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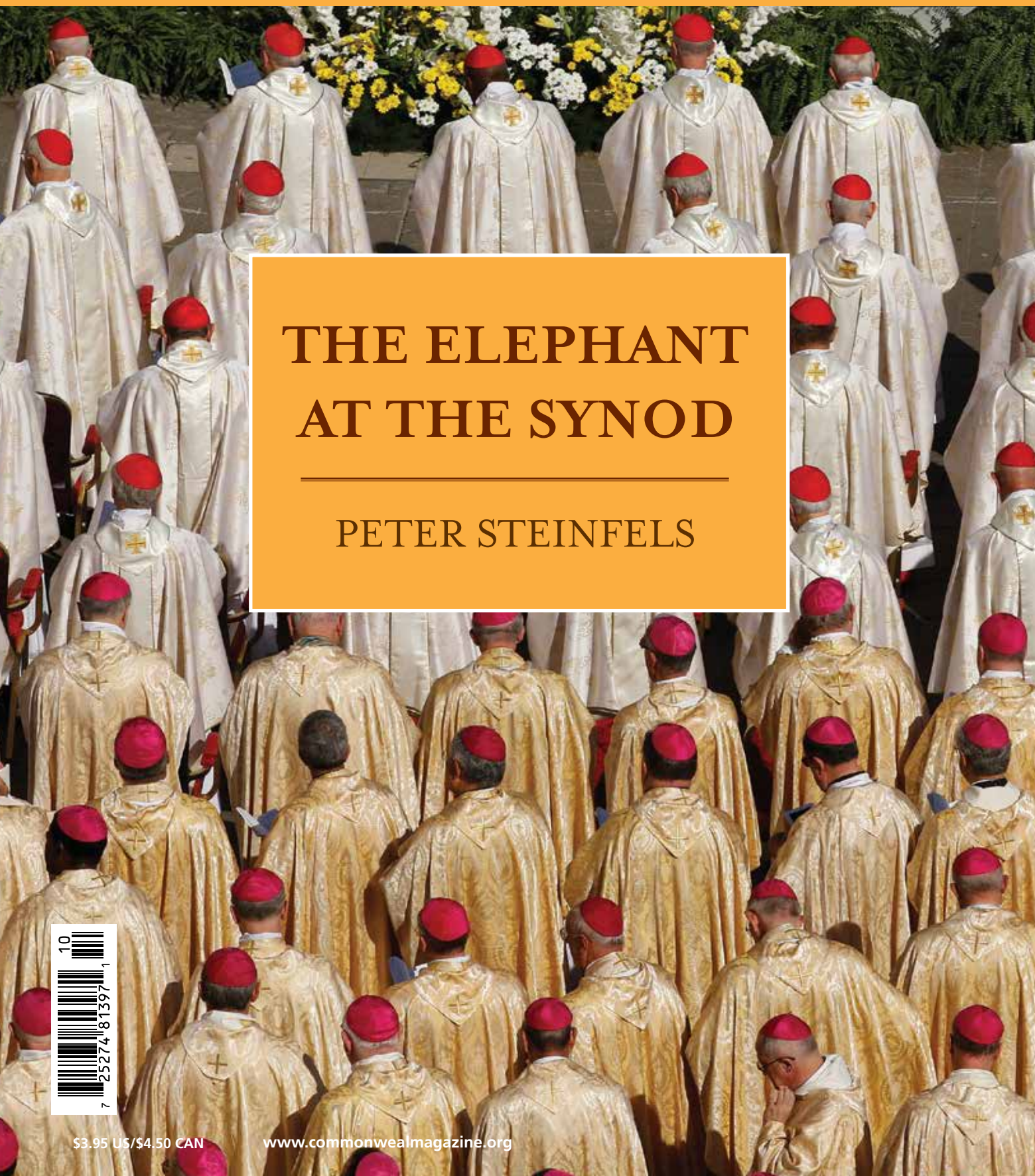

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LETTERS

Theists vs. Atheists

REWRITE

O how comely it is and how reviving for us theists to come upon the "kinder, gentler atheism," or perhaps rather agnosticism, espoused by Michael Ruse in his book *Atheism*, reviewed in *Commonweal* by Gary Gutting ("Believe It or Not," May 1). On the other hand, I fear it is all what is nowadays known as "God-talk" between professional theologians, and has little to do with the ways people have at all times come to recognize the existence and the providence of God.

The problem may be traced back to St. Anselm and his ill-conceived endeavor to prove the existence of God to an imaginary pagan. And so we get the "ontological argument," which was no sooner out of his mouth, or proposed by his pen, than his great theological successor St. Thomas Aquinas called that argument into doubt. Instead, we have the much discussed "five ways" offered by Thomas early in his *Summa Theologiae*, only to have them in turn called into doubt by successive generations of theologians. Then it is: "Doubt, doubt, nothing but doubt!"

Yet doesn't Thomas himself, from the outset of his theology, emphasize that the basis of Catholic theology is to be found, not so much in rational disputation as in our faith in Holy Scripture? And what do we learn from Holy Scripture but that the name of God, whom we worship whether as Jews or as Christians, is "I AM." And isn't this an intimately personal relationship, far removed from the impersonal, impartial objectivity of professional scholars, whether Catholic theologians or atheist philosophers?

For this reason the true knowledge of God consists, as Martin Buber has in our age aptly emphasized, in an "I-Thou relationship," that is, in an attitude of prayer. He is above, and we are below. He is in heaven, and we are on earth. He is our Creator, and we are his creatures. Or rather, he is our Father, and we are his children. Only in this way, and in this relationship, can we be said to know God, as it were, within a divine-human family. Or rather, it is not so much knowledge as wisdom, the wisdom that is so strongly emphasized in the sapiential books of the Bible, beginning in the fear of the Lord and ending in the love of our heavenly Father—according to the saying of St. John, twice repeated in his first epistle, "God is Love."

Among these sapiential books, of particular note is the Book of Job, in that it treats of the particular problem urged by atheists against theists, the problem of innocent suffering. As the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins puts it, in terms he himself has borrowed from the prophet Jeremiah: "Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must / Disappointment all I endeavor end?" In the Book of Job the problem takes the form of a protracted debate between Job and his comforters, followed by the divine answer from the whirlwind. So here at last we may expect to receive the correct theological answer to the problem so often urged by atheists such as Richard Dawkins, even from the mouth of God himself.

But what are the words put into the mouth of God by the human author? His words have nothing to do with the preceding problem, which is derived from the dark mystery of non-being. The answer he proposes directs our attention to the bright mystery of being. In this answer we are shown the wonders of this wonderful world within which we have our life, our movement, and our being. And in its glorious light of being, the very

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light that was created in the beginning, all our petty problems fade into the darkness of non-being from which they took their rise.

Above all, when we turn from the Old to the New Testament, and from the old Book of Job to the new Gospel of Jesus, what, we may ask, does Jesus have to say about the existence of God? Nothing. He isn't concerned with such petty problems as waged between our theists and atheists, or agnostics. He is no theologian, like the scribes and Pharisees, who stand out against him. He is a teacher and a prophet, and he teaches us—in contrast to all the books of the Old Testament put together—to address God as "Our Father in heaven," repeating it again and again, no less than seventeen times in his Sermon on the Mount and fifty-one times in his discourse at the Last Supper.

Then, once we learn to address God as our heavenly Father—despite all the variations in the presentation of God in the Old Testament, in which (as St. Augustine says) the New remains hidden—and once we learn to regard ourselves as his dear sons and daughters, there is no room left for doubt but only for belief. And that belief is no blind faith against all evidence to the contrary. It is a reasonable belief, based upon what Newman calls in his *Grammar of Assent* a "convergence of independent probabilities" amounting to a moral certainty. Thus whether we look with wide open eyes upon the wonderful world around us, filled with vestiges of the divine creation, or upon ourselves as created to the image and likeness of God, we find our mind and heart raised upwards to our origin in him who is the light and life of our being. And so it is again St. Augustine who also says of God, "Because he is, we are."

Such, in conclusion, is what Gary Gutting should have said to Michael Ruse, but for the unfortunate fact that he was considering himself as "cabined, cribbed, confined" to the terms of postmodern professional theology.

PETER MILWARD, SJ
Tokyo, Japan

BETTING MAN

In reviewing Michael Ruse's book Atheism, Gary Gutting says, "It's hard to see how there could be a rationally compelling case for atheism." Indeed, back when I studied logic, I was taught that you can't prove a broad negative. Well, nothing is broader or more negative than to say that there is no God. So if you jump to that conclusion, just know it is logically baseless.

Meanwhile, the case in support of the existence of God grew stronger in the twentieth century. Einstein's general relativity theory, the Hubble telescope, and the background radiation discovered by the Bell Laboratory scientists all pointed to the fact that the universe had a beginning about 13.7 billion years ago. That is significant because, as Professor Gerald Schroeder says: Science could not have made a bigger concession to religion than the concept of a beginning.

Indeed the experience of humanity points to the theist conclusion. Everything we, or our science, has figured out—from the laws of nature to how to apply those laws to produce the whole array of modern marvels from engines to smartphones and much more—has been by a process of observing, measuring, and replicating what we learn from the world around us. This was more or less a process of reverse-engineering, to use the term applied when—in the building of a product—a competitor violates the patent rights of a patent owner.

And our science works. Our minds can grasp, to a significant extent, the logic inherent in what we have observed of our physical universe, and we have used that scientific knowledge to stunning effect. Having thus proved that reverse-engineering works, it makes no sense to say, as atheism requires, "Yes, but there's no Engineer." I won't claim that this makes an air-tight case for my view, but it's enough for me to gladly join Pascal in his famous wager.

GEORGE E. WARD
Canton, Mich.

Rescue Mission

At a July 2013 Mass on the Italian island of Lampedusa, Pope Francis blamed the "globalization of indifference" for the plight of migrants fleeing war, poverty, and religious and ethnic persecution. So far that year, about fifty people had died attempting to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean from Africa. Four months later more than three hundred Eritreans drowned trying to reach Lampedusa in a leaky boat. In 2014, about three thousand died in the crossing. Since just January of this year, close to two thousand more have perished. The failure of the international community to address this rising toll has been, to quote Francis again, a disgrace.

It appears that the European Union has finally gotten the message. In May it announced it would not only launch operations against trafficking rings that prey on desperate migrants, but also prioritize the rescue of those crossing the Mediterranean and allow them to apply for asylum in Europe. Though many are dying elsewhere too—the U.S.-Mexico border, the Indian Ocean—as they seek refuge from economic crisis and political conflict, the Mediterranean has proven especially perilous. With the erosion of stability in dozens of nations stretching from sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East, the number of migrants headed for Europe by sea has been rising significantly. More migrants means more voyages in overloaded, unseaworthy craft and more opportunities for exploitation, as smugglers exact higher prices for passage. The EU announcement comes as a welcome if belated development in a crisis crying for moral leadership from the nations that so many are risking their lives to reach.

Italy has seen the largest influx of migrants, its proximity to northern Africa making it a natural entry point to the Continent. It is already sheltering about eighty thousand people seeking asylum, and more than 200,000 are expected to arrive this year, twice last year's total. EU officials are now proposing that refugees be distributed among its twenty-eight member nations. Though this is sure to generate resistance from some governments, it is the right way to proceed. All of Europe, not just Italy and its neighbors, must provide a sanctuary for those refugees most in peril. As for the targeting of smuggling rings, most of which operate out of Libya, EU officials said they are prepared to act in dismantling them. The EU says it will move even without approval of a United Nations draft proposal for a militarily enforceable mission in international waters, and in Libya's territorial waters and on its shores, an effort that would include the seizure and perhaps the destruction of vessels used to transport migrants. It is still not known whether Libya's authorization would be required for such action—or which of the rival groups now vying for control of the country would be the one to do the authorizing.

Where this would leave those who've already left their homes and gathered in northern Africa is unclear. Nor does it address the root of the problem—conditions in the regions from which people are fleeing. How to bring order to Libya and Somalia, or peace to Yemen, or stability to Syria and Iraq? How to build better functioning economies in Africa? How to stop the persecution and killing of religious minorities? The scope and complexity of the challenges are considerable. But certainly the nations that are blessed with relative economic strength—and whose military and political missteps have helped bring about the crisis in Libya—owe it to the afflicted to stop the loss of lives at sea. Efforts must also be made to stabilize regions that are in turmoil. The Obama administration has taken steps in this direction in Central America, pledging $1 billion to help address the socioeconomic and security issues that spurred the massive migration of children to the United States last summer (it is not yet clear how or whether Congress will allocate these funds). A similar approach is needed in Africa and the Middle East.

