily revised should it become expedient to do so.

Buttonholed after an Iowa campaign event by a peace activist wanting to know where she stands on the issue, for example, Hillary Clinton replied, "I'm going to look into that," before adding enigmatically, "It doesn't make sense to me." Yet her campaign website is silent on the matter. Asked a similar question by another activist in New Hampshire, Bernie Sanders offered impassioned generalities:

> How does it happen that we have a trillion dollars available to expand our nuclear arsenal, but we don't have the money to take care of the children in this country?... Does Congress listen to the military-industrial complex that has never seen a war that it didn't like? Or do we listen to the people of this country who are hurting?

Yet when the candidate's diatribe had ended, the question he had been asked remained unanswered. Yes, Sanders clearly favors children over the military-industrial complex. But his position on whether or not to update the nation's nuclear arsenal remains anyone's guess.

As for Republicans in the race, Obama's high-ticket plan to upgrade the U.S. nuclear arsenal puts them in a bit of a bind. With virtual unanimity, GOP candidates routinely denounce Obama for being pathetically weak on national security and for denuding the country's defenses. Contrary evidence they ignore while touting their own superior credentials for "keeping America safe." Yet on that score, Republican candidates are less interested in parsing the finer points of deterrence theory than in signaling their eagerness to kill bad guys.

Here, unquestionably, Ted Cruz leads the pack. Famously pledging to "carpet bomb [ISIS] into oblivion," the Texas senator thereby offered a fair imitation of Barry Goldwater or General Curtis LeMay, who orchestrated the fire-bombing of Japanese cities. He then hinted that nuclear weapons might have a place in that fight. "I don't know if sand can glow in the dark," Cruz allowed, "but we're going to find out."

At least we know where Cruz stands. Not so Donald Trump. By muffing a straightforward debate question about his nuclear priorities, the Republican frontrunner revealed that he has yet to give the matter much thought. A hasty retreat into narcissistic blather ensued: "I think, for me, nuclear is just the power, the devastation is very important to me."

Senator Marco Rubio has thought about nuclear weapons. On his campaign website, he vows to "modernize the nuclear arsenal and stop the Obama administration's proposed cuts to the nuclear arsenal," essentially signing on to the president's plan while simultaneously denying its existence. Indeed, Rubio has charged that "we are the only nation that is not modernizing its nuclear weapons," suggesting a command of the facts no better than Trump's.

Jeb Bush's position is indistinguishable from that of his fellow Floridian, albeit without the flamboyance and with even fewer specifics. Like Rubio, Bush favors modernization as self-evidently good. Like Rubio, he faults Obama for having "weakened U.S. strategic nuclear forces." Rather than telling us whether Obama's trillion-dollar program to address those putative weaknesses is too much, too little, or just about right, Bush opts for pretending that no such program exists.

As for Chris Christie, while agreeing that U.S. nuclear forces need updating, he goes way out on a limb to suggest that "one trillion dollars sounds a bit high"—albeit without suggesting an alternative figure.

On the surface, the views offered by the various candidates vary. Yet taken as a whole, what they suggest above all is an absence of meaningful engagement with the subject. In the presidential election of 2016, the future direction of U.S. nuclear policy figures as an afterthought or at best as an opportunity for posturing. Here, if we needed it, is further evidence of just how debased and devoid of substance American politics has become.

My own expectation is that Obama's nuclear-weapons recapitalization program will stand alongside health-care reform and the diplomatic opening with Iran as a legacy-defining initiative. Decades from now, beyond the decades required for its implementation, its effects will persist. Whether those effects will ultimately promote the security and well-being of the United States (not to mention the rest of the planet) remains to be seen.

At this juncture all we can say is this: Nuclear modernization signals the final abandonment of nuclear disarmament as even a nominal goal of U.S. policy. That this should have occurred in the midst of a contested presidential campaign with hardly a whisper of discussion qualifies as astonishing. ■

Andrew J. Bacevich *is the author of* America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History, *which will appear in April.*

Stephen J. Pope & Richard R. Gaillardetz

Doctrine Air

ROOM TO BREATHE ON CHURCH TEACHING

In the aftermath of last October's Synod on the Family, we now have the opportunity to take stock of both what has been accomplished and the difficulties that remain. One difficulty concerns the way in which appeals have been made to the normative and unchanging character of church doctrine.

As is well known, the synod offered a lively debate regarding church teaching on the "indissolubility" of marriage and the possibility of extending Eucharistic Communion to some divorced and remarried couples who have not received an annulment. The issue is certainly complex; however, a troubling refrain heard both inside and outside the synod was the simple assertion that "doctrine can't change." It is not a surprising claim for those ideological camps that hold to largely static, ahistorical understandings of divine revelation. One of the bluntest statements of this claim came from *New York Times* columnist, Ross Douthat, who boldly exclaimed that even "the pope can't change doctrine." Strangely, however, there were also a number of "progressive" voices who embraced this assumption, emphasizing ways in which compassion and prudence might guide us to a fresh "pastoral application" of supposedly unchanging church teaching.

During and after the synod, Catholic bishops were generally silent about the church's understanding of how doctrine can develop. A few did raise the topic. Before the 2014 synod meeting, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, the archbishop of Munich and Freising, told reporters that it was too restrictive to say that church doctrine can never change. Cardinal Gerhard Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, also acknowledged that doctrine can develop as long as it remains in harmony with basic principles of Catholic teaching. Yet, by and large, the Catholic teaching on the development of doctrine, so central to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, was simply ignored. Why?

Some Catholics worry that any appeal to doctrinal development amounts to defection from the Gospel and capitulation to what Pope Benedict once called the "tyranny of relativism." Those who embrace this view may have trouble seeing the difference between unjustified cultural accommodation and authentic doctrinal development. Others acknowledge the legitimacy of doctrinal development in principle but then place serious constraints on the concept by reducing it to little more than the changing historical application of unchanging doctrinal principles.

Another difficulty emerges when an undifferentiated appeal to "doctrine" itself is made. Overlooked here is the fact that not all normative church teaching carries the same

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

Cardinal Reinhard Marx (left) at a press conference after the opening session of the Synod on the Family

degree of authority. Dogma, those teachings that directly communicate divine revelation (e.g., the Incarnation or belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist), can grow and develop, often significantly, but cannot be reversed. We can also speak of definitive doctrines, those teachings necessary to safeguard and defend divine revelation (e.g., the determination of those books that belong to the biblical canon) as irreversible. But much normative Catholic teaching that goes by the term "doctrine" belongs in neither of those categories (e.g., the prohibition of artificial contraception). These teachings, often called authoritative doctrine, not only develop; sometimes they have developed in ways that amount to a substantive reversal, or what the theologian John Thiel calls "dramatic development" (e.g., the church's teaching on slavery).

The extent to which the church's teachings have changed in the past few centuries, often to the point of reversal, is breathtaking. Catholicism went from supporting slavery to condemning it as an intrinsic evil and from prohibiting usury to allowing it (while continuing to condemn unjust interest rates). In the nineteenth century, the papacy was an implacable enemy of both democracy and religious freedom, but in the second half of the twentieth century it became their most outstanding global defender. As John T. Noonan, author of *A Church That Can and Cannot Change*, puts it: "Wide shifts in the teaching of moral duties, once presented as part of Christian doctrine by the magisterium, have occurred.... In the course of this displacement of one set of principles, what was forbidden became lawful (the cases of usury and marriage); what was permissible became unlawful (the case

of slavery); and what was required became forbidden (the persecution of heretics)."

It is not only ahistorical but even strangely un-Catholic to assert that doctrine does not and cannot change. In responding to Protestants and Anglicans who criticized Roman Catholic teachings for introducing innovations (concerning the Blessed Virgin and the doctrine of purgatory, for example), John Henry Newman developed an extended account of how doctrine develops from what was implicitly present in Scripture and the Christian tradition. The bishops at Vatican II built on Newman's insight when they wrote:

> For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her (*Dei verbum*).

Genuine doctrinal development flows from a new and sometimes deeper understanding of the Gospel than was possible to Christians of earlier centuries. The fact of development underscores the importance of a distinction articulated by John Paul II in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Speaking of the body of Catholic social teachings, he wrote:

> On the one hand it is constant, for it remains identical in its fundamental inspiration, in its "principles of reflection," in its "criteria of judgment," in its basic "directives for action," and above all in its vital link with the Gospel of the Lord. On the other hand, it is ever new, because it is subject to the necessary and opportune adaptations suggested by the changes in historical conditions and by the unceasing flow of the events which are the setting of the life of people and society.

John Paul II himself presided over a significant development in the church's teaching on capital punishment, and Pope Francis did so in his encyclical on ecology. In a recent speech at a conference held in Florence, the pope said, "Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, interrogatives—but is alive, knows being unsettled, enlivened.... It has a face that is not rigid, it has a body that moves and grows, it has a soft flesh: it is called Jesus Christ."

Finally, the distinction between doctrine and pastoral application, so frequently employed in synodal debates, retains real value. However, the relationship cannot be reduced to that of abstract and unchanging doctrinal principles generating specific pastoral applications. We must remember that much church doctrine emerged out of concrete pastoral situations (the debates about the question of whether to re-baptize those who rejected the faith under threat of persecution, for example). As both Vatican II and Pope Francis have insisted, doctrine can be properly interpreted and applied only when considered in the light of the basic Christian message of love, justice, and mercy. In his address at the close of the synod, Pope Francis said: "The synod experience also made us better realize that the true defenders of doctrine are not those that uphold its letter, but its spirit; not ideas, but people; not formulae, but the gratuitousness of God's love and forgiveness." In short, doctrine is pastoral in its origin, interpretation, and implementation.

