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SEPTEMBER 2019

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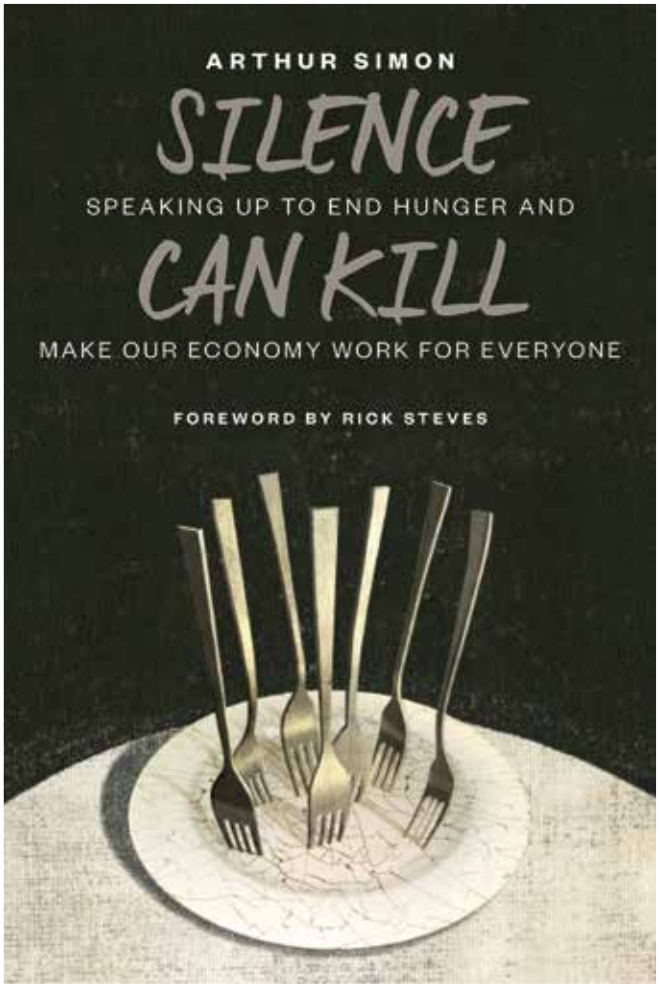

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LETTERS

The bishops and sex abuse, Catholics on the margins & more

BISHOPS CAN'T HIDE

In "Why the 'Metropolitan Plan' Doesn't Work" (August 9), Rita Ferrone writes, "The now-glaring weakness of the USCCB's 2002 Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was that it made no provision for dealing with *bishops* who engage in sexual misconduct." While this is literally true of the text of the charter, it fails to take into account all the bishops' actions in 2002 and the reasons for them.

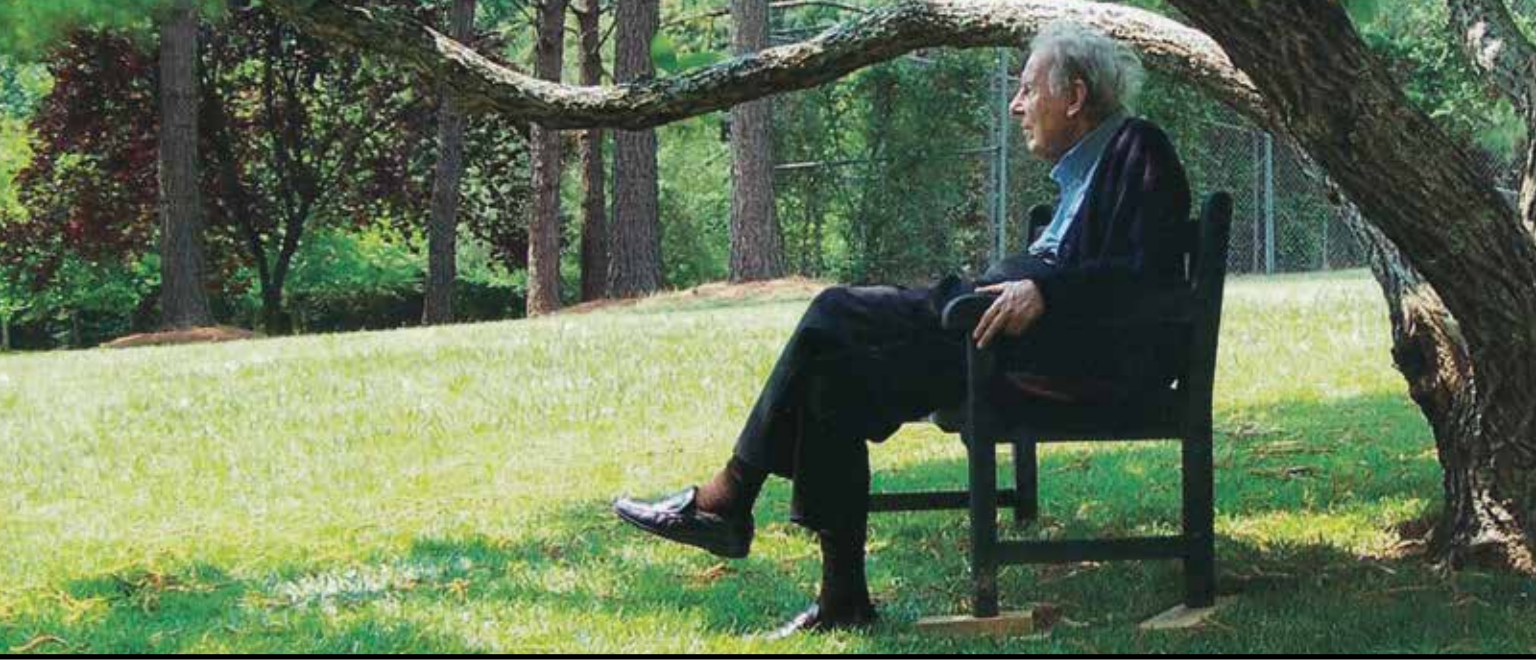
As originally drafted, the charter referred to the disciplining of "clerics" who have abused a minor child, as does the Code of Canon Law (canon 1395, paragraph 2). During the amending process, bishops who were canon lawyers suggested that the word "clerics" be amended to "priests and deacons." National bishops' conferences have no authority to discipline bishops. "Clerics" might have been taken by Rome to include bishops. In a document already recommending several policies which the Holy See was likely to question, confusion over this point seemed counterproductive. The goal was to pass the charter and essential norms (which dealt with the canonical procedures to be followed) and not complicate the process. Plainly, in light of everything the church has experienced in the intervening years, today other considerations have come into play.

However, the novelty of the charter and norms for the church in 2002 cannot be overemphasized: the Charter was developed primarily to permit bishops to act more expeditiously and permanently with regard to priests who had abused. Several attempts by the U.S. bishops (and others) in the 1990s to allow them to do so had not been successful or only partially so.

Even in 2002, however, the bishops were already confronted publicly with the problem of seeming to excuse themselves from the charter. In November 2002, the charter, with the revisions worked out with the Holy See, received its final approval. At that very same meeting, the bishops of the United States adopted a "Statement of Episcopal Commitment" in which they agreed, among other things, that "in cases of an allegation of sexual abuse of minors by bishops, *we will apply the requirements of the Charter also to ourselves*, respecting always Church law as it applies to bishops" [emphasis added]. When the Archdiocese of New York received an allegation of abuse of a minor against Theodore McCarrick, even though he was a cardinal and in retirement, it did apply the charter to him; it investigated the allegation and gave the results to its predominantly lay review board which found it credible. The Holy See supported the archdiocese's actions and acted on the allegation itself. From those actions flowed the revelation of his sexual misconduct against men who were not minors but were nevertheless vulnerable because of his authority over them.

Most important, bishops could not assume that not including themselves in the charter was a form of self-protection for the same reason they were omitted. They are subject to being disciplined by the Holy See alone which had already given evidence that it would act on allegations of abuse of minors by bishops. It did so as far back as 1998 with Bishop J. Keith Symons of Palm Beach and only a few months before the Dallas meeting in the case of Bishop Anthony O'Connell. Bishops in both Kentucky and Massachusetts would also soon have to step down. The charter did not afford bishops guilty of abuse a place to hide. It made them expressly aware of the consequences.

—(Rev. Msgr.) Francis J. Maniscalco
Former Secretary of Communications, USCCB
West Hempstead, N.Y.



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LETTERS

PROPHETS OF PERIPHERY

I think many of us would be surprised by the number of adult Catholics who find themselves in the place Mary M. Doyle Roche describes—lingering on the edges of the church ("Lingering on the Margins," June 14). Some of these Catholics are still in the pews on Sunday; many are not. They share with her a sense of walking along a newfound boundary, neither "in" or "out," neither "staying" or "leaving," as if straddling two realities of church or two relationships with church. For many of these "liminal" Catholics, recent revelations about sexual abuse may be an important issue, but I tend to think the real cause of their disaffection is much deeper.

My experience in adult faith formation suggests that most of these adults are not losing their faith but outgrowing the faith they learned as children and young adults—what James Fowler described as "synthetic-conventional faith," largely shaped by definitive boundaries and carefully crafted rational definitions. Many have passed on into a kind of spiritual adolescence which Fowler called "personal faith," and many more are now emerging into a later stage of faith sometimes called "conjunctive faith" or "mystical faith"—conjunctive because it is usually characterized by the kind of paradox described by Roche, and mystical because it seeks a deeper appreciation of the mysteries of the faith too easily, if necessarily, reduced in earlier stages to literal and rational formulas.

These adults have discovered, as I think Roche is saying, that the precise boundaries and explanations do not always fit our lived experience. In fact, the self-assured answers they learned as children often belie the deeper mysteries that are more easily encountered than described. This is the "shift toward interiority" that Diarmuid Ó Murchú identifies in his latest book *Incarnation: A New Evolutionary Threshold;* it's a faith which Ó Murchú says relies on experience or encounter more than dogma, moral directives, or clerical management. It's a sign, too, that more and more Catholic adults long for the mystagogy that Rita Ferrone prescribes in the same issue of *Commonweal* ("Learning to Notice"), and a development that confirms Karl Rahner's premonition that Christians of the future will be mystics or else cease to exist. The Catechism of the Catholic Church itself affirms, quoting Aquinas, "The believer's act [of faith] does not terminate in the propositions but in the realities [which they express]."

Sadly, this is a lonely place for Catholics like Roche because by and large our local faith communities do not even recognize, much less nurture, adults who are living on the boundaries, partly in and partly out, left to pray and seek and discover on their own. They are the prophets of our time, no more appreciated than the prophets of old. But they may be, as Roche suggests, closer to the center than we imagine; they occupy the liminal space we might expect the church itself to embrace, somewhere between what has been and what is to come.

—Dave Cushing
Waterloo, Iowa

EMPTY POCKETS

God bless you, Danny Kuhn ("Seams of Resentment," June 1). Since 2016 I've been scratching my head over how such a wreck of a man as Donald Trump could have triumphed. Kuhn's evocative, compelling piece opened my eyes to a troubling dynamic of human nature I hadn't fully grasped before: as LBJ said, convince the "lowest white man" that he's superior to all others and he'll "empty his pockets for you." In other words, we'll pay any price to feel superior to another person. That troubling insight, and Kuhn's wonderful prose, was worth my whole year's subscription. Thank you.

—Philip Taft
Edgartown, Mass.

Why Not Think Big?

It's almost half a century since scientists at Exxon (now ExxonMobil) determined that the burning of fossil fuels posed potentially catastrophic dangers to the earth's climate. What happened next is fairly well known. Executive leadership used the findings to game out future drilling opportunities afforded by a melting Arctic, while embarking on a decades-long campaign of public miseducation to sow doubt about the damage their product does and about climate science itself. This strategy, developed with the help of tobacco-industry executives, included taking out full-page advertorials in the *New York Times* every Thursday from the 1970s through the early 2000s—misinformation that made its way to untold numbers of readers weekly for nearly thirty years. In 1997, Exxon's CEO said in a speech to Chinese leaders that the planet was cooling. As late as 2008, the company insisted that industry guidelines on reducing emissions should not "imply a direct connection between greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and natural gas industry and the phenomenon commonly referred to as climate change."

This October, a federal court will hear opening arguments in a New York State lawsuit against Exxon for "engaging in a long-standing fraudulent scheme" to deceive investors about its knowledge of climate-related financial risks. This will not get the world back the forty-plus years that could have been spent using what Exxon knew about the dangers of carbon emissions to address climate change. As it is, July 2019 was the hottest month worldwide in human history. Temperatures reached record levels in India and in northern Europe, wildfires swept across Siberia, and ten billion tons of water ran off the melting Greenland ice sheet, resulting in measurable sea-level rise around the world. These are just the most recent of the observable phenomena. In August, the World Resources Institute warned that a quarter of the planet's population is at imminent risk of running out of water because of climate change; the United Nations followed with a dire report on the threat to the world's food supply, ominously warning of "multi-breadbasket failure," or food crises breaking out on several continents simultaneously.

It is hard to know what to do when confronted with facts so grim. The way climate change plays out—unseen in many ways but also increasingly in front of our eyes, in all corners of the globe—challenges our perceptual capacities and general ability to process, understand, and respond with something other than fatalism. But it is a crisis we have created, and one we still have the power to address. There is, believe it or not, something to seize on even in Exxon's malfeasance: since they have known for a long time what was causing the problem, they have also known how to *stop* causing it. The trouble is, they are still free *not* to do what's right.

What should be kept in mind amidst such news is that any number of futures may yet play out. Many experts think there remains wide enough scope for action to limit global warming to 1.5 to 2.0 degrees Celsius. This could be accomplished not just through what everyone agrees on, such as continued adoption of alternative technologies like wind and solar (which are booming worldwide), tighter emissions regulations, and stricter policies aimed at keeping fossil fuels in the ground. For instance, last year's UN report on the climate laid out a host of models incorporating social, economic, educational, and healthcare recommendations, which in combination could help foster global climate awareness, innovation in sustainability, investment in energy technology, and international policymaking. Since the 2015 Paris climate agreement, the list of countries committing to net-zero emission goals continues to grow. Among the notable exceptions, of course, is the United States. But even in this country, individual states with their own sizable economies—led by California and New York—have set net-zero goals, as have a number of large cities.

Meanwhile, more Republican lawmakers are beginning to break on climate change, while an increasing majority of Republican millennials see it as an urgent issue. Though an ambitious, large-scale initiative like the Green New Deal has far from universal support, the progressive lawmakers behind it are shifting the discussion on climate in important and productive ways. And anyway, why not think big? We've seen what cynical, small-minded thinking has gotten us. Of course, atop the list of achievable near-term goals is the obvious one: making sure that a president who embodies the denialist strain of his party, and whose administration does the bidding of the fossil-fuel industry, is not reelected.

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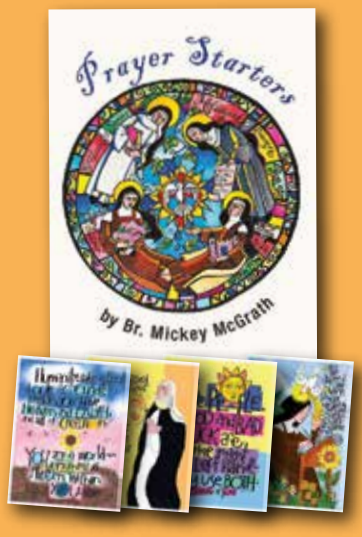

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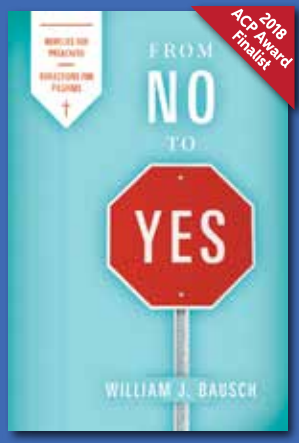
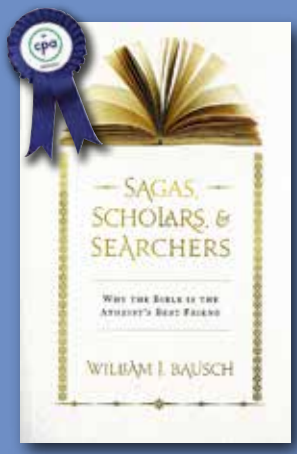
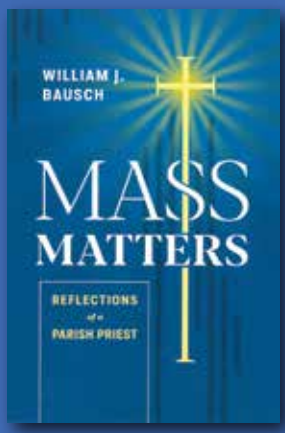


The title of this book "From No to Yes" reflects the age-old beckoning to conversion. The 72 all new homilies are drawn from everyday news ranging from the inspirational to the challenging, with a distinct bias in theme towards the conflict of culture and faith. If you are looking for something to help you make your faith more meaningful this volume is sure to satisfy the hungriest of hearts and minds. $20



This book aims to show what is "out there" in current biblical discovery and commentary. What are the scholars saying? How compatible or non-compatible is what they tell us with traditional understandings? In these days of dwindling religious affiliation (at least in the western world), what is the Bible's authority? Keeping up with the Bible is an ongoing and ever shifting enterprise. This book is a frozen snapshot in that flow to give the reader a chance to catch up. $25



More and more Catholics, determined to reclaim their Church, are rallying for change. This book offers that change at its source: the Mass and its concomitant imperative of the formation of intentional Catholics. Try to be mindful of the subtle subtext that slowly sneaks up on you and ultimately invites you to a new mantra to live by, to reform by: don't leave. Lead. $20

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'National Conservatism'

Ever since Donald Trump came down the escalator of Trump Tower and called Mexican immigrants rapists, conservative intellectuals have struggled with how to respond. His campaign for the presidency, at least rhetorically, was a rebuke to the stale right-wing orthodoxies of economic libertarianism and endless wars abroad, while his personal life was the stuff of the religious right's nightmares. Over time, however, conservative writers and thinkers have followed the lead of Republican voters and adapted, warming to Trump while attempting to turn his mishmash of instincts and impulses into something more coherent—and respectable.

The most serious effort to update right-wing ideology for the Trump era was unveiled this July at the Ritz Carlton in Washington, D.C.: a conference dedicated to "national conservatism." Part of what made the gathering notable was who attended. Absent were Trump administration lackeys like the ghoulish Stephen Miller. Instead, speakers from across the conservative spectrum were present, from mainstream figures like Yuval Levin and former American Enterprise Institute president Chris DeMuth, to respectable magazine editors like R. R. Reno of *First Things*, to the Fox News carnival barker Tucker Carlson. A United States senator, Missouri's Josh Hawley, even gave a keynote address.

A talk by one of the conference organizers, the Israeli academic Yoram Hazony, gives a sense of the mix of social conservatism and nationalism on display. "You throw out Christianity, you throw out the Torah, you throw out God, and within two generations people can't tell the difference between a man and a woman," he said. "They can't tell the difference between a foreigner and a citizen, they can't tell the difference between this side of the border and the other side of the border." Many there insisted that such anti-immigration sentiments had nothing to do with racism, instead invoking culture, "Anglo-American traditions," and the English language. But the mask slipped when, during a panel discussion, University of Pennsylvania law professor Amy Wax blurted out that her preferred immigration policies amounted to "taking the position that our country will be better off with more whites and fewer nonwhites."

That comment was reminiscent of one Reno made to the *Atlantic* in June. When asked if he'd be as worried about a surge of immigrants coming across our northern border as he is about those coming from Latin America, he claimed he wouldn't be. "Canadians are so similar," he said. "Part of it has to do with the cultural fit." That was of a piece with Reno's conference address, which took pains to argue that a Christian could and should be a good nationalist, that the Christian faith was not in fact in conflict with nationalism.

It's beyond troubling that such full-throated nationalism—really, dressed-up Trumpism—is being promoted by people who should know better. These "national conservatives" seem willing to accept the vicious reality of children being put in cages and babies being torn from their mothers' arms along our southern border. "I hope Trump implements immigration policies in a humane way," Reno said in early 2017, "and I'll certainly be a spokesman against him if he doesn't." But Reno didn't utter as word about this during his talk. What brutality will he and others acquiesce to when the climate crisis causes migration to increase, as it almost certainly will?

But it is especially disconcerting that nationalism is being defended on the basis of religious faith. Christians know that we have one king, Jesus, and that all earthly rulers will one day cast down their crowns at his feet. The question "Who is my neighbor?" can never be answered simply by appealing to borders drawn by men. The national conservatism conference, then, was a reminder of the struggles that Christians and all people of good will face in the years ahead. The questions posed by mass migration are difficult, but the answer can never be nationalism.

—Matthew Sitman

The Hong Kong Protests

"Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times." The slogan, heard throughout Hong Kong, expresses the sense of urgency that has gripped the city during weeks of massive public protests. Hong Kong is a "special administrative region" of China and has existed alongside it under a policy of "one country, two systems" for twenty-two years. But the tenuous autonomy Hong Kongers have enjoyed feels increasingly threatened. In June, more than a million of the city's residents took to the streets to rally against a bill that would have allowed the local government to extradite people in Hong Kong to the mainland. Soon after, Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's unpopular, Beijing-approved chief executive, declared the bill "dead," but by then momentum had built for a massive movement in favor of democratic reforms.

As we go to press, there have been protests for eleven consecutive weekends, with demonstrators taking to the streets, the public-transit system, and the city's international airport. Police have fired thousands of rounds of tear gas, and more than seven hundred protestors have been arrested. The protestors' primary demands are for the formal

withdrawal of the extradition bill and for Lam's resignation. But other grievances against Beijing have also risen to the surface. Protestors are angered by the disproportionate influence of money and private interests on their government. They condemn "triads"—organized criminal syndicates thought to be working with Chinese officials and local police. They demand a third-party investigation into police brutality. And they're fighting for universal suffrage, or the right of the Hong Kong people to elect their own government. In the current system, a Beijing-backed nominating committee screens candidates before they're put on the ballot, which means that elections carry little risk of upsetting the status quo. Just last year, the government banned the pro-independence Hong Kong National Party.

China has blamed "external foreign forces" for the protests, pointing to meetings held in Washington between Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates and U.S. leaders this past spring. It's true that Hong Kong has long been home to mainland dissidents and has a more open culture than the rest of China. But this is partially why China needed Hong Kong as its "window to the world" in the 1990s, around the time of the handover. Now that China is one of the world's most formidable powers, with a GDP over thirty times that of Hong Kong's, Beijing feels it can exert greater control.

Hong Kong, long a center of international finance in Asia, has staggering levels of inequality, and this, in combination with China's authoritarian reach, has made life difficult for many ordinary residents of the city. One in five people live below the poverty line. The government owns almost all of Hong Kong's land and levies astronomical property taxes, which disproportionately affect the rents of the city's low-income residents. But absorption into the People's Republic of China would invite still greater systemic corruption, while severely limiting freedom of speech and assembly and all but ending hope for democratic representation in government. The rest of the world seems apathetic toward the Hong Kongers' struggle. Few Western politicians have even mentioned it.

With China approaching the seventieth anniversary of its Communist government on October 1, the fear of military action in Hong Kong looms over protestors. Yet they remain defiantly hopeful. In the words of one protestor, "The escalation of punishment demands an escalation of sacrifice."

—Nicole-Ann Lobo

'Thoughts and Prayers'

In the wake of two mass shootings in Texas and Ohio, it seems the only right response is action. Twenty-two died in an El Paso Walmart at the hands of a twenty-one-year-old white supremacist; hours later, nine died on a bustling street in Dayton. "Do Something!" listeners chanted at Ohio governor Mike DeWine's press conference. The cry encapsulates the voice of a people desperate for basic gun regulations: background checks, red-flag laws, bans on assault-style weapons. Thoughts and prayers, meanwhile, are called cop-outs: meaningless, indifferent, even sinful condolences that express anguish without being willing to end it.

I've been thinking about the thoughts-and-prayers backlash, I think in part because of my connection to El Paso. My husband is from the border city; my in-laws and other friends and relatives live there. (All are safe.) I've felt overwhelmed by the details—the "mangled" injured, the parents who died shielding their baby, Trump's thumbs-up near an orphaned infant, the shooter's manifesto and confession (he came to kill Mexicans)—because it's all unspeakably awful, but also because I love the place.

I feel helpless. The ways I can "do something" are limited. I can write letters to my Connecticut congressmen, but they already agree with me (we were the first state to pass a red-flag law, in 1999). I can march in a protest, if it's happening nearby. But is that helpful, or performative? I can tweet, but I hate tweeting—perhaps a bad excuse, but true. I can vote, but not until November, and only in my own blue state. I can *not* own an assault-style weapon. But that's no great sacrifice for me.

Thoughts and prayers seem to be all I have. For me at least, they don't feel like a cop-out, because critical thinking is taxing, and praying is really hard. If I think of prayer as my task, my assignment, then it feels like action, like *something*. I let my mind roam over El Paso: its pecan trees and mission-style churches, cumbia on the radio, the dry Rio Grande, an almost-constant sunshine. I pray for the city's protection. There are so many things to ask for: that physical wounds heal, that orphans grow up nurtured, that justice is done, that gun laws pass. These are wishes so deep they feel naïve. But formulating them—speaking them, writing them down—feels concrete.

Maybe it's not thoughts and prayers that are the problem, but *who* claims to offer them up; *whose* function in society it is to provide them. Only some of us will be activists, doctors, immigration lawyers, politicians. But all of us should be petitioners. This happens on public forums, but also, corny as it sounds, in our hearts. When we lose thoughts and prayers, or dismiss them as impotent, we lose the most direct access to change most of us have. Our role is to cry out, offer up our longing for change.

Politicians should also think, and if they believe in prayer, they should pray. But they've got another job, too—one that deals in laws, money, power. They lead the *vita activa* (they asked for it, we gave it to them) and so, coming from *their* mouths, "thoughts and prayers" really is a dodge. The politician's job is different from mine.

We ordinary citizens live in the world, but when it comes to problems as massive as gun violence, we live a kind of *vita contemplativa*. We take the forms of action available—voting, organizing—but we also operate like monks, asking God for mercy. *Ora et labora*. We plead with our leaders, and draw strength from entreating Someone greater than them: asking, begging, for help.

—Katherine Lucky

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Dr. Maxine F. Singer
President, Carnegie Institution of Washington

Dr. Charles H. Townes
Nobel Laureate in Physics, University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Robert G. Webster
Virology, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Dr. Ahmed H. Zewail
Nobel Laureate for developments in femtoscience, Chemistry, Cal Tech

RITA FERRONE

Theater or Prophecy?

It isn't enough for adults to applaud Greta Thunberg. They have their own work to do, and sacrifices to make.

All eyes have been on Greta Thunberg, the sixteen-year-old Swedish activist, as she begins her journey across the Atlantic in a carbon-neutral sailing ship to speak at a meeting of the United Nations on climate change. Air travel generates tons of carbon emissions. She won't do it. And we like watching her not do it.

Thunberg first came to public notice about a year ago, via a personal protest in front of the Swedish Parliament. This in turn inspired a worldwide series of strikes by school children, called Fridays for Future, drawing more than a million participants. Nearly 1,600 strikes in 118 countries were planned for this spring, including fifty strikes organized by Laudato Si' Generation, a youth initiative under the umbrella of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. As the clock runs out on the opportunity to turn back some of the worst effects of climate change, Greta, as her supporters call her, has been incredibly brave, focused, and passionate about her cause. In recognition of her efforts, she has been nominated for a Nobel Prize, and affirmed by Pope Francis. She has become an icon of the children-and-youth movement demanding concrete action for sustainability in response to the climate crisis.

On one level, the Greta Thunberg phenomenon conforms to a well-known pattern: one highly motivated individual, present at the right place and time in history, ignites a movement and becomes its public face. The kindling was ready—mounting concern about the environment, and a growing sense of the need for change—and she struck the match. The timing is what matters.

Yet her impact on our imagination also, in an important sense, depends on her youth. Children and young people in the present era have taken on both a real and a symbolic role with

CNS PHOTO / YARA NARDI, REUTERS

Pope Francis greets sixteen-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, April 17, 2019.

respect to how adults grapple with the challenge of climate change and environmental degradation. Young people have increasingly come into the spotlight as the ones whose future hangs in the balance, and whose energy has the potential to rouse the world to action.

Youth activism in the area of ecology, and more specifically climate change, is hardly new. The Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion, the Green New Deal, and other bold initiatives have been fueled by the ideals and energy of young people. At World Youth Day in Panama, a Climate Manifesto was presented to Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, who received it on behalf of the Catholic Relief and Development agency Caritas Internationalis. Greta's Fridays for Future may have brought schoolchildren out into the streets, but she is hardly the only youthful leader pressing for an ecologically sustainable world.

In the United States, a defining moment in identifying the climate crisis with the fate of young people came about in 2015 through the court case of *Juliana v. United States*. It laid out the claim, on behalf of twenty-one young plaintiffs directly affected by the ill effects of climate change, that they have a right to a sound and stable environment. Julia Olson, the plaintiffs' lead lawyer, recalls that she was radicalized about climate change while she was pregnant: "There is something about carrying life inside your body that is transformative and gives you a different kind of perspective on the world."

It's clear why young people are at the forefront of the agitation: future generations will pay the bill of past and present environmental fecklessness. The children and teens of today will be the ones saddled with extreme weather, air pollution, species extinctions, scarcity of clean water, and the rising oceans of tomorrow, not to mention the costs of social unrest and displacement around the world due to ecological degradation.

Can youth save us from ourselves? This is the part I am not so sure about. Their energy, and the very fact that they do not despair of changing the habits and structures that have landed us in this mess, provide the world with something precious. As Fr. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, coordinator of the ecology and creation sector of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said at a recent conference at Creighton University, they give us hope. But if the adult world simply watches and applauds, and does not engage in its own reciprocal work and sacrifice to reduce carbon emissions, little will change. The protests, manifestos, and Greta's trip across the ocean in a little carbon-neutral boat will go down in history as theater rather than prophecy. What matters, in the end, is the principle that Pope Francis articulated in *Laudato si'*: intergenerational solidarity. Each generation holds the earth in trust for the next; each generation is responsible for passing it on intact.

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

When the News Isn't Fake

Clarence Thomas's attack on the media is more than obtuse; it is irresponsible and dangerous.

