A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

JUNE 17, 2016

THE UNITED STATES IS AT A MORAL CROSSROADS. WE NEED TO BE UNAMBIGUOUS ABOUT WHY.

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THOMAS NOBLE ON THE MEDIEVAL ROOTS OF MODERN POLITICS

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LETTERS

Episcopal ineptitude, the Falkland War, soccer

A CLASS ACT

In response to John Gehring's article "Two Steps Back" (June 3): I have known Tony Spence for over thirty years. He was a parishioner at a church where I served and the editor of the Nashville Catholic paper, a job he did successfully under two lesser lights who were his diocesan bishops. Then I followed his subsequent career in Washington and his most recent post at Catholic News Service, where he served admirably. He is an accomplished and polished man, and fair to a point far surpassing even the most patient of men. He has had to endure the complaints of temperamental prelates who became chagrinned when his paper displayed their "large ears" or photos of them from the "wrong" (that is, less flattering) side. All of us who have had to suffer the slings and outrages of the church's ill-tempered shepherds understand full well what Spence patiently endured, only to be shunted aside like some piece of trash after a lifetime of faithful service. It is as if those responsible for preaching the Gospel of Jesus are unfamiliar with the content of the message.

REV. JOSEPH A. SANCHES
Nashville, Tenn.

WAR GAMES

In reference to Joseph Flipper's article, "The Beautiful Game" (May 20), my first experience of Diego Maradona was watching little "Irish-Catholic" Aussie boys hurtling to the ground in our church hall, screaming "Maradona" as they mimicked the little genius's World Cup exploits back in 1986. Watching on TV from the other side of the world, his brilliance with the ball transcended all sense of nationality or politics. Maradona's fame came just a few years after a war in which Australia's traditional ally, Britain, had fought Argentina over a group of tiny windswept islands deep in the South Atlantic Ocean. These islands (the "Falklands" to the British; the "Malvinas" to the Argentines) are both a fragment and a reminder of the sweep of the former British Empire, and a powerful spur to national pride on both sides.

An important correction though: It was not Britain that invaded the Falklands back in 1982, as Joseph Flipper suggests, but rather Argentina that invaded and briefly overwhelmed the British citizens who make the Falklands their home. This might explain the English "outrage" when the impish and brilliant Maradona knocked them out of the World Cup with "the hand of God."

DAMIAN POWELL
Parkville, Australia

ROGUES & GENTLEMEN

I read with fascination Joseph Flipper's article, "The Beautiful Game." I was distantly reminded of Gadamer's similar description of a phenomenology of play or sport. In that spirit Flipper writes, "Perhaps beauty should be defined as play." But while reading his thoughtful article I could not shrug off an old rugby take on the question. The difference between the two sports lies in the fact that soccer is a gentlemen's game played by rogues and rugby a rogue's game played by gentlemen. I trust there's a sporting measure of good humor there.

FR. KEVIN TORTORELLI, OFM
New York, N. Y.

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Stop the Killing

Last month, United States Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced that the Justice Department would seek the death penalty against Dylann Roof, who shot and killed nine African Americans and wounded another at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. "The nature of the alleged crime and the resulting harm compelled this decision," Lynch argued, citing the racial hatred behind the killings, the targeting of a church Bible study to "magnify the societal impact" of the attacks, and Roof's lack of remorse as factors in the government's deliberations. Roof faces murder charges in state court as well, and the local prosecutor is also pursuing the death penalty.

No mitigating factors appear to be at work in this case: the crimes are heinous, and Roof's guilt is undisputed. As details emerged after his arrest, it was learned that Roof had a website that trafficked in white supremacist ideas and symbols, and haunting photos surfaced that included one of Roof holding a handgun and Confederate flag as he icily stares at the camera. He also published a twenty-five-hundred-word manifesto on his website outlining how he came to be a white supremacist and why he chose Charleston for his murderous rampage. The depraved motivations for the killings are as clear as the basic facts of the case.

All this could make it seem as if the trial and eventual sentencing of Roof would be a bad moment to reassert objections to the death penalty. Roof's crime is precisely the kind likely to be held up by defenders of capital punishment to justify its continued use. But just the opposite conclusion should be drawn. Most death-penalty cases aren't nearly as unambiguous as Roof's: guilt and innocence are often harder to discern, and such judgments always take place in a flawed, racially biased criminal-justice system. The Charleston shootings are the exception that proves the rule. The stark clarity of Roof's case should actually serve to underscore all the reasons to hope and work for an end to the death penalty.

The death penalty should be opposed first of all because of our fallible criminal-justice system. Because there is the possibility of getting a verdict wrong, the state should never impose an irrevocable punishment. The risk of executing an innocent person should weigh heavily against whatever arguments are made for capital punishment. This is not just a theoretical worry: from 1973 to 1999, there was an average of three death-row reversals a year. From 2000 to 2011, the average was five per year. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, that amounts to more than 150 inmates sentenced to death who ended up being exonerated. Organizations like the Innocence Project continue to work to overturn wrongful convictions, helping free what they call a "staggering number of innocent people."

A crime such as Roof's, undertaken in the name of white supremacy, should also be a reminder of the deep-seated racial injustices that still mark the United States, not least in the application of the death penalty. Since 1976, people of color have accounted for 43 percent of executions and make up 55 percent of those now on death row—numbers far disproportionate to their share of the general population. Numerous state-level studies have confirmed this bias. A 2015 study of Washington state jurors, for example, found they were four and a half times more likely to recommend the death penalty for a black defendant than for a white one charged with similar crimes. Racial bias also affects the way juries are selected. The evidence on all these matters is overwhelming.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to imagine how these grave problems with administering the death penalty could be eliminated. There is no way to guarantee that executions would be resorted to only in the most clear-cut cases, such as Roof's: if the option to execute dangerous criminals is available, the pressure to use it will follow. Taking our bearings from the most heinous and hateful of murders is a profound mistake.

The deepest argument against the death penalty, however, remains a moral one: every human life possesses dignity, and the taking of life is always an affront to that dignity. Executing a murderer does not bring back his victims and it perpetuates the violence that has plagued American society for too long. If there are alternatives available—and in the contemporary United States, there certainly are—they should be used. Perhaps the extraordinary example of the families of Roof's victims should guide us here. As President Obama put it in his remarks just days after the shooting, "in the midst of unspeakable grief" these families responded "with words of forgiveness." Of course, the grace of individual Christians is no substitute for the work of our criminal-justice system. But if the state should not confuse justice with mercy, neither should it confuse justice with vengeance. The response of the victims' families has pointed us toward a better way. ■

E. J. Dionne Jr.

Obama & Hiroshima's Moral Lessons

AMBIVALENCE IS NOT ALWAYS WEAKNESS

Unless you are a pacifist, you accept that the use of force can be justified, even necessary, in pursuit of good and urgent ends. But unless you are amoral, you also acknowledge the human capacity for self-delusion and selfishness. People are quite capable of justifying the utterly unjustifiable by draping their immoral actions behind sweeping ethical claims. And if you are a responsible political leader, you must recognize both sides of this moral equation and still not allow yourself to be paralyzed.

As a student of Reinhold Niebuhr, the great theologian who was at once a liberal and a realist, President Obama has spent many years pondering this tension. He has sought out occasions on which he could preach about the ironies and uncertainties of human action—and also our obligation to act in the face of them.

This habit can annoy those who prefer to see a world in which good guys with few flaws confront the bad guys. Obama is constantly being criticized for "apologizing" for the United States when he is in fact attempting to hold us to the very standards that make the United States the "exceptional" nation his critics extol. Judging ourselves by our own standards is the best way to prove that our commitment to them is real.

It is thus not at all surprising that Obama chose to be the first president of the United States to visit Hiroshima, where the United States dropped the first nuclear bomb—where, as Obama put it, "a flash of light and a wall of fire destroyed a city and demonstrated that mankind possessed the means to destroy itself."

His speech was powerful precisely because of its moral realism. He made no apology for Harry Truman's decision to use the bomb and instead put it into the context of all the destruction wrought by World War II: "Sixty million people would die.... Shot, beaten, marched, bombed, jailed, starved, gassed to death." Inherent in these sentences, with their reference to forced marches and the death camps, was the explanation of why the Allies fought the war in the first place.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Barack Obama at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial

Obama got at both why wars are inevitable ("We may not be able to eliminate man's capacity to do evil, so nations and the alliances that we form must possess the means to defend ourselves") and why we should nonetheless strive mightily to avoid them ("The irreducible worth of every person, the insistence that every life is precious, the radical and necessary notion that we are part of a single human family—that is the story that we all must tell").

And in good Niebuhrian fashion, he urged that even those who believe they are fighting for justice be wary of "how easily we learn to justify violence in the name of some higher cause."

Remaining aware that even the righteous can do both good and evil was central to Reinhold Niebuhr's project. Back in 2007, Obama greatly impressed my friend and fellow columnist David Brooks with this off-the-cuff statement of what he had learned from Niebuhr.

It was remarkably true to the theologian's core insights:

> I take away the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn't use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction. I take away...the sense we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naïve idealism to bitter realism.

Obama's critics typically see him as setting too high a bar for American intervention or argue that he is far more a realist than an idealist. The simple truth is that moral realism is hard because it means being hard on ourselves and accepting tragedy. Actions undertaken in the name of legitimate goals and actions avoided for prudential reasons can both have appalling outcomes.

Niebuhr himself was deeply ambivalent about the bomb, initially signing a Federal Council of Churches statement declaring that the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been "morally indefensible," but later concluding that he and his colleagues were perhaps too harsh on "statesmen...driven by historic forces more powerful than any human decision."

It's not hard to identify with Niebuhr's moral reticence. A humble ambivalence may be the proper response to a horrifically destructive act undertaken in the name of avoiding even more destruction. ■

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

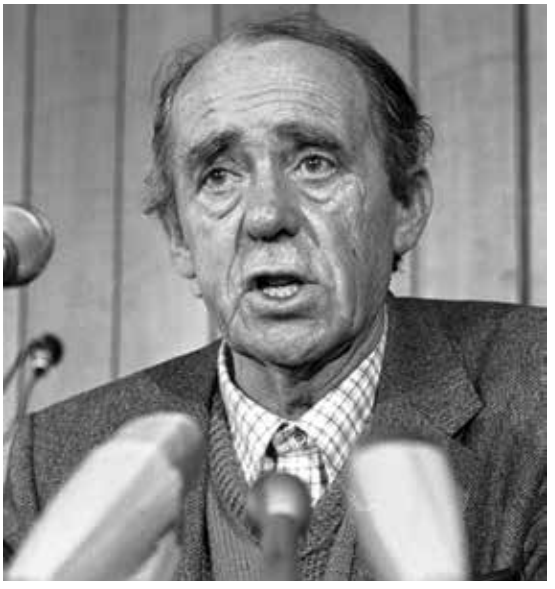
Take That, Max Weber

LEARNING ABOUT IRELAND FROM A GERMAN NOVELIST

In 1918 German sociologist Max Weber devised the phrase "disenchantment of the world" to contrast modernity's emerging values of science, rationality, and bureaucracy with its fading religious and spiritual values. Thirty-five years later, his fellow countryman, the novelist Heinrich Böll (1972 Nobel Prize winner), seems to undermine Weber's thesis, describing in his *Irish Journal* an enchanted land in the modern world.

When my great-grandmother, Margaret Foy, left Ireland in 1850, she likely felt "disenchantment" for reasons other than the values of modernity. In my Chicago childhood there was never mention of Ireland's "enchantment"—or talk of Ireland itself. But now planning a visit, I undertook a cram course. Böll's little book was among my choices along with a few weighty history tomes. These latter describe Ireland as a land so ancient that it existed before God created the universe; then, with the coming of humans there followed centuries of warfare. When Böll arrived in the early 1950s, Ireland—or at least the parts he visited—was at peace. His *Journal* reports and relishes its humorous, observant, thoughtful, patient, kindly, welcoming, garrulous, and enchanting people. Ireland, of course, was neutral in World War II and Böll may have felt more welcome there than in, say, France. Germany in the early '50s was still coming to terms with the moral atrocities of the Nazis as well as its wartime destruction; little wonder, then, that Ireland might have seemed enchanted to Böll.

Could he have been right? He encounters neither bureaucracy nor rationality—never mind science. On the trains from Dublin to Westport, conductors cheerfully take IOUs because the currency exchanges are closed. In torrential downpours, doors are opened and unexpected guests are welcomed. The annoyances of daily life are occasions for conversation and good humor. The nine o'clock movie, starring Ann Blyth, can begin only after the priests finish their dinner. Not to fret. As 9:00 becomes 9:30 and then 10:00, the audience exchange jokes and stories; candy, chocolates, cigarettes are passed up and down the aisle. Children in the front rows carry on like it's recess. This gives Böll plenty of time to meditate on an Irish truth: "When God made time, he made plenty of it." You hear that, Max Weber? The priests finally arrive; the movie begins and ends. Well after midnight, the projector light fades; the theater lights come up; the doors open; the audience smile at the pleasure they have had and begin to go home. Still plenty of time!



Heinrich Böll

Whatever happens in Ireland, you "break a leg, miss a train, go bankrupt," the response is, "it could be worse...you might have broken your neck." Minor events elicit the placid, "I shouldn't worry," which goes for the weather, a sick child, or running out of cigarettes. (Böll shares the Irish chain-smoking habit.)

The affection and tenderness of the *Irish Journal* is a stark contrast to Böll's bitter novellas and short stories of the same years. These dwell on the callousness of the German army toward the conquered as well as its own soldiers. Böll served in both France and Russia, and blessed the day he was taken prisoner by American soldiers. After the war, he attacked the church for failing to criticize Hitler and refused to acquiesce in the nation's amnesia about the treatment of Jews, Poles, Russians, and the German population itself. Some of his stories awaited the 1980s for publication. Yet, as Germany began to come to terms with this past, Böll remained a sharp critic. He was not a "good" German. He might have been a better Irishman.

