A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

# Commonweal

JANUARY 8, 2016

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# LETTERS

## *Arguing about the synod, John's gospel*

### RESISTING RUDDY

Kudos for *Commonweal*'s array of assessments of the Synod on the Family. Above all, Christopher Ruddy's contribution to "Assessing the Synod: Five Views" (December 4) forced me to ponder aspects of the deliberations I had not considered; after reading, thinking, and rereading, I had to agree with some of what he wrote and disagree with perhaps more.

Two of my objections in particular need to be underscored.

First, I agree with Ruddy that Pope Francis's rhetoric was harsh. Speaking of those who "'indoctrinate' in dead stones to be hurled at others" is indeed provocative. But Francis did not condemn all conservatives—Dr. Ruddy himself extended that indictment beyond what the pope's words required. Undoubtedly many who disagree with Francis do so because of their implacable fidelity to tradition; I have personally experienced priests and other leaders having closed hearts who "frequently hide even behind the church's teaching" to abandon those struggling in difficult circumstances. This means hard truths need to be spoken occasionally: Pope John XXIII, for example, called some who took part in the discussion at Vatican II "prophets of doom."

Second, Ruddy's judgment that Cardinal Kasper's proposal to allow some remarried Catholics to receive Communion ignores the requirement to receive Communion in a state of grace misses the point entirely. What Kasper actually is addressing is that some Catholics who remarry without an annulment are in fact already in a state of grace. Many priests of my generation have found Christ's spirit alive and sanctifying beyond the present laws and practices of the church. Indeed, refusing to see this may well be a mark of those who hide even behind the church's teaching.

JOHN TOPEL, S.J.
*Port Townsend, Wash.*

### ROOM FOR DEBATE

I wish to commend you for the December 4 issue of *Commonweal*. The five reflections on the recent Synod on the Family were nothing short of wonderful, each offering a different and fresh perspective. The authors helped me understand the synod and its processes. With them, I await the pope's exhortation!

Keep up the good work.

FR. FRED KAWKA
*Lake Isabella, Mich.*

### LETTING IN THE LIGHT

As someone who has worked with parishes on their liturgical efforts for many years, I agree with Rita Ferrone's assessment in her column ("His Own Received Him Not," December 18). Priests tend to want to give to people what they want to hear, and have their children hear, which is the Lucan narrative. In the hands of a good preacher, there's more than enough paschal mystery content in Luke's story to make people tremble in their seats. Unfortunately, such preachers are rare indeed.

Thank you for calling attention again to the beauty of John's overture, which, in this Year of Mercy, should be a stunning proclamation, as it is intended to be, of "grace falling upon grace"—the leading edge of God's imagination becoming flesh and pitching a tent in the midst of the world's darkness.

RORY COONEY
*Web comment*

The next issue of **Commonweal** will be dated January 29, 2016

*From the Editors*

# Normalizing Carnage

In early October a troubled twenty-six-year-old, armed with five handguns and a rifle, opened fire at his community college in Roseburg, Oregon, killing nine people and wounding seven. Back at his apartment investigators found two pistols, four rifles, and a shotgun. In late November a man armed with an assault rifle killed three people and wounded nine at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs. Less than a week later, a young married couple armed with two assault rifles and two semiautomatic handguns killed fourteen people and wounded twenty-one others at a holiday party in San Bernardino, California.

The motives and circumstances of these shootings had little in common. The Oregon gunman appears to have been motivated at least partly by a hatred of organized religion, while the shooters in California had declared themselves Islamic warriors. In his first court appearance, the Planned Parenthood shooter proclaimed himself "a warrior for the babies." But as the media continues to debate which of these events should be treated as terrorism and which as acts of insanity, we should not lose sight of what we know the three shootings did have in common: they all involved semi-automatic weapons purchased legally—and would have been far less deadly without them.

As critics of gun control are eager to point out, we cannot know for certain whether a ban on the civilian ownership of such weapons or a law mandating universal background checks would have prevented any of these particular atrocities. It is at least possible that the shooters would have found a way to buy the same weapons on the black market: there are, after all, a lot of guns floating around in this country; indeed, there are now more guns in America than Americans. But we do know that mass shootings are much less common in countries that make it harder to acquire firearms. That isn't a coincidence. More generally, other developed countries with fewer guns and tighter gun-control laws have much lower rates of both homicide and suicide. Likewise, studies have shown that, here in America, states and municipalities with more gun restrictions have fewer gun-related deaths. Some might argue that what's good for society collectively is nevertheless bad for individuals who wish to protect themselves and their families, but studies have also shown that people who live in households with guns are less safe overall than those who live in households without them. In short, the politics of gun control may be complicated, but the epidemiology is surprisingly simple: all other things being equal, more guns mean more bloodshed.

This being the case, why *are* the politics still so complicated—even after Sandy Hook, and Aurora, and San Bernardino? The death tolls still shock, but so far they have failed to alarm the country into action. At this point it may be fair to assume that anyone unpersuaded by the mountain of evidence that gun control works is probably unpersuadable. Fortunately, we don't need to convince all the holdouts, since a large majority of Americans already favor common-sense gun laws. A recent study published in *Preventive Medicine* found that more than 80 percent of the public, including gun owners, are in favor of background checks for all gun sales (there are currently exceptions for gun shows and private sellers). About 60 percent are in favor of laws that would ban assault weapons and large-capacity magazines. In 2013 the Chicago suburb of Highland Park passed an ordinance that does just that. Last month the Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to that law. As the *New York Times* noted, this was the seventieth time since 2008 that the Court has declined to consider a lawsuit challenging a gun regulation. The door to further reform is wide open.

All we need now are lawmakers more responsive to public opinion than to the blandishments of gun-industry lobbyists. If the National Rifle Association is allowed to determine our gun policies, and voters merely get to choose which politicians will have the privilege of doing the NRA's bidding, then Congress has ceased to function democratically. In their dubious interpretation of the Second Amendment, too many of our elected leaders—and all of one party—have forgotten that the Constitution was designed not only to secure the "blessings of liberty," but also to "insure domestic tranquility," and to "promote the general welfare." Behind the moral outrage of a country that averages at least one mass shooting per day is a political outrage we can no longer tolerate: a Congress in thrall to profiteers who peddle what is essentially battlefield equipment to the general public. They would sell us bombs if they thought they could get away with it. ■

## CLIMATE CONFESSIONAL

*Rand Richards Cooper*

Years ago, when I was in my late twenties and living in Washington, D.C., I had a German houseguest for a week, a woman named Irena who was spending her summer touring the United States. My girlfriend and I had a tiny apartment with no guest room—but that was no problem for Irena. She slept in the living room on a small folding mat she'd brought with her. I was impressed by how light she traveled. Everything she needed for six weeks was contained in a small backpack. Looking at her tidy pile of neatly folded stuff in the corner of our living room, I recall thinking, Here is a person dedicated to minimizing the ripple she makes as she passes through the world. She took up such little space, made such little impact, that in comparison I felt like an oaf of consumption, a wasteful giant, lumbering heedlessly through life.

I thought about Irena during the recent climate meeting in Paris, and about how individuals and nations respond to the challenge of climate change—or don't. A December article in the *New York Times* delineated Germany's leading role in reducing dependence on fossil fuels, calling it a "global model." The country has been busily investing in renewable and other alternative energy sources (solar, wind, bioenergy), reducing fossil-fuel consumption even as it phases out nuclear power (a decision made after the 2011 Fukushima disaster), all measures taken by way of following an ambitious plan to cut 1990-level greenhouse-gas emissions by 80 percent within sixty years. In the process, Germany has managed to do something no other developed country has achieved: cut energy use without shrinking the economy. Usually, it takes a recession to diminish energy use. Germany is doing it by the efficient execution of an assiduous design.

But Germany is unusual. It's a society where *Umweltfreundlichkeit*—environmental friendliness—has a broad base in the popular outlook, across the political spectrum. (How many fervently right-wing Americans have you met who are also rabid environmentalists?) Visiting Leipzig a few years ago, I went to a lecture by an advocate of the zero-growth or steady-state economy, a philosophy that rejects reliance on perpetual economic growth as a malign force to be extirpated from our politics and worldview. The lecturer was earnest and smart, the audience receptive. But as an American I could only shake my head. String together five years of zero growth in the United States, and you'd have a social nightmare on your hands. We are not a nation of people like Irena.

Here's where the personal and confessional part comes in. When it comes to global warming, I basically just keep punting. There are so many paths to inaction. View climate change as something demanding massive structural realignments, and it becomes a policy problem, something for laws and governments to address. View it as a personal challenge, and it seems overwhelming and hopeless. Does my family try, within limits, to be less profligate in our energy use? Yes. We keep the house chilly in winter; drive fuel-efficient cars and try not to put much mileage on them; use local farms for produce; turn out the lights in rooms we're not using; and so on.

But the key phrase here is "within limits." Ours are limits set by convenience and the realities of daily modern life—not the far more stringent limits that would be set by extrapolating backward from a future global environmental disaster. We fly on planes. We purchase products that fly on planes. We have a sizable house. We live an American life.

At the collective level, that way of life includes a habitually American approach to assessing risk and reward over time. Much more than Germany, where (for instance) household savings are extraordinarily high, we are a buy-now, pay-later society. Yet actions on the scale that environmental scientists tell us will be necessary to produce meaningful reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions would involve massive changes that would be "pain now, gain later"—precisely the kind that our political system and economic system, and indeed our collective personality and habits, seem designed not to be able to make.

Individually and collectively, the U.S. responds well to emergencies. Planning ahead? Not so much. So how can we make a distant future urgency more immediate and, well, more urgent? If you tell me authoritatively that unless I give up half my wealth today, my family will inescapably die tomorrow, I will readily give up half my wealth. But if you tell me that unless I give up one-fifth of my wealth today, there is a pretty good chance that my great-great-grandchild will live in a world where well-being is drastically circumscribed compared with today, then...hmmmm.

I am not advocating thinking this way, just describing it. Human nature being what it is, it sometimes seems that we need to be Marshall Islanders, with our world vanishing into the sea in front of us, before we really, truly do something. And by then, apparently, it will be too late. What we need is to cultivate the Marshall Islander within us all, as Germans and citizens of a few other countries have somehow managed to do. But how? ■

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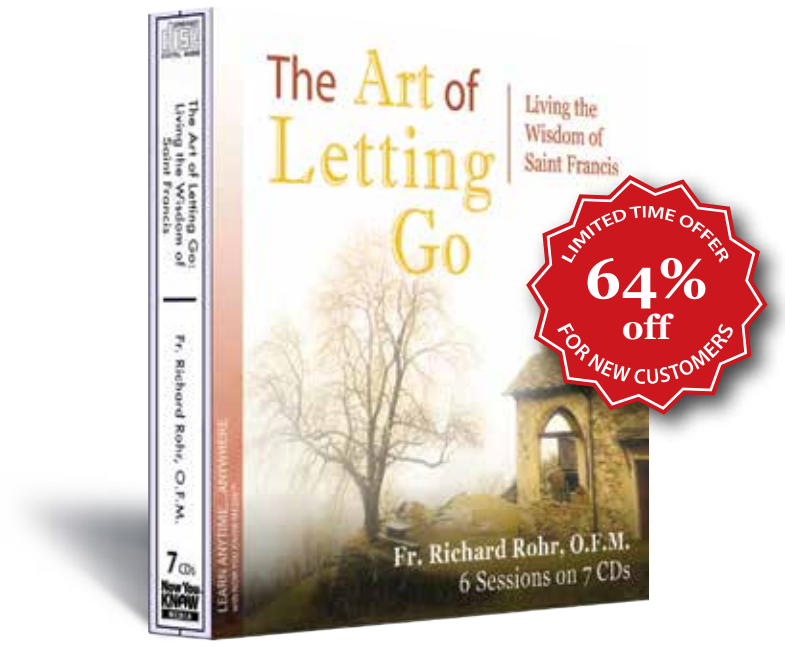


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*Margaret O'Brien Steinfels*

# 'Eternally Begotten'

## WHERE IS THE SON OF GOD BEFORE BETHLEHEM?

*Metaphysics*. Not a word we ordinarily think of during Christmastide and Epiphany. Yet, unexpectedly, it provided me with new reflections on the deepest meaning of the birth of Jesus and the Incarnation—the seen and the unseen.