Action can't come too soon. A new UN report shows a record 38 million people around the world are "internally displaced"—having fled their homes if not yet their countries. About 850,000 people from Nigeria, Central African Republic, Mali, Libya, and Sudan have found refuge in Chad and Niger. These two nations, at the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index, nonetheless "lead the world in their generosity and humanity," says John Ging of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs. The EU now seems ready to follow their example. ■

May 12, 2015

Grant Gallicho

Our Man in Paris

WILLIAM PFAFF, R.I.P.

William Pfaff, longtime contributor to and two-time editor at *Commonweal*, died on April 30. He was eighty-six. The *New York Times* obituary contained the important facts of Bill's life. Born in Iowa and raised there and in Georgia, he wrote prodigiously for over sixty years—first for *Commonweal*, then for publications with a wider readership: the *New Yorker*, the *International Herald Tribune* (work that was syndicated to two dozen newspapers), *Harper's*, the *New York Review of Books*. He wrote his own books, eight of them, one of which was a finalist for the National Book Award (*Barbarian Sentiments*, 1989).

Bill was unswervingly skeptical of the projection of U.S. power, and had no qualms about criticizing American interventions in Vietnam, Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Nor was he shy about identifying shortcomings endemic to U.S. culture, which suffers from a "certain canonization of ignorance," as he told the *Chicago Reader* in 1989. "It's certainly a consequence of the trivialization of issues by television and the press, which has deteriorated very seriously." For such candor, the *Times* obituary explains, Bill was sometimes called anti-American. He moved to Paris in 1971, but always considered himself a patriot. "He lashed out at America because he loved it," his wife Carolyn told the *Times*. "But he became sadder and sadder about the nation that was so great, yet was belittling itself. He wanted America to stay home and fix its own country." Giving Bill an award in 2006, the *Times* reports, the American Academy of Diplomacy called him the "dean" of American columnists, lauding "his moral vision of the proper uses of power and limits on its abuse."

Bill and I exchanged e-mails over the years, a correspondence that began after I was fortunate enough to be tasked with asking him to write something for us. I can't locate my initial request, but I recall putting a foot wrong in my note, perhaps misidentifying a country or a capital, and Bill correcting me in the most diplomatic way possible. I was so green, and he was so kind.

That kindness came through whether he was writing about a recent edition of *Commonweal* ("Just to say to you and colleagues that May 7 was a wonderful issue!"), or a housekeeping concern. "Save some money," Bill once wrote, asking us not to send complimentary copies of issues in which his columns appeared. "Not being an academic, I don't have anyone to send them to in order to build my case for tenure. Hacks don't get tenure."

In his correspondence, he always showed an editor's anxiety over factual errors. When the *New York Review of Books* asked him to review *Why Priests?* by Garry Wills, Bill initially begged off, sure he lacked the expertise. After finally accepting the assignment, he asked whether we might read a draft to make sure he hadn't "made some enormous gaffe concerning the church." He planned to identify himself as a former editor at *Commonweal*. "If I make a fool of myself," he wrote, "there could be an effect on *Commonweal*'s reputation (and mine!)." His concern was unfounded (even if Wills predictably bristled at the review).

William Pfaff in 1983

Bill reflected on his career in a lovely article for *Commonweal*'s ninetieth-anniversary issue (a piece he was reluctant to write because he didn't think he could be as funny as Wilfrid Sheed was in his eightieth-anniversary remembrance). He took an entry-level editorial position with the magazine right out of college, against his father's wishes (he thought his son should embark on a career in the Foreign Service, rather than work for some periodical he'd never heard of). One of Bill's early duties was to travel down to the printers to "read the stone"—to make sure the magazine was free of errors after the type had been set and proofs pressed. Over the next sixty-five years, as he watched the United States repeatedly advance foreign-policy aims premised on an often-misguided understanding of its own destiny, Bill caught more errors than most. He never stopped reading the stone. ■

Grant Gallicho *is an associate editor of* Commonweal. *A version of this article originally appeared on dotCommonweal on May 2.*

UNAMBIGUOUS

Don Wycliff

Thank you, Freddie Gray.

You did not choose to be sacrificed but, God willing, your death, and the reactions to it in Baltimore and around the nation, will reawaken your fellow citizens to ugly realities that so many of us have tried so mightily to avoid.

Your fatal injuries while in police custody—under circumstances that make it impossible for anyone to credibly blame you—have done what the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and even twelve-year-old Tamir Rice could not do: remove any ambiguity about agency.

Your sad history of childhood exposure to lead paint shines a light on a hazard that has afflicted untold numbers of poor children, especially black children, raised in housing that cripples them mentally, shortens their lives substantially, and diminishes the quality of the time they do have.

Demonstrators march in Baltimore to protest the death of Freddie Gray

And whether you would have willed it or not, the riot—or was it a rebellion?—touched off by your death has focused minds on America's urban tinderboxes in a way that no presidential speech (assuming there had been one) or civil-rights leader's sermon has been able to since…well, within recent memory.

"All experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed." So wrote our nation's second slave-holder president in one of America's seminal documents.

Torching a CVS drug store probably wasn't what Thomas Jefferson meant by "abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed." But for people who otherwise find it impossible to command the attention of the powers that be, it may have looked like the best means available.

The question is whether, having now gotten that attention, anything productive will happen. The signs so far are mixed at best.

The state prosecutor in Baltimore has found probable cause to charge the police officers who had Freddie Gray in their custody with crimes including false imprisonment, assault, manslaughter, and second-degree murder.

Having a prosecutor charge a police officer with any kind of misconduct is so rare in America as to be almost a freakish occurrence. The prosecution faces an uphill battle. While, the Baltimore police have a history of mistreating black citizens, juries have a history of acquitting cops charged with brutality.

Beyond the prosecutorial challenges, the events in Baltimore have had the salutary effect of loosening the tongues of the president and of his would-be Democratic successor. Barack Obama, who has been notable for his reticence on issues of race and poverty, called for "some soul-searching" on what he termed a long, "slow-rolling crisis" of urban poverty. And Hillary Clinton, departing from her careful script of anodyne statements designed to sound thoughtful without saying anything substantive, gave a major speech in which she called for reforms to end America's disastrous, decades-old infatuation with mass incarceration and criminal-justice solutions to problems ranging from mental health to bad breath.

Among the Republican presidential candidates, reactions to Baltimore have been surprisingly few so far. Given the track records of most of them, that may be a blessing.

Here's my small contribution to our presidentially proposed national soul-searching: Find a copy of "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 policy paper for the U.S. Department of Labor. It's readily available online. Read it. Don't read commentaries on it. All the commentators have their own hobbyhorses and attempt to draft Moynihan to fight their causes. Pay close attention to the last chapter, "The Case for National Action." That was, remember, a recommendation to President Lyndon Johnson of a policy to guide national action. Here's how Moynihan says his proposed policy would read:

> The policy of the United States is to bring the Negro American to full and equal sharing in the responsibilities and rewards of citizenship. To this end, the programs of the Federal government bearing on this objective shall be designed to have the effect, directly or indirectly, of enhancing the stability and resources of the Negro American family.

That didn't happen. And Baltimore is, at least in part, the result. ■

A version of this article originally appeared on dotCommonweal on May 4.

CNS PHOTO / SAIT SERKAN GURBUZ, REUTERS

Charles R. Morris

Fun While It Lasted

WHY THE BIG BANKS MAY GO BACK TO BEING BANKS

Slowly, but inexorably the behemoth American banks are shrinking. Among the bigger banks—JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Bank of America, Wells Fargo—this year's announced job cuts are already in the tens of thousands.

The dirty little secret of major-league banking is that it is not very profitable. JPMorgan Chase, despite a string of recent disasters, is still acknowledged to be one of the best-managed of the larger banks. Last year, JPMorgan deployed $2.6 trillion of real and financial assets—its offices, its cash, its loans outstanding, its trading book, and much else. Its net profits, however, were just $22 billion. That is a return on assets of less than 1 percent, or 0.85 percent, to be exact. You can buy top-rated CDs that return more than that.

It gets worse. At the moment the Federal Reserve is providing massive subsidies to the banks by means of low interest rates. "Fed Funds" are the short-term loans that the big banks swap among each other. The Fed's current policy is to keep them at between 0 and 0.25 percent. Banks lend that money at rates anywhere from 3.5 percent (for prime mortgages) to 16 percent (for credit-card debt). In 2015, JPMorgan's costs of raising the funds it lent was $7.9 billion, while its gross lending revenues were $51.5 billion, for a fat 85 percent margin. In 2006, perhaps the last normal year before the financial crash, JPMorgan's loan margins were only 36 percent. If that 36 percent margin had prevailed in 2015, JPMorgan would have run at a loss. But the Fed is clearly intent on raising interest rates, which will squeeze those margins.

So why did banks look so profitable before the crash? Well, banks don't headline their puny returns on assets; they focus on their return on equity, which is the portion of their assets owned by their investors. In a normal company, like a manufacturer, borrowed capital rarely rises above 50 percent, with the rest raised from shareholders. Many companies, especially in the tech industry, have no debt at all. Before the crisis, the big banks typically borrowed about 97 percent of the capital used in their business, leaving just 3 percent owned by shareholders. If all your earnings go to investors who put up just 3 percent of your assets, then a 1-percent return on assets creates a 30-percent return for those investors.

But that is changing. The regulatory agencies, both here and abroad, are gradually raising minimum levels of required equity. The biggest banks, the ones likely to pose "systemic risks" to the banking system, will have to carry even higher extra layers of equity. A recent analysis suggests that for the biggest banks, the American equity requirements will rise to between 9 and 11 percent. Returns on equity will shrink to the 10 percent range.

Managers have noticed. General Electric, which once contained one of the country's biggest banks—GE Capital—is in the process of spinning off or selling almost all its banking operations.

Federal Reserve, Washington D.C.

STEFAN FUSSAN

The reason: It decided it couldn't make its profit objectives under the new rules.

A host of other changes are pushing in the same direction. Risky trading operations are being slimmed down or spun off. "Living wills" detailing how to resolve a big-bank crisis without investing taxpayer money are helping to disclose the insane riskiness of some of the banks' business lines. Derivative operations (don't ask) are being made more transparent and less risky.

With the Republican takeover in Congress, all these changes are under threat. But at the same time, the reputation of the banks is at an all-time low, as one revelation after another exposes routine criminal gaming of the financial system. Traders manipulate the foreign-exchange market. The base rate for most global short-term lending is rigged. Commodity prices are rigged through control of storage operations. Banking services explicitly designed to evade American tax laws and money laundering rules are provided to dictators or drug lords. Mortgage holders who have been discharged in bankruptcy are illegally pressured to pay up anyway. Mortgage documentation is forged. What do they teach in MBA courses anyway?

If we can retain the momentum for another few years, we may see the gradual emergence of pure "utility" banks that gather deposits and make loans and provide vanilla money transfer and trading operations for their customers, while earning steady, modest profits, and paying mostly middle-class salaries. In other words, things we used to call "banks."

The rest will be spun off into the world of "shadow banking," with no federal backup, like borrowing privileges at the Federal Reserve, coupled with federal monitoring focused primarily on fraud or extremely risky behavior. ■

Fran Quigley

Labor Gains

UNIONIZING THE RUST BELT'S SERVICE SECTOR

Like many cities across the Midwest, Indianapolis has seen large tracts within its borders decay into a kind of concrete desert. Take Shadeland Avenue, on the east side of town. Fifty years ago it was a six-lane corridor serving massive plants for RCA and Chrysler, along with multiple automobile-parts manufacturers. On this one street alone, there were more than ten thousand union jobs. Just north and east, off Interstate 69, the cities of Anderson and Muncie were filled with workers making products like Delco batteries, GM headlights, and Goodyear tires. But in the 1980s and '90s, GM vacated Anderson, Chevrolet left Muncie, and Indianapolis itself lost more than twenty-eight thousand manufacturing jobs. Most of the plants on the Shadeland Avenue manufacturing corridor are long gone.

It's not as if there are no jobs in Indianapolis today. The former manufacturing centers may lie quiet, but things are bustling at the food court of the downtown campus of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, known as IUPUI. Every weekday, thousands of undergrads and faculty members line up under brightly lit signs for Chick-fil-A, Papa John's, Wild Greens, and Spotz, joined by students and staff from Indiana University schools of medicine and nursing, distinctive in their light-blue scrubs. Behind the counters, men and women fill orders and take payment at cash registers. Others wipe down tables out front or prepare food in back. Despite the name-brand restaurant signage and the lettering "IUPUI Food Service" on the workers' black polo shirts and white chef jackets, they are actually employees of Chartwells, a division of the British corporation Compass Group, the world's largest food-service management company.

