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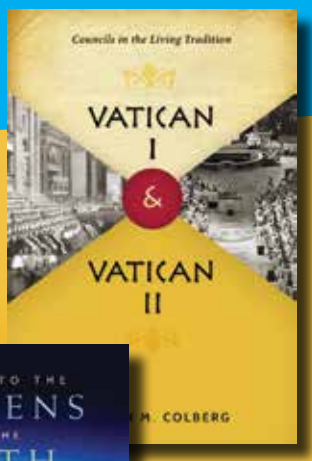

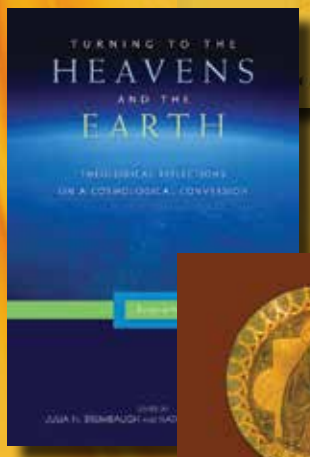

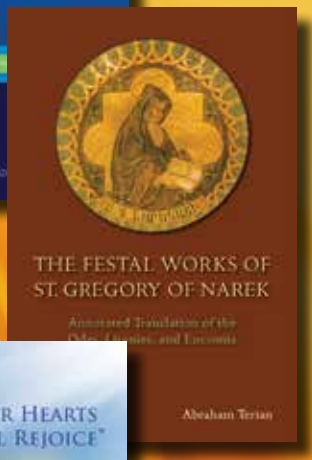

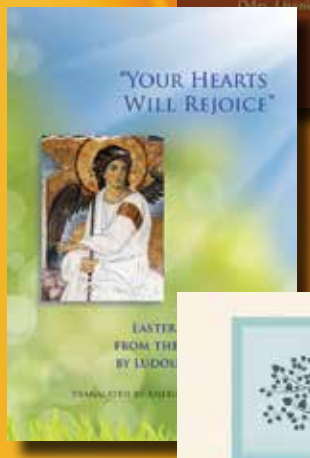

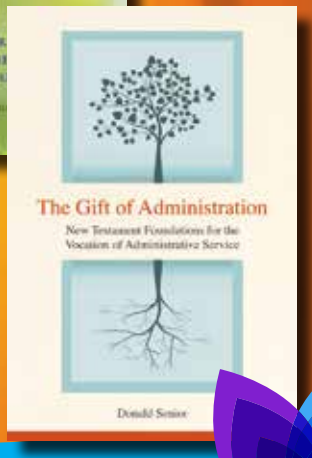

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LETTERS

Free trade, Catholic women, God's love

SHIPPING COSTS

I want to follow up on Charles R. Morris's fine column, "Good for Everyone: Questioning Free-Trade Pieties" (March 25), which clearly sets forth some of the history and economic consequences of global trade in our time.

What is generally missing from almost all discussions of global trade is its environmental impact. Manufacturing gets farmed out to Third-World countries, not only to take advantage of cheap labor, but frequently to avoid the environmental restrictions that are in place in the United States and other developed nations. Moreover, the shipping of goods across thousands of land miles and vast expanses of water contributes significantly to the warming of the planet. We need to recognize that most global trade is not environmentally friendly and to try to act accordingly. From an ecological point of view, goods should be manufactured in as close proximity to the retail outlets selling them as possible.

JOSEPH H. WESSLING
Professor Emeritus of English
Xavier University

TABLE SETTINGS

Tina Beattie's compelling description of the "Catholic Women Speak" project ("A Place at the Table," April 15) demonstrates the alacrity with which women address problems. We cannot kid ourselves: the situation of women in the Roman Catholic Church is a major problem not yet addressed in any serious manner by the all-male hierarchy. In her most telling sentence, Beattie recounts how *L'Osservatore Romano* editor Lucia Scaraffia described "the inability of the assembled prelates to recognize women as their equals" and spoke of "being ignored and belittled by her clerical counterparts." Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis suggested the church give women *più spazio*—more space, pull up a chair—while the black wall says *Non c'e spazio* at the table they consider theirs alone.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO, PHD
Senior Research Associate-in-Residence
Department of Religion
Hofstra University

LOVING THE UNLOVABLE

In "No Glib Gospel" (March 25), Robert P. Imbelli states that Fleming Rutledge "vehemently counters the glib gospel that we are acceptable 'just the way we are.'" That statement reminded me of a woman I once met who focused so exclusively on her sinfulness that she found herself to be utterly unlovable. Meeting her not only gave me insight into the importance of the "as yourself" part of the commandment to "love your neighbor," it also helped me understand that self-love properly understood holds a crucial, necessary, and foundational place in my struggle to grasp the mystery of Christ's love and sacrifice. Rutledge's book may not explore that mystery through the Eucharist, but Imbelli reminds me that as a Catholic, I should not fail to do so.

I also wanted to note that, having recently lost my sister to ovarian cancer, Brian Doyle's "Those Few Minutes" (March 25) made me weep. His piece perfectly captured the unspoken prayers offered up when we honor a departed loved one's "little" legacies, those things that echo in the hole their death leaves behind.

HOLLY WIEGMAN
Niskayuna, N.Y.

Some Exceptions May Apply

When the Vatican released *Amoris laetitia* ("The Joy of Love"), Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation on marriage and the family, the press wanted to know one thing: Would the pope be changing the rule that officially bars remarried Catholics without an annulment from receiving Communion? The answer, which came toward the end of the 256-page document, was "No, not exactly." But the rest of the exhortation made it clear that, for this pope, that was the wrong question.

Francis had once again broken loose from the standard categories that were supposed to govern the debate over a hot-button issue. Rather than changing a controversial doctrine or doubling down on it—as Pope Paul VI did with the church's ban on artificial contraception—Francis recognized the importance of the church's rules about marriage and Communion while also insisting that such rules could not be expected to cover every eventuality or to apply in the same way in every circumstance. This is a time-honored principle in the church: not even the most exhaustive code of law can replace prudence. As the exhortation puts it, "general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations. At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule." Some conservatives may be alarmed at Francis's suggestion that even the best rules have exceptions, while some liberals may be disappointed with his refusal to turn the exceptions into the basis for new rules. But the rigor or laxity of the rules themselves was never the pope's main concern—because *rules* were never his main concern. This is precisely what seems to bother some people.

The pope's conservative critics must know that even the church's strictest teachings often have exceptions. What are the Pauline and Petrine privileges, after all, if not exceptions to the church's general rule about the indissolubility of valid marriages? (These "privileges" allow a pope to dissolve a marriage between a baptized person and his or her unbaptized spouse "in favor of the faith.") Despite such impeccably traditional departures from Christ's commandment against divorce, there is a tendency among some conservatives to confuse fidelity with a one-size-fits-all legalism. And if there is one thing you can confidently say about Pope Francis, it's that he isn't a legalist. Near the beginning of *Amoris laetitia*, he rebukes those who would reduce the Gospel message to a set of rigid disciplines—"stones to be hurled at others." The pope wants to remind us that what Christ said of the Sabbath is also true of the sacraments and the rules surrounding them: they were made for us, not we for them. The rules exist not to protect the sacraments from being soiled by contact with sinners, but to protect us, the children of God, for whom the sacraments were instituted in the first place. The Eucharist, for example, is to be understood primarily as a gift that brings healing and nourishment, not as a remote display of supernatural power to be approached only with trepidation.

In the case of the divorced and remarried, the pope is calling for justice and moral realism. He draws attention to the obvious moral difference between the situation of someone who has abandoned his or her spouse and that of someone who has been abandoned. To treat these two situations the same way is neither just nor merciful. Francis argues that, since the degree of responsibility varies, "the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same." This would seem to leave open the possibility that a divorced and remarried Catholic could, in good conscience and with the approval of his or her pastor, receive Communion. It would all depend on the particular circumstances—which is to say, it would depend on prudence. At the very beginning of *Amoris laetitia*, the pope reminds us that pastoral problems can't always be solved in advance by Rome:

> Not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it.... Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs.

This is not a recommendation of laxity or relativism. It is a recognition of human complexity and an endorsement of subsidiarity, a principle not restricted to politics. Only (properly trained) local pastors can be familiar enough with the members of their flock to undertake the kind of "practical discernment" necessary to apply the church's rules without deepening the wounds caused by divorce or abandoning the already abandoned. ■

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Ramona the Real

WHAT BEVERLY CLEARY KNOWS ABOUT GROWING UP

My oldest son fretted for months about the Old Dark Frog, who features in a ghost story from *Days with Frog and Toad*. He did not want to sleep in the same room as our copy of *The Gruffalo*, just to be safe. But I've never seen him react to a book the way he did when I read him Beverly Cleary's *Ramona the Pest*. He buried his face in my side, covered his ears, moaned, and even shouted, "No! Don't do it!" when he saw trouble approaching for the five-year-old heroine. Then he would beg me to read him another chapter.

Ramona Quimby is one of the most indelible creations of author Beverly Cleary, who celebrated her hundredth birthday April 12. The eight "chapter books" chronicling Ramona's childhood stand alongside more than twenty others, the fruit of Cleary's determination to write the "books about kids like us" that she longed to read growing up in Oregon, and that children asked for in the libraries where she worked as a young woman.

She published her first book, *Henry Huggins*, in 1950. In it and in the books that followed, the child protagonists are not orphans or princes; they don't fall into magical universes or get kidnapped by pirates (even Keith, the boy who befriends Ralph S. Mouse in *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, is resolutely ordinary). They are middle-class American kids whose troubles involve lost pets, playground bullies, and parents who laugh when their children want to be taken seriously. Cleary captures a child's perspective in a way that is totally convincing and never condescending, and feels authentic even several decades on. And Ramona—impetuous, bright, hungry for attention, and selfish in the way that children always are—is her masterpiece.

"Emerging self-knowledge for a little girl prone to both touching and hilarious crises" is how Elizabeth Minot Graves characterized *Ramona the Brave* in this magazine in 1975. Again and again, Ramona's high spirits come crashing down as some disaster or disappointment forces her to consider how others perceive her. When her older sister's account of a playground fight differs from her own, she is astonished: "She thought she was being brave. Now it turned out that she was not brave. She was silly and embarrassing. Ramona's confidence in herself was badly shaken." It is these home truths that make my own child cringe, more than the threat of fire, famine, or the Old Dark Frog. Young as he is, he recognizes the pain of failing to please an adult, the indignity of having his anger met with amusement, the shame of needing to be rescued from a mess of his own making.

I too cringed now and then as I read, recognizing myself in the grownups who unwittingly cause Ramona's pain or compound it by dismissing it. I thought of Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, so like Ramona in her impulsiveness and her need to be loved. Young Maggie cuts her own hair and realizes her foolishness too late. "Very trivial, perhaps, this anguish seems to weather-worn mortals who have to think of Christmas bills, dead loves, and broken friendships," says Eliot's narrator as Maggie sobs. "But it was not less bitter to Maggie—perhaps it was even more bitter—than what we are fond of calling antithetically the real troubles of mature life." The same insight animates Cleary's tales of Ramona, who knows, for example, that her father is out of work and her mother is straining to compensate, but still deeply resents her mother's failure to make her a satisfactory sheep costume for the Christmas pageant. Eliot notes that adults are wont to comfort children by pointing out that childhood problems are minor ones, an approach that serves only to emphasize the distance between them. "Surely if we could recall that early bitterness, and the dim guesses, the strangely perspectiveless conception of life, that gave the bitterness its intensity," Eliot writes, "we should not pooh-pooh the griefs of our children."

Beverly Cleary in 1971

Beverly Cleary is one grownup who never lost sight of just how intense a child's griefs and joys could be. She does not moralize or romanticize; her stories don't aim to teach children not to be selfish or to see things as their parents do. They are honest, they are funny, and they make children feel seen and valued as they are. I'm glad to know Ramona and all her neighbors will be there for my sons to provide good company whenever grownups like me don't understand. Happy Birthday, Ms. Cleary, and thank you for the gift. ■

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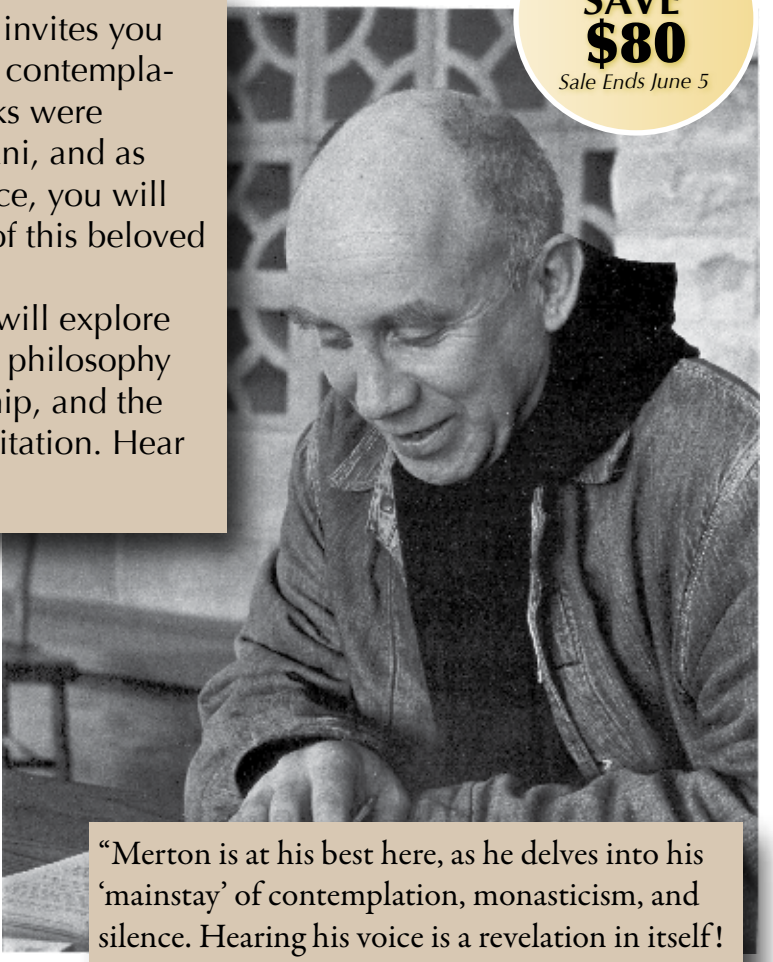

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Cathleen Kaveny

Bookending a Culture War

IT'S TIME FOR CATHOLICS IN BOTH PARTIES TO FIND A NEW WAY FORWARD

As Barack Obama began his historic tenure as the first African-American president of the United States, the University of Notre Dame invited him to be its 2009 commencement speaker. Now, as Obama's second term is coming to its end in 2016, Notre Dame has awarded the prestigious Laetare Medal to both Democrat Joe Biden, Obama's vice president, and Republican John Boehner, the recently retired Speaker of the House. The award is given by the university to recognize exemplary service to the Catholic Church and to the broader society.

Reflecting on the two Notre Dame graduations, I think, clearly reveals that the latest rounds of the culture wars have sputtered to an end—and that we need a new way forward.

In announcing the recipients of the 2016 medal, Notre Dame's president, John Jenkins, CSC, articulated his reasons for the choice: "Public confidence in government is at historic lows, and cynicism is high. It is a good time to remind ourselves what lives dedicated to genuine public service in politics look like." Such dedication requires the willingness to pursue common goals despite deep moral and political differences. So it is significant that Biden and Boehner are sharing the award—and sharing the stage.

But things were very different seven years ago, when Notre Dame's invitation to Obama provoked a firestorm of protest from conservative culture warriors. Mary Ann Glendon, selected to receive the 2009 Laetare Medal, refused her award rather than appear at the same podium with the prochoice president. Bishop John D'Arcy, Notre Dame's local ordinary, skipped the official graduation. Rumors circulated on campus that Fr. Jenkins needed Secret Service protection because of credible death threats. In fact, the attitude of some protesters was so virulent that many Notre Dame faculty members thought it could only be explained by thinly disguised racism.

By contrast, the reaction from social conservatives to the 2016 graduation has been more muted. Kevin Rhodes, Notre Dame's current bishop, objected to honoring Biden on the grounds of his stance on abortion and same-sex marriage—but he took pains to indicate that he understood Father Jenkins's reasoning process. And Donald Wuerl, the cardinal archbishop of Washington, DC, agreed to accept an honorary degree from Notre Dame at the same ceremony, implicitly honoring the vocation to public service of both Biden and Boehner, while doubtless disagreeing with many of the specific policies they support.