I happened to be reading the chapter titled "Metaphysics" in Marilynne Robinson's much lauded recent collection of essays, *The Givenness of Things*. In fact, I opened to that chapter eager to see how the resuscitation of "metaphysics" was proceeding. Robinson, it turns out, is not using the word in the way it has usually been used in the philosophical tradition that runs from the pre-Socratics through Plato, Aristotle, Averroës, and Aquinas, right down to the (once-required) metaphysics course at Catholic universities. She is on to another kind of metaphysics, one that focuses on the Second Person of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

An acclaimed novelist and an occasional preacher at her Congregational church in Iowa City, Robinson finds the basis for a specifically Christian metaphysics "ready to hand in biblical and traditional theology." For theological tradition she turns, not without some caveats, to John Calvin. For scriptural references, she stresses the cosmic hymn of Colossians 1:15–20 ("He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation") and the Prologue to John's Gospel ("In the beginning was the Word"), and points to Psalm 8:4–6 ("What is man…. Yet you have made him little less than a god"), as well as the genealogy in the third chapter of Luke ("son of Adam, son of God"). She is reflecting not on the Jesus of the manger but on the preexisting Son, who was with God and is God for all eternity, the Second Person of the Trinity in whom "all things were created, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible."

Though I recite the phrase every Sunday, Robinson's emphasis on "eternally begotten," brought me up short. Where is the Son of God between "the Beginning" and Bethlehem? Her response: The Nativity and the Incarnation are an outcropping of a reality that existed throughout creation and for all time.

Christ the Savior (Pantokrator), *a sixth-century encaustic icon from Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai*

The Second Person of the Trinity was and is Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of man, "who might be thought of as promised or anticipated in the very fact that he is also implicit, present in humankind before he, *in* the Incarnation, became present among them."

This elaboration has important implications: "In light of the unvarying solicitude of the Old Testament toward the poor, it might be metaphysically respectable to infer that Christ was in some sense present even in the least of them from the primordial moment when human circumstance began to call for justice and generosity." And not only the Old Testament: "An ancient Egyptian aspired to be able to say, to the god who met him after his death, I never made anyone weep." Robinson sees this as "a noble and gentle aspiration I can only imagine Christ would honor." Her high Christology implies, as she says, a high anthropology ("you have made him little less than a god"), evident in these and other turns of thought in the essay.

Robinson's biblical and theological metaphysics is not, of course, wholly independent of the more philosophical sort. She laments that metaphysics is now "abandoned as if it were a mistake sophisticated people could no longer make," replaced by the idea that "God is a human social construct whose existence…is substantially dependent on what people think." This abandonment of metaphysics rests on an "old nuts-and-bolts physics"—a "crudely restricted notion of the possible" that leaves no room for belief in the Trinity or talk of the "eternally begotten." Robinson welcomes the new physics of quantum entanglement not in order to construct an apologetic or science-based Christian metaphysics but to clear away the prevalent "*anti*-metaphysics" that blocks her turn to scripture and theology.

Those familiar with her prose know how slowly and solemnly she unwinds and rewinds these arguments, circling around ideas and spinning off insights. She starts with the debate between science and religion ("fundamentally misdirected") and ends with Luke's placement of the genealogy of Jesus, running back in time from Jesus' baptism to Creation. Bethlehem is implicit in "the Beginning," the seen and the unseen. ■

*Cathleen Kaveny*

# Vigilante Injustice

## THE RIGHT TO LIFE & THE RULE OF LAW

The Friday after Thanksgiving, Robert Lewis Dear killed three people and wounded nine others at a Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado Springs. Officer Garret Swasey of the University of Colorado police force was one of the victims; he was shot and killed after voluntarily responding to reports of an active shooter at the site.

Dear appears to be a mentally disturbed loner. Yet it became increasingly clear that opposition to abortion was his motivation, which put many prolife activists on the defensive. Some attempted to deflect public criticism by portraying Swasey, who was a conservative Christian active in his church, as a martyr for the prolife cause. Glen Stanton, who lives in Colorado Springs and works for Focus on the Family, said that "Swasey was a good man who sought to protect life, even those who engaged in work that he believed was reprehensible."

But Swasey wasn't a martyr for the prolife cause. He was a martyr for the rule of law—the idea that all persons within a community are bound by publicly promulgated and generally applicable norms. The concept of the rule of law helps provide a broader framework that makes sense of the critics and the defenders of the prolife movement in the aftermath of the shooting.

Ask yourself this question: Why was Swasey prepared to use lethal force to stop Stanton, but not to stop the abortion providers—from Swasey's prolife perspective, weren't both killing innocent people? The answer: As a police officer, Swasey had sworn an oath to enforce the law, and the law permits abortion, while it prohibits shooting those who provide, facilitate, or obtain the procedure.

Most prolife leaders have been quick to condemn violence against abortion providers. But they have struggled to provide a coherent justification for this condemnation. (That *First Things* published a symposium titled "Killing Abortionists" in 1994 demonstrates both that the problem is neither especially recent nor confined to the fevered speculation of prochoice progressives.) Some say they reject violence in all forms—especially violence by private persons—but do they really? Most people, after all, would admit that it was permissible for a private citizen to use lethal force if necessary to stop someone from beating a toddler to death. What's the difference between that and using lethal force to stop a late-term abortion? The difference is that a late-term abortion is legal, and beating a toddler to death is not. Private violence is legally permitted if necessary to defend the toddler, but not to defend the unborn.

Most prolife Americans condemn the killing of abortionists as "vigilante" justice. But some might reply: So what, if the law is unjust? The concept of the rule of law helps answer that objection.

Christian political thought includes a long tradition of recognizing the substantial value in even a substantially unjust legal regime—provided that it offers basic social stability through the rule of law. Writing as the Roman Empire crumbled, St. Augustine suffered no illusion that its legal system was fully just. Nonetheless, even unjust political orders provide a certain amount of order and predictability, by constraining the behavior of sinful men and women in ways that everyone can rely on. And that tranquility of order is an important aspect of justice, even if it is not complete justice.

Over the centuries, Christian theologians sometimes gave too much weight to the value of political tranquility, which led to gross indifference in the face of grave injustice. Yet it is important not to react against this tendency by discounting the ways in which respect for the rule of law contributes to the common good, even when some aspects of the law are imperfect or of dubious morality.

What about civil disobedience? What distinguishes it from simple lawlessness is the effort practitioners make to preserve respect for the rule of law. For example, Martin Luther King not only broke unjust laws mandating racial segregation, he also willingly and publicly suffered the penalty for breaking those laws. In any case, the use of violence places activists beyond the pale of civil disobedience. They become political revolutionaries—and political revolution needs to be justified according to the terms of the just-war theory.

Many have condemned the rhetoric of the prolife movement. The concept of the rule of law suggests why it is a problem. Prolife activists regularly describe the American regime of legalized abortion in terms that suggest the legitimacy of armed revolution. They compare abortion to the Holocaust, or to the enslavement of African Americans. Yet they actually do not intend to end abortion by overthrowing the government, but rather by reforming it through the democratic process.

But as Black Friday 2015 showed, the mismatch between rhetoric and reality can be deadly. Prolife activists need to develop a conceptual framework that supports their abhorrence of vigilante justice as much as it does their rejection of abortion. Renewed attention to the requirements of the rule of law might help them do just that. ■

*J. Peter Nixon*

# Steady Pulse

## OBAMACARE IS WORKING, FOR NOW

The fall of 2013 was—to put it mildly—a difficult time for the architects of the Affordable Care Act. The Obama administration's launch of its health-plan enrollment website had been a disaster, with users unable either to access it or to save critical information. At the same time, millions of Americans were receiving letters from their insurance companies telling them that their plans were being terminated because they no longer complied with the ACA's coverage and benefit requirements. This was an embarrassment for Obama, who had famously promised "if you like your plan, you can keep it."

Obamacare's critics could barely contain their glee at the administration's travails. "Obamacare is failing and will fail," opined the *Weekly Standard*'s Bill Kristol. Speaker of the House John Boehner, who had led more than fifty votes to repeal Obamacare, assumed the air of a world-weary statesman: "When you step back and look at the totality of this, I don't think it was ever going to work."

Supporters of the ACA didn't know it at the time, but they had hit rock bottom. From that point forward, the law would slowly but surely accumulate a track record of success. While the patient may not be ready for discharge, he's at least out of intensive care.

Republican demands to repeal the law will grow louder and shriller as we approach Election Day 2016. As another bitterly partisan presidential contest unfolds, it would be good to keep in mind what the ACA has actually accomplished. The ACA's most striking achievement has seen a significant reduction in the number of Americans without health insurance. Earlier this year, the Gallup organization released data showing that the share of Americans without insurance fell from a high of 18 percent in 2013 to 11.9 percent in early 2015, the lowest rate recorded since Gallup began tracking this item in 2008. The improvement in coverage was even more dramatic for low-income families, African Americans, Hispanics, and adults under the age of thirty-five.

The law achieved its impressive expansion coverage in a variety of ways. The ACA requires all Americans to obtain health insurance that covers a standard package of benefits (the so-called "individual mandate"). If you are not already covered, you have a variety of insurance options depending on your age and income. Health plans are now required to allow children to stay on their parents' plans until the age of twenty-six. The federal Medicaid program was expanded to allow states to cover families with incomes less than 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (roughly $33,500 for a family of four). Finally, individuals not eligible for Medicaid can purchase insurance through a regulated marketplace

known as an "exchange," with subsidies available for middle-income families.

The downside of a system with so many moving parts is that some individuals inevitably fall through the cracks. At the beginning of 2015, thirty-three states had chosen *not* to expand their Medicaid programs to cover more of the uninsured, despite the fact that the federal government was willing to pay most of the cost. This left roughly 4 million people in a "coverage gap" where their incomes were too high for their state Medicaid programs but too low to qualify for subsidies that would allow them to purchase private insurance through the exchange. Four states—Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia—account for almost two-thirds of those in the coverage gap.

Another hole in the system is coverage for the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants, who are not eligible for Medicaid and cannot purchase insurance through the exchange. More than half this group is uninsured and they account for about a quarter of the remaining uninsured population. States with large numbers of undocumented immigrants are struggling to address the problem. Earlier this year, California was considering using its own funds to extend coverage to all undocumented immigrants, but cost considerations forced the state to limit the program to those under the age of eighteen.

The ACA's success in expanding coverage is all the more impressive given that it has been able to do so without breaking the bank. Back in March 2010, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that the annual net cost of the ACA's coverage-expansion provisions would be $172 billion by 2019. In 2015, lower-than-expected costs for insurance subsidies led

OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA

the CBO to reduce its estimate to $132 billion, a $40 billion savings. Contrary to the hyperbolic claims of its opponents, the ACA as a whole is actually having a positive effect on the federal budget. When Congressional Republicans asked the CBO to examine the savings associated with repealing Obamacare, they found such a move could actually increase the federal deficit by $350 billion over the next ten years.