James Meyers came to work here in August 2009. A stocky African American with a goatee, Meyers grew up on Indianapolis's East side, the youngest of seven children and a product of Public School 103 and John Marshall High School. When his plans to join the military after graduation fell through, he drove tractor-trailers and dump trucks before switching to food service. He managed a kitchen at a nursing home for a while, and was a shift manager at Popeyes and KFC fast-food restaurants. In his late forties when he came to IUPUI, Meyers was hired as a prep cook. His task was to prepare vegetables for the various restaurants at the food court, and for the catering jobs and day-care center Chartwells also serves from this location.

The good news for Indiana is that there are plenty of jobs like Meyers's. The bad news is that they do not pay anywhere near as well as the manufacturing jobs Indiana has lost. A recent report by the Indiana Institute for Working

Duesenberg Automobile Company Factory, Indianapolis

Families showed that the state's employment growth since the recession has been dominated by low-paying jobs. This low-end growth reflects a trend occurring nationally, as our twenty-first-century economy continues to churn out jobs with limited benefits, no security, and rock-bottom wages. Indiana is feeling the pain more than most. U.S. Census Bureau data show that only two other states saw larger increases in income inequality in recent years.

These jobs place large burdens on the workers who have them, and it did not take long for Meyers to begin noticing problems in the IUPUI workplace. Some of his fellow cooks were making barely more than minimum wage, and the health insurance offered by Chartwells was so costly that no workers he knew were actually enrolled in the plan. Meyers and his colleagues were promised two breaks each shift, plus a thirty-minute lunch. But the kitchen was chronically understaffed, and the breaks rarely occurred. When his colleague in vegetable prep fell ill and had to leave work for several months, management refused to get Meyers some replacement help. Other colleagues, he discovered, were also working multiple roles without any increase in pay. When workers complained about problems like these, management told them to deal with it or look for another job.

Just as Meyers's prep-cook duties finally began to stabilize, he was pulled aside by a Chartwells manager and ordered to switch jobs. The move took him to the front of the food court and offered more responsibilities—but no increase in pay. Meyers said he would prefer to stay in his cook role. He was told to accept the move or be fired. "I had trouble keeping my peace with that," Meyers says.

But things would soon change. Sometime before this episode, Meyers and a handful of other Chartwells IUPUI workers had begun meeting with an organizer for the hospitality workers union UNITE HERE. The union's Local 23 had already organized food-service workers at Indianapolis International Airport and had negotiated contracts with Chartwells at other locations around the country. Meyers was angry at the company for its treatment of him and his coworkers at IUPUI, but he had no previous experience with unions. He had his doubts. "I'd heard all kinds of things about unions, that they just want to take your money, and that unions are for lazy people," he says. "So I was pretty reluctant." But after many conversations with his coworkers and some soul-searching, Meyers decided he was in. He was tired of going from job to job in his life. "I just wanted my job to change," he says. "I wanted to stay here and make this job better."

In time, nearly three-quarters of the Chartwells IUPUI workers signed cards expressing their desire to join the union, and in September 2011, the union effort went public when a delegation of workers, joined by supportive IUPUI students and faculty, paid a visit to Chartwells management. The group of nearly thirty people gathered in the food court, and led by James Meyers, they walked to the manager's office and knocked on the door. The manager—the same manager who had told Meyers to accept his transfer and extra duties or look for another job—opened the door, and his eyes widened. "He was very surprised, and he said to me, 'Why do you have all these people here?'" Meyers recalls. "I said, 'Because we want to have a union and all these people support what we are doing.'" Meyers smiles at the memory. "We finally got a chance to talk to him without him brushing us off. He had to listen this time."

Soon after that show of solidarity, Chartwells agreed to recognize the union. Negotiations began over a contract, and at first things did not go well. The company's initial offer proposed no raises at all for the first year, then just 10 cents an hour in year two. The workers rejected the offer and began wearing buttons to work that read, "RESPECT." The company came back to the table, and eventually offered a contract that included annual pay raises, paid sick and vacation days, a 401(k) retirement plan, and recognition of seniority in transfers and overtime. As part of the offer, health insurance costs would be cut and guaranteed to decrease each year.

On February 1, 2012, the IUPUI workers gathered to vote on the contract proposal. It was not the only union activity in Indianapolis that day. Thousands of union members and supporters from across the Midwest had gathered in angry protest on the steps of the Indiana Statehouse. The occasion was the Indiana General Assembly's consideration of "right to work" legislation, a law that allows workers to opt out of paying union fees even when they benefit from collective bargaining. For weeks, labor advocates had held rallies outside the building and in the hallways between the legislative chambers. But the Indiana Senate ignored the clamor and passed the right-to-work law anyway. The vote made Indiana the twenty-third state in the United States to adopt the rule—and the first to do so in the country's Rust Belt, where union-staffed manufacturing was once a dominant feature of the economy. The setback was just one of many blows inflicted on Indiana unions in recent decades. As recently as 1989, about twenty percent of Indiana workers belonged to a union; today barely 9 percent of the state's workforce is unionized. In 2005, Indiana's governor eliminated collective bargaining for state employees. Republicans hostile to union efforts currently have supermajorities of both houses of the Indiana General Assembly.

In such an environment, every victory is significant; as one Indianapolis-based organizer of service-sector workers says, "If we can win here, we can win anywhere." As it happened, on the very day labor took it on the chin in the Indiana Senate's right-to-work vote, the IUPUI workers voted overwhelmingly to approve their first-ever collective bargaining agreement. Soon afterward, James Meyers became a union shop steward, and half the staff signed up for the improved health insurance. They were thrilled with the wage increases, new benefits, and recognition for seniority. But for Meyers and many others, what meant the most was the intangible boost that came with finally being treated as a partner at the workplace.

Meyers and his colleagues are not the only Indianapolis workers to feel the strength of a new union affiliation. At Marian University and Butler University, private colleges located on the North side of Indianapolis, maintenance and food-service workers for the contractor Aramark have won union recognition and first-ever contracts. At Marian, a Franciscan institution, workers were supported by clergy and lay people citing the church's long history of support for living wages and workplace organizing. Indianapolis International Airport food-service workers also voted for UNITE HERE recognition and negotiated contracts with three companies staffing restaurants and stores. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has been organizing local security guards and janitors for several years, and recently began organizing Indiana home health-care workers.

As is the case nationally, the Indianapolis efforts by low-wage workers go beyond the boundaries of traditional workplace organizing. The national "Fight for 15" campaign to raise the wages of fast-food and retail workers has included a lively presence in Indianapolis, with community supporters, union activists, and low-wage workers engaging in high-profile demonstrations. An energetic campaign for citizenship for undocumented immigrants, funded by the local Roman Catholic archdiocese and fueled in large part by the activism of Latino Catholics, is integrated into the

CELEBRATION

Light began in September to streak the slant.
Now it unseals in the spring, willfully singing the realm of separate design.
It picks up the speed of streaming recall
and takes us off post-equinox able to signify.

Or so I guess: Ninety is old, I
keep telling myself, so behave! And I'm older, 94. It is the look of happy
95, blue, grey though cold. It gives
a green expectation and I taste.

—Marie Ponsot

Marie Ponsot recently received the Aiken Taylor Award for poetry, given annually by Sewanee Review. Collected Poems *(Knopf) will appear in 2015. In 2013, she was awarded the Ruth Lily Prize for lifetime achievement by the Poetry Foundation.*

low-wage workers' campaigns. The first contracts earned by Indianapolis-area service-sector workers have not included remarkable increases in wages, but they do significantly increase access to benefits and enshrine seniority rights and grievance procedures that boost job security. Union members hope that these contracts reflect a traditional pattern in labor organizing, in which contracts are significantly improved in subsequent negotiations.

Many economists, academics, and labor professionals share that optimism. In fact, they view service-sector workers like James Meyers as the future of the U.S. labor movement. As the weed-choked parking lots of abandoned Indiana factories sadly demonstrate, many manufacturing jobs have left the United States or been eliminated by automation. But washing dishes, cleaning bathrooms, and caring for the housebound elderly cannot be outsourced to a Bangladeshi sweatshop, assembly-line robot, or overseas call center. And many of the employers of service-sector workers—including multinational hotel chains and food-service or building-cleaning companies—are earning healthy profits and can afford to pay better wages and provide better benefits. History, both nationally and in Indiana, suggests no reason why service-sector jobs cannot evolve into middle-class employment. Indeed, the region's now-mourned manufacturing jobs were once characterized by back-breaking, low-wage work. Early- to mid-twentieth-century union activism transformed those jobs into careers that enabled workers to buy homes, send their kids to college, and join the American middle class. Can janitors, fry cooks, and health-care aides blaze the same path now?

The unions organizing these workers say yes. UNITE HERE points to significantly higher wages earned by its 270,000 unionized hospitality workers across the country, while SEIU makes similar claims for its 2 million-plus members. But in Indiana it has been a struggle. UNITE HERE's eight-year campaign to organize the city's hotel workers has not yet broken through. Some union activists have lost their jobs in the process, and Indianapolis remains one of the country's largest cities without a single unionized hotel. The SEIU campaigns have had similarly mixed results. Most Indianapolis-area home-care workers, security guards, and janitors are not unionized, and most of those who are still receive low wages and limited benefits. The wage increases and benefit access negotiated by UNITE HERE for the airport and IUPUI workers are better than what the workers had before they organized, but some of those workers still struggle to make ends meet. And some of the "Fight for 15" leaders, who helped drive the conversation on living wages with their media-friendly one-day strikes, lost their jobs in the days and weeks after the TV cameras went away.

Yet all the organizing effort has led to undeniable improvement at several Indiana service-sector workplaces, including the IUPUI food court. A couple of months after the IUPUI contract was ratified, a Chartwells worker was moved into a higher classification job. Though the company's contract with the union called for a pay increase of $1.50 an hour for that new role, the manager proposed just an extra 50 cents an hour. When James Meyers was told about the situation, he made plans to meet with the manager. A half-dozen fellow workers agreed to accompany him. By the time Meyers reached the office door, three times that number were behind him.

Meyers confronted the manager and demanded the full raise for the worker. The manager said he would look into it. Unsatisfied with that response, the group took a few turns marching around the office area before leaving, chanting "We'll be back! We'll be back!"

They did not have to return. The next day, the manager gave the transferred worker her full raise. ■

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Contraception & Honesty

A Proposal for the Next Synod

Peter Steinfels

Perhaps the most important moment of last October's Extraordinary Synod on the Family occurred at its very beginning—when Pope Francis insisted that "speaking honestly" was the bishops' basic responsibility: No topics or viewpoints should be out of bounds. "It is necessary to say all that, in the Lord, one feels the need to say: without polite deference, without hesitation."

I doubt that everyone present was able to live up to that plea. For not a few bishops, self-censorship has become second nature, especially when speaking publicly with other bishops, and infinitely so when in the earshot of the pope.

Fortunately, that was not true in many cases, or the synod would not have made headlines with the several highly controversial topics served up and batted back and forth: reception of Communion by the divorced-and-remarried, cohabitation, even same-sex relationships. But could engrained inhibition have accounted for the glaring gap in the synod's work? I refer to the apparent lack of attention to the question of contraception. Why did the synod appear to treat so perfunctorily the issue that was, and is, the starting point for the unraveling of Catholic confidence in the church's sexual ethics and even its credibility about marriage? To which, of course, one could add further questions about this baffling silence: Does it even matter? And if it does matter, are there grounds for hoping that the bishops who will be gathering in Rome next fall to complete the synod's work can do better?

A lot rests on the answers to these questions. A synod that grabs headlines about remarried or cohabiting or same-sex Catholic couples but says nothing fresh about the spectacularly obvious rift between official teaching and actual behavior in Catholic married life is an invitation to cynicism. It could prove to be a crucial test of Pope Francis's papacy.

Pope Francis greets cardinals at the beatification Mass of Blessed Paul VI, which concluded last October's Synod on the Family.

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

I.

The interim report of last October's synod was startling in its candor about matters commonly considered beyond discussion, yet that controversial report's extensive description of "socio-cultural context" and "pastoral challenges" regarding the family made no reference whatsoever to contraception. The subject was belatedly and perfunctorily addressed, almost as an afterthought to all the more controversial issues: "Realistic language" and "listening to people," the synod fathers had reportedly proposed, are needed for "acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life" and for "an appropriate teaching regarding the natural methods of human reproduction, which allow a couple to live in a harmonious and conscious manner the communication between husband and wife, in all its aspects, along with their responsibility at procreating life. In this regard, we should return to the message of the encyclical *Humanae vitae* of Pope Paul VI, which highlights the need to respect the dignity of the person in the moral evaluation of the methods of regulating births."