What has changed in the past seven years? We now have widespread recognition that the barricades of the culture wars are collapsing upon us. No war—even a culture war—can become an indefinite and customary state of affairs without disastrous consequences. We can only recover by learning how to work together again—despite our deep differences—and learning to see the good in one another. Sometimes, those differences are moral: we have deep disagreements in this country about the morality of the death penalty, torture, drone warfare, abortion, and euthanasia.

Politics is the art of the possible. It's counterproductive for culture warriors to insist on an unrealizable legal regime, even on life-and-death matters such as abortion. As St. Thomas Aquinas recognized, sound and stable law has to be in accordance with the custom of the country. Expecting each and every Catholic politician, for example, to pay lip service to unattainable aims—such as a constitutional amendment that would ban all abortions—diverts energy from the hard work of incrementally improving the situation of the children—and the women and men—whose lives will be affected by crisis pregnancies.

Joe Biden is not pro-abortion, although he supports *Roe v. Wade*. In fact, he has run into trouble with reproductive rights groups because he opposes federal funding for abortion and supports the ban on partial-birth abortions. He struggles with what it means to govern in a society in which there are widely divergent views of women's rights and unborn life. We don't need to agree with every answer to honor the fact that Biden is asking the right questions.

In their efforts to combat abortion and same-sex marriage, conservative culture warriors baptized the Republican Party. What has it gotten them? Republicans are turning out in droves for Donald Trump—hardly a family-values standard bearer. Republican opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage is increasingly perceived simply as cover for economic policies that make it harder for anyone but the well-off to welcome new life into the world. Rather than protecting the vulnerable, Republican frontrunners are inflaming America's original sin—racism—with potentially deadly results.

A few years ago, Pope Francis declared that the Catholic Church had become dangerously "obsessed" with the issues of abortion, contraception, and same-sex marriage. He warned: "We have to find a new balance—otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel."

We need to find a new balance in the political life of the country as well. Neither party is the party of saints. But both parties still include many good public servants. Let's hope that Notre Dame's decision to award the Laetare Medal to both Biden and Boehner will encourage talented, committed young men and women to risk the slings and arrows of political life in order to advance the common good—no matter whether they are Republicans or Democrats. ■

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Rand Richards Cooper

Germany, Eurabia & the End of Europe

THE RISE OF THE IDENTITARIAN RIGHT

Bear with me as I shift our gaze from the drama of our politics to the even more fractious realities of Europe. Looking over there these days, you wonder if we're seeing not just widespread problems, but the failure of European union itself. Like some marriages between people, that marriage of nations seems designed for success only: it works fine as long as things go well, but grievous flaws emerge under pressure. Two cataclysms have provided that pressure: the economic meltdown; and the refugee crisis spurred by catastrophe in the Arab world and inflamed by ISIS terror.

While the economic crisis can bewilder anyone lacking a PhD in economics, the second crisis is easy to grasp. Take southeastern Europe's porous gateway to strife-ravaged areas in the Levant, add the erasure of interior border controls wrought by the EU Schengen Agreement, plus the liberal asylum policies in prosperous Western European nations... and you get a tidal wave of desperate humanity aimed at Europe. Complicating things, once those refugees arrive, is the hamfistedness many Euro countries have with multiculturalism, and the particularly vexing nature of the European-Muslim encounter.

The case of Germany is both emblematic and crucial, so I'll focus on it. The Merkel government greeted the refugee influx with exceptional generosity, taking in an astonishing one million asylum seekers last year. Consider the implications of that number. It's more than the United States accepted in the entire last decade—and remember, the U.S. population is four times greater than Germany's. Imagine if we agreed to take four million Arab refugees this year. When President Obama pledged to accept a paltry ten thousand, all hell broke loose.

The backlash against Merkel's policy came first from other countries, especially the border countries of eastern Europe, which denounced the policy for creating incentives for more refugees. Then it came from within Germany itself, where anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim energies have exploded, sparked by the notorious events in Cologne on New Year's Eve, when scores of German women were sexually assaulted and robbed by gangs of men of Arab origin in the public square by the train station. Subsequent reports revealed that more than half of the thirty-one men arrested were asylum-seekers. The crass prospect of sexual assaults committed by beneficiaries of German hospitality outraged the nation, triggering what *Der Spiegel* opinion editor Anna Sauerbrey called political hysteria. Similar hysteria, as the *New York Times* noted, has spread through Europe: Finland, where militia groups vowing to protect Finnish women have taken to patrolling refugee neighborhoods; Italy, where regional governments are formulating laws against the construction of mosques; Denmark, where the government proposed confiscating the valuables of refugees to help defray the cost of housing them; and even Sweden, where gangs have plotted attacks against refugees. When Swedes engage in xenophobic violence, you know Europe is in trouble.

Partly such responses aim to discourage further refugees. But they also express sentiments long latent in these countries, and boiling over now not only in the form of violent mobs, but as expressions of anger within the body politic. One Bavarian politician, rejecting the government's plan to house refugees in his town, ordered a bus full of asylum seekers to be sent on to the Chancellor's Office in Berlin, with protesters chanting, "Merkel muss weg!" ("Merkel has to go!") as they went. Politically, things are coming to a head in Germany. "The time has come for a broad debate over Germany's future," wrote *Der Spiegel*, "and Merkel's mantra of 'We Can Do It' is no longer enough to suppress it." *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen—in a piece titled "Will Merkel Pay for Doing the Right Thing?"—notes that the Chancellor's popularity has nose-dived, and quotes her predecessor, Gerhard Schröder, calling the liberal refugee policy "a mistake" and saying of Merkel that "she had a heart, but no plan." Why did Merkel—leader of a conservative party, after all—take such a risk in the first place? "Because she is a German," Cohen writes, "and to be German is to carry a special responsibility for those terrorized in their homeland and forced into flight."

Are we seeing the end of that special responsibility? If so, it is a bellwether moment for all of Europe. So let me turn for a moment to the backlash in Germany, and to some of the voices jostling for primacy in the great debate that *Der Spiegel* foresees.

Nowhere is the issue of nationalism more fraught than in the country where its excess led to the Holocaust. The right-wing parties of postwar Germany (the Republikaner, the NDP, the DVU), have been fringe players, hounded by the government and shunned by the vast majority of citizens. As a result, organized right-wing politics has made fewer inroads in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. Now, however, strains of ethnic and cultural nationalism are seeping into the mainstream. There's the group called Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicization of the West), whose recent rally in Leipzig set off an "anti-Islamization" rampage, with hooligans vandalizing foreign-owned shops in what the city's mayor called "open street terror." And an

Migrants arrive at a temporary camp in Scharding, Austria, January 12, after German officials sent them back to Austria.

CNS PHOTO / CHRISTIAN BRUNA, EPA

anti-immigrant political party, Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD), won enough votes in March to gain seats in three regional elections, and is now represented in fully half of the *Länder*, or German states. AfD started out three years ago as a sort of German Tea Party, a middle-class movement of Euroskeptics arguing against the Greek bailout and for the restoration of national currencies, including the sainted Deutschmark. As a party the AfD languished, but the refugee crisis has breathed hot life into it, conferring controversial popularity on one of its leaders, Frauke Petry, a kind of German Marine Le Pen, who in January made a stir when she exhorted border-patrol agents to use firearms to stop illegal immigrants from crossing the border.

The AfD's electoral successes are a big rebuke to Merkel's policy. More important, they are both calling forth, and riding on, nationalistic impulses long marginalized or suppressed in Germany. A slickly produced video put out by a group called the Identitarian Movement records younger Germans expressing an aggrieved sense of national and ethnic pride. Some of their comments might seem innocuous to Americans ("We want a future, for us and our children"); but people familiar with the political landscape of Germany over recent generations will find them unsettling. I spent the late 1980s and early '90s living in Germany, and back then, pretty much any expression of German ethnic or cultural pride was considered verboten: you almost never saw a German flag, and many younger Germans claimed not even to know the words of their own national anthem. Such self-censorship was a powerful reflex formed by the calamity of Nazi rule. History had shown how toxic patriotism could be, and Germans wanted none of it.

That was then. Today, amid the backlash against Merkel's refugee policy, sentiments like those expressed by the Identitarian Movement are going mainstream. They reflect the difficulty that Germany—like most European countries—has in squaring a commitment to diversity with its own deeply held ethnic nationalism. Unlike the U.S. and other immigrant nations, Germany, Sweden, Finland, and others are rooted in what Germans call *das Volk*—a definition of national belonging based wholly on ethnic identity. In the *völkisch* conception of identity you can't "become" German: you either are or you aren't. When I lived in there, I coached an urban youth basketball team, and my players included a couple of Afro-German boys, the sons of long-departed American soldiers, who were being raised by their German mothers. These two dark-skinned boys spoke not a word of English—they were culturally and linguistically German, through and through—but hardly a day passed without their receiving condescending compliments from Germans who would say to them, in surprise, "But you speak German so well!"

I don't mean to castigate those people, merely to show how deep-seated is a sense of Germanness that excludes "foreigners," even when they're German. Across Europe, this ethnic concept of identity is clashing with a de facto diversity wrought by liberal immigration and refugee policies. The prospect of this *völkisch* identity being overwhelmed by brown-skinned Arabic Muslims—the advent of what some are calling "Eurabia"—is inflaming a nationalist reaction, in Germany and elsewhere. Viewed against this backdrop, the Identitarian message, with its broadsides against "multicultural dogma," seems less innocuous. "Our Europe is dying," these sober young Germans pronounce, as background music strikes tones both stirring and grave; "our future is being threatened." Their testimony segues into a warning. "You populate our homeland with foreigners whom we do not understand." And finally: "We want our Europe, not your Union."

And it's not just Germany. The same anxiety afflicts France, where the philosopher and member of the Academie Française Alain Finkielkraut has written a book, *The Unhappy Identity*, in which he observes that "the French feel they have become strangers on their own turf." France's success in integrating immigrants has long been a source of national pride, writes Finkielkraut, but a tipping point has been reached, and "France is disintegrating in front of our eyes." The same dire scenario plays out in Michel Houellebecq's recent novel, *Submission*, which depicts a France of the near future in which Muslims come to power.

Eurabia: that alarming prospect—a Europe culturally and politically overrun by brown-skinned Muslims—has been fueled by the refugee flood and ignited by ISIS terror attacks. Fears of "Eurabia" rest on anxiety about the threat posed by Islam, an anxiety stoked by those who peddle dire theological warnings and lurid scenarios of capitulation and collapse. These doomful prognostications reflect a synergy of apocalyptic views between the United States and Europe. Typical is a website called Real Facts Media, put out by Alex Charles, an American living in Germany, whose latest blog post, titled "Mohammed, Islamic History, and the Bloody Future of the West," issues a broadside against the very project of the multicultural society. Charles begins by noting, accurately enough, that "For most of us Westerners, it's very difficult to reconcile the nice Muslim woman at work with the ISIS jihadist beheading Christians in Iraq." He then explains, step by step, exactly how to overcome that difficulty, counseling readers to listen to the "inner voice" that tells you, with "a sickening feeling deep down inside... that something is very wrong."

What's very wrong, in Charles's view, is Islam itself, and the misrepresentations of the religion by liberal apologists so wedded to multicultural dogma that they're unable or unwilling to tell the truth—namely, that Islamic law, or sharia, "is completely incompatible with all non-Muslim government structures—including every Western democracy"; that its fulfillment "requires the end of free speech, free thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press"; and that its adherents represent an implacable force, "rapidly spreading throughout Europe under the guise of religious tolerance and multiculturalism." Charles writes: "The nice Muslim lady at work and the ISIS jihadist who beheads Christians in Iraq are both following the Islamic doctrine found in the Sira, Hadith, and Koran."

"Germany," he continues, "is the perfect example of this process unfolding today in the West." What began in the 1960s with a "mass immigration of Muslims Turks," he asserts, has culminated today in a roster of cultural and political insults to Germans: schools forced to ban pork, the "elimination of traditional Christian holidays celebrated by German children," female genital mutilation, segregated swimming pools, Turkish children "born and raised in Germany [who] stay in Muslim/Turkish neighborhoods and harbor resentment toward native Germans." And so on. What's important is less how dubious these observations are (who is resenting whom?!) than the conclusions that Euro-nationalists draw from them. "Integration simply does not work," Charles writes. "It can never work long-term because Islam is a civilization that is incompatible with all other civilizations.... Over time, a country will be either 100 percent Muslim or 0 percent Muslim. Multiculturalism is just a transition phase on the path to the final result. And Islam is very patient."

Such views are a dime a dozen here in the U.S., where they emanate routinely from the birther, Obama-as-Muslim, evangelical/apocalyptic worldview peddled on talk radio. But such rants, easy enough to dismiss here as cheap popular entertainment, may land with a thud of heavier consequence in Europe, where they are being propagated via the social-media synergy I mentioned above. No sooner had Alex Charles posted his blog essay than it was translated and passionately referenced on a German Facebook page put out by a German AfD member who read it and turned it into this passionate plea: "I asked myself, should we protect our country, our children, and our religion, or should we be ashamed even to think about doing so?"

What will happen in Europe, not just this year, but over the next decade or two? For a long time, in Germany and elsewhere, the political and cultural contradictions wrought by the problem of assimilation simmered away—surfacing in this or that hot-button topic, such as the hijab controversy in France or the travails of second-generation Turkish workers in Germany or the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and then subsiding. But now, with the attacks in Belgium—or "Belgistan," as one observer called it—underscoring "the vulnerability of an open European society," as a *Times* article notes, those contradictions are front and center, and they won't easily be pushed back again. Instead, they pose what might be an existential crisis for Europe.

What a bizarre and ominous political moment this is in the West. In the U.S., the leading Republican presidential candidate admiringly quotes Mussolini, praises authoritarian leaders like Putin, and cheers the action as partisans from right and left batter each other at his rallies; while in Europe, sentiments long rejected as Fascist swirl into public life once again, even as the shining liberal hopes of European union dissolve in violence, fear, and loathing. And once again, Germany sits squarely at the center of European destiny. "The European idea has not been this weak since the march to unity began in the 1950s," writes Roger Cohen. "If Merkel's refugee gambit implodes, the reverberations will be felt everywhere."

With the calamity of the last century's history in mind, it's hard not to shudder. ■

Rand Richards Cooper *is* Commonweal*'s contributing editor. This essay originally appeared as a post at dotCommonweal.*

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

'Eat the Chard, Say a Hail Mary'

AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT STEPHEN KARAM

"Compassion" is a word that tends to come up when critics talk about the plays of Stephen Karam. Reviewing his newest play, *The Humans*, for the *New York Times*, Charles Isherwood wrote: "Mr. Karam's comedy-drama depicts the way we live now with a precision and compassion unmatched by any play I've seen in recent years." The same critic described Karam's previous play, *Sons of the Prophet*—a finalist for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize—as "written with insight and compassion, not to mention biting wit."

In both that play and *The Humans*, Karam's Broadway debut, loving families struggle with maintaining connections across generations despite the gaps created by increased social mobility and changing attitudes toward religion. The children look for a balance between autonomy and interdependence; the adults try to pass on their wisdom in a way the younger generation won't reject. The references to compassion make sense: Karam seems to care too much about his characters, with all their flaws, to depict any of them as less than fully human, and the families in his plays are bound together by love as well as pain.

The Humans introduces us to the Blakes, an Irish-Catholic family from Northeastern Pennsylvania who have gathered for Thanksgiving at the brand-new, mostly unfurnished New York City apartment of their youngest daughter. The evening plays out in real time on a split-level set—the apartment is a dim basement duplex—with no breaks or blackouts. Over the course of ninety minutes the audience comes to know each member of the family and the fears he or she is struggling to confront: Aimee, the older daughter, has just broken up with her long-term girlfriend and is now facing a frightening health crisis. Her sister Brigid, not long out of college, is excited to be making a home with her older boyfriend, Richard—a plan her mother dislikes—but is losing faith in her dream of a career in music. The girls' parents, Erik and Deirdre, have financial problems they can no longer hide from their daughters, and they are worn out caring for Momo, Erik's mother, who is lost in a fog of dementia.