Engagement with vexing questions is part of the life of a pilgrim church. We should not shy away from those challenges, nor should we fear them. However, in doing so we must keep before us a simple and indisputable fact: Over the past two millennia the accumulating insights of the People of God, forged in lived experience and tested by the church's pastors, have enabled the Christian tradition to come to a deeper understanding of the Gospel. We call this the development of doctrine. To deny that doctrinal development is possible is to deny the possibility that the Holy Spirit might be drawing the church into a fuller apprehension of the truth. If we are to embrace what Pope Francis calls "big hearts open to God," we must also cultivate "big minds open to God." ■

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The Sacrament of Love

Marriage & Remarriage in the Orthodox Church

Carrie Frederick Frost

A Byzantine marriage ring from the fifth century shows a couple in profile in front of a cross: their gazes are locked, their noses nearly touching. On another ring Christ himself stands between the two spouses and joins their hands. Such marriage rings are small but powerful examples of the ancient and enduring Christian esteem for marriage, even in the early church, which often ranked marriage second to consecrated virginity. They show that marriage was already woven deeply into the fabric of Christianity. The fact that each ring is unique—each a singular variation on a few basic themes—is also suggestive. It prefigures the diversity of theological and pastoral approaches to marriage within Orthodox Christianity. There is no one Orthodox Christian theology of marriage. Nor are there many universal rules when it comes to divorce and remarriage.

Of course, this kind of diversity characterizes the Orthodox tradition more generally. As an Orthodox theologian, I am often in the position of answering a seemingly straightforward question with the rather unprofessional, "Well, it depends." For example: "Did the Mother of God experience real human childbirth, with pain?" Well, in the Orthodox context, it depends. According to Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa, who cite Isaiah's prophecy, she did not. But, according to Tertullian and the Syriac poet-theologians, she did experience an authentic human childbirth, because her humanity is critical to her son's humanity.

Properly understood, Orthodoxy's theological diversity does not make it capricious or flaky. The solid basis of doctrine affirmed in the ecumenical councils, the dedication to the liturgy, and the continuous theological tradition and presence of the saints all attest to the solidity of Orthodox theology. Orthodoxy's freedom of theological thinking and pastoral care is built on the bedrock of its spirituality. Orthodoxy's pastoral flexibility has a word: *economia*, which can be roughly defined as a principle of mercy employed when a norm is not met. This concept can be difficult to get a handle on—and not only for those outside Orthodoxy. Different

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

A seventh-century Byzantine wedding ring depicting Christ uniting the bride and groom

Orthodox theologians have understood it in different ways, and its application to particular cases is not systematic. This is partly because it begins with the recognition that God's grace exceeds even the most comprehensive moral system.

The practices of marriage in the early church are not entirely clear. Most of what is known about them has been pieced together from references to marriage in texts and letters. From those fragments, it can be concluded that in Christianity's first centuries the practice of civil marriage was accepted by Christians East and West—at this time, the church did not legally marry anyone—and that the church found ways to incorporate marriage into Christianity, including ritual action in the context of the liturgy.

After a Christian couple married in a civil ceremony, they came to church and received the Eucharist together. This, in part, brought their marriage into the church—made it Christian. Tertullian attests to this when he writes to his

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wife that marriage "is arranged by the church, confirmed by the oblation [the Eucharist], sealed by the blessing, and inscribed in heaven by the angels." In the early church, baptism and ordination were also celebrated in the context of the Eucharist, and sanctified by their proximity to it.

In addition to receiving the Eucharist together, newlyweds would also be blessed during the liturgy by a priest or bishop. That blessing was not just a formality. In a letter to Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch writes: "It is right for men and women who marry to make their union with the consent of the bishop, that their marriage may be for the Lord and not for passion. Let all things be done for the honor of God."

Already there was some divergence between East and West. For example, the fourth-century pope Siricus I dictates that the bride be veiled, and Ambrose refers to the "giving away" of the bride. Neither of these customs was taken up in the Christian East, which saw the introduction of another distinctive tradition: the crowning of both bride and groom with jewels or flowers. The crowns themselves may have been a remnant of Jewish practice (Song of Songs 3:11) or an emulation of Saint Paul's concept of athletic discipline in Christian life (1 Corinthians 9:24–25), or both. John Chrysostom describes crowns as "symbols of victory" over the passions, which suggests an interpretation of the custom that is still popular today: the marriage crown is, in part, a martyr's crown—a reminder of the ascetic dimension of marriage.

These developments reflect a growing esteem for marriage in the early church. Even among those who favored monasticism, there was a strong sense that, when spouses dedicate themselves to each other's sanctification, marriage is a worthy relationship. John Chrysostom, who began his preaching career with a strong animus against marriage, observed, "There is no relationship between people so close as that between man and wife, if they be joined together as they should be."

By late in the first millennium, a marriage rite had begun to coalesce in the East. The rites extant from this period, with plenty of local variation, include the two parts of the Orthodox marriage rite that endure today: the Betrothal and the Crowning. Today the Betrothal is nearly always enacted immediately before the rest of the rite, but in the past it was sometimes practiced separately. The betrothal is thought to reflect the ancient Roman understanding that marriage was based on consent, though the spouses' consent is never actually expressed in the Orthodox rite of betrothal. Most rites of betrothal from the end of the first millennium included a litany for the couple, various Psalm-steeped priestly blessings, and an exchange of rings. The rite continued with the Crowning, which was sometimes followed by an Epistle and Gospel reading, and then the Eucharist. In some places, the Eucharist at the marriage rite was "presanctified"—meaning it was consecrated before, rather than during, the service. The Crowning often concluded with the Common Cup, from which the new couple took the first drink of their new life together.

The tenth century brought dramatic change to Christian rites of marriage. By an imperial decree of Byzantine Emperor Leo VI in 912 AD, the church was put in charge of marriage until the fall of Byzantium. Christians no longer had their marriage first sanctioned by the state and then sanctified by the church. As the distinction between the secular and sacred dissolved, rites were altered to address new challenges. Whereas previously a citizen could legally remarry without the church's blessing, now it became the church's job to decide who could remarry, and on what terms.

Prior to Leo VI's decree, divorced Christians who entered into another civil marriage had to talk with their priest about when they could receive the Eucharist again and thus have their new marriage made a Christian one. This usually took place after a period of penance. Liturgically, the presanctified gifts were removed from the crowning, as an acknowledgement that the church might now be marrying couples who were—due to their divorce or otherwise—not ready to receive the Eucharist during the rite. (In some places, a rite with the presanctified sacrament for couples who were both in good standing with the church survived as late as the fifteenth century.) Over time, the Common Cup came to be understood as a Eucharistic substitute, though this may not have been its original symbolism.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the church lost its control of civil marriage. In many places, a couple married first in a civil ceremony and later in a church, as in the ancient world. In other places, like the United States today, Orthodox Christians do not need a separate civil marriage;

Divorce is not "permitted" in Orthodoxy any more than sin is permitted. What *is* permitted is a return to the Eucharist after confession and repentance for divorce—and the possibility of a second marriage.

the state recognizes their church marriage as legally valid. (There are many Orthodox who would prefer, for various reasons, that the church in America once again get out of the civil-marriage business.)

The second thousand years of Christianity saw embellishments of the Orthodox marriage rite, but no radical alterations. Beginning in the fifteenth century, the priest led the crowned couple around in a circle three times. This came to be known as the "Dance of Isaiah," after a hymn sung at the time: "O Isaiah, dance your joy, for the Virgin was indeed with child." At the end of the dance, the priest intones, "Accept their crowns in Your Kingdom unsoiled and undefiled; and preserve them without offense to the ages of ages."

Also of note was the seventeenth-century addition of an expression of consent in the Slavic rite. Although this was due to Western influence, the Slavic expression of consent is very different in its wording from the Latin rites of this period: the couple is simply asked if they are here of their own free will and if they have promised themselves to anyone else. There is no sense, as there is in the Western marriage rite of the same period, that the couples themselves are the ministers of their marriage. In some cases, this expression of consent spread to the Byzantine rite, but today it is included in some of the Slavic but none of the Byzantine versions. Finally, it was also during this period that Ephesians 5:20–33 became the universal Epistle reading within the rite. This passage, along with the gospel reading of the Wedding at Cana, signified the sacramental significance of marriage.

By the fifteenth century, the Orthodox marriage rite was essentially as we know it today, containing both Betrothal and Crowning, and full of prayers of supplication for the health, procreation, and deification of the couple. (In Orthodox theology "deification" is the process of transformation that leads to union with God.) These prayers implicitly acknowledge the sexual union of the couple and suggest that the saints and martyrs rejoice at their coming together. They repeatedly invoke the community's interest in the couple's union, as well as the ways in which their marriage brings them into the history of God's people.

It was only after the marriage rite settled into the form known today that Orthodox theologies of marriage began to be formulated. This is not to suggest that no one in the Orthodox Church thought theologically about marriage before the past few centuries. As noted above, the Eastern church fathers had quite a bit to say on the subject. But it is only recently that the Orthodox began to construct comprehensive theologies of marriage. These theologies vary from one another in important ways, but they also have important things in common, three of which I will discuss here: the understanding of marriage as a sacrament or mystery, the significance of the Eucharist to marriage, and the eternal dimension of marriage.