Perhaps the *Irish Journal* served as a "might have been," a different life. In an interview many years later, Böll said, "I could imagine, if the Nazis, the war, and postwar political developments had not happened that I might have led a very secretive life. But as a citizen of the Federal Republic and as a German I could not manage that. Sometimes I try to do it, to become a kind of mixture of Irishman and Oblomov—an Irish Oblomov—but I can't do it."

I wonder. Turn to the story of the policeman who stops the car and begins with "Nice day today...how are you?" Many pages and much repartee later, he asks the driver for his registration. "Oh, I left it at home." The policeman: "Oh well…I expect your face is your own." Take that, Max Weber! ■

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SOLDIERS AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL IN PARIS IN THE AFTERMATH OF NOVEMBER 13 TERRORIST ATTACKS.

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

Mark J. Allman & Tobias Winright

Protect Thy Neighbor

WHY THE JUST-WAR TRADITION IS STILL INDISPENSABLE

The recent statement, "An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence," has been hailed as a "landmark" and "groundbreaking" proclamation calling on the church to embrace pacifism and move away from its traditional just-war teaching. The statement was the result of an April conference at the Vatican sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International. However, contrary to many reports, especially on social media, the statement was not in any sense an official proclamation by the Vatican or Pope Francis.

There is much to be commended in the appeal. Its prophetic call to embrace peacemaking more seriously and to emphasize nonviolence is most welcome. So is the document's global perspective, especially amplifying the voices of those who experience war firsthand outside of North America and Europe. All Catholics are called to be peacemakers, to pray for peace and work toward the abolition of war. This should be a commitment not only of Catholic pacifists—who believe that all war and violence are immoral—but also of Catholics who think that armed force is sometimes morally justified.

But the statement also indulges in a tendentious reading of the church's just-war tradition. For example, the appeal declares that "a different path [of nonviolence] is clearly unfolding in recent Catholic social teaching." It goes on to cite Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis in support of that claim. Yet each of these popes, while extolling the virtues of nonviolent peacemaking, also retained just-war thinking—even if under the label of "legitimate defense."

Consider John Paul II, who said, "We are not pacifists, we do not want peace at any price." John Paul also made sure just-war thinking had a place in the Catechism and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. More recently Francis, speaking about ISIS, asserted, "It is licit to stop the unjust aggressor." He also sent a letter to the April conference quoting Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*: "Governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate

MOWING

for what I hope is the last time
until spring, I remember the house at the bottom
of Canal Street, its back porch sinking
into a kingdom of tall weeds
where a junker rested on blocks,
and Mr. Kluhan slouched in a moldy chair
drinking from a quart bottle of Schmidt's
while whittling a small world
of birds, animals and men.
In a good mood he'd offer one
to a kid who ventured close
enough to watch him, the strange one
our parents used as a warning
whenever we complained
at having to brush our teeth,
tie our laces, recite our prayers, any
of the thousand small tasks
that shape a life, like this mowing,
this endless mowing.

—Paul Martin

Paul Martin's poems have appeared in America, Boulevard, New Letters, Poetry East, Prairie Schooner, River Styx, Southern Poetry Review, *and* Tar River. *His book,* Closing Distances, *was published by The Backwaters Press. His chapbook,* Floating on the Lehigh, *won the 2015 Grayson Books Chapbook Contest, and another,* Rooms of the Living, *was co-winner of the Autumn House Press Chapbook Prize.*

defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted." All these examples reflect the mode of moral reasoning traditionally called "just war." Both the United Nations Responsibility to Protect (R2P) obligation and "legitimate defense" are species of a genus: the justified and limited use of armed force in defense of the innocent. If and when the day ever comes when war is abolished—and like all Catholics, we pray for the arrival of that day—there will still be the need for armed force (i.e., "just policing") to enforce the law outlawing war when terrorist groups or nations break it.

Of course, the appeal's main criticism can't be denied: "Too often the 'just-war theory' has been used to endorse rather than prevent or limit war." But this is not a problem with just-war thinking per se; it is problem with how it is used. A longstanding maxim in Catholic moral theology is that the abuse of an idea or principle does not negate its valid use. As John Courtney Murray noted many years ago, "The Ten Commandments do not lose their imperative relevance by reason of the fact that they are violated." So too with the just-war tradition, and as Murray further noted, "there is place for an indictment of all of us who failed to make the tradition relevant." Thus the appeal's recommendation that the church "no longer use or teach 'just-war theory'" is misplaced. Instead of jettisoning the just-war tradition, it would be better to call for a more robust commitment to its criteria and for the church to be more willing to condemn wars as unjust when they fail to meet the rigorous demands of the tradition.

Very few conference participants seemed to fully understand Catholic just-war thinking, especially in its contemporary form. Most ethicists today speak of the "just-war tradition," recognizing that there is no single, universally agreed-upon just-war "theory." Some Catholics appeal to this tradition in a way that too easily sanctifies military action, such as George Weigel's and Michael Novak's hawkish defense of the preemptive war in Iraq. Yet most Catholic ethicists used just-war reasoning to criticize that war. An honest grappling with the just-war tradition, its uses and abuses, excludes neither example.

The statement also fails to recognize that contemporary Catholic just-war thinking has evolved in recent decades. In Catholic just-war thinking there is now a strong presumption against the use of force; an understanding that war is never a good in itself, but at best morally justified as the right or necessary thing to do, even with the many evils, moral or not, that result from it; and a determination that all criteria of *jus ad bellum* (which governs when nations may legitimately go to war) and *jus in bello* (which governs how militaries should behave in war) be fully satisfied.

More recently, two additional categories regarding just war have been introduced and emphasized. The first, *jus ante bellum*, refers to a robust and perpetual commitment to proactive and just peacemaking practices. Thus, from the start, the conference statement sets up a false dichotomy between nonviolence and just-war thinking. This is particularly odd, considering that the appeal embraces "just peacemaking," a middle-ground position between pacifism and just war that was first articulated in the late 1990s by the late American Baptist Glen Stassen and others. Just peacemaking does not reject all uses of armed force, recognizing the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. This was a bone of contention between pacifists and just-war theorists engaging with Stassen's project, but they agreed that just-peacemaking practices, now incorporated into *jus ante bellum*, would diminish the likelihood of war and underscore that war truly should be a last resort—which is a criterion for just war under *jus ad bellum*.

The second recent development, *jus post bellum*, consists of a rigorous set of criteria that expects warring parties to establish a just and lasting peace after combat. This category reflects how just-war theory takes seriously both pacifist

and realist concerns about faithful and effective ways to diminish the likelihood of further violence in the wake of war. In 2006, for example, Bishop Thomas G. Wenski called for *jus post bellum* in Iraq under the rubric of the need for a "responsible transition." Likewise, Rear Admiral Louis V. Iasiello, the chief of Navy chaplains, stressed the need for *jus post bellum* since "the ultimate goal of all just conflicts—[is] the establishment of a just and lasting peace."

Much of current Christian just-war theory, then, maintains a robust commitment to proactive peacemaking, and its principal aim—establishing a just and lasting peace for all involved—governs all the criteria. It simply cannot be claimed that all this amounts to a rationalization of war. Indeed, the U.S. bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, so stringently interpreted and applied its criteria that it has often been derided by more permissive just-war proponents as "functionally pacifistic." Nevertheless, this stricter Catholic just-war theory does allow the use of limited armed force, primarily in cases of national defense and humanitarian intervention.

Even if the case for just war is rare, such cases still occur: specific examples include Rwanda and Kosovo, as recognized by the United Nations in its recent R2P norm for international relations. Another would be the threat posed by ISIS to Christians and others in Iraq and Syria, extreme situations from which perpetrators and victims alike need to be rescued. The statement from April's conference glosses over these real-life challenges, blithely asserting that nonviolence has the capacity to reduce conflict. While certainly much more can be done to teach and use nonviolent conflict resolution, the statement fails to acknowledge that nonviolent peacemaking also has shortcomings.

Indeed, the conference statement fails to recognize any achievements of just-war thinking. In particular, it ignores the *jus in bello* criteria, which really have restrained professional militaries from abusing their power—they are in fact what distinguishes professional militaries from criminals. While militaries have sometimes violated these principles, it is precisely because of just-war thinking that war-crimes trials can be held. Without just-war principles informing these trials, the moral and legal resources that help hold accountable soldiers who indiscriminately kill noncombatants or use excessive force against combatants would be greatly diminished.

Some contemporary just-war theory also places emphasis on virtues, practices, and character, so that just-war thinking is not reduced to a mere checklist of principles. United Methodist theologian Daniel M. Bell Jr.'s work in this area is particular noteworthy.

There is one last problem with April's statement that deserves attention: the way it selectively and mistakenly engages Scripture and tradition. A number of just-war theologians—from Ambrose and Augustine to the Protestant ethicist Paul Ramsey and others—anchor their theory of just war in Scripture, particularly Jesus' call for love of neighbor, including the enemy. The resort to force should truly be a last resort, but it can be a moral necessity if that is the only way left to protect the innocent neighbor. Out of respect for the human dignity of the aggressor, the use of force should be governed by the principles of proportionality and discrimination between combatants and noncombatants. Those who voted in support of April's appeal may not agree with how just-war proponents interpret Scripture, but they should not portray their view as the only one with scriptural warrant. The term "just" in just war, after all, does not mean just as in perfectly right or good; it only means morally "justifiable" or "permissible."

Whatever its merits, the statement on nonviolence produced by April's "Vatican" conference presents a distorted version of just-war thinking. It fails to engage in an honest dialogue on the church's ethics of war and peace in all its richness and diversity. Any future encyclical on war and peace should be written to clarify these matters by upholding the noble, necessary just-war tradition that is needed now as much as ever. ■

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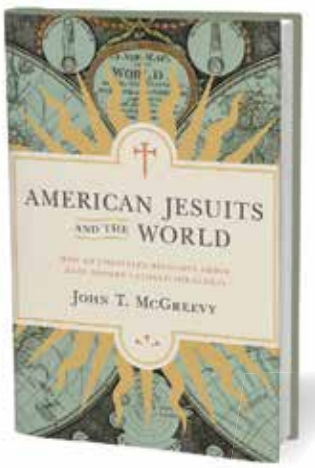

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The Semi-Fascist

How Dangerous Is Donald Trump?

Peter Steinfels

Let's be clear: Donald Trump is not a fascist; he is a semi-fascist. I recognize the risk of using the f-word. In fact, I am positively allergic to it. This case, however, is different. The United States is at a moral crossroads. We need to be utterly unambiguous about why.

I emphasize the "semi" in semi-fascist. Trump has shown no interest in the stereotypically fascist exaltation of discipline, not for himself and not for any organized movement. The closest his militants get to uniforms are baseball caps. And though he may have toyed with the occasional outbreaks of violence at Trump rallies, those scuffles are absolutely nothing like the systematic thuggery of budding fascisms.

On the other hand, consider this: He has built a political movement on a populist nationalism that scapegoats enemy groups both within and without. He promises to expel or bar alien intruders. He plays relentlessly on a sense of national humiliation, victimization, grievance, and decline. He asserts that the nation faces an emergency that justifies torture and murdering the wives and children of our terrorist enemies, even briefly suggesting that as commander in chief he could order the military to violate the laws of war. Unlike full-fledged fascists, he is not explicitly anti-parliamentarian, an idea perhaps too complex for him (or perhaps too multisyllabic); instead he scorns virtually the entire political class as "stupid" or "without a clue"—i.e., unable to make a deal. He takes no note of congressional procedures and constitutional limits. He is indifferent to civil liberties except for gun rights, and has spoken ominously about reining in the press. When asked about compromise, he replies by vaunting his own "flexibility," as though compromise were nothing more than a personal skill rather than an appreciation for distinctive outlooks and interests. If none of that rings an alarm bell, you haven't read enough about Europe in the 1920s and '30s.

Still, why not just call Trump an authoritarian or a demagogue, which would be bad enough? Why not "Caesarist" or *caudillo*? Liar, bully, opportunist, vulgarian, purveyor of toxic politics—won't that language suffice? I don't think so.

CNS PHOTO / NANCY WIECHEC

All those other terms underplay the seriousness of the moment. I deliberately choose semi-fascist for its historical resonance. It calls to mind a critical period in the last century. We continue to judge the public figures of that time by the political and moral choices they made regarding a fresh form of venomous politics.

Fascisms, often inchoate in early stages, have never come to power without the acquiescence or connivance of elites. American voters, yes, but especially American elites—intellectual, religious, cultural, and above all economic and political—now face a moment of profound choice. We shouldn't let them off the hook by using euphemisms.

Until now, conservative elites—the Republican "establishment" most famously—have been divided about Trump. Most have opposed him. The corporate establishment detests his unorthodox positions on trade and immigration. Some conservative political elites have welcomed his attacks on

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Washington and "political correctness," his nativism, his defense of military might overseas and gun rights at home; and above all the "excitement" he generates, drawing crowds to stadiums and voters to the polls. But even more conservatives have objected to his liberal views on sexual issues, his slurs against groups the GOP needs in the future, and his potential impact on down-ballot candidacies. Foreign-policy elites of all sorts quail at what seemed like an uninformed, off-the-cuff "America first" reshuffling of longstanding alliances and engagements. In every quarter there have been questions about Trump's personality.

Admittedly, that personality lends itself more easily to psychological than ideological labels. Clinical narcissist, say some worriers. Seriously unstable, say others. Efforts to describe him have exhausted the second letter of the alphabet: blowhard, boor, braggart, buffoon, blusterer, brash, belittling, belligerent, brutal, bombastic. His record of outrageously crude, boastful, and wildly inaccurate statements, almost gleefully volunteered, goes back many years. His stream-of-consciousness speeches, skipping from one non sequitur to another, are mesmerizing for their self-centeredness and his compulsive measuring of himself against others. Perhaps an "a" word rather than a "b" one would best describe this mix of egocentricity and insecurity: adolescent. But that would not be fair to most teenagers.