Erik and Deirdre worry about their daughters' safety, physical and emotional: Is it wise to live in Lower Manhattan, after 9/11 and Hurricane Irene? Do they understand that marriage "can help you weather a storm"? Deirdre brings a

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Stephen Karam

statue of the Blessed Mother as a housewarming gift. "I know you guys don't believe," she says. "Just keep it for my sake…I feel better knowing that you have it." Brigid rolls her eyes: "Mom, I will absolutely keep this in a drawer somewhere, thank you." For her, adulthood means embracing an urban worldliness; she sends her parents a list of "superfoods" to look for at the grocery store and serves a "rainbow chard salad" because "it's packed with nutrients." As a family the Blakes have reached an uneasy but familiar détente—they pray "Bless us, O Lord…" in unison when they sit down to eat, but then, as tempers flare, peacemaker Aimee reminds them: "No religion at the table!"

Alongside the back-and-forth of the family's conversation runs a ghostly current of suspense; lights go out, ceilings thump. It is as though the fears the Blakes are trying to keep buried are forcing their way to the surface. *The Humans* turns out to be a naturalistic comedy-drama with the emotional intensity of a thriller. And critics love it, both in Chicago, where it premiered in 2014, and now in New York, where the Roundabout Theatre Company's 2015 Off-Broadway production, directed by Joe Mantello, made a heralded transfer to Broadway's Helen Hayes Theatre earlier this year. Since then, *The Humans* was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in drama. The Roundabout will produce Karam's adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* on Broadway in the fall. And two films he wrote (one based on his play *Speech & Debate* and the other an adaptation of Chekhov's *The Seagull*) are scheduled to premiere in 2016 as well.

I've been a fan of Stephen Karam's since we were doing high-school plays together back in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and so, after seeing *The Humans*, I was excited to sit down with him and discuss how the hometown roots we share have influenced his work.

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY: Both *The Humans* and *Sons of the Prophet* look at the connections and the distance between generations in families. In both plays you have kids who have fallen away from the religion they were raised in, and then are left with the question of: What replaces it?

STEPHEN KARAM: Absolutely. I thought about this interview while watching the show last night, and I was astonished at how big a role religion and spirituality and God [play in it]. When critics talk about the play, they use the word "supernatural," but—maybe because of my own upbringing, and being an altar boy, being raised in the Catholic faith—I guess I always saw it as more of a spiritual play. Less *Twilight Zone*, to me, and more of a play that has that searching quality you talked about. Searching—across the generations, with people at different points of their lives, who are both in the church and moved away from the church—how does that faith sustain the family, how does it complicate relationships, and then, ultimately, how does it strengthen them—and, for those who have fallen away, what does replace it?

MWO: The religious tensions in *Sons of the Prophet*, which is about a Lebanese-American, Maronite Catholic family, come especially from anxiety about the end of a heritage and what we owe to our ancestors. In *The Humans* I see more of a focus on how the parents want their kids to have religion in their lives because they think it can keep them safe, or help them stay connected. They want their daughters to have what it has given them.

SK: Yeah. I think the parents are really trying to meet their daughters halfway, in their own faltering way. And the daughters are trying, as well—maybe not even doing as good a job. But a lot of these clashes are about the father just trying to understand his own kids, his own flesh and blood. "I'm watching you put your faith in organic vegetables, and showing up for yoga…but to you it seems ludicrous to sit in silence in a church and say a prayer. That seems silly to you, but you'll go do hot yoga for an hour."

MWO: Right, and then talk about it as a centering experience.

SK: Yes! Maybe this is the Thanksgiving where even the younger daughter, post-college, is starting to glean that she is on a quest—I don't know that she's quite figured out that she's looking for something to fill that hole. At the end of *Sons of the Prophet* Joseph says something to the effect of how much he misses having his father's faith around, even though he hasn't quite figured out how, as a gay man, to stay in it completely. There's this [sense that] something's missing.

MWO: In both plays I was moved by seeing people praying onstage, and praying in a specifically Catholic way. And authentically. People think they understand Catholicism and get it wrong all the time. So, watching Uncle Bill praying the rosary in *Sons of the Prophet*, I thought, "Those really are the Sorrowful Mysteries! And in the right order too!"

SK: What cracks me up is how many people thought that I named the Sorrowful Mysteries for comic effect. They said, "Well, how do you actually pray the rosary?" And I was like, "What are you talking about?" And someone said, "Well, it can't actually be called 'The Agony in the Garden.'"

There have actually been a lot of clergy and priests and rabbis who have come to see *The Humans*, and that's made me so happy because I have to believe that someone somewhere is putting in a good word for it. It's not an experience that I've had before. But priests are very interested in theater in New York! It's this lovely reminder that priests are just people, too, who need to be entertained.

I know how much respect I have for people of all different faiths, but especially for my family, who are the most important people in my life, and who are still practicing, and deeply religious. But I think because I'm a gay man, and because that created a very on-the-nose conflict as a teenager, coming of age, just wondering, How do I keep

my faith? Especially when you're hearing the worst blanket statements about who you are as a person. About, from my perspective, the way God made me. And suddenly you're at church and you hear someone pray, "For gays and lesbians, that they might realize their sins..." That's happening less and less now, but all it takes is one of those when you're nine, ten, eleven, twelve—and it's hard to describe to people who aren't, because of course if you're not gay, an eleven- or twelve-year-old wouldn't even remember that that happened.

I guess what I'm saying is, because of that conflict, I'm always very self-conscious and assume the way faith or religion might come up in my plays will seem very harsh to people of faith, or who are currently practicing.

The full cast of The Humans *in performance*

MWO: One thing from *The Humans* that stayed with me was the moment when the family says grace—the effect it has on Momo reminded me of how my own grandmothers, in the last stages of their dementia, retained their connection to religion, and the prayers, and the sacramentals. They knew that stuff even though the rest of them was gone, and that seemed to be such an anchor and a comfort for them. I'm aware of being kind of an outlier in our generation in continuing the practice of this faith—and now I'm thinking about passing it on to my kids, and why am I passing it on to my kids, what do I want them to have. And that's a big part of it, I think, if I'm honest with myself—at the end of my life, I want it to be there for me. And I want my kids to have it at that deep level.

SK: Writing plays for me is often an act of looking at basement-level fears in terms of where they come from. The best work that I am able to do is when I am willing to write about questions I haven't quite figured out, or things I'm really wrestling with, things that keep me up at night. When I go to those basement-level fears—and this play is full of the underlying existential horrors of this family—without a conscious effort I end up coming back to faith and spirituality and the search for it. It ends up playing such a major role in every play that I write. In some ways there's a part of me that also feels the need for it.

And so I do think it's fascinating to see a play where everybody's sort of, in various ways, uprooted, and you see the older generation, the parents, whose faith has been something concrete that has guided them through a specific set of hurdles and circumstances. And you see Aimee, the older daughter—probably a lot of her quote-unquote faith was this very real, meaningful, deep, true love that she had, not only for her family but for her girlfriend, who is now gone. So I feel like she's looking for any sort of ballast.

If I'm proud of anything, it's that the play isn't trying to offer a solution—if anything, the play might provide a kind of comfort in the way that these people still find each other to be anchors, even as they push each other's buttons.

I was reading a short story of Chekhov's today…just thinking about somebody whose writing always felt deeply obsessed with faith, and yet somehow not, at the same time. It felt like that moment when you're reading a novel or short story and you feel someone from across a stretch of time illuminate something in your own life—and in this case I felt like he was illuminating something in my own play better than I could even articulate. [Reading from his smartphone] "In reality, life was arranged and human relations were complicated so utterly beyond all understanding that when one thought about it one felt uncanny and one's heart sank."

Maybe it struck me because it has the buzzword of "uncanny"—the lens that I've been exploring a lot of these issues through. But I think *The Humans* is also deeply obsessed with a higher power, or with the acceptance of pain and suffering and all of these things that seem beyond human comprehension, beyond understanding.

MWO: You and I used to love to study murder mysteries. Stuff like *The Last of Sheila* and *Deathtrap* and *Getting Away with Murder*. *The Humans* is not a "puzzle" play like those, where everything is wrapped up tightly at the end—kind of the opposite; it's very unresolved and open. But the building of suspense and dread is so well calibrated. Am I right to sense an influence?

SK: Completely correct. There actually is one, very undercover "puzzle" element to this play. And that is simply that I was reading a chapter in a bookstore from this terrible book called *Think and Grow Rich*. All those self-help books make me laugh. And there's a chapter about the big human fears: the fear of ill health, the fear of poverty, the fear of losing the love of someone.... Being obsessed with psychological thrillers and murder mysteries, I thought I was going to write something much more genre, and I thought that [list of fears] might be a way to start thinking of characters, assembling

PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

a family and thinking about different generations coming together for a meal. As you can clearly tell, I didn't write the silly campy murder mystery I set out to write. I ended up growing deeply attached to these people with these big fears but big hearts and, hopefully, a lot of fight in them. So the play, against my own will, became a family play that I think is infected by the thriller genre. Instead of a thriller about a family, it became a family play that oddly has these elements of a ghost story, or the kind of movies and plays that we used to love talking about.

If *Sons of the Prophet* is about how acknowledging your pain, or naming it, can help ease its grip a bit, *The Humans* is about how acknowledging these fears when they creep up can make things a little less scary. Aimee is cracking jokes because she's actually so terrified about the disease that she has and what it might mean for her. I think the father in the play is terrified about losing his mother, and so he keeps talking about how it's "just not one of her good days." He knows she's sick, and he knows that she's dying, but it's the way we all behave when these unthinkable things start to creep closer to us, like the idea of losing people that we love. It is unimaginable on some level. And, going back to what you said, it's what always brings me closer to clutching a rosary and saying a prayer—what do you do with something as unfathomable as someone you love just being gone. Just being here, and then one day...not.

My mom's sister lost two of her kids, and living through that, even just as someone who loved her and my cousins—part of me thinks that's informed a lot of the plays that I have written. There's so much that's just so unknowable about why that suffering happened? You get to a point where you realize that if there isn't something greater out there, a higher power, a God—I don't know how there couldn't be, because otherwise what is the alternative, but despair?

MWO: The critic Chris Jones wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* that *The Humans* "is a work filled with uncommon compassion for the kinds of people whom the theater often ignores." Did you set out saying, I'm going to write plays about people I don't see onstage?

SK: No! I don't know, on some level I guess we all feel like underdogs. I remember being a freshman at Brown University and not knowing what a Wasp was. We were reading an Edward Albee play, and—it was just a moment of accepting, certainly that I wasn't very worldly, but also that a lot of the plays that I'd been reading, let's say other kinds of family plays, were speaking a foreign language. So in creating this family it felt, not like I was serving up "uncommon compassion" for those who are often not seen on the stage, it just made me realize that so much of great American drama has been about a certain kind of dysfunctional family, and maybe my interests are in the kind of strange dysfunction that exists even among deeply functional families. Maybe that's what he's talking about, that this is not a play about a group of people where the question is will one of them smash a glass over the other one's head after they have too much to drink, will a table be overturned, or will there be wrestling or food-throwing.... Let's put it this way: You don't really question the family's love for each other.

MWO: And you, as a playwright, don't condescend to anybody, even as they're condescending to each other, and you're illuminating that dynamic within families. I think about that moment when Richard tells Brigid, "Be nicer to your mom." I'm finding myself very sympathetic to Deirdre, maybe because I am a mom now, and I'm like, "Oh my God, my kids are gonna be rolling their eyes at me someday...."

SK: And what I'd like to say to you about that is that I completely agree with you, and I feel the same way. Every night when I watch it I'm like, "Tonight, just be nicer to your mom!" I actually feel it, even though I wrote it and I know what Brigid has to say, I'm like, "Maybe tonight she will be a little nicer!"

What I love most about the mother in the play is that she is coming at it from all fronts. Here is a woman whose faith means everything to her, but who has this acceptance of where her daughters are at, and so she's forwarding this *Scientific American* article, trying to find ways to articulate it.… And there is this loving acceptance of her daughter's sexuality—which has just all happened off stage.

MWO: That was something that I really recognized, and I was glad you wrote it that way. The family has a lot of issues, but having a gay child—

SK: That is just not one of them.

MWO: Maybe it was an issue for them fifteen years ago, but not today.

SK: Exactly. I don't think it was the happiest day of their lives, but—unconditional love is very much a part of this particular family.

But there's this unspoken history that exists between any mother and daughter, no matter how deep and loving the bond is, twenty-five years of being raised by someone, there's a kind of deep history which means that there are shortcuts to getting on each other's nerves. Aimee has a better coping mechanism, but Brigid wants something that is just unrealistic to expect from Deirdre. Because Deirdre is coming at it from a place of wanting to impart all of this knowledge and her own experience, and this idea of what she really believes in her core is going to make her daughter safer, happier, healthier. You know, not rainbow chard only. It's like, "Eat the chard and then…say a Hail Mary!" ■

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly *is* Commonweal*'s editor at large. This interview was edited for clarity and length.*

Uncommon Decency

The Careers of Simon Leys

Nicholas Clifford

Back in the summer of 1996, the *New York Review of Books* published a review of Christopher Hitchens's *The Missionary Position*, a ninety-eight-page book about Mother Teresa that found her to be essentially a pious fraud. Two months later the journal printed two responses defending Mother Teresa, one by James Martin, SJ, in New York, the other by Simon Leys in Canberra. Martin was a newcomer to the *NYRB*'s pages, but Leys had been a frequent contributor for twenty years, and would continue to be until his death in 2014.

Of course it's very easy—too easy—to see the argument as one of Catholic vs. Atheist and to consider Leys blinded by the doctrines of Catholicism or Hitchens by the dogmas of atheism. With respect to Leys at least, that would be a mistake. From his follow-up 1997 essay "The Empire of Ugliness," published in the *Australian Review of Books*, it's clear that what really offended Leys was not Hitchens's irreligious viewpoint, but the fact that he had made cheap fun of an elderly nun whose idea of charity was to provide comfort and companionship to India's poorest of the poor as they approached death. Hitchen's sophomoric title lacked a sense of "common decency"—to use the words of another atheist, George Orwell, whom Leys, like Hitchens, admired enormously despite Orwell's "rabid" anti-Catholicism. It's worth noting that in an Australian broadcast of 2011, Leys went out of his way to praise Hitchens, not least for his courage in facing his own death.

Simon Leys in Brussels, 2005

"The Empire of Ugliness" is reprinted in Leys's *The Hall of Uselessness*, which was published in 2013 not long before Leys's death (*New York Review Books*, $19.95, 576 pp.). It is a collection of extraordinarily graceful essays, not only about China (his main field of study), but about some of his other enthusiasms as well. Here and elsewhere his writing is of a sort increasingly uncommon in university circles today: one that never shows off ("see how brilliant I am") and one that in more than five-hundred pages has not a single word of scholarly jargon. To some of his French friends, gathered for a commemorative broadcast after his death, that grace and clarity in his writing seemed an Anglo-Saxon characteristic (which may simply mean that they are unschooled in contemporary British and American scholarship). As Ian Buruma put it in an appreciation after Leys's death, "his essays on André Gide or Evelyn Waugh are as profound and stylish as his work on Chinese painters or the art of calligraphy. He was a literary scholar in the Chinese literati tradition, that is to say, his scholarship was a form of literature." Read, for example, "The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past" or "Poetry and Painting" and you will see what Buruma means.

Who was Simon Leys and why should we know him

Nicholas Clifford, *a professor emeritus of Middlebury College, is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal.

better? Leys once remarked that George Orwell is almost unknown in France except for his novel *1984*, and even that is too often read simply as an anti-Communist tract rather than the ominous warning against totalitarianism that he intended. Is that the problem with Leys too—that, if we remember him at all, it is for something like that dispute with Hitchens almost twenty years ago? Or, for those with longer memories, his battles of almost forty years ago with those who saw in Mao Zedong the great philosopher-statesman leading China out of tyranny and imperialist oppression into the brilliant freedoms of a new day? In 1961 François Mitterand, for example, wrote that Mao was no dictator but a new kind of humanist.

In fact, though Leys was primarily an extraordinarily gifted Sinologist, he had many other interests and accomplishments. *The Hall of Uselessness* gives some sense of their range: besides the articles on China there are essays on literature, primarily French and English, though Cervantes and Nabokov appear, as does Lu Xun, the great revolutionary writer of early twentieth-century China, whom Leys much admired. He also wrote about the sea. After university, Leys had shipped out on an old-fashioned French tuna-fishing boat, fell in love with the ocean, and remained a passionate sailor throughout his life. In 2003 Leys published two volumes of French maritime writing, a subject that, he pointed out, had been largely neglected by that country's intellectuals, the Atlantic being invisible from Paris. He also translated into French Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, which he thought the greatest of all seafaring accounts. There were many other works too, including a new translation of the Confucian *Analects* and a brilliant and prize-winning novel, *The Death of Napoleon*. Leys even illustrated *The Two Acrobats*, a children's book by his daughter Jeanne Ryckmans. He was a man who seemed to combine several impressive intellectual careers into a single lifetime.