Within Orthodoxy, there is no discrete, agreed-upon list of sacraments. Instead, there is an expansive understanding of the "sacramental." In fact, anything that brings the divine and the human together can be understood as sacramental. Nevertheless, Orthodox Christians do see particular rites as sacraments, because they involve specific human persons in epiphanic moments of communion with the divine. In the case of the sacrament of marriage, there is no guarantee that this communion will be sustained. Through the grace of God and the effort of the spouses, perhaps it will be. But just as there is no certainty that those who receive the Sacrament of Baptism will grow in Christ throughout their lives, there is also no certainty that a particular marriage will grow in Christ.

Given Orthodoxy's diversity, it should come as no surprise that there are even those who insist that the marriage rite is only a blessing, not a sacrament. But most Orthodox Christians agree with Archdeacon John Chryssavgis when he writes, "Marriage is, according to the Orthodox view, a sacrament because through it God directly reveals the heavenly Kingdom to the world in two specific persons." Indeed, for most Orthodox, Saint Paul's comparison of marriage with the relationship between Christ and church and his proclamation of marriage as a "great mystery" are sufficient testimony to marriage's sacramental nature.

As each of the other ritual sacraments has its own telos, so also does marriage. The Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov is known for calling marriage "the sacrament of love." For the Orthodox Church, the love union—not consent or consummation or procreation—is the heart of Christian marriage. This is prayed for in the Betrothal: "That He will send down upon them perfect and peaceful love…let us pray to the Lord." This perfect and peaceful love is not the stuff of troubadours or rom-coms; it is rather a reflection of the love among the three persons of the Trinity. This love is a communion rather than just an expression of desire.

The understanding of marriage as a sacrament relates to the importance of the Eucharist within Orthodox marriage. Before they receive the Eucharist, Orthodox Christians pray, "May the communion of Thy Holy Mysteries be neither to my judgment, nor to my condemnation, O Lord, but to the healing of soul and body." This prayer underscores a central Orthodox belief about the Eucharist: that it heals. Through its mediation between the human and the divine, the Eucharist helps repair whatever ails a person or a community. There is a strong sense in Orthodoxy that all other sacraments are completed and fulfilled in the Eucharist because of this mediation and its power to heal us. Even today, when the Eucharist is rarely received during the marriage rite, the expectation is that an Orthodox married couple will continue to receive the Eucharist together throughout their marriage, thus healing whatever rifts develop between them and sealing the communion between themselves and God again and again. Just as the couple's one-flesh union is celebrated in their matrimonial union, they are also united with Christ's body in the Eucharist.

The Orthodox also believe that marriage may be eternal. There is no mention of parting at death in the Orthodox marriage rite. In fact, most Orthodox premarital instruction suggests that there is an eschatalogical dimension to marriage. Evoking a baptismal understanding of things, an encyclical letter of the Orthodox Church in America puts it this way: "For those who fight the good fight as good and faithful servants, the crowns become their eternal reward as witnesses to Christ and the wedding garments are transformed into robes of salvation and eternal glory."

This is why, even though the remarriage of the divorced or widowed is now treated mostly the same way in the canons and the rite, it is not always treated the same way in practice. Because of his eschatalogical understanding of marriage, my own father did not remarry after my mother's rather young death, even though he was fortunate enough to have a loving companion for the last five years of his life. He took seriously, as do many Orthodox, the possibility that his first and only marriage crown might be part of his eternal reward.

This emphasis on the eternal quality of marriage is in some ways similar to the language of "indissolubility" used in the Christian West. In Orthodoxy, being married just once is understood not only as the ideal but as the norm. Divorce is considered to be nothing short of a failure to honor the sacrament and achieve the eternal union—a failure both on the part of the couple and on the part of the greater community who ought to support them. Divorce is not "permitted" in Orthodoxy any more than sin is permitted. The sinful "unchastity" that Christ referred to when advising the multitudes (Matthew 5:32, 19:9) is understood broadly in the Orthodox Church. Unchastity includes all the many sins that violate or undermine the sacramentality of marriage. But unchastity has always existed and always will, and the Orthodox tradition has a way of working toward forgiveness and reconciliation in its aftermath. The brokenness of this life is manifested in divorce, but there is a path toward wholeness and redemption for the divorced, as there is for everyone.

It is true that the late Byzantine Empire endured a particularly awkward period when, after the edict of Leo, the Orthodox Church was in the business of issuing legally binding divorce, but this was mostly not the case either before or after this period. Today, the Orthodox Church deals with the outcome of civil divorce, but does not issue divorces. Practices vary from one Orthodox jurisdiction to the next. Some jurisdictions have an official process for recognizing a civil divorce; others require only that the divorced speak to their priest. What *is* permitted in Orthodoxy is a return to the Eucharist after confession and repentance for divorce—and the possibility of a second marriage.

A lot of Orthodoxy's canonical language about remarriage has to do with the concept of *economia*, and penance is an important part of this concept. In the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea asserted that those who marry for a third time are not to be thrown out of the church, but are instead to do

penance. In such cases, the couple acquired a civil marriage, and then waited a period appointed by their priest before coming to receive the Eucharist together and having their marriage sealed by the church. Around the same time, the Council of Laodicea declared that those who were lawfully married for a second time could be received back into Communion. These are but two examples. There are other canons sprinkled throughout the Orthodox Church's history—from its earliest centuries well into its second millennium—that support a period of abstention from Communion for the remarried, whether they were divorced or widowed.

The Emperor Leo—the one who put the church in charge of civil marriage and divorce—may be the reason that Orthodox canons do not permit a fourth marriage. Leo married a fourth wife after she alone produced an heir, and he swapped out patriarchs in order for this marriage to be accepted by the church. Ever since then, Orthodox Christians have agreed that a maximum of three marriages is an appropriate disciplinary limit.

The Orthodox rites of marriage also include the principle of *economia* when it comes to remarriage. Toward the end of the first millennium, a different rite for remarriage was established, one that included penitential language not found in the ordinary marriage rite. In place of the names of the great scriptural families mentioned in the ordinary rite, the "Office for a Second Marriage," which survives today, mentions figures in the Bible who were forgiven great sin: Rahab the harlot, the thief on the cross, and the publican. Its language makes quite clear that a second marriage is not to be considered the norm: "Do Thou cleanse the transgressions of Thy servants, for, unable to bear the burden and heat of the day, and the burning of the flesh, they have come to a second communion of marriage."

Although Orthodox canons and rites together point to a penitential understanding of remarriage, I should add that they are not always observed in practice. I do know of cases of remarriage in which the "Office of a Second Marriage" has been used, but I know of far more cases in which it has either been modified or not used at all. And here I can give a bit more than a "Well, it depends" sort of answer: when it comes to remarriage, Orthodox practice strongly tends toward generosity.

One priest reports that he modifies the second marriage rite because he cannot tolerate the "snickering from the audience" that he hears whenever the couple before him is characterized as "unable to bear the burden and heat of the day." It isn't just that the laughter is inappropriate; it may also embarrass or even shame the couple, which is completely at odds with the sacrament. Another priest includes the prayer of the scriptural sinners, but omits entirely the "burning of the flesh" prayer. A priest's wife told me that she had never heard the "Office for a Second Marriage" used in any of her husband's parishes. Of the dozens of priests and laypersons I have spoken with, only one person told me he was comfortable with the "Office for a Second Marriage": a young, newly ordained priest who spoke with relish of his intention to consistently use the second-marriage rite, because it aligned with the canons.

Just as the use of the second-marriage rite varies from parish to parish, so also do the practices of excommunication after divorce. Many priests recommend to the newly divorced that they undergo penitential practices, such as increased almsgiving, a prayer rule with prostration, and possibly a time of excommunication. Many have completed this penance before a second marriage is even on the horizon, in which case they may not be asked to do further penance before they remarry. Sometimes Orthodox priests understand that, depending on the circumstances, the process of divorce may be penitential enough by itself.

Such decisions are based on discernment about the particular people involved. This reflects the authentic Orthodox practice of *economia*, which is fundamentally about persons, not principles, rites, or laws. The thread running through all these decisions is the acknowledgement that a second or third marriage, while not the same as a first, may nevertheless become a marriage in Christ. The return of the divorced and remarried to the Eucharist affirms once again that they, too, might be received in Christ's Kingdom, having been healed and strengthened by his body and blood. Perhaps one or both of the two figures in profile on the Byzantine nuptial ring were marrying for the second time, and the cross that stood between them served as a reminder that Christ, the true physician, was at work in their union. ■

IMAGE OF VATICAN II COURTESY OF BERNARD P. PRUSAK

Leap-Frogged?

The Protestant Reception of Nostra Aetate

Ulrich Rosenhagen

Last October marked the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra aetate* ("In Our Time"), the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. *Commonweal* has devoted a great deal of space over the years to explaining and exploring the significance of *Nostra aetate* for Catholic-Jewish relations. Luke Timothy Johnson, Donald Senior, John Connelly, Steven Englund, Philip A. Cunningham, and John R. Donahue are just a few of the scholars who have analyzed various facets of the document in these pages. One aspect of the declaration that perhaps deserves greater attention is the impact it made on Protestantism at the time, an impact that can shed light not only on Christian-Jewish dialogue but also on fundamental questions about the nature of revelation dividing Catholics and Protestants.

Many Protestant theologians of 1960s viewed Vatican II as a whole in overwhelmingly positive terms, as a transformative divine event with implications not only for Rome but for the whole Christian Church; even the neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth—arguably the most influential Protestant theologian of the twentieth century—praised much of the council's work. When it came to *Nostra aetate*, however, Protestant commentators weren't so sure. Barth was disturbed by aspects of the declaration, and Protestant theologians in Europe and the United States, following his lead, tried to dodge it. Indeed, for the first twenty years after the council, no official Protestant church statement explicitly mentioned it.