Obamacare has also succeeded in bringing millions of new individuals into the individual insurance market without (so far) causing premiums to skyrocket. Prior to the passage of the ACA, the individual insurance market was extremely fragmented with a very wide range of coverage options (for example, some plans covered abortion services while excluding coverage for childbirth). One of the goals of the new law was to introduce more competition in this market by allowing individuals to aggregate their purchasing power through the federal and state exchanges. With so many "covered lives" at stake, insurers have an incentive to offer a good rate to individuals purchasing through the exchange. The ACA also requires plans to offer a standardized set of benefits and cost-sharing options, making it easier to compare apples to apples when shopping for insurance.

Is there trouble ahead? Recent news stories have suggested that rates for individuals in the exchanges may rise dramatically this year. Some insurers have been proposing increases of 20 percent or more, although these tend to be opening bids in negotiations with state insurance regulators that ultimately result in more modest increases. Even after those negotiations, however, there will be cities like Portland, Oregon, where some enrollees will see premiums increase by 16 percent. Families in rural areas may also see higher increases because fewer insurers compete for their business.

Looking across the country, however, the average increase is likely to remain in the single digits. That's not bad for a segment of the market that routinely saw double-digit increases in the years before the ACA's passage. Consumers, for their part, may be able to obtain even lower rates if they are willing to switch plans. Indeed, the willingness of consumers to switch plans will be a critical factor in putting pressure on insurers to keep premium increases under control. There is some evidence that consumers are indeed shopping around from year to year.

The trillion-dollar question is whether Obamacare's run of financial good luck will continue. The rollout of the ACA coincided with a slowdown in the rate of increase in health care costs, which industry analysts are still trying to explain. Some of it was due to the lingering effects of the Great Recession, as consumers cut back on all forms of spending, health care included. With wages still growing slowly, it may take a while for health-care cost growth to return to pre-recession levels. Employers have also been shifting more of the cost of health insurance to their employees in the form of higher deductibles and copayments, which leads them to consume less. The

## THE DIVORCE

In a small way, the foreign residents
Are rounded up—the Spartans sit and comb
Their hair, watched by the Persians from their tents—
Rationing starts—the diplomats go home—

But all discretely, ordinarily—
Toy Lusitanias sink in the bath—
So with no end in pomp and amnesty,
No noisy choking on the wine of wrath.

And next door, in my living room tonight,
My "Who could tell?" is an unending scene
Of teenage mourners burning flags: I might
As well transmit that to a simmering screen.

The child is laughing still, at three years old,
In the yard with its invisible tanks on track.
She's with her aunt and hasn't yet been told.
Her diplomats are never going back.

***—Sarah Ruden***

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ACA will place some limits on this, but it will not reverse the overall trend.

At the same time, some of the things that had held back health-care spending over the past few years may not be as powerful going forward. Recent controversies over the high cost of new drugs for cancer and Hepatitis C suggest that pharmaceutical costs may be poised for a new upward climb after several years of relative quiescence. The phase-out of programs that compensated insurers if their Obamacare enrollees used more health care than expected is also likely to put upward pressure on premiums in the years ahead. The recent announcement by insurance giant UnitedHealth that it may exit the state exchange business due to large losses raised fears that other insurance companies might follow. Other large insurers seem inclined to stay the course for now, but the Obama Administration is likely to be nervously eyeing the industry's balance sheets over the next few months.

It's clear that the passage of the ACA was a bit of "shock therapy" for an industry that had grown rather bloated and complacent. Insurers, hospitals, and providers have moved rapidly to cut costs as they prepare for a future where they will be competing more explicitly on price. It is still an open question how much of the cost savings is coming from sustainable changes in how health care is delivered and how much is due to picking "low-hanging fruit"—renegotiating supply contracts or restricting business travel, for example—that yields only short-term savings.

Federal officials are hoping it is the former. The law authorized a number of demonstration programs aimed at moving the industry away from traditional fee-for-service medicine toward a payment system that would reward providers for keeping people healthy. At the core of this is the concept of the accountable care organization. ACOs are groups of doctors, hospitals, and health care providers who come together to coordinate care for Medicare beneficiaries. If they can provide care for less cost than traditional Medicare, they get to keep some of the savings.

About 6 million Medicare beneficiaries are cared for through ACOs and the program has produced some modest savings. Most of this, however, is coming from health-care systems that had significant experience in providing integrated care before the passage of the ACA. Organizations that are relatively new to this way of working are still struggling to make the transition.

Despite its track record of success, the ACA remains politically vulnerable. Ongoing polling by the Kaiser Family Foundation suggests that the public remains divided on the law, with less than half of Americans having a favorable view of it. At the same time, the share with an unfavorable view has been falling. It peaked at 53 percent in July 2014 and fell to 40 percent by the summer of 2015.

The Republican Party remains united in opposition to Obamacare, and all of its presidential candidates are on record as supporting its repeal. What is less clear is what they will be able to do if they attain the Oval Office. Millions of newly insured Americans will create a powerful constituency to maintain the status quo, as will the governors of states that have benefited from the increased flow of federal Medicaid dollars. A Congress that has a difficult time with the simple task of electing a Speaker of the House would almost certainly struggle with the hundreds of policy tradeoffs that true "repeal" would demand.

Like any major piece of social policy, the Affordable Care Act is certainly not perfect and two years in may be too early for a conclusive judgment about its long-term success. Nevertheless, if you had told those frantic White House officials in the fall of 2013 that within two years almost 17 million people would obtain health insurance and that it would all cost less than originally expected, I suspect they would have considered the law a smashing success. So, perhaps, should we. ■

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*David Carroll Cochran*

# A World without War

## WHY IT'S NO FANTASY

Last July Pope Francis spoke about the hundredth anniversary of World War I to a crowd gathered for the Angelus in St. Peter's Square. He used the occasion to exhort his listeners to abolish war: "Never war! Never war! I think most of all about children, whose hopes for a dignified life, a future, are dashed, dead children, wounded children, mutilated children, orphans, children who have the leftovers of war for toys, children who don't know how to smile. Stop it, please! I beg you with all my heart! It's time to stop!"

But the pope has since suggested that military action to protect civilians from massacre at the hands of groups such as the Islamic State can be just. This tension—between calls to abolish war and cautious support for the use of armed force to protect the vulnerable from violence—is nothing new at the Vatican. In 1991, St. John Paul II wrote, "No, never again war" and called on humanity to "proceed resolutely toward outlawing war completely," but the same year he also said, "We are not pacifists, we do not want peace at any cost."

And Over Us the Sky, *Fritz Richter*

So what's going on here? Does contemporary Catholic teaching reject war or not? The answer is yes and no. The church still deems military action to be permissible in certain narrow circumstances, while simultaneously urging us to work for a world in which war is never necessary, and insisting that such a world is possible. In other words, church teaching is not pacifist, but it is abolitionist.

This formula finds its clearest expression in Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, which acknowledged that "governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted," but only until war is "rooted out of human affairs." The document demanded that human beings "free ourselves from the age-old slavery of war" by moving toward "the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent" through "the establishment of some universal public authority" that provides a better way to uphold international peace, security, and justice.

Here the development of Catholic teaching on war resembles the development of its teaching on capital punishment. The Catholic tradition once accepted the death penalty as a normal and just method of criminal justice but now advocates its abolition, not because it is never permissible in theory, but because we now have effective alternatives. Capital punishment is a cruel and violent practice, and now that it isn't necessary to ensure public safety, it no longer has a legitimate place in a civilized society. Catholic teaching has the same vision for warfare: it is a cruel and violent practice that the world can and should find ways to do without.

Many people, of course, consider calls to abolish war utopian and dangerous. Images from war zones around the globe make the idea sound ridiculous. It is hard not to see war as an unavoidable part of the human condition. As Albert Einstein put it, "So long as there are men, there will be wars." War also seems necessary, at least in some circumstances, to protect innocent people and uphold a peaceful and just order in the face of those who are willing to use war for destructive and unjust ends. For many, the call to give up war amounts to a form of reckless unilateral disarmament.

So is the conventional wisdom correct? Is the Catholic Church hopelessly unrealistic in its demand that humanity abolish war? I don't think so, for two reasons.

The first is historical precedent. In calling for an end to war in *Centesimus annus,* John Paul II drew a parallel to how "a system of private vendetta and reprisal has given way to the rule of law." It is a telling example. We take modern policing and courts for granted, but these are relatively recent institutions. For much of human history, people turned to private acts of vengeance and duels as a matter of course. These practices were considered unavoidable, a reflection of the natural human tendency to give and respond to offense. They were the only way to protect oneself and one's family from unjustified attack. An early governor of South Carolina, Lyde Wilson, argued that war and dueling were based on the same thing: "the first law of nature, self-preservation." Not surprisingly, those who urged the abolition of private vengeance and dueling were dismissed as foolishly utopian, and even as dangerous for seeking to dismantle institutions necessary to punish wrongdoing and vindicate the innocent. Yet today it is hard

for most of us to imagine that these violent practices were once part of everyday life.

Or, again, consider capital punishment. Through most of recorded history, societies around the world executed people for things we now consider either relatively minor crimes or no crime at all—poaching, picking pockets, stealing horses, adultery, heresy. The death penalty was routine, pervasive, and accepted as just the way the world worked. And it was justified in terms remarkably similar to those used to justify war: it was perhaps an unpleasant form of violence, but it was necessary to uphold a just and peaceful order and to protect the innocent. Movements to abolish the death penalty are a relatively recent phenomenon, and the abolitionists were initially accused of sentimentality, ignoring the reality of evil in the world, and threatening to turn society over to bloodthirsty criminals. Yet over the course of the past century, most countries have abolished capital punishment, and the handful that have kept it, including the United States, have dramatically curtailed its frequency.

Perhaps the most powerful historical precedent for abolishing war is chattel slavery. Like war, slavery first appeared about twelve thousand years ago. And like war, it quickly spread to every major society and region of the world. Over its long history, it was simply accepted as an inevitable part of the human condition. Indeed, it is striking how just-war theorists from Augustine to Aquinas to Francisco Suárez used the same language to justify slavery that they used to justify war, defending it as a necessary part of a fallen world marked by sin. As slavery took on an explicitly racial character later in its history, its defenders considered it essential to the natural racial order that protected superior peoples from the savagery of inferior ones. In words that many today might apply to war, one eighteenth-century English commentator, Edward Bancroft, wrote of slavery, "Many things which are repugnant to humanity may be excused on account of their necessity for self-preservation." It was only within the last century of its long history that a sustained movement to abolish slavery arose. These early abolitionists were condemned as recklessly naïve for challenging something so deeply rooted in human history and fundamental to social order, yet their movement rapidly produced one of the world's great moral triumphs.

As these examples show, it is possible to abolish long-standing and widespread violent practices once accepted as natural and necessary parts of the human condition. Each gradually disappeared as social attitudes shifted, political actors moved to suppress them, and new institutions arose as alternatives. And such shifts are realistic because they do not require a world of pure peace, love, and understanding. Abolishing vendettas and duels did not eliminate grudges and interpersonal violence. Nations that have gotten rid of capital punishment may still have plenty of other injustices

in their criminal-justice systems. And ending chattel slavery certainly did not eliminate other forms of exploitation or racism. One of the strengths of Catholic social teaching is its recognition that progress does not require perfection. The reality of sin in the world and the strife it brings does not prevent constructing, in the words of *Gaudium et spes*, "a world more genuinely human." Realism about human flaws is no barrier to gradual and partial but nonetheless genuine social reform. It does not negate what John Paul II called Catholicism's "optimistic view of history."