The Trump psyche, now being politely referred to as his "temperament," raises serious doubts in itself. What renders it more threatening is its powerful resonance with millions of angry voters. America is "losing, losing, losing"; radical Islamic terrorism is "a big, big problem"; his primary victories are "amazing"; he will replace Obamacare with "something much, much better"; America will "win, win, win" again, and be "a great, great power over everybody." If you have doubts, well, "believe me!" The sheer vacuity and primitive articulation of his ramblings make ordinary political promise-mongering sound highly sophisticated. They do not faze Trump's zealous followers, however. On the contrary, the more magical Trump's proposals, whether to wall off Mexico at Mexico's expense or to track down, arrest, and deport 11 million U.S. residents, the more he defies all standards of consistency, civility, and fact, the more his followers see proof of his sheer power of will.

What Trump celebrated in those weird victory speeches was winning. He mocked his rivals not because of their policies but because they were not winning. Questioned about the tenor of his conduct or campaign, the presumptive nominee's reply is simple: I've been winning. Winning is validation.

However did we get here? Who or what is responsible? The debate has been lively. Most of us know the answer—the other guy. Read the opinion pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and you'll learn it is all Obama's fault. Liberals blame the rigged economy, growing inequality, the Great Recession, loss of

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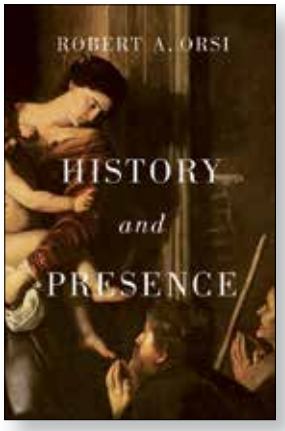

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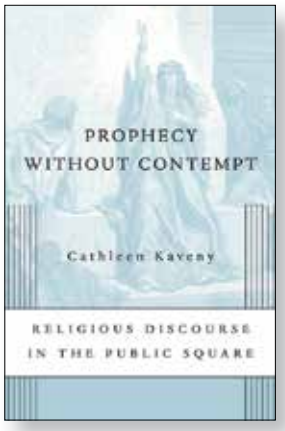

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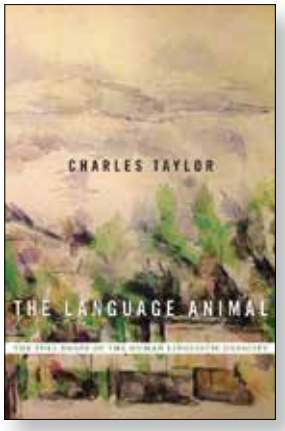

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jobs to globalization, years of tutorials in rage by talk radio, and the Koch brothers. (Count me in, for the most part.) Conservatives blame liberals who deride traditional values, shrug off what their loss has meant to the economically vulnerable, and then treat the floundering reactions of the downwardly mobile as bigotry. (Count me in here, too, at least a little bit.) Others blame larger forces from automation to social media. That is a vitally important discussion. Let it continue, perhaps with greater doses of self-scrutiny.

Right now there is a more immediate challenge. The presidential candidate of one of our two political parties is a semi-fascist with a gift for mobilizing millions and may even, against the odds, win the presidency. What is to be done?

Obviously the moral test is greatest for conservatives and loyal Republicans. Some are shamelessly failing it, enthusiastically lining up behind Trump, and shedding, when necessary, their prior commitments. Others are reluctantly getting on board, as though they had no choice. It can be expected that alarmed donors, corporate lobbyists, and other big-money muscle like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will seek quiet backroom reassurances regarding tax cuts, trade, deficits, taxing hedge funds, and foreign-policy commitments. Hasn't Trump made it clear that he's flexible and everything is negotiable? Meanwhile Republican advisers are sketching strategies for a November victory, on the premise evidently that Trump's only problems are his electoral weaknesses.

Michael Gerson, once a speechwriter and policy adviser for George W. Bush, had a one-word description of the scurrying to climb onto the Trump bandwagon: "Disgusting!"

Thank God, Gerson is not alone. More than a few conservatives and true-blue Republicans have declared a principled refusal to support Trump. The principles motivating them are not always clear. Are they principally objecting to Trump's policy positions (or lack of them)? To his person and past conduct? The principled objections may be mixed and confused. What matters is whether they reflect the conviction that something very basic is at stake, something fundamental to American freedom, democracy, and values. Something even more basic than party policies on tax cuts, immigration, budgets, and Obamacare. Something that can't be fixed by the emergence of a "new Trump" or a campaign strategy that can protect GOP seats in Congress.

Liberals and Democrats have a less daunting moral responsibility but a still serious one. They should not minimize the gravity of the Trump phenomenon. Or trivialize it by emphasizing the personal over the political. Or mute their opposition because Trump's criticism of trade agreements, military interventions overseas, and Wall Street, as well as his on-again-off-again interest in a higher minimum wage and other deviations from small-government ideology, appeals to Democratic voters. Nor should Democratic leaders, counting on a Democratic victory, throw their energies into positioning themselves in the administration to come.

Above all, liberals and Democrats must resist the temptation to disparage rather than welcome anti-Trump sentiment among conservatives and Republicans. That sentiment won't be free of inconsistencies and self-serving excuses. Before Trump became "presumptive," Robert George and George Weigel penned "An Appeal to Our Fellow Catholics," signed by over thirty politically conservative Catholics. It urged them to recognize that "Donald Trump is manifestly unfit to be president of the United States." The appeal was direct and impassioned. From my perspective, it was also marred by a simplistic identification of Catholic social concerns with the Republican party.

Liberals should not minimize the gravity of the Trump phenomenon. Or trivialize it by emphasizing the personal over the political. Or mute their opposition because Trump's criticism of trade agreements, military interventions overseas, and Wall Street. Above all, they must resist the temptation to disparage rather than welcome anti-Trump sentiment among conservatives and Republicans.

But so what? That appeal was written when it seemed that a not-Trump candidate had a slim chance for the Republican nomination. Today its signers and sympathizers, like conservatives and Republicans of every faith and flavor, are being asked to set aside their moral qualms and whatever visceral sense of decency, revulsion, and fear for the nation led them to go on record against the front-runner. This is not the time for liberals to gloat over the conservatives' predicament or to chastise them with lectures on "Didn't we warn you?" and "You've made your bed, now lie in it."

"Better Trump than Hillary!" is now becoming the steamroller slogan. It is advanced as self-evident, no explanations needed. For principled conservatives and Republicans who recognize Donald Trump as the semi-fascist that he is, the only honest answer to that demand will be: "I will not vote for Donald Trump. I will not support him whatever the cost or the circumstances. If there is a real chance of a Trump victory, I will vote for Hillary Clinton."

This is not a matter of preserving Republican seats in Congress or avoiding an embarrassing association with a vulgarian. It is a matter of self-respect, political urgency, and moral integrity. ■

Sharing the Prosperity

Why We Still Need Organized Labor

Angela B. Cornell

"We can either have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

—U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis

Today economic inequality is greater in the United States than in any other advanced nation. According to Federal Reserve Chairwoman Janet Yellen, "[b]y some estimates, income and wealth inequality are near their highest levels in the past hundred years...and probably higher than for much of American history before then."

The consequences of such disparities have been dire. Forty years ago the United States was in step with other advanced democracies, but now we place at or near the bottom of rich nations on important measures of individual well-being and social cohesion. We are the world's richest country, with a GDP of $17.42 trillion, but 20 percent of our children live in poverty—and nearly half of those in extreme poverty. Deplorably, we rank thirty-fourth out of thirty-five in relative child poverty among industrialized countries, according to UNICEF, with only Romania faring worse.

Poverty in the United States brings other risks, including premature death. The gap between the life-expectancy of the rich and that of the poor has been widening for decades, and currently the longevity gap between the top 10 percent and bottom 10 percent is fourteen years for men born in 1950 and thirteen years for women. More striking perhaps, since 1999 death rates for white middle-aged men and women have risen dramatically, especially for those with only a high school education. Public-health researchers have found that smoking and drug abuse among the economically marginalized have exacerbated these disparities. The prescription-drug epidemic has also deepened the problem.

Basic food and shelter needs are also going unmet in ever-larger sectors of society, even among the employed. Last December's U.S. Conference of Mayors' Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in American Cities: A 22-City Survey, pointed to the rampant demand for emergency shelter and food assistance. Low-paying jobs led the list of causes of hunger and were a significant factor in homelessness: 42 percent of those seeking emergency food assistance were employed. More than three-quarters of the cities surveyed reported that they were not able to accommodate all the families with children needing emergency shelter. With these basic needs unmet, and many parents cobbling together two or even three low-paying jobs, it's fair to say that the working family is under siege.

Conservatives continue to argue that the solution to these problems are policies that promote economic growth by lowering taxes, unshackling business, and spurring greater competition. But the idea that corporate America has been stifled or disadvantaged over the past forty years defies all evidence. No, what has been pushed back on nearly every front is the American labor movement. Its revival is the key to reducing economic inequality and fostering real, widely shared prosperity.

Unionized workers earn about 21 percent more than non-unionized workers and receive better benefits. (The wage difference between union and nonunion jobs is even more dramatic for African-American and Latino workers.) The International Monetary Fund has concluded that declining union membership has led to rising inequality worldwide, with about half of the increase in the income of the world's wealthiest 10 percent tied directly to the decline in unionization. In this country, where only 6.7 percent of private-sector workers are unionized, the decline in union membership over the past forty years is responsible for up to one-third of the growth in wage inequality, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

As this year's presidential race has shown, the issue of inequality has increasing salience with the electorate. Twenty-seven percent of Iowa Democratic voters surveyed during the caucuses listed inequality as the issue that mattered most to them. Exit polling of Democrats in other primaries has shown similar concerns. In a January Gallup poll, 69 percent of Americans expressed dissatisfaction with how wealth and income are distributed in this country. Much of the widespread voter disenchantment with establishment politics is surely tied to disillusionment with how the economy is functioning (or failing to) for the working poor and middle classes.

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Fast food workers on strike for a higher minimum wage and better benefits

This nation has faced similar problems in the past and solved them. Last year the United States celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the National Labor Relations Act. The statute, passed in Franklin Roosevelt's first administration, was intended to redress acute inequality, promote labor peace, and strengthen the economy during the Great Depression. More important, the NLRA was designed to do more than establish a legal framework for collective organization and bargaining; the ultimate goal was to strengthen the nation as a whole by empowering workers and democratizing the workplace. "The struggle for a voice in industry through the process of collective bargaining is at the heart of the struggle for the preservation of political as well as economic democracy in America," said New York Senator Robert Wagner, the architect of the bill. Widely considered the most radical piece of New Deal legislation for its capacity to redistribute wealth and power, it set economic and political goals that are just as pressing today.

Labor rights have a secure place in international law as well. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles created the International Labor Organization to advance rights and justice in the workplace. In 1948 the ILO was integrated into the newly formed United Nations as its first specialized agency. International law protects the right to organize, to bargain collectively, and to strike. The International Bill of Rights, comprised of the Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, all firmly place labor rights within the rubric of basic human rights.

In its 1937 *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp.* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged that labor rights are "fundamental," recognizing that an employee's financial dependence makes him or her helpless in dealing with employers. The Court understood that union representation is essential if workers were to resist arbitrary and unfair treatment and deal with employers on a more equal basis. Collective action on the part of employees is essential to safeguard their interests.

Unfortunately, U.S. law has become less accommodating over the past few decades, with Supreme Court decisions undermining the right of workers to form unions. In *Lechmere v. NLRB* (1992), the Court ruled that a union may not access employer property, including the parking lot, to communicate with workers. Employers, on the other hand, can require workers to attend anti-union speeches during working hours or risk being fired. In other decisions, including *NLRB v. Kentucky River Community Care, Inc.* (2001), the scope of the law was narrowed, excluding many employees from the law's protection by allowing them to be reclassified as supervisors. Worst of all, for nearly forty years unions have been deprived of a meaningful right to strike because of the modern Court's interpretation of the Mackay Doctrine, which permits employers to permanently replace strikers. President Ronald Reagan ushered in the new anti-union era in 1981 when he fired thirteen thousand striking federal air-traffic controllers. The result has been devastating to the labor movement. Union membership, now just 11.1 percent of the public and private labor force, is a little over half what it was in 1983, and one-third that of the 1950s.

Equally damaging have been so-called "right-to-work" laws now on the books in twenty-five (and soon to be twenty-six) states. At first blush the language of this sort of legislation appears innocuous, stressing the right of individual employees to decide whether to contribute dues to their union. But these statutes are in fact deliberate efforts to fatally weaken the ability of unions to function or organize workers. Labor law in the United States is majoritarian: if a majority of workers in a bargaining unit choose to be represented by a union, then the union is certified as the exclusive representative for all the workers. In non-right-to-work states, employees who wish not to be represented are still required to help pay the union's basic expenses, but not required to contribute to a union's political activities. Those expenses are separated out, allowing nonmembers to make a reduced contribution.

In right-to-work states, non-union members are exempt from all union dues. This creates what is known as a "free-rider" problem. Unions have a "duty of fair representation" that includes all workers in a bargaining unit. The "free-riding" employee who is not a union member thus receives the fruits of the collective-bargaining agreement—higher wages, job benefits, and the contractual requirement of just cause for termination—without paying his or her fair share of the expenses. There are significant benefits that come from being organized, especially the representation unions provide when an employee is disciplined or terminated. Such representation entails considerable expenses that should be borne by all those represented by a union.