I learned about the case of Curtis Flowers, a black man who has been tried six times for the same crime, through the excellent reporting of the investigative podcast *In the Dark*. For the show's second season, American Public Media host Madeleine Baran and her team of reporters went to Winona, Mississippi, to find out why Flowers was accused of murdering four people in a small-town furniture store in 1996, and why he has spent twenty-one years in prison awaiting trial after trial. Four guilty verdicts have been thrown out due to prosecutorial misconduct (the other trials ended with deadlocked juries). And each time, Flowers was tried by the same district attorney, a man named Doug Evans.

Baran has a longstanding professional interest in issues of power and accountability—she exposed a cover-up of clergy sexual abuse in Minneapolis–St. Paul while working at Minnesota Public Radio. And in the story of Curtis Flowers, her team found alarming lapses everywhere they looked. Each aspect of the

prosecution's case—police record-keeping, witness statements, handling of evidence—was called into question. One crucial episode lays out damning evidence that Evans deliberately eliminated black jurors from Flowers's trials.

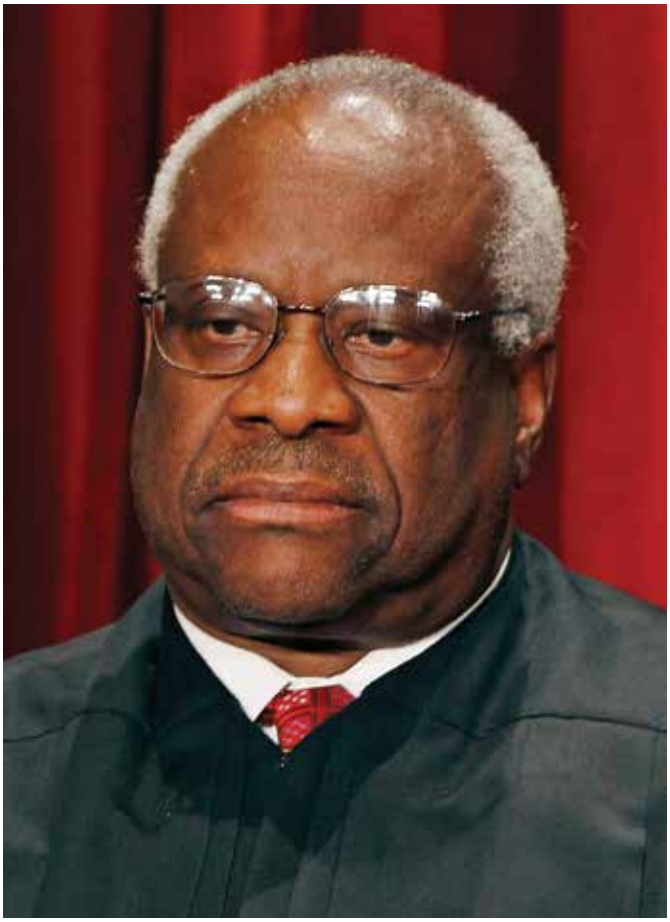
In 2007, the Mississippi Supreme Court found that Doug Evans had done just that in Flowers's third trial, in violation of the 1986 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Batson v. Kentucky*. The conviction was overturned, but Evans was not penalized. Three trials later—after Flowers was sentenced to death in 2010, and following *In the Dark*'s dogged investigation—an appeal alleging Evans had committed another Batson violation brought *Flowers v. Mississippi* to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In June, the court overturned Flowers's conviction with a 7–2 ruling. Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote, "The State's relentless, determined effort to rid the jury of black individuals strongly suggests that the State wanted to try Flowers before a jury with as few black jurors as possible, and ideally before an all-white jury."

Clarence Thomas dissented (along with Neil Gorsuch), which itself was not surprising. But his dissenting opinion took a disgraceful swipe at the media that went beyond right-wing boilerplate. Thomas speculated that the Supreme Court heard Flowers's appeal only "because the case has received a fair amount of media attention," a mistake that, in his view, "only encourages the litigation and relitigation of criminal trials in the media, to the potential detriment of all parties—including defendants." Quoting an older opinion of the court, he added, "The media often seeks 'to titillate rather than to educate and inform.'"

Some "true crime" reporting does aim primarily to titillate. No one could fairly say the same about *In the Dark*. The podcast describes but does not revel in the details of the crime, and it treats its subjects with compassion. It examines the murders from every angle, with a focus on the people most affected, from the victims' grieving families to Flowers's steadfast parents. It holds the evidence against Flowers up to the light and sifts through public records to establish patterns of misconduct. Its painstaking, humane approach to uncovering injustice is a sterling example of what public media is for.

In the era of President Donald Trump, our system of checks and balances is performing as poorly at the federal level as it did in Mississippi.



When *In the Dark* took up his story, Flowers had been in prison for twenty-one years. "Could the attorney general have said, you know, enough already?" Justice Samuel Alito asked during oral arguments, wondering why the state never intervened, even after Evans was found to have violated the Constitution. The answer he received was that the state could intervene only if asked to do so by the district attorney. In other words, no one but Evans could take Evans off the case.

The "media attention," then, did precisely what it should. *In the Dark* educated and informed. It exposed flaws in a justice system that cannot police itself. Citing concerns about defendants' rights, Thomas says, "Any appearance that this Court gives closer scrutiny to cases with significant media attention will only . . . undermine the fairness of criminal trials." But Flowers's case is most noteworthy for having escaped scrutiny for so long. It is hard to imagine the defendant being treated less fairly in the wake of this rebuke—even though, as Thomas notes with satisfaction, "the State is perfectly free to convict Curtis Flowers again."

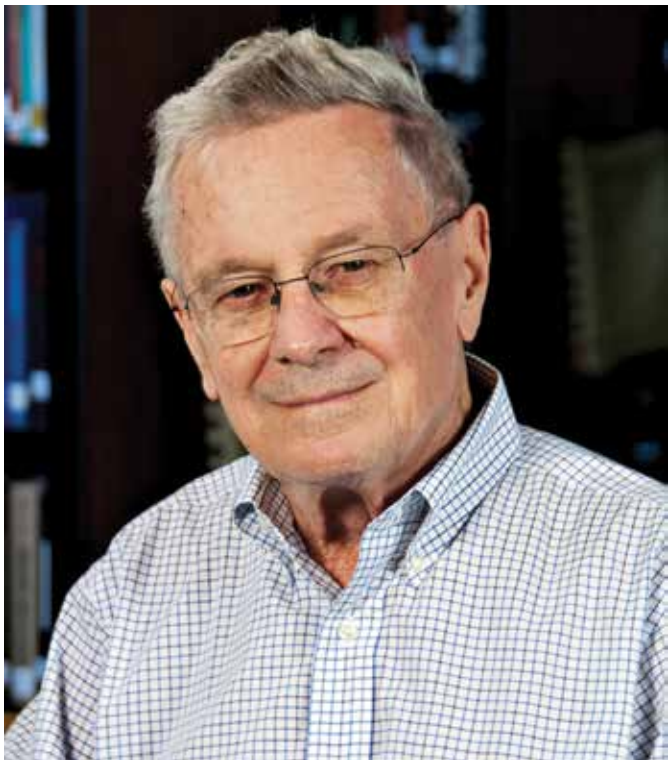
Thomas's attack on the media is more than obtuse; it is irresponsible and dangerous. In the era of President Donald Trump, who constantly threatens the freedom of the press and angrily resists accountability, our system of checks and balances is performing as poorly at the federal level as it did in Mississippi. Strong, independent journalism is desperately needed. A world where no one outside of Winona ever learned about Curtis Flowers and his six murder trials would not be more just. It is demoralizing for a Supreme Court justice to argue otherwise.

CNS PHOTO / LARRY DOWNING, REUTERS

PETER STEINFELS

Uncommon Clarity

Remembering Daniel Callahan (1930–2019)



Daniel Callahan

CNS PHOTO / COURTESY THE HASTINGS CENTER

Daniel Callahan never stopped asking hard questions. The week before he died, on July 16, two days before his eighty-ninth birthday, Dan was still writing—despite the burdens of the pulmonary disease that had plagued his life for some years and would finally end it. He had just sent off another piece to someone, Sidney Callahan told me. She spoke in the what-would-you-expect tone of someone who had witnessed Dan's prodigious productivity over sixty-five years of marriage.

Dan was one of the most influential editors in the history of *Commonweal* and the preeminent creator of the field of bioethics. He was a good friend, as is Sidney, herself a *Commonweal* contributor and until a few years ago a member of its board of directors. Dan was also a mentor, a model, a colleague, a boss, and an inspiration. Not long after inviting me, age twenty-two, to write an essay for a book he was editing, he recruited me to join the *Commonweal* staff and eventually to join him at the Hastings Center, the struggling venture he had cofounded and that would become a major fountainhead for the international interdisciplinary field of bioethics. I was a modest witness to what I consider two interrelated phases of Dan's life work.

It is a shock to me now to realize how brief was the first, the *Commonweal* Catholic phase. Dan began writing for the magazine in 1958. He was a graduate student in philosophy at Harvard, a Catholic finding his footing in a very secular setting. He actually worked at the magazine only from 1961 to 1968.

"Only" is a relative term. Those were the years of civil-rights struggles, the Second Vatican Council, the war in Vietnam, campus turmoil, resurgent feminism, sexual revolution, urban riots, *Humanae vitae*, and the assassinations of JFK, RFK, and Martin Luther King Jr. Dan wrote his way into and through all of that. The titles of five books he published in seven years capture the era: *The Mind of the Catholic Layman* (1963), *Honesty in the Church* (1965), *The New Church: Essays in Catholic Reform* (1966), *The Secular City Debate* (1966), and *The Catholic Case for Contraception* (1969).

Meanwhile, Dan and Sidney were raising six children, and she had written *The Illusion of Eve: Modern Woman's Quest for Identity* (1965) and *Beyond Birth Control: The Catholic Experience of Sex* (1968).

Abortion: Law, Choice, and Morality (1970), the more than five-hundred-page product of two years of research, was the hinge on which Dan's life swung to a half-century of work in medical and scientific ethics. The book took Dan to ten nations in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. If he had insisted on asking hard questions in his *Commonweal* years, about the role of the laity, contraception, honesty in the church, and the truthfulness of Catholic claims, he did no less in bioethics: about abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, embryonic stem-cell research, allocation of scarce medical resources, defining death, care of the dying, the promise and perils of technology, the dynamics of research, medical funding, and the cost of medical care.

Time and again, Dan provoked controversy, sometimes heated controversy, by defying the reigning assumptions of many colleagues in the worlds of medicine and biomedical research. He questioned their faith in unlimited progress, the priority of individual autonomy and the invocation of personal choice in resolving biomedical quandaries, and

the reflexive elevation of health, and especially of extending life, over competing dimensions of human well-being. For two decades, books with titles and subtitles containing phrases like "setting limits" and "false hopes" and "what price better health?" and "how medical costs are destroying our health care system" spun out Dan's questions like a string of firecrackers. He warned against technological and research "imperatives"—if we can do it or discover it, we should. He dismayed feminists by combining a pro-choice argument regarding the law with a stringent view of what, in fact, might justify abortions morally. He created a stir by advising President George W. Bush to maintain restrictions on the use of embryos for stem-cell research.

These caveats weren't coming from just anyone. Dan was, after all, one of the rare philosophers elected to the National Academy of Medicine, and a recipient of the Freedom and Scientific Responsibility Award of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Dan also challenged dominant styles in ethical reasoning and moral philosophy. He had gone to Yale in 1948 as a competitive swimmer and graduated in 1952 as an aspiring philosopher. But he found little satisfaction in the analytic philosophy he went on to encounter at Harvard. The questions that he wanted to address were practical, and the method had to be empirical and cultural. (Three-fifths of his book on abortion are devoted to empirical findings and cultural contexts.) There is no "Callahanian" system. He never opted for one or other of the contending schools of ethical theory, arguing that they were different tools appropriate to different contexts, whether physician-patient relations or national health policy.

Dan's style in moral reasoning was inseparable from his style in writing. Dan wrote constantly and easily—and gave good advice to many of us who didn't. He eschewed technical argumentation (as he would have the word "eschewed"). Surgeon and bioethicist Sherwin Nuland went so far as to compare Dan's essays to Montaigne's attempts to philosophize on the basis of "a scrupulous observation of his fellow man and the world in which he lives." Nuland, a master of such writing himself, called Dan a writer and thinker "of uncommon perception, logic, and clarity." Clarity and accessibility are hallmarks of Dan's prose, and there was a moral basis for them: he did not think that the ethical reasoning surrounding life-and-death issues should be the bailiwick of academic experts, but of the general concerned public. His writing was often marked by a wry, frequently self-deprecating, sometimes mischievous, occasionally sardonic wit; and that too had a moral source, a conviction that ethical reasoning is an ongoing dialogue in which participants should acknowledge their prejudices and weaknesses and admit that their conclusions were provisional.

Despite the relative brevity of Dan's *Commonweal* experience, he often credited it as formative of his approach to bioethics, framing issues in broad cultural and factual terms for a general educated readership. About his loss of faith and departure from the church (and *Commonweal*) by 1968, he was both candid and low-key. He knew how much it surprised and disappointed some friends and particularly pained Sidney, a convert and serious believer and religious thinker. No, he wasn't "angry" or oppressed. No, he didn't "split" from the church over abortion, as more than one stereotypical account put it. What he described was a gradual seeping away of belief in Catholic truth claims, indeed in Christianity and God. In retrospect, I think there is more that could be teased out about the roots of this loss, to the benefit of those of us who care about it. The fact is that Dan's taking leave of religious faith was never anything like his impatience with dogmatic secularism and its unwillingness to take religion seriously.

Theologians like Paul Ramsey, William F. May, and Richard McCormick loomed large in the first years of bioethics. So did conceptual frameworks honed over centuries in moral theology. Dan prized these thinkers and their contributions as entry points to deeper issues; he was disappointed when their role was eclipsed by the skills of lawyers and philosophers as bioethics risked becoming a kind of "service industry" to health care. Years later he made an effort to revivify the religious current in the field, but felt that it really didn't succeed.

It is always surprising when people discover that Dan's moral sensibility may reflect his earlier Catholicism—as though that weren't obvious. His resistance to the myth of scientific progress, to liberal individualism, to the prioritizing of choice apart from what is chosen, to skepticism about markets; his matter-of-fact recognition of tragic limits and a self-deceiving humanity (himself included) and the potential for abuse of new biomedical powers; his egalitarian view of ethics as a matter not of professional expertise but public discussion; his constant push for examining deeper issues of the common good and how *we*, not just individually but as a culture and society, should live—is it really so hard to discern the roots of Dan's sensibility?

Not that proprietary claims matter; what matters is that such a moral sensibility be nurtured and propagated. In a fine, comprehensive tribute, Mildred Z. Solomon, current president of the Hastings Center, writes of Dan's "fundamental wariness of human power." Without such a moral sensibility, she warns, we may become "vulnerable and naked" members of a society of "self-interested stakeholders"; we may become "tone-deaf and mute on matters having to do with patience and acceptance, community and mutual care, ambiguity, humility, fairness, and stewardship."

I have made much of titles in this reflection. In 2012, MIT Press published Dan's autobiographical "life in bioethics." The book's title was an apt summary: *In Search of the Good*. The last chapter was "Reaching the Finish Line."

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NICK SWITANEK

Minority Rule

Not a single U.S. senator was elected by a majority of eligible voters. That needs to change.

On a wide range of issues, such as taxing the wealthy, infrastructure spending, gun control, and corruption in politics, the will of majorities is routinely misrepresented by elected politicians. How is that possible? How can a democratically elected politician act against what she knows a majority or even supermajority of her constituents want?

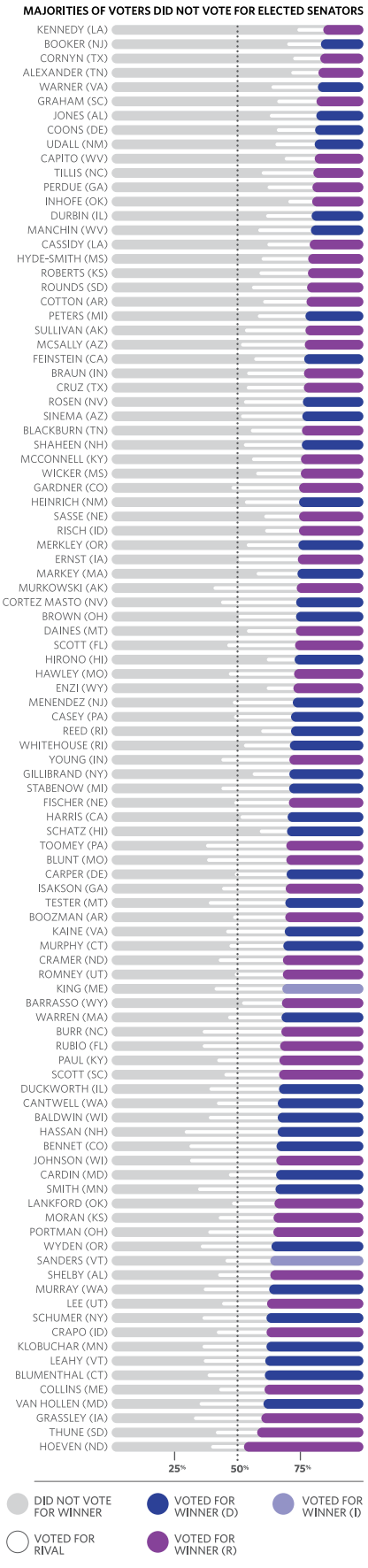
One answer is that lawmakers vote according to the preferences of donors and lobbyists rather than according to the preferences of the public at large. Money talks, lawmakers listen. There is, alas, plenty of evidence for that theory. But another reason lawmakers neglect their constituents is that so many of their constituents don't vote.

Data on elections for the seats of the U.S. Senate show the alarming consequences of low voter participation. For all the races resulting in the current Senate, I collected election results reported in the *New York Times* and eligible voter-population estimates from the United States Election Project. (A state's eligible voters are all its voting-age citizens not disenfranchised by state law due to felon status.) I grouped eligible voters into three categories: those who voted for the winner, those who voted for a rival candidate, and those who did not vote. The results shocked me: not one sitting senator was elected by a majority of eligible voters.

Senators Cory Booker of New Jersey and John Cornyn of Texas, for example, both won their seats with votes from less than 17 percent of their states' eligible voters, which means five out of six eligible voters did not vote for them. More than seventy senators won with the votes of just a third of their states' voters. Only three senators won with more than 40 percent of voters. John Hoeven of North Dakota was closest to earning a majority of voters when he won with 47 percent. Still, ninety-seven senators won even though a supermajority of voters did not vote for them. Both Republicans and Democrats won their Senate races with small fractions of eligible voters. On average, senators from both parties needed just 29 percent of voters to win an election.

When candidates need the votes of only a minority of voters to win, they need never learn what a majority of their constituents want. Nor can they be held to account for acting against the will of the majority.

Not that senators refrain from using election results to claim democratic legitimacy. In a recently recorded conversation with a group of her constituents, California Sen. Dianne Feinstein used her reelection to justify her apparent unresponsiveness to constituent concerns: "I was elected by almost a million-vote plurality. I know what I'm doing. So, you know, maybe people should listen a little bit." Here Feinstein acknowledges that she won *only* a plurality of votes, but at the same time claims that her election tally is strong evidence that she has listened to her constituents enough, and that now her constituents need to listen to her. Feinstein was elected



with votes from just one of every four California voters.

Denial of the problem is bipartisan. Sitting senators are empowered by the current system, and have incentives not to change it. Mitch McConnell, who currently controls whether bills are voted on in the Senate, argued that proposals to make our democracy more representative are unnecessary: "People are flooding to the polls," he claimed. "What is the problem we're trying to solve here?" Turnout in the polls he's referring to, the 2018 general election, was just 50 percent. Three times as many Kentucky voters didn't vote for McConnell as did.

The problem is not confined to the Senate. Of the 416 contested House races in 2018, only three were won by voter majority. And no U.S. president has *ever* been elected by voter majority. Donald Trump won with the votes of just 27.7 percent of eligible voters, which was worse than Barack Obama's first-term 32.6 percent, and better than the first-term elections of George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon.

Increased voter participation does not necessarily benefit one party over the other. In the data I looked at, Democrats don't win higher-turnout elections more often than Republicans. The sitting senators who received the lowest and highest percentages of their constituents' votes are both Republicans: Kennedy and Hoeven, respectively. Of the incoming class of senators, the senators who received the lowest and highest percentages are both Democrats: Manchin and Klobuchar. But the effect on a particular party or politician is, or should be, irrelevant. Increasing voter turnout will increase the legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness of all lawmakers.

Both parties have proposed legislation to affect voter turnout. Republicans are trying to reduce the participation of voters they expect to vote for Democrats. Democrats have proposed measures to increase voter participation among all eligible voters. Ongoing Republican efforts to tactically shrink voter turnout among Democrats have been effective. In fact they are, in words McConnell has used to describe Democratic election-reform proposals, "a naked attempt to change the rules of American politics to benefit one party." By contrast, in H.R.1, their first bill since taking control of the House, Democrats propose several policies that will help increase voter turnout and ensure that the vote of every eligible voter is securely cast and counted. No Republican in the House voted for H.R.1; McConnell is blocking a vote on it in the Senate. The provisions of H.R.1 include automatic, online, and same-day voter registration; an Election Day holiday; early voting and voting by mail; independent redistricting commissions; and campaign-finance reform.

Increasing voter turnout will increase the legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness of all lawmakers.

These reforms would all help correct our democratic deficit, and many states passed such policies in the 2018 midterms. And yet even the complete implementation of H.R.1 would not be enough to really solve the problem. Same-day registration is estimated to increase turnout by only around 5 percent. Automatic voter registration increased turnout in Oregon by not more than 4 percent. In advance of the 2018 elections, Vermont used automatic voter registration to register over 92 percent of its eligible voters, but still had turnout of only 56 percent. Voter registration is clearly not the same as voter turnout. Even if all states implemented all the proposals of H.R.1—and they certainly should—the forecasted increases in turnout would not be enough to ensure that lawmakers are elected by a majority of eligible voters.

If H.R.1 doesn't get us there, what would? The simplest and most effective policy would be to make voting compulsory. Why not mandate that Americans take their civic responsibility at least as seriously as they take buckling their seatbelts? Coupled with some sort of runoff election system, compulsory voting would result in voter participation rates high enough to guarantee that all winning candidates would win because a majority of voters voted for them. The many liberal democracies in the world that have made voting compulsory, making Election Day a national holiday and levying fines or tax penalties on voters who abstain, routinely achieve voter participation rates above 85 percent. Australia's voter turnout averaged 65 percent before instituting compulsory voting, and now averages 95 percent.

But if compulsory voting is too bold a goal for now, we should at the very least pursue the many other effective policy tools proposed in H.R.1 and elsewhere. We should arrange incentives so that everyone eligible to vote does so—which will in turn strengthen incentives for lawmakers to serve their constituents rather than just their donors.

Americans can fail to get the representative democracy we deserve in two ways: either lawmakers can be elected by a minority, or they can act on behalf of a minority. Right now both of these things are happening. But solving the first problem is easier, and may help us solve the second.

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MICHAEL W. HIGGINS

A Surrogate Creed

Quebec's Bill 21 truncates religious freedom in the name of *laïcité*.

It wasn't supposed to happen, but happen it did. Having thrown off the shackles of clericalism and everything else Catholic, the once-pious province—a Quebec steeped in the life of a church seen as sole protector of French identity, culture, and religion in the New World—has embraced a new form of dogmatism and intolerance: the radical secularism of *laïcité*.

On June 16, a week after Pentecost, the National Assembly in Quebec City passed Bill 21, a draconian law intended to address the challenges of religious pluralism. Following a marathon session, and after weeks of protest and political wrangling, the government of Premier François Legault's Coalition Avenir Québec succeeded in passing its controversial legislation. The bill bans police, civil servants, teachers, government lawyers, prison guards, and other state employees from wearing any form of religious garment—the Sikh turban, the Jewish kippah, the Muslim hijab, niqab, and burqa, and the Christian cross—while on the job. Those currently under contract will be grandfathered, although any change in their status—promotion, lateral transfer or the like—will require compliance with the new legislation. And so, within a short time, the crucifix hanging over the speaker's chair in the National Assembly will be removed in the spirit of the new *laïcité*, Quebec-style.

Sheema Khan, a Harvard-educated scientist and inventor, writes regularly on the status of Muslim women in Canada; Khan wears a hijab, and struggles to find common ground between secular Canada and her own religious tradition. She has written about witnessing a terrible auto accident while visiting Montreal shortly after the passage of Bill 21. Khan provided a statement to the police and now wonders, "What if I am called to testify and denied the opportunity to do so because of my hijab? Will the court be deemed a space *laique*, where no religious symbols are allowed?" Noting that on two occasions, Quebec judges have unsuccessfully tried to bar women with hijabs, she asks: "Will judges be emboldened to try again? In the future, a turbaned Sikh police officer cannot take a witness statement; an observant Jewish lawyer won't be allowed to prosecute a case on behalf of the province." Decrying a Quebec that is "march[ing] to its own tune of folly," Khan envisions "religious dress" police, and urges her fellow Canadians to "not remain silent while their fellow citizens are denied basic human rights."

Indeed, many organizations are not remaining silent, including the major universities of the province, the Montreal English-speaking school board and teacher unions (both French and English), law firms, journalists and editors of the premier media organs in Quebec, and religious bodies of every stripe, including the Assembly of Quebec Bishops. The Archbishop of Montreal, Christian Lépine, called Bill 21 an erosion of individual freedoms and a diminishment of human dignity. The Fédération des femmes du Québec warned of the damage that will be done to Muslim women through the bill's discriminatory bias.

Most important, the federal government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a native Quebecker, stand vigorously opposed to the bill, and are resolved to appeal it to the Supreme Court as a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Their challenge will be amplified by the Legault administration's intention to invoke the so-called "notwithstanding clause," also known as the "override clause," which allows federal or provincial governments temporarily to override or bypass certain Charter rights. The clause, a controversial amendment since its inception as part of the Canada Act of 1982, which completed the country's constitutional independence from the United Kingdom, was deemed necessary at the time to ensure the cooperation of all the provinces, and Quebec specifically. Invoking the clause has been rare; but when a provincial government does so, it usually gets its way.

Legault knows that the province's prerogative can be tested in the courts, but he also knows the bar for revocation is high, and that in a national election year the governing party in Ottawa will be reluctant to alienate the population of a province it depends on for elected Members of Parliament. Given the prime minister's very public opposition to Bill 21, however, he will have little choice but to intervene at some point. While this is more likely to happen after the election, Trudeau might conceivably choose to make it an election battleground: Ottawa defending religious freedoms over the secularists keen on scrubbing the public landscape clean of religious markers. Given the wide antipathy to Bill 21 outside Quebec, that might work, but he will need to weigh in the balance the collateral damage of pitting English Canada against *la belle province*.

Support for the bill within Quebec has come from various constituencies: rural residents hostile to the urban monoliths of Montreal and Quebec City; native Quebeckers uncomfortable with significant immigration in recent years from former French colonies,

principally in Africa and the Caribbean; rising anxiety over the perceived threats to the linguistic and cultural identity of Quebec by the expanding Muslim population; the relentless denigration of the old values in an ever-changing Quebec; and the emergence of populist politicians further to the right of Premier Legault, like Maxime Bernier and his People's Party, who feed the fears of a citizenry under siege. But support has also come from leftist circles, including sovereigntists keen on democratic socialism in the European mode, and some feminist organizations that see the veil as a cultural prop of an oppressive patriarchy.

Legault didn't create the current turmoil; he inherited it. And his effort to end it via Bill 21 is merely the latest and most radical attempt at closure. Attempts to deal with religious tensions in Quebec resulted in the appointment by Premier Jean Charest in 2007 of two distinguished academics—political philosopher Charles Taylor and sociologist Gérard Bouchard—to investigate the issue of reasonable accommodation. The province had been rocked by several controversies around conflicting secular and religious rights, including the decision by a YMCA to install clouded windows so that ultra-orthodox men and boys could better resist the temptation that comes from watching young women in gym attire, the proscribing of ceremonial weapons like the Sikh kirpan in school playgrounds, the outlawing of full facial veils for women voting or dealing with public officials, and the initiative of at least one town, Hérouxville, to pass a code of conduct outlining behavior congruent with Quebec standards and banning those practices deemed inappropriate, like female genital mutilation.

Taylor and Bouchard had their work cut out for them, and their final document—the result of public hearings, formal submissions, focus-group discussions, and individual consultations across a wide spectrum of opinion—recommended a series of accommodations that acknowledged the province's distinctiveness in the Canadian confederation. "It is in the interests of any community to maintain a minimum of cohesion," the authors wrote. "For a small nation like Quebec, always preoccupied with its future as a cultural minority, integration represents a condition of its development, indeed its survival."

To that end, Bouchard and Taylor recommended that state employees obliged to exercise "coercive powers"—officers of the Quebec provincial police, to take one instance—be prohibited from wearing religious symbols. As *Globe and Mail* columnist Konrad Yakabuski has noted, in 2008 the RCMP had already been allowing Sikh officers to wear turbans for eighteen years, and so "[i]t was obvious then that, in implementing such a ban, Quebec would put itself on a collision course with the rest of Canada." Yakabuski observes further that proponents of Quebec secularism quickly "seized on the imprimatur of Bouchard-Taylor to legitimize their cause." A decade later, Taylor has repudiated his prior recommendation. In a session with the commission studying Bill 21, he confessed to having been naïve about the results such a recommendation would entail, and feared now that it would help "provoke incidents of hate." In the end, of course, the formidable opposition to Bill 21 failed, and all eyes will now turn to Ottawa and Quebec City to see how they slug it out.

Missing in all the analysis of the political contretemps is the recognition of the uniquely Québécois origins of the controversy, and in particular the province's hard rupture with its Catholic past—a rupture quiet and nonviolent in its unfolding, but quite comprehensive in the end—which created a vacuum that has yet to be filled. When you rip out the religious foundations of a culture, you prepare, however unwittingly, for their replacement by what George Steiner in his 1974 CBC Massey Lecture, *Nostalgia for the Absolute*, called a "surrogate creed." Steiner was referring to such "substitute theologies" as Freudianism or Marxism, or any "system of belief and argument . . . whose claims on the believer are profoundly religious in [their] strategy and effect." Quebec's "substitute theology" is the secular doctrine of *laïcité*, which demands that all signs and markers of a religious sensibility must be erased as a means of securing social harmony. The deal, in effect, is to eradicate the Catholic past in order to limit the public presence of Islam—and it is clearly the Muslim community that is the primary target of the legislation. This is now where the battle is joined. And while its genesis and coloration may be provincial, its larger impact will be national.