This language, sandwiched between concerns about declining birthrates and "affectivity" in marriage, echoed the pre-synod *lineamenta*, almost phrase-by-phrase. And with an added reference to adoption, it was echoed in turn by the final synod report. From start to finish, these documents gave little evidence of any discussion. Nor did the press conferences indicate any lively attention to contraception, taken up as they were by the headline-grabbing topics. The only exception to this neglect seemed to be the testimony to the synod of a well-chosen Brazilian couple, Arturo and Hermalinde As Zamberline, married forty-one years with three children, and active in a movement devoted to the spirituality of marriage. The couple stressed that even within their movement many religiously serious Catholic couples rejected *Humanae vitae*, as do, they added, "the vast majority" of Catholic married people generally. This unpalatable news was sweetened by the couple's own endorsement of the encyclical and fervent advocacy of Natural Family Planning.

It is also hard to reconcile Pope Francis's insistence on "speaking honestly" with the code language used throughout these documents. There are numerous references to "openness to life," "unconditional openness to life," "openness to the gift of children," "respect" for "the dignity of the person in morally assessing methods in regulating births," the "very act of opening itself to the generation of life," and so on. The sexual meaning is clear and yet the phrases can be stretched to encompass all sorts of generous giving of oneself quite beyond the sexual. The result is a terminology at once edifying and obfuscating.

To their credit, the Zamberlines diverged just enough from this vague, exalted language. First, they gave some glimpse of the concrete importance of sexuality in married life, and, second, they identified the specific issue at stake. Quoting John Paul II's statement in *Familiaris consortio* that "the fundamental task of matrimony and the family is to be at the service of life," the couple continued with a reference to *Humanae vitae*, "and, therefore, 'every marital act must remain open to the transmission of life.'" It is precisely in that "therefore" that the whole debate lies.

The Zamberlines did not point that out, of course. Generally, they trod a fine line, professing complete fidelity to *Humanae vitae* and to Natural Family Planning, yet delivering the hard news that this teaching was not likely

to be accepted without some great "pastoral pedagogy...to adopt and observe the [encyclical's] principles" and "an easy and safe orientation, which responds to the needs of the present-day world, without wounding what is essential of Catholic morality." What exactly would be that pedagogy, those principles, that easy and safe orientation responding to present reality without wounding essential Catholic morality? The couple did not attempt to say; nor, it seems, did the synod.

One other attempt to raise the question of contraception at least somewhat straightforwardly appeared in the "Report Prior to Discussion" prepared by Cardinal Péter Erdő, archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and primate of Hungary. (As the synod's relator general, he was the official author of the controversial mid-synod report.) Presented on the opening day, this initial report was intended to summarize responses to the preparatory documents. In a sub-section, "Topics Relating to *Humanae vitae*," Cardinal Erdő proposed that to surface its "positive message," the encyclical "needs to be reread" using "a suitable historical hermeneutic, which knows how to grasp historical factors and concerns underlying its writing by Paul VI." From Pope Paul's poignant statement at a July 31, 1968, audience recounting the anguishing labor and prayer that lay behind the encyclical, Cardinal Erdő quoted a few sentences that seemed to downplay the document's moral prohibition, acknowledge the encyclical's incompleteness, and put it in the context of the "law of gradualness" later noted in John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio*.

Other preparatory material for the synod accurately reported Catholics' massive rejection of *Humanae vitae* and the natural-law reasoning it reflected. Ascribing this to "secularization" and lack of education, the *instrumentum laboris*, for example, avoided any hint that the pastoral challenge posed by this testimony from both laity and clergy might be to reexamine the teaching. Inevitably the pastoral challenge was framed as one of educating and guiding the faithful. In other words, exactly what has been called for time and again for almost half a century.

II.

Why this complacency, especially in contrast to the boldness of the discussion on other topics? Perhaps many of the synod fathers considered the whole controversy a dead letter: Why revive it? If *Humanae vitae* might have been the leading reason for the sharp decline in Mass attendance in the 1970s, as Andrew Greeley concluded for the United States, that was perhaps a one-time event. The decline eased, even though it never stopped. More than twenty years ago, interviewing young Catholics for a *New York Times* story on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Humanae vitae*, I found that most knew virtually nothing about it. They took the morality of contraception for granted. Most of their parents had reached the same conclusion, perhaps with some conscientious wrestling. One of the findings about contraception that seemed to distress those preparing the synod was not merely that Catholics massively rejected *Humanae vitae*'s condemnation of contraception but that they did so with such good conscience, neither seeking absolution nor staying away from Communion.

It might have been tempting, then, to think that battles over contraception were done and over with, the whole question fated to disappear. Yes, Pope John Paul II appeared to double down on Paul VI's condemnation. Yes, an outspoken minority saw it as the litmus test separating the sheep ("faithful Catholics") from the goats ("dissenters"), some even arguing that it was an infallible teaching. Meanwhile the vast majority of Catholics so steadily went their own way that to make much of a fuss about contraception came to seem, well, a bit embarrassing. That topic again? Oh, please! The less said about it, the better. Especially at a synod. And especially because much of the world seems to have moved on—to treating premarital sex as routine, legalizing same-sex relationships, and celebrating sexual transgression in the arts and entertainment.

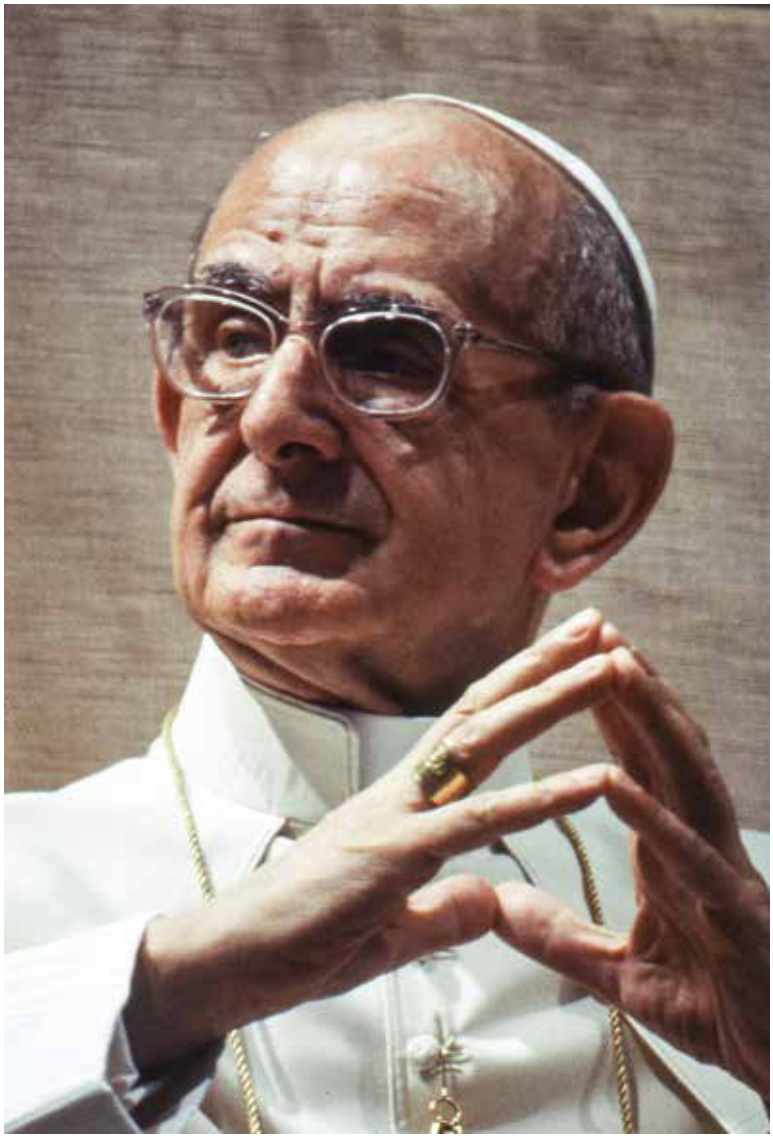
> The reasoning underlying *Humanae vitae*'s exceptionless condemnation of contraception does not rest on the effectiveness of NFP or its potential for spiritual growth and moral harmony. The key argument made in *Humanae vitae* about each and every act of sexual intimacy would be just as true—or just as false—if the only alternatives to constant or dangerous pregnancies were separate bedrooms.

That temptation should be resisted. *Humanae vitae* itself and the theological civil war once surrounding it may now be as unfamiliar to most Catholics as Pope Innocent III's 1215 condemnation of the Magna Carta as "shameful and demeaning" or the nineteenth-century demands for restoration of the papal states. Yet bitter and sometimes tragic stories of mothers torn between risking death by additional pregnancy and unyielding talk of hell by confessors are still told. Timothy Egan's powerful *New York Times* column about his own mother last January was one example. And one way or the other Catholics learn, often in distorted versions, that the church is "against" birth control ("Catholics believe that the only purpose of sexual intercourse is procreation"). This may no longer drive people from the pews; but if they find

such notions unintelligible, it inserts a wedge into their relationship with Catholicism, a wedge that then extends to all manner of other teachings about sexuality, and sometimes more broadly to teachings on marriage and abortion. If priests, especially fresh and inexperienced ones, denounce contraception from the pulpit, skepticism can turn into anger. If priests pass over the teaching in silence, whether in the pulpit or the confessional, gratitude is nonetheless tinged with a corrosive suspicion that the church is duplicitous.

This hemorrhaging of confidence in the integrity of Catholic moral teaching is only one cost of the sweeping condemnation stated in paragraphs 11 and 14 of *Humanae vitae*. That condemnation remains a source of anguish for many confessors, a source of tension for many moral theologians, and a source of disqualification for otherwise promising candidates for church leadership. Avery Dulles, SJ, a papal loyalist whose theological centrism would later earn him a cardinal's hat, said all these things to the bishops back in 1993. The gap between insistence on the condemnation and its widespread rejection has introduced a serious element of dissembling at all levels of the church.

Not unreasonably, the 2014 synod addressing "the challenge of the family in the context of evangelization" repeatedly recognized that the primary evangelizers of Catholic teaching on the family would be Catholic families themselves. What went unacknowledged was how unlikely *Humanae vitae*'s condemnation of contraception made this. Harboring serious doubts about the church's understanding of sexuality hardly prepares parents to wholeheartedly "evangelize" their own children, let alone their culture, about the tradition's larger wisdom regarding love, desire, marriage, and family. A Catholic church divided against itself over contraception has been effectively sidelined from the high-stakes debates about sexuality roiling many societies. So much for all the talk of the church's stance as "prophetic."



Pope Paul VI

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There is a sobering analogy from the age of the Enlightenment. One astute historian of that period, Dale K. Van Kley, has written that from the perspective of Paris, "the reputed capital of the Enlightenment, the eighteenth century may be as plausibly christened the century of *Unigenitus* as of *lumières*." *Unigenitus*? Hardly any contemporary Catholics can identify this 1713 papal pronouncement on the "heresies" of Jansenists in their battles with Jesuits. Those battles were not theologically trivial. But to think that the ecclesiastical, social, and political conflicts surrounding this papal bull were more preoccupying and internally divisive than the assault on the church and faith mounted by Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and the Encyclopedistes is mind-boggling. Will some future historian conclude that in the age of globalization, economic disruption, boom and bust, religious violence, ecological danger, and mass migration and displacement, Catholic energy and authority pivoted around *Humanae vitae*? Indeed, in regard to sexuality itself, now contested on every continent in one dimension or another, from battling rape and abuse to yearning for the Dionysian, will that future historian marvel that all that the church could have said had to begin with this one encyclical's judgment on contraception?

These are the consequences that should be contemplated by any synod fathers who imagine that the issue of contraception no longer matters. Of course, some synod fathers may be influenced by another impression—namely, that even if the condemnation of contraception is no longer a live issue for many Catholics, it is carved in granite for many bishops. No matter the testimony of Catholics, no matter the destructive consequences for the life of the church, no matter remaining questions for third-world poverty or

combatting AIDS. There are simply too many in the ranks of the hierarchy, it is felt, including perhaps Pope Francis himself, who just cannot contemplate any return to the question. At least some accommodation can be made on Communion for the divorced and remarried or on pastoral attitudes toward cohabiting or same-sex couples. About contraception, biting one's tongue is the better part of valor.