In January, the issue of mandatory fees for public-employee union members was argued before the Supreme Court, in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. The Court considered whether requiring union fees that support core functions, not political activities unrelated to collective bargaining, infringes on the First Amendment rights of public employees. The petitioners, ten public-school teachers supported by conservative groups including the Center for Individual Rights and the National Right to Work Committee, argued that even the core activities of the union are political in nature and thus infringe on their First Amendment rights as a form of compelled speech and association. In January, the Court appeared poised to overrule a thirty-eight-year precedent, *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, which upheld the constitutionality of mandatory union fees. However, the unexpected death of Justice Antonin Scalia likely altered the outcome of the case. In March, the Court issued a 4-4 decision, which leaves in effect the lower-court ruling upholding mandatory dues for all, at least for now.

While unions have made mistakes, history shows that a strong labor movement benefits society at large. Labor law, like tax policy, is a significant tool for ensuring that income and wealth accumulation are not concentrated at the top, which can cause a myriad of social ills, distort the economy, and ultimately undercut American democracy. It is no accident that the postwar rise of the American middle class coincided with historically high levels of unionization. Ensuring that labor laws are vigorously enforced and that labor unions can thrive helps recalibrate the economy, making sure the gains from productivity in the workplace—which for decades resulted in wage increases for working people—are once again widely shared. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, the linkage between productivity and wages has eroded, with productivity gains gravitating upward in the form of skyrocketing CEO pay and capital gains in the stock market, even as wages have stagnated. The results have been devastating for millions of Americans.

There have been some significant gains for working people in the past few years, and high on the list is the "Fight for $15," the national campaign for increasing the minimum hourly wage. "Fight for $15" was built on protests in the fast-food industry, and gained acceptance from the public at large by telling poignant personal stories about the human cost of poverty wages. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has been a driving force in this effort, working alongside other unions, community organizations, and non-profits. The results are impressive: minimum-wage increases in New York, Connecticut, and California and for federal contractors in 2013; in Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Vermont, and West Virginia in 2014; in Alaska, South Dakota, and Arkansas, thanks to midterm-election ballot initiatives; and in Rhode Island and the District of Columbia in 2015. This year, Oregon passed a minimum wage of $14.75, to be phased in over a period of years. In California the minimum wage will rise to $15 by 2022. In New York, the $15 mark will be phased in by 2018 in the city and 2021 in the suburbs. Upstate the minimum will rise to $12.50. In short, we've witnessed a sea change in Americans' attitude regarding justice for minimum-wage workers. "Fight for $15" is helping lift millions out of poverty, while also focusing attention on workers in the service sector, which is often neglected by organizing initiatives.

As readers of this magazine know, Catholic social teaching is especially strong in recognizing the right of workers to have an effective voice in the workplace. Labor unions are "a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people in accordance with their individual professions," John Paul II wrote in *Laborem exercens*, his 1981 encyclical on work. And *Economic Justice for All*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1986 pastoral letter, asserted that "[n]o one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself," and "firmly oppose[d] organized efforts, such as those regrettably seen in this country, to break existing unions and prevent workers from organizing." Responding to the recent attacks against public-sector workers in Wisconsin, the USCCB reasserted the important role of unions in promoting "principles of justice, participation, and how workers can have a voice in the workplace and economy."

Bringing the minimum wage up to a true living wage is a crucial step forward, as are other employment-related benefits like broadening access to overtime and instituting paid sick leave. But employment statutes such as minimum-wage regulations cannot replace the broad-based benefits that come from organized labor. Unionization places the ability to influence what happens in the workplace directly in workers' own hands, even as it creates institutions that can advocate for working people at the community, state, and national level. Under an effective labor-law regime, unions remain the unique vehicle for worker empowerment. As envisioned by Senator Robert Wagner more than eighty years ago, a strong union movement is the most effective tool for strengthening economic and political democracy. ■

Consenting Adults

The Medieval Birth of Modern Politics

Thomas F. X. Noble

Published in 2010, 2012, and 2015, the three volumes of *The Emergence of Western Political Thought in the Latin Middle Ages* constitute the culmination of a lifetime's thinking about Western political thought. Francis Oakley's ideas are controversial in the best sense: they stir up lots of discussion.

Right off the bat, his overall title will strike most observers as preposterous. The emergence of Western political thought...in the Middle Ages? Everyone knows that our political philosophy derives from democratic Athens and republican Rome, followed by the Renaissance retrieval of those two traditions and finally the secularization launched by the Enlightenment. The Middle Ages were about popes and emperors, Christendom, lords and vassals: priestcraft, in other words, not statecraft. In this conventional view, proper political thought could not develop until the millennium-long religious eczema that was the Middle Ages was cured by modernity.

But the historian Frank Oakley, president emeritus of Williams College, has an instinct for excavating deep beneath conventional wisdom. While the traditional progression of Western political thought is held to be secular-religious-secular, he argues that it is in fact religious-religious-secular. He rejects the idea that Greece and Rome were secular, or that Christianity made purely political thought impossible. And he insists that the "seedbed" for consent and individual rights, which are central to modern political thought, lies in the Latin Middle Ages. That's the brochure for the journey Oakley takes his readers on. Let's visit some sites along the trip.

Volume 1: Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050), (Yale University Press, $50, 306 pp.), addresses kingship, "the political commonsense of humankind." Oakley shows how cosmic kingship, which arose in ancient Mesopotamia, represented a fusion of religion and politics in which kings were held to be divine, semi-divine, or else instituted by divinity. Hellenistic writers added a philosophical gloss to their inheritance and passed along the result to the Romans and their emperor cult. Jewish and Christian traditions ought to have excluded such rulership: Hebrews drew a sharp distinction between creator and creation, one that stripped rulers of sacrality and thus "disenchanted" the world, in Schiller's phrase, while Jesus shifted emphasis from a covenantal view of the relationship between a people and God to a personal relationship between individual souls and God. This shift demanded a "dramatic...limitation on the allegiance that human beings owed to any earthly society." And so in a Christian dispensation royal religion ought to have vanished. Yet several forces kept it visible and brought it into ever keener focus. St. Paul said that all power comes from God, and St. Luke saw a convergence between the Roman and the Christian stories. The Greek fathers, especially Eusebius, effected an accommodation between sacral kingship, Christianity, and the Roman Empire. Eusebius's "beguiling evocation of the parallelism between divine and human regality," writes Oakley, "was destined for an extraordinarily long life."

Augustine did not share the "providentialist enthusiasm" of most other Church Fathers; for him no earthly institution, whether empire or church, was sacred or could serve as a tool of God's plan for salvation. But his was a lonely voice. Ironically, in the early Middle Ages, Augustine's *City of God* was understood in a Eusebian sense. The Carolingians combined ancient Germanic ideas of sacrality with biblical, patristic, and liturgical ideas to equate their church and empire and to see the resulting *imperium Christianum* as the earthly manifestation of the divine will. "Political Augustinism" was the term long applied to this kind of polity. Carolingian kingship had a priestly aura, and by the middle of the eleventh century this kingship had become Christocentric. Yet concepts and practices of reciprocal fidelity and consent, connected with what historians still call "feudalism," limited its aspirations to absolutism.

Volume 2: The Mortgage of the Past: Reshaping the Ancient Political Inheritance (1050–1300), (Yale University Press, $60, 327 pp.), deals with kingship in the high Middle Ages, and reveals how three encounters with the past influenced it. First, the naturalistic philosophy of Aristotle was gradually domesticated; Aristotle's view of man as a political animal whose true ends could only be met in a political commu-

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nity rebutted both Augustine's view that government was a punishment for sin, *and* the opposite view that government was a central element of God's plan for human salvation. Second, the recovery of Roman law and the veritable explosion of canon law generated a great deal of rumination on absolute rule in both church and empire, directing greater attention to the papacy. Third, reflection on the early church uncovered a spiritual tradition that emphasized intention and consent.

The Gregorian Revolution—the massive program to reform church and society associated with Pope Gregory VII—tried to strip kings of sacrality, insisting that they were merely laymen. Even their temporal jurisdiction within their kingdoms was up for discussion. Did they rule on their own, or by delegation from the ecclesiastical hierarchy? As thinkers diminished royal sacrality, they also argued that the king had to rule justly, seeking the common good and not merely his own. An unjust king was a tyrant, and his people had a right to resist him. Still, medieval writers had little to say about who the "people" were or how they were to voice their resistance to tyranny.

The Holy Roman Emperor Henry V visiting his father Henry IV in prison, image ca. 1450

As an institution, the papacy grew in unprecedented ways after the Gregorian epoch, and reflections on the papal office grew apace, as thinkers tackled themes of power and authority. The former dealt mainly with the effective exercise of rule and the capacity to coerce. The latter dealt with legitimacy. Commentators on canon law spoke of "the fullness of power" possessed by the pope, a concept that owed not a little to Roman dicta such as "What pleases the prince has the force of law" or "The law is in the mouth of the prince." But did the pope's jurisdiction include both the ecclesiastical and the temporal realms, or just the former? High papalists, whose views were preponderant in the high Middle Ages, viewed the pope as all-powerful within a hierarchically structured universal Christian commonwealth. Fainter voices would have excluded the pope from the temporal realm.

One could argue that both continuity and change are apparent in concepts and practices of rulership in the high Middle Ages. What's clear is that something new had arrived on the scene—namely, representative institutions, which appeared everywhere, and in many different forms, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A unique contribution of the medieval centuries, they too owe something to Roman ideas, especially the principle that "What touches all by all must be approved." Representative institutions also gathered up and articulated consent. It is worth noting that this consent was not political or democratic in any modern sense, but rather procedural and consultative. Moreover people (almost always men, to be sure) expressed themselves as members of groups—clergy, knights, burghers, barons, members of guilds or cathedral chapters, among others—and not as autonomous individuals. Nevertheless, a big step had been taken.

As Oakley tells the story, in 1122 Emperor Henry V of Germany and Pope Calixtus II concluded the Concordat of Worms, which put an end to the Investiture Controversy, the decades-long battle over whether kings or emperors, as laymen, had the right to invest members of the clergy with the ring and staff of office. Worms left three problems in suspense. First, the secularization of rulership had not been settled. Kings did not meekly agree that they were mere laymen, and the popular view of them as hallowed figures lived on in such rituals as the "Royal Touch," the belief that the king could, by his touch, heal certain diseases. Second, the relationship between pope and bishops remained unclear—as it has until today. And finally, the governance of the church and the role of the cardinals was left murky.

These problems form the backdrop for Oakley's third and final volume, *Volume 3: The Watershed of Modern Politics: Law, Virtue, Kingship, and Consent (1300–1650)*, (Yale University Press, $85, 415 pp.), the core of which is devoted to conciliarism and the right of resistance. In both idea and practice, conciliarism had deep roots in the Middle Ages, but it was specifically provoked by the Great Western Schism (1378–1417) and by the classic age of councils: Pisa 1409, Constance 1414–1418, and Basel 1431–1449. Resistance too owed something to medieval precedent, and something to new and unforeseen developments, especially the Reformation. Both, moreover, are built upon high-medieval concepts of consent.

Before the papacy plunged into the crisis of schism and council, it was the subject of both effusive elevation and angry criticism. High papalists, including such unfamiliar figures as Augustinus Triumphus and Alvarus Pelagius, argued for a unitary Christian society, aligned with the church. In it, the emperor derives his authority from the pope. Papal power is direct from God; the church is a hierarchical clerical corporation, and within it the *potestas ordinis* (the power that attaches to the priestly office) and the *potestas jurisdictionis* (the power to govern) are one. One is hard pressed to say whether this is a political or an ecclesiological theory.

The papacy had its critics. Dante in his *Monarchia* sought to restrict the pope to the spiritual sphere. Marsiglio of Padua extolled the same view at greater length and with white-hot intensity. The chief cause of all Europe's troubles, he wrote, was the temporal authority of the pope. Priests, he said, succeeded only to Christ's human nature, and had no right to compel. In any community the "human legislator" makes the law to which the people in a given place are bound, and the pope has no right to intrude. William of Ockham sought, as it were, to desacralize temporal power and desecularize ecclesiastical power, arguing that since Christ had no temporal kingdom, neither could the apostles or their successors. John Wycliffe likewise denied the pope any authority in the temporal realm—and went further than the others, denying the pope meaningful authority even within the church.

But the most powerful check on papal power, as Oakley relates, came from conciliarism, a set of ideas with deep antecedents in both the patristic and Carolingian periods. Conciliarism could mean anything from church reform effected through councils, to a vision of the church as a kind of mixed monarchy, with pope, cardinals, and councils sharing power in various combinations. Strictly speaking, however, conciliarism was an ecclesiology assigning the pope to the role of a constitutional ruler subject to correction by the faithful, exercising their authority via councils (see Oakley's "Authoritative & Ignored," October 24, 2014). The papacy loathed conciliarist ideas and concluded a series of concordats with secular rulers that effectively renounced the idea of a universal Christian order and divided the church into a series of national communities. Through such arrangements the popes managed to persuade secular rulers that conciliarism harbored real threats to their own power.