The deal, in effect, is to eradicate the Catholic past in order to limit the public presence of Islam—and it is clearly the Muslim community that is the primary target of the legislation.

Canadian expat Adam Gopnik of the *New Yorker* has written movingly of his native land that "one need hardly enumerate all of the flaws and errors in the Canadian story," pointing out that "indigenous people alone can tell us much." But Gopnik goes on to note the "unique" way that Canada's liberal institutions "install a corrective conscience directly into the heart of our social life," in the process shaping Canada as a model country to build upon.

Indeed. But that model is going to be sorely tested as Quebec, one important strand of Canada's political fabric, truncates religious freedom in the name of *laïcité*. After all, surrogate theologies can be as hegemonic and intolerant as those they replace. Often more so.

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ANONYMOUS

My Two Abortions

I never thought it would happen again. Then it did.

Some years ago, after I had converted to Christianity and become a Catholic, I had an abortion. I know the term "pro-choice" holds power for a lot of women, but not for me. I dislike it, because it speaks to the opposite of my own experience. I didn't think I had a choice. Rather, the choice was made for me. To choose to keep my child would be a choice to lose everything else, including my home, my family, my larger community. I was being made to do something that went against everything I believed in. But I felt there was no alternative. And so I acquiesced, with the approval of all those around me.

In reality, I could have done something else. I could have dug in my heels. I could have said no. But I did not yet have the strength of character to do so. Back then, my God was a magical being, making no demands, fulfilling every wish. Concepts like "humility" and "sacrifice" were just words to me, and held only a negative connotation. So I believed it when people told me that having the baby would be selfish and would put a burden on others. "They are afraid of the little one, they are afraid of the unborn child, and the child must die because they don't want to feed one more child, to educate one more child," Mother Teresa once said. And I caved. I caved with tears and anger and resentment, but I caved. And when I woke up I felt utterly impoverished.

There were more falls and more mistakes before I found the way again. When I did, I was firm in my personal prolife stance. But I was also sure of something else. At the time of the abortion, I had been extremely vulnerable; even if it had been illegal, I might still have been pressured into having it done. And thus, I have never been able to ally myself politically with anti-abortion groups. For I know, on a very personal level, that women, for one reason or another, have always had abortions. For one reason or another, they always will. And when abortions are illegal, not only does the child die, but the woman might also be seriously injured or killed.

So there I was. Dismayed by the flippant attitude toward abortion expressed by my fellow progressives, but uncomfortable with the certainties expressed by the prolife movement.

As Christians, we often find ourselves in these liminal spaces of being, where we cannot be completely defined by one thing or another. The one thing we can define ourselves by is following Christ. Though it is often a grace in disguise, it can be hard going. How was I to ever honestly enter the debate on abortion? I couldn't. I did, however, begin to share my story with young Catholics, both men and women. I talked with them as someone who had experienced an abortion, and also as someone who by then had gone on to experience motherhood. I talked to them about the sacredness of life.

I write anonymously for a number of reasons, which will begin to make themselves clear. I have to think about the privacy of my family, for one thing. But it's also so that you might look at the women in your parish and know that they might be me—that this could very easily be their story too. I am not the only Catholic woman to bear these sorrows.

If Christians find themselves in liminal spaces, then so do women, only more so. We are never exactly *where* any part of society wants us to be. So was the case for me when, last year, I found out I was pregnant.

It was unexpected. Two years earlier, after giving birth to my youngest child, I had been fitted with an IUD. My pregnancies are hard; like the other women in my family, I suffer intense morning sickness. It's significantly worsened by medication I need to treat mental illness, so much so that I have to reduce the dosage during pregnancy or risk hospitalization. Even so, while pregnant with my youngest, I was still sick multiple times a day for the first seven months. The doctors were worried: I was losing weight rather than gaining it. Once my son was born, it seemed advisable to go on birth control, although it was something I was reluctant to do. Part of it had to do with my Catholicism, but birth control also worsens the symptoms of my mental illness. Doctors suggested the IUD as an alternative, and several weeks later, it was placed inside my uterus.

IUDs are considered 99 percent effective. So the next pregnancy came as a surprise—yet it was not an unpleasant one. My husband and I had been married for well over a decade. An agnostic, my husband nonetheless went through the preparations for Catholic marriage, which of course includes the promise to be open to life. When we learned that a third child would be on the way, that our family would grow, we responded with joy. Of course, we were also worried about how to manage with another child, especially because I was about to begin a PhD in theology. But we'd been worried when as a college-aged couple we'd had our first, and we were worried as well when we'd had our second, while I was working on my master's degree. Love enables us to make a way, even when things seem

impractical, even when they might seem impossible.

The doctors laughed when I called and told them I was pregnant. A baby conceived with an IUD must really want to be born, they said. I went in to have the IUD removed and to have my first ultrasound. I was the talk of the office. Jokes were made about my husband's virility. All was well.

But then came the exam, which revealed that the IUD wasn't there. The doctors said it had likely fallen out. If that was the case, then it wasn't a surprise that I'd become pregnant. But there was another possibility. There was also a chance, an extremely small one, that the IUD had perforated my uterus. If *this* was the case, I was told, then the IUD would have to be located and removed, because it could cause serious complications during the pregnancy.

I underwent an internal and external ultrasound and two pelvic exams. The IUD could not be found. The doctors restated their belief that most likely it had fallen out, but it wasn't something they could confirm. I could carry on with the pregnancy and assume that everything was okay, or I could get an x-ray exam. X-rays pose several dangers to a fetus, including a heightened risk of cancer later on; they can also cause miscarriages. But if the IUD had perforated the uterus and was still somewhere inside me, there could be fatal consequences for the unborn child—including preterm stillbirth.

Already, and completely unexpectedly, I was faced with a decision regarding the life or death of my child. Neither choice seemed better than the other. But I had a nagging feeling that the IUD was still in my body, so I went for the x-ray. And I was right.

The IUD had perforated my uterus, and there was no safe way to remove it before the baby was born. But I take openness to life seriously. Even knowing the risks, I would not abort. Not again. If the pregnancy failed, then that was something we would go through. For what of the person being formed inside me, with its own traits and talents and faults? What if this life was to continue to bloom? I knew my child already, simply in knowing its personhood. And in knowing my child, I loved my child, as much as I did my two sons already born. It was the same knowledge and love that allowed me to grieve over my abortion all those years before.

Aware of my faith, the doctors didn't call it an abortion. They called it a "surgical procedure." But I knew what it was.

My husband was supportive, and despite his worries, was courageous in his support. But soon I started feeling pain in my abdomen, and I learned that just as the IUD could perforate my uterus, it could also perforate other organs in my body. While this is considered rare, I was already finding myself in a situation where the highly unusual had occurred. The dangers of an IUD floating freely in my abdomen were considered low, but not so low as to rule out complications that could be lethal to my child, and to me as well.

So there were several possibilities to consider. There was the possibility of a normal pregnancy and my giving birth to a healthy baby. There was the possibility of the child being born prematurely, not only surviving but also going on to thrive. There was the possibility of a stillbirth. There was the possibility of some other medical emergency. And there was the possibility of death—my own in addition to my child's.

As a follower of Jesus, I am to follow him to the cross. The disciple is no greater than the master and my master ended his life on a cross. Was this my cross to carry to the end? Was even the possibility of this baby being born alive worth taking on the risk of serious illness and death? My immediate Christian response was yes. And then, I thought of my husband, and my children who were alive and well. And I could not do it. This time *I* made the decision to have an abortion.

Aware of my faith, the doctors didn't call it that. They called it a "surgical procedure." But I knew what it was. A dear friend and fellow Catholic told me afterward: "Don't you dare call it an abortion because that is not what it was. You were in danger. Your child probably would have died anyway. What you did was merciful." But I will call it an abortion because that is what it was. It was my choice . . . and yet at the same time, it was not. Sin, if I have learned anything in theology, is something we choose when we are not fully free. I take responsibility for this choice, and I recognize that the fact that this choice was one of the limited decisions I could make is evidence of a constraint on my own moral freedom.

I was awake during the abortion. If I had chosen general anesthesia, I would have had to wait another week, which seemed worse to me, both for my baby and myself. A volunteer doula was there; she held my hand and massaged my neck and held me. Before we began I had the two doctors, the nurse, and the doula stop for a moment of silence. I had my miraculous medal with me, and I said a Hail Mary out loud.

This story, I know, says as much about women's experience with obstetrics as it does about religion and abortion. The reason I confess this experience here is to show how it encompasses far more than considerations of legality and illegality. The debates over the passing of abortion bans in several states do not do sufficient justice to the full experiences of women. I recoil at the oversimplifications coming from both sides. Abortion is, like so many things, a mainly pastoral issue. It is not as simple as legal or illegal, a personal right or an undeniable wrong. It *is* as simple as confronting the experiences of real women and hearing the

voice of Jesus within their experiences of sex, childbirth, and, yes, the decision to terminate a pregnancy.

If all abortion is illegal, women will die. This is not debatable. It is a fact. Most people know this, and yet I understand as a Catholic that state-sanctioned killing—which I believe abortion to be—is more than problematic. I am not attempting here to convince anyone to change their political beliefs, but to break open their view of women's experience of abortion itself. The need for abortion is evidence of our broken humanity, but our current response is also evidence of our church's inability to respond fully to the female experience when there are no female voices.

At their best, prolife organizations affirm the grief and trauma felt by women recovering from abortion. They provide resources and direction for mothers and their unborn children, helping them not only survive but also thrive. Yet there are parts of the prolife movement that seem blind to other life issues, that in their actions and rhetoric can in fact seem hypocritical. I see certain American Catholics who don't take in the entire seamless garment of life, and I wonder if their focus on the unborn is being used to distract attention from other policies that are prejudicial or even lethal. It seems in these cases that the bodies of infants are being used to hide such things.

This is not acceptable, and it demands that we must listen, as a church, to women. Not just to those women who say what we want to hear. Not just to those who echo our own visions of motherhood, or affirm society's accepted version of it, or repeat our faith's representation of it. Rather, we are called to embrace the entirety of female experience. Women in our churches—myself included, and I know that I am not alone—carry this burden in their hearts and remain unheard. So I ask you to hear my story, and not to turn away from it. Keep it in mind when you say your homilies and speak to your students. Keep it in *your* heart so that you may know how to minister and how to advocate.

B. D. MCCLAY

Small Graces

Big cities can breed indifference. Prayer helps us resist it.

In the Tyburn Convent, on the north side of London, the nuns pray for people all night. This practice is beautifully memorialized in Sukhdev Sandhu's little book *Night Haunts: A Journey Through the London Nights*, which I read in anticipation of a recent visit to the city. People call the convent and leave prayer requests, which are subsequently offered up during Night Adoration. Sandhu writes that the practice has continued without disruption for over a hundred years, including when the place was bombed in 1944. "Prayer is the true language of the night," he concludes. "It is the sound of London's heart beating. The sound of individuals walking alone in the dark."

If you are not a cloistered nun, city life seems to present many opportunities for indifference and few for kindness. In most of America's cities you can't walk a block or two without meeting someone who is in a state of serious destitution. It's not meaningless to give such a person money or stop for conversation, but it is, in the broader sense, ineffectual. Meanwhile, ambulances scream past you; people weep on the bus. You read the news and discover something horrible has happened very near you, about which you had no idea.

This ambient sense of failure can be harnessed in a bad-faith way, of course. As a person routinely harassed by street canvassers, I can only assume that I project a dark cloud of guilt wherever I go and appear to be an easy mark. Attempts at deflection usually backfire. A man who approached me with a pitch for saving orangutans was unphased by my declaration that I hated great apes and smoothly switched to water conservation. "I would hate to see you again," he told me, "when we're fighting over the last bottles of clean water."

So it's useful to have an understanding of what you can and can't do, can or can't fix, and also when people, while not deserving to be treated unkindly, can still be dealt with brusquely. Sometimes you are in situations where there is no clearly right thing to do. (Do you offer the person crying in public comfort or privacy?) But it's hard to disagree with a vicar in Sandhu's book who called the city, viewed from a height, a vision of Christ crucified.

But if proximity breeds indifference, there are also ways to resist fully succumbing to it. When I walk through cities, I try to remember to pray. It doesn't usually get very sophisticated—Hail Marys and Our Fathers, in some combination, when I pass someone who seems to be homeless, or hear an ambulance, or see a person in distress. Even if there's nobody in distress, I'll try to just recite these prayers to the rhythm of my footsteps. After all, just because I can't see someone doesn't mean they might not need a prayer. And every once in a while, strangers will ask you to pray for them.

I don't know that this is, as praying goes, particularly good, since it's usually (really, always) distracted. But it can't hurt. And it is one action I can take to prevent the hardening of my heart in a city where that often seems like the only way to live as I pass from one extreme

Lily Furedi, *Subway*, 1934

to another with every step—wealth to poverty, highbrow to lowbrow, and then back again.

City life is troubling in the same way the rest of life is troubling; it presents you with people who have a real moral claim on you, with whom you are linked by various dependencies, and then leaves you to navigate these things on your own. Even seemingly neutral things can create a series of reactions: a baby cries in my apartment building; the dog upstairs barks; my dog barks at the dog upstairs; the baby is disturbed and goes on crying. But because in cities we are all thrown together, the good ways in which we are dependent on each other are present too: public transportation, libraries, giving directions, doing each other small favors.

A city is noisy, dirty, sometimes cruel, sometimes surprisingly kind, always restless, constantly building over its own past. There is a sense of the vastness of human experience not only in a particular space but across time. In London there is an old Roman temple to Mithras, uncovered by a bomb. You can go down into it and stand in the dark, and wonder about the people who were here who worshipped a god about whom almost nothing is really known: what they wanted, what they were hoping for, what exactly they did. Temples to one god become temples to another. Churches become houses and stores and monuments. And if you could stand in one place and let centuries pass over you, if you could see everything that had happened in such a space all at once, maybe you would begin to understand prayer.

But you can't. There's only the polyphonic city itself, what you can grasp of it, the knowledge that the full range of human joy and pain is taking place all around you, that you're standing and thinking in a place where anything could have happened and everything probably has. There's only the feeling that you are in a place where the connections of the people around you create something with a life that is its own. The closest one can probably come to understanding prayer is knowing that you don't. But lots of people, without knowing what they're doing, or even believing in it, go on praying every day—for themselves, for their neighbors, and for people they love. And the thing that ties them together, place to place, past to present, isn't just prayer. But surely that is one aspect of it.

I didn't get to visit Tyburn Convent on my trip to London, but I did look them up and leave a message asking them for prayer. About a week later, I was surprised to get an email from them telling me that they were "sorry that you have had to wait for an email to assure you that we are happy to include your intentions in our prayer." I was touched by the email. Still, one nice thing about prayer—it doesn't really matter if you know someone's praying for you or not. It does what it does all the same.

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An Orthodox theologian on the controversy still rocking the Roman Catholic Church

Divorce, Annulment & Communion

David Bentley Hart

As I am not a Roman Catholic, I cannot pretend to have any stake in—or, for that matter, any particular right to an opinion regarding—the controversy surrounding *Amoris laetitia*. From the vantage of Eastern Orthodoxy, there is nothing particularly scandalous in the document—certainly nothing repugnant to the Eastern Christian tradition's understanding of Scripture, ecclesial law, or pastoral practice—but that is an observation of only the most boringly incidental kind. I do, however, know enough about the development of Christian tradition, both East and West, to note that many of the claims made by Catholic traditionalists have been wildly inaccurate. Not that this is surprising. It is always the "traditionalists" (Orthodox no less than Catholic) who tend to have the most tenuous and idealized concept of the actual traditions of their churches, and necessarily so. The one thing they cannot tolerate is ambiguity. But, alas, history is nothing but ambiguity, and the actual historical record is very rarely the traditionalist's friend.

Not that I would dismiss the dissenters from *Amoris laetitia* simply on historical grounds. I merely insist that their dissent, if it is grounded in theological principles they believe to be indubitable, should not be diluted by association with easily discredited fictions about the Christian past. I have no doubt, for instance, that Ross Douthat's alarm at the apparent leanings of the current pontificate on these issues is sincere and prompted by genuine spiritual concerns. But when it becomes clear that he imagines that current Roman Catholic practice regarding divorce and remarriage—especially permanent exclusion from the Eucharist for the remarried—has been the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church from the earliest centuries, and that this is the inarguably correct interpretation of Scripture, and that it is clearly the Orthodox Church that has deviated from the ancient rule of the faith, it becomes difficult not to reject everything he has to say on the matter out of hand. The problem is not simply that he is wrong on the facts; it is that he obviously has a concept of the early centuries of Christianity that borders on fantasy.

Then again, I suppose that most of us do, at least at certain times. It is natural to think that what seems urgently important to Christians now must have occupied at least as prominent a place in the Christian self-understanding of earlier ages. And so, where documentary evidence to that effect is lacking, we are all too ready to supply the deficiency with our own fond imaginings. We speak with ardent earnestness today of the "Christian family," for instance, largely unaware that the very concept is scarcely two centuries old, and is more a relic of nineteenth-century sentimental bourgeois piety than an expression of the ethos of the Gospel. Christ's indifference to the special claims of familial loyalty seems to have been almost perfect (see, for example, Matthew 12:47–50 or Mark 3:32–35). Nor, in the early centuries, was there any distinct concept of "Christian marriage," or of the moral merits of connubial happiness. Paul, for instance, grudgingly allowed that the married state was a licit concession to the irrepressible carnal appetites of the morally feeble (1 Corinthians 7:9), but he certainly didn't see it as encompassing some special sphere of sanctity.

The one thing traditionalism cannot tolerate is ambiguity. But, alas, history is nothing but ambiguity, and the actual historical record is very rarely the traditionalist's friend.

Neither, for several centuries after the Apostolic Age, did any Christian theological authority think of marriage as a sacrament in our sense. Augustine (354–430) thought it might be described as a *sacramentum* in the proper acceptation of the Latin word: a solemn and binding oath before God. But even then, although he took the term chiefly from Jerome's rendering of Ephesians 5:32, he certainly did not number matrimony among the saving "mysteries" of the church, alongside baptism and the Eucharist. Neither did anyone else, for many, many years. Even the great Church Fathers tended to treat marriage as little more than a civil institution, no different in kind for Christians than for non-Christians. One need only look, for example, at John Chrysostom's fifty-sixth homily (on the second chapter of Genesis) to see how unacquainted even a late-fourth-century theologian of the highest eminence was with any concept of "holy" matrimony. And, inasmuch as they thought of marriage chiefly as a natural fact rather than as a sacred vocation, the Christians of late antiquity did not treat it as a theological topic.

They did, however, treat it as an issue of *moral* discipline. But here, it turns out, they tended to take a surprisingly pragmatic approach both to the frequent dissolution of marriages and to the frequent remarriage of divorced spouses. Obviously, they regarded both as sinful in some sense. But neither Orthodox nor Catholic tradition (which in the first millennium were of course one and the same) treated divorce and remarriage as the equivalent of apostasy. Not only were the remarried as a class not excluded from communion for life, or required to abstain from sexual union in order to gain readmission to the sacraments; it was actually inscribed in some synodal canons that they should *not* be permanently excommunicated (see below). Moreover, precisely because marriage was not regarded as a worthy object of theological reflection, the practices of the early church were far more fluid and ad hoc than we might like to believe.

In his *Commentary on Matthew*, for example, Origen (ca. 184–253) notes that many of the bishops of his time permitted both divorce and remarriage among the faithful. Canon 11 of the Council of Arles (314) *recommends* that a divorced man not remarry so long as his former wife still lives, but also grants that, for healthy young men incapable of the continence this would require of them, remarriage may prove necessary. Basil the Great (ca. 330–379) instructed Amphilochius of Iconium to allow men abandoned by their wives to remarry without penalty. It was he, also, who apparently first established an official penitential discipline for remarried laity: a second marriage, after either bereavement or divorce, requires one to two years of abstinence from the Eucharist, while a third marriage requires three to five. These rules remained canonical at least as late as the days of Theodore the Studite (759–826)

Illustration by Jon Krause

and Patriarch Nicephorus I of Constantinople (c. 758–828). Incidental remarks of Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315–403) show that remarriage for the divorced was not in his day regarded as an eternal bar to sacramental life. The Council of Carthage (407) proclaimed that abandoned spouses should, ideally, refrain from second marriage, but that, if they could not, they should undergo penance before being readmitted to communion. Even Augustine, while firmly convinced that marriage should as a rule be indissoluble, nonetheless confessed in his *Retractiones* that he had no final answer on the issue.

The most crucial pronouncements on the matter, however, were promulgated in 692 in the canons attached to the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) of 680–681 by the Council in Trullo. Canon 87, which largely reprises the rule of Basil, prescribes that a man abandoned by his wife be allowed to remarry without any penitential sequel. But if it is he who is the truant spouse, he must endure seven years of penance—the first as a "shedder of tears," the next two as a "listener," like a catechumen, the next three as a "maker of prostrations"—before he may take the Eucharist again (without any obligation to dissolve his second marriage).

Now, it is true that the Council in Trullo was accepted as fully part of the ecumenical deposit only by the Eastern patriarchs, but that should not distract us from what is most significant here. Rome demurred as to the ecumenical status of the council principally because no properly certified Roman legate was present and because, in consequence, certain of the ritual practices enshrined in the council's canons differed from Western usages. The actual doctrinal and moral contents of the canons, however, including the eighty-seventh, were offensive to no one. Certainly the council was no cause of division among the patriarchates. Pope Hadrian I (r. 772–795) praised its canons, in fact, and even now its ninety-first canon is routinely cited by Catholic apologists as proof of the church's dogmas regarding abortion.

Through much of the Middle Ages the whole issue of wedlock certified by the church concerned mostly the aristocracy, inasmuch as marriage was chiefly a matter of property, inheritance, and politics.

To be honest, many modern believers would be shocked to learn how late in Christian history a clear concept of marriage as a religious institution evolved, and how long it took for it to be absolutely distinguished from what would come to be thought of as common-law unions, or for the church to insist on its solemnization in all cases. They would be even more disturbed, I imagine (as much on democratic principles as religious), to discover that throughout much of the Middle Ages the whole issue of wedlock certified by the church concerned mostly the aristocracy, inasmuch as marriage was chiefly a matter of property, inheritance, and politics. As far as we can tell, among the peasantry of many lands, and for many centuries, marital union was a remarkably mercurial sort of arrangement, one that coalesced and dissolved with considerable informality, as circumstances dictated. And the clergy did not, for the most part, give a damn.

Nevertheless, as the patristic Christian world yielded to the medieval, East and West did begin to grow apart in the severity with which they dealt with divorce and remarriage among the enfranchised classes. To some extent, it would not be unfair to say that the former fell too much under the sway of Byzantine civil law; and perhaps a militant Newmanian would claim that the latter was being led by the Spirit toward an ever fuller understanding of its own doctrinal inheritance. But the fact remains that neither East nor West, in the early centuries, promoted or practiced anything remotely as strict as modern Roman Catholic teaching prescribes. And, indeed, for almost all the premodern period, the differences between East and West were nowhere near so pronounced as modern Catholic traditionalists imagine. In the West, divorces became harder to obtain, but not impossible. One of the best attested in the historical record was that of the Earl of Gloucester, Gilbert de Clare, and his wife Alice de Lusignan: the formal dissolution of their wedding vows was requested in 1271, but was not granted by the pope until 1285. But it *was* granted. Nor was their case unique. Later Catholic historians, out of embarrassment, tend to characterize these rare but real ecclesially dissolved marriages as annulments, identical in kind to those so easily obtained today. But no one at the time took them as such.

As I say, history is ambiguity. Perhaps, then, the issue ought to be adjudicated solely in light of the explicit pronouncements of Scripture. Curiously enough, however, it is precisely the New Testament record—especially as originally read by those closer in culture and language to its authors—that accounts for a great deal of the imprecision and variety of the church's practices in its early centuries. The oldest text in the canon that addresses the issue of divorce, historically speaking, is of course 1 Corinthians 7. There it is quite clear, for instance, that in Paul's view a Christian husband ought not to divorce (literally, "send away," "expel": ἀφιέτω) an

unbelieving wife and a Christian wife ought not to abandon an unbelieving husband, but he explicitly qualifies his advice with the condition that, in both cases, the unbelieving spouse must also consent to the arrangement (7:12–13). "But, if the unbeliever separates, let the separation happen; in such circumstances, the brother or the sister is not enslaved" (7:15). As for the issue of remarriage afterwards, Paul's at times positively sublime gift for obscurity here raises certain insurmountable obstacles to a single sure interpretation. "Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek divorce. Have you been divorced from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do indeed marry you do not sin" (7:27–28). It is simply impossible to tell whether the "you" to whom Paul is speaking is the same divorced "you" of the immediately preceding sentence (as the plain syntax of the passage would seem to suggest), or whether instead he is tacitly reverting to an earlier reference to those who are as yet unmarried.

In any case, one feature of the text that one should not overlook is the asymmetry in Paul's formulation of the ways in which a marriage might break apart: a man may "divorce" his wife, but a woman can only "abandon" her husband. It is a distinction in usage that one should keep firmly in mind in trying to make sense of how the pronouncements of Christ on the matter might have been read by the earliest Christians. The truth is that the very word "divorce" becomes somewhat equivocal when we use it as a designation both for the Mosaic legal mechanism of which Christ speaks in the synoptic gospels and for the *ex consensu* termination of a marriage with which we are familiar today. Under the Mosaic code, only the man enjoyed the power of issuing a writ of separation; and, in an age and place in which a wife was typically much younger than her husband and always entirely dependent upon him for her livelihood, such a writ entailed the expulsion of a woman from her home without property, protection, or any means of supporting herself. Should a man tire of his wife and become enamored of another girl or woman, the only permissible method for exchanging his old bride for the new one was effectively to condemn the former to a life of total penury, and often of prostitution. It was entirely in keeping, then, with Christ's constant excoriation of every injustice worked against the defenseless and the poor that he should condemn as an adulterer any man who would cast his wife away to a life of utter desperation in order to replace her with someone more to his fancy (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18), and accuse him of forcing his former wife to commit adultery in turn (Matthew 5:32). Hence it

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is that the immediate response of Jesus' disciples to these pronouncements is merely: "If such is the responsibility of a man with a wife, it is not profitable to marry" (Matthew 19:10).

As for the culpability of the woman who remarries (Mark 10:12), one must also remember that no woman, under the circumstances of that age, would have abandoned her husband for any reason other than to attach herself to another man. Moreover, the word ἀνήρ used in this passage means both "man" and "husband." It would have been perfectly natural, then, for the earliest Christian interpreters of the gospels to assume that Jesus was speaking specifically about a wife who leaves her husband in order to be wed to another, perhaps obliging her second husband in the process to dispose of an inconvenient prior wife of his own. Certainly it would have been assumed that the man who marries a divorced woman (Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:38) is in fact someone who has lured the woman away from her home. At least, such a reading would seem to be largely confirmed by Matthew's gospel, where a man who merely lusts after a "married woman" (γυνή) has already committed adultery in his heart (5:27), and where the dominical prohibition on men divorcing their wives is explicitly qualified by an exception for cases of πορνεία, or "harlotry" (5:32, 19:9).

Perhaps none of this tells us exactly how we should now understand the New Testament's treatment of the issue of divorce. It certainly does not help us decide whether the terms in the New Testament that we habitually translate as "divorce"—in the gospels ἀποστάσιον (writ of separation) and ἀπολύσις (dissolution, release); in 1 Corinthians λύσις (loosing, dissolution) and ἄφεσις (sending away, expelling)—should be understood as exact equivalents of the sort of *ex consensu* "divorce" or διαζύγιον codified in imperial law, effected between two adults, each of whom "had a person" before the court. It does, however, allow us to understand how it is that the Christians of the first several centuries of the church did not naturally conclude that they were obliged to regard divorce and remarriage as constituting a permanent rupture of sacramental communion. For one thing, neither Paul nor Christ (at least, if Matthew's gospel is accorded the same doctrinal weight as Mark's and Luke's) absolutely forbade every kind of divorce. Why then would the church have done so? And it does not seem unreasonable to wonder whether the various meanings of the scriptural terms we translate as "divorce" ought not to give us pause, and make us wonder whether we are not attempting to make sense of both the past and the present in terms of practices very different from our own.

When one looks at it closely, in light of both the empirical facts and abstract principles of the matter, the distinction between divorce and annulment is specious all the way down.

At least, I do not find it intuitively obvious that Christ's condemnation of a very specific unjust legal practice of his time and place, inflicted upon women who could make no appeal against it and whom it left defenseless, or of a very particular act of betrayal on the part of a truant wife and her lover, applies in the same way to the consensual dissolution of a hopeless marriage by two legally enfranchised adults. I do not mean to minimize even that sort of divorce. But I think we have all seen truly disastrous marriages, and we all know that there are few situations in life more spiritually, psychologically, and morally devastating. And it is worth asking whether that was what Christ was talking about at all. Or, then again, perhaps it is not. In fact, no Christian tradition assumes that this was what Christ meant. Hence even Rome allows for annulments. But here we arrive at the greatest ambiguity of all.

I have been asked on a few occasions to speak on the differences between the Orthodox and Roman church teachings and practice regarding divorce and remarriage—generally with the expectation that I will attempt to justify one over against the other, or at the very least hold them in tension. I have generally declined the invitation, not because I think the issue too complicated, but because I do not actually believe there is much real difference on this matter between the two communions, and yet I know that saying so will almost certainly initiate an excruciatingly tedious argument. It is not the case, it seems to me, that the Eastern church is especially lax with regard to marital dissolution while the Western is especially strict. Both are remarkably pliant and pragmatic (sometimes to a deplorable degree) when the crisis comes. In fact, this is what strikes me as so odd about the exuberant anguish occasioned by a few small, hesitant, almost majestically ambiguous formulations at the edges of *Amoris laetitia*. Viewed from any sane perspective, the Roman communion is absolutely brimming over with divorced and remarried persons who suffer no impediment at all in approaching the sacraments.

Really, when one looks at it closely, in light of both the empirical facts and the abstract principles of the matter, the distinction between divorce and annulment is specious all the way down. For one thing, as regards actual cases

on the ground, anyone who has seen a sufficient number of annulments at close quarters (and I have witnessed quite a few) knows that they are not only fairly easy to obtain for those willing to make the effort, but that the terms governing them are applied with such plasticity that it is difficult to see how any marriage could fail to meet the standards. True, *abusus non tollit usum* (abuse does not do away with proper use); but, in fact, there really is no abuse involved. The very concept of annulment, as something ontologically distinct from divorce, is logically incoherent, and really can be taken seriously only by a mind so absolutely indoctrinated to believe that the Roman Catholic Church does not tolerate divorce and remarriage that no evidence to the contrary can alter that conviction.