Why did a text so significant to the history of Catholicism get such a muted reception in Protestant thought and practice? Answering this question means reviewing how *Nostra aetate* was assessed both by Barth and by the Protestant theologians serving as ecumenical observers in Rome between 1962 and 1965. For already in their early comments we find the concerns that would define the Protestant engagement with the text—or lack thereof—for years to come.

These early Protestant commentaries disclose two very different modes of reaction to *Nostra aetate*. The first takes up those passages that revoke the traditional anti-Judaic theology of the Christian Church. Here *Nostra aetate* and the powerful Barth school complemented each other, both recognizing the role of the Jewish people as distinct partners in God's salvific plan for the world, and embracing a

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corresponding theological overhaul of Jewish-Christian relations. In touting the "spiritual bond" between Christians and Jews, rebuffing the idea that Jews had been rejected by God, and even invoking St. Paul's image of the olive tree whose old root supported younger branches, the Catholic Church had finally acknowledged her primal connection to her older Jewish sibling. Protestant theologians greatly welcomed this new recognition of Israel's meaning for the church, viewing it as one of the groundbreaking insights of the council; some expressed the hope that it would inspire a new theology of Israel in the World Council of Churches.

Protestant contemporaries also embraced *Nostra aetate*'s rejection of anti-Semitism—and discussed its omission of a confession of guilt for the persecution of Jews by the Christian church. The World Council of Churches had yet to produce such a statement for sins committed against the Jewish people, but the issue resonated with many ecumenically minded Protestants, not a few of whom believed that a new Jewish-Christian beginning depended on such a confession. Stanley Stuber and Claud Nelson's 1967 Baptist/Methodist coproduction, *Implementing Vatican II in Your Community*, criticized the declaration for omitting such a confession. "For centuries Christians have put Jews on the cross, [and now] some degree of Christian repentance is required," wrote Stuber and Nelson, who had both been in Rome throughout the council. Barth, too, echoed the deep longing for an official Christian admission of guilt. "Would it not be more appropriate, in view of the anti-Semitism of the ancient, the medieval, and to a large degree modern church," he wrote, "to set forth an explicit confession of guilt here?"

Beyond the Jewish-Christian relationship, however, many leading Protestants rejected *Nostra aetate*'s dialogical engagement with non-biblical religions. That dialogue rested on the traditional Catholic natural-theology approach, which argued that reason, as well as revelation, discloses God's existence. If all men are endowed with reason and the desire for religion, as natural theology presupposed, non-Christians could indeed participate in the divine truth revealed in Christ. As a result, *Nostra aetate* mentioned Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as well as Judaism. Citing John 14:6, it maintained that all of these religions reflected aspects of God's unique truth in Christ, asserting that those traditions often "reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."

Protestants of the Barthian inclination, however, viewed natural theology's elevation of reason as a trap for making God in our own image. Like Barth, and under the influence of his theology, most of the Protestant theologians attending the council as observers were unable to accept non-Judeo-Christian religions as divinely ordained, and made a categorical distinction between human religious practices on one side and God's revelation in Christ and Israel on the other. They could not see the "ray of truth" in other religions that the declaration spoke of and that many Catholics began to explore after the council.

These two modes of engagement hint at the contested history of the declaration itself. *Nostra aetate* went through many drafts. First planned as a separate statement on the Jewish people, it was later considered for placement in the "Decree on Ecumenism." Afterwards it was reworked accordingly, the parts concerning Jewish-Christian relations now fused with a statement on non-Christian religions. Many Barthian Protestants openly took issue with this fusion. For instance, New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann, a colleague of Barth's at the University of Basel and one of the most influential Protestant observers at the council, complained that *Nostra aetate* made Judaism appear to be like any other religion, and hence failed to recognize the particular and ongoing role of the biblical Israel and the Jewish people in the events of salvation. While he and other leading Protestants embraced those sections of *Nostra aetate* that firmly connected Christians and Jews by a mutual history of salvation, they believed that this history excluded all non-biblical religions. Thus Lukas Vischer, a Swiss Reformed theologian who had been one of the World Council of Churches' observers at the council, commented with dismay that "God's Chosen People is thus drawn into the context of the 'religions.'" To Barthian theologians like him, the biblical Israel did not present a mere "religion," but the original and sole form of God's revelation, and Vischer openly doubted that "the revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can be correctly understood in this context [of religions]" at all.

Clearly, then, on this new interreligious turf laid down by *Nostra aetate*, the Catholic faithful walked two steps ahead of their Protestant brethren. A few early Protestant commentators, however—notably the Americans, who had returned to a much more religiously diverse society than most of their European counterparts—sensed that the Catholic bishops were on to something. William Norgren, an Episcopal priest from New York and executive director of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, affirmed that the declaration was the "first official statement of the Roman Church ever [that] appreciated the values in other religions." William Barnett Blakemore, a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, noted that "Catholicism is more open to discussion with 'the world' at large than...Protestantism."

Yet a number of Protestant heavyweights leaned in with rigorous critiques. Visser't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, criticized the declaration's examination of religions beyond Judaism as "very, very weak." To him, *Nostra aetate* offered a false approach to religious dialogue, abandoning the unique character of Christian revelation as the motivation for interreligious encounter and assuming instead a salvific equality of religions; he derogated the approach as amounting to little more than "polite remarks about other religions." The reformed theologian

Lukas Vischer was equally unhappy. He acknowledged that *Nostra aetate* intended to create a climate for dialogue. In his view, however, "the fullness of truth is to be found in Christ alone," and Christians could only enter into dialogue with other religions by proclaiming the unique superiority of Christ. For Vischer, it was precisely this Christological center that had gone missing in the declaration, and he did not hide his deep disappointment.

Karl Barth's teaching that non-biblical "religion" is a man-made attempt to comprehend God provided the material for such demurrals. Barth had long argued that religion as commonly understood and practiced was not a divine enterprise but rather a merely human one and, as such, a form of what he called "unbelief." He set Christianity apart from this "unbelief," however, since it (and it alone) followed the one God who had revealed himself uniquely in the Christ event. Theology had to be *revealed* theology, in other words, attuned exclusively to God's revelation in Christ and Israel as documented in the Bible. For Barth and his students, God in Christ was thus the absolute counterpoint to mere human religion. Accordingly, Barth was deeply troubled by the "religious" approach of *Nostra aetate* and its lack of missionary language. Instead of dialogue, he advocated proclaiming the crucified Christ to the religious other, and vehemently rejected interreligious dialogue as a human and therefore ungodly endeavor.

For Karl Barth and his students, God in Christ was the absolute counterpoint to mere human religion. He vehemently rejected interreligious dialogue as an ungodly endeavor.

These theological fault lines left many Protestants uncertain how to view and value the ideas set down in *Nostra aetate*. Of course, not all Protestants embraced the Barthian line. "[W]hat about us non-Romans in the aftermath of Vatican II?," Albert Outler, Methodist observer of the council and professor of theology at Southern Methodist University, asked in a 1966 essay. Eager to shake up his readers, Outler asserted what he called the "blunt truth" that with the Second Vatican Council "the Roman Catholic Church has leap-frogged the rest of us [in matters of] church renewal and ecumenical action." Hence, he readily added, "there is finally no evading the challenge of Vatican II that we (non-Catholics) go and do likewise."

In the specific area of Jewish-Christian relations, many Protestants soon followed such calls to renewal and action, harnessing ecumenical enthusiasm for the council to help form a new theology of Israel. Though barely acknowledged in subsequent Protestant discourse, the declaration provided a crucial spark for the Jewish-Christian conversations in Europe and the United States that took place in the 1970s and 80s. And even without the explicit mentioning of *Nostra aetate*, theologians—in particular those of the Barth school—increasingly pondered Israel's continued chosenness and salvific meaning, and began to address their own shame over the teachings of their theological ancestors. The influential Declaration of the Rhineland Synod of 1980, in which a Protestant church body for the first time publicly confessed its guilt for the past and rejected the old theology of supersessionism, marked this change. The nearly two thousand years of anti-Judaic teaching that had paved the way to modern anti-Semitism were at an end.

In broader interfaith matters, however, Outler's sentiments did not serve as guide; most influential Protestant thinkers rejected *Nostra aetate*'s natural-theology-based reflections on the interconnectedness of Christianity, Islam, and other religious traditions. Spurning the Catholic Church's embrace of religious pluralism, they held fast to the Barthian model, calling on the faithful to confront other religions by insisting on the superiority of Christianity as the one true and revealed religion. Perhaps this traditionalist stringency helps explain why Protestants of the era failed to produce a text of their own of equal reach and significance. "There is no Protestant impulse that compares to *Nostra aetate*," wrote Rolf Rendtorff, longtime chairman of the study commission "Church and Judaism" of the Evangelical Church of Germany, in 1988.