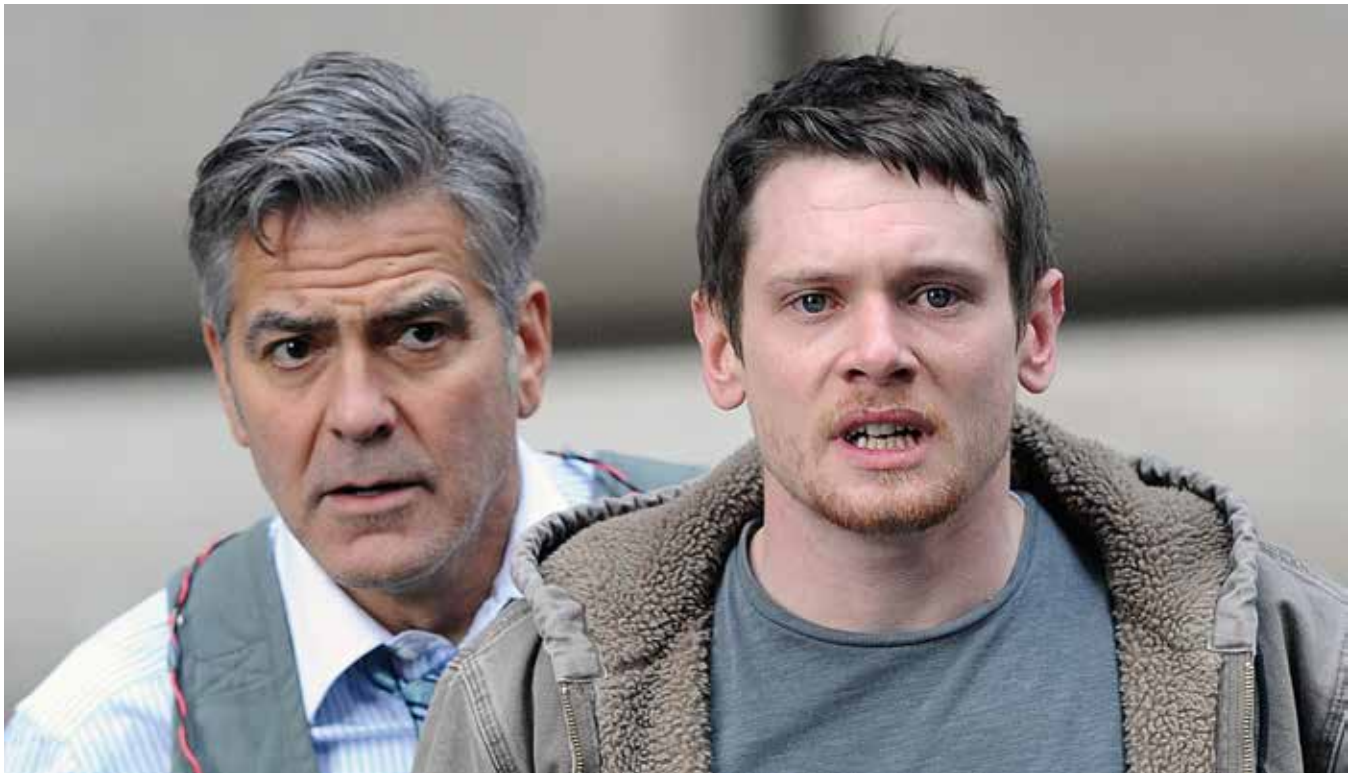
Into this maelstrom came the Protestant reformers. Luther obliterated the difference between clergy and laity, eliminated the clerical hierarchy, and announced that clergy existed only to preach the Gospel and rebuke sin. Secular rulers were to be obeyed without question unless they interfered in the spiritual sphere. God rules through them, Luther averred, and temporal rule was a remedy for sin. The Reformed tradition went further than Luther did in equating the temporal and spiritual spheres while disagreeing on where authority resided: for Zurich it lay with temporal rulers, for Geneva with the religious.

Out of this extraordinarily complex situation, Oakley explains, at least three outcomes can be perceived. First, both popes and kings once again asserted the religious roots of their authority in the face of consent-based challenges. Where the popes were concerned, high papalists like Robert Bellarmine stressed the divine and absolute nature of papal authority; and medieval theocratic kingship, meanwhile, was augmented in what has come to be called the "divine right of kings," with monarchs answerable only to God, subjects bound to obedience on pain of hell, and hereditary succession kept exempt from forfeiture.

Next, the right of resistance took shape, as the fear that the state might seek to crush religious communities, along with the increasing awareness that those communities differed sharply among themselves, spurred theories of legitimate opposition to tyranny. In part, such theories derived from the idea that Scripture or conscience conferred a right to resist a ruler who would command what is wrong. But even Protestant writers plundered conciliarist writings for concepts and expressions that legitimated opposition. Conciliarist writings were a crucial conduit for medieval constitutionalist thinking. One of Oakley's key findings is the way in which political and ecclesiological ideas meshed with each other. Such syntheses—and resulting paradoxes—found their apotheosis in the case of Charles I of England, whose healing "royal touch" was felt by more than thirty thousand people—and whose head was chopped off by parliamentarians who believed they had a right, perhaps a duty, to resist him.

Finally, while consent in the religious sphere suffered diminution, in the temporal sphere it flourished as never before. Gradually there arose the conviction that the legitimation of political authority required the "free consent of a concatenation of individual wills"—and that such freedom, to be meaningful, included the right of consent to be withheld as well as granted. This doctrine was called into being by medieval juristic, political, and ecclesiastical life, shaped by Romano-canonical corporate thinking, and connected with a natural-law tradition that was Hellenistic, philosophical, and universal. The resulting synthesis was impregnated by Christian notions of moral autonomy, individualism, and voluntarism that were biblical and patristic. In the end, however, the seventeenth century did not witness a concept of subjective rights attaching to autonomous individuals and did not create durable institutional forms for the expression of either consent or resistance.

If it looked as though royal religion remained robust in the seventeenth century, its temporal brand had little future. (Its papal brand is another story.) Royal religion was not the heart of medieval political thought, however, but its rival. As Oakley makes clear in this meticulously documented and cogently argued book, constitutionalism, consent, and resistance are the chief modern inheritances from our medieval past. ■



GEORGE CLOONEY AND JACK O'CONNELL IN *MONEY MONSTER*

TRISTAR PICTURES

Richard Alleva

Spectacle & Speculation

'MONEY MONSTER'

Can a movie be too entertaining? More specifically, can a film that's trying to convey a social critique be so much fun to watch that it fails to sting? Jodie Foster's remarkable *Money Monster* may be a test case. It's been accused of projecting a muddled message, but its warning about our national and international casino of a financial system seemed explicit enough to me. Still, its subject matter is of such crucial importance to everyone affected by global capitalism (and who isn't?) that any movie dealing with it should surely rile as well as amuse—should even dare to disturb our dreams. Didn't *Dr. Strangelove* achieve that with its farcical nightmare of nuclear destruction? But I walked out of *Money Monster* thoroughly amused and content and slept soundly that night. Should I have?

George Clooney plays Lee Gates, a cable-channel investment guru (obviously modeled on Jim Cramer of CNBC's *Mad Money*). Gates uses show-business glitz—music, dance, rap, computer graphics, celebrity interviews—to impart stock-market advice, and his carnival-barker antics and improvised verbal sidebars are so exhilarating that we instantly understand his popularity. He's smug and slick but he invites every listener to feel like an insider.

The smugness persists even when one of Gates's choice recommendations, an investment firm called IBIS, suffers what its CEO describes as a computer-algorithm glitch that costs investors $800 million. Man up, Gates tells his audience. So what if you've taken a beating? IBIS will be back on its feet and so will you. Now on with the show.

But the show, broadcast live, takes a startling turn when Kyle, a deliveryman who lost all his inherited savings by taking Gates's advice to invest in IBIS, sneaks onto the set, takes the host hostage at gunpoint, and straps him into a vest wired to explode at the touch of a trigger in Kyle's hand. Kyle doesn't demand his money back; he just wants a televised pulpit from which to vent his outrage. As the show continues live, Kyle's anger mounts and police snipers take their positions.

Money Monster's scriptwriters (Alan Di Fiore, Jim Kouf, and Jamie Linden) provide the plot with an ingenious gimmick. Like most TV hosts, Gates wears an earbud, through which his director and former lover, Patty (Julia Roberts), continues to feed him information and advice during the ordeal. Sometimes he heeds her advice; just as often he ignores it. Kyle has his weapons and his outrage; Lee has media savvy, quick wits, Patty's advice, and sheer survival instinct. Who will manipulate whom? And which man will more fundamen-

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tally raise the awareness of the other, as Kyle's outrage begins to crack Gates's self-satisfaction, while Gates's insider knowledge—greatly expanded by Patty's ongoing investigation of IBIS's malfeasances—begins to suggest to Kyle a means of finding justice. This aspect of the movie is riveting: the suspense never slackens and manages to leave room for comedy, pathos, and even a touch of romance, as Lee's dependence on Patty reawakens his love for her. (To Foster's credit, the romantic element is subdued and never sticky.)

In fact, under Foster's direction, everything works: the lithe camerawork by Matthew Libatique, Matt Chesse's seamless editing, and above all the cast. Nobody does charm, sincere or appropriately insincere, like George Clooney. Julia Roberts's serenely strong heroine puts one in mind of the great Katharine Hepburn. Irish actor Jack O'Connell never allows Kyle to become so menacing that we lose sympathy for his plight. As a CCO in charge of public relations, Caitriona Balfe (best known from the TV series *The Outlander*) unfussily suggests how a surface coldness can mask an underlying sense of justice.

So what's not to like about *Money Monster*? Nothing. It's completely likable. But its very likeability is a limitation. The film starts out as an angry exposé on how, hidden from public view, international business leaders can meddle illegally in a country's public affairs to the ruin of citizens unable to grasp what caused their ruin, much less resist it. Kyle's outrage isn't originally about any crime; he's not even sure a crime has been committed. As far as he knows, it's the entirely legal operation of the financial system that has ruined him, and he wants to protest by denouncing Gates, whom he regards as a shill for that system. But as the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that one person is to blame for the IBIS "glitch," and Lee and Kyle, now working together, will expose and punish that villain. The implication is that, once this one rotten apple is removed, the rest of the barrel will be fine. Is that really what the creators of this film intended to say?

That the source of evil in *Money Monster* is ultimately a single villain doesn't entirely invalidate the film's implicit critique of the global financial system. After all, if one villain is able to take advantage of it, doesn't that indicate a systemic weakness? But melodrama has its rules: when we pity Kyle, our pity is being moved by one particular, egregiously foolish sap, just as our righteous anger is stirred by one particular, egregiously callous financier. And it is the crude but irresistible logic of melodrama to make us feel that, once a particular villain is punished, order is restored and all is right with the world. Maybe that's why I walked out of the theater so satisfied that evening and so unsatisfied the morning after. I woke up feeling that this movie was a well-oiled pleasure machine rather than a trenchant critique.

Yet that's not quite fair. For *Money Monster* has another theme, which it treats more seriously. As the movie clearly indicates by referencing O. J. Simpson's famous televised highway chase, the dangerous, potentially lethal hostage situation soon becomes merely a part of the ongoing, all-encompassing entertainment scene. At first, the program's audience thinks it's just one more Lee Gates stunt ("Is this for real?" a voice calls out toward the TV in a crowded bar) to promote his show. But even after everyone realizes what's going on, most are amused and beguiled, not appalled. And when, near the film's conclusion, Lee and Kyle take to the crowded Manhattan streets with both their lives in danger, people on the sidewalks are cheering, jeering, dancing, and catcalling as if they were at a sporting event. And, as far as they're concerned, they are. There's one fleeting but unforgettable close-up of Clooney as he realizes he's now a freak on display rather than a master of the media universe. The best thing in *Money Monster* is the awareness of Jodie Foster and her collaborators that so much of public life is turning into sheer spectacle, and that so much of that spectacle is coarsening our souls and warping our judgment. ■

James Wetzel

Choosing the Better Part

Augustine
Conversions to Confessions
Robin Lane Fox
Basic Books, $35, 657 pp.

The last line of Robin Lane Fox's massive and meandering study of the confessional Augustine, author of "the greatest prayer in Christian literature," is lovely and evocative: "Marthas in our multiplicity, most of us avoid the Mary within, but some of us know, from Augustine, that there, but for the grace of God, go we."

In Luke's gospel (10: 38–42), we find Mary and Martha, the beloved sisters of Lazarus, hosting Jesus at the family home in Bethany. Jesus is not long for the world, but his death and Resurrection, forecast so bluntly in the previous chapter, casts no obvious shadow over a festive dinner and riveting audience with the Father's son. Martha is not so happy, however, having to do all the prep and tending work, while younger sister sits rapt at the feet of Jesus, drinking in every word.

Now imagine, as Lane Fox invites us to do, that Martha and Mary are inner dispositions. Your Martha is the part of you that cares for others and keeps you working on yourself, so that one day you too may be worthy of love and life-changing illumination. Your Mary is either beyond or before all that: she is an unselfconscious lover of beauty, drawn ineluctably to the most noticeable portion on offer. The Martha within you may be forgiven for thinking that her complacent inner sibling ought to be helping out more and enjoying less, lest she confuse the most noticeable portion of beauty with the best. But Jesus, having migrated from dinner guest to inner teacher, speaks for a contrary wisdom: "Mary has chosen the better part," he reminds your anxious and preoccupied self, "and it will not be taken away from her."

It is fair for us to want the active and contemplative sides of our psyche to be on good speaking terms. A Mary, left to her own devices, has all the charm of a blind appetite, and a Martha, having disowned her sister, is tyranny on the way to despair. And yet there is no way, despite what you may have heard, to find reconciliation in a balance of opposites: even when in balance (and perhaps especially so), opposites still oppose. Jesus does not tell Martha to be a bit more like Mary; he tells her that Mary's choice is really the only choice, and so the one true necessity. How is Martha, the psyche with plans and ambitions and a closeted desire for pleasure, able to take such a word to heart and not be humiliated? Lane Fox nicely suggests that some of us Marthas know, by way of Augustine, that grace humbly restores us to a love we never had a prayer of avoiding.

Baptism of Augustine by Ambrose of Milan, *Gozzoli, 15th century*

But is this Augustine the same Augustine that Lane Fox has been leisurely introducing to us over the course of the previous 563 pages of the narrative? (And add to that an extensive bibliography and notes.)

I don't mean to complain (too much) about the length of *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions*. As Lane Fox points out in his Introduction, there have been "many fine short books on Augustine," and, not wishing to crowd that field, he has resolved on a long one. Although the reasoning here is not entirely reassuring, the task that Lane Fox has set for himself, with regard to Augustine, does require a certain

amount of narrative expansiveness. For roughly half the book, Lane Fox tracks Augustine's life from birth to his famous conversion in a Milanese garden, using the *Confessions* for the basic narrative framework. In what follows, the really long slog, he turns to the eleven years that separate convert from confessor and works to reconcile the forty-three-year old bishop, laden with pastoral cares, with the thirty-two-year old convert who forswears sex and seeks otherworldly release. Since it is the writer of the *Confessions* who is supplying Lane Fox with his portrait of the convert, it is far from clear what confession can add to conversion beyond being a description of it. Lane Fox likens his book to a symphony of two movements, but most symphonies have more than two, and the ones that don't risk either monotony or incoherence.