The name "Simon Leys" did not come until his thirty-fifth year. He was born Pierre Ryckmans near Brussels in 1935, "into a happy family," as he noted with a nod to Tolstoy. In 1955, while studying at Louvain, he was the youngest of ten Belgian students invited to visit the new People's Republic of China on a tour capped by an hour-long interview with Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai. A Catholic with socialist leanings, the young Leys was duly impressed, but as he later said, the chief sense he brought away was that "it would be inconceivable to live in this world, in our age, without a good knowledge of Chinese language and a direct access to Chinese culture." Later he would come to describe that culture as the most antipodal of all to the West—or in the words that he quotes from the great historian Joseph Needham: "Chinese civilization presents the irresistible fascination of what is totally other, and only what is totally other can inspire the deepest love, together with a strong desire to know it."

In 1958 he began his language study in Taiwan, later moving to Singapore and Nanyang University until in 1963 a suspicious government expelled him for imagined Communist leanings. For the next two years in Hong Kong, he shared with three roommates a hovel in a Kowloon squatter slum populated by refugees from the People's Republic. One of them, a superb calligrapher from Taiwan, gave their abode its only decoration: a sign reading *Wu Yong Tang*—"The Hall of Uselessness," a reference both to the classic *Book of Changes* and to the great Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi ("everyone knows the usefulness of what is useful, but few know the usefulness of what is useless").

Then came marriage to Chang Hanfang, a student of journalism whom he'd met in Taiwan, and by 1967 they had become parents. By then he was teaching at New Asia College and also reporting to the Belgian consulate on events in China, then being wracked by Mao's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. His sources came from the Chinese press, from refugee interviews, and from the invaluable *China News Analysis*, published weekly from the University of Hong Kong by Fr. László Ladány, a Hungarian Jesuit expelled from the People's Republic after 1949. This last was a staple for everyone concerned with contemporary China, though many preferred not to admit it (as Leys later wrote, for them such dependence was "akin to what a drinking habit might be for an ayatollah, or an addiction to pornography for a bishop: it was a compulsive need that had to be indulged in secretly").

In the summer of 1967, the waves of the Cultural Revolution spilled over into Hong Kong itself. Not only were trussed-up bodies washed onto the colony's beaches, casualties of the fighting upstream in Guangdong Province, but Leys found himself a horrified witness to the assassination right outside his house of a popular broadcaster who'd made some satirical remarks about Chairman Mao. An "unforgettable lesson," Leys called it, and one that convinced him he must do more than live the quiet life of an art historian (his first two books in that field would appear in Paris in 1970). In 1971, from his consular work came *Les habits neufs du président Mao* (*The Chairman's New Clothes*), the first of four books about contemporary China. The reference of course is to the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale in which only a child understands that the emperor proudly showing off his gorgeous new robes is in fact naked. Leys's thesis was plain: Mao's "cultural revolution" was neither cultural nor a revolution, but simply a sordid struggle for power. His Paris publisher wisely suggested that if Ryckmans ever hoped to see China again, he'd better take a pen name. Thus was born "Simon Leys": Simon, for Simon Peter (or Pierre) and Leys, from *René Leys*, a novel of 1922 by Victor Segalen, set in Beijing during the death throes of the last dynasty in 1911. (René is a young Belgian who convinces a French diplomat that he's entered the innermost circles of the Palace, and is privy to all its intrigues.)

Not that the cover name did him much good. A significant part of France's intellectual left—think Sartre, Foucault,

Barthes, Kristeva, and so on—had by then decided that Mao's Cultural Revolution was a movement that could ignite, if not perhaps a waiting world, then at least a waiting France, and the huge student uprisings of May 1968 raised their hopes further. In November 1971, Alain Bouc (who would presently become his paper's Beijing reporter) contemptuously dismissed Leys's book in *Le Monde* as a piece written by a "French [sic] 'China-watcher' working *à la mode américaine*" and full of errors. Superbly ignorant though most of them were about China, the Parisian Maoists knew how to smoke out their ideological enemies, and managed to block any university invitations for Leys/Ryckmans to teach.

In 1970 Leys moved with his family to the Australian National University in Canberra, and then, since Belgian speakers of Chinese were rare, in 1972 he became cultural attaché to the new Brussels embassy in Beijing. There he spent six months, traveling as widely as he could, and from that experience came *Ombres chinoises* (1974). *Chinese Shadows*, its later English title, rather misses the double meaning of the French, which refers not only to the shadows Leys was casting on the imagined brilliancy of Mao's regime, but also to the traditional shadow-puppet plays popular in China (and, for that matter, in the salons of Proust's Faubourg Saint-Germain around 1900). Now, Leys wrote, foreign visitors to the People's Republic (the French Maoists among them) "pretend they describe Chinese realities when they are in fact describing the shadow play produced for them by the Maoist authorities."

Leys always insisted that his writings gave away no secrets. They were based on materials available to anyone, and the real problem lay less with the lack of evidence than with a refusal to look at it. Not yet in English, his books were a sensation in France, bringing down all sorts of attacks from the *bien-pensants* of the Parisian left (and indeed elsewhere), who accused him of elitist nostalgia for China's imperial culture, of ties to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist dictatorship (which he despised), and, of course, to the CIA. In 1975, as Pierre Ryckmans, he published a translation of *Ye cao* ("Wild Grasses," or "Weeds") by the great Lu Xun, who had died in 1936. Leys added a long introduction upholding the writer's integrity and independence, and condemning the way Beijing sought to co-opt him as one of its own. Michelle Loi, one of the few French Maoists who could handle Chinese, responded with a violent attack that not only upheld Lu Xun's imagined Maoist fidelity, but gleefully exposed Leys's real Belgian identity. Leys, however, showed himself to be a formidable antagonist. In 1976 his *Images Brisées* contained an essay that not only took her arguments apart, but also pointed out that in her own account of a visit to the New China, she managed to confuse *Huangdi* (the Yellow Emperor, mythical founder of Chinese culture) with *Qinshi huangdi*, the very real and tyrannical First Emperor

Portrait of Simon Leys by Mathew Lynn

of the late third century BCE. What, he asked, would we do with an Italian historian who managed to mix up the legendary Romulus with Mussolini? After all, the chronological spread is about the same (the piece is unfortunately absent from *Broken Images*, the book's English translation).

In 1977 *Chinese Shadows* appeared in English, drawing both some very good reviews (one of them from the historian Lucien Bianco in the *China Quarterly*) and some very bad ones, most of the latter coming from those still under the spell of the Chairman, who had gone to his reward in late 1976. (The *NYRB* devoted large parts of two issues in mid-1977 to printing excerpts from it.) Another essay collection, *The Burning Forest*, subsequently appeared. There was one more sharp clash with the Maoists in 1983 when Leys appeared on the Parisian television program *Apostrophes* with Maria-Antoinetta Macciochi, the Italian author of a five-hundred-page book on the wonders of the New China. Leys, after politely remarking that he'd never had the pleasure of meeting Signora Macciocchi, then referred to her book as "utterly stupid." (You can watch the exchange on YouTube, and you don't need fluent French to understand "*stupidité totale*.")

By then, however, the bloom was off the Maoist rose, what with the mysterious disappearance in 1971 of Lin Biao, the Chairman's carefully anointed successor now turned arch-traitor, and the arrest of the Gang of Four a month after Mao's death in 1976. Many of the Paris Maoists moved on to other games. "What scandalized me most," Leys wrote to the French journalist Pierre Boncenne, "is that from the day it no longer lived up to their prefabricated myth, China ceased to exist." Indeed, though Leys never mentions it, in 1981 Beijing itself issued a statement damning the "so-called cultural revolution" as the worst setback in the Party's history, and putting most of the blame on Mao himself for (I'm not making this up) his failure to uphold Mao Zedong Thought.

In retrospect, Leys's original vision of the Cultural Revolution as only a power struggle was too simple; it was indeed that, but it was also much more, and *Chinese Shadows* and its successors, as Lucien Bianco noted, are more penetrating books than *The Chairman's New Clothes*. Clearly, Leys's opposition to Mao had nothing to do with ordinary right-wing anti-Communism, dynastic nostalgia, or sympathy for Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship. Leys was quite ready to criticize not only European Maoists but also those conservatives whom he thought bedazzled by the Chairman: Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Georges Pompidou, Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, and others. Yet his dislike of Maoism never blinded Leys to the noble aspirations that led some in the West to welcome it. In his recent book, *Le Parapluie de Simon Leys* (2015), Pierre Boncenne describes a friendly argument years later between Leys and Jean-François Revel about the similarities and differences between what Revel had described as the "direct" totalitarianism of the Nazis and the "utopian" totalitarianism exemplified by Stalin and Mao. From the standpoint of history and of their victims, said Revel, their criminal acts came down to the same thing, and thus the differences were mere epiphenomena. Leys, however, argued for a moral distinction. Many of us, he said, have had good-hearted and courageous friends who were deceived by Communism, and yet we accept them as our friends in ways that we could never accept ex-Nazis. Such people might well have been moved by the "superb and passionate" *Communist Manifesto*, but one would have to be "dishonest, mad, or idiotic (preferably all three)" to fall for something like *Mein Kampf*. Here, Boncenne suggests, you can see the temperamental differences between the agnostic Revel, limited by his rationality, and the Catholic Leys, with his sensibility to what is most mysterious and indefinable in humanity.

After *The Burning Forest*, Leys said he would leave the matter of contemporary China to others who were more qualified. Though that was only partly true—he continued to write about China for the *New York Review of Books* and other publications in Europe and Australia—it allowed him to pursue other interests, not only Sinological but literary. Yet he never saw the People's Republic again after his diplomatic service in 1972, by which time he was happily settled with his family in Australia, where he would remain for the rest of his life.

In the early 1980s, his brother-in-law Richard Rigby, then serving in the Australian embassy in Beijing, invited him for a visit. Though Leys applied for a visa, Beijing's embassy in Canberra apparently dithered, uncertain quite how to handle this Enemy of the Chinese People, and the trip never came off. A shame: though back then cities like Beijing and Shanghai had not yet become the forests of skyscrapers that they are today, it would be fascinating to have Leys's observations on that early stage of China's recovery from Maoism. In 1987 Leys moved from Canberra to teach at the University of Sydney, where one of his students was Kevin Rudd, who became prime minister of Australia in 2007 (and about whom Leys wrote an admiring piece in a

Belgian newspaper). Though Rudd and some others thought that Leys never quite understood the great changes taking place under Deng Xiaoping, the Tiananmen massacre of June 1989 and the jailing of the Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo in 2010 suggested that his views were not yet entirely outdated.

There were also occasional trips to Europe and the United States, and though Boncenne reports that there were several invitations to teach in this country, Leys always turned them down, put off by a sense that American universities, for all the quality of their work on China, were closed off to the world around them, and by a sense of academic competition that he found uncongenial to his nature. A great admirer of Newman's *The Idea of a University*, Leys was increasingly distressed by what he considered the growing commercialization of higher education. "The demand for equality is noble and must be fully supported, but only within its own sphere, which is that of social justice. It has no place anywhere else. Democracy is the only acceptable political system; yet it pertains to politics exclusively, and has no application in any other domain…for truth is not democratic, intelligence and talent are not democratic, nor is beauty, nor love—nor God's grace. A truly democratic education is an education that equips people intellectually to defend and promote democracy within the political world; but in its own field, education must be ruthlessly aristocratic and high-brow, shamelessly geared towards excellence." Though this may sound simply like an appeal to elitism, in fact it is an appeal to respect the intellectual ability and integrity of students, as Leys's concluding sentence makes clear: "A university is not a factory producing graduates, as a sausage factory produces sausages. It is a place where a chance is given to men to become what they truly are."

All of Leys's writing, Pierre Boncenne said in a broadcast shortly after Leys's death, was marked by his deep Catholicism, even that on China. Perhaps we might say: *especially* that on China. A chapter in *The Burning Forest* on Matteo Ricci, the late-sixteenth-century founder of the Jesuit mission to China, brings out very clearly one aspect of Leys's Catholic vision. To a Westerner, says Leys, China's complete "otherness" is not only a challenge but can also become an illuminating originality. "It is only when we contemplate China that we can become exactly aware of our own identity and that we begin to perceive which part of our heritage truly pertains to universal humanity, and which part merely reflects Indo-European idiosyncracies." Ricci understood this, thought Leys, and saw "that the question of how China could become Christian was first the question of how Christianity could become Chinese." This is fundamentally an issue of translation—the difficult translation of a theology "encumbered with a number of narrowly western notions.... Medieval scholastic philosophy is a monument as sublime as the great gothic cathedrals of Europe, but it is equally as unfit for transplantation."

Ricci's successors, however, lacked his clarity of vision; to them, becoming a Christian meant becoming an honorary European. "Western missionaries were ascribing universal relevance to their particular values (the 'God-speaks-Latin' syndrome)," and Leys quotes the "naïve and arrogant statement" of an unnamed French philosopher (it was Étienne Gilson) who called Thomism the "gathering up of the whole human tradition," as if a thirteenth-century Western European school of philosophy could be so all-encompassing. Not only that, but by the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christian missions in China and elsewhere had become hopelessly entangled with imperialism and conquest, and even notions of cultural and racial superiority. French Catholics were prone to such views, and so were Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

But in what sense exactly can Christian universalism become Chinese? The question remains, and disentangling it from its Indo-European specificities has proved an enormously difficult task. Nor, though Leys never pursues the topic, is the question of disentanglement one for Christianity alone. Think of Western secular views about the universality of, say, Enlightenment thought, or Progress, or (among historians and social scientists), of "modernization." Shall we ever successfully disentangle those concepts from their Indo-European roots?

Then again, why even bother to try? For Leys, apart from his own beliefs in Christian universalism properly understood, one concrete answer may be found in some of his remarks on Confucius. Much as he admired Confucius—the real Confucius, not the Confucius of subsequent Confucianism—Leys suggested that the lack of any sense of original sin made it more difficult for Confucius to deal with the problems of evil. (He said much the same about Orwell, whose agnostic humanism left him with no better preservative against the horrors of the twentieth century than "common decency.")

For many, the easy answer is to avoid any disentangling. The Chinese are "different." They have no approach to religion similar to Western Christianity, nor do they have any of the traditions out of which Western democracy, shared governance, and human rights were born. It is common enough to argue this way (and not only about China), but at least when it came to human rights Leys would have none of it. He was strongly critical of those who could look with equanimity at the cruelties of, say, the dictatorships of Chiang Kai-shek or Mao and argue that this is what Chinese are used to and we must respect their different culture. For the people who make this kind of argument, says Leys, there are no universal human rights but only particular Western ones—and indeed, he adds, if Hitler had simply remained within his own frontiers, we might say: Well, slaughtering Jews is a German idiosyncrasy, and it's not up to us to pass judgment.

He never tried to hide his Catholicism, a reviewer once said of him. But Leys's Catholic sensibility is difficult to define.

AIR WAVES

Set off by the light-governed timer
the lawn-sprinkler
waves a rain-wall of water
east and west. A robin,
its bright beak still fledgling-yellow,
stands at the verge of the spatter-pattern
head tucked & tilted to hear imaging
loosed by the multiple resonances
a worm sets off as it shrugs itself
short/long/short in waves underground.

A plane goes over, high,
headed for Europe. The robin
does not lift its head.
No worm-waves up there.

—Marie Ponsot

Marie Ponsot recently received the Aiken Taylor Award in Modern American Poetry, given annually by Sewanee Review. *In 2013, she was awarded the Ruth Lilly Prize for lifetime achievement by the Poetry Foundation.*

It is never insistent, and never descends into preachiness. As Leys himself said of Confucius, on ultimate questions it may sometimes be better to remain silent. Ian Buruma, meaning to praise Leys after his death, remarked that "if he had any prejudices, they were informed by his Catholic faith, and not by his Chinese learning"—an odd but all too common point of view (*if you and I disagree, it must be because you are prejudiced*). Nor was Leys uncritical of those of his own faith. He had no use for the priests who sought to embrace Mao (like the Belgian *abbé* whose book on the New China "was published by a company belonging to the Fathers of the Inquisition"), and he was alive to the resemblances between Maoism and some of the less fortunate aspects of Catholic history. "Indeed," he wrote in *Chinese Shadows*, "ecclesiastical metaphors are virtually irresistible when describing the People's Republic.... Maoism has a peculiar fascination for some clerical-minded souls. Those who harbor a certain nostalgia for totalitarianism and unconsciously regret the passing away of the Inquisition and the Pope's Zouaves, will find in Maoist China the incarnation of a medieval dream, where institutionalized Truth has again a strong secular arm to impose dogma, stifle heresy, and uproot immorality."