In examining the Protestant response to *Nostra aetate*, we see more clearly how the declaration not only changed the church's relations to the Jewish people but also opened new interreligious grounds. By recognizing Buddhism, Hinduism, and "other religions," and by noting the shared Jewish patrimony of Christianity and Islam through the figure of Abraham, the council disavowed rejecting anything "that is true and holy in these religions." Like the council itself, *Nostra aetate* was far from perfect. But it did understand that evangelization and authentic interfaith dialogue are not the same. A half-century later, this awareness continues to pose both challenge and opportunity for Catholics and Protestants alike. ■

Richard Alleva

Bear Slobber & Corny Mysticism

'THE REVENANT'

One of the first shots *The Revenant* presents us with is a wide view of a wintry landscape somewhere in the Louisiana Purchase territory in 1827. A group of trappers are gathering their goods for the long trek home. Suddenly, a gob of half-frozen rain blows straight at us and smears a bit of the screen. Forty years ago this would have been considered a technical gaffe and ended up on the cutting-room floor. But nowadays we're used to this sort of thing in documentaries, and that bit of sleet announces that *The Revenant*, based loosely on a true story, is being shot like a documentary. No constructed sets, no snow-wind-rain machines, no blue-screen digitalization. Rather, this period piece was filmed under harsh conditions (in Canada and Argentina)—real cold, real ice, really shivering actors—in order to give audiences a time-travel experience. The good news is that the movie, for most of its running time, really is just that vivid. Very few historical films have achieved this degree of physical verisimilitude. The bad news? This verisimilitude may be *The Revenant*'s only great achievement.

The story's hero, Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), is a resourceful scout respected by most of the members of the hunting party, though the presence of his half–Native American son, Hawk, arouses the paranoia of a shifty, possibly psychopathic mountain man named Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy). When Glass is nearly torn to pieces by a bear and left behind, the men assigned to guard him, Fitzgerald and the adolescent Jim Bridger, abandon him in a shallow grave. Hawk tries to stop them, but Fitzgerald murders him before his helpless father's eyes. The half-dead Glass drags himself over miles of dangerous terrain to his company's fort to take his revenge.

The director, Alejandro Iñárritu, and his genius cameraman, Emmanuel Lubezki, have contrived some amazing and memorable sequences. For that bear attack the camera presses down on Hugh as closely as the animal does. We feel each slash and crunch, and, to add disgust to injury, see the dribble of the bear's slobber trickle down on Glass's face. This is skin-crawling enough, but after the beast retreats to the far background of the shot and we start to feel relief, the grizzly charges forward again. And again. The entire scene is filmed from a low angle so that we stay trapped right beside the victim.

I'm tempted to call Iñárritu the maestro of engulfment, because he achieves his best effects by perching the viewer on the shoulders of his actors as they head into danger or comic embarrassment (*Birdman*) or moral quandaries (*Amores Perros, 21 Grams*). When Michael Keaton in *Birdman* has to take that hilarious detour around Times Square in his underwear, we make the entire jog with him in one unedited shot. In *The Revenant* this same method is used for thrills rather than laughs. We're plunged into the midst of hand-to-hand combat, onto river rapids, down snowy mountainsides. These thrills would serve to make *The Revenant* a classic adventure story if only its creator were content with that. But Iñárritu aims higher.

20TH CENTURY FOX

From the start we know that Glass isn't just trying to survive but searching for revenge. And, whatever our ethical view of revenge, we can't help being on his side. Yet we soon come to feel that *The Revenant* is far too intelligently and lovingly made to be a simple revenge story; something more must be at stake. But what exactly? Are we watching a spiritual education as well as a trek?

The movie encourages this speculation. Iñárritu does hint at what is happening to Glass's mind as well as his body, but the hints remain only hints. Glass has visions of his wife, who, in flashbacks, is shown murdered by soldiers (though in what war or conflict we never find out). One rather risible special effect has her floating above his supine body. Why floating? Wouldn't her bereaved husband want to imagine her physical closeness, her sensuous, earthbound presence? He also hears her muttering something in her native language, words that sounded cabalistic to me, but no subtitles translate them. Glass also has visions of his son, one showing the boy near a Christian church. Was Glass a Christian? Was his son? No answers are forthcoming, so are these images necessary to the story or just whims of the director?

The treatment of Native Americans throughout the film is suggestive. Parallel to Glass's odyssey is the search by an Ankara Indian named Powage for his daughter, who has been kidnapped by a rival tribe. But what is the meaning of the parallel? Is Powage's loving quest for reunion supposed to be some sort of reproach to Glass's quest for vengeance? Perhaps. If so, it is an odd reproach since, as far as the audience knows, Glass is simply seeking to bring a criminal to justice.

But at least some sort of Native-American admonition is at work here, especially in Glass's meeting with Hikuc, a kindly and philosophical Pawnee whose loved ones have also been murdered. Pawnee tells him that "revenge is in the Creator's hands." Which leads us to wonder if Glass will refrain from killing if he ever gets the chance. Of course, he does get the chance and, though I don't want to spoil the ending, I have to report that the denouement is one of the phoniest, most contemptible cop-outs a major film has ever stooped to.

For me, the moral and artistic confusions of *The Revenant* became even more striking when I revisited the 1971 version of the same story, *Man in the Wilderness*, starring Richard Harris and directed by Richard Serafian. Not for a moment would I suggest that *Man in the Wilderness* has the cinematic power of *The Revenant*'s best sequences. The cinematography is handsome but conventional—almost placid in comparison with Lubezki's dynamic rawness. Harris's acting is more than competent, but the director never asks as much of him as Iñárritu demands of DiCaprio, a constantly improving actor who is formidable here. Even the bear attack, though gruesome enough, doesn't frighten us the way the new movie's mama grizzly does.

But the older movie's script, by Jack de Witt, has a perspicuity about character transformed by suffering that Iñárritu's film entirely lacks. Despite DiCaprio's talent, the actor can't tell us what is happening to Glass's mind while the director is distracting us with corny mysticism, vague mutterings on the soundtrack, and unhelpful subplots. De Witt's script gave Harris a throughline of psychological development that defined the hero as a man embittered by the death of his wife and unable to draw on the consolations of religion or philosophy. But that changes during his agonized trek after the bear attack. Keeping himself hidden from possibly hostile natives, he nevertheless observes them and learns from their suffering. He sees the slaughter of a mixed-race family and helplessly watches a Native-American woman give birth in the wild all alone. Death and birth and his own travails reawaken his visceral love of life, and, because of that love, he forgives those who abandoned him. This is a fulfilled dramatic arc, and that's precisely what *The Revenant*, for all its visual brio and stirring action, does not have. ■

Barry Hudock

The End of Coercion

Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity

The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom

David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy Jr.

Wm. B. Eerdmans, $45, 491 pp.

The conflict behind the creation of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom is familiar to many. The American Jesuit John Courtney Murray proposed, in 1948, a reconsideration of the classical Roman Catholic approach to church-state relations, which held that, in a truly just society, only the Catholic religion would be practiced publicly and that non-Catholics would be denied the right to worship or express their faith in public. The Vatican's Holy Office condemned four doctrinal errors in Murray's work and he was silenced by his superiors. Then, a decade later, he was invited to serve as a theological advisor at the Second Vatican Council—where the most tumultuous debates over the course of four annual sessions were on religious freedom. During those debates a number of the most powerful figures in the church warned that embracing religious freedom would be a betrayal of the church's doctrinal heritage. With *Dignitatis humanae* (1965), the Council finally offered an authoritative and historic affirmation of religious freedom.

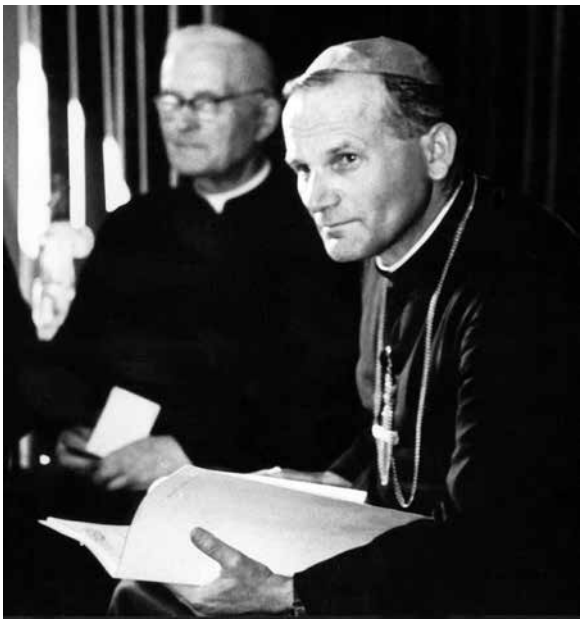
Less well known is a secondary conflict that took place within the ranks of those who supported religious freedom at the council. Murray proposed—and the American bishops strongly supported—a "juridical" approach to religious freedom, which would treat it primarily as freedom from coercion by governments, and he defended that freedom primarily by appealing to natural law. Others, however, advocated a more theological approach, rooted in Christian revelation and fundamentally linking freedom and truth.

Thanks to the work of David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy Jr., who both teach at the Washington-based John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, the contours of this latter dispute and its impact on *Dignitatis humanae* can now be better understood. Their new book, *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom*, offers the uninitiated a deeper look at the document's origins than the standard popular accounts have provided.

Histories of the council have long recognized the central place of French theologians and bishops—in particular Yves Congar, OP—in promoting the revelation-based approach. While not ignoring Congar, Schindler and Healy place another figure closer to the center of the argument: Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, later known as Pope (and now Saint) John Paul II. Through a careful presentation of the various drafts of *Dignitatis humanae* in English translation (in itself a helpful contribution to students of the council) and Wojtyła's own conciliar interventions, they construct a compelling case.