In an effort to lend his minimalist symphony greater internal complexity, Lane Fox resorts to the odd device of constantly comparing Augustine to two of his relatively obscure contemporaries, both wholly unknown to him: Libanius of Antioch, a pagan orator, and Synesius of Cyrene, a married Christian bishop. Taken together, the two of them dramatically frame the goods that Augustine, the convert, has definitively renounced: sex and worldly ambition. Switching his simile from music to the visual arts, Lane Fox now encourages us to liken his book to a triptych on a medieval altar, with Augustine occupying the central panel and with Libanius and Synesius looking in on him respectively from the left (disapproving) and from the right (moderately admiring).

This is the picture of a wholly contrived complexity, and it is complexity of the wrong sort. What we need from Lane Fox is a close reading of the *Confessions* and not a fanciful farming out of some its details to parts less known. What comes back to us from there is neither a two-part symphony nor a triptych, but something akin to a slideshow from a well-traveled and somewhat eccentric "uncle," one whose enthusiasm has outrun his focus.

But the root problem of Lane Fox's *Augustine* is not that its narrative is long and overburdened. A seasoned historian (among other books, he is the author of *The Search for Alexander* and *Pagans and Christians: In the Mediterranean World from the Second Century A.D. to the Conversion of Constantine*) should in any case have leave to a take a side trip or two and to speculate on occasion about what might have been the case where the evidence falls short. (Lane Fox has a particularly elegant speculation about Augustine's composition of the *Confessions*, placing it squarely in the Lenten season of 397.) The root problem is that Lane Fox boxes himself into a conception of conversion that relegates the Christological logic of Augustine's confession to what William James would have called "over-belief." Once conversion gets cast as essentially a psychological phenomenon, a turn from an old life to a new one, it doesn't matter deeply how you further describe what gets rejected and what embraced. The psychological dynamics are the same.

Lane Fox's Augustine doesn't convert to Christianity; he converts to whatever it is you get to experience when you put your worldly ambition behind you and give up your sex life. When Augustine is eighteen, highly sexed, and newly intoxicated with the delights of Carthage, a young man's sin city, he comes across the (now lost) *Hortensius* of Cicero, a rhetor's exhortation to philosophy. He converts—almost. Based largely on the evidence of a passage from book 8 of the *Confessions*, Lane Fox has the eighteen-year-old take three morals from the *Hortensius* to heart: that the pursuit of wisdom is far better than love of worldly gain, that worldliness is to be despised, that sexual satisfaction is a worldly good.

Augustine only almost converts because he can't quite bring himself to despise sex: "Give me chastity, Lord, but not yet." Lane Fox sees in Manicheism—a form of Christian Gnosticism—the half-hearted convert's sanctuary. As a hearer among Manichean adepts, a Martha among Marys, Augustine can labor at chastity and still enjoy sex on the side. The Platonists will, many years later, confirm for him his growing sense that spiritual release is of a different order of goodness than sex. After an agonized bout of self-recrimination over his lingering attachment to the old lusts, Augustine finally yields to a voice of innocence—a child's call to "take up, and read"—and receives through Paul the requisite words of deliverance: "Put on Jesus Christ, your master, and don't look to lusts to care for flesh."

That is, in brief compass, Lanes Fox's portrait of Augustine's conversions. It is really only of a single conversion, a perfected shift from one totalizing attachment to another, and the Augustine who confesses to it might as well be as Manichean as Platonist, as Platonist as Christian.

It is true that Augustine never converts to Christianity, but not for the reason that Lane Fox suggests—not because the agent of conversion (some psychological goad) is so indifferent to the way we speak our reverences. Augustine doesn't convert to Christianity because Christianity is nothing apart from the Christian god, from Christ. I say this not to inject a note of supercilious piety into my review (yes, I too can distinguish Christ from Christendom!), but to suggest that God's humility matters infinitely more to Augustine than his own, and that we will have no sense of what he is confessing to in the *Confessions*, where pastor and perfectionist sanely conjoin, until we come to grips with that. Lane Fox continues a venerable tradition of confusing humility with acquiescence to superior power.

Augustine shares in the confusion; he just refuses to sanctify it. I commend Lane Fox to his best line: we Marthas get to the Mary within when we realize that there was never any place to go but there. This is not oneness without otherness; it is the beginning of speech—of confession. ■

James Wetzel *holds the Augustinian Endowed Chair in Philosophy at Villanova University. Among his books are* Augustine and the Limits of Virtue *and* Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed.

Anthony Domestico

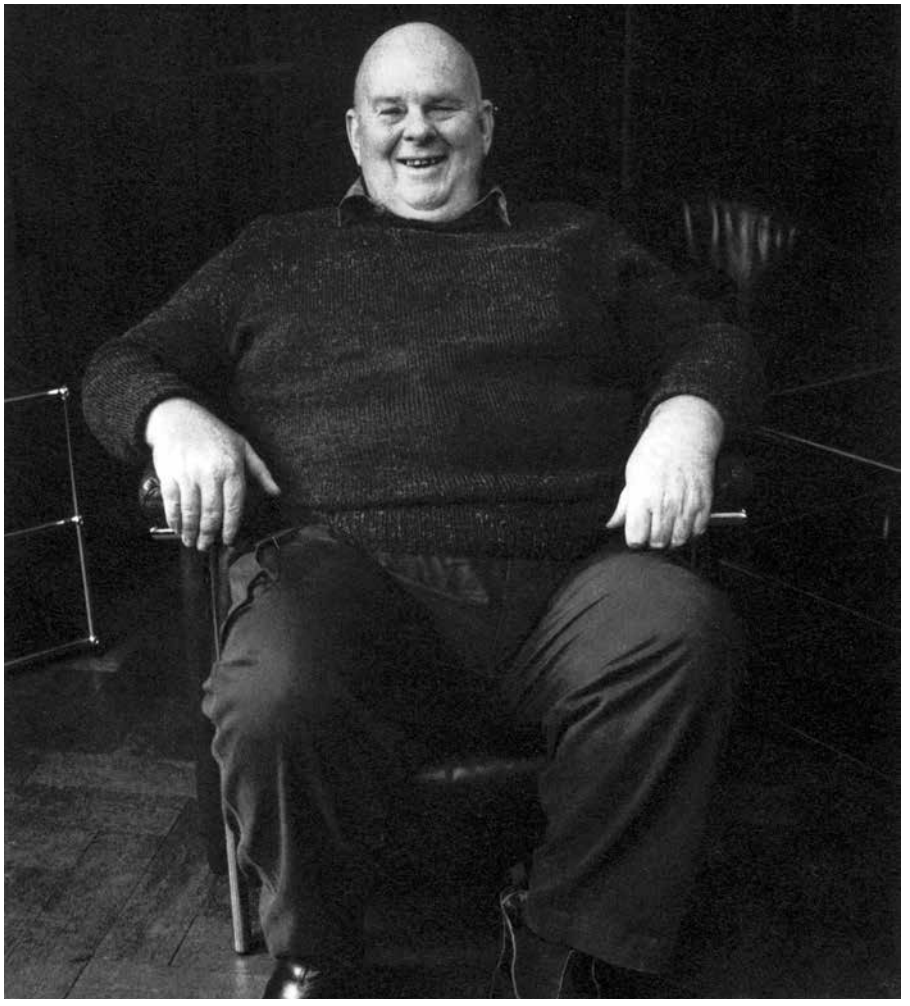
Look Again

Waiting for the Past

Les Murray
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $18, 96 pp.

Les Murray is a poet of immensity. First, there's the immensity of his output. Born in 1938 in rural Australia, Murray has published more than thirty collections of poetry, many of them rapturously received: he has won the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Premio Mondello, and the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry, among many other awards.

Then there's the immensity of Murray's life. Tall, bald, and of Falstaffian girth, Murray looks like someone you'd avoid in a rugby scrum or outside a pub. He's worked farms, post offices, and railways; he's suffered from crippling bouts of depression and from congenital crankiness. His colorful life seems the stuff of legends. The biographer Peter Alexander tells us that for a period in the 1960s, Murray, depressed and lacking funds, slept in unfinished buildings "on a plastic sheet and a blanket, emerging in the morning to slap the cement dust off himself as the builders arrived." While working for the State Railways around the same time, Murray "surreptitiously ate a turkey prepared for the New South Wales Railways Commissioner, picking the flesh away from the inside so that later when an attempt was made to carve it, the shell collapsed with a sigh." In 1996, he almost died when a chicken bone perforated his gut. As I said, the stuff of legends.



Les Murray

But what is most remarkable is the immensity of Murray's poetic gifts. There isn't a thing that Murray can't do—and do better than almost any other living poet. Describe landscape? Take these lines from "All of Half Way," which features the volcano-produced coast of Northern Ireland: "the Giant's columns // massing on out, a basalt grandstand / of rain-cup pillars, crimped like Rubiks / from cooling out of their rock floor / all of half way from America." Speak intelligently and ferociously about poverty, labor, and banking—things that nag at Murray's very being, perhaps because he grew up in a poor farming family in New South Wales? Read "The Rollover," which addresses bankers and "under-manager types" with these acid lines: "Their turn / is coming. They'll be rationalized themselves, made adapt / to a multinational society." Simply savor the beauty of language, the weight and coloring and tonality of individual words? Consider "Infinite Anthology," in which Murray celebrates those "single-word poets" who create neologisms and, in doing so, "allow us to visit the oracular and sense its renewing dance": "Irishtown—a Soweto of old-time Catholic labor"; "dandruff acting—the stiffest kind of Thespian art"; "window licker—a voyeur." Murray's language is fierce, and so is his sense of the world. To read him is, to quote Emily Dickinson, to "feel physically as if the top of [your] head were taken off."

"The Black Beaches" serves as a perfect opening to Murray's latest collection, *Waiting for the Past*. In it, we see Murray's complete command of form—of rhyme and half-rhyme, of imagery and tone. The poem also reveals one of the collection's major thematic threads: how any single moment of existence is overlaid with many other moments of existence; how, to modify T. S. Eliot, time past and time

future are both perhaps contained in time present:

Yellow rimming the ocean
is mountains washing back
but lagoons in cleared land often
show beaches of velvet black

peat of grass and great trees
that were wood-fired towers
then mines of stary coals
fuming deep in dragon-holes.

This morning's frost dunes
afloat on knee-sprung pasture
were gone in a sugar lick
leaving strawed moisture

but that was early
and a change took back the sun
hiding it in regrowth forest.
Coal formed all afternoon.

Notice how Murray builds drama through the careful deployment of syntax and enjambment. The poem is elegantly compressed: four quatrains, with each short line between five and eight syllables. Over the course of the poem, we move from a completely enjambed eight-line sentence to a completely enjambed seven-line sentence to a final end-stopped, single-line sentence: "Coal formed all afternoon." The poem narrows as it proceeds, and it ends not with the perfect rhymes we've grown accustomed to ("back"/"black," "coals"/"holes," "pasture"/"moisture") but with an imperfect one: "sun"/"afternoon."

These formal effects cause us to linger over the poem's final image of coal formation: geological time (the years needed for coal to form) held within human time (the span of a single afternoon). "The Black Beaches" argues both for time's fleetingness—"This morning's frost dunes" are "gone in a sugar lick," vanished in a single line—and for the continued presence of the past. Lagoons show beaches of peat, and this peat contains within it, if only we would look, its many past lives, first as "wood-fired towers / then mines of stary coals / fuming deep in dragon-holes." *Hic sunt dracones*, here be dragons, but the "here" isn't a faraway and exotic realm. It is the world all around us.

"The Black Beaches" dramatizes the enfolding of time within place, reminding us that, to use Eliot again, on any afternoon, in any place, history is now. *Waiting for the Past* is filled with poems about Murray's childhood in rural New South Wales—a time and place that seem to have passed away but that remain alive in the poet's memory and in his work. "Growth," one of the book's truly great poems, begins like this:

One who'd been my friendly Gran
was now mostly barred from me,
accomplishing her hard death
on that strange farm miles away.

My mother was nursing her
so we couldn't be at home.
Dad had to stay out there, milking,
appearing sometimes, with his people,
all waiting for the past.

There are many things to love in these lines: that sharp sense of how, to a child, illness seems to possess a terrifying, transformative power (the person who had been Gran is now someone else); the formal language that we use to deal with such frightening transformations ("accomplishing her hard death"); that puzzlingly lucid and dazzlingly complex final line, "all waiting for the past." The speaker's father is waiting for Gran to pass, and so to become part of the past. The speaker is, in the moment of composition, waiting for the past to make itself present once again.

Many other poems contain similar evocations of Murray's personal past: those "years when farm wives / drove to the coast with milk hands to gut fish, because government no longer / trusted poor voters on poor lands"; the year 1960, when electricity first came to New South Wales, and "Old lampblack corners / and kero-drugged spiders / turn vivid and momentary / in the new yellow glare / that has reached us at last."

Murray is seventy-seven years old, and he feels time in his bones. The poem "Vertigo" begins with darkly comic lines—"Last time I fell in a shower-room / I bled like a tumbril dandy / and the hotel longed to be rid of me"—and ends with this lovely, quiet description of how age changes the way people negotiate the world and those around them: "Later comes the sunny day when / street detail gets whitened to mauve // and people hurry, or wait, quiet." That last line, set off as its own stanza and containing two pauses within its short span, asks the reader to slow down, to consider, to look again.