Might war follow the same path to extinction? What we know about war suggests it could, and this is the other reason not to dismiss the church's call for its abolition. In urging humanity to rid itself of war, contemporary Catholic teaching emphasizes a powerful set of tools for global peacemaking. First, removing the roots of war means working to alleviate poverty and inequality, protect human rights, and promote democracy and the rule of law. Second, while conflicts among and within countries will persist, it is possible to resolve these through nonviolent negotiation and mediation. Third, areas experiencing chronic conflict require robust international peacekeeping commitments to break local cycles of warfare. Fourth, rather than military force, the community of nations can rely on a mix of diplomacy, sanctions, and incentives to pressure its members to uphold international norms. Fifth, for people facing oppression, methods of nonviolent direct action continue to spread around the world as effective alternatives to armed struggle.

These tools all rely on more effective international cooperation and coordination. This is why popes since Vatican II have stressed the importance of greater global governance, what Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate* called a "true world political authority" able to "ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for rights." Rather than concentrated in some remote seat of power, such authority would be spread across an interlocking web of global institutions—international laws, treaties and their enforcement regimes, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, civil-society groups—that Catholic teaching consistently commends.

Some critics dismiss the church's peacemaking commitments as more unrealistic sentimentality. George Weigel, for example, has described faith in greater international governance and multilateral cooperation as "inexplicably stupid" and lamented that this "fantasy" continues to appear in papal encyclicals. But it is remarkable how much social-scientific research on armed conflict supports the effectiveness of the very tools Catholic teaching emphasizes. Those who study trends in warfare find that greater economic development, more participation in international trade, and deeper involvement in regional intergovernmental bodies all significantly reduce a country's risk of war. So too does democracy, the rule of law, and effective governance. The research also shows that there is much that the international community can do to promote these economic and political trends in countries most at risk of war. The use of mediation and peace agreements to resolve disputes between and within countries has been increasingly effective. Meanwhile, international peacekeeping missions and peace-and-reconciliation initiatives have significantly reduced the risk of conflict breaking out again in places where it has recently ended. Those who study armed conflict have also shown the effectiveness of diplomacy and sanctions in influencing state behavior without resort to war. Finally, studies show that in the past century nonviolent civil resistance has been twice as effective as armed struggle against both domestic dictators and foreign oppressors—and this effectiveness gap has grown even greater in the past few decades. The church's ideas about peacemaking turn out to be pretty realistic after all.

The best news from research on armed conflict is how infrequent it has become. War still exists, of course, as news accounts from Syria and Ukraine remind us every day, but there has been a gradual long-term decline in war across the past several centuries, one that has dramatically accelerated in the past sixty years. Whether measured by the number of active wars or the number of battle deaths per capita, we may be living in the most peaceful period in human history. Wars between states, especially those between great powers, have virtually disappeared. In many parts of the world, countries still have disputes but don't even consider using war to resolve them. The Greek debt crisis, for example, sparked serious conflict within the European Union, but nobody thought Germany was going to invade Greece, even though collecting national debts was once a common reason for war. The thought of the United States going to war in order to resolve various differences with Canada or Mexico over trade or pollution or drug trafficking is now as improbable as the thought of two doctors in Peoria fighting a duel over a medical-ethics complaint.

Today's wars are almost all civil wars fought within impoverished, frail, or failed states. There is no reason to think that the tools of peacemaking emphasized by Catholic social teaching cannot be effectively used to bring such states into existing zones of peace, where war is simply no longer considered a valid option.

There is obviously no guarantee that the decline of war will continue or that humanity can push this decline so far as to abolish war completely. Even if we did manage to eliminate warfare, there will still be plenty of political violence, injustice, and general human misery around the world. But it is clear that Catholicism's call to abolish war, like its call to abolish the death penalty, is far from foolish. ■

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# Matchless

## *An Observant Jew Searches for Love*

Viva Hammer

I came to America in the hope of a husband, leaving my birthplace and my parents' loving home ten thousand miles behind.

Not a man in Australia ever asked me on a date. I was the only observant Jew at the University of Sydney, with girlfriends of all stripes, but having a male friend would have caused a scandal and dating out of the faith was unthinkable. In Australia being a Jew was eccentric, but being an Orthodox feminist Jew was impossible. So two days after finishing law school, I escaped to New York City. In the carnival of New York I would (without doubt) find soulmates: interweaved, interlocking nests of comrades. In New York I would be *normal*.

I slept on the couches of friends, of friends of friends, and then of anyone who'd have me. While I studied for the Bar Exam I rented a room from a rebbetzin (rabbi's wife) on Manhattan's Lower East Side. All day she vacuumed while rattling on the phone about *shidduchim*—marriage matches. My arrival caused a tumult, as she now had in her fist an exotic specimen to launch. Before the first date she yelled because I didn't wear stockings and when I ran out in a rain shower to buy a pair she yelled that I didn't have a blowdryer. Nevertheless she introduced me to a man she thought suitable because he didn't wear a hat and I was barelegged. We both liked hiking and we stayed together two months.

After I moved out of the rebbetzin's orbit, I lived single for three glorious years. Without a network of family or school friends, I still managed to make a list of about fifty men I'd been set up with. (Lists were so you wouldn't—perish the thought—date the same person twice). This was the 1990s; the internet was a decade away. We communicated by phone and left voicemails or sent faxes.

I was a terribly nervous dater. I had no brothers and had never had an intimate conversation with a man. My aim was to find favor in someone's eyes, like a piece of inventory in a shop window, hoping someone would pick me out. Most of the fifty men I met only once; a few lasted two months each, which was considered long-term. Whether I rejected a suitor or he rejected me, I was despondent. All I wanted was to get the process over with and go back to being part of a loving family. So when a charming rabbi from a distinguished family asked me to marry him, I accepted.

The rabbi and I dated for fourteen weeks and were engaged for nine. Before our first night alone, we had not touched.

Upon emerging from under the marriage canopy, I became a rebbetzin. All my dreams for New York were fulfilled: ring, headscarf, parsonage.

Jewish law obliges a man to marry. "And whoever lives without a wife lives without well-being, without blessing, without a home, without Torah, without a protective wall, without peace...whoever has no wife is not a man…" (Yakov ben Asher, *Arba'ah Turim*, Even Ha-Ezer, Ch 1). A woman has no such obligation, but the rabbis were not concerned. "A woman wants to marry more than a man wants to marry," (Yakov ben Asher, Yevamot 113a), so much so, that "a woman prefers to be impoverished and married than wealthy and unmarried" (Talmud Sotah 20a).

In traditional Jewish circles marriage is almost universal. Single life is a shame, a sorrow. The matchmaker is no mere vacuuming busybody; she is an agent of national survival.

Twenty-one years after I stood under the wedding canopy, I was divorced. For almost half a decade, I lived in limbo: separated but not divorced. Now I was free.

Divorce has always been permitted in Jewish law, but even today it is rare. The 2014 Pew Religious Landscape study finds that only 9 percent of adult Jews surveyed are divorced and currently unmarried while 14 percent of Christians are. Symmetrically, 52 percent of Christians are married whereas 56 percent of Jews are. Naomi Schaefer Riley's *'Til Faith Do Us Part: How Interfaith Marriage Is Transforming America* finds that Jews married to Jews have half the divorce rate of any other religious group surveyed, although Jews married to non-Jews divorce at the average rate.

For observant Jews, the couple is the unit of participa-

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tion in a community; a single person is an extra digit, a misfit. Observant Jews do not divorce because married life is uncomfortable or even unpleasant; they divorce only when they are desperate.

At the beginning of my second singlehood, I was jubilant with freedom. In America, as much as among religious Jews, marriage is celebrated and coveted, and I was afraid I would be shunned as a divorcée. Far from it! Friends were so supportive; neighbors I had never noticed congratulated me. A colleague I hadn't seen in a decade told me I looked years younger.

And I was determined to try again. The loving people who had carried me through the marriage and its dismantling were distressed, and asked *why*? Why couldn't I just enjoy life alone and free?

How can I justify starting this risky journey again? Simply, I don't want to be alone. I want someone to look after me and someone to look after, to live in mutual striving and support, to be co-mentors and peer coaches for one other. Someone to whisper to at 4 a.m. when the night won't pass.

*Edvard Munch,* Two Human Beings *(also known as* The Lonely Ones*), circa 1899*

I'm a single woman in my forties with grown children, stimulating work, and a network of friends, living in a home I built. This time around I will choose my partner, not capitulate in a panic for the process to be over, but with the hope that I will find someone fitting. Astonishingly, confusingly, I am much more popular now than when I was young.

This time, my network is trolling their networks for me. As soon as I was free, I was inundated with names. I never say no. And I am never nervous. The exercise is simple because in a partner I require only two things: that a man be righteous and that he be intelligent.

I am an immigrant, and an optimist. Every horizon is an enticement to my curiosity. If I need to put food on the table, I go through a process called earning a living. Similarly (I reasoned), to find a partner I would go through the dating process and out of it would come a soulmate. "Nothing stands before the human will," our tradition teaches.

So I went down the list of men, who are mostly nonreligious. A wider net would yield better results, I decided, and if we came to love each other, all differences would be smoothed out.

The men arrived, gray-skinned from indoor work, with eyes dulled from sleeplessness and a diet of coffee. It only takes my asking a couple of questions. And then! What they pour out to me of sibling suicides and breech births, money troubles and death out at sea. Brothers disappeared and recovered as French chefs, families jagged by crisis.

Ending with, "I've said too much," after which I smile encouragingly and say, "You can never tell me too much," and I wait for them to ask something about me, which they rarely do, and when they do, they do not listen to the answer. They do not want a conversation but to unburden themselves to a smiling face.

Half the men I meet have no loving person within five thousand miles. Their temperaments vary, but the dates do not. They speak their stories and I listen, breathless. They don't want to know anything about me, and then they want to go out again and again. They become *infatuated*. For a girl who didn't have a single date through her whole young life, this is unfathomable. Men tell me women are hard and mean and looking for glamor. They want my empathy (which I willingly give). And then they want other things too.

I was celibate till I married and have been celibate since I separated more than a half decade ago. Secular friends ask if it's because I have a low sex drive, and I raise my eyebrows. Do I have no appetite or thirst today, as I write this, on a long religious fast over a hot holiday weekend in which the rest of the country is reveling? Do I never wish to jump in a car or make a phone call or turn on the dishwasher on the Sabbath? Do I not itch to share a word of gossip with a friend? All these tempt me, and I resist them. That is the nature of religion: choosing to live your life by the law, whatever everyone else does, and contrary to what your heart desires.

Premarital sex is not considered adultery in Jewish law. Adultery is a capital crime defined as sex between a married woman and a man who's not her husband. Sex outside of marriage is not a capital crime, but proscribed nevertheless, and I keep those rules, just as I keep the kosher and Sabbath

rules, even when it's excruciatingly hard to do so. I am not a masochist; I love my religion as I love life. The moments of struggle are overwhelmed by the pleasurable ones.

In dating nonreligious men today, I discover we're meeting with different purposes. Even if some claim they wouldn't mind a partner, the time till they find one is indeterminate and by the time they meet me, they have failed to reach that goal.

Involuntary singlehood in the middle of life is the symptom of something else. It is the result of one set of maladies and the cause of another set. Between the ages of thirty-five and sixty-five, the majority are partnered. Those who are not, are not waiting to have their needs met. Why would they?