The very premise that a marriage can be pronounced null and void, in effect retroactively (since that same marriage would be regarded as real and legitimate if suit for annulment had never been brought forward), on the grounds of some original defect of intention that means it was never a real marriage to begin with (though again, it *would* be considered a real marriage if that defect were never exposed), basically provides a license to regard every marriage as provisional only. After all, in what union of a man and a woman could one not detect some crucial defect of original intention if one were to seek it? Moreover, if one looks at the criteria customarily used to prove that a marriage was never really a marriage, they scarcely differ at all from the criteria that the Orthodox Church—in principle, at least—is supposed to accept as legitimate grounds for divorce. And what is a divorce, after all, other than a recognition that the original marriage was contracted in ignorance and without full mutual commitment to everything a true marriage is?

In the end, both communions grant dissolutions of marriages and tolerate remarriages with perhaps far too little reluctance; certainly neither requires a real penitential reconciliation with the church, as prescribed by the ancient canons. It might make Catholics feel better about their Eastern brethren if the Orthodox Church called these separations "annulments," and issued formal absolutions from wedding vows under such terms. I have to say, however, that I am glad it does neither. To my mind, the concept of annulment is not only specious and logically contradictory, but also somewhat insidious—in fact, often rather cynical and cruel. It is terrible enough when a marriage—something on which a man and a woman, at what is usually a fairly innocent moment in their lives, have staked their futures and their hopes for happiness—falls apart. It is somehow all the more terrible when, solely for the sake of avoiding institutional embarrassment, we are asked to indulge in the fiction that it was never a real marriage to begin with.

I know of a woman whose well-connected husband managed to obtain an annulment without her consent, and on grounds that would have scarcely qualified him as a plaintiff before a secular divorce court. And I happen to know that, of the two, he was the far more culpable in the matter. What she found bitterest of all in the final settlement was that, according to her church, no one was obliged to admit that her life as a wife and mother of twenty-six years—in a union freely contracted, sacramentally solemnized, physically and fruitfully consummated—had broken apart. Rather than properly acknowledge the tragedy she had endured, she was expected to consent instead to something perilously close to golden-age Hollywood farce (Robert Montgomery and Carole Lombard discover that their marriage license from three years before was jurisdictionally irregular, and that they are not really man and wife in the eyes of the law, and oh, what hilarity ensues…). To her it seemed both humiliating and dishonest to pretend that what had disintegrated after a quarter century, and left her emotionally shattered, was in any sense something less than a true marriage.

In any event, as I said at the beginning, I have no answers to propose to Catholic believers on the issue. More to the point, though, I also think the search for answers is somewhat pointless under the conditions that actually obtain. I cannot make myself believe that the distinction between divorce and annulment is logically sustainable. And so, as far as I can tell, the situation in both the Orthodox and the Roman churches is, for all intents and purposes, the same. Both communions call marriage a sacrament, both bless it before the altar as something that should in principle never be dissolved, and yet both do allow for such dissolution, and provide mechanisms for reconciling the separated spouses to the church. The communions use different words at certain crucial junctures, and justify the abrogation of sacramental vows by slightly different reasoning, but in the end the effect is the same. In either case, what occurs is a kind of spiritual and personal catastrophe. There is only, it seems to me, a single significant difference between their practices: in only one of the two communions is that catastrophe compounded by what sometimes looks like a cynical duplicity.

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Standing in the Light

The clandestine correspondence of Helmuth and Freya von Moltke

Freya and Helmuth James von Moltke are thirty-three and thirty-seven years old as we meet them in late September 1944. At that point, Helmuth had been in Gestapo custody for nearly nine months, and during this period the couple met only under supervision and exchanged letters that passed through Gestapo censorship—so all communication needed to involve caution. Helmuth had been arrested for warning a colleague that a secret police spy had infiltrated an anti-Nazi circle of friends, and that the colleague faced imminent arrest as a member of the group. By September, that circle of friends had been tried for the capital crime of "defeatism," invented by the Nazis for those who failed to believe that Germany would win the war, and Helmuth's colleague had already been executed.

Before Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg detonated his bomb in a conference with Hitler on July 20, 1944, it had looked as if Helmuth, an international lawyer, would manage to survive his imprisonment. The Gestapo had remained unaware of his conspiracy with about twenty-five trustworthy civilian friends in the years 1940–1943 to draft the structure of a democratic German state after the Nazi system had collapsed. The plenary discussions had taken place at Kreisau, the estate Helmuth had inherited from a Prussian field marshal. There larger gatherings could be disguised as weekend parties—all the more so since the field marshal continued to be much revered by Germans, including the Nazi hierarchy. Following Helmuth's arrest early in the year, his friends, including Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, had joined Stauffenberg's plot and a number of them had been arrested, tried, and executed. In the process of investigating the conspirators' background, the Gestapo identified the "Kreisau Circle," led by Helmuth and Peter Yorck, as the source of their opposition. Once Helmuth's own conspiratorial activity had been exposed, he was transferred to Tegel Prison.

Both Freya and Helmuth clearly understood that his transfer to Berlin for trial in the "People's Court" was a prelude to his own almost-inevitable execution. They initially anticipated that both the trial and the execution would take place within the following month, but there were several delays. By a stroke of luck, Harald Poelchau, the Protestant prison chaplain at Tegel Prison, was an unidentified co-conspirator in the "Kreisau Circle" who now had regular access to Helmuth. For the first time in nine months of Helmuth's imprisonment, now, at Tegel, he and Freya were able to communicate via almost daily clandestine letters that Poelchau smuggled past the guards. Over the arc of this correspondence, they declare their love for each other, strengthen one another for the parting they have to contemplate, and find solace in their deep faith that even death

Helmuth von Moltke before the Volksgerichtshof (People's Court) in Berlin, January 10, 1945.

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cannot part them. Freya seeks permission to visit her husband, which is granted repeatedly. Both experience these meetings with great intensity, though the first visit triggers a particular wave of anguish in Helmuth as he contemplates his end. Outside the prison, Freya continues her efforts to save Helmuth's life, gaining access (undoubtedly thanks to the revered family name) to the much-feared political judge Roland Freisler and to Heinrich Müller, the head of the Gestapo. It soon becomes apparent that there is no chance of clemency.

Helmuth lays out the fundamental reasons why he opposed the Nazis from the beginning of their rule in his farewell letter to his two young sons. Freya, for her part, clearly states that there could be no compromising with the Nazis. If death was Helmuth's fate, this was a death that had meaning. Her sense of their unity would sustain Freya after Helmuth's execution and throughout her life. Just six months after his death she was able to write to her mother, "I'll never be truly alone again in my life, since I was able to part from Helmuth in such a beautiful manner." These letters between her and Helmuth remained her private treasure until she donated them to the public in the last year of her life. First published in German a year after her death in 2010, they are now available for the first time in an English translation.

—Helmuth Caspar von Moltke

FREYA TO HELMUTH, SEPTEMBER 29, 1944

…I will have to go on living and that will be hard, but it will work out, because I will be able to go on loving you. I will love you in God and not disturb you on the paths you'll take, and I will love God more and better than I have before. But please, when you die, it must be in the certainty that apart from God I belong only to you. These fifteen years, that was our life, my Jäm; what comes now will be a life for the little sons, for other people, for things—I don't yet know what, but my life, our life, my beloved Jäm, that is now coming to an end here. You always told me that you would die young. You promised me seven more years, but why talk about quantity. Quality is what counts.…Your life seems beautiful and complete to me. You'll die for something worth dying for. It's uninteresting in the extreme that you might have gone on to become a "great" man.…If you have to die now, I believe your death will have meaning.…

HELMUTH TO FREYA, OCTOBER 1, 1944

…I have no fear of death and I believe that I will be holding on to all of you in some form or another, and I have a creaturely fear of dying, and it pains me that I will not see you and the little sons again with these eyes of mine. I feel that I have had so much in this life that I have no right to make any more demands, but I don't feel as though I'm the harvest calling for the reaper.…

HELMUTH TO HIS SONS CASPAR AND KONRAD, OCTOBER 11, 1944

…The issue that will result in my being killed will go down in history, and no one knows in what form. But I want to say the following to you: throughout my life, even back in school, I have always fought against a spirit of narrow-mindedness and violence, of arrogance and lack of respect for others, intolerance and an absolute and merciless stringency, which is inherent in the Germans and has found expression in the National Socialist state. I have also done what I could to see to it that this spirit and its terrible consequences, such as an excess of nationalism, racial persecution, lack of faith, and materialism could be overcome….

FREYA TO HELMUTH, OCT 24–26, 1944

…It is an odd life, hovering between life and death, and therefore so intense at times. There are hours, moments of unbelievable intensity, and then many hours go by that are still close to you, but they move along calmly, hours in these days that may be the most precious for me. My love, none of this is easy to live well and in the right way, and yet it's so astonishing that in many respects I find it a source of great happiness.…Death lies ahead for you, and for me, a life alone in which our love must remain alive. We have to embrace both death and life, compose ourselves, and stay close together, my dear love: how difficult that is, yet how full of the most beautiful consolations.…

HELMUTH TO FREYA, OCTOBER 26, 1944

My love, since yesterday my death has become closer and more real, and I am very happy about it. I'm in good spirits even so, or for that very reason, and nonetheless determined to fight for my life. But there is no doubt whatsoever that only a miracle of God can save me. Today, when I was half asleep, I had an odd idea, half idea, half dream. I went to Plötzensee for my execution, and the executioner said, "How am I supposed to execute just the left one without the right one; that won't work." And when they looked at me, you had grown onto my right side, like a Siamese twin, making an execution impossible. It was very beautiful, and then I was fully awake.

I've been wanting to describe the details of my daily routine to you. The times of day are guesswork, because I don't have a watch: the first time I wake up at about 1 o'clock at night and then I read hymns aloud, mostly some particular group, one after the other, until I feel sleepy again. Then I wake up once and for all at about 5:30 and reflect, think about you, the little sons, and I enjoy that until 6:30. Then, when the others are waking up, I read the hymns in the "morning" section. Then I get up and do what I can, pour myself some water, do 100 squats, and things of that nature. At about 7:10 I'm unlocked, which is to say unchained, and wash and clean up and eat breakfast. That takes me to 8 or 8:30, depending on what I have planned. Then I write to you or do something else until 9:15, when I'm shackled again. After that I walk back and forth until 9:30 and recite psalms to myself. Then we go out and are back in at 10:10. I spend the whole morning, from 10–11:45, reciting Bible passages, to which I've now added Psalms 111, 118, and 139, and I recite Romans 8. In the mornings the newspaper is delivered, and if I read it, I won't finish my reciting. At 11:45 our shackles are removed again, and then there's always some tidying left to catch up on. At 12 the food arrives. At 1 we're shackled again, and this time has to be used for things that would be better done with two hands, such as writing, reading with looking things up, and activities of that sort. At 1 I finish reciting my Bible passages, maybe start a hymn as well, then sit down atop my table, the bolster behind my back, a blanket under me, and your lovely blanket around me, my feet on the chair, and read. From time to time, once or twice a week, I read through my notes about my statements. On the other days, I systematically read the hymnal, write notes for myself in the Bible and hymnal. By the way, when I'm sitting, I definitely start by reading several chapters from the Old Testament before the Psalms, from the New Testament after the Psalms, from the Gospels and the Epistles. That's how the afternoon always begins. At 4 our shackles are taken off again; then I keep on reading if I have nothing else to do, at 5:30 there's supper, and at 6 we have to be ready for bed and the shackles go on. Then I read the hymns for evening worship, and if I'm in good shape, I ponder things, and if I'm not, I read the hymns or psalms until I'm sleepy, punctuated by thoughts of you, my love, and go to sleep early. That is the day. So far it has never really been long enough.

So, my love, I've been shackled since the fifth line of this page, and now we're getting ready to go out. Farewell, my love, full of gratitude for the great blessing of these weeks, full of confidence that He will guide things in the way that is best for us, full of confidence, full of prayers that He may watch over you and hold His hand over you, and watch over us and hold His hand over us. Jäm.

FREYA TO HELMUTH, OCTOBER 26, 1944

…Isn't it strange that since yesterday I have also once again started to regard your death as the far more likely outcome! This feeling became clearly

palpable to me yesterday, to the point that I felt the need to call to you again to embrace this outlook, because it is without question a blessing to be able to die with such awareness and say goodbye with such awareness, and we mustn't, my dearest, let this opportunity to see and live it fully slip away from us by hoping against hope, and we're not letting it slip away, but that is exactly what I have to keep thinking and saying. My dear, how wonderful that I had grown onto you, how wonderful, how comforting. My dear love, how I enjoy your still being here, that I still stand hand in hand with you, that you're still there, that I can write to you and your dear eyes roam over my words, your dear eyes. Oh, Jäm, help me if I have to remain alone. I have to stay really and truly alone in order to keep you. But maybe the solitary path ahead of me won't be so long. Who knows! The only thing that matters is the readiness to accept what God has given us. May He grant us—us both—the strength we need, may He make us small and Himself large within us, and then all this will work out. Good night, my dear love! Sleep well. I embrace you, and I am and will forever remain your P.

HELMUTH TO FREYA, OCTOBER 28, 1944

My dear love, I want to spend a bit of time on a quick chat with you. It's the afternoon and we don't have shackles on, because we're supposed to be scouring, and I've already done that. I assume you went home this morning so you could celebrate Casparchen's birthday. I guess that means you're now in the train somewhere between Liegnitz and Kreisau, although I have no sense of what time it is, because it's raining and so dark that the light's been on the whole day. I really felt like talking to you because I was sad. There was no reason at all. But living this way, between death and life, is exhausting. Once you're finally totally ready and prepared to die, you can't make a permanent state out of it. Unfortunately that doesn't work; the flesh doesn't play along. So you bounce back to life, maybe only a little, you build a house of cards and then, when you notice it, you tear it down again, and the flesh doesn't take well to that. It's also an instance of practice not making perfect; it always remains unpleasant to the exact same degree. That's how it is today all over again; then two nasty air raids during the night—always so close that you hear those big chunks hurtling down and the windows shaking during the explosion—then darkness and rain. The Old Adam just isn't willing.

It's especially difficult these days because I'm working on my defense and then have to summon up within me confidence that I'll be able to mount a

POETRY

A CONSTELLATION OF STONES

Block Island, RI

In the bright morning
sun of this other life
three swans lift with your delight
into the cool air above Sachem Pond.

Here, even your eyes have wings
and the sea behind you echoes
their thunderous thrum.

A gull pulls its shadow
across great rocks balanced
between the days, monuments
to the moment, poised
like the heron posed at pond's edge.

At your feet, a constellation of stones
settles into the earthen sky.

Even now you know—you hope—
one day you'll remember
this water, how it was broken
upon a stone, how the night came
and you imagined a fire blown
into cascading arcs of stars.

—Vernon Fowlkes Jr.

VERNON FOWLKES JR. *'s poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals, among them* The Southern Review, Negative Capability, Birmingham Arts Journal, Elk River Review, The Texas Observer, Ampersand Review, *and* Willow Springs. *His poetry collection,* The Sound of Falling, *was published by Negative Capability Press in 2013.*

successful defense, and that results in an unpleasant split in a center layer of my consciousness. On the top, my powers of reason say: Nonsense; the center says: "God can help, and my attitude isn't so wrong," and at the same time: "Maintain your readiness for death or else you'll undergo spiritual crises." And deepest down is this: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." And unfortunately, this deepest layer doesn't always hold sway over the two higher ones.

So, now I've laid it all out for you, and that has already made things a little bit better. You know, my major sin is black ingratitude. Not only for my life as a whole—no, it's for the day-to-day things. What marvelous weeks I have behind me; I have been given so very much. And then I act as though it would be a misfortune for it to stop. I'm certainly not entitled to more! Instead of humbly accepting every new fortunate day, I tremble with worry about whether there will be another one. Why should I actually—from my standpoint—go on living even one more day: I have enjoyed more true happiness and, most of all, love than anyone else I know. Why should the happiness of these past weeks go on for even a single day more: Who else has enjoyed this?—As far as I can see, there is only one reason for me to need to go on living: in order to get my share of chastisements.

My love, I'm writing this to you in part so that you can pray for me to learn humility and gratitude and that God's grace is with me throughout the ups and downs of these days and I never lose sight of the firm foundation.—And that you pay careful attention to this with the little sons: Humility differs from modesty, and gratitude needs to be a permanent condition. By the way, I think Casparchen will have that.

When I look back upon these years, I find the image of the sower a fitting one. The seeds are scattered, and I'm certain that they will sprout someday, because no thought is lost in God. We cannot know whether an earthly connection will be apparent, whether our death will mean something. Maybe it will, among other things. It would be good, as that would accelerate everything. Of all the agricultural figures, the sower is the most fortunate, because he is full of hope, and no hail, no storm, no drought has yet come to curtail his hope; everything is possible. That is part of what makes sowing so wonderful.

My love, I, too, hope that we will bid each other farewell in full awareness of this life, and that we won't spoil this precious thing for ourselves by clinging to false hope: But we must always remain vigilant that the train doesn't leave the station, you might say, while we happen to be looking elsewhere. I'm not fully back in a parting frame of mind, thinking about your and your sons' future lives. Sometimes I focus on the great moment of death; I tremble at the thought that creaturely fear will overpower me then, that, you might say, I will miss out on this moment that is all about keeping the faith. How very weak we are! Only grace can help us keep the faith and see the Redeemer. Poelchau would probably chuckle at that and call it pure romanticizing; he would say that it all happens quite soberly and that one is so little in control of oneself and one's senses that nothing whatsoever can be of help. Well, I'll have to wait and see.

I'll quickly jot down a few hymnal verses I'm working on and learning: 208, 5 + 6 [and] 222, 7-12. And now I'll stop. I hope all of you have a lovely birthday celebration. I thank you, my love, because I'm now quite consoled. J.

FREYA TO HELMUTH, NOVEMBER 14, 1944

My dear love, it was such happiness, such sheer happiness, to see you. Oh, my Jäm, how beautiful it was. This beautiful time is sparkling within me. You looked so well, so good, so right, the way you have to look, just like my Jäm, just like always. I was familiar with everything and saw this with delight and saw that everything was well wrought and well appointed from within. It really was as beautiful as could be, my love, and I know that you were content as well. My Jäm, there is no question that we are as one and united, but it was so palpable that God is prepared to stand by us, now and in the future. He is truly with us. He has also helped us—helped me, in any case—to achieve this beautiful state. For while I was on my way to you, I suddenly became afraid of what my heart might do, until I recalled a beautiful passage I had read on Sunday here at the friends' house: 1 John 4:18. Do read it. From that moment on, I was no longer afraid, and then, after waiting so long at first, I got to be with you surprisingly quickly, and I felt nothing but happiness, even though I certainly bore in my heart the possibility that I would have to part with you in this world. My dear Jäm, my dear love, my beloved, my husband, we have to bear it in our hearts as well. I say it again and again. I saw that you do, but I do too. That's the way it should be, and you said, quite beautifully, that we mustn't hope, but believe. […]

My Jäm, my Jäm, how beautiful it was and how grateful I am. I'd often told myself that it wasn't the least bit necessary for us to see each other, but seeing you was actually such an exhilarating confirmation of everything we have learned and lived through and

Freya and Helmuth von Moltke

experienced. You looked exactly the way that I hold you securely in my heart, and everything was just the way I know and love from the bottom of my heart, so dearly, so tenderly. […] You wrote so much and so beautifully in your last letters to me. Go ahead and be quite chatty. That is my good fortune and reward. But our time together also proved that we are in complete accord in our very foundation and that this needn't be elaborated in words!

Poelchau has to leave in a moment, so I'll say farewell, my love. I love you very much and I'm full of gratitude and keenly aware of the words by which the two of us live. I am and will remain your P.

HELMUTH TO FREYA, NOVEMBER 14, 1944

My dear love, […] since I've always turned my struggles into a letter to my beloved, I'll go ahead and start one. Maybe it isn't time yet and the letter certainly won't get finished.

You can see that your proud rock has split apart once more and has again spent some time in hell. One thing is certain: if I were to spend several more months in this situation, I'd know hell better than I know Kreisau, for I've discovered that each time you penetrate hell more deeply than the time before. This time I was driven by my haughtiness, my lack of humility, and if Satan didn't appear to me last night, complete with tail and talons, it is only because the light in my cell stays on at night. Your beautiful, precious, magnificent, invigorating visit, this splendor, which seemed, once again, to sum up my entire life, had made a center layer within me keenly aware once more that such a conscious parting from life is simply not an act of reason, a mere formality, but a cut into the living flesh.…I have learned quite a bit in the past few weeks, recited psalms and songs and biblical passages, and as an old hand, so to speak, I always knew precisely what was needed next, and then there was Psalm 139, then the redemptive penitential prayer, and then the opening words of the sacrament of the Holy Communion, and now, I said to myself, I ought to be at peace, and I stood before the good Lord feeling so certain about my request: now I've done everything, now hand over that peace of yours. And this haughtiness, this very routine of fighting off the devil, was my pitfall; things kept going lower and lower, and the good Lord had no intention of doing as I wished, but instead had me tortured by the devil.…And in my haughtiness I was not able to find simplicity. I was so haughty, my love, that you might say I was proud of my suffering, and told myself: How few people in all of Germany are capable of such suffering. I was unable to retain my faith, so I returned to gratitude, and then the image of my beloved looking so lovely in the little gray foal came to me, and I fell asleep gratefully. But I soon woke up again, and the whole thing started all over. Suddenly I was alone with my fear of being hanged—something that is downright antiquated—and alone with the devil, who cast doubt on things that had seemed utterly fixed and absolute during the tribulations I faced in October.

FREYA TO HELMUTH, NOVEMBER 17, 1944

I'm so glad that you are taking a firm line, and that this line is a bold one. That makes it easier to keep your composure. My Jäm, I'm not ambitious on your behalf; the gravity of this day is hard for me to fathom. But I have faith that you will weather it well.

I'm asking God to give you strength and power and serenity, Moltke serenity. In the end, they can take nothing from you but your life! Whether you lose it at the age of thirty-eight or forty-six is of lesser importance than that you die a rich man: you know the whys and wherefores; you will die in the faith that you are dying after a brief and beautiful life. You will leave me stronger, you yourself were able to help get me this way, you know that life basically comes easily to me; and we both know that we will never lose each other because our love unites us forever. All hells and all torments, all tears and all sorrow can do nothing to change that: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." Do you find that so comforting and so beautiful too, or is it beautiful only for me?

Death has become such a steady companion during the entire year. And though at first I got awfully upset when "Emil" was summoned for a "walk around the camp," these violent killings have become such an everyday occurance that I've accepted the disappearance of individual men with sorrow, yet like a natural phenomenon.

HELMUTH TO FREYA, DECEMBER 28, 1944

For me, a strange year is coming to an end. I actually spent it among people who were being prepared for a violent death, and many of them have since suffered that death.... I've lived in a building with all these people, shared in their destiny, listened as they were taken away for interrogations or when they were carted off once and for all, spoke with almost all of them about their cases, and saw how they coped with everything. And here in Tegel about ten, I think, from my group have already been executed. Death has become such a steady companion during the entire year. And though at first I got awfully upset when "Emil" was summoned for a "walk around the camp," these violent killings have become such an everyday occurrence that I've accepted the disappearance of individual men with sorrow, yet like a natural phenomenon. And now, I tell myself, it's my turn. Can I accept it like a natural phenomenon in my own case as well? That's the frame of mind in which I came here; actually I only thought the detour via the People's Court was a nuisance, and if anyone had told me that death sentences could also be imposed at the request of the accused by means of an order of summary punishment and be carried out at once, I would have made that request in late September.

FREYA TO HELMUTH, JANUARY 6, 1945

...My love, you now have to focus everything on the path ahead of you, on the trial and on death. You mustn't think about me anymore, and you don't need to either, because my love will surround you tirelessly and irrepressibly. It will envelop and warm you when your enemies encircle you, it will go with you wherever you have to go. Never, never, never will it have an end. It has made my life rich and will keep my life rich. We will always find each other in our love, here or there. We were happy, we are happy, and we will stay happy. Together we are grateful, and together we are in good hands; we will stay together, and death cannot part us. I'm not complaining, because we have to be willing to lay our lives on the line. I approve of everything you did, from the bottom of my heart. I don't want to start making grand statements that would make it seem as though we're not as one, but since we are, this is also a part of it and it gives me courage and composure and pride. But this goes too far in pointing to your death: we ought to consider that outcome possible, but we don't have to believe in it firmly. First we need to fight, and for this fight you need my love. You have it, you have me...

HELMUTH TO FREYA, JANUARY 10, 1945

The following legal principles were decreed: "The People's Court holds the view that the failure to report defeatist statements like Moltke's, statements of this kind from a man of his reputation and position, is itself an act of treason."—"Anyone who discusses highly political questions with people who are in no way competent to engage in such discussions, especially those who do not at least actively belong to the Party, is already on the path to committing high treason."—"Anyone who presumes to pass any sort of judgment about a matter that is for the Führer to decide is on the path to committing high treason."—"Anyone who himself objects to acts of violence but prepares for the case that another, that is, the enemy, removes the government by force, is on the path to committing high treason, because he is then counting on the force of the enemy." And it went on and on in that

vein. This allows for only one conclusion: anyone not to Herr Freisler's liking is guilty of high treason.

Then came my objection that the police and the Abwehr had known about it, whereupon Freisler was seized with fit of rage number 1. Everything Delp had experienced up to that point was trifling by comparison. A hurricane was unleashed: He banged on the table, turned as red as his robe, and thundered: "I won't put up with that kind of talk; I won't even listen to something like that." And it went on and on in this way. Since I knew anyhow where this was heading, it was all the same to me: I gave him an icy stare, which he clearly didn't appreciate, and suddenly I couldn't help but smile. This then spread to the associate judges, sitting on Freisler's right, and to Schulze. You should have seen the look on Schulze's face. I think that if a person were to jump from the bridge over the crocodile pond at the zoo, the uproar couldn't be greater.

FREYA TO HELMUTH JAMES, JANUARY 13, 1945

…You, my love, have stood completely in the light. Thank God things were the way they ought to be with you, my dear, very blessed and very beautiful, but I didn't help you with that, even though I wanted to so badly. All this is very difficult to describe, because it isn't clear enough to me for me to be able to describe it. I just have the distinct feeling that I didn't do it right, that the peace during those three days [of the trial] wasn't peace from the dear Lord, no matter how hard I tried. I spent every day, from morning to night, trying to be there with Him and for you, and all the effort we went to with all our beautiful texts, with all our precious experiences, has come to naught. People didn't notice this on the outside, nor did I notice it myself; I don't even know if Harald [Poelchau], for example, has picked up on it. But at midday on Thursday, when, in spite of it all, I was right up against my physical limits—in every way—and realized that I couldn't manage to accompany you in my thoughts all the way to your death, yet wanted to so much, again and again, your letter arrived, and I saw that I'd done it wrong; it was quite clear that my letter couldn't touch your heart, or—how should I put this—missed the mark, because I myself was off the mark. Then I grew quite small and poor, shattered and wretched, unlike any other time in my life, so small, so miserable—yet there you were, alive—what good fortune! All the activity with Carl Viggo [von Moltke] overshadowed that feeling during the day, but I was well aware of my puniness. By 5 I was here again, shattered in body and soul, and as I was lying alone on my sofa here, feeling totally exhausted, I suddenly knew the right way to go about it, and now I think I know it through and through, even though I tremble at this certainty, as you did about yours back in November, and even though I don't yet dare bestir myself and am still walking carefully and as if in a new way. When I came out of my room this morning and Dorothee [Poelchau] saw me, she happily declared: Today you look altogether different again! That is true. How can I describe it. The difference between life before and life after death is truly not big, and even the step that seems so huge to us is small and so much more natural than we think. Now you're still living with me, and one day you will suddenly go on living—no longer with me, but only inside me.

HELMUTH TO FREYA, JANUARY 14, 1945

Good morning, my dear love. Are you feeling all better again? I quickly want to read your letter through once again. Yes, my love, I understood it all well. It is nothing new, but the certainty now rests more deeply by one more rotation of the screw. […]When I left the courtroom after the sentencing, I thought I'd be going straight to Plötzensee, and was very cheerful about it, and quite lighthearted. At the moment, I think it would be a matter of indifference—that word is not the right one, but you'll understand what I mean—to me if the door were to open and I were taken away. If I think about the anxiety I used to have, especially in November, when the telephone rang in the main office and Herr Claus was summoned, I can only be filled with gratitude as I try to fathom the grace that has been granted to me.

My love, the trial is over; I don't have to deal with my defense anymore, and the clemency initiatives will make demands on all of you and not on me, which means there is now room in my brain and in my time, as I can't engage with anything but the Bible and hymnal the whole day long. I may have only a short time to live, and in all human likelihood I won't survive until the end of this month, but I still want to live as though I'm to remain alive; anything else is nonsense. I'm not happy with the idea of "just reading"; instead, I'd like something to sink my teeth into, as it were. You really have to see—please—what you can get for me. I could, of course, continue with the Kant, but I'd rather like to begin learning Russian. I'm not gifted in languages, but maybe I can learn enough to be able at least to read it.

I guess you'll be going to slaughter your pig in the course of the week. Greet everyone for me… My love, we will keep on going from one day to the next until we are reunited, in this world or the one beyond.

HELMUTH CASPAR VON MOLTKE *is a retired lawyer and the son of Freya and Helmuth von Moltke. He lives in Quebec and Vermont.* *These letters were excerpted from* Last Letters: The Prison Correspondence 1944–45, *published this month by New York Review Books. Used by permission.*

ARTICLE

Can the Chinampas Survive?

Joseph Sorrentino

Pollution and urban sprawl threaten Mexico City's 'floating gardens.'

Marino Gonzalez Galicia stands at the edge of a small concrete loading dock, looking down at the dry, trash-filled canal. He starts speaking as I pass by, half to me, half to himself. "What a shame," he says, slowly shaking his head and waving his hand toward the canal. "This used to be so beautiful. Now it is filled with trash. We used to be able to travel more than a hundred meters on this canal."

We are in San Gregorio Atlapulco, one of the pueblos that make up Xochimilco, Mexico City's southernmost borough. The canal Marino is looking at is part of the *chinampería*, an ancient agricultural system that consists of manmade islands, called *chinampas*, built in the shallow lakes of the Basin of Mexico. There is archeological evidence that some of these *chinampas* were in use five thousand years ago. The ones that are still farmed here are between twelve hundred and two thousand years old and were most likely built by the Xochimilcas.