Readers familiar with Murray's earlier work will find many of his regular strengths in *Waiting for the Past*. I marveled, once again, at his Lawrentian attention to animal life, especially the lives of cows and horses: "the oaten seethe / of thoroughbred horses," their "loose-lip sigh." Also worth remarking upon is Murray's Catholic sensibility (he converted to Catholicism in the early 1960s). *Waiting for the Past* is dedicated "To the glory of God" (as are most of his earlier collections), and it contains a brilliant poem called "Jesus Was a Healer," as well as "Persistence of the Reformation," previously published in *Commonweal* under a slightly different title. Finally, readers will recognize the trademark distilled energy of Murray's short lines, as in the ending to "Winter Garden": "wirraway crack! / pigeon zoom / grass pheasant whirr."

Waiting for the Past is a brilliant collection by a brilliant poet. As in "Time Twins," with which I will end, Murray reminds us of the strangeness of time, its ruptures and its braidings:

A youth, rusty haired
as I was in my time,
rocked atop a high stool
as he read a book from
the stock he was to sell.

His left leg kinked under
his right knee, as mine does.
We had likely both of us
floated that way before birth
in separate times and wombs. ■

Anthony Domestico *is an assistant professor of literature at Purchase College, SUNY. His book on poetry and theology in the modernist period is forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press.*

David Bentley Hart

Our Atheism is Different

Battling the Gods
Atheism in the Ancient World
Tim Whitmarsh
Knopf, $27.95, 304 pp.

Buried in the pages of this short, disappointing book is a shorter, better book; and, had Tim Whitmarsh confined himself to writing simply as a classicist and historian, the latter is what he might have produced. Unfortunately, he chose to pursue a grander purpose, and that one occasioned by those voguish volumes of popular atheism that have been burdening bookshelves with their unbearable lightness for a decade now. As a result, he has turned what should have been a quick, engaging narrative about ancient intellectual culture into a sluggish catalogue of confused judgments, procrustean readings, and arguments occasionally achieving a banality worthy of the New Atheists themselves. Again and again, just as the story threatens to become interesting, its flow is dammed up by some attempt to conscript a recalcitrant text into Whitmarsh's larger project, or diverted by some logical error into marshes of vagary. And, in the end, Whitmarsh's larger argument—about the perennial persistence of atheism and skepticism, the birth of philosophical "naturalism" in ancient Greece, and so on—rests upon conceptual misprisions so fundamental as to render it quite beyond rescue.

Again, it need not have been so. That buried text is quite enjoyable. It relates facts not nearly as obscure as Whitmarsh imagines, but does so in lucid prose and with a judicious eye for detail. It tells of the variety of views in the ancient world regarding the nature of the divine, the relation between the divine and the world, and what we can know of either. And it contains good surveys of Skepticism's exquisite art of suspended judgment, Epicureanism's winsome metaphysical eccentricities, Cynicism's glorious loucheness, and so on. Mind you, Whitmarsh occasionally exerts himself needlessly trying to make these schools look even more atheistic than they were; his treatment of Epicureanism manages to weaken an inherently strong case by refusing to rest content with the actual evidence. But his depictions of certain individual thinkers—Protagoras, Prodicus, Democritus, Lucretius, Sextus Empiricus, Carneades—are good specimens of solid schoolboy history.

These, though, exhaust the book's virtues. And its vices are many. The most discreditable of them is simple prejudice: both an obvious intellectual prejudice, of considerable philosophical crudity, that modern metaphysical "naturalism" is self-evidently the most rational of worldviews; and a more concealed but unmistakable cultural prejudice, verging on casual bigotry, regarding the things he imagines the developed monotheisms believe. Whitmarsh certainly seems to think that any substantial faith in God involves a combination of childish anthropomorphism and fatalistic determinism, and whenever he talks of Jewish or Christian (or Muslim) Scriptures or traditions his obvious lack of acquaintance with the sources produces only silly caricatures. At times the result is just a scholarly lapse, such as his apparent projection of late antique and rabbinic Judaism's lofty monotheism back over the whole corpus of Hebrew scripture. At other times the result is more sordid, as when he accuses the Apostle Paul of "derision leveled at those poor, benighted fools who do not belong" to his group: a remark that, quite apart from being wholly uncorroborated by the texts, is a boorish slander of arguably the first "Western" thinker to articulate a spiritual and moral universalism—sur-

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passing even anything the Stoics envisaged—in which there is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, man nor woman.

All this might be tolerable if Whitmarsh's larger argument were coherent, but it is not. In part, this is because his insatiable desire for proof of a larger antique intellectual movement away from religion leads him to find atheism where there is no sign of it. For him absence of evidence is evidence of absence. Does Demosthenes's failure to invoke the gods frequently in the courtroom indicate disbelief? Perhaps, perhaps not. Does Metrodorus's denial that the Roman empire is a providential dispensation secretly advance an atheist agenda? If so, it is very secret indeed. "Was Anaxagoras an atheist?" Certainly not in any modern sense.

Xenophanes

And some of Whitmarsh's conclusions are not merely suppositious, but are in fact explicitly contradicted by the evidence. The pre-Socratic philosophers, he proclaims, inaugurated Western thought's long journey toward modern philosophical "naturalism," and when they speak of "divinity" we should substitute the word "nature." Where to begin? The anachronism of speaking of modern "naturalism" (a mechanistic materialist metaphysics unimaginable in antiquity) is bad enough. As is the tacit assumption, belied by the whole history of classical theism, that belief in active divinity must be a belief in finite cultic deities. As is the equally tacit assumption, belied both by plain logic and by all of Western intellectual history, that speculation on the material constitution of the cosmos necessarily militates against belief in the divine. But still worse is Whitmarsh's univocal understanding of "nature," as if a late-modern materialist and a pre-Socratic philosopher of "physis" are talking about the same thing. When Thales says that all is full of gods, or Heraclitus that "logos" pervades everything, or Parmenides that being is a perfectly realized divine plenitude of rational order, they may not be describing the anthropomorphic divinities Whitmarsh thinks "properly" define theism, but neither are they describing a mindless mechanical order.

In short, Whitmarsh habitually mistakes any philosophically refined concept of divine transcendence for an abstraction leading toward unbelief. And this habit reaches a point of consummate absurdity when he attempts to drag Xenophanes into his narrative. Xenophanes, he says, "was in part a naturalist"; and he asks whether "anything would be lost in Xenophanes' account of the world if we substitute 'nature' for 'the one god'?" Well, if by "nature" one happens to mean an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, limitless divine mind possessed of rational intellect and will, immanent within and transcendent of all things, then I suppose not. But to me the question just suggests a profound ignorance of the logical implications of any developed belief in divine transcendence. Thus Whitmarsh thinks it significant that Herodotus speaks more of "the god" or "the divine" than of any particular cultic deity, and seems to be referring to a universal power of moral order. Somehow, Whitmarsh sees this as indicating a weaker, more metaphorical—rather than stronger, more robust—understanding of divine reality. And he does his damnedest to insinuate that Socrates, contrary to the testimonies of those who actually knew him, truly denied the divine. Whitmarsh notes, for instance, that in Plato's earlier dialogues Socrates seems concerned mostly with how to live a virtuous life in this world, but in the later has turned his thoughts to the immortal soul's escape into a transcendent realm. Why Whitmarsh sees these emphases as contradictory rather than complementary he does not say.

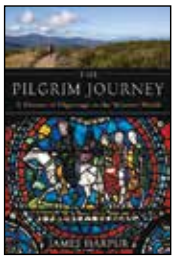
In the end, the most debilitating conceptual limitation in Whitmarsh's story is a simple unawareness of what "theism" is—or, rather, of how what philosophers call "classical theism" differs from polytheistic myth and devotion. And yet this difference constitutes one of the most significant

truths about the development of classical culture, both East and West. It belongs to the very essence of that immense cultural shift often called the "Axial Age." Where Whitmarsh thinks he sees an intellectual fatigue with the divine, he is often actually looking at an invigorating conceptual revolution away from polytheism, not toward atheism, but toward theism. A touch of metaphysical sophistication would have served Whitmarsh well here. The philosophical discovery of the logic of transcendence leads to classical monotheism, which is not merely a numerically more constricted version of the same kind of thing as polytheism, but a radically different claim about the structure of reality, the relation between the absolute and the contingent, and the relation between being as such and contingent beings. In the West, Xenophanes is the first figure known to have effected this transition, but one sees the same pattern in ancient Persia's movement from the cults of the ahuras and devas toward early Zoroastrianism, in the Indian movement from the Vedic gods toward the Brahman of the Upanishads and the Bhaktic monotheisms, in the rise of Chinese speculation on the Way of Heaven, in the Greco-Roman emergence of high Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic theologies, even in the quite gradual evolution of Jewish monotheism.

This same conceptual failure causes Whitmarsh also to misunderstand the difference between ancient and modern atheism. His argument is that there is a far broader commonality between pre-Christian ancient culture and post-Christian late modernity than is often imagined, and that the period of Christian ideological and social dominance was really an interruption of a more natural cultural situation. This is extravagantly wrong. Ancient "atheism" was a private skepticism toward certain received religious and mythic narratives; modern "atheism" is the cultural embrace of an unprecedented metaphysical, anthropological, and social vision. And this latter is an historical possibility only at the far end of a twofold cultural disenchantment: first, Christianity's "atheistic" forsaking of a sacred realm of local gods embraced within cosmic nature in favor of the total metaphysical, spiritual venture of classical theism; and, second, Christendom's gradual turn inward of the critical power it had deployed against polytheism, which led inevitably to a complete rejection of transcendence as such, and the birth of a truly mechanistic vision of reality. And this rejection required the creation of something new: the secular, which is not simply the "real" world out there discovered when a thin layer of "supernaturalism" is stripped away, but an ideological, social, political, moral, and metaphysical invention.

In every age and land there have been skeptics and unbelievers, but modern secularism has nothing to do with that. Most modern post-religious persons are not rationalists; they lack faith precisely because they are no less credulous than most peoples throughout time have been, and so no less prone to accept the prevailing prejudices of their age. Post-Christian culture is most definitely not a reversion to the intellectual pluralism of antiquity, or the revival of a long suppressed tradition of "secularist" thought (an anachronism of the wildest sort). It is what Nietzsche—whose understanding of Christianity's epochal self-subversion was exquisitely, if biliously, precise—called the Death of God: that time when the whole horizon of the transcendent has been evacuated, when an unprecedented absence has appeared at the heart of human experience, and when the self has been progressively reduced to an isolated center of desire and will confronted by a universe of strictly immanent ends.

Let me put it this way: If you want a sense of what the ancient world was like religiously, visit India. Modernity has left its marks everywhere there, true, but secularism rests like a faint mist upon the surface of a fathomless ocean of religious belief, intuition, and longing. Once the whole world was like that: all things were full of gods, all things were pervaded by God. When one gazed out at nature, another gaze—mysterious, fitful, terrifying, enticing—met one's own. And the self belonged to a spiritual story as ancient as time and touching upon eternity. There was the realm of the sacred (the temple) and that of the profane (literally, what lies "before the temple"), but of a "secular" realm there was none. All was "religious." Now our cultural situation is very different indeed. We can never be ancient persons, precisely because the whole history of the rise and decline of Christian culture took that possibility away forever. We look out at a world composed from mindless mechanical forces and sheer blind chance, and absolutely nothing looks back. We now belong to a kind of humanity altogether without precedent, inhabiting a world that never before existed. For a historian of Western culture not to understand this is, frankly, to have missed just about everything. ■



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David Bentley Hart *is at present a fellow at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Studies. His most recent book is* A Splendid Wickedness and Other Essays.

RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Luke Timothy Johnson

Shared Stories, Rival Tellings

Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims

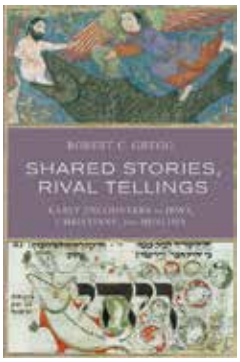
Robert C. Gregg

Oxford University Press, $39.95, 712 pp.

Over two dozen stories with the same cast of characters are shared by the Jewish Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. Other stories concerning Jesus, John the Baptist, and Mary are common to the New Testament and Qur'an. Robert Gregg has selected five such narratives to illustrate the distinctive interpretive tendencies of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. Four of them come from the Jewish Bible: Cain's murder of Abel, the strife between Sarah and Hagar, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and the reluctant prophet Jonah. A fifth is drawn from the New Testament portrayal of Jesus' mother, Mary.

Gregg moves systematically through each of the stories, showing first the biblical basis for interpretation, then displaying the respective "tellings" of the account in each tradition, and concluding each section with a comparative summary. His work is both learned and accessible. It is scholarly, because he deals deftly and in detail with text and translation problems, engages disputed questions concerning each interpretive trajectory, and in some seventy pages of end-notes provides extensive discussion with primary and secondary literature. It is accessible, because his language is clear and jargon-free; he explains what may not be obvious to the non-expert, and his presentation is straightforward. The book can therefore serve for the uninitiated as an introduction to the three monotheistic religions of the West and, for those already acquainted with the three traditions, as a superlative collection of primary sources (literary and artistic) dedicated to biblical stories.

Befitting such a collection of complex hermeneutical traditions, the two theses argued by Gregg are eminently reasonable. First, interpreters within the three religions were themselves powerful shapers of the tradition, adapting the biblical stories to new circumstances and perspectives in order to reinforce Jewish, Christian, or Muslim identity. Second,



"competitive Scripture interpretation was a supremely powerful force in the early divergence" of respective traditions as they developed into independent religious cultures. The competitive interpretation is perhaps best displayed in the treatment of Mary; readers who know only of the exaltation of Mary within Christianity will discover the source of the "illegitimacy of Jesus" in the Jewish *Toledoth Yeshu*, and be surprised at the high honor given Mary the mother of Isa in the Qur'an.