In 2013, Leys published an English translation of Simone Weil's *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, written in 1943 shortly before her death. What drew him to this essay? Was it that Weil's vision of continental political parties—heirs of the French Terror of 1793—ineluctably leading to the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century bears a similarity to the "horror" of ideological politics that George Orwell learned in the Spanish war? Or was it perhaps that Leys thought the exemption Weil granted to English politics might no longer be valid? (In fact, he quoted Orwell himself saying that *1984* was set in England precisely to make the point that totalitarianism could triumph anywhere.) One of Weil's arguments was that party loyalty tended to undermine one's attachment to the truth. Leys's experience with Maoists, both in China and in Europe, had led him to the same conclusion.

In August 2014, Simon Leys died in Sydney. Long and flattering obituaries appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Economist*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Guardian* and elsewhere. *Le Monde* and a French press that once vilified him now praised him, especially for his insights into Maoism. In June 2015 the French quarterly *Commentaire* printed appreciations from eight scholars and Sinologists, among them Roderick MacFarquhar of Harvard and Perry Link of California. Link, who has been persona non grata in China since 1996 thanks to his human-rights work, refers to Leys as the "North Star" in his study of that country.

Perhaps the best tribute came from the French political philosopher Philippe Raynaud, who wrote:

> There is…a true unity to [Leys's] work, beyond the moral and intellectual virtues of the author. It is the fruit of an attempt to elucidate the human condition, which often refers to extreme situations, but which is addressed to everyone without any pretense of revealing what is inaccessible to ordinary reason, and that's why one finds admirers of Simon Leys in all political, intellectual and spiritual quarters. But you also find in him many traits that come from a Catholic faith and culture, and which, subtle though they are, nevertheless play an important role in the way he sees the world. Simon Leys had enough confidence in nature, in the love of humanity itself, and above all, in tact and good taste, to be convincing to men of good faith without condemning unbelief or liberal society. But he was also sufficiently sensitive to the mystery of evil and, no doubt, to the precarious nature of human virtues, not to limit himself merely to the virtue of *humanitas*. No one is obliged to follow the way that he chose, but we must admit that he embodied a rare enough model, which doubtless represents that which Catholic intellectuals should be—but not always are.

Nor are Catholic intellectuals the only ones who could profit from Leys's example. He offers a North Star to intellectuals of all kinds, combining qualities rarely found together in a single writer: tact, good taste, and generosity, but also great courage and a sometimes astringent honesty. If this was a "rare enough" combination in the last century, it is even rarer today. ■

The Gifts Reserved for Age

T. S. Eliot, Early Achiever & Late Bloomer

William H. Pritchard

T. S. Eliot's *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* was published in 1963, two years before he died. More than one review remarked at the time how austere was Eliot's decision to let these two hundred and some pages stand for the poems by which he wished to be remembered. By comparison, the collected poems of contemporaries such as W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, or Robert Frost ranged from two to three times longer. This disparity is due in part to the fact that after *Four Quartets* was published in 1943, Eliot wrote very few poems (he was in part preoccupied with writing poetic dramas), while Yeats, Stevens, and Frost continued with undiminished energy to turn out lyrics until overtaken by death. It thus comes as something of a shock to see this new two-volume edition of his poems, which comes to almost two thousand pages with annotations. None of Eliot's contemporaries, including the three mentioned above, has received such an editorial tribute.

The Poems of T. S. Eliot
Edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue
Johns Hopkins University Press
Volume 1: $44.95, 1344 pp.
Volume 2: $39.95, 688 pp.

The two volumes are arranged as follow: Volume I contains 219 pages of collected poems, followed by uncollected ones, then an "Editorial Composite" of *The Waste Land*, and about a thousand pages of commentary, plus introductory material, bibliography, and index. Volume II contains *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Eliot's translation of St. John Perse's *Anabasis*, followed by other verses, then "Improper Rhymes," featuring Eliot's "Columbo" and "King Bolo" poems, scatological and humorous (or so the poet hoped) in character. Concluding the two volumes are 350 pages of textual history for all the poems. Together, the two volumes weigh about ten pounds and are hard on one's wrists and knees.

Christopher Ricks, head of the Editorial Institute at Boston University, is the most authoritative scholar and critic of Eliot in the world. While these volumes were in preparation his co-editor, Jim McCue, published essays on the special challenges and difficulties of editing Eliot. In the introduction to their commentary, they address the question any interested reader is likely to ask: Is all this necessary and does it not smother rather than illuminate Eliot's work? In Ricks's introduction half a century ago to his splendid edition of Tennyson's poems, he spoke directly to what a fully annotated edition consists of, and justified the frequency with which sources and influences were cited in the annotation. His project was to "illustrate the range of possible likenesses...from conscious allusion to another poet, then unconcious reminiscence, then phrasing which is simply an analogue and not a source." The notes, he argued, should refrain from interpretative explanation but instead offer points of information, leaving the reader free to make up his own mind about how useful the information is.

The seeking out of parallels is the most controversial aspect of an annotated edition such as this one. The recipients of such scholarly attention have not always been appreciative of the honor. When in his *Illustrations of Tennyson*, John Churton Collins, a late-nineteenth-century critic, put his encyclopedic mind to work in detecting echoes of all sorts in Tennyson's poems, the bard responded as follows:

> There is, I fear, a prosaic set growing up among us, editors of booklets, book-worms, index hunters, or men of great memories and no imagination, who *impute themselves* to the poet, and so believe that he, too, has no imagination but is forever poking his nose between the pages of some old volume to see what he can appropriate. They will not allow one to say "Ring the bell" without finding that we have taken it from Sir P. Sidney, or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean "roars," without finding out the precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarized it.

Whether the echo was a source, an allusion, or an analogue, mattered not a bit to the annoyed Tennyson, who allegedly called Churton Collins "a louse on the locks of literature." (Subsequent research has determined that Tennyson's name for Collins was "Jackass.")

As for Eliot, he seems to have been of two minds about the

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T. S. Eliot with wife Valerie in New York en route to a vacation in Nassau around Jan 21, 1960

AP PHOTO

propriety of annotating his poems at all. In a letter written near the end of his life to the master of a Cambridge college, he declared emphatically, "I will not allow any academic critic (and there are plenty of them in America only too willing) to provide notes of explanation to be published with...my poems." In Ricks's edition of Eliot's early uncollected poems, *Inventions of the March Hare* (1997), he quoted this letter but balanced it somewhat by pointing out that Eliot had sometimes "applauded" an annotated edition, and that he himself provided notes for the most allusive of his poems, *The Waste Land*. The editors' statement in *The Complete Poems*, that the notes "proceed from a point of information," leaves open possible disagreement about whether a particular note does or does not constitute "information," or whether it may instead constitute interpretation. We shall never know whether Eliot would have admired this massive work, been appalled by it, or expressed mixed feelings about it.

That said, we can remark more particularly on features of these two volumes. First, if we may momentarily detach him from his co-editor, a word about Christopher Ricks. In *Inventions of the March Hare*, Ricks quotes Eliot saying about Shakespeare that he "read with the most prodigious memory for words that has ever existed." I think it fair to say that on the evidence of his long career as a critic, scholar, and editor, Ricks has exhibited a comparably prodigious memory for words. We know that Harold Bloom possesses a prodigious memory because he has often told us so. (He can recite the whole of *Paradise Lost* and all the poems of Hart Crane). But Bloom consistently shirks the task of describing the verbal interanimation of poems he has brought up for commentary. Ricks's own style in his essays, in which his words are so interanimated with puns, anti-puns, double-entendres, playful twistings of language in every direction, has bothered critics who prefer a plainer style. But there is no denying his remarkable ability to call up analogies and parallels to the particular line under consideration. To take but one example (and to refer perhaps unjustly to Ricks in isolation from his co-editor): Eliot's "What the Thunder Said" (*The Waste Land* Part V) has a memorable evocation of aridity in the lines "But sound of water over a rock / Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees / Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop." The commentary tells us the drip-drop line was anticipated by Coleridge, Poe, and W. E. Henley. The Coleridge citation is brief: "Drip! drip! drip! drip!—in such a place as this / It has nothing else to do but drip drip drip." The citation is to Act IV of *Osorio*. Only a Coleridge specialist will have even heard of *Osorio*, which turns out to be a failed play from early in the poet's career, eventually retitled and produced in 1812 with the help of Lord Byron. Such a calling-up from this obscure source is beyond the reach even of Google. Then again, no reader is going to say, "Aha! This is what I've been waiting for—now I understand Eliot's line."

But in many other instances we are helped by a note to fill in something we only imperfectly understood, if at all. In the lines from "East Coker"—"Had they deceived us / Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders"—it may or may not have occurred to us to think about the Biblical anecdote of Susannah and the Elders, but it occurred to the editors, and they provide possibly relevant sentences from the four-page story of Susannah in the Apocrypha to the Book of Daniel. The editors gloss "deceived themselves" by adducing similar phrasing about "elders" in Eliot's essay "Thoughts After Lambeth," and they conclude with a parallel which, like the "drip drip" in *Osorio*, will have occurred to nobody else, but is pleasant to have anyway: Henry Adams's reference to Garibaldi as a "quiet-featured, quiet-voiced man in a red-flannel shirt."

At a higher level of annotative usefulness and interest, here is part of the commentary on lines opening the second part of "Little Gidding": "Ash on an old man's sleeve, / Is all the ash the burnt roses leave. / Dust in the air suspended / Marks the place where the story ended." We may remember that during World War II Eliot was an air-raid warden, and sometimes "watched" at Faber, his place of business, as well as near his home in Kensington. But the particular salience of these lines is enriched by sentences from a letter Eliot

wrote to William Levy about such fire-watching: "During the Blitz the accumulated debris was suspended in the London air for hours after a bombing. Then it would slowly descend and cover one's sleeves and coat with a fine white ash. I often experienced this effect during the long night hours on the roof." Or there may be an unexpected enrichment of a particular moment in a poem—even a moment not to every reader's taste. In perhaps the prosiest section of *Four Quartets*, the follow-up to the beautiful lyric about the fishermen in part II of "The Dry Salvages," Eliot draws a distinction between real happiness, a "sudden illumination," and lesser sorts of happiness: "Not the sense of well-being / Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection, / Or even a very good dinner." A friend of mine used to writhe over that business about the good dinner as an unattractive example of Eliot in his most churchwardenly mode. The editors quote a letter to Eliot's boss, the publisher Geoffrey Faber, about moments of illumination, quoting St. John of the Cross about how the soul must be divested of its cravings for wordly things: after this happens, writes Eliot, "One returns (I do anyway) to the Canard Aux Oranges or the Moules Marinières or whatever it is with a keener pleasure.... If we are rightly directed, a good dinner can lead us toward God, and God can help us to enjoy a good dinner." My friend wouldn't have been won over, but I shall now read these lines in a slightly enhanced way.

It would be disingenuous for a reviewer to suggest he has followed all or even most of the Commentary. I singled out the 163 pages devoted to *The Four Quartets* as a good spot for concentration, especially the fifty-five pages given to "Little Gidding," which Eliot once called the best thing he had written. Before the notes on individual lines and passages, there are introductory pages dealing with the history of the poem, its composition, the "Dante" section, and the history of its reception. There are twenty-four pages of notes about the unforgettable seventy-line encounter with the ghost ("some dead master") who says:

Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
First, the cold friction of expiring sense
Without enchantment, offering no promise
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
As soul and body begin to fall asunder.

The unrhymed tercets both remind us of, and are distinct from, Dante's *terza rima* and were described by Eliot in a letter: "What is quite interesting is that the austere Dantesque style is more difficult, and offers more pitfalls than any other." The commentary on this passage, filled with illuminating statements about it by Eliot, makes for fascinating reading in its own right.

In fact, the fineness and human resonance of this edition's critical apparatus is mainly found not in its notes on particular lines but in the more general commentary drawn from Eliot's letters and other communications, which show the depths of ennui, despair, and self-recrimination that marked the man. Often the sardonic bite, a darkly humorous one, is apparent, as when, asked by W. H. Auden why he liked to play Patience, Eliot responded that it was the nearest thing to being dead. Or a quite unhumorous confession, perhaps the bleakest self-assessment I'm aware of by any writer, comes in a summing-up he made to his close friend, John Hayward, in 1936:

I have no family, no career, and nothing particular to look forward to in this world. I doubt the permanent value of everything I have written. I never lay with a woman I liked, loved, or even felt any strong physical attraction to. I no longer even regret this lack of experience. I no longer even feel acutely the desire for progeny which was very acute once.

These words stop the curious reader in his tracks. What rescued Eliot from the despair he located in "The Hollow Men"—"the lowest point I have reached in my sordid, domestic affairs"—was his conversion to the Anglican Church in 1927, but more dramatically his marriage to Valerie Fletcher eight years before he died. In an undated communication he wrote, with reference to the grim ending of *The Waste Land*, "If I had known that I was, late in life, to have the felicity to have this radiant angel, Valerie, my Valerie, as my wife...I should have been myself radiant with joyful hope."

New to me and I suspect to most readers, is the existence of an "exercise book" made for his wife and titled "Valerie's Own Book." It consists, in no special order, of many poems Eliot had previously written and then copied into the book for his wife. The contents range from famous poems like "Prufrock" to a few of the infamous obscene verses, gathered in our edition under the title "Improper Rhymes." On a wedding announcement card he sent to his old friend Conrad Aiken in 1957, he declares himself "intensely happy, except for the fact that Valerie wants to learn about King Bolo and thus far I have resisted her attempts." He finally relented, and what is more surprising wrote three poems about their marriage: "How the Tall Girl and I Play Together," "Sleeping Together," and "How the Tall Girl's Breasts Are." They contain such revelatory passages as this:

I love a tall girl. When we lie in bed
She on her back and I stretched upon her,
And our middle parts are busy with each other,
My toes play with her toes and my tongue with her tongue,
And all the parts are happy. Because she is a tall girl.

What happened to Old Possum? Who would have thought that the author of *Four Quartets*—or, for that matter, of "King Bolo and his Big Black Bastard Queen"—would have been capable of such unprotected, intimate sincerity to a beloved? It is one of the more surprising of the Eliotic selves displayed in this magnificent, overwhelming edition. ■

Rand Richards Cooper

Grim Reaper

'EYE IN THE SKY'

The taut military drama *Eye in the Sky* stars Helen Mirren as Colonel Katherine Powell, a hardnosed British officer overseeing, from a bunker in the English countryside, a drone anti-terror mission in far-off Kenya. The mission is intelligence gathering; but upon discovering that the Somali Al Shabaab terrorists they've been spying on are plotting an imminent suicide bombing, Powell orders a drone missile attack on their hideout, a domicile located in a crowded Somali slum in Nairobi. The actual firing is to be done by a U.S. Air Force pilot (Aaron Paul, from TV's *Breaking Bad*), operating the Reaper drone remotely from a base in Nevada. His finger is on the trigger when the drone's camera reveals a nine-year-old girl arriving to sell bread at the perimeter of the targeted compound, posing the specter of collateral damage; much of the film consists of decision-makers hashing out, with maximum angst, whether to fire. The ethical dilemma hinges on a dreadful utilitarian question: Does the chance to eliminate terrorists who are preparing to attack dozens of innocent victims justify killing one innocent child?

Of course, war has always posed the potential for gruesome harm, and the ethical threshold of civilian targets was crossed a century ago, with the advent of the modern military's capacity for mass bombardment. In this sense the death of an innocent girl, alas, is nothing new. What is new is drone technology, which complicates the traditional ethical calculus of war—and its emotional and psychological challenges—in three basic ways: the accuracy of the weapon makes these missions more like assassinations than attacks; the warrior is half a world away from the war zone, and thus kills without himself being at risk; and the instantaneous transmission of crystal-clear, up-close images brings home the reality of the attack with absolute clarity, as those who order and execute it watch the kill happen in real time.