"Ninety-five percent of men are prepared to sleep with a woman on the first date, but only 5 percent of women are willing," a friend of mine who's been at this for a long time informs me (providing no source). "But by the fourth date, 65 percent of women are ready." I am aghast. What's the difference between the first and the fourth date in terms of knowing someone, feeling safe with him, or even comfortable? Forget religion, forget physical health, forget even emotional health: how can a woman feel safe getting naked in front of a man after a fourth date?

No doubt some women have the psychological power to go into combat with men, but I am not one of them. By any measure I am of the weaker sex. Although physically active I am petite and have no martial arts. Even without religious observance, it would behoove me to check out the men I want to be intimate with before making myself vulnerable to them.

Women friends frown when I explain my philosophy. Isn't sex the purpose of dating? I respond: If you want to turn a date to into a partner, how is sleeping with the date before you know him going to get you to partnership? Isn't sex a signal of intimacy? The outcome of trust, and caring? Is the sex-first approach an effective path to permanence?

Women then confess that sex has a paradoxical effect on unattached couples: it makes women desiring of more intimacy, and men less. A woman's body no longer has any value in encouraging a man into a lasting relationship. Which is fortunate, because I'm not offering it.

Today people date for sex, with partnership a distant possibility. I date for that distant possibility, of which sex is a part.

After eight months of intensive dating, I took a break while my parents visited from Australia. Reminded of what a family looks like, and what its purpose is, I began again with a different method: the religious matchmakers. Even if a religious man isn't celibate, he's not expecting sex on the fourth date.

There are few religious Jews in America, or anywhere in the world. We have always relied on middlewomen and men to help us join demand and supply, and this generation is no different. In the dating world, a matchmaker can encourage an unlikely couple, or smooth the jitters. The best ones have connections to outposts in regions holding that singular jewel we're seeking.

Jewish law mandates that a matchmaker get some reward for a match that turns to marriage, but no one does it for that, and some absolutely refuse reward. The work required and the failure rates are so high that a matchmaker must be driven by obsession. Last week I was honored to be taken on by the most famous matchmaker in the world, a woman featured in the secular press, who has made hundreds of matches and spends all her time on it. I drove half a day to visit her and together we scrolled through her inventory.

So far, the most interesting dates have been with the matchmaker. On our first messaging exchange she jokingly offered to marry me herself, assuring me her husband would be thrilled. She's not a sheltered lady; she's selling fur coats in the Sahara.

This matchmaker is more than I bargained for. She is available on demand, to give coaching and encouragement. She tells me how to move things along and how to slow things down. But she does not do background checks. For that I have to tap into my worldwide network. There are no six degrees of separation for Jews, and it doesn't matter where they live; I'm surprised if there are one-and-a-half degrees of separation.

The matchmaker sets me up with men in those far flung places. An observant Jew serious about getting married has to be willing to communicate using every medium, and to get onto planes for the short or the long haul. A first date on the phone is so inferior to one in person that it might take me ten minutes to get a feel on a person as opposed to ten seconds. But the principle is the same: Does he ask a good question? Or does he talk without ceasing about himself?

That is, can he *communicate*?

So far, the most interesting dates have been with the matchmaker. On our first messaging exchange she jokingly offered to marry me herself, assuring me her husband would be thrilled. She's not a sheltered lady; she's selling fur coats in the Sahara.

I've been divorced a year now, and haven't come across anyone worth meeting more than a few times. Some have been predators awaiting their next chance; some have been dull. A couple were intelligent. Not one was righteous, nor interested in hearing anything but his own voice. Nevertheless, I feel privileged to have listened to a few dozen who gave me a deep immersion into manhood.

I feel now the necessity and inevitability of being alone, and the image that comes to mind is a bud unfolding leaf by leaf. Becoming me without aids, without anyone to lean on, to support me and encourage me, to take care of me as I take care of him.

That is, I will unfold by myself.

Somehow I feel the relentless love-looking my dates and I are engaged in is a metaphor for something larger. Perhaps it is an attempt to alleviate the essential aloneness of all humans. We are looking for the completion of ourselves, or the perfection of the self, and the person on the other side of the table is someone who hasn't shaven or showered that morning, who can't make eye contact or pronounce our names.

Singlehood describes a social status, but it is also a facet of the mind. The internal sense of singlehood cannot be fixed by dating, even if it culminates in a ceremony under a wedding canopy. Many married people feel aloneness even though society views them as attached. Singlehood is the human condition, and the ceaseless search to end it is the search for that which will shelter us from the unknown. No living being, however beloved, can achieve that for another person.

This past Sabbath as torrential rain fell I felt enveloped by a canopy of love, from my children and my parents, my workmates, a new neighbor who sends homemade challa—braided bread—over on Sabbath eve, friends at every corner of the earth.

I might well settle down in that space and bless the Lord who sent me here and not go chasing after love I cannot have. ■

# 'Lovely in Eyes Not His'

## *Discovering God's Presence behind Bars*

Edward T. Wheeler

Razor wire has a brightness made equally cruel by sunlight and by floodlights. Prison buildings are fortress-like, the concrete blocks, the narrow windows. The perimeters carry warnings alerting passing motorists not to stop. How can prisons and prisoners not be, to use that overused term, "other"?

The poet and essayist Christian Wiman, in one of the meditations on faith in *My Bright Abyss*, reminded me of a Hopkins verse that has figured largely in my understanding of life: "For Christ plays in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his, / To the father through the features of men's faces." Wiman uses the quotation to assert that our faith means "believing in a God who is not apart from matter (or not merely that) but part of it, a God who does not simply enjoin us to participate fully in life, and specifically in the relationships within our lives, but a God who inheres wholly within those relationships."

The men's faces I have in mind are those of prison inmates. Presumptuous as it sometimes seems to me to apply Hopkins's vision (and Wiman's explication) to my experience, it strikes me that this vision is the core of Christian belief. My experience with prison ministry has caused the injunction, "Love thy neighbor," to sound to that core in ways that humble and at times confuse me. Perforce I face that change in heart so often mentioned in the gospels.

I was retired, convalescing from a five-month hospital stay, and needed a focus for my free time. A good friend involved in prison ministry suggested that I join him for a visit. I attended a worship service and a session of an introduction-to-Christianity course, and I found myself committed. Soon I—a former high-school English teacher and long-ago Jesuit seminarian—was involved in a biweekly writing seminar for GED students, then a book discussion club, and finally a life-skills course sponsored by the state university's extension division.

In this capacity I continue to meet regularly with perhaps forty of the seven hundred men interned at a mid-level security facility. This is a self-selecting group, and those enrolled often see their faith and their lives in the clearest terms of salvation and the Christian call to a renewal. To them the biblical struggle with Satan is an everyday affair, expressed in just those terms. For many, the King James Version's stately cadences convey the solemnity of their state: they fell and lost the earlier battle; they accept their rebirth and are well aware that they experience the wiles and snares of the Enemy. They look for release, for the "hedge of protection" in their lives. They are confronted daily with their sins in ways that make the supplication of the psalms and admonitions of St. Paul live in the moment.

There is a remarkable sense of fellowship, Christian fellowship, that is part of this ministry. The prison separates the men into dormitories, so when they congregate for worship or study they are seeing one another after considerable breaks in time. Barriers of age and experience are not evident. The inmates are almost all men of color, and as a white man whose life has intersected infrequently with African-American and Hispanic adults, I find my acceptance by them remarkable. Then again, for them it is welcome human contact in a world that daily denies it.

I understand that I need to be careful about inmates' manipulation of me. They have little overt power, but good behavior opens up privileges: attending the book group, for instance, might offer them two hours to watch a video of a book we are reading. They know that they have to work with authority through the careful cultivation of attitude and request. Many are serving time for non-violent drug offenses, but others are felons in the proper sense of the word. I must remind myself: This is a prison.

That said, the men I meet with are remarkably responsive to learning. Perhaps because of the general "negativity," as they call it, of their prison lives, they seem hungry for knowledge—a hunger I have observed in writing classes, book groups, a life-skills course, and in scripture study. They have been willing, after a time, to reflect on their lives: on what prison forces them to face daily and on their fears and hopes after "re-entry." In their reflections they are frequently self-hating and fearful. Many readily see the pattern of their lives, the cause and effect of their history and their imprisonment. They also see the likelihood of returning to prison. (In my state, four out of ten do.) Some are resigned to the "contamination" of imprisonment: they

**Edward Wheeler,** *a frequent contributor, lives in Quaker Hill, Connecticut.*

know themselves to be tainted, and feel stigmatized. Others insist that the past is over, that they have "paid their debt," and that new beginnings await.

Prison forces a break in men's lives. The term they serve, their "bid," is time on hold. The men have television; they are spectators to the world they left. Those who have been "inside" for more than twenty years struggle to envision a world that has technologically shifted. One young offender, incarcerated on the day of his high-school graduation, mused out loud that he had never written a check, used a credit card, or breathed an independent breath as an adult. How was he going to cope after ten or more years in jail?

*An inmate prays during Pope Francis's visit to the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia.*

CNS PHOTO / DAVID MAIALETTI, POOL

But I should really try to give a sense of what happens in the work of prison ministry. Consider these occurrences.

I sat with X at a group discussion in an introduction-to-Christianity course. A small group of just five men, we had met for three sessions, consecutively, on the matter of the Holy Spirit. I admitted to X that I had never felt that "inrush" of the spirit as found in many scriptural passages. He turned to me and said, "Let me see if I can help you with that." He proceeded to describe a hypothetical situation in which one might succeed in restraining a hostile reaction to being threatened or taunted by another man. "That," he said, "is the movement of the Spirit."

Later, in a Sunday service of testimony, where the inmates offer stories of how God has acted in their lives, X explained that he had been in a notorious gang and had had to order the assassination of a rival gang member. He commissioned men to do this, but their target had been tipped off and got away—much to his relief, he said now, since he never wanted to take another's life. God had saved him from doing so. Somehow he left the gang but in the end wound up serving twelve years—another "blessing" that he attributed to the workings of the Spirit.

On another occasion, our book group read *The Catcher in the Rye*. All the participants had high-school diplomas, and some had taken college courses; all were committed readers. Many had heard of the book, knew it was considered a classic, and described feeling "amped up" to read it. We spent an easy hour, soliciting reactions to Holden Caulfield ("I liked him, the way he talked") and his problems. The discussion fed into the more general topic of not really knowing others—of who in the novel is unable to understand Holden and misinterprets his boorish, loud behavior. Then the men talked about prisoners who had committed grave crimes: Would they talk to such men, murderers, rapists? When, if ever, should they refuse? One man talked about what sort of friendship he would have to form before he revealed what he had done, or what he hoped for. Silence fell upon revelation: "I killed a man. Don't you all know that I did time for murder?" The nods followed.

I lead a writing group with men enrolled in a GED class. Some are undocumented Hispanics learning English in the course of getting their GED; they know they will be deported when they have finished serving their sentences. There are a few white men with varying histories, suburban, country, and city. And there are many who share the all-too-common background of the streets: hustling from their early teens; broken families or ones just getting by; easy drug money; gangs; sometimes armed robbery or assault. School for most ended in their mid-teens as they chose a path they viewed as necessary for survival. Their childhood left them with little sense of any other way of life.

The group does a free-writing exercise, and after five minutes I ask what they wrote about. "My life, how I got here." "Why I am sitting here when I told myself I would never do the things that I saw going on around me." "What my friends tell me when they write: the clubs they go to and the females." Most have to be prodded to talk, but after a while the responses come more easily. They share knowing smiles. Someone recounts his first night in juvenile detention. "Did you cry?" someone asks. Another answers: "Everyone cries."