If this is the situation, it is a very strange one indeed. All the former issues raise considerations much more radical than those raised by contraception: the indissolubility of marriage and the morality of sexual relationships outside of it. Is it the case that so many bishops have been appointed precisely because of their support for *Humanae vitae* that they are capable of flexibility on any other matter but that one? For them, is it thinkable to entertain questions about applying Jesus' words on divorce and remarriage in Scripture itself but not about Paul VI's words on contraception in a 1968 encyclical?

III.

At this point, it is essential to recall exactly what this debate is—and is not—about.

It is not about the "contraceptive mentality," not about "openness to life," not about hostility to children or a refusal to have any. "Contraceptive mentality," so roundly denounced by everyone, is an ill-defined term. It has been used to cover everything from acceptance of marital infidelity, degradation of women, a selfish refusal of the sacrifices incumbent upon having and raising children, and even resort to abortion. If the synod wants to condemn such conduct, fine. But that is not what caused the rejection of the church's teaching by millions of Catholics who were palpably open to life, who were already parents doing their loving, sacrificial best to raise children, or who were young people looking forward to doing so.

Nor is the debate about Humanae vitae *in its entirety, with its many insights and warnings.* When I taught courses at Georgetown University on "Change and Conflict in Twentieth-Century Catholicism," *Humanae vitae* was required reading. Inevitably, a good number of students were impressed by the encyclical's sentiments about love, marriage, and sex. (I hope that the growth of the so-called hook-up culture in the past fifteen years would not make their successors more cynical.) They were also impressed with the encyclical's warnings about potential misuses of humanity's new powers over sexuality, although I personally believe that the document was far less "prophetic" than its advocates like to stress: it came, after all, when the Sexual Revolution was well on its way, and plenty of others, not necessarily opposed to contraception, had earlier voiced concerns about the morally disruptive consequences of separating sexuality from reproduction. But none of this triggered the massive turmoil surrounding the encyclical. That turmoil centered on several passages that condemned as "intrinsically evil" any act or means "specifically intended to prevent procreation" in any instance whatsoever of sexual intercourse ("each and every marital act")—even "to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family, or of society," even "when the reasons...appear to be upright and serious."

The debate is not about Natural Family Planning. (I use the capital letters to circumvent the argument that for human beings the use of pharmaceuticals or mechanical devices is just as "natural" as the use of thermometers and calendars.) *Humanae vitae* and *Familiaris consortio* go to great lengths (critics would say contortions) to distinguish forbidden contraception from Natural Family Planning and to praise the latter. In some circles, Natural Family Planning has been proselytized as an eighth wonder of the world, if not a kind of eighth sacrament. NFP is celebrated as highly reliable not only in spacing births but also in fostering marital communication and sexual sensitivity. The enthusiasm, frequently bordering on exaltation, is easy to parody, but I don't doubt that NFP not only works for many couples but that its regimen and periodic abstinence can be spiritually meaningful and maritally enriching. This may also be true for Orthodox Jewish couples who observe the complicated restrictions of sexual conduct surrounding menstruation and other circumstances. It may be true of many couples whose occupations impose regular rhythms or extended periods of abstinence.

I have my skepticism about these matters. Last year a book titled *The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning* by Simcha Fisher (*Our Sunday Visitor*) came my way. The author, a blogger and contributor to the *National Catholic Register*, writes in the Erma Bombeck mode, self-deprecating and hyperbolic. I liked her. I trusted her. Yet amid the wit and common sense and apologetics about NFP, more than a few glimpses of genuine marital and spiritual ugliness poke through. One learns from her book and other NFP sources that the method is no guard against the specter of "contraceptive mentality"—and worse. And this says nothing about the workability of NFP in those billions of impoverished and burdened households that Pope Francis won't let us forget.

But set all that aside. Assume the best about NFP. Commend and encourage all who find it valuable and beneficial. It remains the case that the reasoning underlying *Humanae vitae*'s exceptionless condemnation of contraception does not rest on the effectiveness of NFP or its potential for spiritual growth and moral harmony. The key argument made in *Humanae vitae* about each and every act of sexual intimacy would be just as true—or just as false—if the only alternatives to constant or dangerous pregnancies were separate bedrooms or old-fashioned "Vatican roulette" or not even that.

The debate is not about birthrates, aging populations, exploding populations, Malthusianism, or neo-colonialism. These are

Bishops and cardinals attending a morning session of the Synod on the Family.

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

all legitimate concerns with moral significance. But again the argument of *Humanae vitae* either stands or falls quite independently of them. The church may very well want to encourage larger families or discourage "breeding like rabbits"; the church may call for material, educational, familial, or communal resources allowing mothers and fathers to raise more children or plan for fewer. Those are different matters than the judgment that all resort to contraception is intrinsically evil. They should not be pretexts or rhetorical distractions for not examining that judgment.

Two ways of deflecting that responsibility are very much in the air breathed by the synod fathers. One stems from the fact that part of the context for Pope John XXIII's establishment of a Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family, and Births in March 1963 was a wave of alarm over global population growth. Some of the more dire predictions, like the original Malthus's, proved wildly off the mark, a development seized upon by outspoken defenders of *Humanae vitae* as vindication of the encyclical's wisdom. This triumphalism verges on hypocrisy. If population growth now appears more manageable (not that associated problems have disappeared), it is hardly because the world has observed *Humanae vitae* or adopted Natural Family Planning. What has succeeded is not the encyclical but its disregard: the steady acceptance of contraception in many cultures plus the draconian and morally disgraceful one-child population in China.

The second, more understandable diversion from the difficult issue of contraception is the resentment by many church leaders in the developing world of Western (especially U.S.-led) efforts, in conjunction with local family-planning advocates, to make contraceptives legally and practically available. This is easily viewed as a form of neocolonialism, lumped together with a host of other economic and cultural pressures disrupting vulnerable societies. *Humanae vitae* is seen less in terms of its specific contested argument than as part of a defensive barrier to protect vulnerable societies against intrusions by the powerful and destructive West. Unfortunately, this kind of opposition is indiscriminate and too often allied with oppressive values (e.g., patriarchy) and myopic about who pays the price of the local status quo (e.g., women). It is also probably fated to go the way of Pius IX's indiscriminate denunciation of "progress, liberalism, and modern civilization"—and with similar cost to the faith.

IV.

Once the real issue is acknowledged, what can the upcoming synod do about it? How can the synod fathers, in a two-week session, realistically address a problem that has been festering since 1968?

They should begin, as Pope Francis pleaded, by speaking honestly. The synod fathers should recognize the absurdity of taking on profoundly challenging issues, issues touching on ancient understandings of marriage, while averting their eyes from a teaching that, despite links to other moral questions, is relatively modern and narrow—and yet has had vast pastoral consequences, dividing the church, eroding faith, and destroying confidence in the tradition's moral wisdom, especially about conduct at the heart of marriage and family life. Drop the code language. Allow other voices to be heard alongside those ardent about Natural Family Planning. Stop treating all rejection of *Humanae vitae*

as merely a problem to be solved rather than testimony to be taken seriously.

If the synod fathers find it incumbent to reiterate the standing teaching, they should do so straightforwardly, not tucking its absolute condemnation into an appeal for better means of "acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life." The fathers ought to say clearly that all couples employing contraception, regardless of their reasons or circumstances, "degrade" human sexuality, themselves, and their spouses (*Familiaris consortio*). Traditionally, this was gravely sinful conduct barring couples from receiving Communion in the absence of confession and absolution. The synod should clarify whether that remains the church's position.

But in the process of reaching this or any revised conclusion, the synod fathers should not let their courage suddenly collapse in the face of papal statements. If at all versed in church history, they know that many papal texts from the past two centuries, even the past century or less, indeed even positions affirmed by successive pontiffs, have been corrected or reread to lift up certain points and discard others in light of subsequent experience and theological reflection. I am confident that the synod would not endorse much of the wording of *Casti connubii*, the ur-condemnation of birth control, today. Yet that encyclical was issued only a long lifetime ago; Benedict XVI was three when it appeared.

If the synod fathers find it incumbent to reiterate the standing teaching, they should do so straightforwardly, not tucking its absolute condemnation into an appeal for better means of "acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life."

When Pope Francis insisted that the synod fathers feel free to speak "without polite deference," there is no sign that he was excepting deference to himself. That is all the more important because, in his blessedly refreshing spontaneous manner, he has said all sorts of things possibly pertinent to contraception, praising Paul VI and *Humanae vitae*, warning against irresponsible breeding "like rabbits," lauding large families, and so on. On the eve of the synod, he will travel to the United States and stop in Philadelphia following the World Meeting of Families, an occasion likely to elicit more such utterances. All of them deserve attention. But the synod should focus on freely addressing the question rather than merely adjusting their views to Francis's.

Finally, what if the synod fathers decide that simply reaffirming the blanket condemnation contained in *Humanae vitae* is inadequate to the seriousness of the problem? What can they realistically do in the course of a two-week synod, no matter how extensively prepared? A problem forty-seven years in the making cannot be undone in a dozen days. They could begin, however, with two steps, at once modest and bold, that would help immensely to restore trust in magisterial teaching.

Again, the synod fathers need to demonstrate the virtue Pope Francis asked them to embody: honesty. Their first step would be to acknowledge candidly the pain and division that have wracked the church for decades now over contraception. True, the rejection of an official teaching by so many practicing Catholics is not necessarily determinative—as always, the church doesn't decide doctrine by polls. But this "non-reception" should be recognized as a theologically significant fact, ground for further discernment and not to be filed away as merely the bad fruit of secularization, the media, or insufficient education. The synod might very well praise the loyalty, motivation, and sacrifice of Catholics who heeded papal recommendations of Natural Family Planning, at the same time conceding the moral seriousness of the many devout, churchgoing couples whose informed consciences about moral responsibility and openness to life put them at odds with the papal conclusion about "each and every marital act." The synod fathers might also acknowledge the difficult, sometimes anguishing position that division over contraception has created for many priests. Merely to state these things would be a major step toward restoring the credibility of the church's teaching authority.

The second step would be a pledge of further action. The synod's time is short, after all, and its agenda long. My suggestion is that it urge a renewed study of church teaching on marriage and sexuality, perhaps to mark the fiftieth anniversary of *Humanae vitae* in 2018. One starting point might be Cardinal Erdő's proposal for a rereading of that encyclical like our standard rereadings of nineteenth-century papal pronouncements on church and state. As he suggested, a rereading would underline the encyclical's historical context—presumably as an immediate response to novel contraception techniques like the Pill or increasingly popular intrauterine devices and to the startlingly rapid breakdown of social disapproval of premarital sex.

Another starting point could be the kind of thinking expressed by Benedict XVI when he headed the Holy Office and was interviewed in the mid-1990s by Peter Seewald (*Salt of the Earth*). His defense of church teaching focused

on openness to children as blessings, refusal of the kind of drastic separation of sexuality from procreation one finds in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and recognition that moral problems cannot be resolved by technique or technological manipulation. None of these "major objectives" of church teaching, as he put it, are incompatible with using contraception under some circumstances and to some extent. Certainly they do not imply the absolutism of *Humanae vitae*.

But the study would have to reach well beyond the encyclical and contraception in scope. It would have to address sexuality in general. And it would have to welcome the testimony of a full range of morally informed witnesses, theologians and non-theologians, men and women, married and single, vowed, ordained, and lay, stretching across all the continents. Undoubtedly any such study would attend to the loveless, desperate, and so often abusive features of today's sexual landscape, especially for women. It would also confess that the anti-sexual strands in the church's own tradition have harmed its ability to speak convincingly to this confusion and chaos. "Openness to life," it might be argued, includes openness to whatever contemporary insights into sexuality can increase Catholicism's potential for offering wisdom and healing. Openness might also mean that such a study, although not eschewing all clear judgments, could propose questions for additional exploration rather than pretend to some exhaustive moral codification.

Any pledge of further study and reflection faces an immediate objection. Wasn't it precisely the prolonged work of the papal commission under Popes John XXIII and Paul VI—followed by the fifteen months between the April 1967 leak of a majority report supporting change and the July 1968 encyclical ruling change out—that led Catholics to decide the matter for themselves without regard to Rome? Wouldn't the proposal for a renewed study simply repeat this dynamic?

As a practical matter, no. For a great many Catholics in the mid-1960s, the default position was either to spurn contraception or to use it (as birthrates indicate many had been doing) with a guilty conscience. Today the default position is the reverse. What is primarily at stake is no longer changing behavior or conviction, for contraception or against, but articulating a coherent and persuasive stance on sexuality, marriage, and family, drawing on Scripture, tradition, and human reasoning, embracing openness to life while placing moral responsibility in conceiving children firmly within that larger framework rather than as an isolated decision driving everything else.