In effect, these technological innovations burn away the "fog of war" that has traditionally obscured moral accountability. In the "fog of war" scenario, a theme explored in such war films as *Platoon*, violence occurs amid mortal combat and far from official scrutiny, leaving the moral and ethical reckoning to be done *ex post facto* (if at all), and with a strong bias toward justifying the combatant's actions as a response to grave danger. In the drone era's new, "daylight of war" scenario, on the other hand, killing takes place in the absence of danger, and is wholly foreseeable; as a result, ethical reckoning is required *ex ante facto*, right up front. Making the calculus still more difficult in this case is the fact that the enemy is not a nation, but a terror group whose own calculations of success or failure rest largely on propaganda; as the British attorney general puts it at one critical juncture, "If they kill eighty people, we win the propaganda war; if we kill one child, they do." All in all, the drone's distorting effect on military, political, ethical, and legal imperatives creates a quagmire; it's a classic case of technology being out in front of not only our laws and doctrines, but our moral intuitions.

Helen Mirren in Eye in the Sky

BLEECKER STREET

The intuitions and responses laid out in *Eye in the Sky* are, essentially, three: the indignation expressed by a civilian participant in the deliberations who vehemently argues that killing the girl is wrong on the face of it; the military's adamant insistence, presented by Powell and her superior general (Alan Rickman), that the mission is necessary, and that legalistic qualms are a self-indulgence; and the weaselly cravenness shown by political appointees desperate to avoid having to make any decision that they might have to take public responsibility for later on.

As drama, *Eye in the Sky* is wholly engrossing, the narrative briskly shifting between Nairobi, where a Somali agent working for British intelligence tries to get the girl out of the way; the United Kingdom, site of tense deliberations over the attack; and Nevada, where Aaron Paul's character guides the Reaper and prepares to strike, with mounting dread. Along the way, the film makes some trenchant political observations. One concerns the quality and quantity of intelligence images passed along, not only via the drone itself, but via mini-cams deployed in a mechanical bird and insect (such devices are currently in military development), reminding us just how extensive the observational capacity of the government and military has become. Another concerns the scramble for legal justification by decision-makers, who view legal opinions merely and wholly as a means of political cover, and shop for them accordingly, rifling the legal racks, as it were, for anything that will fit. This Machiavellian attitude is manifest in Mirren's Colonel Powell, who bullies her information specialist into underestimating the likelihood that the Somali girl will die in the attack, and unleashes

steely fury on her legal adviser when he dares to remind her that there are legal limits to such actions.

Other aspects of the film's portrayal of drone warfare are more doubtful. First is the implication that every single collateral death caused by drone warfare provokes moral agonizing up and down the chain of command; indeed, that participants are so troubled as to be rendered at times incapable, literally, of pulling the trigger. Would a real-life American drone pilot allow his qualms to contravene direct orders? And would his superiors on the national-security team really worry so floridly about one girl? The *New York Times* reported last year that since 9/11, over five-hundred U.S. drone strikes have killed nearly four thousand people, with well over 10 percent of them unintentionally targeted civilians. In Yemen, meanwhile, some reports suggest that the number of civilians killed as collateral damage has exceeded the tally of intended targets.

You'd never know this from watching *Eye in the Sky*. And that's the problem with using a Hollywood movie as a vehicle for investigating ethical and political dilemmas. The conventions of a mainstream feature—the focus on individual characters and fates, the impulse for sympathetic roles and portrayals—conduce easily to propagandistic aims. The atmosphere of moral agony and tragedy that suffuses *Eye in the Sky* reflects standard-issue Hollywood sentimentality; but in a political sense, it offers Americans reassurance that our drone warfare is morally justified. Ostensibly, *Eye in the Sky* sets out to present divergent points of view in a neutral fashion; but in the end, there's little doubt about the bottom line. The movie closes with a terse colloquy between Rickman's general and one of his political advisers, a woman who has passionately opposed the decision to fire. "What happened today was disgraceful," she upbraids him. "And all done from the safety of your chair." Rickman responds, in grave reproach, that he has seen up close and personal the carnage caused by suicide bombers. "Never tell a soldier that he doesn't know the cost of war," he intones.

The moral bottom line of *Eye in the Sky* seems to be that we need these assassinations, even if we know in advance that innocents will die—and then we need to feel badly about it afterward. Meanwhile, in the real world, the tally continues to mount. And what about that other, greater and eternal Eye in the sky?

Postscript: a terse lecture about a soldier's duty is not necessarily the way I would have expected to say goodbye to Alan Rickman, who died in January of pancreatic cancer at sixty-nine. But then again, Rickman could pull off just about anything, and do so convincingly. A veteran of both stage and screen, he was that rare actor who possesses chameleonic versatility while always remaining uniquely himself. With his squinting, ferret-like face and insinuating velvety baritone—his voice, Helen Mirren recalled at his funeral, "could suggest honey or a hidden stiletto blade"—Rickman was tailor-made for villainy, and indeed played his share of heavies: Rasputin; the sherriff of Nottingham; Hans Gruber in *Die Hard*, Severus Snape in the Harry Potter films, and the corrupt Judge Turpin in Tim Burton's screen adaptation of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*. Yet his gift for sympathy shone through, so much so that *Rolling Stone* critic Peter Travers praised him for "giving us a glimpse into the secret nurturing heart that Snape masks with a sneer." Some of my favorite Rickman performances were in roles that went against the grain of villainy altogether, especially his tender turn in the badly underrated *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1991), where he plays a gifted musician who died before his time. Perhaps the weepiest comedy ever made, it's also one of the very best films—ever—about grief.

Fans needing one last dose of Rickman, and the honeyed voice that combined brooding intelligence and more than a touch of ennui, will be able to hear him voicing Absolem the Caterpillar in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, to be released next month. ■

John T. McGreevy

From Hemingway to Charlie Hebdo

How the French Think
An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People
Sudhir Hazareesingh,
Basic Books, $29.99, 338 pp.

Shadows of Revolution
Reflections on France, Past and Present
David Bell
Oxford University Press, $29.95, 421 pp.

The spell cast by France on American visitors is a familiar literary set piece. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Langston Hughes wrote the defining accounts in the 1920s, implicitly contrasting Parisian bookshops, fine wine, and sidewalk cafés with small town mores in the Prohibition-era United States. The Library of America recently felt compelled to publish an anthology, *Americans in Paris*, edited by *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik, whose own sparkling account of his family's sojourn, *Paris to the Moon*, is a worthy addition to this expatriate canon.

Americans in Paris unreflectively took the republican side in the cultural struggle that followed the French Revolution, defining much of modern French history between civil servants desiring to lead a unified nation state and priests and nuns determined to define France as the "eldest daughter of the church." The remembered France of Gopnik's Americans included jazz clubs in Montmarte, but not Montmarte's largest building, the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur, constructed by Catholics grieving the nation's defeat by Prussia in 1871 and the murder of their archbishop at the hands of the Paris Commune. The effect of the Louvre on bedazzled American tourists was detailed. The effect of Lourdes on bedazzled American Catholic pilgrims was not.

The struggle between republicans and Catholics in France culminated in the early twentieth century as governmental officials implemented a strict version of *laïcité*, or the separation of religion from the state. This separation included an abrupt end to state funding of religious institutions and schools, but also limitations on what would seem to Americans basic freedoms. In 1901, for example, the government banned Catholic religious orders such as the Jesuits from operating in France for a time, because of their perceived loyalty to Rome, as opposed to the nation, and their potential influence over young people in schools.

Paradoxically, these skirmishes over religion expanded French influence across the globe, as government officials and Catholic missionaries competed with each other to inculcate French (or Catholic) values. The *mission civilisatrice* promoted by French civil servants resulted in schoolchildren from Madagascar to Guyana reading Molière and learning about the *liberté* brought about by the French Revolution. Alternatively, my own university, Notre Dame, like many other Catholic institutions, was founded by missionary French priests and brothers for whom the trauma of the anticlerical phase of the revolution was an abiding warning against the dangers of modernity.

This French version of the culture wars ended with the Second World War. One version of conservative Catholicism was discredited in the war by its alliance with the collaborationist and anti-Semitic Vichy regime. Postwar French leaders declined to refight past battles, and a new generation of Catholic politicians played a larger role in both French politics and the nascent European Union. Most important, declining levels of Catholic practice made questions about the integration of religious institutions into society less pressing. The archbishop of Paris termed the city "mission territory" as early as 1947, and he sent priest sociologists to Chicago to marvel at bustling Catholic parishes and schools. Sophisticated French theologians had a major influence on the Second Vatican Council, but active Catholics had already become a minority—and, depending on the region, often a tiny minority—within a fundamentally secular society.

Unfortunately, culture wars connected to religion have returned in a different, more ominous key, most notably with the massacre of 130 concertgoers and diners in Paris last November, by French-born Islamic militants. This attack occurred eleven months after the murder of staff members at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, again by Islamic militants raised in France. The editor of *Charlie Hebdo*, whose cover stories mocking Islam had infuriated the militants, had once been quoted, in a nod to France's religious history, as saying, "We need to make Islam in France as banal as Catholicism."

In this context two new books are especially welcome. The first, *How the French Think*, is by Sudhir Hazareesingh, an Oxford historian who is a frequent reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* and the author of two books on Napoleon. Raised in Mauritius, a onetime French colony, and educated on what he terms "a copious diet of French classics," Hazareesingh now lives in Paris part of each year.

The second, David Bell's *Shadows of Revolution*, is a collection of lucid and

insightful review essays on an enviably wide range of topics within French history and culture. Bell is a Princeton historian who became intoxicated by France after college and never quite left. During his first year in Paris, studying at the École Normale Superiore, he stalked local cheese and wine shops, gaining fifteen pounds, and not regretting "a single ounce." He has also authored a biography of Napoleon—the topic is apparently irresistible—and other important studies, including a riveting history of the Napoleonic wars.

Hazareesingh deftly moves from Rousseau to the opinion pages of today's Parisian newspapers. His central conceit is an affirmative answer to a simple question: Do nations think?

It is hard to imagine answering "yes" if the question were posed about the United States. Do Marilynne Robinson, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Francis Fukuyama "think" together? But Hazareesingh convincingly argues that certain preoccupations constitute a coherent French intellectual tradition. These preoccupations include a focus on science, less in the laboratory than in the idea that a technocratic elite can direct governmental affairs in a disinterested way. They also include a spiritualism related to France's Catholic heritage but distinct from it, a valorization of the countryside, not Paris, as the deepest source of French identity, and an enduring interest in philosophical argument.

This summary inadequately conveys Hazareesingh's achievement. What in other hands might become a tedious march through texts and authors becomes in his a witty, even bemused, probe into the underpinnings of French culture.

These underpinnings include what anthropologists term a face-to-face milieu. All nations with universalist aspirations elide their provincialisms but the elision in the French instance is nonetheless striking. Most French intellectuals read the same journals, watch the same (erudite) talk shows, live in the same Parisian neighborhoods, and bump into each other while grocery shopping or out for dinner.

The Basilica of Sacré-Coeur

DAN TAYLOR-WATT

Bell notes how one of France's most prominent historians, Pierre Nora, simultaneously taught at the country's leading graduate school, edited an important newspaper, and selected titles for publication at the country's most prestigious publishing house. This tightly bound milieu, Bell suggests, fosters a welcome intensity of conversation, but with some deleterious consequences. Scholars such as Nora, for example, have been uninterested in the history of immigration, and what that might mean for the ideal of a unitary French culture. For instance, immigration from Poland and Italy in the early twentieth century, and from former colonies after the war, is one of the central phenomena of modern French history. One in four French citizens has at least one grandparent born outside of France, but the Statue of Liberty, designed and constructed in France, became a symbol for the "huddled masses" of immigrants only once it was placed in New York Harbor.

Hazareesingh ends by remarking on the decline of French influence. If Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault were once known throughout the intellectual world, their successors have modest visibility outside of France. The need to work within the balky structures of the European Union constrains even the most activist governmental ministers, and the inability to generate homegrown versions of Google and Facebook makes France ever more vulnerable to the global economy. Even the language itself seems under threat, struggling to sustain its influence in comparison to English, most of all, but also Spanish and Chinese. Fewer French-language books are translated into English than a generation ago. Another French historian, Marc Fumaroli, himself, like Nora, one of the forty members of the famed Académie Française, recently authored a book on eighteenth-century figures ranging from Benjamin Franklin to Frederick the Great, with the elegiac title, *When the World Spoke French*.

This focus on unity within French culture feeds into the current crisis. France's religious history, with a state determined to limit the influence of a Catholicism perceived as excessively hierarchical and insufficiently nationalist, ill-positioned the French to

absorb the Islam that often accompanied immigrants from the Middle East and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. The physical isolation of these immigrants in suburbs and housing projects outside of Paris and other major cities naturally incubated alienation. Recent laws limiting the ability of Muslim young women to wear veils in public schools suggest an inability to cultivate a French multiculturalism, or at least a patriotism capable of working through religious institutions instead of in spite of them. The populist National Front Party, at its origin in the early 1970s loosely associated with some conservative Catholics, now loudly proclaims the virtues of *laïcité* in the face of the growing Muslim population.

Still, the attackers in Paris did not become terrorists because of nineteenth-century battles over church and state. Online sermons and trips to Saudi Arabia or Syria seem to radicalize young Muslims in San Bernardino, not just Paris. A major American political figure, Donald Trump, now advocates an end to Muslim immigration to the United States, and refugees from the Middle East are causing political upheaval across central Europe. Paris's status as terrorist target may rest less on specific religious tensions within France than its iconic status as a symbol of Western modernity and one of the world's great tourist destinations. Bell sent his essay collection off to the publisher before the November attacks but his compelling final assessment is that terrorist assaults are part of the "broader story of the West's troubled relationship with the global South, and with the Muslim world in particular." France's influence in global markets and global culture may be waning, but in this discouraging sense France's problems are becoming ours. ■

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Paul Lakeland

They Always Had Paris

At the Existentialist Café

Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails

Sarah Bakewell

Other Press, $25, 448 pp.

A facility at writing about serious thinking with a deceptively light touch was the signal feature of Sarah Bakewell's 2011 book, *How to Live: Or a Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer.* The same quality graces this latest work, in which she subjects existentialist philosophers to scrutiny both as thinkers and as human beings marked by their moment in history. While existentialism is less a distinct school of philosophy than a kind of extended family—one that includes thinkers as varied as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Eugene Ionesco, and Ralph Ellison—almost all of those at the center of this book lived and worked in Paris during the mid-twentieth century. Such Parisian café habitués as Raymond Aron, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and, to a lesser extent, Maurice Merleau-Ponty belong to this inner group. As the story unfolds, others come and go: Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, the Catholic theologian Gabriel Marcel, and many more. But it is about the French core that we learn most.

The existentialists Bakewell discusses are largely unread today outside the ranks of professional philosophers and college students. To most of us, existentialism means, if anything, a film-noirish mix of Gauloises cigarettes, Nazi occupiers, and a whole lot of coffee drunk in a whole lot of cafés. The one in the group who continues to be read widely is Camus—his novels, at least, if not his almost impenetrable philosophical essay *The Rebel.* I would wager that for every modern American who has read Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, there are a thousand who have finished Camus's novel *The Plague*. If

PHOTO BY BRASSEÏ

Jean-Paul Sartre (bottom left), Albert Camus (with dog), Pablo Picasso (behind Camus), and Simone de Beauvoir (to the right of Picasso, with book)

we look a little more widely at some of the great figures whom Bakewell rightly invokes as influences on the existentialists, like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, we come face-to-face with even more formidably difficult writings. Perhaps only Franz Kafka from this group continues to be attractive to the non-specialist reader—once again, a novelist.

Bakewell clearly thinks we need to know more about these philosophers and their ideas. Existentialism's call to live authentic lives in challenging times may be out of fashion, but she considers it all the more important for the very fact of our ethical amnesia. So via the conceit of a "synchronic café," where all the players can come and go, sipping on their apricot cocktails (really?), she interweaves for our benefit the lives and circumstances of many of the major players. This is attractive writing that draws the reader in, but not all of it is easy. Unflinchingly, Bakewell launches into an account of Husserlian phenomenology, then follows it with a first look at Heidegger. The pace picks up with the war years, including the dramatic story of how Husserl's papers were smuggled to safety in the last moments before WWII was declared, and how Sartre fared as a soldier and prisoner-of-war, and as a philosopher in the midst of Nazi Paris. If there is one notable omission in the book, it is any consideration of how Sartre and the rest negotiated life amid occupation and the temptation to collaborate—a temptation to which a number of French intellectuals gave in.