Of the twenty-two men, only four or five are regular participants. Prison populations are transient, and the men can have conflicting assignments. Some just don't come back: a man is transferred or is in another program, or he's out, or he's "in seg"—in solitary confinement for breaking some prison rule. At such moments the shutter comes down for me, and the gulf between me and the men in my class returns. In any case, for this ever-shifting group I have returned the week's papers, written in the previous class, typed and corrected and with a comment on each. I try to

chat for a bit with each man. The offer to the new men is the same. "If you want me to read your writing, I will. I will type the papers up in correct form. You can improve your English by comparing my version with your original. I'll gladly talk with you about what you have written." I collect the pieces that the men are willing to submit. And then we read a short story.

I often ask them to read out loud, and usually many are eager. I hear their surprise when they realize the strange spellings in a Richard Wright story are phonetic attempts to reproduce a Southern drawl; they struggle to read the dialogue, laughing as they do. For some reason, D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner" wows them. Their perceptions are acute. They ferret out motivation and judge accordingly: "The mother sold that kid for money." The two hours pass quickly. "When you coming again, Mr. Wheeler?" I am asked when it is over. "I like this class." I cannot resist the pull of that affirmation. So I keep coming, and so do they.

Again and again in the three years of my involvement I have learned that the men respond if they receive respect, if they are treated as individuals, if their voices are heard and acknowledged. A life-skills session I led focused on friendship, and turned out to be a means of facing the peer or gang pressure that almost inevitably brought the men to prison. We watched the football film *Rudy*, with its tough love, honest talk, and pain. I asked the group what their own experience of friendships had been. "You know what friendship is?" one man said. "It's what got me shot at, it's what got me drunk and drugged, it's what got me fighting, and it's what got me here. I don't want no friendship!" Another spoke up to recall what his brother did: "As soon as I was sent here, he took my car, went to my apartment and took all my electronics. And he's supposed to be family. But that's my brother. Always snaking."

Once in a Bible-study group I introduced John Donne's Holy Sonnet, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God." Twenty-four mostly black and Hispanic men patiently parsed Donne's invocations. I wondered if they might hear, in the poet's plea for Divine correction and the violent change of heart necessary for true Christian life, any resonance in their own. The response was immediate and positive. How strange, they said, that this man four hundred years ago experienced the same need to be reformed, to be shaped, as in the hymn they regularly sing: "You are the potter, I am the clay." The men did not need to have the spirituality of Jacobean England explained to them. These are issues of faith, correction, damnation, and salvation that they live daily. A plea for reform is an ongoing need, the correction of prayer a necessary aid.

Once in a prison Bible-study group I introduced John Donne's Holy Sonnet, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God." The response was immediate and positive. How strange, they said, that this man four hundred years ago experienced the same need to be reformed, to be shaped, as in the hymn they regularly sing: "You are the potter, I am the clay." The men did not need to have the spirituality of Jacobean England explained to them.

I'm familiar with the damning critique of "mass incarceration" so powerfully propounded in *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander. And anyone who volunteers has to ask: What is prison for? Punishment or correction? There are over seven hundred men "on hold" in the prison where I volunteer. Their family life is disrupted, their future at risk. What are the social mechanisms for change? In January of last year, a report on mass incarceration, written by the Economic Policy Institute for Civil Rights, concluded that "crime and punishment are multidimensional problems that stem from racial prejudice justified by age-old perceptions and beliefs about African Americans."

Prison ministry exists within a larger context of systemic problems in our society. The recent demonstrations throughout the country over the treatment of people of color by police have, one can hope, raised the fraught nature of the criminal-justice system and put it forward for greater public review and reform. But at the individual level, the need is great now. The stigma of imprisonment is real. The inmates have dignity as human beings, as Christ "through the features of men's faces." This is a fundamental Christian vision.

My work in a medium-security prison has made me re-see the men with whom I meet, as Hopkins wrote, "in eyes not his." I find myself reaching for a Christological context to explain what I have deeply felt in coming to know these men, whose lives differ so markedly from my own. The rewards of prison volunteer work are not limited to one source, but in remarkable ways, brotherhood in Christ is unmistakably present. My volunteer effort has maintained a spiritual focus that has reshaped my life. The extraordinary exists by way of contrast; wonder is a break in the flat plain of expectation. For the men meanwhile there remains the continuing prospect, shorter or longer, of life on hold; and finally the future, that obscurely envisioned open door and, one hopes, a new beginning. ■

*Richard Alleva*

# Room without a View

**'ROOM'**

Psycho-stalker horror and the quiet drama of family relationships might seem to be incompatible genres, but Emma Donoghue married them successfully in her novel *Room*, the story of a young woman, Joy, abducted by a maniac and imprisoned in his electronically sealed garden shed for seven years. Recurrently raped, she bears two children; the first one dies, the second becomes her only comfort. In the book's second half (since *Room* isn't a conventional thriller, I'll hazard a spoiler), Joy is restored to her family and faces the subtler torment of post-traumatic depression while the five-year-old Jack discovers a world he never knew existed.

What sets the novel's first half apart from the usual woman-in-peril commercial thriller is its first-person narration by the child, a dazzling feat of literary ventriloquism. To preserve Jack from the misery and boredom she feels so intensely, Joy has told him that the shed is no prison but the entire world, that the images on the TV their captor allows them are sheer fantasy, and that their captor, dubbed "Old Nick," may not be a friend, yet magically purveys food and other goods from the incomprehensible nowhere outside. So, seen through Jack's eyes, the shed is a kind of Wonderland in which each object—Plant, Table, Chair, Sink, Bed—is a virtual personage. Jack calls the shed, simply, "Room." The scenario brings to mind two very different literary masterpieces: Margaret Wise Brown's bedtime classic *Goodnight, Moon*, and Plato's *Republic*, with its cave dwellers ignorant of the outside world. Jack enjoys this microcosm, and Donoghue pulls off the Jamesian trick (as in *What Maisie Knew*) of having us perceive the mother's torment through Jack's eyes even though the mainly happy child can't understand why "Ma" is miserable.

The book's second half is just as absorbing as the first but necessarily less of a virtuosic stunt, since we are back in the outside world. Everyday objects have been restored to their ordinariness; "Ma," who was an earth mother in the shed (still breastfeeding her son in his fifth year), is once again a vulnerable young woman trying to adjust to new realities—her own mother's divorce and new love life, the predatory disruptions of the interview-seeking media, her gnawing doubt about whether deceiving her son was the right strategy. The central drama here is taking place in Joy's mind, and Donoghue is again successful in conveying it through a five-year-old's perceptions. But Jack is no longer the inhabitant of the land called Room; he is now an increasingly ordinary kid trying to circumnavigate an ordinary existence. A strange illusion has been replaced with familiar reality, to our moral relief but somewhat to our aesthetic disappointment.

The film adaptation, directed by Lenny Abrahamson from Donoghue's screenplay, is a work of skill and tact but also displays an interesting shift that says as much about the differences between literature and cinema as it does about the talents involved. The film's first half, though gripping, doesn't convey the archetypal feel of the Room of Jack's imagination. Not familiar with Abrahamson's earlier work (*Room* is his fifth feature), I would

A24 FILMS

*Jacob Tremblay and Brie Larson in* Room

guess that his strong suit is a mildly impressionistic realism, rather than the fantastic, but consider the problem facing him. It is Joy's *words*, working upon Jack's imagination, that have endowed the shed's objects with life, but how could we see them the way he does? The director might have resorted to some visual wizardry, but what kind? Animation? Wouldn't that be too much like the talking teapots in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*? Fiddling with lenses, lights, and shadows? Surely too baroque, too Orson Wellesian. Abrahamson opts for conventional lighting and color and, together with the boy's off-screen narration, this works well enough, but it lacks the book's sinister magic.

And surely the director has made a mistake by showing us too much of the abductor in too plain a light. To Jack, this "Old Nick" is only (as he says) "half real." The poignant moment when Jack crawls out of the cupboard (where Joy puts him whenever she's about to be raped) and stares at the face of the sleeping criminal—a face that seems too ordinary to belong to such a monster—would have been more effective if we, too, were seeing "Old Nick" clearly for the first time, discovering him as Jack discovers him.

But though the director hasn't achieved the visual equivalent of Donoghue's writing, the captivity scenes still work as horrific realism because Danny Cohen's hand-held camerawork conveys the claustrophobia of the prison. Even more impressive is the way Brie Larson, playing Joy, encompasses the many sides of her character: the desperately loving mother whose son has become her buoy; the still defiant sex slave cunningly organizing escape routes; Jack's educator and life coach; the former teen whose youth was buried within her by the crime; and, saddest of all, the vital young woman too often overtaken by a lassitude that is nudging her close to madness. The rapport between Larson and the talented, well-directed child actor Jacob Tremblay convinces us that they are really mother and son.

But this movie really takes off in its second half. Abrahamson's slightly stylized realism works adroitly to convey the physical strangeness of being released into the wide world after long captivity. In fact, the unique mixture of bewilderment, terror, and exhilaration Jack feels during his first encounter with life outside "Room" may well be a compound of emotions never before put on the big screen. As far as I know, this kind of captivity-and-escape has never been filmed before in such a subjective way—and with such a young protagonist. It's as if one could see the world through the eyes of a newborn but with the mind of an intelligent five-year old. (The similar true story of Kaspar Hauser has been filmed by, among others, Werner Herzog, but none of these movies tried to portray Kaspar's plight through his own eyes.)

Escaping in the back of the kidnapper's pickup truck, the child lies flat on his back and looks up at the sky—no longer a patch of blue seen through the tiny skylight of "Room" but a manifold, swiftly coursing ocean above the clouds. Then Abrahamson adds a marvelous touch: still looking up, Jack sees telephone wires. The nature he is seeing for the first time is crisscrossed by urban civilization. Fleeing from the truck, he crashes into a dog walker's leg. The leg seems as thick as a tree stump; the dog looks as big as a hippo. Jack is like a little Adam opening his eyes in an uncontrollable, whirligig Paradise.

The subsequent scenes of family reunion are nicely done in the novel, though the adult dialogue is a little too well remembered and transcribed by the five-year-old Jack. The movie jettisons the strict subjectivity of the book and lets a superb cast explore the tensions of a shattered family unable to put itself back together as it was before, but gradually assuming a new shape as it heals. Joan Allen, as Joy's mother, is such a strong actress that she doesn't need close-ups to rivet our attention. Bill Macy's wizened fussiness is well employed as the father who can't rise to the demands of a difficult situation. As the second man in Allen's life, Tom McCamus is all rumpled sympathy.

A wonderful novel has been made into a worthy movie. ■

*Paul Horwitz*

# Class Dismissed

## A War for the Soul of America

**A History of the Culture Wars**

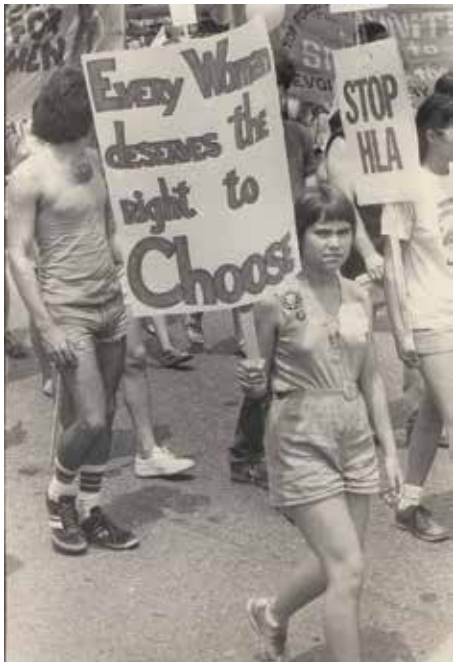
*Andrew Hartman*

University of Chicago Press, $17, 384 pp.