But the *chinampería*'s continued existence is threatened by pollution, the over-extraction of water, and Mexico City's chaotic, unchecked growth. Its loss would be devastating. In addition to providing food for the city and work for hundreds of people, it contains 2 percent of the world's—and 11 percent of Mexico's—biodiversity. Several species of migratory birds spend their winters here, and the area's vegetation absorbs huge amounts of carbon. Were the *chinampería* to disappear, it's estimated that Mexico City's temperature would rise by 4 degrees Fahrenheit.

Although they're often referred to as "floating gardens," the *chinampas* don't, in fact, float, but are firmly attached to the lake bottom. They're built by first sinking *ahuejote* (a species of willow) branches into the lake bottom. These are arranged to form enclosed rectangular spaces which are filled in with mud and vegetation. Canals between the *chinampas* allow for easy access by canoe. In the tourist areas of Xochimilco, colorful boats called *trajineras* take people on tours. "People know Xochimilco and the *trajineras*," says Paola Casas Gonzalez, one of a handful of women working in the *chinampería*, "but they don't know this pueblo or these *chinampas* that produce tons of food for the country. There are people living in the city who only know the *trajineras*."

The rest of San Gregorio is urban, but just a short walk from Belisario Domínguez, one of the pueblo's main streets, is the *chinampería*, where rows of produce and flowers stretch far in all directions. Here, the sound of a siren is the only sign that a city is close by.

The people who work here, called *chinamperos*, use farming techniques that are as old as the *chinampas* themselves. Martín Venagas Paéz confidently balances himself in his canoe, using a long pole with a net at the end to dredge up mud from the bottom of the canal, dumping it in the boat's bottom. The water's stench is almost overpowering. "This water used to be clean, clean, clean," he says. Not anymore. Now sewage is discharged into the canals, whose surface is littered with discarded plastic bottles and other trash. Venagas Paéz swirls his bare hands in the muck, picking out debris. Behind him a set of stairs leads from a house down to the canal. So much water has been extracted from this area that the bottom step now hangs several feet above the water's surface.

It takes Venagas Paéz well over an hour to carry buckets filled with mud up a small incline to where a shallow rectangle has been dug in the ground. It's strenuous work, but he rarely pauses to rest. He pours the mud into the rectangle and waits a day for it to dry. Then he cuts the dried mud into small squares called *chapines*, which will be used to plant seeds. Venagas Paéz blesses himself before starting this work. "I ask for a blessing that the work not be too hard today," he says. Venagas Paéz places a small cloth on the ground beside the *chapines*. Kneeling on it, he licks his fingertip so that he can pick up a seed from a small tin before placing it firmly in the *chapine*. The work is slow and methodical.

Once the plants are large enough, they're transferred to the *chinampa*. The land is so fertile here that there are four or five harvests a year. Juan Serralde's hands move assuredly as he harvests his lettuce, using a small knife to cut the plants at their base, then trimming off dead leaves before he places the lettuce in crates. Like most *chinamperos*, Juan and his brother Eric farm land that has been in their family for many years. "My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father all planted this land," Juan says. He's worked here his entire life and has seen many changes, few of them good. He indicates a canal a short distance away. "That is a dead canal," he says. "Thirty years ago, it was young. We could use canals to deliver our produce. Now, we have to carry it on our backs to the loading dock." His brother agrees that the *chinampa* is in trouble. "The *chinampa* is almost done," says Eric. "It is very tired. Thirty years ago, the water level was over my head, like two meters. Now, it's only about one meter. Thirty years ago, we could drink the

The *chinampería* is so fertile that *chinamperos* are able to plant and harvest vegetables four or five times a year. Here, Eric Serralde and his son, Eric Jr., harvest lettuce. "I want my son to study," said Eric, "to have a career so he does not have to work here." (All photos by the author.)

Chinamperos still use ancient farming techniques to grow food. Martín Venagas Paéz is pouring mud he's extracted from the bottom of a canal into a rectangular area he constructed. Once the mud has dried, he'll cut it into small squares called *chapines* into which seeds will be placed.

water in the *chinampa*, there were many fish. Now, there are no fish . . . nothing." He knows that the two biggest threats to the *chinampería* are the city's continued expansion and its extraction of water. When he talks about these things, he sounds more resigned than angry. "That," he says, pointing in the distance, "is the city. This is the pueblo. All the water is going to the city. If there is no water, how will we eat?"

The *chinampería* is shrinking. It originally covered between 22,000 and 24,000 acres. "Now there are only about 3,000 hectares [6,600 acres] remaining," says Miguel Ángel Elizalde, an attorney who has represented *chinamperos* for eighteen years. As Mexico City has expanded, its population has grown from about 5 million people in 1960 to almost 22 million today. This has led to an ever-increasing, unsustainable extraction of water from the areas that surround the city.

The drying out of the Basin of Mexico isn't a new problem; it has been going on for at least five hundred years. The Aztecs built Tenochtitlan, their capital, and what is now Mexico City, in the middle of Lake Texcoco in 1325. Their god, Huitzilopochtli, is said to have instructed them to build where they saw an eagle with a snake in its beak perched on a nopal (prickly-pear cactus). For better or worse, they found it in that lake. After conquering the local tribes, the Aztecs used their *chinampa* technique to build their city. Then came the Spanish Conquest. Once Hernán Cortés had conquered the Aztecs, he decided to build his capital in the same location as theirs. Ignoring centuries of water management, he drained the lake. Canals became streets; rivers became sewers. This pattern of draining the lake for more land to build on continued for hundreds of years. By the early twentieth century, Mexico City's water problems had become acute. In 1905, President Porfirio Díaz ordered the construction of a twenty-mile-long aqueduct that

Juan Cervantes Fernandez is collecting *lirio*, the common water hyacinth, which will be used to make compost.

would bring water from Xochimilco into the city's center. This had a devastating effect on the *chinampería* and surrounding areas, causing many springs that fed it to go dry. Water levels in the canals have dropped precipitously, and there are neighborhoods in the outlying areas of San Gregorio that have no running water. Their streets are lined with large barrels that are periodically (but not dependably) filled by water trucks. Large parts of the metropolis and its environs are sinking because the Mexico City Aquifer has been emptied. This likely exacerbated the devastating earthquake that shook the city in September 2017.

The *chinampas* on which Juan Cervantes Fernandez grows his crops have been in his family for four generations. He has worked there his whole life—six days a week, ten or twelve hours a day—earning only 20,000 pesos (a little over $1,000) a year. "It is only enough to survive," he says. "Only to eat, buy clothes and shoes." This is how it is for all *chinamperos*: long days, little money, not enough water. And still they choose to stay. "The *chinampas* are land we got from our ancestors and have used for thousands of years," says Casas Gonzalez. "We are dedicated to this land. My great-grandparents had this land. As parents, if our children do not know why they are here and where they come from, we will lose this. Our primary responsibility is to give this to the next generation, to give them information." But not many in the next generation want to work on the *chinampas.* "My son is twenty-two years old," says Daniél Lopez. "He does not want to work as a *chinampero*. He studies computer technology. I will pass the land to my daughters and if they do not want it, they will sell it."

In 1987, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated the *chinampería* as a World Heritage Site, calling it "the only reminder of traditional ground occupation in the lagoons of the Mexico City basin before the Spanish conquest." In 2004 the *chinampería* was also designated as a

The forces arrayed against the *chinampería* are just too overwhelming to be met only with local efforts. The *chinamperos* did not get themselves into this trouble, and they won't be able to get themselves out of it without help.

Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance). Mexican politicians have often promised to rescue the *chinampería*, but, as Elizalde notes, "There is a contradiction between what politicians say and what they do. Yes, the conversations are pretty but in reality, they do nothing."

There is another section of the *chinampería* that is far wilder than the one in San Gregorio. Leonardo Medina Jiménez agrees to take me there by canoe. As we get farther from Xochimilco's urban center, the houses thin out and eventually disappear. Egrets and other birds stand on the banks or fly overhead. My guide points to the water. "It is much cleaner here," he says. The air smells fresh. There's no trace of the stench that comes off the water in San Gregorio.

On his land, Medina Jimenez raises axolotls (also called "*ajolotes*," or Mexican salamanders). They used to be abundant in the canals but are now listed as critically endangered; it's estimated there are between 700 and 1,200 left in the wild. According to an Aztec legend, a god named Xolotl transformed himself into an axolotl to avoid being sacrificed. "Axolotls are part of our culture," says Medina Jimenez as he stands by several large barrels containing adults. Nearby is a barrel filled with egg sacs. He scoops up a handful to show me the larvae inside. Once they're grown, he'll place them in a large pool he's built. He will also release some of them into the canals, but he's cautious about this; he knows they face more than one threat there. As clean as the water may look and smell, there's already evidence of pollution, and it's likely to get worse soon. Then there are the non-native carp and tilapia that were introduced in the late 1990s; these feed on young axolotl and other native species in the canal.

Gisela Landázuri, a professor at the Metropolitan Autonomous University Xochimilco, has been studying the *chinampería* in San Gregorio for more than ten years. "Less land is being cultivated," she says. "Technically, it could be possible to save the *chinampería*, but there are too many factors involved: the water extraction, the state of the land, the water pollution, urbanization. You have to start with cleaning the water." Enrique Villanueva, the president of Patronato, a union of *chinamperos*, says that cleaning the water is at least theoretically possible. "First, we need to stop pumping waste into the canals. Then we need treatment plants. There are treatment plants that can clean the water. We just need the political will." But that may be hard to come by, given the expense of such a project.

"We are the last generation to know how beautiful Xochimilco was," says Sergio dos Santos, "that it was clean, that the environment was good." All the *chinamperos* I speak with doubt that the *chinampería* can survive. "Ten years, maybe twenty, there won't be any *chinampería*," Elizalde tells me. Eric Serralde says that if the government doesn't help, "in ten years, we will all die of hunger. We will not even be able to afford shoes." What seems certain is that if nothing is done to change the current trend, people like Serralde will not be able to earn a living working on the *chinampas*.

For now at least, the future of the *chinampería* depends mostly on a few local individuals and organizations. Casas Gonzalez is a member of Hortalizas la Chicuarota, an organic farming cooperative. Fernando Coqui uses a water-purification system he developed himself, one that filters out heavy metals and other pollutants. He also grows his produce organically because, he says, "Our house is not where we live. Our house is everything around us." A cooperative called Yolcan, which was co-founded by Lucio Usobiaga, has a community-supported agriculture program whose aim is not only to provide organic produce, but also to make urban residents familiar with the *chinampería*. The cooperatives are doing important work, but they won't be able to save the area without help from the government. The forces arrayed against the *chinampería* are just too overwhelming to be met only with local efforts. The *chinamperos* did not get themselves into this trouble, and they won't be able to get themselves out of it without help.

But that doesn't mean they're giving up. They still plant and harvest and hold the land dear. They'll hang on as long as they can. As Elizalde explains what the area means to the people who live and work there, he says, "*El terreno es parte de su carne, el agua es parte de su sangre*." The land is part of their flesh, the water is part of their blood.

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Very few women work in the *chinampería*. Angelina Gomez Muñoz, who's seventy-seven years old, still does on occasion. She's holding radishes she harvested. "Not everyone likes working in the *chinampa*, but I do."

THE EFT

Christian Wiman

Not nothingness but too many meanings
as of a creature under siege.
First the basement floods the first day of the year
and instead of making love we make rage.
Then the kids lava down into the living room,
the dog vomits up something from the Pleistocene,
and in the brick wind the whole house tilts and lists like . . .
like an old house.
"Any problem that can be solved with money
is not a problem," bubbles up from somewhere,
as if that weren't our honeymoon—eight days in a rainforest,
the howling darks and the vehement greens—floating in the murk,
as if that weren't—in a Connecticut suburb, in winter—a snake
that just breached and vanished in the corner,
and as if this wisdom weren't merely the echo of an uncle
whose only grace was goats, Liza and Little Bean,
Blue-Blue and Getchagone, all gone
to tuft and viscera, to an old man's only ever tears,
at the teeth of wild dogs.
Look at them,
our girls, bent over their project now
and impervious to everything. And look at you,
bent over the sump pump's guts
in your brand-new and barely-tethered Christmas robe,
smoothing sockets, exquisiting screws and lug nuts
like a lissome clockmaker.
I go down
into the flood again to find—among the floating bows
and ornaments, the party plates and drowned dolls—a Jesus lizard
leisurely eating thirteen three-inch caterpillars
from the side of a cocobolo tree.
Remember? Its placid appetency, its face full of hills,
the way time warped and distended like heat
as it looked right through the camera's lens,
philosophically chomping each green glob.
"If you will accept it, if you will drink the cup to the bottom—
you will find it nourishing: but try to do anything else with it
and it scalds." Remember? *The Great Divorce*.
Though our favorites were the dwarf and the tragedian,
who are one entity, actually, the latter the actor
of the former's pain, or after-image of pain, rather,
the pleasure pain becomes when it becomes a thing to wield,
a means of extracting meaning from someone else's heart
when your own has run dry.

"Let's try it now,"
you say, clomping downstairs in bathrobe and rubber boots,
and it goes, of course it does, the motor and the water,
the anger and the hours, until we stand
in a dispensation we had not known we desired,
the purged clutter and the pristine concrete,
as if catastrophe were but occasion for a further order,
which can include, apparently, even a snake,
which even as we glimpse it again
grows legs, swivels its suddenly unsnakelike head
and is a newt—or an eft, rather—that trundles off
("Scoot, newt! Scoot, newt!" the girls encourage)
behind the freezer.
"Hell is a state of mind—
ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind,
left to itself, every shutting up of the creature
within the dungeon of its own mind—is, in the end, Hell.
But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself.
All that is fully real is Heavenly."
Too tired to make love,
we make love when the girls have gone to sleep,
and go to sleep holding each other like buoys
as the waters drip and descend
from every slope and bend in the waterlogged land
of Connecticut, and the pump kicks on like a sound
so inside it's cellular, "for all that can be shaken will be shaken
and only the unshakeable remains."

CHRISTIAN WIMAN *recently edited* Joy: 100 Poems.
He teaches at Yale Divinity School.

ARTICLE

Boot Camp for Nuns

Sr. Helen Prejean

The harsh disciplines and surprising tenderness of a 1950s novitiate

At the close of the evening meal I'm performing what our Holy Rule calls a "practice of humility." Along with a few other Sisters I'm kneeling at Mother Anthelma's table to ask for a penance. Pinned to my veil is a placard that states my failing: "Most uncharitable," but I have to announce my fault out loud, too: "Mother, please give me a penance for having mean and unloving thoughts about another Sister." The idea behind the practice is that by declaring our faults publicly, we might be stirred to strive more earnestly to overcome them.

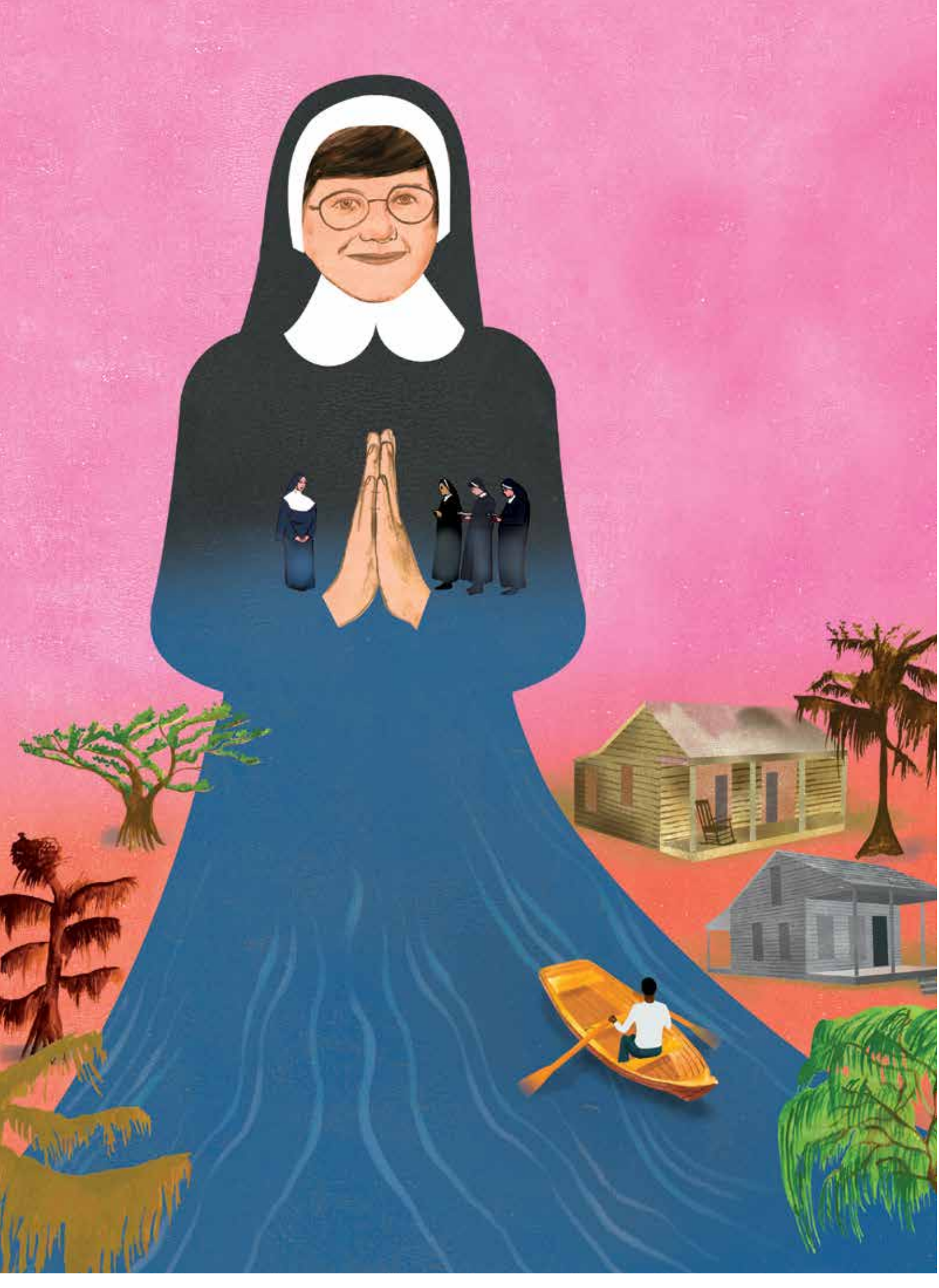
When you're going to do a practice of humility, you go to a drawer in the dining room and select your failing from a wide selection of placards: "Unrecollected," "Proud," "Gossip," "Selfish"…You pin it on and wear it during the meal. In among the placards there is also a string with a piece of broken dish tied to it. That is worn around the neck for failing in the vow of poverty by breaking something.

Among us novices, when we know a fellow novice's failing in poverty ahead of time—like the time Sister Eugene broke a toilet seat—we're over the top in anticipation about how she will phrase her failing to Mother. If she says "toilet" anything, the solemnity of the practice will be extinguished by hoots of laughter emanating from the novitiate side of the dining room. It doesn't take much to set us off. With no TV or radio, we're starved blind for entertainment. One time our table of six giggled through the entire meal, losing it every time we glanced toward Sister Anne Meridier, who'd pinned the placard "Unrecollected" upside down on her pious little head. It doesn't help matters that meals are supposed to be eaten in solemn silence.

I have to say that the main reason I'm wearing this "Most uncharitable" placard is because of Sister Roseanne (not her real name). She has one of those bossy, pushy personalities, and in the close, constricted life of the novitiate…well, that can drive you nuts. Sister Roseanne had rushed to be the first one to arrive at the novitiate on entrance day, knowing that the "band" (class entering together) would be referred to as "Sister Roseanne's Band." It burned me up that she did that, which proved to be but a small harbinger of her dominating character. And now that everything in the novitiate is recoded into religious ideals, she's doing her level best to be Number One Novice—even in holiness.

Well, to be truthful, competition gets me going, so at first sound of the 5:00 a.m. bell (*the bell is the voice of God*) the two of us throw on all ten pieces of the holy habit—kissing dress, veil, and rosary as we go—and race lickety-split to be first in the chapel for morning prayers. All it took to launch the race was a casual remark of our novice mistress that a *really fervent* novice would not

Illustration by Ellen Weinstein



only be on time for prayers but would hasten to the chapel early so she could have a few extra minutes with our blessed Lord. That was it. The race was on.

Another thing that galls me about Roseanne is that during meditation—she sits *right behind me* in chapel—she's always fiddling and rustling. She can't keep her hands still, cleaning one fingernail with another, *click, click, click*, and sighing deeply, one sigh after another. They reverberate seismically through the chapel—where, with everyone quietly meditating, you can hear your own breathing. So imagine *click, click, sigh* behind you constantly when you're trying very, very hard to quiet your soul and enter into the depths of mystical prayer with God.

At our weekly conference, our novice mistress, Mother Noemi, talks to us about putting up with one another's faults and foibles. Now, there's a new nun word, *foible*, part of a whole new lexicon I'm learning, like *edifying* (good example), and *modesty of the eyes* (eyes lowered to avoid distractions), and *religious decorum*, which covers a multitude of actions: speech (demure, never raucous), walking (never swinging arms), singing (like the angels with clear notes and blending voices), politeness (answering "Yes, Mother," "Yes, Sister"; avoiding nicknames), and even blowing your nose in nunly fashion (with men's large white handkerchiefs).

And now *foible*, a quaint little word if ever there was one. I've seen it written but never heard it used by real people in real conversations. Well, ol' Click may well be the Foible Queen of the World. As far as I know, I don't have too many foibles, but you can never be sure. As Mother says, self-knowledge is hard to come by; we all have blind spots because of pride, which we're born with as Daughters of Eve, and pride blinds, while humility opens the eyes of the soul.

Lord knows I need humility just to handle Click. I'm praying for a divine infusion of grace to overcome all the mean-spirited things I hope happen to Roseanne, the most benign of which is that Mother will move her place in chapel and foist her onto other poor souls. And it is such thoughts that now bring me to my knees at the feet of Mother Anthelma.

I'm nineteen years old, the year is 1958, and I've already made it through the first nine months of probation (called "postulancy") and am now a first-year novice at St. Joseph Novitiate in New Orleans. More than anything in the world I want to be a holy nun in love with God. I want to be a saint. And, according to Catholic teaching, by joining the religious life I'm choosing the most direct route to sainthood. By my vows I will become a spouse of Jesus Christ.

Or, rather, as I am learning, I *am chosen* by Jesus because you can't simply declare yourself chosen and become a nun just like that, because that might be self-will, not God's will. Jesus said, "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you," so you have to be invited and you have to pray long and hard, listening to your deep-down soul to hear the call. Then you have to ask admittance to the community, and merely because you're asking doesn't mean they'll accept you, and I prayed and prayed and wrote and rewrote my application to Mother Mary Anthelma, the superior, asking to be admitted to the novitiate. I also had to have my parish priest, Father Marionneaux, write to Mother Anthelma to assure the community that I was a Catholic in good standing. The novitiate, where I am now, is the training ground, the place where you and the community see if there's a "fit."

In senior religion class at St. Joseph's Academy, where I went to high school, Father William Borders taught us that religious life, or the Life of Perfection, is the "highest" state of life for a Christian, higher than marriage and the single life. That's because the other states of life must be lived in the *world*, which is full of traps, seductions, and temptations—all lures of Satan, who is hell-bent, you better believe it, on separating souls from God.

I still have a pocket-sized New Testament given to me by my sister, Mary Ann, on my entrance day into the community. In it she inscribed:

> To my favorite sister, Helen [I'm her only sister, her little joke],
>
> I hope that you shall be very happy. You are one of God's children who has been chosen to be in His special family. I'm very proud to tell people that I have a sister in the convent praying for me. I will need your prayers, Helen, for the way of life I have chosen is a worldly one, and I'll have many obstacles in my way. I shall remember you always in my prayers. May you love God always and stay close to Him, as you are now.
>
> All my love,
> Mary

The *highest* state of life? A life of seeking *perfection*? Bride of Christ? I always did have high ambitions. When I was in eighth grade I announced to Sister Mark and my classmates that I intended to

The Holy Rule prescribes that you are supposed to lie in bed in nunly fashion: legs straight, not bent; arms by sides; hands holding a rosary or crucifix: the reverent posture you'd assume if Jesus suddenly appeared to you.

become either the Pope or president of the United States. A joke, of course, thrown out with a thirteen-year-old's flippancy, and everyone laughed, but even then I harbored within my young breast a desire for greatness. After all, as president of our class had I not already exhibited solid, if not brilliant, leadership? When Maxine, our dearly loved classmate, was forced to leave us because her father was transferred away from Louisiana to the other end of the world—somewhere way up north like Detroit—had I not given a stirring speech of farewell, which moved many to tears, including Maxine herself (and almost me myself, had I not hung strenuously onto my self-control)? I reached this pinnacle of emotion in my speech simply by pointing out that Maxine's passage from us was truly a form of death, for we, remaining in Baton Rouge, would probably never see her alive again this side of the grave. My speech stunned my classmates. It was my first intimation of the power of words.

Who knows what fame as an orator I might have achieved in the "world"?

But I'm chucking it all to embrace the hidden, prayerful life of a nun. I'm only a teenager, but I know what I want. I want to withdraw from the "world" and its temptations so I can contemplate and achieve union with God. Jesus had told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," and it is this spiritual kingdom I'm after. So, whatever happens in the "world" is of no concern to me, except I know to pray ceaselessly for sinners, especially for the conversion of atheistic, Communist Russia. I am well aware that, hands down, atheistic Communism is the single greatest threat to Catholics, who alone possess the one true faith, and to the United States of America, the unparalleled leader of the Free World.

During these two-and-a-half years of training I will not listen to or read the news except for really big Catholic news like the election of a new pope. So I know nothing about young black men such as Emmett Till in Mississippi, beaten to death around this time for supposedly flirting with a white woman, nor do I know that in my own state of Louisiana a portable electric chair is making its way to New Orleans and other cities to kill criminals—overwhelmingly black men or boys summarily convicted of raping or murdering whites.

What do I know (or care) about that? For sixteen centuries the Catholic Church has unerringly taught (all Church teachings are free of human error, of course) that the state has the

Sr. Helen Prejean speaks during a demonstration against the death penalty held outside the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in Anaheim, California, February 27.

CNS PHOTO / J. D. LONG-GARÍA, THE TIDINGS

right—indeed, the duty—to keep society safe by imposing the death penalty on violent criminals. It's clearly a question of self-defense for society, just as countries in war have a right to self-defense. Besides, if a criminal is truly remorseful and accepts death as just and rightful punishment for sin—"The last will be first," Jesus said—that criminal can win a place in heaven along with St. Peter and the Blessed Mother and all the saints. Isn't gaining heaven the purpose of everyone's earthly existence?

As for poverty and injustice, when you think of it, haven't there always been poor people in the world? Isn't that simply the way the world is? That's what we were taught. Kids in India starve and we in the United States have abundance. But if poor people accept their sufferings as God's will, they can achieve an awful lot of eternal merit and win the heavenly crown, just like criminals who repent. Didn't Jesus say to the Good Thief who died beside him on the cross, "This day you shall be with me in Paradise"? Besides, Jesus didn't seem to think poverty was all that terrible. He even seemed to think poverty offered spiritual advantages. "Blessed are you who are poor," he told the crowd. Maybe it was because all peasants in Galilee were poor or like himself, a craftsman, barely a notch above.

In high school, I once met some poor black families in the countryside outside of Baton Rouge when our Catholic Students Mission Crusade took them Thanksgiving baskets. Very nice baskets, packed with a lot of Christian charity: turkey, yams, corn, milk, bread—even cranberry sauce, to top off the festive meal. Three of us in a Jeep had to drive off the road and across a field to reach some shacks—tiny wooden frames with tin roofs and a front porch—and a whole bunch of kids pouring out the front door as we drove up. I asked the mama how many kids she had, so that we could hand out candy.

"Six," she says, counting heads.

Then, out of the door comes another kid.

"Make it seven," she says.

I loved it—told the story for months to my white friends. From my culturally superior perch I thought I had black folks all figured out. *I mean, what do you expect, with all these women having litters of kids by different fathers and lending them out to kin to raise? I guess it is close to impossible to keep track.* At our congregation's health clinic in New Roads, a rural town about thirty miles out of Baton Rouge, a story circulated about Mandy, a black patient, who every year came to the clinic to have her baby. As she was leaving with number four, one of our Sisters said, "Bye, Mandy, see you next year."

"No, you ain't neither," said Mandy. "We done found out what's causin' all dis."

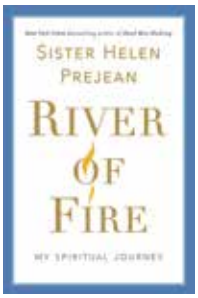
That's black folks for you, we thought. Not a care in the world. Like the kids, squealing with delight, helping us carry the Thanksgiving goodies onto the porch. It was November and some of the kids were barefoot, and a few had runny noses, but there they all were, smiling and giggling and happy as larks that these white ladies were delivering candy and good eats for everybody.

I used to think that poor people are happier than most of us. Their minds aren't screwed up with conflicted philosophical notions about the meaning of life. They just live. No worries about house payments or even the expense of having babies. They just collect monthly welfare checks from the government. It's been that way forever in Louisiana, which had a huge slave population to work in the cotton and sugarcane fields, and black people still compose a hefty percentage of the state's population. I'm not prejudiced, I'd tell myself, I'm Christian. I love all people, whatever their skin color. And I get along with "Negroes" as well as I do with anybody. I was always the one in our family who hung out in the kitchen the most, chewing the fat with the servants.

Here at the motherhouse all the servants are black—Bernice with Sister Bernard in the laundry, Lily Mae with Sister Joseph Claire in the kitchen, and Monroe with Sister Mercedes in the yard. We novices work right alongside them, cutting up vegetables and peeling potatoes or folding sheets and towels in the laundry. When I'm a professed Sister I'm looking forward to being on the "home missions" team in summer, teaching black kids their catechism in Morganza, another rural Louisiana town. After all, they're God's children, too. And when God looks at souls, He doesn't see black or white. He only sees who's in *sanctifying grace* and who isn't.

One day, as the river of consciousness deepens, I will radically change my way of thinking about all of this. But not until I burst out of my cocoon of privilege. It's going to take a while.