For those willing to work through the massive amount of material here assembled, the true delight is not found in the demonstration of those theses, but in observing the many fascinating twists and turns of interpretation even within each tradition. For the story of Joseph and the seductive Potiphar's wife, for example, Rabbinic and Muslim interpreters are willing to speculate on Joseph's own sexual drives and perhaps even his complicity in events. In contrast, Hellenistic Jewish readers (like Philo) emphasized Joseph's unstained virtue, a path followed by Christian interpreters, who made Joseph a champion of chastity. Now, the twist: Even though Muslim interpreters tended to obsess over the seductiveness of Potiphar's wife, among Sufis, she becomes an exemplar of mysticism; her erotic longing is transmuted into the desire for God.

In a period when relations between religious traditions are characterized by suspicion and lack of understanding, Gregg's even-handed and irenic treatment of each religion's biblical interpretation provides a positive appreciation of each on its own terms and an invitation for each religion to consider rejoining with the others in an important conversation.

Unnatural Frenchmen

The Politics of Celibacy and Marriage, 1720–1815

E. Claire Cage

University of Virginia Press, $39.50, 238 pp.

In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, priestly celibacy was not only loudly and publicly disputed, it became a matter of the state's social policy—indeed, social engineering—during and after the Revolution (1789–1799). Basing her research on published literature and on state archives, E. Claire Cage traces the stages by which the celibacy of the clergy went from being contested by the *philosophes*, to being proscribed by the state in the period of the terror (1793–1794), to being restored by the Concordat of 1801. Her story is enlivened by generous cita-

tions from the participants in this great social upheaval, giving voice above all to the priests who found themselves at one point seeking permission to marry, and at another point seeking forgiveness for having married, even if under duress. The number of those affected by controversy and policy was not insignificant: in a pre-revolutionary French population of some 28 million, about 190,000 were bound by celibacy because they were secular clergy (90,000) or members of religious orders (80,000, including some 55,000 nuns).

The title "Unnatural Frenchmen" nicely captures the two main arguments made against a celibate clergy. Celibacy was first of all "unnatural," because it prevented men—and they are the ones exclusively in view—from fulfilling the role that Nature intended for them: to marry, to beget children, and to be the heads of households. Since every man had the right to fulfill the role assigned by Nature, celibacy was literally a sin against Nature. The damage done by such an unnatural life was illustrated by reports (and cartoon portrayals) of clergy seducing young women in the confessional, and betraying parishioners through acts of adultery. But there was also a political dimension to the debate from the first. The best science of the age declared that depopulation, not overpopulation, threatened the nation; celibacy was therefore unpatriotic, especially in a time when France was threatened by enemies and needed all the soldiers she could raise. Moreover, celibate clergy owed their first allegiance to a foreign power and could not be relied on as honest citizens of the *patrie*. Far better that priests should be enmeshed in good French citizenship through the bonds of a wife, children, and the care of a household. Such criticisms turned to social policy during the Revolution, when the right of a priest to marry became an obligation to marry. The full force of propaganda and law was turned to the project of getting priests married, as part of the liberation of France from its Catholic past. An engraving captures the moment: a long line of priests and a long line of nuns approach a simple member of the Third Estate, who joins their hands in marriage. The suppression of religious orders hastened the process. Some priests and nuns married out of conviction or love, others under severe legal and social pressure. But Cage's account makes clear that the experiment in social engineering left much messiness behind, in the lives of priests and nuns themselves, in the families they formed, and among the congregations in which many of them continued to minister.

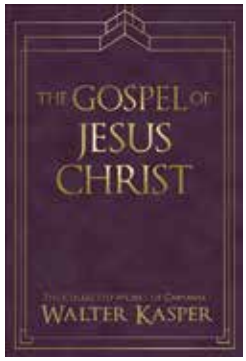
Although Cage does not introduce contemporary debates over celibacy until her very last paragraphs—noting how the charge of "unnatural" has changed from the eighteenth-century context—readers cannot help but regard the older conflicts in light of more recent discussions. And although Cage does not herself draw the lesson, her readers are led to reflect on the vagaries in what in different eras might constitute a consensus of "scientific knowledge," and on the frightening ways in which pseudoscience can be used to support totalizing experiments in social programming.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Collected Works, Volume 5

Walter Kasper

Paulist Press, $49.95, 320 pp.



This is the first of eighteen volumes containing Cardinal Walter Kasper's collected theological writings planned for publication by Paulist Press. Kasper is an old Vatican hand, having served as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity since 1999, and as a cardinal since 2001. He has also been an academic and episcopal theologian of long standing and considerable range. Speaking of Kasper's recent book on mercy, Pope Francis called him, "a clever theologian…a good theologian," from whom he had learned much. He has also been excoriated by the ultra-conservative Pius X society as a "cardinal without faith." So he comes recommended.

The present volume contains three essays in a distinctively didactic style, all having to do with the character and challenge of Christian faith in the present age, but written at different stages in the theologian's life. The title is a bit misleading: although Kasper speaks of Jesus' proclamation, and of Jesus as the content of faith, Jesus is much less the topic here than are the nature of religious belief within late modernity. The longest piece, "Introduction to the Faith," was first delivered to academic audiences at Tuebingen—where Kasper was on the faculty—in 1970–1971, and responds to the dual challenges of modernity, the Second Vatican Council, and the European social unrest of the late 1960s. The second, "Surpassing All Knowledge: A Reflection on the Christian Faith," is a 1987 pastoral exercise in fundamental theology, with a more precise focus on the anthropological dimensions of faith. The third is a set of lectures on "New Evangelization as a Theological, Pastoral, and Spiritual Challenge" that Kasper reworked over his time as a diocesan bishop (1989–1999); it emphasizes "evangelization" as a form of faithful witness rather than a technique of conversion.

Readers will not find much that is, at the level of theory, original or brilliant in these essays. Kasper is a centrist of irenic instincts, who seeks to give pastoral expression—and a distinctive piety—to the best of the Catholic tradition. Six aspects of his mediational role are clear. First, he wholeheartedly embraces the reforms and the spirit of Vatican II: he shows no taste for a return to a Tridentine Church; second, for his theological framework, he draws consistently on the great theologians who prepared for that council: Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac appear frequently in his notes; third, he draws on both

patristic and scholastic resources, showing an intimate acquaintance with both Augustine and Thomas; fourth, he remains in constant conversation with the papal magisterium both before and after the council, finding valuable points of agreement among Pius XII, John XIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II; fifth, he also finds inspiration in the nineteenth-century Catholic theologians of Tuebingen, above all the spirit-inspired writing of J. A. Moehler on the church; finally, very much in the spirit of Vatican II, he seeks to translate the truths of the faith in response to changing historical circumstances, both intellectual and social.

This first translated volume from a theological elder reminds readers of how vibrant and intellectually alive European theologians and bishops alike were for a period of some two hundred years, how bravely and faithfully they maintained fidelity to the tradition and commitment to intellectual integrity. That reminder, in turn, makes us more sharply aware of the loss of those qualities, not only among the academics, whose social location provides some excuse, but above all among the hierarchy, which is without excuse.

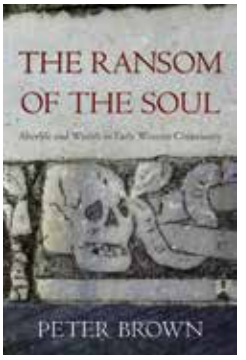
The Ransom of the Soul

Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity

Peter Brown

Harvard University Press, $24.95, 272 pp.

From the start of his illustrious career as a historian of Late Antiquity, Peter Brown has connected theological ideas with social contexts and practices. His 2012 monograph, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550* showed that arguments about the use of wealth among Christian churches across those centuries emerged from and responded to the specific circumstances of communities, making the case that religious history cannot adequately be considered apart from social and economic history. Although Brown insists the expanded set of lectures—delivered in Vienna in



2012—that form the basis of the present book is not a "spin-off," he acknowledges that the same concern to connect ideas to social practices persists in his examination of imaginative pictures of the afterlife and the ways in which Christians disposed of their wealth.

Brown traces two distinct lines of development. The first is the elaboration of ideas about the postmortem destination of individuals—specifically those who were not certifiably either great saints or obvious sinners. In the third and fourth centuries, little attention was given to this question, and Augustine tends to suppress speculation about the state of the individual's soul after death. But by the time of Gregory of Tours in the late sixth century, the journey of the soul after death is imaginatively construed as a process of purgation; the next step, toward a full-blown conception of Purgatory, is a short one, and is realized in the work of the late seventh-century bishop, Julian of Toledo.

The second line of development concerns the proper Christian disposition of possessions. Already in the time of Augustine, there was a tendency to construct impressive burial places near those of the martyrs. But Augustine argues that money should be given to the poor among them, not in one great act, but bit by bit, corresponding to the daily sins inevitably committed by believers, thus "paying their debts" (*debita*) as they ask the Lord to forgive their debts. By the time of Gregory, in contrast, and even more in the period of Columba and the Irish monks, sins of individuals are thought to be propitiated through the prayers of religious professionals—monks and nuns—and the great benefactions of the wealthy to such religious institutions are precisely for the remission of the sins of the benefactors and their loved ones. The monasteries were to be the place where the poor found help, to be sure, but they were even more, for the benefactors, great powerhouses of prayer for the departed. At this point, Brown says, "We can say, around the year 650 A.D., that the ancient world truly died in Western Europe."

The evidence is sparse and the interconnections between these developments less than obvious. Brown explicitly eschews easy links between ideology and social processes, between social cataclysms and new ideas; indeed, his interest is as much in elements of continuity as in discontinuity. He works hard to make all the lines of his inquiry clear, adding both an introduction and epilogue to his original lectures to frame his presentation. But his extraordinary ability to flesh out the social contexts of ancient literary works enables the reader to follow his suggestions concerning the intricate ways in which the ancient notion of making "treasure in heaven" found both imaginative and practical expression in response to the most pressing of all questions: What happens to us (and our loved ones) before the ever-longer delay of the triumphant return of the Lord?

Across his long scholarly life, Peter Brown has made fundamental contributions to our understanding of early Christianity, and in his eightieth year he offers still another original, unexpected, and deeply insightful vision of how Christians constructed and reconstructed their world. ■

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Lives That Testify

Emily Holman

Each week at the end of Mass, we are told to go and announce the Gospel and to exemplify it with our lives. I always love this moment. It is a powerful way of being sent back out into the world, one that marks out the church as a "different" space, where again and again we are readied for good living in our communities.

But how exactly should we announce the Gospel? We all know the good news—Christ exists, we are saved—yet this message alone does not make Christianity, and by itself will do little to communicate the reality of Christian spirituality to non-Christians. Much more is needed, specifically a mode of testifying with one's life—what Timothy Radcliffe, OP, calls "becoming a moral agent whose life is discovered to have a shape and meaning," or what Marilynne Robinson, in *Gilead*, simply calls "human beauty."

I was reminded of this very personal challenge at Mass recently. The sermon was on conversion, and the deacon delivering it drew attention to al-Qaeda and ISIS, by way of asserting that Muslims are mistaken in their beliefs and that Catholics should pray for their conversion. Though I don't doubt the deacon's intentions or good will, I find the argument that "Islam is fundamentally flawed because ISIS exists" to be illogical, or worse. Are there conversations to be had about the links between Islamic teaching and various offshoots or practices? Surely. But such conversations need to take careful account of complexity—*and* to include people from a multiplicity of backgrounds and perspectives, not least scholars of Islamic teaching. A brief sermon in a Catholic church is no place to raise the question of ISIS and Islam.

The sermon was troubling because of its language of "them" and "us." Casting Muslims as "other," it seemed to preclude the possibility of receptive dialogue. It put Catholics in the role of superiors empowered to pray for the conversion of Muslims. Yet, for my part, I feel I have no right to seek the conversion of others, particularly those with their own life-giving, God-giving faith. It's not that evangelization is never a beautiful thing. Far from it: many of us are converts, and cherish the gift of conversion. Yet the straightforward language of conversion, especially spoken from a position of complacency, can be obstructive; and if we begin with conversion as our objective, we often close off the possibility of learning from interreligious encounter.

What I *do* view as a powerful, joyful, and humbling possibility, however, is the prospect of convincing others with the testimony of one's own life. This action is related to conversion, since convincing someone of the value of one's faith might guide them toward it. But it involves what the language of conversion can easily preclude: openness to learning, the desire to see how one's own relationship with God might be lived more fully through encounter with another faith. And it might better reflect the imperative of those closing words at Mass, asking us to "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."

Pope Francis exchanges gifts with Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Egypt's al-Azhar mosque and university, during a private meeting at the Vatican on May 23.

Testifying to the meaning of one's faith through the way one lives can be an effective method of persuasion. I, for one, have learnt from witnessing the deep wells of faith in others who never spoke of conversion. I am reminded of a friend of mine in Lebanon, who is Greek Orthodox yet speaks movingly about how powerful she finds Catholic Mass and the beauty of the Catholic liturgy. My friend has a genuine delicacy in discussing different beliefs and different faiths that I find heartening and inspiring. Giving a talk last year at an international symposium titled "Religions Together for Humanitarian Action," she described how the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta, where she works, advocates interreligious communities, practices, and charitable works. In Tyre, she explained, thanks to the order's relationship with the Shiite community, you can see veiled Shiite nurses wearing the cross of the order. The order also works with Dar Al Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon, and is even in charge of providing nutritional advice during Ramadan. My friend tells of the symbolic power, collaborative energy, and witness to God that she sees in watching Muslims and Christians work together.

I admire her perspective, and the way she allows space in her language for openness and learning. Deeply Christian, she has no desire to impose her religion on others, but only to work together to make her country better. Her practice—so open and humble—stays with me. It testifies more, I think, to the beauty and gift of Christianity than does a practice that emphasises superiority. Now, in the attempt to attest to my faith in a similar way, I hope I might convince others of something of value.

Being told that God exists is not enough; we want to see and feel—and live—the difference that God makes. Convincing, not converting: Might we not be better encouraged to pray that our own lives exemplify the joy of faith? ■

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Journal of Catholic Social Thought

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