In some ways it is a mixed blessing for a book to be timely—and not just in the sense that the phrase "may you live in interesting times" is not exactly a benediction. Timely books are the envy of every author because they are actually read and discussed—or discussed, anyway. But they are also more easily refuted and harder to judge on their own merits. They are too often praised, vilified, or misread for transient reasons.

So it is simultaneously a compliment, a criticism, and a caution to observe that, in *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*, Andrew Hartman has written a very timely book indeed. To a number of recent observers, the current cultural and political climate bears a close resemblance to the 1990s, another period in which left-right cultural clashes and "identity politics" both figured prominently. In recent months, campuses across the country have exploded with such conflicts, with Yale and the University of Missouri prominent among them. Then as now, questions about race, gender, and sexual orientation were at the forefront. Of course the issues have changed to some extent; there are bound to be differences between on- and off-campus controversies separated by twenty years. And the rise of social media has rendered public debate over these and other issues more democratic, more passionate, and more transient. Still, the tenor of both periods is remarkably similar. In this sense, any book, like Hartman's, that carefully revisits the culture-war heyday of the 1980s and '90s just as we enter another such moment is timely and worthwhile.

It's precisely because the period we are living in now seems to involve a continuation, or even a dramatic resurgence, of the earlier culture wars that Hartman's eloquent closing declaration seems so startling and untimely: "This book gives the culture wars a history—because they *are* history," he writes. "The logic of the culture wars has been exhausted. The metaphor has run its course." It's understandable that reviewers have fastened onto this assertion like lampreys. There is good reason to be skeptical of such a claim. If Hartman is right in agreeing with the old saw that "the history of America, for better or worse, is largely a history of debates about the idea of America," then it is hardly likely that the history of wars over what Pat Buchanan called "the soul of America" is at an end, or even that a temporary cessation of conflict can be so nicely punctuated by the historian's placement of periods. In any case, Hartman's book has hit the shelves at exactly the moment when any claim that the culture wars are "over" seems outlandish.




*An abortion-rights rally in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, 1982*

DOROTHY MARDER / SWATHMORE.EDU

This does not do Hartman justice, however. His real argument is not that the culture wars are over, but that, while "cultural conflict persists," it has come to partake of a highly ironic flavor. Across a range of issues characteristic of the long cultural conflict between the 1960s and the end of the twentieth century, all Americans, "even conservatives," were forced to "acknowledge transformations to American life." The flashpoints of controversy over race, gender, sexual orientation, and similar matters were hard steps on the way to a more just and egalitarian culture.

But a deeper justice has eluded us. Feminism, for example, has "transformed American attitudes about women." But it has left unresolved a deeper paradox: that class, as much as gender, continues to play an outsized role in denying all men and women the wherewithal to exercise their rights, fulfill their needs, and express their selves. Similarly, the civil-rights movement "to a certain extent had been successful in changing American racial attitudes," but "was ill equipped to ameliorate the economic inequality that attached itself to the color line." The "next American movement for liberation" will have to reckon far more with class and capitalism, not "just" culture, identity, and ethnicity. It must concern itself with creating a society in which equal welfare is as important as equal respect.

Surely there is much to agree with in that, and any reader who subscribes to the notion of justice as a seamless

garment will be broadly sympathetic to Hartman's conclusion. Nonetheless, that conclusion colors the whole of the book that precedes it—and not in a way that is wholly supportive of his argument.

For Hartman's tale, up to the ending, has been about the conflict and not the ambiguities, the punches and counterpunches and not the sober second thoughts or regrets. His categorization of the players has been slashing and Manichaean, subsuming vast and varied movements—some explicitly political and some decidedly phenomenal and Dionysian—under the rubric of the "New Left" on the one hand, and under the the label of "neoconservatism" on the other. And his depiction of the clash between these "two" sides is equally broad-brush, focusing entirely on power—the power to advance or resist various kinds of liberation.

To the extent that this picture is accurate, it is incomplete. Missing from the picture is any sense of the desire that was often in the air for a way out of that clenched-grip conflict, or of ideas, neither wholly liberal nor wholly conservative, that emerged in strange places and made strange bedfellows. Hartman worries at the end of the book—late, too late—that "permanent cultural revolution makes a common culture a very difficult proposition. And without a common culture, it is extremely hard to build the solidarity necessary for social democracy."

Quite right. But it was ever thus, and all through the history that Hartman recounts, there were thinkers who recognized this and lamented that this concern, or the institutions that could address it, might be forgotten or neglected amid the flash and fire of the larger culture wars. Witness, for example, the communitarians and institutional pluralists of both left and right, lovers of society's "little platoons," who appear in a similar book, Daniel Rodgers's excellent *Age of Fracture*. They make little or no appearance here, in a book that is ultimately not so much about ideas as about armies clashing over bits of ground.

It cannot be a surprise that either liberatory or reactionary movements of this sort sometimes ended up preoccupied more with who would get to be department chair than with deeper questions of social and economic justice. Yet, early on Hartman does not have much patience for those who argued that the left had forsaken its working-class constituency in what he calls "normative America" for a new brand of emancipatory cultural politics. A more patient engagement with this argument would have allowed him to limn the limits of the "New Left" from the start. It might also have given him a little more sympathy, if not for the leading think-tank neoconservatives, then at least for all those bewildered people drifting within "normative America" itself. As it is, although this is not an especially partial or unfair account, there is no doubt where the author's sympathies lie. Sometimes he conveys these very subtly, but even then they distort the overall picture. The left is described in essentially objective terms, allowed to speak for itself, sometimes criticized, but almost always forgiven. The right, by contrast, is psychoanalyzed and subjected to frequent spot-checks for concealed motives.

Hartman is pleased with the victories won by the "New Left," but now urges us to place our focus on economic and not just cultural issues. But the culture wars he describes in this book have long conditioned us to see the personal as political and to identify justice narrowly with personal liberation. He is right to think that this approach leaves important issues off the table. But then, it always did. Why, the reader may wonder, does Hartman seem to notice this problem only at the end of his story? And why, as we enter a new era of similar conflict, should we doubt that the same mistake will happen again? ■

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*Robin Darling Young*

# A Shattered Mosaic

## A Land of Aching Hearts
**The Middle East in the Great War**
*Leila Tarazi Fawaz*
Harvard University Press, $35, 416 pp.

## Among the Ruins
**Syria Past and Present**
*Christian C. Sahner*
Oxford University Press, $27.95, 256 pp.

It has now been a hundred years since ethnic cleansing began in the Middle East, making enemies of neighbors, destroying sites medieval and ancient, and casting settled populations into exile or death. Over the century since, faced with a destruction frequently quickened by war, untold numbers of exiles have undertaken perilous journeys in search of safety, as the institutions of this complex and venerable region crumbled. Few before World War I could have foreseen such calamity for the region. At last century's outset, its cosmopolitan cities had become lively centers of polyglot, religiously differentiated groups, growing rich as people came from the countryside to gain from their international trade. Awarded imperial trading concessions, the cities' notable families flourished, accumulating ever-greater wealth in a global economy. A distinctively middle-eastern modernity might have been.

But then came the terrible Battle of Gallipoli, and the cruel April of 1915 brought to Constantinople a state-run slaughter of prominent Armenian leaders; trampling the Anatolian countryside, it became a genocide consuming more than a million Armenians and other Christians—Assyrians, Greeks, Syrian Orthodox, Chaldaeans. Some of their former neighbors, the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Middle East, had already gone south to the new settlements in Palestine; most of the rest would follow in 1948. In 1918, victorious France and England divided their Ottoman spoils into Mandates, succeeded after World War II by Arab nationalist states in which Christians at first participated, indeed often as leading citizens. But not for long. World War II had also inevitably established Israel, and after that the expulsion of Palestinians, setting the stage for the interminable conflicts and cleansings that continue to this day.

Two recent books record the beginning and the end of this hard century of upheaval, war, and exile. Leila Tarazi Fawaz's magnificent *Land of Aching Hearts* describes the experiences of ordinary people—merchants, soldiers, women—during the First World War; Christian Sahner's *Among the Ruins* turns to the recent past, chronicling a graduate student's travels in Syria and Lebanon just a few years ago. While differing in aim, scope, and depth of scholarship, both authors write perceptively and sympathetically about a complex and sophisticated society unfamiliar to most Americans. Focused on periods at each end of the twentieth century, neither book thoroughly covers the rise of nationalism, and the roles played by the United States, the World Bank, and the IMF in creating the conditions for the region's distress also lie beyond both authors' scope. (Readers looking for a fuller picture can turn to James Gelvin's

FREEDOM HOUSE

*Aftermath of barrel-bomb attack in Aleppo, Syria, February 6, 2014*

*The Modern Middle East*.) Yet Fawaz and Sahner help distant observers of the region gain a nuanced understanding of displaced Christians, Jews, and other minorities (including Muslim groups) who once comprised the much-lamented "mosaic" of peoples in Beirut, Alexandria, Baghdad, Istanbul, and Smyrna—a variety that continued to exist in the Syrian city of Aleppo, for instance, until just five years ago.

Fawaz, a professor at Tufts, recounts the effects of the Great War upon a Middle East grown prosperous and relatively free during a period of industrialization and Ottoman political decline. During the war, battles, genocide, disease, and starvation eliminated 25 percent of the region's population. Fawaz shows how particular people endured the war—or failed to, succumbing to starvation or disease. The tales of Falih Rifki Bey, a journalist, and Ihsan Turjman, a cleric and translator who enlisted in the Ottoman Army, are just two examples of her dauntless research.

But not only individuals died; as the century proceeded, a way of life disappeared as well. Fawaz cites the eloquent testimony of Wadad Makdisi Cortas in her memoir *A World I Loved: The Story of an Arab Woman*. "We would not have thought it then," Cortas writes,

> but the war brought the twentieth century to Beirut. Those who gave a certain rhythm to our daily life—the potters propelling their wheels by foot amid the fragrance of wet clay; the neighborhood blacksmith and his two boys, deaf from typhus, who helped in the shop but whose great talent was kite-making; the baker, who didn't make and sell bread at all but rather baked the prepared dough that the people without ovens brought him; the blind man who roamed the streets singing for alms until he learned to mend chairs, at which point he had two occupations—all of those people belonged to another time.

Until very recently, remnants of that prewar Ottoman world survived here and there. Before 2003 in Iraq or 2012 in Syria, Western travelers could safely walk into a mosque near a church. As recently as the 1980s, they might even encounter an aged member of the now-departed "Moses people," a Jew, in Damascus. But no longer.

The title of Christian Sahner's book, *Among the Ruins,* refers to the ancient sites of Syria, but the title now tragically evokes the rubble of modern Aleppo and ancient Palymra as well. A student of the historian Peter Brown at Princeton, Sahner was encouraged to visit the region to study Arabic and research a thesis on Christian martyrdom under medieval and modern Islam. There he wrote reports for the *Wall Street Journal* that became the basis of this volume. In Syria he covered Damascus and Beirut, the hill-town of Ma'aloula west of Damascus, Deir es-Zor in the northeast, and the ancient sites of Qalat Siman, Palmyra, and Dura-Europus; later he wrote from Lebanon. In both countries he encountered Syrians and Lebanese who lived urban lives surrounded by reminders of the past. Now, with 4 million Syrians living as refugees and many more millions displaced, the people he encountered so recently are likely gone.