Later I'll also realize just how much my faith is riddled with fear. So much fear that I'm even afraid of Jesus. Yes, I know he is my Savior, but he also has this no-nonsense, tough-judge side. In the gospels he makes no bones about the Last Judgment, that the saved—the sheep—will come with him into heaven, while the goats are separated out and sent to hell. It's clearly there in the Gospel of St. Matthew, and I can just picture myself jock-



RIVER OF FIRE
My Spiritual Journey

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN
Random House
$27 | 320 pp.

eying around in the final push, trying to get away from the goats and in tight with the sheep but knowing there's no hiding, no blending in with the crowd when it comes to this final, very particular, judgment from which no human is exempt. As I'm at last approaching Jesus, getting close, I can hear him and see him point to this one and that one: *You! Over here with the sheep, welcome into heaven.* But terrifyingly, also: *You, goat! Not you! Away from me into eternal hellfire*, and I can picture the poor goat bleating pitifully, *Bahhh, bahhh, I wanna be with the sheep*, but off he goes, prodded and shoved with the other goats into eternal perdition. Which would I be? Sheep? Goat? All eternity, hanging in the balance, and I'm praying like mad, "Please, Jesus, please, let me be with the sheep."

A vivid imagination can be a curse.

The morality I know I learned straight from the *Baltimore Catechism*, and there I learned that all it takes to end up in hell with the goats is one mortal sin. One single, solitary mortal sin. That's it, and you burn forever. Which drives me to pray to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who is finally and surely the only fail-safe access to God's mercy because she has true compassion, as only a mother has. For me, finally, Mary, Our Lady of Mercy, is the only one I can really count on.

But enough for now about distorted ideas of a cruel God. Life in the novitiate is bumping along with its ups and downs when a huge, dark influenza cloud hits us, felling almost all but a few of the novices. It flattens me for nine days. Mother Noemi tells us stories of saints who used the occasion of illness to offer up their sufferings for the conversion of sinners. Mother is a stickler for religious decorum even when you're sick as a dog.

The Holy Rule prescribes that you are supposed to lie in bed in nunly fashion: legs straight, not bent; arms by sides; hands holding a rosary or crucifix—the reverent posture you'd assume if Jesus suddenly appeared to you. The mind game I always play with that scenario is that if here and now Jesus deigned to appear to me, I'd be so shocked out of my mind that whatever posture I was in, irreverent or not, would get frozen. Thus, the logic went, I could lie in bed any way I wanted to. I figure if Jesus were to go out of his way to appear to me, would he care one divine whit what posture he found me in? Honestly.

But here is the bad thing about being sick in the novitiate, the thing that speedily dissipates whatever virtue I possess: you are always under surveillance. Always. And without fail every time Mother visits the dormitory, she singles me out and corrects me for my posture in bed. She finds it slovenly, irreverent; she says I am "lying in bed like a cowboy." (A cowboy?) She always seems to pick on me, and normally (when I can *breathe*) I can take my share, but I am sick and *very*, *very* tired of trying to pray and be holy all the time.

My saintly sentiments have long ago flown the coop, and all I can think about is Mama and how loving and attentive she was when we were sick, how she'd be fixing us special things to drink and eat, custards and ice cream or ice chips to ease our sore throats. But here, supposedly the dwelling place of God's chosen ones—here it is hell warmed over. Nine days and nights . . . hence, the state of my weakened and brittle soul when Mama and Daddy come on visiting Sunday, and Mother decides that despite a low-grade fever, I am well enough to visit.

I handle the visit okay. I don't cry in front of my parents. (Good nuns don't cry.) But after Mama and Daddy leave and after I have silently wept my way through the psalms of evening prayer (which are studded with tear-jerk phrases such as "Forget your father and your father's house"), I wait for Mother in the darkened room that she always passes on her way back to the novitiate from the chapel. And when I call out to her and she steps into the room, the nine days and nights of raw throat and boredom and fever and reprimands for un-nunly posture all erupt. It isn't so much anger—I haven't garnered enough selfhood yet to muster real anger toward a superior (the voice of God for me); it is more sheer vulnerability and confusion: *Why are you always fussing at me? I'm sick. I feel terrible. Aren't you supposed to be tender toward the sick? We're stuck in this sick room all day and don't even have a deck of cards or Scrabble or any kind of game to play. All we're supposed to do is pray, pray, pray!* I cry full force and don't notice or care how loud I am. I think I ended with: *And you call yourself a Mother?!*

I don't remember Mother's exact response but I got its import—her utter sincerity in her role to train us (as she had been trained) to be "strong women of faith." And the very next day Mother arrives at our sick room with chess and checkers, decks of cards, and, of all things—ice cream. Her conversion toward tenderness is so immediate that I feel embarrassed, humbled even, that I had let her have it with both barrels. But once we are all well again, forget the tenderness, it is back to business as usual: Boot Camp for Brides of Jesus.

SR. HELEN PREJEAN, *a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph in New Orleans, is a human-rights leader known around the world for her advocacy to end the death penalty. This article is excerpted from* River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey, *published by Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC.*

How should democracies deal with irreconcilable differences?

Hope Against Hype

James T. Kloppenberg

HEALTHY CONFLICT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SOCIETY
From Enemy to Adversary

JASON A. SPRINGS
Cambridge University Press,
$99.99, 368 pp.

Once upon a time, Americans prided ourselves on our tolerance of difference. According to the story we told ourselves, we forged "one" people out of "many." *E pluribus unum*. Unlike European nations with traditions of a single established religion, the United States separated church and state at the outset. As a result, we (eventually) became more willing to welcome different religious groups and tolerate a wider range of religions. Unlike European nations that rooted citizenship in blood or soil, we (eventually) became more willing to accept birthright citizenship, which means that anyone born in the United States is a citizen.

In recent years, however, that familiar story has come under sustained, even violent pressure. Now it is in danger of unraveling. Since the mid-1990s, Evangelical Christians and many conservative Catholics have mobilized over a variety of issues, including opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. Some have insisted vociferously that the United States was founded to be a "Christian nation." They aim to restore school prayer, and they want their version of biology and American history taught in schools. Many white Americans, and many men, have begun to challenge the wisdom of allowing nonwhites and women equal access to the privileges they once enjoyed exclusively. Opposition to affirmative action and support for forms of white nationalism, patriarchalism, and immigration restriction have become increasingly popular. These conflicts simmered after the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965), the Immigration and Naturalization Act (1965), and *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) opened the door for desegregation, increased immigration, and interracial marriage. Since the decisions in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) legalized abortion and same-sex marriage, the conflicts have threatened to boil over.

President Donald Trump has become the symbol of the latest battles in these culture wars. He first rose to national prominence by spearheading the stupefying "birtherism" movement, yet another reminder of the continuing vitality of American racism. On the basis of exactly no evidence, and in spite of the readily available birth certificate confirming that Obama was born in Honolulu's Kapiolani Maternity and Gynecological Hospital on August 4, 1961, Trump denied that the president was born in the United States. Evidently invigorated by the realization that bluster now provides a serviceable substitute for proof, candidate Trump launched an unlikely campaign for president premised on exaggerated claims and outright lies. He insisted that illegal immigration from Mexico constituted a crisis, even though it was declining. He insisted that The Wall was the solution, even though the stretches of the border with a wall have proven no less permeable than those without one. He branded Mexican immigrants murderers and rapists, even though the percentage of crimes committed by illegal immigrants is lower than that of native-born citizens. He conjured up an epidemic of late-term abortions, a problem to be solved by

new legislation and new judges, even though, again, there was no evidence to sustain the claim. He trumpeted a familiar Republican charge that millions of people were voting illegally in U.S. elections, even though neither he nor anyone else could find examples.

Although it was well known that Trump's own businesses had employed illegal immigrants and that he had supported abortion rights for decades, his hypocrisy seemed not to matter to the adoring crowds who flocked to his rallies to chant "build the wall" and "lock her up." Those two vacuous mantras not only expressed his supporters' fury but they also, and conveniently, sidestepped substantive issues of domestic and foreign policy about which Trump knew little and appeared to care less. His election to the presidency in 2016 was made possible by the mobilization of traditional Republican voters and the fact that many of those who had twice voted for Obama chose not to vote at all. Through his speeches and his tweets denigrating nonwhites, women, the press, and the ominous "elites" he held responsible for the nation's ills, Trump signaled to many culturally and politically conservative Americans, both during the campaign and since, that they now had a friend in the White House. Neither Trump's proud vulgarity, his notorious record as a swindler, his boasts that he had cheated on all three of his wives, nor his obvious disregard for the longstanding norms of political behavior mattered as much to those who voted for him as his empty promise to "make America great again." Somehow.

A flurry of books has appeared since the 2016 election to demonstrate what the campaign had already made self-evident: the United States is more divided than ever. First off the mark were E. J. Dionne Jr., Norman J. Ornstein, and Thomas E. Mann. Their *One Nation After Trump* captured the outrage of many liberals and moderate conservatives in its subtitle, *A Guide for the Perplexed, the Disillusioned, the Desperate, and the Not-Yet Deported* (2017). Greg Sargent of the *Washington Post* followed fast with *An Uncivil War: Taking Back Our Democracy in an Age of Trumpian Disinformation and Thunderdome Politics* (2018), which detailed the strategies by which Republicans seized control of state legislatures, gerrymandered Congressional voting districts, and deployed various counter-majoritarian strategies that enabled them to seize control even when they lost the popular vote—as George W. Bush did in 2000 and Trump did in 2016. Michael Tomasky,

CNS PHOTO / TYLER ORSBURN

editor of the journal *Democracy*, contributed *If You Can Keep It: How the Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved* (2019), which provides a wealth of evidence to explain the puzzling decline of comity and the rise, since the mid-1990s, of unprecedentedly bitter partisan rancor—unprecedented even in a nation in which partisan rancor has been the rule rather than the exception. That list could be expanded considerably, especially if one were to add the dozens of books that have poured from the presses of conservative publishers ever since the election of Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996 and of Obama in 2008 and 2012.

In short, it is well established that Americans are more divided over political and cultural issues today than they have been since the 1850s, the decade that culminated in the Civil War. Those of us unwilling to consider even the possibility that we might be replaying that script were taken aback when Michael Cohen, Trump's former attorney turned chief accuser, predicted before the Congressional oversight committee on February 27, 2019, that the president would never accede to a peaceful transition of power were he to lose the 2020 election. Coming near the end of an eight-hour-long denunciation of his former boss as a racist, misogynist, lying conman who behaves more like a Mafia boss than a corporate executive, let alone President of the United States, that observation nevertheless provoked shudders. Have we, at long last, reached the point at which our divisions are so deep that one of the most crucial of all qualities in a democracy, the respect for the results of an election, can no longer be considered sacrosanct?

In the midst of all this chaos, with charges and countercharges flying furiously every day of every week, Jason A. Springs gives us a scholarly study of potentially constructive conflict. Many of us wring our hands over the findings of the Mueller report and tempers on all sides continue to rise as we await the next indictment, revelation, or outrage, Springs proposes that we reevaluate our longing for the resolution of our problems and consider instead the positive role that persistent conflict can play in democracy. *Healthy Conflict in Contemporary American Society* is a serious, provocative analysis of the roots of our divisions and an ambitious proposal for how such conflicts might productively be reframed. Skillfully marshaling materials from the academic disciplines of religion, moral philosophy, and studies of peace and reconciliation, Springs contends, in the words of his subtitle, that we should reconceptualize our "enemy" as our "adversary." Is his imaginative, intriguing analysis worth wrestling with? Yes. Does he make good on his promise to show how our democracy can move forward through "healthy conflict"? I'm not so sure.

Springs begins with the tradition of American pragmatism. Why does democracy work, when it does work? John Dewey argued, according to Springs, that "democracy can be a form of government only because it is more basically a mode of spiritual and moral association among particular persons and groups." If democracy is "first a tradition of mutual accountability, nondomination, and shared deliberation through discursive exchange," problems arise when individuals or members of particular groups are understood to exist outside what Richard Rorty called "the circle of the we." When some people, whether because of their race or ethnicity, their religion, or their sexual orientation, are considered unworthy of the respect accorded those within the community, what is to be done? How can we expand the "circle of the we" to include those deemed unworthy of the mutual accountability that democratic citizens owe each other?

Springs first considers two familiar examples from U.S. history: the antebellum contest over slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Although racism was widespread among white Americans, antislavery sentiment eventually spread to the point that Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments extended the rights of citizens to former slaves. Even though the coming of Jim Crow restored white supremacy for almost a century, the equal rights campaigns of the 1950s and '60s again raised the crucial question: Were African Americans at last to be included in the "circle of the we"? How did deeply ingrained racial attitudes change sufficiently in both cases? Generations of historians have lavished attention on both questions, but rather than drawing on that literature, Springs turns instead to different discourses in philosophy and literary studies.

Legend has it that Lincoln greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe as the "little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." Ever since the Civil War, commentators have emphasized the role of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in changing the attitudes of northern whites. Rorty argued that imaginative literature contributes more powerfully to changing hearts and minds than arguments from moral philosophy. Whereas universal, abstract principles fail to shake long-cherished cultural predilections, fiction can evoke affective responses strong enough to uproot even the most deeply ingrained prejudices. The literary critic Elaine Scarry took issue with that assessment. Drawing on a tradition that extends back to Aristotle, she argued instead that reading novels or attending plays merely invites us to see ourselves in another person's shoes. Such an experience neither contributes to a lasting change in individual attitudes nor challenges social norms. The danger, in Springs's words, is that literature and art encourage only "therapeutic voyeurism," which might inspire a momentary emotional response but leaves intact whatever form of social injustice the novelist or playwright might have identified. If Rorty occasionally suggested that his "Enlightenment utopia" would be secure if only cruelty could give way to "niceness," he failed to reckon with the prevailing norms of a culture in which "greed is good." So pervasive is the twenty-first-century American orientation toward self-interest, Springs argues, that most individuals

see no reason to worry about any other people, let alone other people who have long been considered unworthy of equal treatment. Even John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* has been lionized for decades because he made a convincing case for greater equality, envisioned individuals making judgments in "the original position" based entirely on calculations of their own self-interest. Only more potent weapons than those from literature or philosophy will level the walls of prejudice.

Beyond eliciting emotional responses, Springs argues that art and literature can contribute to social change only if they reveal the structural sources of injustice or violence and point toward the steps necessary to effect lasting change. He invokes William James's classic *Principles of Psychology* to establish that changing habits requires conscious attention, deliberate choices, and recurring behavior. Combining "the sentimental encounter of moral imagination with the rigors of self-reflexive, habit-cultivating action" is hard work for an individual, even harder work for a culture. Where can we find the power we need to change our collective habits? Turning to the tradition of religious prophecy, Springs examines in detail the increasingly strident critiques issued in recent years by Cornel West, a self-styled radical Christian prophet. Like the political theorist Sheldon Wolin, West has argued that existing American democracy serves only to anesthetize the public and inhibit direct political engagement. To celebrate small-scale, spontaneous uprisings such as Occupy as more attractive alternatives to the uselessness of conventional politics, Springs concedes, runs the risk of romanticizing what can easily become directionless, routinized, and ineffective. No-holds-barred critiques of political leaders, such as West's notorious characterizations of Barack Obama as a "house slave"—when what was needed was the unbowed defiance of the "field slave"—risks descending from responsible criticism toward "unhinged hatred." It also shows little understanding of how politics actually works.

After showing the dangers courted by prophets who indulge their anger but fail to combine it with love and self-reflection, Springs discusses the ideas of an unlikely trio: Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor, and Rorty's former student and colleague Robert Brandom, now the best-known American pragmatist philosopher. Despite Foucault's decades-long campaign to expose the ways in which the disciplinary regimes of modernity structure individuals' autonomy, at the end of his life he cleared out a space for limited "self-creation" within the constraints he had identified. A better alternative, Springs argues, can be found by combining Brandom's concept of "expressive freedom" with Charles Taylor's communitarian critique of the hyper-individualism of Foucault's final writings. Brandom offers as the normative standard whether a culture enables all individuals to innovate, i.e., to transform existing vocabularies through their creative action. To escape Rorty's telling critique of Brandom's "pseudo-aristocratic condescension and ivory-tower aestheticism," Springs invokes (as Taylor and Brandom do) the venerable Hegelian idea of "mutual recognition." Only within communities, Springs insists, can freedom operate as anything more than self-indulgence.

In Part Two of *Healthy Conflict*, Springs moves beyond the analysis of competing philosophical ideas to the heart of his argument: How can we convert our contemporaries to an ideal of nondomination? How do we eradicate our culture's willingness to condone and perpetuate injustice and violence? His answer takes him beyond the familiar arguments advanced by pluralists for decades. Thinkers ranging from Anglo-American liberals such as Rawls to Hegelians such as Dewey, Taylor, and Jürgen Habermas have offered variations on a common theme, which Springs labels "accommodationist." From this perspective, the members of diverse cultures can make peace with each other if everybody accepts the norm of an open, tolerant, pluralist society, a society that makes room for—accommodates—many different ideas and forms of belief and behavior. In the formula preferred by liberals ever since John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, we must tolerate everything except that which is intolerant. Because there are no eternal truths, we should be willing to submit all of our beliefs to scrutiny and defend them, with reasons, before the court of public opinion.

The problem with liberal pluralism, as Springs points out, is that it is premised on the assumption that if everyone accepts its conditions, as they should, then all disagreements are, in principle at least, capable of resolution. Once we sit down, face to face, and talk through any controversy, we will find our way toward reconciliation, or at the very least an arrangement that all of us can accept. Springs challenges that assumption. Following the Belgian-born political theorist Chantal Mouffe, he suggests that an attractive alternative to liberal pluralism or deliberative democracy can be found in the ancient idea of "agonistic politics." To be in society, from this perspective, is to be locked inescapably in conflict. Thus it is futile to look toward resolving disagreements or reconciling opponents. But even Mouffe takes refuge in Wittgenstein's notion of a "form of life"; she contends that democracy requires acceptance of provisional "rules of the game" that stipulate allowing one's antagonist to survive if she loses an argument or an election. Such an approach, Springs insists, still restrains contestation with certain boundaries that implicitly privilege the status quo.

Resurrecting an argument advanced by Walt Whitman in his "Democratic Vistas," made familiar in the late 1960s by Herbert Marcuse (at the time the darling of many members of the New Left on both sides of the Atlantic), and later elaborated by Alasdair MacIntyre, Springs observes that the ideal of liberal pluralism aims to suppress conflict rather than resolve it. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre wrote that tolerance "imposes a bureaucratized unity on a society which lacks genuine moral consensus." When one of the parties in a conflict conceives of her convictions not as opinion or

prejudice but Truth, she will not be content to be tolerated. She will want fundamental changes that make her way of seeing the world not one option among many but the only acceptable option. MacIntyre even suggested a step that we might want to reconsider in the wake of the abomination at Mother Emanuel in Charleston and the ugliness of the alt-right's demonstration in Charlottesville. Perhaps the time has come to adopt a policy toward racism akin to that instituted in Germany toward Nazism and Holocaust deniers after World War II, a policy not of free speech but of zero tolerance. But that is not Springs's prescription.

Healthy Conflict addresses several of the issues currently roiling American culture, including racial equality, economic redistribution, civics and school prayer, Islamophobia, and abortion. Springs devotes a chapter to the strategy adopted by Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail." King was correct to target white moderates who called for patience and condemned civil disobedience as unnecessarily disruptive. Police Chief Bull Connor's dogs and hoses elicited outrage, but the quiet disapproval of right-thinking southerners was much more insidious, and harder to overcome, because it implicitly legitimated the regime of Jim Crow that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was determined to upset. If King had been willing to accept the offer of "tolerance" for his righteous anger, nothing would have happened. Only by demanding fundamental change and refusing to accept less was the SCLC able to get anything done. Springs holds out King's approach as exemplary. What he calls "healthy conflict" is "(1) oriented by the pursuit of justice; (2) marked by a practical, goal-oriented sensibility about the dimensions of power inscribed in conflict; and (3) motivated by respect for the humanity of one's opponents (thus grounding hope for eventual reconciliation), even when their actions must be denounced and resisted because they produce, or sustain, evil conditions." Forcing confrontation can be healthy when it forces "into the light of day the irreconcilability of the opposition at stake, and the unjust, and ultimately intolerable, character of the status quo."

Springs suggests that considering other points of view concerning deep disagreements might help us see the limitations of our conventional arguments for toleration. Opponents of economic redistribution, like critics of inequality, frame the issue in terms of injustice. According to economists such as Milton Friedman and activists in the Tea Party, having one's hard-earned money extracted in taxes to pay for programs that benefit people who have not earned it constitutes forced labor. They believe such injustice is an unmitigated evil that must be stopped. Those who have mobilized to make sure the textbooks used in public schools provide what they consider a properly balanced view of God's creation, American history, public life, and human sexuality do not simply want their voices to be heard. They are unwilling to accept anything other than a change in the way certain subjects are taught. Champions of school prayer likewise are content with nothing less than reinstatement of the Truth of Christianity in public schools.

On the issue of Islam, Springs advances a more complex argument. Characterizing all criticism of Muslims as "Islamophobia," he contends, risks intensifying tensions because it masks the history of cultural violence against Muslims in which almost all Americans—and almost all Europeans—have participated. Praising the rhetoric of pluralism, like automatically rejecting all criticism of Islam, can prevent us from acknowledging the hegemony of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the pervasiveness of intolerance directed against Muslims. Instead we should welcome confrontations, such as those over the caricatures of the Prophet in Denmark or the controversy over head scarves in France, as opportunities to move from a "lazy," unthinking profession of tolerance to a "strenuous pluralism" that forces us to deal head-on with discrimination, exclusion, and structural inequalities.

It is on the question of abortion, though, that Springs raises what I consider the most problematic of his claims for healthy conflict. Barack Obama's invitation to give the 2009 commencement address at Notre Dame provoked an uproar. His qualified defense of abortion outraged anti-abortion activists. Catholic legal scholar Mary Ann Glendon noisily withdrew from the event. Crowds descended on South Bend. In his address, President Obama pushed all the buttons of liberal tolerance. He recalled his work as a community organizer working with Catholic parishes on Chicago's Far South Side. He narrated his own conversion to Christianity. He observed that regardless of one's position on its legality, a woman's decision to abort is always agonizing. "When we open up our hearts and

I'm still not sure that we have a sufficiently clear understanding of how to distinguish healthy from unhealthy conflict—or, if we do, how to deal productively with the conflicts that, even if they are "healthy" in the abstract, nevertheless threaten to tear us apart.

our minds to those who may not think precisely like we do or believe precisely what we believe—that's when we discover at least the possibility of common ground." But some of those at the ceremony screamed "Abortion is murder!" and "Stop killing our children!" A few minutes into the speech, a barely audible scratching, which at first resembled crickets chirping, continued to increase in volume. Eventually it became clear that multiple recordings of a chorus of high-pitched babies' cries were being piped in from sources encircling the ceremony. According to Springs, who as a professor at Notre Dame was present at the event, "The sound of crying inserted itself viscerally into Obama's measured rhetoric," effectively disrupting the "elegant case for tolerance."

Now, what lesson does Springs want his readers to draw from that incident? He admits that the protests, clearly intended to "unexpectedly alter the deliberative frame" of the president's well-considered remarks, left him "uncertain how to respond at the time." But that is all he says about the event. Because it comes in the middle of his exploration of forms of healthy and unhealthy conflict, I am unsure into which category he would place the protests against Obama's speech. To use his own criteria, surely anti-abortion activists believed they (1) were seeking justice; (2) had a strategy that challenged powerful defenders of abortion with the voices of the powerless unborn; and (3) admitted the humanity of their foes and very much hoped to reconcile with them after ending what they regard as a grave injustice. Just as surely they had made plain the "irreconcilability of the opposition at stake, and the unjust, and ultimately intolerable, character of the status quo." Were they not, to sharpen the point, forcing just the sort of "healthy conflict" that King modeled in Birmingham? They did not want to deliberate with defenders of abortion. They wanted to embarrass them, to make clear that the status quo after *Roe* is intolerable to those who consider abortion just as evil as abolitionists came to consider slavery.

Don't get me wrong. I am sympathetic with the point of Springs's book. In my own recent book *Toward Democracy*, a history of ideas of self-rule from ancient Greece through the eradication of slavery and the consolidation of democratic government throughout the Atlantic world, I argue that democracy inevitably generates tensions that threaten its survival. Because democracy requires commitments to deliberation, pluralism, and an ethic of reciprocity, it encourages struggles among citizens with fierce and irreconcilable commitments. Those struggles, necessary as they are, can undermine the cultural predispositions that democracy depends on, the rules of the game itself. I had hoped that Springs's conception of "healthy conflict" would show how we can make progress dealing with the disagreements that paralyze us today. Instead, I think his book shows just how deep and persistent those conflicts are, whether the issues have to do with race, religion, civic responsibility, economics—or abortion. By demonstrating just how inadequate the promise of tolerance has been for those committed to fundamental, systemic change, Springs has performed a valuable service, for which we are in his debt. But I'm still not sure, after all his careful analysis of many important thinkers and ideas, that we have a sufficiently clear understanding of how to distinguish healthy from unhealthy conflict—or, if we do, how to deal productively with the conflicts that, even if they are "healthy" in the abstract, nevertheless threaten to tear us apart.

I will close with reflections on one of the most arresting passages in Obama's 2006 book *The Audacity of Hope*, which suggests why the problems Springs addresses are so intractable. Obama thinks historically. After ruminating on the controversies concerning interpretations of the Constitution between Originalists and legal realists, between champions of dogmatic rigidity and pragmatist flexibility, he came down where he usually did, in the latter camp. And yet, he writes, "I'm reminded that deliberation and the constitutional order may sometimes be the luxury of the powerful, and that it has sometimes been the cranks, the zealots, the prophets, the agitators, and the unreasonable—in other words, the absolutists—that have fought for a new order." For that reason he could not "summarily dismiss those possessed of similar certainty today," absolutists such as "the antiabortion activist who pickets my town hall meeting" (or interrupts his commencement speech at Notre Dame?), "or the animal-rights activist who raids a laboratory." Even though Obama disagreed with those who took such steps, he understood that they were playing an essential role in a democracy. Those who refuse to compromise, who refuse to be satisfied when their challenge to the status quo is "tolerated," are often those who shift the gears of history. With the passage of time, they are sometimes proven right, as were the most fanatical abolitionists. So, Obama concluded, "I am robbed even of the certainty of uncertainty—for sometimes absolute truths may well be absolute." The best we can do, he suggested, is to weigh the value of deliberation against its costs, as Lincoln did during his presidency. Lincoln's humility led him to work for his principles using democratic processes. It also led him to realize that when he had to act decisively, to end slavery or propose the framework for reuniting the nation when the war ended, he had to "resist the temptation to demonize the fathers and sons who did battle on the other side, or to diminish the horror of war, no matter how just it might be. The blood of slaves reminds us that our pragmatism can sometimes be moral cowardice." But the carnage of war should also remind us that "there may be a terrible price to pay" when we "pursue our own absolute truths."

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GRIFFIN OLEYNICK

Play, Memory

The video art of Bill Viola

How do you see something that's not there? It's a question that Bill Viola, one of the world's leading video artists, frequently poses. For more than four decades his experimental works have been exhibited in museums and public spaces around the world, many commissioned by institutions like the Guggenheim, the Whitney, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, others by the International Olympic Committee in Athens, St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and the Doha International Airport in Qatar.

But the pivotal moment in Viola's career took place in much humbler surroundings. It was 1991, not long after his mother's death, and he was removing a few objects from the kitchen cupboard. Taking down a small green-and-white bowl, originally a gift from his mother, Viola recalls being flooded with memories and emotions, returning him to the moment when he first received it:

> I could feel [my mother's] hand and see her face, vividly, as she handed it to me that day. At that point, my relationship to material objects changed—completely and irrevocably.... After that I looked around and realized that all of the things I was encountering were like this. They each contain the presences and desires of their makers.

For Viola, the otherwise empty bowl becomes a node of connection, charged with the invisible presence of his mother. A similar dynamic informs his video art: moving images, by definition fleeting, intangible, and impermanent, can nevertheless serve as portals into sacred realities that transcend space and time.

While it's not a full-scale retrospective, *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like: The Art of Bill Viola,* on view at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia through September 15, transports audiences to the heart of the artist's pioneering inquiries into the phenomenon of visual perception. Curated by longtime

PHOTO: KIRA PEROV

A still from Bill Viola, *Ascension*, 2000 (video/sound installation)

admirer John Hanhardt (who commissioned many of Viola's works, organized prior shows, and wrote a monograph), it's the first-ever exhibition devoted to video art at the Barnes. Such a setting harmonizes well with Viola's practice and sensibility, which are formally innovative yet thematically rooted in the European art-historical tradition: just as the Barnes houses classic European paintings within a sleek modern space, so too do Viola's cutting-edge video installations feature imagery inspired by old masters like Giotto, Jacopo da Pontormo, and Albrecht Dürer. Rather than a chronological survey, the show has the feel of a meditative essay, encouraging visitors to make connections between the works (there are eight on display, their glowing screens spread across five darkened galleries) and spend time pondering the spiritual and theological mysteries evoked by Viola's art.

Viola's film *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* (1986), its title a loose translation of a Sanskrit verse from the *Rig-Veda*, serves as the intellectual and spiritual touchstone of the exhibit. Eighty-nine minutes long, it unfolds as a wordless odyssey, an epic quest for self-understanding and transcendence that ranges from mountain lakes and underground caves to grassy fields and remote islands. Viola contemplates the cryptic gazes of wild animals (mostly fish and birds, but also a pair of bison, a zebra, and an elephant); takes us inside his studio (playfully modeled on seventeenth-century Dutch still-lifes); leads us through an intense, violent sequence filled with split-second flashes of lightning, crowded highways, and roaring flames; then drops us down in the middle of a raucous firewalking ritual in Fiji, the soundtrack filled with beating drums and wailing wind instruments. The film concludes in a forest, close to the lake where we began.

These different settings, and their varied imagery, may seem disconnected, but in fact they're all one, intertwined like threads of a tapestry. It's the medium of video that enables us to perceive their unity, as the camera's capacity to compress and extend time (by speeding up and slowing down), and to grow and shrink the visual field (by zooming in and out), mimics the workings of the human mind. Like the faculty of memory, the process of editing and combining video footage, and viewing video art, helps us see what we ordinarily can't, as, in Viola's words, the "diverse forms of nature continue to reveal their common origins":

> …there is a single moment when the flash of insight bursts into your unguarded mind, when all the pieces fall together, when the pattern is seen or the individual elements uncovered…when the breath of clarity opens the mind and you "see" for the first time in a long while, remembering what it was like again as if suddenly jolted from sleep.