Those familiar with Wojtyła's papal magisterium, especially his 1993 encyclical on moral theology, *Veritas splendor*, will recognize the thinking expressed in his interventions at the council. "It is in the truth that the human person achieves his own proper perfection, for the truth corresponds to his rational nature and constitutes the firmest foundation for true freedom," he argued in a written intervention in the fall of 1964. And in a speech on the council floor around the same time, he said succinctly, "There is no freedom without truth." Schindler and Healy point out real and important ways that the text of *Dignitatis humanae* came to reflect this thinking.

For his part, Murray was disappointed in this development. He saw it as an unnecessary embellishment and a potential threat to what ought to have been the church's principled commitment to the right to religious freedom. It is a short step, he argued, for a government—be it Catholic or Communist—that sees itself as possessing truth to decide it must impose that truth and repress error for the good of the people.



CNS PHOTO

Bishop Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II

Besides shedding light on Wojtyła's prominent role, Schindler and Healy also propose a further revision of the standard account of *Dignitatis humanae*, which sees the juridical and theological approaches finally enshrined together in the text. They argue that the Wojtyłian approach actually ought to be understood as the guiding force of the entire document, the heart of its argument, with Murray's juridical approach relegated to a secondary place within that larger context.

This seems to me to be a harder case to make. The brief document is, after all, made up of a short introduction followed by two chapters. The first chapter clearly presents the juridical approach Murray championed, while the second offers a more theological approach. (Inexplicably, the English version available on the Vatican website omits the document's chapter divisions. This is not the case in the Latin version, nor in any of the other translations on the site.)

Religious freedom, chapter one begins, "means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups, and every human power." Again and again throughout the following paragraphs, this right to immunity from coercion—"both psychological freedom and immunity from external coercion"—is emphasized. The human person "must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in matters religious."

The second chapter, of nearly identical length, picks up the theological approach, rooting religious freedom in revelation and Scripture. Repeating in its first paragraph the document's understanding of the right as "immunity from external coercion in religious matters," it acknowledges that religious freedom is not explicitly taught in Christian revelation, but nonetheless insists it is "one of the key truths" of Catholic teaching.

One gets the impression from Schindler and Healy that a few references to a freedom-truth connection outside the boundaries of chapter 2 demonstrate the triumph of the Wojtyłian view over Murray's in the final document. However, this cuts both ways: by a similar accounting, the eight reiterations of religious freedom as immunity from coercion in the second chapter could suggest the triumph of Murray's thinking.

This is not to say that Murray's approach did not become somewhat relativized during the drafting process. It is quite clear that as the document neared its final form, the more theological approach, with its insistence on freedom's bonds to truth, was indeed given more prominence. Many observers at the time recognized that Murray's absence from the later drafting process due to his poor health weakened the opposition to Congar. (At one point in his interpretive essay, Schindler audaciously suggests that the providence of God may have been behind Murray's ill health.) Still, it is not right to say that the revelation-based, freedom-truth approach became the document's guiding idea, with the juridical taking a backseat. In fact, they share more or less equal footing in the final document.

Finally, while this aspect of the story of *Dignitatis humanae* is fascinating and well worth deeper understanding (especially given Wojtyła's later place in church history), we shouldn't obscure the essential truth behind the document's creation. All those who defended religious freedom—which, again, included Murray, the U.S. bishops, Wojtyła and his senior compatriot Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the theologians Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac, and others—were united in their opposition to a powerful minority who asserted that such talk stank of the French Revolution and modernism and represented an unthinkable betrayal of the Catholic faith.

Insisting on the important connections between freedom and truth did not change the revolutionary nature of what the council taught. In the mid-twentieth century Alfredo Ottaviani, as cardinal prefect of the Holy Office, rejected the idea of religious freedom as dangerous to the faith and salvation of Christians; two generations later, Joseph Ratzinger, having served for decades as Ottaviani's successor before his election as pope, lauded such freedom as "fundamental to Christianity." The difference is nothing short of stunning.

Today, as then, those who are unwilling to consider the slightest shift in pastoral practice, theology, or doctrine fail to grasp an important truth, which both doctrine and history make clear. It is one Pope Francis recently proclaimed with great eloquence: "Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, concerns, investigation, but it is alive, knows how to disturb, knows how to animate. It does not have a rigid face. It has a body that moves and develops. It has sensitive flesh. Christian doctrine is called Jesus Christ." ■

Barry Hudock *is the author of* Struggle, Condemnation, Vindication: John Courtney Murray's Journey toward Vatican II *(Liturgical Press) and other books. He lives in central Minnesota with his wife and children.*

Abigail Woods-Ferreira

One Kind of Convert

What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?

Jack Mulder Jr.
Wm. B. Eerdmans, $20, 238 pp.

Converts often continue to engage in an internal ecumenical dialogue. Raised in the Dutch Reformed Church, Jack Mulder Jr., converted to Catholicism as an adult. In *What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?* he gives the reader a glimpse into that ongoing internal conversation. Mulder presents a coherent, if often narrow, overview of Catholicism. As he acknowledges, his purpose is to "explain why the Catholic story captivated, and still captivates" him, with the goal of enhancing "dialogue within the Christian community, not to convert anyone." As a one-time "convert" myself who has been carrying on a similar interior debate between Lutheranism and Catholicism for almost fifteen years (one that is much more volatile than Mulder's, and increasingly includes contributions from Canterbury and Constantinople), I sympathize with Mulder's evangelical modesty.

However, despite his worthy effort to promote dialogue, Mulder's approach often fails to convey the meaning of a faith as diverse, deep, and delightfully shocking as Catholicism can be. He places little focus on spirituality or life as it is lived by most practicing Catholics. The section on the sacraments is dry; they are discussed in technical terms, but what they mean to those who receive them is not really explored. Catholic social teaching is covered in a few pages at the end of the book, and much of that is taken up by the issue of gay marriage. To his credit, Mulder acknowledges that the church does not have a home at either end of our current right-and-left political dichotomy. He also offers a persuasive defense of affirmative-action policies based on the Catholic understanding of the fundamental social nature of human beings. He is at his best, and comes nearest to how I understand what it means to be Catholic, when he moves beyond catechesis and draws examples from life. But overall, more words are spent analyzing and comparing church doctrines than on what being a poor church for the poor might entail.

Nor does Mulder's Catholicism seem to leave much room for what Pope Francis calls a necessary "area of uncertainty." "I am a Catholic and I believe that Catholicism is true," he writes. "That means, of course, that I think beliefs that conflict with my Catholic faith are false." In other words, he offers a clear map through well-lit streets laid out primarily by official church documents and the *Summa*, but does not venture down the alleys where sinners light candles in the darkness and old ladies hide statues of the Virgin in their closets. He also shows discomfort with theological speculation that pushes boundaries and does not neatly align with what he perceives to be settled Catholic teaching. Yet the often untidy dialectic between the church and her theologians—one "area of uncertainty"—has always been a vital aspect of Catholic intellectual life. It has often been the pushing of theological boundaries that has advanced the very tradition Mulder seeks to defend against fundamentalism and biblical literalism.

Catholicism is messier than Mulder wants to admit, and he remains steeped in the habits of a certain kind of confessional Protestantism, with its tendency to reduce faith and church membership to the acceptance of theological propositions. Theological propositions are, of course, essential to Catholicism as well. But in my experience the richest sort of Catholicism also makes room for dissent, as well as for those marginalized by sin, detachment, or even apathy. That, at least, is the Catholic Church

most people know. It is the church Pope Francis has called a "field hospital."

As a convert and a theologian, Mulder seems to want a tidier world. I have been there myself, as someone who once sought refuge from the seeming complacency of mainline Protestantism in both evangelical fundamentalism and conservative Catholicism. After all, if you join a church because you believe it promises absolute and certain truth, doesn't this church fail you when it lets "uncertainty" in? Too often, however, we converts seek to trade "certainty of salvation by faith alone" for "certainty of truth by magisterium alone." Many Protestants, I suspect, are less suspicious of Mary, the saints, or purgatory than they are of a faith that makes room for a good deal of ambiguity.

But Mulder's limitations are also a strength. He wants to build a bridge to his former coreligionists based on an honest exploration rather than a minimizing of differences. In the process, he highlights differences with charity and embraces common ground whenever possible. For example, regarding Catholic teaching on purgatory, he notes that "most Protestants…think that God simply brings an end to this process [of sanctification] upon death." While many Protestants would find this a simplistic dismissal of their theological concerns, it is a worthy attempt to narrow the gap between Catholic and Protestant perspectives. Mulder is also capable of the striking analogy, as when he compares the complexities of dressing a stubborn small child to the relationship between God and humanity.

To my mind, Mulder's version of Catholicism fails to embrace the full richness, diversity, and complexity of both the church's theology and the faith experience of many Catholics. However, he succeeds in providing a well-articulated account of the differences between Catholic and Protestant beliefs, and does so in a way that fosters ecumenical dialogue rather than a sterile apologetics. ■

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BOOKMARKS

Anthony Domestico

Early in her dazzling new book *H Is for Hawk* (Grove Press, $26, 320 pp.), the poet and naturalist Helen Macdonald learns that her father has died of a heart attack. A renowned photojournalist, Macdonald's father was a lovely and loving man, and his sudden loss leaves his daughter unmoored. Macdonald begins to read her horoscope with great seriousness. She starts experiencing "memories of things that haven't happened yet." She feels herself drifting into "a kind of madness": "I could tell a hawk from a handsaw always, but sometimes it was striking to me how similar they were."

How can we describe the almost-madness of loss? Macdonald's method is to circle it from as many sides as possible: the more angles of approach, the more ways of considering her grief, the closer Macdonald's book can get to approximating the pain that inspired it.