The Catholic world—and not only the Catholic world—has placed great hope in the Synod on the Family. That great hope deserves an equal degree of honesty, insight, courage, and creativity. ■

Peter Steinfels, *a former editor of Commonweal, is the author of* A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America.

Celia Wren

Road to Nowhere

'MAD MEN'

Jon Hamm as Don Draper

Anyone who has watched all seven seasons of AMC's *Mad Men* might have found some irony in a striking image from one of the show's final episodes. After abruptly leaving the advertising agency he helped to build, we see a stone-faced Don Draper driving across middle America. He stops to pick up a hitchhiker. The camera pans to take in the flat rural landscape. David Bowie's "Space Oddity" begins to play. Flanked by cultivated fields and telephone poles, the highway stretches ahead, straight as an arrow, not a twist or turn in sight. If only the show itself—which began with such promise—had shown such sure direction.

From its central narrative vision—a conjuring of 1960s advertising staffers at work and play—some plotlines meandered this way and that, only to hit a dead end. Colorful characters appeared, stealing focus from the leads, then vanished. Remember the enigmatic, smarmy up-and-comer Bob Benson? The closeted art director Salvatore Romano? The young priest, Fr. Gill, whose friendship with Peggy Olson seemed so poignant in the aftermath of her hushed-up pregnancy? These and other figures and storylines ended up going nowhere.

It should be noted that, because of *Commonweal*'s publishing schedule, I am writing before the show's final two episodes have aired. It is possible that show creator Matthew Weiner and his colleagues will tie up all the dangling narrative threads in a powerful conclusion. But even if they should achieve such an improbable triumph, the fact remains that, for too many seasons, *Mad Men* has seemed exasperatingly diffuse.

The flaw was all the more apparent because, in its first year, *Mad Men* displayed so much momentum. The show's initial claim to fame was its gleefully ogling portrayal of a recent but alien past—a time when smoking and workday drinking were casually accepted, and the sexual harassment of secretaries was business as usual. For twenty-first-century audiences, exoticism is hard to come by. What passes for exotic these days is the past, and *Mad Men* turned its lens on that past with unflinching glee. (The meticulous art direction and costume design were always invaluable in this regard.)

But the strangeness of the 1960s milieu was not just for gawking; it also added to the show's suspense. Watching the initial season, you were always aware that the tale's pre-feminist, pre-political-correctness dispensation was about to expire. The broodingly tense dynamics of the suburban Draper household—home to Don Draper (Jon Hamm), his unhappy wife Betty (January Jones) and their children—always seemed on the verge of combustion. It wasn't until the final season, which takes place in 1970, when the women of *Mad Men* showed signs of a feminist awakening.

Adding to the suspenseful mood was the matter of Don's momentous secret—the fact that he had grown up as the dirt-poor Dick Whitman, before switching identities with a deceased serviceman at an opportune moment during the Korean War. The imposter theme seemed to add to the show's dark, mythic dimension. Don was not just an impossibly handsome, chronic philanderer with a genius for PR—the activity that often seems to have worked its tentacles into every aspect of modern culture. Don was also a Jay Gatsby–style figure whose adventures echoed the American dream: Be anyone you want to be.

But the double-identity story fell by the wayside too. Don went from being mysteriously interesting to frustratingly opaque—a quality reinforced by Hamm's (perhaps deliberate) inexpressive acting style. Always an enigmatic figure, Don never gave the series much of an emotional through-line. Partly as a result, the show's flood of anecdotes and small stories, featuring larger characters like the amiable rapscallion Roger Sterling (John Slattery) and the sultry office manager Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks), as well as pleasingly idiosyncratic smaller ones (the aforementioned Bob Benson, et al.), often felt shapeless. Of course, history itself inevitably provided some structure; but the scenes that registered public events—the assassination of John F. Kennedy; the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.; the moon landing—often seemed more perfunctory than thoughtful.

To be fair, the story of Peggy (Elisabeth Moss), the ambitious but vulnerable secretary-turned-copywriter-turned-creative-force, has always had a discernable contour. And, given Moss's knack for infusing the character with loneliness, awkwardness, yearning, and sometimes arrogance, that story has always been affecting. As Don set out in his Cadillac, in the lead-up to the show's conclusion, Peggy's career looked set to founder amid the sexism of the workplace. Despite the shortcomings of the storytelling in previous seasons, I couldn't help hoping that Weiner would pull off a feat of narrative synthesis—a final episode that would knit Peggy's saga, and all the other storylines, into a gratifying finale. ■

AMC

Andrew J. Bacevich

Mowing the Grass

Kill Chain
The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins
Andrew Cockburn
Henry Holt and Company, $28, 310 pp.

In this imperfect but exceedingly useful book, Andrew Cockburn explains how targeted assassination became an emblem of contemporary U.S. foreign policy. In the course of doing so, he makes a strong case that the results, whether achieved by relying on missile-firing drones or by employing commando raids, have been politically counterproductive and morally disastrous.

A seasoned journalist long based in Washington, Cockburn comes from an Anglo-Irish family whose members possess a Waugh-like aptitude for the English language. Siblings, spouses, offspring—seemingly all make their living in ways centered on the written or spoken word. Family Scrabble games must be a hoot.

In *Kill Chain*—the title refers to the various phases of an attack from target identification to actual destruction—Cockburn describes a convergence of political frustration and technological utopianism, with U.S. policymakers drawn to the latter as a means of cutting through the complexities of the former and thereby (presumably) keeping Americans safe. Yet as the author makes clear, the motives of those involved extend beyond considerations of national security. Factors such as personal ambition, bureaucratic rivalry, and corporate profits always form part of the mix as well.

The technological utopianism, which dates back at least to Vietnam, derives from the conviction that information holds the key to enhancing the efficacy of force. Throughout history, war has been messy, confusing, costly, and fraught with risk. Exploiting advanced technology to collect, analyze, and harness ever-growing quantities of information will invest war with predictability, precision, greater economy, and vastly greater utility. That's the expectation anyway.

The political frustration stems from the challenges inherent in translating superior power into effective leverage. Getting the other side to submit, play by the rules, or just shut up isn't as easy as it looks. The past is replete with examples of history, culture, religion, ideology, and identity complicating disputes that appeared straightforward when comparing the relative strength of opposing armies or battle fleets. For the United States, this has been a source of abiding exasperation. Time and again, peasants, revolutionaries, fanatics, and thugs with resources that pale in comparison to the Pentagon's have defied the dictates of a superpower and gotten away with it.

Many decades ago, early proponents of air power pioneered theories that promised to work around such annoying paradoxes. The key, they argued, is to identify—and then destroy—"critical nodes" essential to sustaining the enemy's war-making potential. This describes the logic of strategic bombing, which began not as a means to flatten cities and kill civilians, but as an effort to reduce the unbridled violence characterizing the conduct of industrial-age warfare. Taking out select targets on which the enemy's capacity to wage war depended—oil-storage facilities, rail networks, ball-bearing factories—would produce victory more quickly, they believed, and with less bloodshed than more conventional methods.

Alas, translating theory into practice proved difficult, as the experience

of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and other late-twentieth-century conflicts made plain. Nonetheless, with promotion prospects, budget share, and lucrative defense contracts all at stake, the dream refused to die. Indeed, with the development of precision guided munitions and enhanced surveillance capabilities toward the end of the last century, it enjoyed a rebirth.

The ability to deliver ordnance with unerring accuracy redefined the meaning of critical node. Cockburn quotes one U.S. Air Force general bragging, "We can now hit any target anywhere in the world, any time, any weather, day or night." Yet why bother with bombing bridges, power plants, or communications facilities, when taking out Mr. Big himself provides the definitive shortcut to victory? Here was the ultimate critical node: Decapitate the regime. As an approach to waging war, what could be more humane, not to mention efficient?

Implementing this concept required overcoming certain scruples, achieved by adopting euphemisms such as "targeted killing" in place of assassination and inventing "high-value individuals" or HVI as a category of persons marked for liquidation. Yet by the time the Iraq War of 2003–2011, which began with an unsuccessful attempt to grease Saddam Hussein, assassination had become integral to the prosecution of Washington's global war on terrorism.

The problem, as Cockburn convincingly shows, is that results have fallen well short of expectations. Eliminating Mr. Big doesn't resolve the issue at hand. It merely paves the way for Mr. Worse. Remove one leader and another appears in his place, probably nastier and more ruthless than his predecessor. Washington's answer: Try harder. Soon enough, the White House roster of those designated to be killed—the Joint Prioritized Effects List or JPEL—started to grow and has kept growing. Already by October 2009, Cockburn writes, it consisted of more than two thousand names.

Over the past decade or so, assassination has become a growth business. As such, it has attracted the attention of

entrepreneurial generals who know opportunity when they see it and of contractors eager to cash in by providing the hardware and software needed to facilitate a global manhunt. U.S. Special Operations Forces, the most rapidly expanding, least visible, and least accountable part of the military, has carved out for itself a large part of the action.

Cockburn writes that insiders now refer to targeted killing as "mowing the grass." Notably, Israelis use the same expression to describe their recurring efforts to suppress entities such as Hamas. As with lawn care, the chore promises to be never-ending. To extend the metaphor, wherever they go, the mowers leave behind a trail of fertilizer: resentments caused by killing bystanders instead of, or along with, the intended target make the grass come back all the faster.

Information exists in abundance. The air force alone vacuums up the equivalent of "seven hundred copies of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* per day." Even so, those who preside over the kill chain while staring at video screens thousands of miles from the target area keep knocking off the wrong people with disturbing frequency. As President Obama's recent public apology reminds us, the "wrong people" can even include the occasional American.

In a way that would command the approval of most Waughs, Cockburn nurses a pronounced antipathy for the new and novel. His loathing of technology permeates *Kill Chain*, but leads him off on needless tangents. He provides chapter and verse on complex machines that cost too much and don't always work as intended, except in boosting the bottom line of privileged Pentagon clients. Others have already made the same point with greater effectiveness. Cockburn comes precariously close to suggesting that technology is an impediment to success in war, which is as mistaken as considering it a panacea. It's an unnecessary rant that mars what is otherwise a very fine book. ■

Andrew J. Bacevich *is currently writing a military history of America's war for the greater Middle East.*

Molly Farneth

Varieties of Religious Experience

The Norton Anthology of World Religions

Volumes I & II

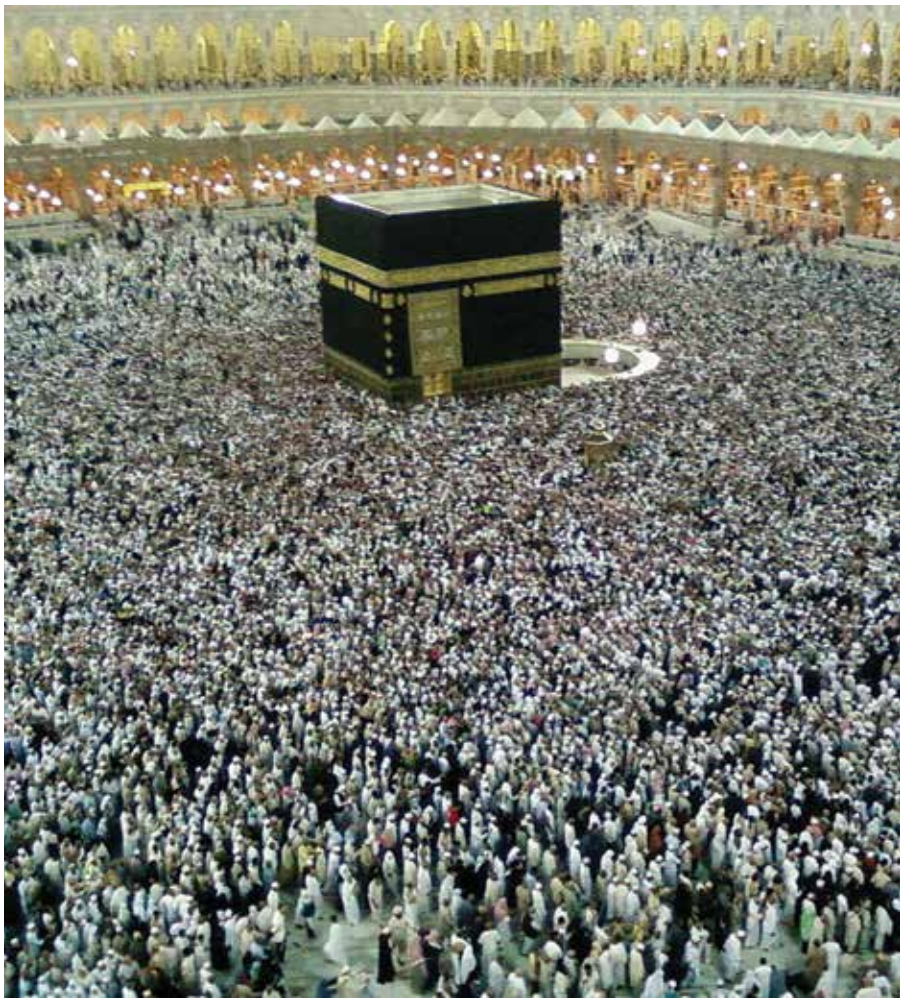
Jack Miles, General Editor

W. W. Norton & Company, $200, 4,319 pp.

The study of world religions has a troubled history.