As a video artist, Viola knows that his works can only gesture at permanence. His medium, he insists, is not light, or motion, but time.

Indeed, the film has the uncanny feeling of a dream, conveying an intimate knowledge whose truth lies beyond the range of ordinary speech. As Viola's images accumulate (water dripping from stalactites, flies buzzing around a decomposing fish, a snail sliding across a table, a chick hatching from an egg) they begin to converge and illuminate one another, revealing the elemental and opposed forces of creation and destruction constantly at work in nature—and, by extension, in ourselves.

Yet as much as Viola celebrates the power of images to reveal connections, he also leaves room for mystery. Human beings, as the world's great religious traditions contend, are both part of the natural world *and* uniquely separate from it, an idea Viola dramatizes in one of the work's most compelling sequences. He films a horned owl at medium distance, slowly and steadily zooming as the animal gazes directly into the camera. After about two minutes, we begin to discern Viola's reflection mirrored on the surface of the owl's enormous eye. Viola then cuts abruptly to a close-up of the owl's black pupil, ringed like an icon by its gold cornea, as Viola moves within it. Here Viola's attempt to penetrate the owl's inner world is blocked by his own reflected image. His search for self-understanding fails, yielding not the illumination of wisdom but instead an awareness of what he terms "the irreconcilable otherness of an intelligence ordered around a world we can share in body but not in mind."

Darkness and defeat, of course, aren't necessarily negative. As the Christian mystics remind us, they're crucial stages in the soul's journey to God. Recall the *Dark Night of the Soul*, a short text by the sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite St. John of the Cross. Viola became fascinated with the poem in college, later turning its paradoxical imagery (night shining like sunrise, oblivion yielding knowledge) into a video installation in 1983. (Entitled *Room for St. John of the Cross*, it's unfortunately not on view at the Barnes.) Similarly, Viola draws on *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century treatise on contemplative prayer by an anonymous English monk, for *Pneuma* (1994), in which staticky black-and-white projections mimic the way unbidden memories float in and out of consciousness during meditation.

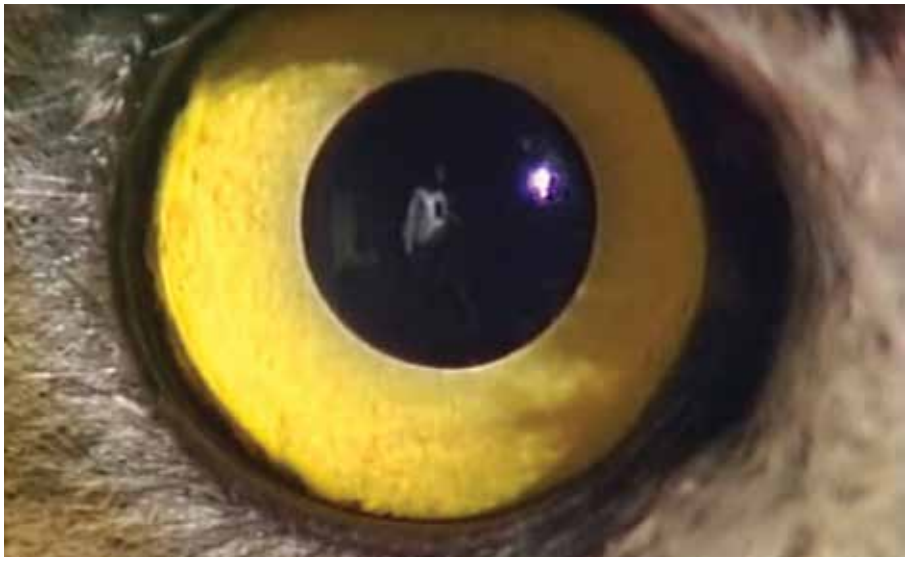
The moment of mystical union, when the self ecstatically bursts from its limits and becomes one with something larger, likewise informs Viola's 1976 installation *He Weeps for You*, whose title alludes to the idea of self-sacrifice found in the Bible. Here a closed-circuit camera films viewers from behind a dripping copper spigot. As they enter the gallery, a projector casts their zoomed image, contained within a steadily growing drop of water, onto a large screen. The drop swells before finally falling onto an amplified drum below, the booming sound echoing throughout the gallery. The process, where a tiny drop is suddenly converted into sound waves that fill an entire room, encourages viewers to ponder the ways in which the microcosm of the self—small, contained, limited—mirrors and

is in fact one with the macrocosm that surrounds it.

In the second half of his career, beginning in the mid-1990s, Viola turned his attention from nature and the language of religious mysticism decisively toward the human body. Concerned about the ways his chosen medium of video was increasingly exploited for distraction, fragmentation, and manipulation in the dawning digital era, Viola began studying the perspectival theories of the Italian Renaissance. Paintings by figures like Giotto (Viola was struck in particular by his *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata* in the Louvre) display a spiritual sincerity and an abiding trust in the world as it appears; not only is it observable, and thus knowable, it's also linked to the world we *can't* see, as human figures and the spaces they inhabit become windows into the divine.

The Barnes show devotes a gallery to four works from this period. It's like entering the European painting wing at the Met, except that the images are moving. Close to the entrance is *Ablutions* (2005), a diptych in which two nude male and female torsos reverently approach two streams of water before dipping their hands to produce a slow-motion splash. On the opposite wall is *Observance* (2002), in which a long line of men and women file up to and peer out from the screen, their faces contorted in grief as they witness an unseen horror (they're modeled on Dürer's *Four Apostles* from 1526). The prayerful tone is deepened by *Catherine's Room* (2001), inspired by a fourteenth-century predella by Andrea di Bartolo featuring five scenes from the life of St. Catherine of Siena.

But the focal point is *The Greeting* (1995), a massive installation that transforms a single moment from Pontormo's *Visitation* (1529), in which a pregnant Mary greets Elizabeth, into a long slow-motion scene that plays out over the course of ten minutes. We witness every minor change in facial expression, every unconscious gesture, every shifting fold of clothing as the two come together and embrace at the center of the nine-by-seven-foot screen. Though Viola removes the Christian framing of Luke's gospel (these could be any two women, not necessarily Mary and Elizabeth) and invests the scene with considerable ambiguity (a third woman arrives, but her presence is never explained), the work nevertheless conveys a moment of profound hope, even joy, as a fleeting moment of friendly recognition is extended in time, becoming almost permanent.



A still from Bill Viola, *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*, 1986 (videotape, color, stereo sound)

As a video artist, Viola knows that his works can only gesture at permanence. His medium, he insists, is not light, or motion, but time. And though it can be said his videos "cease to exist" each night when the museum closes and shuts off the power, still they manage to convey a sense of the eternal. Nowhere is the enigmatic relationship between time and timelessness more powerfully on display that in *Ascension* (2000), which occupies its own gallery. Over ten minutes, we watch as a fully clothed man plunges feet-first beneath the surface of dark blue water, his cruciform body surrounded by a cloud of bubbles as he first sinks, then rises, and sinks again. Here Viola symbolically evokes the self-emptying paradox (*kenosis*) at the heart of Christianity: the ever-living God freely becomes mortal, diving down (in the person of Christ) into a broken world of temporality and death, giving his life in order to rescue fallen humanity, leading them back to eternity.

Taken together, Viola's works in video show that screens, as much as they can distract, even enslave us, need not be superficial. Certainly, video can be cynically put to dark purposes (think of "deepfakes" and internet memes), but it can also bring us into contact with deeper realities, enhancing our propensity for connection and compassion. There's a poignant image Viola uses to describe human life in the age of media hyper-saturation—the Buddhist Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, also known as the God of Compassion:

> He has a thousand arms to reach out and touch all the suffering beings in the world, and a thousand eyes. . . .We see [him] depicted with a tower of heads stacked on top of each other on his shoulders in order to look out in all directions.

That image, of course, is all of us, with our smartphones, computers, TVs, and tablets. We can see into corners of the world we never could before—and therefore, Viola argues, we now hold the capacity (and the responsibility) to offer comfort and consolation to each and every suffering person who inhabits it.

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PHOTO: KIRA PEROV

RAND RICHARDS COOPER

What's That Sound?

'Echo in the Canyon' & 'Yesterday'

Echo in the Canyon refers to a hilly Los Angeles neighborhood whose winding roads link Sunset Boulevard to the San Fernando Valley, and whose population in the mid-1960s included key figures in the emerging pop-folk-rock scene. Laurel Canyon was a place, says David Crosby, then of the Byrds, where you could be close to a city yet feel out in the country; where instead of clubs, people popped into each other's homes for impromptu music sessions, trading ideas and inspiration. The community provided crucial proximity to the burgeoning music industry in LA, which was wresting influence from New York and increasingly provided a conduit to record deals and airplay. Suddenly, careers were taking off. "We knew the Byrds," Michelle Phillips of The Mamas and the Papas recalls with a laugh. "They were our friends. If they had a hit record, anyone could have one!" The scene was the pop-music equivalent, the film proposes, to the literary ferment of Paris in the 1920s and '30s.

Directed by longtime music executive Andrew Slater, and featuring Jakob Dylan as a kind of master of ceremonies, the documentary studies the transformative energies of the LA music scene during those years. *Echo* interviews many of the chief players from that time and place, along with younger musicians, including Beck, Regina Spektor, Cat Power, and Norah Jones, who ponder the era's significance, discuss its music, and perform some of the songs in a Laurel Canyon tribute concert.

The transformation that occurred when folk music met the electric guitar is often traced to Bob Dylan and the 1965 Newport Jazz Festival (a subject about which, along with anything else to do with his father, Jakob Dylan is notably silent). But *Echo* attributes it to Southern California. The theme is announced explicitly by The Mamas and the Papas' smash hit, "California Dreamin'," which redirects our attention from the brown leaves and gray sky of Manhattan to the warm and sunny left coast. Musically, the shift is nicely encapsulated in *Echo* by a segue from Pete Seeger performing "The Bells of Rhymney" before a silent churchlike audience of folk devotees, to the Byrds doing their version of the same song, the austere melody enlivened by Roger McGuinn's jangling guitar riff on his twelve-string Rickenbacker.

With such deft studies, *Echo* makes us present at the creation of folk rock. It focuses particularly on the four B's: the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, and the Beach Boys, all acting partly in response to the Beatles. The process involved what both Stephen Stills and Ringo Starr refer to as "cross-pollination," especially across the Atlantic—the way in which the Byrds' recording of "Mr. Tambourine Man," for instance, influenced *Rubber Soul*, and then (via Brian Wilson, who was wowed by it), *Pet Sounds*—which, lobbed back into the Beatles' court, in turn helped shape the huge smash of *Sgt. Pepper*. It was the kind of musical borrowing that stops short of stealing. For instance, George Harrison's 1965 *Rubber Soul* song "If I Needed Someone" owes a huge debt to McGuinn's version of "The Bells of Rhymney"—first recorded, as we have seen, by Seeger, with lyrics taken from a poem written by the Welsh poet Idris Davies way back in 1938, but which McGuinn first heard in a haunting cover by Judy Collins. Given such a complex pedigree, McGuinn wasn't bothered when a notably similar guitar sequence emerged in the Beatles' song. Besides, when the song came out, Harrison politely sent McGuinn a note of thanks. People were nicer then.

As for the Beach Boys, they and their trademark surfer pop—garage-band rock-and-roll adorned with mellifluous vocals—might at first glance seem like an outlier in this company. Interviewed by Jakob Dylan, Jackson

From left to right: Regina Spektor, Jakob Dylan, Beck, and Cat Power in *Echo in the Canyon*

COURTESY OF GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT

Browne comments wryly that "To me, at first, The Beach Boys was just four guys wearing the same striped shirt and carrying a surfboard. I thought it was lame." Then he listened to *Pet Sounds* and changed his mind. With its innovative and complex orchestrations, and its norm-busting song lengths, *Pet Sounds* figures as a leitmotif of genius in *Echo*, drawing lavish comparisons (Bach, Mozart), and a broadly shared awe at Wilson's gifts as a composer; in the estimation of just about everyone interviewed here, it was the most powerfully influential album of its era.

Echo in the Canyon exudes a leisurely nostalgia, and has a low-key, wandering quality. Outtakes from the 1968 film *Model Shop*, French director Jacques Demy's love song to LA, are intercut with scenes of Jakob Dylan visiting old recording studios, and Dylan and pals sitting around in someone's living room, browsing through a big pile of records, discussing album covers, extolling the glories of their musical forebears. The film is oddly constructed so that while Dylan appears to be interviewing people, more often than not, we don't get to hear his questions, only their answers—as Dylan nods sagely and is quietly impressed. It's fascinating; at fifty (!) Jakob Dylan strongly resembles his father, yet he possesses all the conventional social and conversational graces that Bob Dylan long ago spurned, if he ever had them. There's not a touch of anything cryptic or snarky to Dylan *fils*; he's a genial host—he's so normal!—and does a fine job on vocals with many of the songs, especially "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times" from *Pet Sounds*.

Curiously, while Crosby, Stills, and Graham Nash all contribute lengthy interviews, Neil Young is absent, until the closing credits, where he is shown—not back then, but today—alone in a studio, playing an odd, stomping version of "Expecting to Fly," the dreamy 1968 Buffalo Springfield song (and Young composition) that Stills, looking back, describes as a de facto announcement of Young's leaving the band. *Echo* construes the song as a signpost of a new and psychedelic impulse in pop music, one that effectively puts an end to the folk-rock moment the film so enjoyably captures.

Danny Boyle's latest film addresses the meaning and impact of that fourth and greatest B of the '60s pop scene—the Liverpuddlian one. *Yesterday* presents a curious mishmash of *The Twilight Zone*, *Notting Hill*, and such pop-driven romantic comedies as *Once* and *Begin Again*. Rod Serling would have loved the film's premise (major spoiler coming): What if a strange cosmic hiccup erased the entire history of a world-famous pop group, and for some reason only one man was left with the knowledge of its existence?

This is the conundrum confronting Jack Malik (Himesh Patel), a failed London singer-songwriter who suffers a bicycle accident at the precise moment that a twelve-second global blackout occurs. Jack awakes in a hospital, with minor injuries; consoled by his loyal longtime manager and would-be girlfriend, Ellie (Lily James), Jack asks her, with appreciative playfulness, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me when I'm sixty-four?"

"Why sixty-four?" she asks, puzzled.

Such puzzlement is what you get when you go around quoting the Beatles in a world where the Beatles never existed. As Jack begins to comprehend, some glitch in the cosmic brain, some ontological mini-stroke, has wiped out a seemingly random handful of cultural realities. No more Coca-Cola, no cigarettes, no Harry Potter. And no Beatles.

The situation presents Jack with an opportunity and a dilemma. The opportunity is to reinvigorate his flagging music career with an injection of Lennon and McCartney. The dilemma—which sharpens as his successes mount—is whether doing this is, you know, ethical. *Yesterday*'s enticing counterfactual provides some prime comic moments. We smile to see the formerly lethargic Jack in his room at his parents' home, frantically trying to recall the chords and lyrics to all Beatles titles, listed on his wall on colored post-it notes. Soon he is trying out the songs on his friends—who, accustomed to greeting Jack's music with cheerful affection, are blown away, and bewildered, by his new stuff. Where did this explosion of creativity *come* from? Working his way outward from friends and family, Jack parlays his ventriloquism into stardom. Soon, failure to launch has become global launch.

Rarely has a film been so wholly and clearly the mingling, for better and for worse, of two very different creative imaginations—belonging to two men who coincidentally were born two weeks apart from one another in 1956. One is Boyle, whose penchant for rousing uplift (along with *Slumdog Millionaire*, he interestingly also created *Isles of Wonder*, the opening spectacle of the 2012 London Olympic Games) belies both a minor strain of sci-fi darkness, exemplified in his 2000 post-apocalypse horror film *28 Days*, and a sympathy for suffering protagonists (*127 Hours*). The other is screenwriter Richard Curtis. Curtis has written and directed an array of hit romantic comedies, such pleasantly gossamer-like fluff as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Notting Hill*, and *Love Actually*.

Yesterday is an agreeable patchwork of a movie, stitched together from pieces of other agreeable movies. A scene in which Jack, by now hailed as a musical genius, is challenged by pop star Ed Sheeran (acting as himself) to a songwriting competition—who can write the better song in ten minutes?—echoes the byplay between Mozart and Salieri in *Amadeus*. Boyle and Curtis crib a lot from *Notting Hill*, especially the theme of fame colliding with Everyman normalcy, and, eventually, the soothing and anodyne idea that being truly in love—that recognizing soul-mateness and hewing adamantly to it—is a form of courage, and that this courage is both necessary and sufficient to living right. Can you say "happy ending"? There is even a large, comically oafish, "lovable" character who replicates the role played so memorably by Rhys Ifans in *Notting Hill*. Much of the film is cozily familiar,

Himesh Patel in *Yesterday*

including such shtick as the LA-based agent played by Kate McKinnon: watching her bluster and insult her way through the film, a veritable demon of greed, is the definition of a cinematic guilty pleasure.

Once the basic premise of the film is in place, it's not clear that Boyle and Curtis know quite what to do with it. There are plenty of funny tossed-off ironies; asked to explain his songwriting process, Jack engages in squirrely evasions, finally blurting out that the songs just come to him—"almost like someone else wrote them, you know?" Yuk, yuk. For anyone of the Beatles' generation, it is also satisfying to see dramatic proof that such masterpieces as "The Long and Winding Road" and "Yesterday" (amusingly, Jack has a hard time with "Eleanor Rigby," struggling to recall the lyrics) are indeed timeless works of genius—so brilliant, in fact, that a schlubby second-generation Indian man in London can become world famous by singing them. Jack's fame is the ultimate vindication of Lennon and McCartney.

But what is Jack himself supposed to make of that fame? Should he enjoy it? The most interesting and affecting parts of the movie address his growing turmoil as the songs catapult him to dazzling celebrity. Trapped in a sense of personal fraudulence, and increasingly miserable, he belts out a ferociously unhappy performance, in a huge concert accompanying his breakout album, of "Help!"—ending the song with a ragged cry of desperation, as the audience goes wild. Yet if in fact Jack is to renounce the spurious fame that performing the Beatles brings—if that renunciation is the key to wholeness—we are left with a question: What about the Beatles' music? Should it be sacrificed on the altar of Jack's integrity? He is, in effect, the only anthropologist in the world with access to what constitutes, in pop-musical terms, the greatest ancient civilizational dig ever. If he walks away, what about the rest of us?

The last third of *Yesterday* goes downhill, picking up romantic speed as it zooms along to the inevitable Richard Curtis ending, with Jack abandoning celebrity in order to ally himself with that special person who was there by his side all along—the prospect of pure love tying things together in a joyous vision of life in which, as the Bard wrote, *Every Jack shall have his Jill, and all shall be well.* The hallmark of such endings is not just that the *main* thing has to end happily, but that *every*thing does. Thus, as in John Carney's *Begin Again,* a musician proves not only happy in love, but defies the evil record-label corporate types by giving his music away as a free download in order to make all humanity happy. But wait, isn't that the kind of thing that destroyed the music industry? Never mind.

Such quandaries aside, we can be grateful to Boyle and Curtis for any number of pleasures along the way, including gratifying every person's Walter Mitty pop-music fantasy. Wait, you mean you haven't heard of Walter Mitty? Hey—what's going on here?

RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is a contributing editor to* Commonweal.

COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Out of Touch

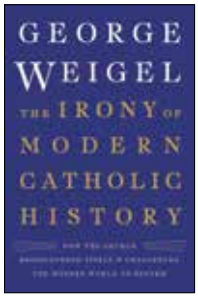
JAMES CHAPPEL

The pope is far less in control of his flock than most people realize. This has always been the case: no leader in history, let alone one in charge of a billion people across the globe, has been able to claim absolute obedience. It is especially true, though, of Pope Francis, and especially true in the United States. Here, the standard-issue neglect of papal missives coincides with a well-financed effort to conquer the Catholic public sphere in the name of clerical conservatism and libertarian economics. Over the centuries, popes have had to deal with all manner of challenges to their rule, including military ones. And while some of those were devastating to the church, perhaps none were as corrosive as this one to the world the church calls home.

One of the most prominent of these conservative organizations is the Napa Institute, founded and financed by a millionaire attorney and businessman named Timothy Busch. Its ninth summer conference took place in July, and its list of seventeen speakers makes for interesting reading. Sixteen of them were white; sixteen of them were men. Lindsey Graham and Scott Walker, who are not Catholic but are certainly conservative, spoke, as did Cardinal Raymond Burke, the leader of the conservative resistance to Francis inside the church.

Of all the politicians and church leaders who attended the conference, however, George Weigel stands out. He is affiliated with a think tank rather than a political party, and he is probably the speaker with the best reputation outside of conservative Catholic circles. His books are published by mainstream publishing houses, not the Christian operations that publish works like Alan Sears's *The Homosexual Agenda*, to name another of the luminaries onstage at the Napa gathering. Weigel is best known for his 1999 biography of Pope John Paul II, which is clearly hagiographical but is also a competent study that labors to place that larger-than-life figure in the many historical contexts he traversed.

Weigel matters because the conservative Catholicism he represents matters. Especially on the Supreme Court, but elsewhere too, this strange Catholic brew brings together gender conservatism and libertarian economics in ways that seem alien to the gospels but which are perfectly at home on the contemporary right. Hence the importance of Weigel's new book, *The Irony of Modern Catholic History*, which represents his first attempt to give a full accounting of how the Catholic Church has evolved in the past few centuries. Weigel's book claims to be written for non-Catholics and non-conservatives. He draws on secular historians, including me, and keeps the jeremiads to a minimum. The whole thing is pleasantly written and has an air of plausibility about it. And this is what makes it so dangerous.



THE IRONY OF MODERN CATHOLIC HISTORY
How the Church Rediscovered Itself & Challenged the Modern World to Reform

GEORGE WEIGEL
Basic Books
$30 | 336 pp.

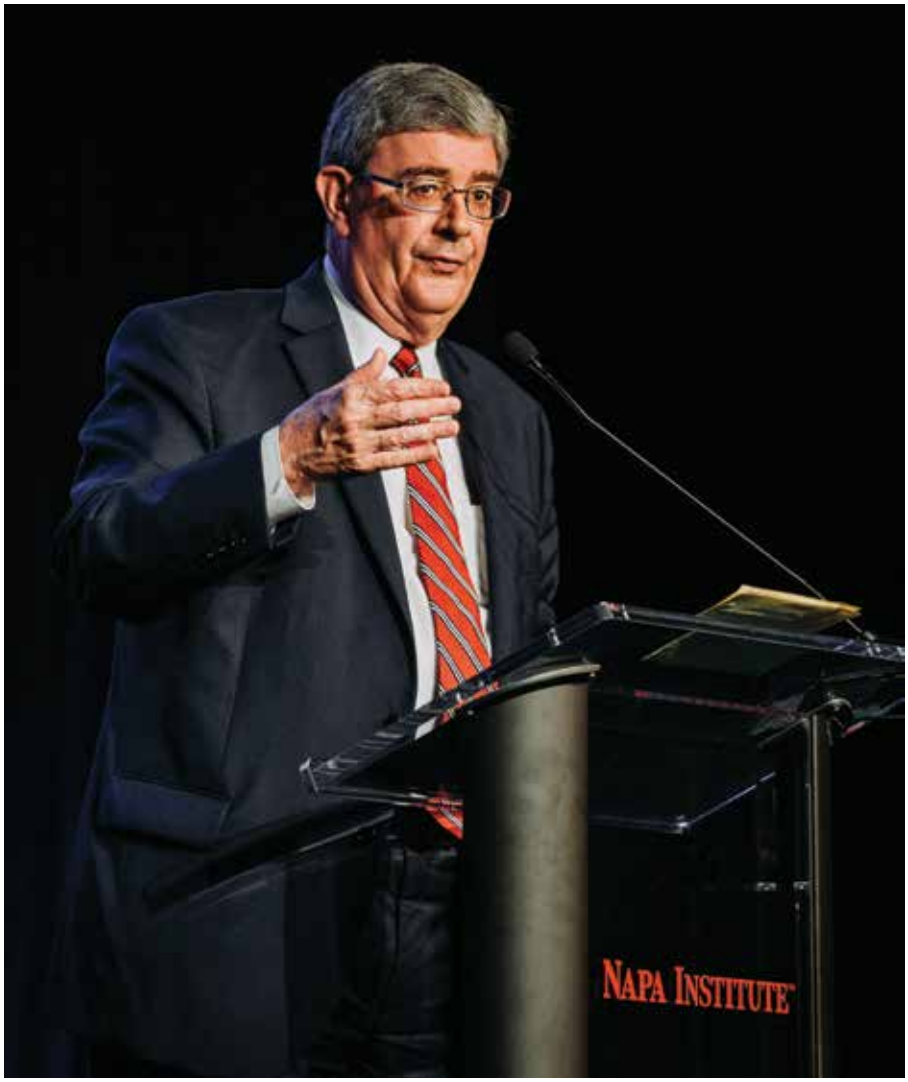
The Irony of Modern Catholic History does purport to be a scholarly work of history, so I will engage it on those terms before turning to what seems to me to be its true intent, which is to provide a usable history for the conservative, Napa brand of Catholicism. As a work of popular history, it is reasonably successful, and sometimes even exciting. It is, essentially, a polemical account of the Catholic Church from the French Revolution to the present, focused on the papacy and focused on the past half-century (Vatican II is reached at around the halfway mark).

The basic thesis is that the Catholic Church and "modernity" (not clearly defined) were at loggerheads for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Catholics were suspicious of secular science and the secular state, while non-Catholics were wary of the church as a hothouse of dogma and intolerance. While there were some church leaders and theologians who sought a more constructive dialogue between Catholicism and the secular world, they were in the minority, and the intransigence of violent anticlericals rendered the time unripe for them. Since the 1960s, however, this has changed. Especially during the pontificate of John Paul II, Catholicism and the world opened up to one

another, in ways that Weigel thinks are healthy, or at least potentially healthy, for them both.

This basic argument is unobjectionable, if a little banal. "Modernity" is defined so vaguely that it is challenging to put Weigel's argument in a form that would be acceptable to historians; since there is no clear causal argument at work, there is not much for the guild to grapple with. At some basic level, though, he is clearly right about the broad sweep of the story. There are not that many volumes that trace the history of the church from the early modern period to the present, or which integrate the North American and Latin American stories with the well-trod European ones. *The Irony of Modern Catholic History* is, at one level, just such a volume, and not a bad one.

Before moving on to Weigel's true purposes, it is worth pointing out that this clearly is not a cutting edge history of the church. Catholic history has been a boom field in recent years, even and especially for non-Catholics, and while Weigel does sometimes cite them, he does not seriously grapple with their findings. More than most historians, he believes that the history of the papacy is essentially the same thing as the history of the church. And more than most historians, he is uninterested in the long Catholic heritage of anti-Semitism; he is risibly sketchy about the depth of the Catholic attraction to dictatorship and fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, which is covered in just a few paragraphs. His rosy account of Pius XI, who reigned from 1922 to 1939, does not grapple at all with the conclusions of David Kertzer's *The Pope and Mussolini*, a much less charitable book that, having won the Pulitzer Prize in 2014, is not exactly obscure. A great deal of work in recent decades has been done to decenter European men in Catholic history, but this leaves not a ripple in Weigel's book. As far as I can tell, the only woman mentioned by name in this long book is Mary. Women in the abstract are mentioned once as founders of schools, and once as an audience talked at by a pope.



George Weigel, Senior Fellow and William E. Simon Chair in Catholic Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, speaks at the Napa Institute's annual Summer Conference in California, July 25, 2019.

CNS PHOTO / COURTESY NAPA INSTITUTE

As a purely historical thesis about the Catholic Church, then, Weigel's argument is not especially objectionable, even if its sins of omission are just shy of forgivable. This is not, though, the most interesting way to reflect on this book, which after all is not written by a trained historian and is not aimed at an audience of historians.

Weigel's true purpose is more moral than historical. The vagueness and banality of his historical claims are matched by razor sharp and controversial claims about the state of the world today. Let's begin by listing what Weigel sees as the grave dangers that we face in

As far as I can tell, the only woman mentioned by name in this long book is Mary. Women in the abstract are mentioned once as founders of schools, and once as an audience talked at by a pope.

general, before turning to his more specific thoughts about the dangers faced by the Catholic Church. As we will see, in both cases Weigel's position is bizarre to the point of absurdity. While this would normally doom a book to well-deserved obscurity, these are not normal times. The bizarre and the absurd have increasingly become commonplace among conservatives, inside the church and without.

In general, Weigel believes that our present moment, which he calls "post-modernity," is defined by the curse of rampant individualism, which has both intellectual and moral components. Intellectually, he believes that we have, in our universities especially, abandoned a commitment to rationality and truth, replacing that commitment with a relativist free-for-all in which only the claims of our subjective identity have import. Morally, he believes that we have abandoned any claims of objective truth, following our sexual and consumerist impulses wherever they might take us.

These are such familiar canards of this genre that it is easy to skim over them without noticing how outrageous they are. Weigel cites no evidence for any of them, which is surprising for someone so apparently committed to rational inquiry. In truth, he is presenting a warmed-over stereotype from the 1960s, which may have accurately reflected some pockets of a hedonist, student subculture then but hardly does so now. He shows no evidence of actual familiarity with the world outside of the frigid AC of the lecture circuit, in which people are obviously and sometimes heroically committed to living an ethical life, in all sorts of ways. I have tried to compare Weigel's portrait with the people that I know from my own workplace, and my own church: people trying desperately to pay medical bills and provide a decent upbringing for their children amid conditions that make doing so almost impossible. These people do not inhabit the relativist free-for-all of the conservative imagination. Weigel, like so many others, is dealing with Fox News caricature rather than observable reality.

Weigel is not interested in the many ways that secular and religious people today craft morally meaningful lives for themselves. And he is not interested in the role of the universities in that process. A minor yet persistent theme in the book is the claim that universities are purveyors of relativism, and no longer teach people to apprehend truth. This kind of claim has become commonplace, especially on the right: so commonplace that there is no perceived need to provide a shred of evidence, even as it legitimates a world-historical assault on our educational system. Nobody who spends time in university classrooms could countenance it, and Weigel does not display any familiarity with what actually goes on inside them. He claims, preposterously, that the philosophy departments of Harvard and the Sorbonne have given up on truth and reason. Given that those departments are full of people who teach logic and the philosophy of mind, we are justified in wondering who, exactly, has given up on rationality.