Macdonald begins by looking to etymology: "Here's a word. *Bereavement*. Or, *Bereaved. Bereft*. It's from the Old English *berafian*, meaning 'to deprive of, take away, seize, rob.' Robbed. Seized." Ralph Waldo Emerson described language as "fossil poetry," and Macdonald here performs a kind of linguistic excavation. Bereavement, the word's roots suggest, isn't about emptiness, as we might expect, but about violence. To be bereft is to have had sudden, unexpected hurt done to you, and this is exactly how Macdonald feels.

Macdonald's mind frequently works by associative leaps, and so the roots of "bereft" suggest to her another word: "raptor, meaning 'bird of prey.' From the Latin *raptor*, meaning 'robber,' from *rapere*, meaning 'seize.' Rob. Seize." Here, in the figure of the bird of prey and in the violent roots of its name, we get a hint of the central and peculiar means by which Macdonald deals with her grief: she acquires, trains, hunts with, and comes to love a goshawk. She meets one kind of violence, her father's death, by attempting to tame another kind of violence—that of the hawk, whom she names Mabel.

For the rest of the book, Macdonald devotes more time to describing her relationship with Mabel and the techniques and terminology of hawking than to describing her relationship with her father. She also, surprisingly enough, devotes many pages—some readers might say too many—to describing the life of T. H. White. Most famous as the author of *The Once and Future King*, White also wrote *The Goshawk*, a wild 1951 memoir about White's sadistic attempts—and failures—at taming a hawk. Macdonald uses White's story as a way to think about her own story (and engages in some good literary criticism and psychologizing in the process).

H Is for Hawk is an odd combination: a personal study of Macdonald's grief and her experiences with Mabel, a biographical study of White, and finally a cultural study of the various meanings that have accreted around the figure of the hawk over the centuries. This generic messiness might seem a flaw: Macdonald has a good and painful story to tell, so why get distracted by so many *other* stories? But, to me at least, this refusal to clean things up is precisely the book's strength. This isn't a neat and tidy book, but then grief isn't a tidy emotion.

Why the hawk, though, and why Mabel? Ever since she was a little girl, Macdonald tells us, she had been obsessed with birds of prey: reading about them, dreaming about them, imagining herself as one of them, or as one who tamed them. Mainly, her fantasies focused on falcons—"sharp-winged, bullet-heavy birds with dark eyes and an extraordinary ease in the air"—and Macdonald went on to become a falconer herself. But, from the age of twelve, she also had a wary fascination with the goshawk. Macdonald draws a sharp contrast between the falcon and the hawk, showing how each bird has been read as signifying certain cultural, even spiritual, values. Falcons, Captain Gilbert Blaine wrote in 1936, are "confined to the aristocracy, as an exclusive right and privilege." Falcons are noble and beautiful; they need great space to hunt in; they stand in for a life of grace and luxury. Goshawks, on the other hand, are standoffish and temperamental; their hunting style is quick and vicious; they stand not for grace and nobility but for brutish, primal power. They are, Macdonald writes, "ruffians: murderous, difficult to tame, sulky, fractious, and foreign."

Macdonald is an extraordinary describer, and some of the best parts of *H Is for Hawk* involve her looking closely at Mabel and allowing us to look with her: "Her wings are the colour of stained oak, their covert feathers edged in palest teak, barred flight-feathers folded quietly beneath. And there's a strange grey tint to her that is felt, rather than seen, a kind of silvery light like a rainy sky reflected from the surface of a river." What attention to color! Elsewhere, we see how the hawk seems to shift and transform, fairy-tale like, under her tamer's gaze: "The hawk is alternately a hunchback toad, a nervous child or a dragon."

Macdonald knows that the hawk is a bringer of death, "a being whose world is drawn in plots and vectors that pull her towards lives' ends." Though it's not spelled out explicitly, Macdonald seems to be engaged in the kind of magical

thinking that often attends grief: the hawk is a ruthless engine of death (notice the precision of "plots and vectors"), so if I can tame *her*, then perhaps I can tame the death that has wrecked me.

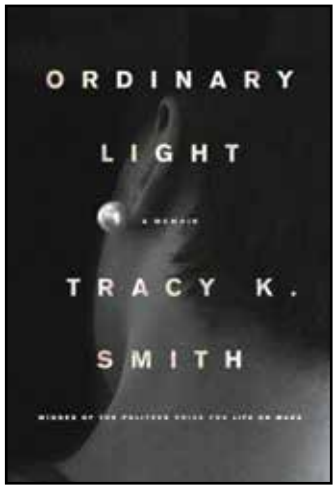
In the end, though, Macdonald comes to see that Mabel is not a symbol to be deployed in the service of her handler's journey of self-healing. In one of the book's final scenes, Mabel flies away from Macdonald and slaughters a bunch of pheasants on private land. This isn't a story of gaining power over death by gaining power over an animal. The otherness of hawks, Macdonald writes, "is to be treasured because what they do has nothing to do with us at all." If Mabel teaches Macdonald a lesson, it's that the world doesn't exist to teach us lessons.

Another poet's memoir, *Ordinary Light* (Knopf, $25.95, 368 pp.) by Tracy K. Smith, also begins with loss, a fact that is announced in the book's very first sentence: "She left us at night." The "she" is Smith's mother, and Smith goes on to describe the exact moment when, as Smith puts it in a rather old-fashioned way, her mother's "dying came on":

> Then we heard a sound that seemed to carve a tunnel between our world and some other. It was an otherworldly breath, a vivid presence that blew past us without stopping, leaving us, the living, clamped in place by the silence that followed. I would come back to the sound and the presence of that breath again and again, thinking how miraculous it was that she had ridden off on that last exhalation, her life instantly whisked away, carried over into a place none of us will ever understand until perhaps we are there ourselves.
>
> It's a kind of miracle we never let ourselves consider, the miracle of death. She followed that last breath where it led and left her body behind in the old four-poster Queen Anne bed, where for the first time in all of our lives it was a body and nothing more.

"She left her body behind": how perfect, and how perfectly simple, a description of death, the one moment in a person's life—its final one—that he or she will never be able to describe or remember. Smith has attempted to describe this moment before in "Speed of Belief," the best poem from her 2011 Pulitzer Prize–winning collection, *Life on Mars*. There, Smith writes of her father's death in similarly unassuming language: "You stepped out of the body. / Unzipped it like a coat."

The opening of *Ordinary Light*, then, seems to suggest two things: first, that it will be, like *H Is for Hawk*, a grief memoir; and second, that it will echo, in idea and imagery, moments from Smith's poetry. The first suggestion, it should be noted, proves false. Though the book begins and ends with the death of Smith's mother, it is not a grief memoir. Rather, it is an attempt to use language to rescue the things that are always passing away from us: most specifically, childhood innocence, the time when we didn't quite understand the complexities of social existence (Smith is



black and her mother was raised in Jim Crow–era Alabama) or think to doubt religious orthodoxy (Smith was raised Baptist and her mother was particularly devout); more generally, the ordinary, banal reality that seems to exist so as to be forgotten.

Smith's life has been a relatively quiet and incredibly successful one. She was raised in a big, happy, loving, middle-class black family in the suburbs of California (after leaving the military, her father worked as an engineer on the Hubble Telescope). A do-gooder in high school, Smith eventually went to Harvard, got an MFA from Columbia, and published her first collection of poetry, *The Body's Question*, at the age of thirty-one.

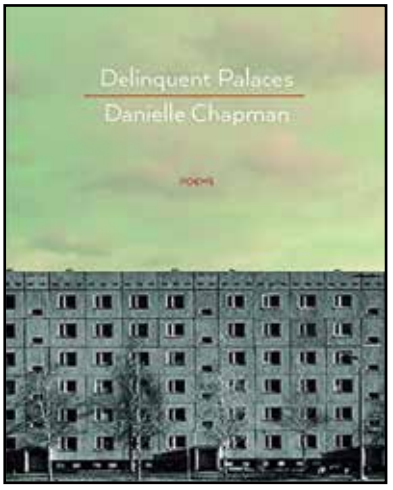
There isn't much about drugs or sex in *Ordinary Light*. There is some embarrassment but little humiliation, much honesty but little confession. Instead, the book is filled with quiet, beautiful moments that are quietly, beautifully rendered, as when Smith remembers being kicked in the stomach by a calf, her "first collision with the world's solid fist," or when she recounts first reading Emily Dickinson: "It made me feel special, privy to magic, as if whoever was speaking had sought me out, discerning an affinity." The book exists not to create dramatic tension or to make polemical points about race or religion—two of the work's most regular subjects—but to save the ordinary from oblivion through the power of loving attention.

The second thing suggested by the book's opening sentences—that readers of Smith's poetry will hear echoes of it in her prose—does prove true. Anyone who loved *Life on Mars* will love *Ordinary Light*. That collection has a poem, "It and Co.," that refuses to specify the referent of its title but gestures instead toward all that is ineffable: the self, history, the cosmos, God. Midway through *Ordinary Light,* the wondrous power of the unclear referent appears again, when the young Smith worries about the Biblical apocalypse and her sister responds, "'Don't worry, Kitten. If it happens, it'll be a total adventure.' That *It* meant everything, the whole apocalyptic chain of events. *It* was a lumping together of the good and the ghastly, a breezy, offhand dismissal of nuance. *It* lightened things for me, told me to let go of trying to plan for something so far off and far-out."