In early modern Europe, explorers, missionaries, and colonial agents returned from their exploits with startling observations about non-European people. Many of the earliest accounts commented on the apparent absence of religion in the Americas, Australia, Asia, and Africa. In his *Mundus Novus* (1504–05), the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci claimed to have found a people without religious beliefs, practices, or institutions: "Beyond the fact that they have no church, no religion, and are not idolaters, what can I say?" Farther south, and a few decades later (1553), the Spanish conquistador Pedro Cieza de León reported that the indigenous people of the northern Andes "observ[e] no religion at all, as we understand it, nor is there any house of worship to be found." Similar reports of people without religion made their way to Europe from the Pacific Islands, Australia, and Africa.

It was not long, however, before Europeans began to "discover" religion



Pilgrims on hajj at the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca

among non-European people. Accounts of religious beliefs and practices proliferated. Back in Europe, scholars gathered these accounts and began to arrange taxonomies of the religious beliefs and practices of the world. The earliest taxonomies identified four religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and paganism. As more and more information reached Europe about Asian religions and the indigenous traditions around the globe, the fourth category expanded and, eventually, divided to include such religions as "Boudhism," "Hindooism," and "Confucianism." In creating and refining these taxonomies, the goal of scholars was to turn the study of religion into a science.

Taxonomies of world religions were often mapped onto developmental histories of human civilization, with religions hierarchically ordered from the most primitive to the most advanced. The terms of comparison were based on Christian assumptions about what religion was. Not surprisingly, Christianity came out looking like the purest example of religious expression. Imagine if botanists derived the definition of fruit from their knowledge of apples, and then applied that definition to all the other fruit they came across. A kiwi might taste good, but it makes for a bad apple.

The effects of all of this were significant. The raw data for the comparative study of religion in Europe came from the observations of travelers, missionaries, and colonialists, many of whom viewed indigenous people as less civilized than themselves. Europeans' initial assumption that non-European people lacked religion, followed by their claim that the other world religions were inferior forms, supported these biases and gave pseudo-scientific cover to European imperialism.

This history is well documented in the work of David Chidester, Tomoko Masuzawa, Jonathan Z. Smith, and other historians of religion. As a result, many contemporary scholars of religion are cautious about the idea of "world religions." As Masuzawa argued in her influential book *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), the legacy of this history haunts the term "world religion," which seems to presume that people's radically diverse beliefs and practices are different instances of the same universal thing. Nevertheless, the need for understanding those beliefs and practices seems as urgent as ever.

Enter *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, which aims to let "six major, living, international religions speak to readers in their own words." This new anthology contains more than a thousand primary texts from Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with extensive background information provided by accessible introductions, annotations, glossaries, pictures, maps, and timelines. Like many of the other anthologies in the W. W. Norton & Company library, the *Norton Anthology of World Religions* is designed for use in a college classroom but is likely to become a valuable resource for readers of all sorts.

Unlike the religious taxonomies and encyclopedias of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, the *Norton Anthology of World Religions* makes no claim to comprehensiveness. Such traditions as Sikhism, Jainism, Shinto, and indigenous African and American religions are recognized but not anthologized here. Nor does the anthology define "religion"—or any one of the six traditions represented in it. In a masterful introduction to the anthology, the general editor Jack Miles (the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *God: A Biography*) explains:

> A good many scholars of religion decline to define the essence of religion itself but do not find themselves inhibited by that abstention from saying a great deal of interest about one religious tradition or another. Rather than monolithically name at the outset the one feature that establishes the category religion before discussing the particular religion that interests them, they make the usually silent assumption that the full range of beliefs and practices that have conventionally been thought of as religious is vast and that each religion must be allowed to do as it does, assembling its subsets from the vast, never-to-be-fully-enumerated roster of world religious practices. Having made that assumption, the scholars take a deep breath and go on to talk about what they want to talk about.

We must, Miles insists, "begin where we are, with the language available to us."

While Miles, a longtime contributor to *Commonweal*, situates the anthology in the complicated history of the comparative study of religion, he notes that its goal is not to define, categorize, or compare these six traditions. Readers looking for pithy characterizations of these religions will not find them. The anthology's goal is to present the variety of practices within and among them, and "to present through texts how this variety has developed and how the past continues to shape the present." The diversity of the texts and traditions included in the anthology strain universal theories and definitions of religion. "The texts gathered here," Miles writes, "constitute the empirical evidence that any such theory [of religion] must cope with."

Miles is joined by six section editors: David Biale (Judaism), Lawrence S. Cunningham (Christianity), Wendy Doniger (Hinduism), Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Buddhism), Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Islam), and James Robson (Daoism). The section editors have included texts that range from the foundational to the heretical. In the Christianity section, for example, readers will find familiar texts from the Bible and church fathers. Together with the prophets, apostles, and saints, however, are a mass of poets and mystics, rationalists and Romantics, even skeptics. There are apocryphal gospels. There are literary texts—from the *Canterbury Tales* to Emily Dickinson's poems—nestled into the context of the religious tradition that shaped and informed them. There is Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian." There are arguments for non-violence alongside Reinhold Niebuhr's theological argument against Christian pacifism. Although the section introductions and headnotes

contextualize the texts, it is left up to the reader to draw her own conclusions about what constitutes the tradition. (The editor of this section, Lawrence S. Cunningham, wrote *Commonweal's* Religion Booknotes column for more than twenty years.)

Doniger's introduction to the Hinduism section makes this non-essentialism explicit. She suggests that readers ought to think of Hinduism as a cluster of belief, practices, and traditions. "Not every Hindu will believe in all the ideas or follow all the practices, but each Hindu will adhere to some combination of them, as a non-Hindu would not." Doniger's picture of Hinduism is what she calls a Zen diagram, "a Venn diagram that has no central ring":

> Among the many advantages of the cluster approach is the fact that it does not endorse any single authoritative view of what Hinduism is; it allows them all. The diversity of the tradition, however, as well as the sheer mass of available texts, means that any anthology of Hinduism will involve a selection so drastic as to be inevitably subjective, though not necessarily arbitrary.

Doniger presents a collection of texts that ranges from the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad Gita to the modern poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and A. K. Ramanujan. Her Zen diagram of Hinduism may be provocative—as when an excerpt from Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which imagines the special powers of the children born in a hopeful India at the moment of its independence from the British Empire, is followed by the Hindu nationalist Purushottam Nagesh Oak's "attempt to rewrite Indian history in support of an anti-Muslim agenda" in *Taj Majal: The True Story*.

The Daoism section is remarkable for other reasons. While two foundational pre-Daoist texts, the *Daode jing* ("The Scripture of the Way and Its Virtue") and the *Zhuangzi* ("Book of Master Zhuang"), have been available and widely read outside China for centuries, the vast majority of Daoism's eleven hundred canonical texts were unavailable, even to scholars in China. Following the 1926

reprinting of a copy of the 1445 Ming Dynasty canon, these texts made their way to scholars in China and around the world. Meanwhile, reports suggest that Daoist practice is now recovering from more than a century of repression. *The Norton Anthology of World Religions* presents the most extensive collection of canonical Daoist texts available to non-specialists. Robson, the section editor, also includes a range of texts that show how ideas about Daoism have been reflected and refracted in Western imaginations, from George Harrison's "The Inner Light" to RZA of the Wu-Tang Clan's *The Wu-Tang Manual.*

The other three sections—on Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam—share this wide range. Once again, these religions' foundational texts are matched with centuries' worth of interpretation, application, and argumentation over what those early texts mean in a changing world. An image in the Judaism section captures this approach. Four photographs of Jews praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem are placed side by side. The first shows Israeli soldiers at the Wall at the end of the Six Day War, "embodying the intersection of secular nationalism and religious memory." The second shows an Orthodox man holding his cell phone against the Wall, transmitting a prayer from afar. The third shows members of Women of the Wall, defying restrictions against women wearing prayer shawls and reading from the Torah at the Wall. The fourth is an early twentieth-century photograph of men and women praying together. Here, as elsewhere, the section editors are intent on displaying the diversity and disagreement internal to each tradition and, in the process, dislodging readers' assumptions about what these religions are about.

The texts in each section are presented chronologically. Beyond the chronological order, each editor has organized the texts at his or her discretion. There are no unifying themes. That decision was consistent with Miles's insistence that there would be no preliminary definition of religion or assumptions about what these religions have in common. He writes that "the only assumptions made are that the most populous and influential of the world's religions are here to stay, that they reward study best when speaking to you in their own words, and that their contemporary words make best sense when heard against the panoramic background of the worlds they have remembered and preserved from their storied pasts."

Generally, this is a good approach. Occasionally, it is frustrating. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many of these traditions have grappled with similar issues—often in conversation with or response to one another. King's non-violent resistance to racial domination was influenced by Gandhi's idea of *satyagraha*. In the Hinduism section, the headnote for Gandhi's essay "The Gospel of Selfless Action" mentions his admiration for Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* and the Qu'ran in translation, but the reader has to work to make these connections. An index of themes that cut across traditions would make their work easier.

Moreover, while the Judaism and Islam sections group texts that address women's engagement with and critique of these traditions, the Christianity section does not. Nor does it include any of the most influential feminist, womanist, or *mujerista* contributions to modern Christian thought and practice. This is another place where the discretion of the section editors may leave readers scratching their heads.

Nevertheless, *The Norton Anthology of World Religions* is a bold and important work. It is likely to launch new debates about world religions. To teachers and students, believers and skeptics alike, it offers texts that will illuminate, challenge, and provoke. It gathers the voices—small and still, clamorous, harmonious, cacophonous—and asks its readers to listen.

Take a deep breath. Let's begin. ■

Molly Farneth *will become an assistant professor of religion at Haverford College in September.*

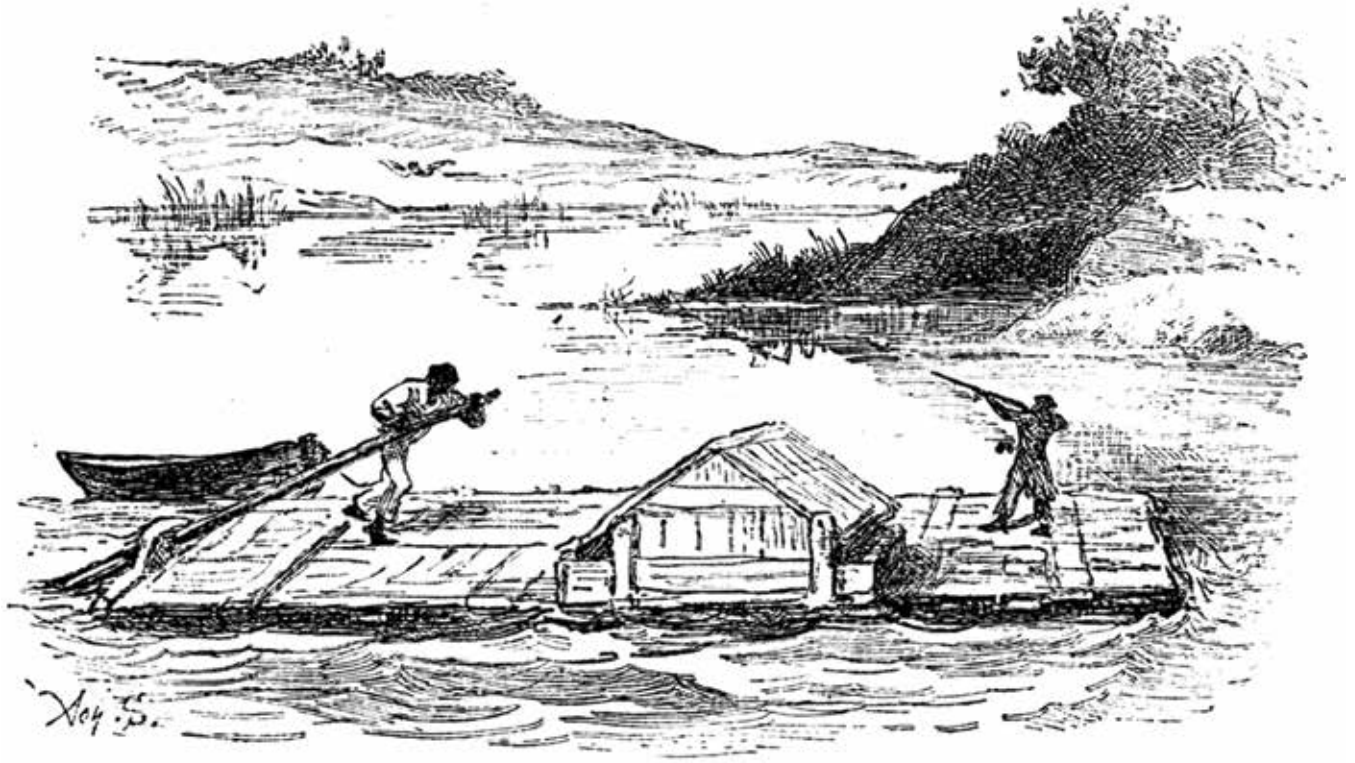
Paul Johnston

Reading 'Huckleberry Finn' in Georgetown

The Republic of Imagination
America in Three Books
Azar Nafisi
Viking, $28.95, 338 pp.