Sahner's final chapter ponders Syria's future. Attachment to the ancient past might unify Syrians, Sahner speculates; the country has suffered chaos before, and perhaps "like a phoenix, it shall rise again once the fighting is over." Its diversity might be conserved, he reasons, particularly its Christian communities. But diversity is a modern and particularly American value, made possible in this country both by the public secularism that protects religious minorities and by a common agreement to restrict religious conflict to the private sphere. Traditions in the Middle East are different. The Ottomans used and tolerated Christian minorities; Western powers exploited them; dictators manipulated them; now sectarianism and anarchy are killing them.

Saddam Hussein is reported to have told a Christian leader that if Christians were the rose, he was the vase: once he was shattered, they would die. Bashar al-Assad, too, found uses for Christian groups that allowed them to persist. These strongman polities have now come to a disastrous end. Since the revolution and civil war, 40 percent of Syria's population has been displaced, and since last summer millions have been moving west—ironically, heading toward the countries of their former colonial rulers. Displaced Iraqis have begun to follow them in large numbers.

Within the Ottoman Empire, non-Muslim communities lived as subordinate members of society. Still, by custom and law, their Islamic rulers often welcomed, tolerated or protected them—sometimes, indeed, from Western Christian rulers. Muslims and non-Muslims shared, often peacefully, a culture and a world. Fawaz shows how that world began to crack, and Sahner records its modern vestiges, a fractured system in violent collapse. Both show us just how much the Syrians, the Iraqis, and their children—and the world—have lost. ■

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*Hannah Gais*

# From Carnage to Consensus

## Out of Ashes

**A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century**

*Konrad Jarausch*

Princeton University Press, $39.50, 880 pp.

With news headlines continuing to reveal a Europe struggling in its less-than-perfect union, Konrad Jarausch's ambitious and sprawling new book, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century*, seems like a text for our times. A professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Jarausch examines Europe's recent past, pursuing a fundamental question—namely, what is modernization?—that connects the continent's violently ideological "dark times" to its postwar renewal and ambiguous future.

Jarausch contends that the term "modern" can't be reduced to a single meaning, but remains open to constant re-interpretation; depending on the context, modernization might be viewed as creative or destructive—witness, for instance, the massive carnage and the dazzling material achievements that both marked the twentieth century. For Jarausch, modernization is best defined as a process. Broadly, it describes the rapid proliferation of new technologies, as well as the formation of the institutions that came to define the contemporary West—nation-states, democratic political systems, and capitalism. A certain cultural flux accompanies these developments. The artistic movement known as modernism, for example, displayed a cultish obsession with the new. Jarausch's skepticism toward broad verdicts about what constitutes modernity reflects his awareness of how incessant change marks our times.

This complex understanding of what it means to be modern receives it most strenuous challenge from the Holocaust. The Nazis' campaign of mechanized, systematic killing on an unprecedented scale embodied the sheer destructive power of modern warfare. The assembly line provided the inspiration and the methodology for industrial-scale extermination. Nazi theories on race were based on a perverse theory of evolution, with social Darwinism providing the rationale for Germanization, the ethnic cleansing that weeded out "inferior" races and political opponents. Germanization, in turn, constituted the intellectual basis for a massive, violent, and ultimately self-destructive bureaucracy.

Did Nazism constitute a throwback to primitive barbarism, or did it in fact reveal the modern era's brutal essence? The question is still debated today. The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, for example, views the Nazis as an unanticipated and unforeseeable development, like the rise of a "malign strain of an allegedly tamed virus." In this way of thinking, Nazism was an unexpected aberration in a mostly blameless modernity. Jarausch resists such optimistic characterizations. "The brutality of the Holocaust broadly defined," he writes, "poses a fundamental challenge to the Western narrative that views modernization as a civilizing process." His language here is precise: to elevate Hitler's atrocities to the level of an ahistorical spectacle, he argues, is "to place its stylized narrative of good and evil beyond human understanding." Our inability to fully comprehend the Holocaust's immense evil does not require us to turn it into an empty abstraction, shorn of human agency.

While the destructive events of the twentieth century elicit conflicting views, Europe's remarkable recovery from catastrophe arose from consensus. Jarausch shows that this broad political consensus—an agreement to work together for a collective future that would serve all of Europe—came out of necessity. By war's end in 1945, Europe was unrecognizable. Huge swaths of the continent lay in ruins, as did its institutions, either tainted by politicians' cooperation with the Nazis or completely destroyed. What lay at the heart of Europe's resurrection, Jarausch posits, was an "elemental drive to go on living that inspired the effort to reconstruct a more benign modernity." Postwar Europe concocted its own blend of modernization, combining


*German postage stamp marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Elysée Treaty*

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tradition and modernity. The embrace of democratic institutions, vindicated by their resilience against both Nazism and fascism, made the fate of healthy democracies a priority. Not all was born anew, however. Some monarchs returned to their thrones from wartime exile. Even the brick-and-mortar aspect of reconstruction, in such places as Warsaw's Old Town—and in many German cities—looked back to prewar traditions.

Seven decades later, it's easy to lament the rampant destruction caused by Europe's totalitarian excursion and to promise "never again." But the fluidity and dynamism of modernization makes such political security difficult. Such dynamism can be a source of great progress—social, political, philosophical, and scientific—but it can also dredge up insecurity and conflict. Jarausch recommends what he calls "a chastened modernity," by which he means one that would capture the progressive aspects of modernization while couching it in a framework that ensures broad benefits for all. Europe must harness markets to prevent speculation from running rampant. Democratic institutions must ensure adequate human-rights protections to all citizens in equal measure. National interests shouldn't be allowed to halt international cooperation—or even intra-EU cooperation, for that matter.

Because the geopolitical climate is uncertain and changing, a chastened modernity can't erase points of contention entirely. The European model faces a number of stumbling blocks, from transatlantic tensions to postcolonial criticism of Western hegemony. Still, the most decisive challenge comes from within. Fifteen years into the twenty-first century, it remains possible that conflicting viewpoints about Europe's future will tear the continent at its seams. Such conflicts include disagreements over how far the EU's economic union will expand, whether existing member states will deepen their political unity, and how much the nations with stronger economies are willing to sacrifice for the weaker. On a bureaucratic level, Europe is more united than it has ever been, but it has yet to overcome ethnic and political division to grasp the dream of a "United States of Europe." Some new challenges look like old ones turned inside out. In the twentieth century, as Jarausch asserts, the "economic success of the Common Market actually helped rescue the nation-state in postwar Europe"; today the nation-state threatens to tear the common market apart.

The 2009–10 economic crisis is not the only time in recent years that divergent views on European policy have stressed the union—the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was bitterly polarizing—but the crisis has revealed what is perhaps the most dangerous of the EU's fault lines. In the past five years, Europe's experiment in adopting a common currency while lacking a unified fiscal system has veered from neoliberal dream toward nightmare. Fifteen years after the currency's debut, not only its worth, but its very existence was threatened by a debt crisis that remains partially unresolved to this day. The crisis's effect on the economy—particularly on the unemployment rate—continues to undermine the delicate political balance that binds the union together, with rising extremism, nationalism, and dissatisfaction with the European project reverberating across the continent.

Although Jarausch contends that Europe has abandoned its "naïve enthusiasm for progress" for "a more humane sense of the modern," recent economic turmoil may leave some, particularly in the continent's southern half, thinking otherwise. The sense of progress offered by a united and democratic Europe has not proved liberating for all. Once again, European modernization has shown itself to be multifaceted, complex, and often muddled. Today the continent that eighty years ago went "dark" shows an affinity for shades of gray. ■

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# Mission Accomplished

*Lloyd I. Sederer*

In 2004, my wife and I first visited the magnificent Abbaye Saint-Michel de Frigolet, set in rural Provence, near the Rhone, northwest of Marseilles. It seemed like a dying institution. We returned in 2014 to visit with Joël Houque of the Order of the Canons Regular of Prémontré, the Premonstratentians, who had been tasked to see whether Frigolet could be saved from closing.

Fr. Joël, now in his late sixties, met us at the massive doors of the rectory wearing his white alb. Born in northern France, he studied economics in Paris, spent two years working at an orphanage in Laos, and then found his calling as a Prémontré priest, becoming the leader of its Mondaye community, located near the Normandy beaches. The Prémontré Order was begun by a German priest, Norbert, in 1120, and today has communities in Europe, North and South America, Zaire, South Africa, India, and Australia. Norbert was canonized in 1582.

*Frigolet Abbey*

Frigolet Abbey was opened in 1858 by a French priest, Jean-Baptiste Boulbon. It had been established as a Benedictine monastery in the thirteenth century and fell into ruin after the French Revolution. It was Boulbon's vision that inspired its restoration and elegant additions in the medieval revival fashion of the nineteenth century. A drawing hangs in the foyer of the rectory depicting his idea of a five-turreted, walled fortress of interconnected buildings, much of which was built before he died twenty-five years later.

Boulbon eventually brought the abbey into the Norbertine community, even though he was not a member of that order. He didn't quite adhere to the order's teaching, which includes a monastic life governed by liturgical prayer, pastoral work, and evangelization. But he did launch Frigolet's restoration.

Twice since the abbey's nineteenth-century reincarnation, seasons of demise and renewal have befallen Frigolet. Anti-clerical government policies shut it down—for a few years in 1880, and for two decades in the early twentieth century. Each time it was reborn to resume its mission as a religious, educational, and community institution.

Last year, facing closure again, Frère Joël was asked to advise the superior general of the Prémontré Order on the future of Frigolet. Joël had stepped down as abbot of Mondaye after battling a chronic blood cancer. In July 2014, he moved from Mondaye to Frigolet, arranged for local medical care, and settled into his spacious office with ancient furnishings and five computer screens to begin his review of the abbey's workings.

When we visited Frigolet last year, we asked Joël what makes for a vital religious community. "New men," he replied. Not money, not administrative acumen, but men. With them, the rest will follow. But a young man at the outset of his priestly ministry needs to be able to envision building a community, not managing its decline. While a certain *tristesse* draped the Frigolet, there was also hope. Joël had no personal agenda: he was able to bear the burden of a decision that had to be made, that no one would want to make. He was determined to cut back the vines so they could regrow.

*Avoir confiance*—have trust—we said as we bid farewell to Joël. We trusted that Frigolet would see another season. But Fr. Joël would not. He died on March 25, 2015, the Feast of the Annunciation. His mission to renew Frigolet had been completed. He had returned to Mondaye, where he had served most of his priesthood and had served as abbott. The community's announcement read:

> Our brother Joel came from Abbey Frigolet on March 17. He never left his room and ate very little. Friday night around 8:00 we needed to drive him to the Bayeux Hospital. For several days he faded, gradually. Yesterday morning at 7:45 he left for the house of the Father, the day of the Feast of the Annunciation.

The decision about Frigolet's future turned on a choice between a community run by a different Catholic order or an independent Premonstratentian community. In late April 2015, the abbot general announced that Religiosi di Sant'Antimo, a community of Norbertines from Tuscany, would make Frigolet their own. Their membership is also limited and all are praying for a renaissance, a future of abundance for their new community and for Frigolet. ■

**Lloyd I. Sederer** *is a psychiatrist and public-health doctor who works for New York State.*

VÉRONIQUE PAGNIER

# FOUR
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