Subsequent chapters examine de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*; Heidegger's shift to a more mystical thinking and his flirtation (or worse) with Nazism; and Sartre's "unreadable" work on Flaubert and his later turn to more philosophical and political writings, which led to his estrangement from Camus, Aron, and Merleau-Ponty. The phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty comes across as quite the most personable individual of the group, and Bakewell provides an excellent account of his difficult but important thought on embodiment, deftly mingling it with anecdotes about his skill as a dancer and his (largely ineffective) flirtatiousness. In her closing chapters Bakewell turns to writers who toyed with elements of existentialism but are not usually labeled as such, like the African-American trio of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison, and Colin Wilson and Iris Murdoch in Britain.

Bakewell's mix of anecdote and exposition, with a nod to history and a dash of autobiography, makes her writing attractive to the general reader, even (or perhaps especially) when she writes about thinkers she views as "hopelessly flawed." One thing that rapidly becomes apparent to anyone who reads the history of philosophy—or the lives of artists and writers—is that no correlation whatsoever exists between creative thought and personal virtue. If Heidegger is the proof of that, there are others in the existentialist café who are far from being shining examples of human goodness—or even, surprisingly enough, of authenticity. But as Bakewell comments, while they may not be exemplary, they are interesting.

In her lovely final chapter she admits to having come to respect and even to like Sartre. Bakewell acknowledges that "of course, he was monstrous," but at the same time she makes clear that he possessed the character Heidegger lacked; for all his flaws, he is "good" and Heidegger is not. But the writer Bakewell will continue to love is Simone de Beauvoir, whose autobiographies she cherishes. Bakewell confesses that as a young person she used to think that ideas were what mattered, but by now she has come to the conclusion that "ideas are important, but people are vastly more so." And sure enough, while her treatment of the existentialists' often challenging thought is fair and admirably clear, it is the people themselves, sipping their apricot cocktails (*really*?), whom we will remember from this fascinating and warmly human book. ■

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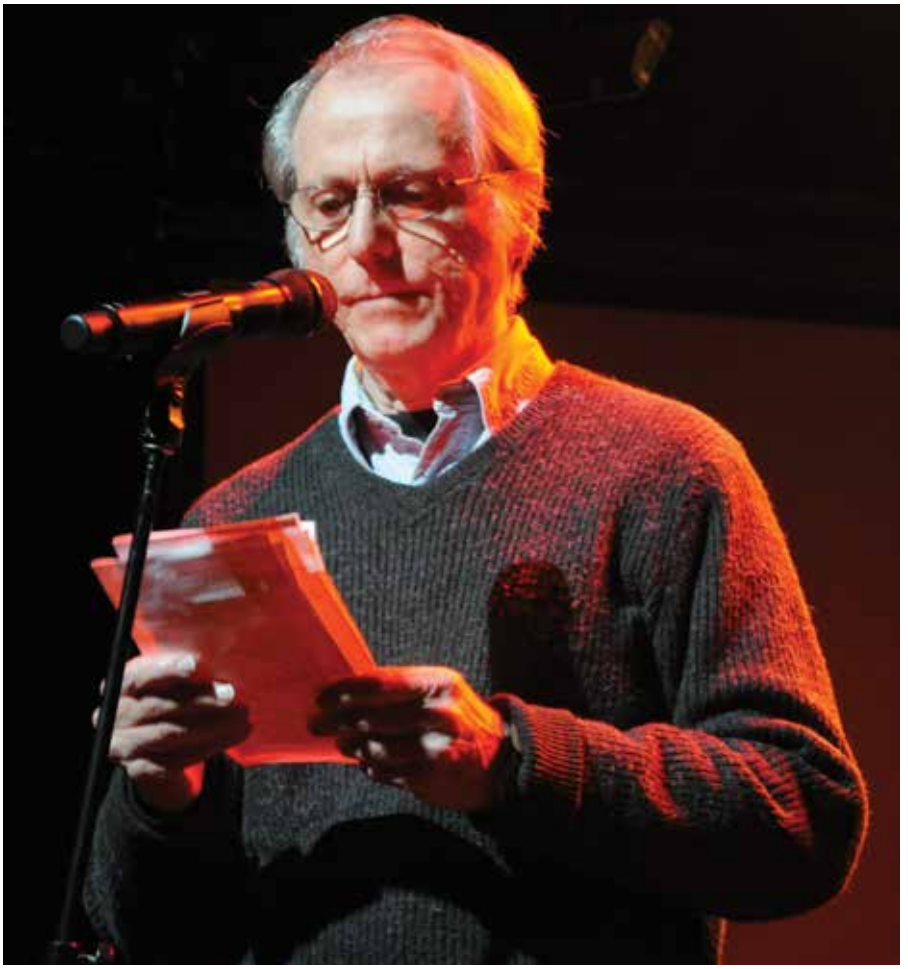
Dominic Preziosi

Better Living Through Dying

Zero K
Don DeLillo
Scribner, $26, 288 pp.

The husband and wife at the center of Don DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise* both flirt and despair over the question of who will predecease the other. *Why do we have to die?* is the existential plaint behind not only their pillow talk and estate planning but also the narrative itself, which proceeds less as conventionally plotted drama than as darkly comic, special ongoing coverage of the ever-approaching encounter with life's end. Flash ahead to DeLillo's latest, *Zero K*, and the question is: *But must we die at all?* The ageless query has become an expression of entitled consumerism, disburdened of inconvenient philosophical or theological confusions. Maybe it's no coincidence there's not as much to laugh about either.

DeLillo has long been celebrated for his prescience, his ability to somehow capture a world that's about to arrive in fiction that may be steeped, if not always set, in the past. He accomplished this most deftly in 1988's *Libra*, engaging conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination and amassing troves of biographical data on Lee Harvey Oswald to comment on the futility of seeking "truth" in images, and on our vulnerability to paranoia in trying to make sense of senseless events. He exhibited it most grandly in *Underworld*, a novel huge in scope and page count, spanning decades and locales; nuclear cataclysm is its primary theme, though pandemic, environmental degradation, and economic collapse also make ominous appearances. These creeping terrors inspired an original jacket design showing the towers of the World Trade Center, upper floors obscured by a smoky fog, with the black, aircraft-shaped silhouette of a spread-winged bird swooping in from the top corner and the cross of a Catholic church in the foreground—this a full four years before 9/11.



Don DeLillo in New York City, 2011

Zero K dwells less on the post-war, premillenial anxieties that gave those earlier works their particular unsettling charge. It seems less historical, more futuristic, yet it's set in a worrisomely recognizable present. Limited in cast, modest in length, and intimate in point of view, it's in keeping with similarly contained work of later-career DeLillo, such as *Cosmopolis*. Typical of his fiction, though, it offers few of the narrative, thematic, or aesthetic comforts that readers might ordinarily seek. The jarring plausibility of the central idea—"Life everlasting belongs to those of breathtaking wealth.... It's no longer a teasing whisper you hear in your sleep"—is taken up in jarring, occasionally jargony language and chilly, jagged interactions among sometimes frustratingly oracular characters. Yet this may be the point: What other mode might possibly suit the material?

Zero K's first-person protagonist and reluctant conscience is Jeffrey Lockhart, who early on learns that his terminally ill stepmother, with the emotional and financial support of his billionaire businessman father, will have herself put into "cryonic suspension" before she dies. (The book's title refers to absolute zero degrees Kelvin, the temperature at which atoms stop moving.) It is the couple's certainty that a cure will someday be discovered, at which point she can be reanimated and live on—perhaps forever, not only having

survived her illness but also having slept safely through all the calamities sure to have beset civilization in the meantime. "Faith-based technology," Jeffrey's father, Ross, explains. "Another god. Not so different, it turns out, from some of the earlier ones. Except that it's real."

Jeffrey is troubled from the outset, when he is summoned by Ross to the secret facility, apparently somewhere in remote Kyrgyzstan, where the procedure—grandly dubbed by its creators as the Convergence—is performed. He arrives after a long flight to find it is largely funded by Ross's billions; staffed with scientists, spokespeople, and armed security; and already serving a select (wealthy) clientele. Much of the action, such as it is, consists of elliptical debates about death, money, and business between Jeffrey and Ross (or Jeffrey and mysterious unnamed personnel); exploration of the windowless, mostly subterranean site; and recollections of his own upbringing—all as his stepmother prepares to enter her suspended state. It is in this long opening section that DeLillo presents the inversion from which *Zero K* will draw its tension. No Catholic, Jeffrey says of himself, he once nonetheless went into a church on Ash Wednesday and got "a splotch of holy ash thumb-printed to my forehead. Dust thou art.... And to dust thou shalt return." This memory stands in notable opposition to his father's characterization of the physical structure of the facility and the principle undergirding the Convergence: "Return to the earth, emerge from the earth."

Even if Jeffrey had the tendency or vocabulary to talk in terms of heresy, it's unlikely he would, as DeLillo seems not to want to hark back to those "earlier" gods but rather tilt his book toward the future made possible by our technophilic age. When one of the mysterious, nameless Convergence officials challenges him with the obvious if rhetorical question—"What is the point of living if we don't die at the end?"—Jeffrey doesn't rush to take it up. He seems more like an emissary from a simpler place, or at least from a place where unending biological life is not so readily, frighteningly purchasable. Back in New York after his stepmother has entered cryonic suspension, he spends time in long walks with his girlfriend, one foot in front of the other, in firm contact with the earth beneath him. "Know the moment," he thinks, "feel the gliding hand, gather all the forgettable fragments, fresh towels on the racks, nice new bar of soap, clean sheets on the bed.... This was all I needed to take me day to day and I tried to think of these days as the hushed countermand, ours, to the widespread belief that the future, everybody's, will be worse than the past."

Lurking beneath the main concerns of *Zero K* is a story of filial conflict, but moving portrayals of interpersonal relationships are not exactly DeLillo's thing. The critic James Wood long ago castigated him for sacrificing people to conspiracy and paranoia. Character, Wood complained, can't take form when a narrative moves outward toward chaos rather than inward toward stability. But do people really come to DeLillo for character anyway? It's his special brand of angst, and his artful melding of language to subject, that attract fans. Still, Jeffrey—scion of wealth, irreligious, ambivalent in his relationships, uninterested in a career—emerges as an emotionally complicated, even hopeful, voice of reason. Witnessing the twice-yearly natural phenomenon in which the western sun's rays align with Manhattan's street grid, Jeffrey is moved by the response of a boy next to him, "whose howls of awe" express "the purest astonishment in the intimate touch of earth and sun." Might this, in addition to reflecting Jeffrey's own understanding of life's depths and limits, also signal the author's later-in-life arranging of things? If so, there are worse places to arrive at. Let the 0.1 percent pay to live forever; the rest of us know why to invest in a sunset. ■

Dominic Preziosi *is* Commonweal*'s digital editor.*

Kathleen Sprows Cummings

Where She Stands

Joan Chittister
Her Journey from Certainty to Faith
Tom Roberts
Orbis, $28, 272 pp.

"We don't change as we get older—we just get to be more of what we've always been." So wrote Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, in *The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully*. After reading Tom Roberts new biography of Chittister, I wonder whether she would add that growing older also means coming to terms with who you have always been—and why. A full-length biography was on the minds of neither the author nor the subject when Roberts and Chittister met in Erie, Pennsylvania, in July 2011. Roberts's purpose was to "update the file" on Chittister for the *National Catholic Reporter* (code for preparing her obituary). He began by observing that while he had known Chittister as a friend and NCR columnist for many years, he did not know much about her personal life. "Tell me who you are and where you come from," he prompted. "Let's begin at the beginning."

And so Chittister did. Over the next four days, she shared with Roberts the story of an early life shaped by domestic violence and vulnerability. Chittister's father, Daniel Daugherty, died when she was a toddler. Joan's widowed mother, Loretta, soon married Harold "Dutch" Chittister, an alcoholic with a fierce temper who subjected her to physical abuse and consigned Joan to a childhood full of fear. It was only in 2011, at age seventy-five, that Joan was ready to tell this part of her life story. "It's time," she told Roberts.

Joan's memories of her adoptive father show how complicated love and family life can be. Despite the trauma he inflicted, she was grateful to Dutch for providing materially for her and her mother, and remained so attached to him that she decided, as an adult, to keep his surname. And while Dutch, a non-Catholic, had refused to pay for her Catholic schooling and had initially been opposed to her entering the convent, he came to love the Benedictines. When Chittister contemplated leaving the community in the tumultuous early days of post–Vatican II renewal, it was Dutch who spoke to her about the bonds of love and loyalty.

Joan's relationship with her mother was far more loving but equally complex. She remembers Loretta as a wisdom figure who did the best she could to protect her daughter and to remove obstacles in her way. When Joan first applied to enter the Benedictines, the prioress refused her permission; as an only child, she explained, Joan would need to care for her mother in her old age. It was only through Loretta's insistence that the prioress relented. That prioress, it turned out, had proved oddly prescient. Loretta did indeed need to rely on her only child in her old age. Diagnosed with advanced Alzheimer's disease, she moved into the Benedictine motherhouse where she was cared for by the entire community until her death four years later, a development made possible only by the Benedictines' shift from an almost exclusive focus on education to a broader corporate commitment to social justice.

Joan Chittister

PENN STATE

Through her leadership in the community and beyond, Chittister spearheaded that transition and the others that reshaped women's religious life after the council. In 1971, she was elected president of the Federation of St. Scholastica, one of four Benedictine Federations in the United States. She would later be elected president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, prioress of the Erie Benedictines, and president of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses. All the while she maintained a grueling speaking schedule and devoted significant time to her writing, emerging as a national and international authority on religious life and a prophetic and fearless advocate for women, a commitment she ascribes to her mother.

Loretta's influence endures. Though her mother had died several years before, Joan sensed her presence at a pivotal moment in 2001, when she was informed that the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life had demanded that the Benedictines forbid her from speaking at a conference on women's ordination in Dublin, Ireland. She heard her mother tell her, "You go ahead and you'll be all right. Do not be afraid." She confesses to Roberts that, to this day, she struggles under the weight of her mother's high expectations. This glimpse of vulnerability is difficult to square with the powerful and confident speaker many of us know Chittister to be, but it is one of the virtues of Roberts's biography. The personal touches he inserts in the book—memories of her madcap spins on a motor boat around Lake Erie, for example, or the fact that she personally responds to each and every one of the thousands of emails she receives—give the reader an intimate portrait of a much-admired public figure.

The biography is also a love story about the Catholic sisters in Joan's life.

Joan's earliest memories are of the Sisters of Mercy comforting her at her father's funeral. Her fourth-grade teacher, a Sister of St. Joseph, secretly laundered her uniform when she spilled ink on it, avoiding a confrontation at home. More important, her teachers noticed and cultivated her manifest intellectual gifts. Sisters at Erie's Benedictine Academy provided a work-study job to cover her high-school tuition, and, after one of them noticed she was skipping the noon meal in the cafeteria, arranged for her to have both lunch and dinner free of charge. Soon after she entered the Benedictines, the community provided support as she battled polio. The community eventually also sponsored her postgraduate education, a path certainly followed by many U.S. sisters but highly improbable for a member of a community that did not sponsor a college. A chance encounter at the University of Notre Dame led Chittister to Penn State in 1969, where she earned a PhD in speech communication in a record two-and-a-half years. The timing, it might be said, was perfect, in that she finished graduate school at the moment her gifts as a leader and speaker were most needed.

Apart from the early chapters, the biography does not provide much new substantive information about Chittister. Still, this account of Chittister's life is compelling for the history it provides of women's religious life over the past half century. It is, ultimately, a story not of one woman but of a generation of Catholic sisters that came of age in the heady decades that followed the Second Vatican Council, when transformations in church and society combined to restructure women's religious life.

In the final chapters, Roberts weighs in on the ongoing debate over the wisdom and consequences of this restructuring. He cites the arguments of Ann Carey and others who would blame Chittister and her ilk for the decentralization of religious life and the decline in the numbers of U.S. Catholic sisters. Roberts clearly disagrees with this interpretation, and admires Chittister for performing what she calls her "ministry of irritation" within the church. Roberts quotes at length from a recent sociological study, *New Generations of Catholic Sisters*, which shows how generational analysis can confound ideologically based judgments Carey and others make about women's religious life. Roberts's book, perhaps unwittingly, also testifies to the benefit of using a generational lens. At one memorable moment during Chittister's tenure as prioress, the community debated whether or not to erect a flagpole at the motherhouse. Chittister's contemporaries, committed to peace, objected; her elders, who remembered brothers serving during World War II, felt differently about the American flag.