When cultural conservatives deem a book bad for young people, they often make news by demanding its removal from classrooms. When liberals deem a book offensive, its removal typically takes place out of the limelight—not before school boards, but in the graduate schools where professors teach and the academic journals where they publish. In the 1970s, many canonical books began to be rejected by the left as artifacts of the cultural hegemony of white men, and books by writers representing women, minorities, and other marginalized groups were put forward to take their place. As the midcentury archetype hailed by Lionel Trilling in 1955 as "the opposing self" came under increasing suspicion, some classic American works were criticized for exalting individualism. In Trilling's day, conformity was the province of cultural conservatives, and those who rebelled against it were celebrated by the left. But today these positions have reversed, and such figures as Emerson—author of "Self-Reliance" and mentor to America's first two hippies, Thoreau and Whitman—are anathema to many progressives, even as a rebellion against collectivist conformity, on behalf of a heroic American individualism, has become the battle cry of the right. Odd times indeed.

Enter Azar Nafisi. Niece of the Iranian poet Saeed Nafisi, she studied literature in the United States before returning to Iran in 1979, the year revolution toppled the Shah and ushered in the rule of the ayatollahs. Nafisi took a university teaching job, but when religious authorities made it impossible for her to teach literature freely, she resigned her post. Subsequently, she invited a number of young women to continue their literary study with her privately, an experience she describes in her 2003 bestseller, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. That book explored and affirmed the importance of canonical Western writers to those living in a totalitarian society. Her new book asserts the value of canonical American literature not in another society, but right here in ours—a value that Nafisi (who moved here in 1997 and is now a citizen) fears is losing its purchase among conservatives and liberals alike. The three



Les Aventures de Huck Finn, illustrations by Achille Sirouy, 1886

long sections of *The Republic of Imagination* deal with Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, and Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*—books Nafisi believes one must appreciate not only to understand America, but to *be* American.

Nafisi's treatment of *Huck Finn* focuses on crucial passages, including the moment when Huck decides he will go to hell rather than betray Jim, the runaway slave who has become his friend, and the novel's long last section, where Jim is held captive and Tom Sawyer shows up to playact at aiding his escape. This section has been rejected as morally retrograde by many readers, but Nafisi disagrees. In her view, it highlights the difference between an American who asserts his individuality against a smothering society and one who does not. She sees Huck as representing the spirit of American antinomianism, which was also the spirit of her friends who resisted the authorities in Iran. As in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi's discussion of literature is interwoven with memories of those friends, including one dying of cancer. The most memorable passages of this first section turn out to be those focused not on Huck but on her friend—the imprisonment and torture of the friend's husband, her escape to America, her courageous acceptance of her own death.

Section 2 turns to Sinclair Lewis and the eponymous protagonist of *Babbitt*, who embodies all that Huck rebels against: rote learning, conformity, materialism, soullessness. Rather than weave *Babbitt* into her own personal narrative, Nafisi uses Lewis's novel as a soapbox for preaching against trends in American culture and education that she fears are moving us away from Huck's humanity toward Babbitt's soulless conformity. In particular, she targets the new educational standards known as the Common Core, which she criticizes for deemphasizing the humanities in favor of job preparation; as evidence she quotes one of the reform's designers quipping cheekily that "it is in a rare working environment that someone says, 'Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday, but before that, I need a compelling account of your childhood.'"

One can't help noting that Lewis's fictional Babbitt is forgotten for much of Nafisi's denunciation of the Common Core. But she is surely right to insist that market analyses will not sustain America's greatness. Perhaps it takes someone raised elsewhere to remind us that, as she so memorably puts it, America's founding fathers—all of whom were well versed in the humanities—"knew the value of engineers, of people who build roads, canals, and bridges, but they also knew that dictatorships could build roads, canals, and bridges, and they believed that what a free society needed was an enlightened and civic-

minded public that could prevent tyranny from taking root."

In Section 3 Nafisi returns from polemic to literary appreciation intertwined with personal narrative, evoking the friendships she made while in graduate school in Oklahoma in the early 1970s. With an art student from North Carolina, the young Nafisi reflects on the particular quality of sunlight in the American South and discusses *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as an example of Southern literature. But her true interest is in the misfits who make up the novel's cast of characters, whose stories she interweaves with her recollections of another misfit, a townie radical who remains in their college town well after Nafisi and her friends move on. Her portrait turns this cliché of '60s radicalism into a figure of unexpected pathos and redeems a shortcoming of the book's first two sections—namely, Nafisi's insistent identification of herself with the American left. Following the publication of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi was attacked by some on the left as a neocon fellow-traveler justifying the American invasion of Iraq by trumpeting the values of the West over those of her own Muslim culture. As if in rebuttal, in *The Republic of Imagination* she takes every opportunity (and then some) to establish her liberal/progressive bona fides.

This over-correction toward liberalism isn't her book's only flaw. At times Nafisi tries too hard to make her case, as when she writes, of Twain's creation of Huck, that "he started from scratch and conjured a character as yet unborn." In fact, Huck has numerous ancestors in American literature and culture—Hope Leslie, Natty Bumppo, Hester Prynne, and behind them all "the sainted" (in Hawthorne's ironic phrase) Anne Hutchinson, whose antinomian insistence on spirit over the law led to her banishment from Puritan Boston. What was new in *Huckleberry Finn*—what Hemingway so admired in the novel—wasn't Huck, but the American language through which Twain presented him.

Nor can it be said that Nafisi's persona is always a good match for her literary claims. She and her friends discuss Huck's rejection of "sivilization" while meeting in Georgetown's fashionable hair salons and coffee shops, hardly the rough frontier territories for which Huck lights out at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*. Nevertheless, by the time Nafisi in her epilogue offers up a peroration on the importance of American literature, reaffirming it against all comers liberal and conservative, her readers will surely want to return to Twain and Lewis and McCullers and James Baldwin and others. Many readers may also find themselves longing to return to being not liberals or conservatives, but simply Americans, joined through bonds of culture to their fellow Americans. ■

Paul Johnston *teaches literature at the State University of New York, Plattsburg.*

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In Deed

Amanda Erickson

Rev. Ray Bomberger prayed after twenty-five-year-old Freddie Gray died of a severed spine, an injury he sustained while in police custody. Bomberger prayed after Gray's funeral last Monday. And he prayed as rioters took to the streets outside his church that night, setting fires, breaking windows, and tossing rocks and bricks at police officers. Then, early Tuesday morning, he got to work.

Bomberger runs St. Peter Claver, a 126-year-old Catholic Church in Sandtown-Winchester. Sandtown, one of the most blighted areas in Baltimore, was also Freddie Gray's neighborhood. More than 30 percent of its residents live below the federal poverty line; 21 percent are unemployed. About 450 are in state prison right now—the highest number from any census tract in Maryland. The life expectancy of those born in Sandtown is thirteen years shorter than the national average. Those are problems that can't be fixed by one man, or in one morning. So instead, Bomberger grabbed a broom and headed across the street. The windows of Wonder Land Liquor had been smashed. Looters took what was useful (alcohol, mostly) and left the rest strewn on the sidewalk.

As Bomberger began to clean, he was joined by others. "I had to get to the church as soon as I could," said Raymond Kelly, who leads the No Boundaries Coalition, a community-building organization in West Baltimore. "This building has always served as a sanctuary. We're going to have to keep it that way, so that generations to come have the seed of faith planted in them." Natalie Mercer, seventy-seven years old, came too. Mercer is a lifelong parishioner and still works down the street from the church at Penn North Recovery, a substance-abuse treatment center. She said the news of the rioting devastated her. "My heart has been heavy," she said. "So I went to pray."

By noon, hundreds had come together to put the neighborhood back together. When that was done, they began collecting food for needy families. Bomberger says the church excels at this kind of work—feeding the sick, sheltering the homeless. He often walks up and down Pennsylvania Avenue (Sandtown's main drag) bringing comfort to drug addicts and the homeless. But Gray's death has made Bomberger realize it's not enough. How, he wondered after the protests and riots, could the church engage with the injustices that keep so many down, generation after generation? "We need to really dig into the root causes of the issues here," he said. "There is a sense of hopelessness around so many. The church needs to be a source of hope."

Until 2010, St. Peter Claver did that through the parish school. Opened in 1890, the school played an important role in supporting the neighborhood's young people, helping them develop skills and self-esteem and "the strength to do good." Now that the school is shuttered, Bomberger said, the church needs to do a better job of finding other ways to serve this mission. "We want to provide a moral education."

That Monday Bomberger was reminded of that responsibility by Baltimore mother Toya Graham. She was filmed smacking her masked son on the head after she caught him rioting with the looters. "She said to him, 'You know better,'" Bomberger said. "That suggested to me that he had been educated in a 'moral sense.' But he needed to be reminded to do better. We have to be energized to be that reminder for young people here."

Joyful, peaceful demonstrations followed the announcement that Maryland's state attorney was bringing charges against the six officers involved in Gray's arrest. "That gave me a sense of hope," said sixty-eight-year-old Luisa Toney, who has been a member of St. Peter's for almost sixty years. "I've been crying, but now it's tears of joy." At Mass that Sunday, the church sang "We Shall Overcome." When they reached the line "God is on our side," the room burst into applause. Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori stopped by to preside at the 10:45 Mass. Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (a Catholic) sat in the front row with his wife and daughter.

St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, Baltimore

"Freddie Gray's death has brought to the surface longstanding issues of structural sin," Lori said in his homily. "When we see that loss of life, the abandoned row houses, the lack of jobs, failing schools, drugs, insecure family situations, mistrust…we must acknowledge the right of people who see no way out to make their voices heard. We must continue to truthfully and effectively address the deep systemic problems urban neighborhoods and urban families are facing."

It's a tall order for the parishioners of St. Peter Claver, and for all Catholics. Can we find ways to work for justice, not just charity? The most encouraging words of all came from Sunday's second reading, from St. John: "Children, let us love not in word or speech, but in deed and truth." In other words: Let's get to work. ■

Amanda Erickson *is an editor at the* Washington Post.

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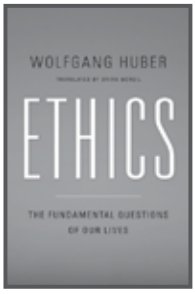

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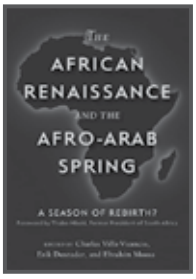

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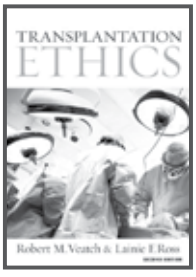

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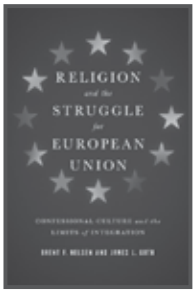

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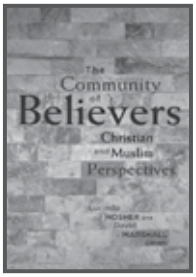

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