In "The Weather in Space," the opening poem in *Life on Mars*, Smith asked, "Is God being or pure force? The wind / Or what commands it?" These lines reverberate at the end of *Ordinary Light*, where Smith asks, "Is God each of the many different things we seek in the course of a life? Is God what animates the body, drawing us into a deeper, more primal sense of our physical selves?" Then, she admits, "I feel myself most alive, most electric with faith, breath, and courage, when I think of God as a current that runs through all that is. Not by will or by choice. Not as a benediction but because there are laws that even God must obey." Whether or not Smith believes in a personal God, she believes in the holiness of existence, and her prose shows this as clearly as her poetry.

Having talked about two works of prose written by poets, it seems appropriate to end with an actual book of poetry. Danielle Chapman's *Delinquent Palaces* (Triquarterly, $16.95, 72 pp.) is her first collection, and it introduces a poet already in full command of her voice and her verse.

One good definition of poetry might be: language that demands to be read out loud. Still, some poets demand to be read out loud more than others (Hopkins more than Bishop, for instance). Chapman is like Hopkins: to read her silently is to do her an injustice. In one poem, for example, she describes a "wad of gum" being dropped into a glass of ginger ale: "Bubbles rose like souls / unburdening from selves, bearing tiny spheres / of bliss that broke upon the surface / like sleepers to the touch of



consciousness." The intricate linking of sounds exhibited here (bubbles, unburdening, bearing, bliss, broke) recurs elsewhere, and Chapman uses this sonic intensity to suggest a world of intense sensations. Here is one of the collection's best and shortest poems, "Let Alone":

Every spring you yank me back up
to this blossom brink
too bright for any sane comparison—

No person in leaf-flame immolation.

That any two details should gather matter out of absolute heat!

Let alone on this street.

Again, notice the music (blossom, brink, bright; leaf-flame immolation). And, again, notice how that music makes us hear the harrowing, sublime ferocity of the world. "No person in leaf-flame immolation"—a line set off as its own stanza and so drawing attention to itself—sounds as if it could have come out of Hopkins. Chapman is an incarnational poet, trying to make us feel in our very bones a world charged with the grandeur of God.

All three books under review here are, at one level or another, about love. *H Is for Hawk* is about the love that Macdonald felt for her father and the love she ends up feeling for Mabel, even and especially when Mabel seems so incapable of returning it. *Ordinary Light* is about the love that Smith felt for her mother and feels for the ordinary moments of existence. And *Delinquent Palaces* is not just about a love of the world but about the love of a specific person. The collection is dedicated to Chapman's husband, the poet Christian Wiman, and many of the collection's strongest poems show how, in a Dante-esque manner, romantic love might lead to a Christian love of existence. "A Shape Within" opens with an epigraph from *Paradiso*, and it closes with lines that remind us of the urgency with which we desire to love and be loved:

…—beyond our grand stupidities—
the urgency won't perish: to be known
in one's own person as crocuses are known
by sun, conceiving green to breathe it,
for ravishment by light, to grow
into the moment in our cells when we open
ourselves as a plant uncoils pistils
and become refulgent whether looked at or not. ■

Christian Iran

Christopher Thornton

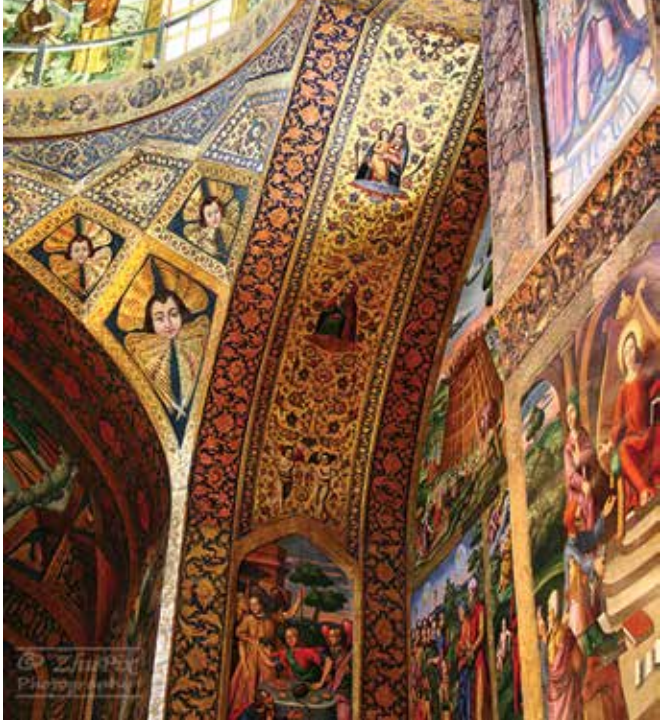
On a dimly lit side street in central Tehran, a bright yellow light shines above a wooden door. Step inside and you might imagine you had left the Islamic Republic. An unveiled woman greets guests and leads them to a spacious dining room, where other women have hung their veils and monteaux at the door. It is early summer, so sleeveless tops reveal bare arms and shoulders. When one patron produces a bottle of Scotch, a waiter brings him a tumbler with ice.

This is one of Tehran's three Armenian clubs—informal "Islamic-free zones" where Armenian Christians can socialize without the constraints of Islamic law. There are other kinds of Christians in Iran—Assyrians and Chaldeans, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox—but Armenians are the most numerous. It is estimated that there are three hundred thousand of them in Iran. They are allocated five seats in the religious-minorities section of parliament, freely attend services in the six hundred Armenian churches throughout the country, hold observer status on the powerful Guardian Council, and operate their own schools so that their children can be taught in the Armenian language.

Christianity has a long history in Iran. The Acts of the Apostles tell us that Parthians, Persians, and Medes converted to Christianity at Pentecost, and the Parthian kings allowed the new religion to spread throughout the empire. Christians fleeing Roman persecution found a safe haven there. But for the next fifteen hundred years the fortunes of Persian Christians were subject to the political conflicts that swept across Asia. The fourth-century Zoroastrian ruler Shapour II initially allowed religious freedom but then cracked down on both Christians and Jews. In the early centuries of Islamic rule, Christians enjoyed the status of a protected minority, but the Crusades revived old religious tensions. The early Mongol rulers converted to Christianity after they invaded in the thirteenth century, but when later rulers opted for Islam, Christians were again persecuted.

The Armenian community of Iran was formed in 1603, when Shah Abbas allowed five hundred thousand Armenian Christians who were persecuted by the Ottoman Turks to resettle in Esfahan. Three centuries later, the Armenian genocide of 1915 led fifty thousand more Armenians to seek refuge in Iran, primarily in Tabriz, Tehran, and the enclave of Esfahan that had come to be known as New Julfa, after the city in Azerbaijan where the Armenians originated. As Reza Shah and his son Mohammed Reza Shah sought to modernize Iran in the twentieth century, Armenians rose to high positions in the government, as well as in the arts and sciences.

Since its construction in 1606, Vank Cathedral has served as the spiritual heart of the Julfa district. It is also one of Esfahan's major tourist attractions. Christian pilgrims, foreign tourists, and visiting Iranians all pass through its gates. In one corner of the cathedral's grounds stands a memorial of the 1915 genocide—a slender spire encircled by an apron of grass. Inside the Armenian Museum, photographs and documents offer a moving record of the genocide. Visitors, both Christian and Muslim, also gaze at handwritten Bibles, distinctive crosses, vestments, and chalices.



The interior of Vank Cathedral

ZHUPIX

The main attraction is the cathedral itself, where the beauty of the Armenian religious tradition is revealed in all its glory. At the top of the central dome the creation story is painted in patterns of blue and gold. Winged cherubs, a traditional Armenian motif, decorate the stone columns, and traditional Persian imagery appears in the floral patterns that adorn the entrance ceiling.

The cathedral isn't the only church in Julfa. Knock on the wooden door of the Church of St. Mary and a caretaker will open it to admit visitors to the inner courtyard. Built by a wealthy silk merchant in the seventeenth century, St. Mary's was later expanded to accommodate overflow crowds. Then there is the Church of Bethlehem, where the life of Jesus is portrayed in seventy-two wall paintings. The crosses of both churches rise above their central domes to share the skyline with the local minarets.

Many Westerners think of Iran as a theocratic monolith. They would no doubt be surprised to discover Christians of various kinds living there comfortably. Some of these Christian communities are ancient; some arrived more recently, seeking asylum. But even the newcomers now regard Iran as their home. They think of the Shiite majority not as their hosts, but as neighbors with whom they have much in common. For example, Muslim and Christian Iranians are united in their enthusiasm for the recent nuclear deal, which will release their country from stifling economic sanctions. In an interview with the Fides News Agency, Hormoz Aslani Babroudi, director of the Pontifical Missionary Society of Iran, offered his endorsement of the agreement: "Christians, along with all the Iranian people, are rejoicing because their prayers were answered. From now on it will be easier for the world to have a positive view of Iran." He added, "We do not consider ourselves foreigners but Iranians, and we are proud of it." ■

Christopher Thornton *teaches at Zayed University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.*

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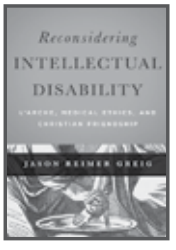

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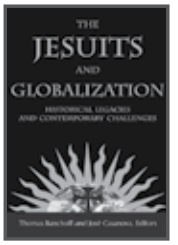

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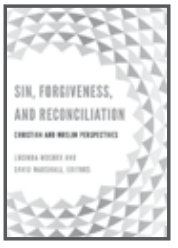

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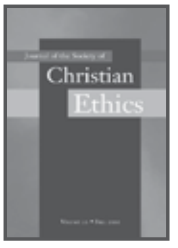

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