When I finished the book I thought far less about the generation that preceded Chittister than I did about those that follow her, in particular the millennials. Members of this generation are removed from those in Chittister's cohort on at least two counts. They are not only more disconnected from the church but are also often suspicious of feminism, having learned about it more through its detractors than its advocates. In seeking simple ways to demystify feminism, I often rely on pithy quotes from Chittister. One of my favorites appeared in her regular NCR column, "From Where I Stand": "Feminism is not about turning women into men or men into women. Feminism is about enabling both men and women to develop as full human beings." These are words more young Catholic women need to hear. Those who are not already fans of Chittister might do well to first meet her without Roberts's mediation, by reading her own beautiful and powerful prose. ■

Kathleen Sprows Cummings *is an associate professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame. She holds a joint appointment in the Department of History, and serves as the William W. and Anna Jean Cushwa Director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism.*

Gilbert Meilaender

No Cheap Grace Here

C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity

A Biography

George M. Marsden

Princeton University Press, $24.95, 248 pp.

A biography of a book may seem like a rather strange beast, but something like that is what Princeton University Press provides in its "Lives of Great Religious Books" series. With this offering written by the well-known historian of religion, George Marsden, *Mere Christianity* takes its place in the series alongside books as different as Calvin's *Institutes*, the book of *Job*, and the *I Ching*. Given the relatively brief "life" of *Mere Christianity*, compared to that of these other books, Marsden prescinds from labeling it a classic. But when one considers that it has been translated into at least thirty-six languages, and that in the past fifteen years alone it has sold over 3.5 million copies just in English, it is hard to deny that *Mere Christianity* merits inclusion in the series.

As many readers of Lewis know, *Mere Christianity* did not begin life as a single volume, or even as a *written* work. It began in several different series of BBC radio talks that Lewis gave during World War II. The first two series of talks were published under the rather generic title *Broadcast Talks* (but titled *The Case for Christianity* when published by Macmillan in the United States), the third series under the title *Christian Behaviour*, and the fourth as *Beyond Personality*. (As someone who more than once has had occasion to suggest to editors that they were not necessarily better able than I to express my views, I took some pleasure in Marsden's observation that, although Lewis was given "lengthy editorial suggestions" when *Beyond Personality* was being prepared for publication, he "did not seem to alter the content in any substantial way," and he kept his title "despite some urging for something that would more clearly reveal his subject.")

Interestingly, Marsden notes that no one seems to know who first had the idea to combine these three small books into one book titled *Mere Christianity*, which first appeared in print in 1952. Lewis wrote a new preface for that volume in which he explained what he meant by the notion of "mere Christianity" (a term he probably first

saw in writings by the seventeenth-century English theologian Richard Baxter). Marsden's "biography" is helpful in tracing the development of these series of talks and the (relatively few) changes and additions Lewis made when they were drawn together into a single volume.

After a brief sketch of Lewis's life, Marsden takes eight chapters to set the book into its wartime context, to describe the four series of talks that were eventually combined in the book, to document initial reactions to the talks and their publication as separate books, to describe the publication of *Mere Christianity* in the context of other things Lewis was writing at the time, to recount its reception by Evangelical readers in the United States, to characterize its reception by readers from other Christian denominations (especially Roman Catholics), to report some of the (positive and negative) critical reactions, and to offer reasons (seven in all) why the book has enjoyed a "lasting vitality."

Among the most helpful features of Marsden's biography is his discussion of the process by which Lewis developed the broadcast talks and then moved from oral talks to written publications. He also includes an appendix summarizing the changes Lewis made when combining the three earlier small books in *Mere Christianity*. It is also very helpful to have the development of the book placed in the wartime setting and the other writings of Lewis at roughly the same time—a time when his productivity was astonishing. Marsden even provides us with bits of information that, while hardly of great significance, nonetheless get our attention. Thus, for example, he reports that during the NCAA basketball tournament in 2013, "the Emerging Scholars Network of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship ran 'The Best Christian Book of All Time Tournament.'" Pairing sixty-four books in several elimination rounds, voters narrowed the field. In the Elite Eight *Mere Christianity* defeated Augustine's *City of God*. In the Final Four it defeated Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*. But we learn (perhaps, let us admit, with just a bit of relief) that in the championship pairing *Mere Christianity* "was edged out by Augustine's *Confessions*."

Chapter 7's account of critical reactions seems far too dominated by the not-very-persuasive criticisms made by the philosopher John Beversluis and discussion of the "trilemma" Lewis develops (that Jesus was either divine as he claimed to be, or a liar, or a lunatic). To be sure, the trilemma does play a significant role in Lewis's thought, but there is far more to the argument developed in *Mere Christianity*, and the imaginative moves made in the book's fourth section ("Beyond Personality") merit greater attention. With respect to Lewis's rather traditional notion of differences between the sexes, Marsden

PHOTO: WALTER STONEMAN, BROMIDE PRINT, 1955, © NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

speculates that had Lewis lived longer his views (rather, I guess, like those of conservative Supreme Court justices) "would have continued to evolve." He does not, however, speculate that Lewis's equally traditional views on economics might similarly have evolved.

Marsden notes that in 1965 Chad Walsh, one of the first to write about Lewis's Christian writings, suggested that in the postwar era Lewis was "'entering into a period of relative obscurity.'" Clearly, that did not happen, and in his final chapter Marsden asks why *Mere Christianity* has "not faded in the way that every other non-fiction book of the 1940s and 1950s has?" He finds seven reasons that seem widely shared among those who have thought about that question. I will not attempt to summarize them here but will merely note one of them that seems to me especially significant: "*Mere Christianity* does not offer cheap grace." For Lewis, being drawn into the life of Christ hurts. What Marsden calls "Lewis's simple but demanding emphasis on giving up one's old self to have Christ live within us" has been received, I suspect, as a powerful antidote to notions that God exists to make us happy and successful. If Marsden's biography of *Mere Christianity* encourages his readers to read or reread it for themselves, it may in its own way be an antidote for the attention to self that so dominates our culture. ■

Gilbert Meilaender *is a Senior Research Professor at Valparaiso University and the Ramsey Fellow at the Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture.*

Remember Me

Joan Sauro

The day before Palm Sunday, my grandfather buried my grandmother in a soaked and blackened grave at Assumption Cemetery. His place would be at her side; already the marker stood with both their names engraved. It was very near the cemetery gate, as he wished, so the two of them could go for evening walks.

But there was no talk of twilight walks the day before Palm Sunday. Not much talk at all as children, grandchildren, and relatives to the third degree shivered under a makeshift tent. We huddled for warmth and strength around the old chief mourner, his eyes puffy and red.

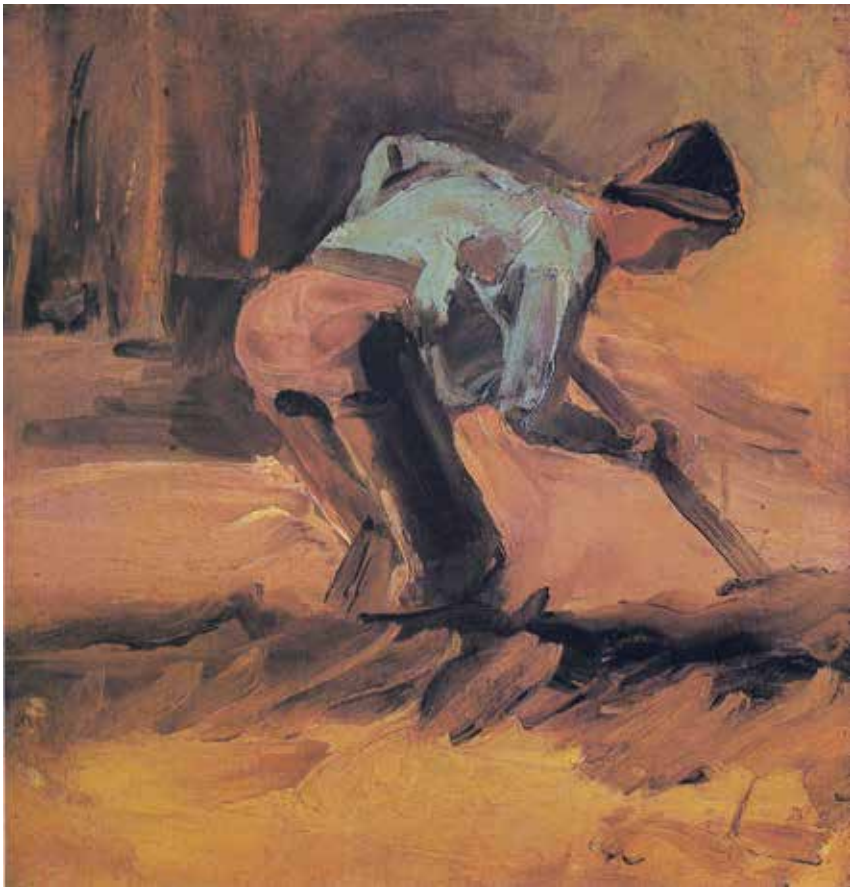
On Palm Sunday we huddled in my grandparents' warm and well-lighted dining room with its scrubbed linoleum floor, refrigerator, the small-backed chair in which Grandma had died, and the oversized table around which the family lived. Some of the third-degree relatives spilled over into the parlor; others fussed in the kitchen.

But the main attraction was in the dining room where *paisanas* from the old country cut and wove strips of palm into intricate crosses, flowers, braided baskets and loop de loops. All around the table fingers wove in and out, while Grandpa with his hands folded on the table, his eyes shining, told stories about crossing the ocean seven times—twice free—about laying tracks for the Union Pacific for twenty cents an hour, about marrying Grandma over in the old country and leaving her too soon to fight World War I, about returning with his buddies on a "freelough" and finding my father, then a little boy, trailing GIs for cigarette butts. When the war was over, they packed Grandma's crocheted tablecloth and Grandpa's Victrola with the loudspeaker into a trunk and immigrated to America with my father and his brother.

I left the weaving of palm and stories and went up to the attic. There was the trunk marked "steerage." I sat on it, the child of immigrants, and thought about how my grandfather's extraordinary memory was taking all of our rich history and weaving it into a gift for us. Grandma was present down in that dining room, and maybe we were doing this to remember her. And I thought about the Last Supper, how "Do this in memory of me" was more about Christ's presence than about his absence. "Do this in memory of me" were not words dusted off some ancient ritual done once and for all. The "memory" was like a stamp, like the seal we say is part of Baptism, the sign of faith proclaiming that, at that last supper, we were in the mind of Christ. He set his seal upon our hearts, then gave us "Do this in memory of me" as a reminder that he has first claim on us. This is what we would commemorate in a few days on Holy Thursday.

The day after Palm Sunday was warm and sunny—a good day, my grandfather thought, to unearth his fig tree. Carefully, with a shovel as old as he was, he pulled away dirt from a six-foot-long grave, two or three feet deep. He stopped when something showed, bent down, and gently brushed away dirt to reveal the thin limbs of a fig tree. Slowly, Grandpa lifted it, careful not to disturb the roots. He quietly held it upright, while some of us filled in the grave and packed dirt around the base of the tree. He fixed a long stick to the skinny trunk and we all smiled. There, shooting out of every possible crevice, were miniature green leaves. Under all that buried winter ground there was life. ■

Joan Sauro, CSJ, *is the author of several books, including the forthcoming* We Were Called Sister*, whose title essay was awarded the prize for Best Essay 2014 by the Catholic Press Association.*



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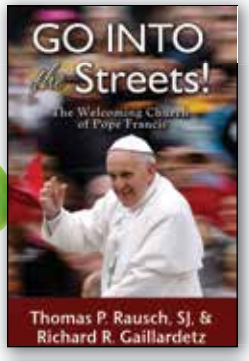

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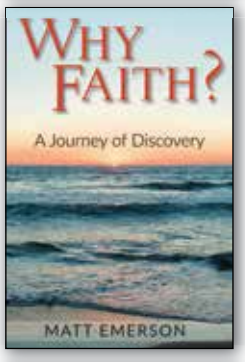

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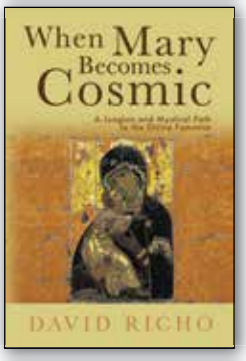

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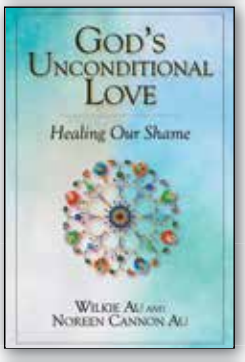

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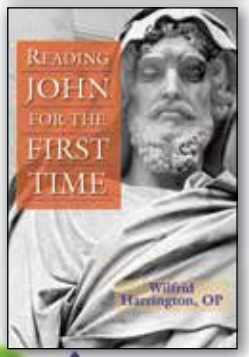

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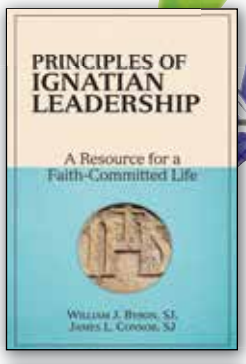

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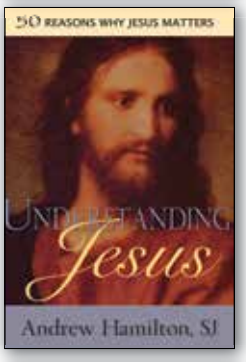

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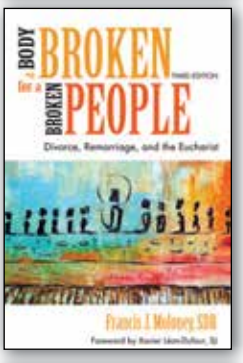

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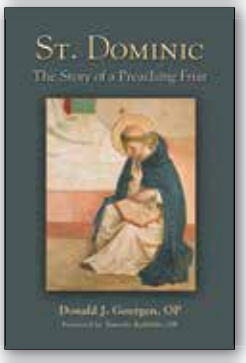

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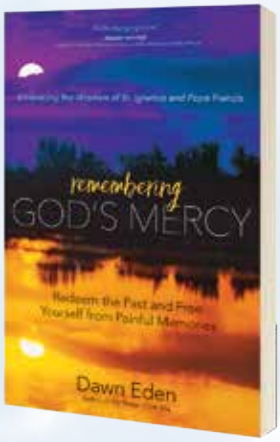

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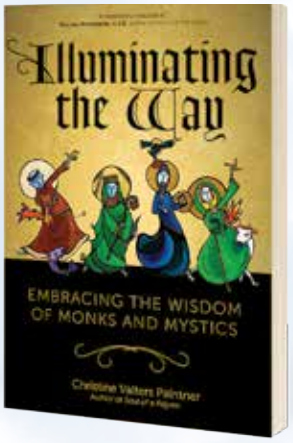

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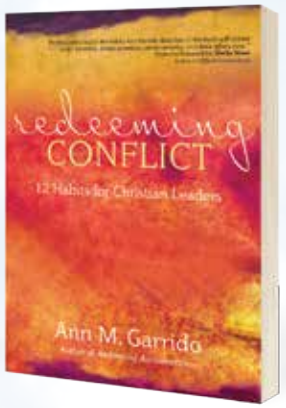

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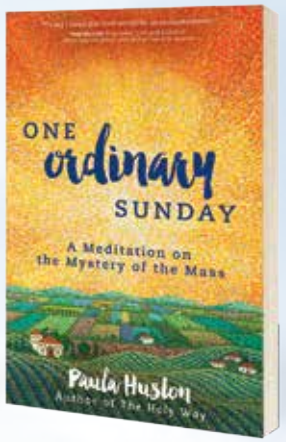

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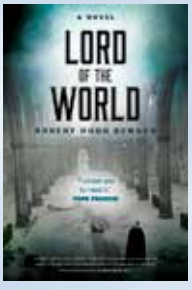

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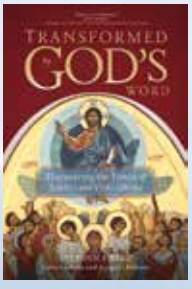

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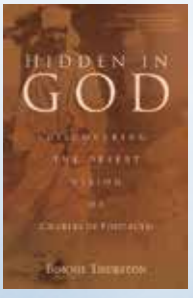

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