In some parts of the book, Weigel is admirably upfront about his cafeteria Catholicism, even as it is hard to square with his denunciations of us moderns for believing we can craft our own morality.

The transparent bad faith of Weigel's diagnosis is compounded by what he chooses to leave out. The issues that consume most of us—inequality, climate catastrophe, the re-emergence of concentration camps on American soil, and so on—simply do not merit discussion for him. He asserts without evidence that contemporary capitalism is doing a wonderful job at addressing domestic inequality, and that economic impoverishment abroad can be chalked up to the corruption of third-world governments. He says nothing about climate change and nothing about the refugee crisis.

Some readers might think this is unfair: Weigel is writing as a Catholic, to a Catholic audience, so perhaps it is asking too much for him to abandon this framework. This, though, is precisely the danger of the book. It resurrects an antiquated and narrow form of Catholicism at a historical moment when the future of the church is very much in contest. Many Catholic intellectuals would disagree with Weigel almost completely, although this is hardly mentioned in the text. Pope Francis, for instance, has made climate change and refugee care the linchpins of his own engagement with "modernity," including secular scientists and non-Christian refugees. These would seem to be reasonable topics of consideration in a book supposedly dedicated to the church's encounter with the modern world—and yet they go mostly unmentioned. Francis's own diagnosis of climate change as a negative externality of the capitalism Weigel champions is both transparently correct and transparently incompatible with Weigel's system.

In some parts of the book, Weigel is admirably upfront about his cafeteria Catholicism, even as it is hard to square with his denunciations of us moderns for believing we can craft our own morality. This highly selective approach has long marked his work, and resulted in some of the strangest passages of his biography on John Paul II. Essentially, whenever the pope wrote or spoke in terms compatible with economic lib-

ertarianism, he is judged correct; but where he did not, he is judged wanting, and readers are counseled that they need not make too much of it. This same model is followed even more radically in the current book. In his previous work, Weigel criticized some papal encyclicals in favor of others. This is a time-honored Catholic tradition: encyclicals are not necessarily dogmatic, and really constitute little more than the pope writing to his bishops. Here, though, Weigel takes aim at *Gaudium et spes*. As the pastoral constitution of Vatican II, this is significantly bigger game, and it is striking how freely Weigel bats away its anti-capitalist findings as baleful features of their own time rather than a component of Catholic doctrine that ought to trouble the libertarian conscience.

This leads us to what might be the most shocking aspect of the book: Weigel's diagnosis of the two gravest dangers facing the church. The first of these is "Gallicanism," by which he means the independence of national synods from papal guidance. He is particularly concerned with some decisions that the German bishops have threatened to make regarding sexual ethics and priestly celibacy; the threat, in his view, is that this could portend a fracturing of the church into component parts—the dreaded spectre of Anglicanism, often invoked on the Catholic right. The second of these is "historicism," by which he means the view that moral teachings, specifically sexual and marital ones, should evolve over time, instead of being informed by the universal light of reason and Scripture.

The skeptical reader might wonder whether either of these really constitutes much of a threat. The independence of national synods has risen and fallen over time, and there is no inkling that the German Church is about to launch a new Reformation. As for "historicism," it is curious that Weigel is so exercised by this, as the whole point of his book seems to be that the doctrine of the church has and should evolve. One might dispute this or that form of evolution, but it seems strange to posit the mere fact of change as a danger.

But even the sympathetic reader could not possibly be convinced that these are the two gravest dangers facing the church. Talk to any young Catholic today (outside of the Napa Institute at least) and they will tell you that the sex-abuse crisis is rocking their faith. I was recently at a conference of young Catholics, and in between the keynotes, which hardly addressed the issue, they spoke of nothing else.

Weigel does, to his credit, address the matter in the closing pages of the book. And while the results make for painful reading, they are also illuminating as to just what is wrong with Napa Catholicism. Any analysis of the sex-abuse scandal, *especially* one that purports to come from a Christian perspective, must begin with the experience and suffering of the victims. In all of Weigel's pages on the theme, he has nothing to say about or to them other than to point out that they were "frequently vulnerable innocents." Even that comes several pages in: from the beginning, his concern is more with the *church* as a victim. He refers to the crisis, for instance, as a "self-inflicted wound," rather than a wound inflicted on one group of vulnerable people by another group of powerful ones. This approach to the problem leads him to the perverse claim that the crisis was "a moment of necessary purification" for the church.

His main concern in his account of the crisis is to cast stones. This is a valuable enterprise, if a secondary one—the question is where they are aimed. Those stones ought to be aimed, as many Catholic scholars and historians have argued, at a longstanding culture of clericalism and *noblesse oblige* in the church. Weigel rejects this approach, perhaps because it tends to tarnish the legacy of John Paul II. Instead, he places most of the blame on "late modernity," whose culture of sexual confusion and license was so powerful that it affected even the church. And the cover-up is blamed, conveniently if implausibly, on Pope Francis.

The abbreviated, skewed coverage of the sex-abuse scandal represents the true nadir of the book—the point at which it becomes obvious that Weigel has lost contact with the living core of the church in his ascent to the Napa pantheon. He claims a desire to recover the evangelical core of the Catholic mission, converting wayward moderns back to the Catholic fold. Such a mission would, presumably, involve meeting the world where it is: mainly young and mainly female; many poor or incarcerated; many seeking some kind of refuge from the horrors of late capitalism but rightly worried, in the wake of the sex-abuse crisis, that the church cannot provide one. This mission would, like Christ himself, begin with the downtrodden. Christ reached out to the tax collector and the prostitute, while followers today might begin with the prisoner, or the refugee, or even the victim of sexual assault.

Weigel is so uninterested in this task that one wonders if evangelism is truly his goal. He seems more interested in providing a plausible historical narrative for a brand of narrow Christianity that has enormous political power, to the detriment of the poor and the lonely. He seems more interested, too, in providing an affable face and a scholarly apparatus for a reactionary project that, whatever it might augur for the church, is disastrous for the common world we share. Weigel wants to argue that the church is necessary to save modernity from itself. And yet he proposes a vision of the Catholic Church that celebrates and amplifies the very impulses that are putting us all in danger. It might be that we need saving, and it might even be that the Catholic Church is up to the job. But not like this.

JAMES CHAPPEL *is the Hunt Family Assistant Professor of History at Duke University. He is the author of* Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church *(Harvard University Press, 2018).*

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DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

PRESENTATIONS

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 24

7 p.m. | Sylvester (Jim) Gates
Challenges of 'Anthropocenic' Policy-Making: A View From Inside A Policy-Formation Organization.

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 25

9 a.m. | Mary Jane Angelo
Food Security, Industrialized Agriculture, and a Changing Global Climate.

11 a.m. | Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda
Hope, Radical Love, and Moral-Spiritual Power in Age of Climate Colonialism.

12:30 p.m. | Ronan Barr
Spiritan Global Citizenship Education Program: Preparing for the New Challenges in Our Interconnected World.

2 p.m. | Aurora Sharrard
Sustainability Via Patience, Persistence, & Hope.

3 p.m. | Patricia De Marco
Protecting the Rights of the Living Earth.

4 p.m. | Panel Discussion

7 p.m. | Thomas McQuillan
The Food Asset Potential, Changing Cultural Norms to Reduce the Amount of Food We Waste.

Commonweal CONVERSATIONS *and* Loyola Marymount University Latino/Latina Theology and Ministry Initiative (LLTM) present

Romero: A Man in search of God & the Truth with Dr. Ana María Pineda

Sister Ana María Pineda, RSM, STD, is a member of the leadership of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, West Midwest region, and a tenured faculty member in the religious-studies department at Santa Clara University. She is the author of *Romero & Grande: Companions on the Journey*.

DR. ANA MARÍA PINEDA

Dr. Pineda will be in conversation with both **Dominic Preziosi, editor of *Commonweal***, and the **Latino/Latina Theology and Ministry Initiative**, exploring the socioeconomic, political, and spiritual implications of Óscar Romero's life and sainthood for our church today. This event is a collaboration between *Commonweal* and LMU's 9th Ministry and Theology Lecture.

***Event is free and open to the public. For more information and to RSVP, please visit* commonwealmagazine.org/events**

Thursday, November 14TH | 7:00 PM
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles
Life Science Building, Room 120

Commonweal | LMU LA Loyola Marymount University

Ready for the Worst

DANIEL PHILPOTT

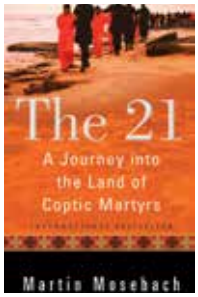
It is only natural that a journalist would jump at the chance to tell the story behind the colorful, choreographed, and utterly gruesome video showing militants of the Islamic State (or ISIS) beheading twenty-one Christian migrant workers on a beach in Sirte, Libya, on February 15, 2015. The militants posted the video on YouTube and lodged its images in the memory of millions of people—millions of potential readers.

An ambitious author could easily situate the episode in a familiar storyline pitched to appeal to Westerners alarmed by the rise of Islamic terrorism. The militants were Muslim, members of an outfit that has committed terrorist attacks in several major U.S. and European cities and was at war with the United States and its allies in Iraq and Syria until quite recently. They entitled their video, "a message signed with blood to the nation of the cross," a clear call to arms against Christians. So, we have a ready-to-tell story about a violent religion, Islam, attacking Christians, all but one of them Egyptian Copts, who are in turn supported by a regime that is allied with the West.

Were it published, such a story would predictably meet with criticism that it overgeneralizes about Islam, risks stoking conflict through its binary, polarizing narrative, and plays into the hands of dictators like Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who has built his rule upon countering violent Islamist extremism. The author would thus join and fuel a debate that has been going on in the West since the attacks of September 11, 2001. And he or she would likely sell lots of books.

This is not the book that the German writer Martin Mosebach chose to write. He abjures facile storylines and declines to consider the "garish bouquet of hypotheses" that purport to explain the murders and depict their consequences. Nor is this book a work of journalism. While Mosebach does report facts he learned firsthand, his account reads more like the diary of a pilgrimage or perhaps an entry in a martyrology. Even the table of contents is iconic, listing twenty-one chapters, corresponding to the number of martyrs. And each chapter begins with the name and photograph of one of the twenty-one. This focus on the slain, not on the slayings, is what makes Mosebach's account startlingly innovative.

Who were these martyrs? How did their Christian faith shape their response to their forthcoming martyrdom? These are Mosebach's questions. But why even assume that their faith shaped their response? Their murderers selected them, after all, merely because they were (except for one) Egyptian Christians, not because they were particularly saintly. Any Egyptian Christian would have done. Mosebach claims, though, that their faith was strong and unwavering, and devotes most of the book to convincing us of this. He spots one of his first clues in the video, whose producers were keen to display the Christians' faces but surely did not intend to reveal that they were praying, audibly professing their faith in Jesus Christ, and in many instances displaying a look of calm. How did these men—"unremarkable farmers" who had migrated to Libya to find work—succeed in stamping this viral video with a message very different from the one intended by their executioners? Mosebach travels to the village of El-Aour, Egypt, the home of most of the martyrs, in order to find out.



THE 21
A Journey into the Land of Coptic Martyrs

MARTIN MOSEBACH
Plough Publishing House
$26 | 272 pp.

El-Aour is very poor. Villagers live in houses of concrete and exposed rebar, with whole rooms devoted to animals. Heaps of rotting trash are scattered about the village. But here too Mosebach fastidiously avoids predictable and condescending narratives. Over the past couple of centuries, but especially in the mid-twentieth, the prevailing understanding of religion in the university and among Western elites has been the secularization thesis, which holds that religion is irrational, primitive, and destined for extinction. The poor, in this narrative, turn to religion as a salve for their hard lives and because they are too ignorant to know better. Once economic development brings them education, health care, a long life, and bourgeois comforts, they will forget about God. A recent statement of this thesis is the 2011 book *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, where political scientists Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart offer global evidence that when people achieve material security they become less religious.

Evidence that the poor are more religious, though, does not necessarily demonstrate that religion is an irrational anachronism. Perhaps the poor possess a profounder faith because their circumstances force them to recognize

their fragility and dependence. After all, in the gospels, the poor—the blind beggar, the widow offering her mite—find it easier to follow Jesus than the rich do. Historian Philip Jenkins arrives at a similar insight in his important book *The Next Christendom*, which documents the shift of Christian populations and vitality to the Global South, where people enjoy far less wealth and security than in the Global North, but where faith is far more alive with a sense of the supernatural—healings, miracles, exorcisms, and movements of the Spirit. In the same vein, Mosebach comments:

> We have become accustomed to assuming that it is primarily political and economic motives that lie behind every religious conflict, because we don't want to consider the fact that a person's faith might actually be the ultimate, highest reality. But for these twenty-one Coptic peasants and migrant workers, that is precisely what their religion was.… They were well aware of the disadvantages associated with being a Christian in Egypt. But these people who superficially seemed so weak, who eked out such a meager existence, were willing to accept these disadvantages.… Life itself, without faith, would have been worthless to them.

Refreshingly, Mosebach is open to understanding his subjects' religion on their own terms.

It is a close-to-the-surface faith that Mosebach discovers in his visits to the martyrs' families in El-Aour. He learns that their first response to the death of their fathers and husbands was not to call for revenge or to demand government action but rather to enshrine them as martyrs. They recounted to him that joy mitigated their grief when they first saw the video of the beheadings, not only because it brought an end to their uncertainty about their loved ones' fate, but also because "we now have a martyr in heaven and must rejoice," as Mosebach quotes them saying. They constructed shrines in their homes, gathered relics, composed hymns, and created prints of the deceased wearing crowns. With money from the government and the full support of their bishop, they constructed a vast pilgrimage church to which the martyrs' bodies were returned and could be venerated by visitors. They attributed miracles to the martyrs' intercession, including, most dramatically, the appearance of drops of oil on the blown-up passport photo of one of the martyrs, Mina, on two successive anniversaries of his death—similar to the drops that have appeared on the grave of his patron saint, Menas, a Coptic Christian from the early centuries of the church.

Tortured during the day, they prayed and sang at night. Offered freedom on the condition that they repeat the Muslim creed, they refused.

The families in El-Aour tell Mosebach that long before their loved ones were murdered on the beach, their lives were marked with prayer, devotion, Bible memorization, experiences of miracles, and even premonitions of their martyrdom. It was during the forty-three days of captivity prior to their beheading that they proved themselves to be something more than passive victims of persecution. Tortured during the day, they prayed and sang at night. Offered freedom on the condition that they repeat the Muslim creed, they refused. Matthew, the one worker from Ghana, was asked by his captors if he, too, was a Christian. He replied that he was. How do we know this? Because one of the captors, moved by the captives' faith, later became a Christian and phoned the martyrs' families to tell them what he had witnessed.

Mosebach anticipates the reader's skepticism. How do we know that the workers did not brawl, party, and chase girls in their youth in El-Aour? He admits that he did not press such questions: "I'm not much of a reporter. Professional journalists enjoy a lack of restraint I find hard to muster.… What more could prying inquiries produce, anyway? The beheaded men's new presence as saints and miracle workers was more important to these families than anything in the past."

Mosebach acknowledges further that "accounts of people proclaiming 'I am a Christian' when they know the consequences will be death have a fairy-tale-like ring to our contemporary ears." He continues, "one might be tempted to say that it is impossible for anyone to think that way today, had Matthew's blood not flowed from his throat into the

sea at Sirte." But Matthew's blood did flow; this is no fairy tale.

What convinces Mosebach that the faith of his subjects is genuine—both before and after their capture—is, above all, liturgy. The liturgy "alone constituted the most important mental and aesthetic influence" on the twenty-one Coptic martyrs, he says. They can "certainly be called *homines liturgi*, men of the liturgy, which in the Western world is now a very rare mode of being human." Mosebach depicts the Coptic rite in detail. The readings, he points out, are drawn not only from Scripture but also from the Coptic martyrology and chronicle of the saints, thereby connecting the congregation with their church's long history of suffering, dating back to the Diocletian Persecution. He describes the consecration of the Eucharist—not just a brief moment, as it is in the Roman Catholic Mass, but rather a drawn-out exchange in which the priest emphatically proclaims the mystery and the members of the congregation emphatically affirm it. For the Coptic Church, the liturgy shapes all other aspects of the Christian life, such as service to the poor and, not least, martyrdom.

In this remarkable book, Mosebach doesn't simply avoid the standard Western narratives but turns the tables on them. He is not interested in providing a lurid account of barbarities from which we, in our secular sophistication, are immune, or in explaining away the miracles in the lives of the devout poor, or, still less, in telling us how to regard radical Islam, formulate a foreign policy for the Middle East, or help persecuted Christians abroad, much as they could use our help. Rather, he wants to show Christians—in the West and elsewhere—what these migrant workers from Egypt (and Ghana) can teach us about living our own faith.

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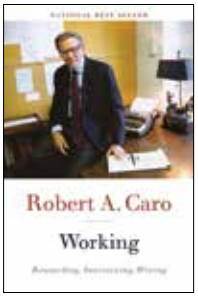
Reporting the Past

PAUL MOSES



WORKING
Researching, Interviewing, Writing

ROBERT A. CARO
Knopf
$25 | 240 pp.

Since I took only one journalism course in college, I had a lot of catching up to do when I became a daily newspaper reporter some forty years ago. Fortunately, I read Robert Caro's book *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. It became my textbook for understanding how political power works, and a technical manual for where to look for municipal corruption and double-dealing.

So anytime Caro speaks about his method, I listen. Now aged eighty-three and working on a fifth volume of his biography of President Lyndon B. Johnson, he has paused to pass along his ideas for researching, interviewing, and writing. *Working* includes previous articles and interviews—his fans may be familiar with some of this—along with some new material. If you'd like to hone these skills, I recommend this book strongly; I'd assign it to my college journalism students if I were still teaching. If you'd like to hear some entertaining war stories from a masterful writer, it's also a good choice. If you're looking for a searching memoir, however, this book is not it. Caro reports that he hopes to write such a book, but at his age, he can't be sure of both accomplishing that and completing his portrait of Johnson. Hence this book, now.

For me, the most revealing detail comes early in the book, when Caro describes his introduction to research, interviewing, and writing as a young reporter at the Long Island newspaper *Newsday* in the 1960s. (I reported for *Newsday* in the 1980s and '90s). Surprised that the recent Princeton graduate had shown savvy investigative skills, the managing editor, Alan Hathaway, gave him advice that helped shape his career: "turn every page" when going through a stack of documents. Then the editor took another step important to Caro's development: he gave him a desk next to "an already legendary investigative reporter," Bob Greene. Caro credits Greene and Hathaway with teaching him how to be a reporter. "And these weren't lessons you'd be taught in journalism school," he writes.

Greene, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who died in 2008, is recognized as a father of modern investigative reporting; his

"Greene Team" is considered journalism's first permanent investigative team. Like FBI agents, Greene's reporters filed frequent memos to build a file on their target. Their investigations could take years: a Pulitzer-winning 1969 exposé of Long Island land deals took three years, an eternity in a newsroom—then and even more so now. Caro is among many accomplished investigative reporters Greene mentored. I don't know if this kind of mentoring is as common in today's overtaxed newsrooms as it once was, but for reporters of an earlier era, it very often left a lifelong imprint. It did in Caro's case: his advice on research and interviewing essentially applies the techniques of investigative reporting, which he learned in those early years, to narrative history.

These techniques have yielded many a memorable scoop. Caro shares the thrill of discovering the truth behind Johnson's quick rise to power as a thirty-two-year-old member of Congress. After a prodigious chase through the 32 million–document collection of Johnson's papers, Caro finally found a key piece of evidence in a bulging folder with the unpromising label "General—Unarranged." It showed how even as a fledgling congressman, LBJ brokered power in Congress by funneling campaign donations from his benefactor, owners of the Texas contractor Brown & Root, to grateful colleagues. "For someone interested in the sources of political power, as I was, those boxes in the Johnson Library contained such clear evidence of the use to which economic power could be put to create political power," Caro writes. He had followed his managing editor's maxim to "turn every page." It worked for him time and again.

There are other single-minded historical researchers, of course, and some employ teams of researchers or rely on their graduate students. (Caro relies on his wife, Ina, who obviously plays a big role in their work.) Where Caro differs is that unlike most academic historians, he is not content to rely on the documented record, and he is not shy about using aggressive interviewing techniques. In *Working*, he relates how he learned the basics of interviewing as an investigative reporter; his editors' advice on squeezing information from reluctant officials sounds like a primer for law-enforcement agents. (Not coincidentally, Bob Greene had been an investigator for the U.S. Senate Rackets Committee and its counsel Robert F. Kennedy in the 1950s.)

Caro's persistence and skill in interviewing helped distinguish his work on Johnson from seven previous biographies, which, he writes, related the same set of Horatio Alger anecdotes about LBJ's youth. It wasn't easy. Caro, a loquacious Manhattanite, found it difficult to interview the laconic women and men who'd grown up with Johnson. They often lived on isolated ranches in the Texas Hill Country. Their answers to his questions were honest but terse, as if they were taking a polygraph test. To break through, Caro and his wife moved to the Hill Country. In a characteristically long and rhythmic sentence, Caro writes:

Caro, a loquacious Manhattanite, found it difficult to interview the laconic women and men who'd grown up with LBJ.

Robert Caro

JEFF NEWMAN / GLOBE PHOTOS / ZUMAPRESS.COM

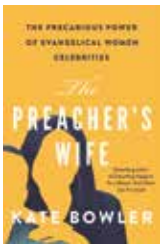
> I began to hear the details they had not included in the anecdotes they had previously told me—and they told me other anecdotes and longer stories, anecdotes and stories that no one had even mentioned to me before—stories about a Lyndon Johnson very different from the young man who had previously been portrayed: stories about a very unusual young man, a very brilliant young man, a very ambitious, unscrupulous and quite ruthless person, disliked and even despised, and, by people who knew him especially well, even beginning to be feared.

Caro provides details on some of his most successful interviews. Among them are Johnson's classmates at Southwest Texas Teachers College, who told Caro that LBJ had fixed his election as senior representative on the Student Council; and Luis Salas, a county election judge who confirmed, after decades of rumors, that Johnson had stolen the 1948 Democratic primary runoff for U.S. Senate from a former governor, winning by eighty-seven votes. All this helped Caro illustrate Johnson's character in ways that had not been done before—and show how LBJ's ruthlessness grew out of his humiliation from growing up dirt poor after his father lost the family ranch. "Hundreds of writers—journalists and the authors of books—all agree that Lyndon Johnson was ruthless," Caro writes. "I try to explain *why* he was ruthless—and a large part of the explanation is the place he came from."

This deep sense of flawed character also drives Caro's biography of Robert Moses (no relation to me, although the question has often been asked). Caro's key insight was that Moses had figured out how to use public authorities to build a power base that made him more powerful than any elected official. Acquiescent mayors and governors piled titles on Moses: New York City parks commissioner and construction coordinator, head of New York State's power commission and parks council, chairman of numerous public authorities. He held a dozen public jobs at the same time, and exploited the power they gave him.

In another writer's hands, this could have made for an important but dull

BOOKS IN BRIEF



THE PREACHER'S WIFE
KATE BOWLER
Princeton, $29.95, 368 pp.

The preacher, the homemaker, the talent, the counselor, the beauty. Religion scholar Kate Bowler's *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* uses these categories to understand how Evangelical women wield influence in a conservative church that forbids them formal authority. Masters of the market, these women have packed conference halls, written best-selling devotional books, and performed popular worship music. They've sold recipes and weight-loss plans, beauty tips and Bible studies, traumas and confessions. Adhering to capitalist logic—marketing wisdom and spiritual authority—they also adhere to the logic of their church: acknowledging the headship of husbands, fathers, or pastors, and never presuming to preach. Thus the precarity. Bowler's skillful ethnography is a blend of interviews, reportage, history, and analysis of women's leadership in today's Evangelical church.

THE DRY HEART
NATALIA GINZBURG
New Directions, $12.95, 96 pp.

Natalia Ginzburg, the great Italian novelist who died in 1991, is having a moment. On the heels of Elena Ferrante's successful Neapolitan novels, anglophone readers outside the *bel paese* are rediscovering her prose's spare beauty. There's no better introduction to her fiction than *The Dry Heart*, a novella about a toxic marriage that goes from bad to worse. The book, originally titled *È stato così* (*That's How It Was*), is a study in truth-telling: "I shot [my husband] between the eyes," the unnamed wife and narrator confesses in the opening scene. What follows is a deep dive into a fascist society's atomizing loneliness and existential despair. *The Dry Heart* also serves as Ginzburg's declaration of artistic integrity: "I felt that the time of conventional and clear-cut answers had come forever to a stop within me."

TALKING TO ROBOTS
DAVID EWING DUNCAN
Dutton, $29, 320 pp.

What is humanity's place in a future run by robots? The question lies at the heart of David Ewing Duncan's *Talking to Robots: Tales From Our Human-Robot Futures*, a collection of visionary short stories that grapple with how our lives will change as technology advances. In "Politician Bot," congresspeople fight over robot citizenship; in "Warrior Bot," strategists contemplate how much decision-making power to give fearless, guiltless robots. Duncan imagines a Beer Bot, a Memory Bot, even a God Bot; these imaginative scenarios are supplemented with interviews from thinkers in various fields. Ultimately, Duncan's vision of the future is optimistic. Amid robots' promises of heightened efficiency, and our own anxieties about automation, humans—with all our temporal idiosyncrasies—can never really be replaced.

study that maybe would have alerted a small audience of academics, pundits, and urban-affairs journalists to the dangers of ceding too much power to public authorities. But Caro's prose style is in a class of its own; it draws from the depth of his research in the way a hurricane strengthens as it crosses warm waters.

Caro, as his readers know, is a fan of lists. He recalls listing all the highways Moses built to convey the magnitude of his accomplishments:

> He built the Major Deegan Expressway, the Van Wyck Expressway, the Sheridan Expressway and the Bruckner Expressway. He built the Gowanus Expressway, the Prospect Expressway, the Whitestone Expressway and the Throgs Neck Expressway. He built the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the Nassau Expressway, the Staten Island Expressway and the Long Island Expressway. He built the Harlem River Drive and the West Side Highway.

Caro says he learned about the power of lists from *The Iliad*, "with the enumeration of all the nations and all the ships that are sent to Troy to show the magnitude and magnificence of the Trojan War." For Caro, a list is more than just a list. He uses lists to build a rhythm, then shifts the meter sharply in the last sentence. "Rhythm matters. Mood matters. Sense of place matters," he writes. "All these things we talk about with novels, yet I feel that for history and biography to accomplish what they should accomplish, they have to pay as much attention to these devices as novels do."

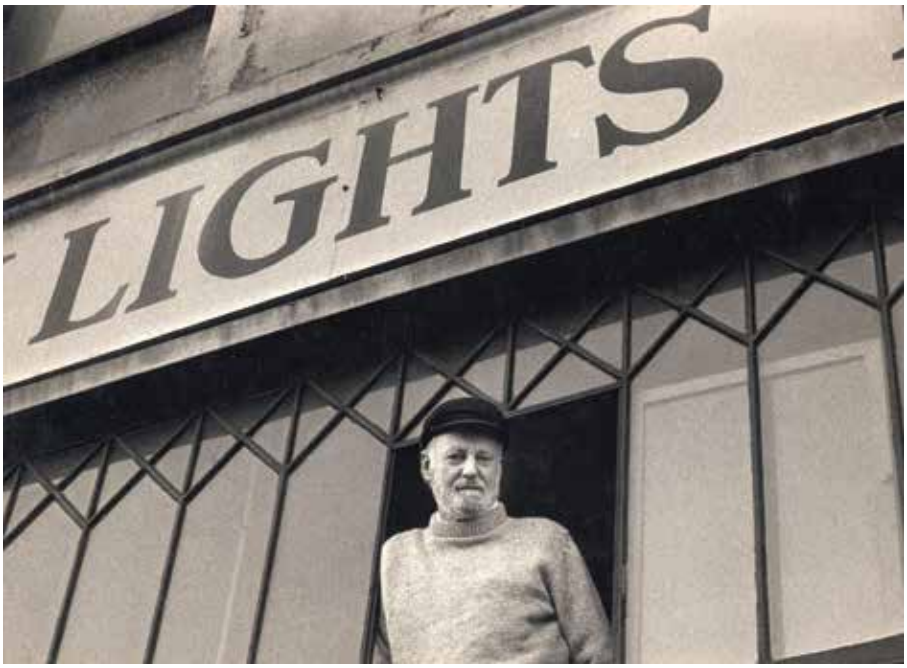
Of course, none of that novelistic detail can be fabricated. Caro offers some useful interview tips on how to capture what really happened—how he pushes interviewees to recall exactly what a scene looked and sounded like. He went to such lengths as getting the National Park Service to open Johnson's boyhood home so that he could interview LBJ's younger brother, Sam Houston Johnson, at the long plank table in the dining room. He had Sam Houston re-create arguments LBJ had with their father over the dinner table: "You're a failure, Lyndon, and you're always going to be a failure."

Caro succeeds at what he set out to do in *Working*—to show *how* and *why* he creates his books—but there is a larger story about the *meaning* of his work that is beyond his scope here. He hints at it late in the book:

> There is evil and injustice that can be caused by political power, but there is also great good. It seems to me sometimes that people have forgotten this. They've forgotten, for example, what Franklin Roosevelt did: how he transformed people's lives. How he gave hope to people. Now people talk in vague terms about government programs and infrastructure, but they've forgotten the women of the Hill Country and how electricity changed their lives. They've forgotten that when Robert Moses got the Triborough Bridge built in New York, that was infrastructure.…We certainly see how government can work to your detriment today, but people have forgotten what government can do *for* you.

Is Caro expressing second thoughts about having exposed such deep flaws in two of the most accomplished public figures of the twentieth century? When Johnson was president, some three-quarters of the American public trusted "the government in Washington always or most of the time," according to Pew Research Center polling. The number slipped sharply over the next decade and after some ups and downs was at 17 percent in March. The question of how much the media—using this plural term broadly—contributed to the public's cynicism about government can't be ignored. Caro's great biographies illustrate the wonders both Johnsons and Moses worked in the public arena, and yet the focus is on how power finally corrupted and crippled them. I hope Caro does write that memoir.

PAUL MOSES, *a contributing writer to* Commonweal, *is the author of* The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace *(Doubleday, 2009) and* An Unlikely Union: The Love-Hate Story of New York's Irish and Italians *(NYU Press, 2015). Follow him on Twitter @PaulBMoses.*



EDWARD NACHTRIEB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Last of the Beats

KAYA OAKES

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's one hundredth birthday in March was the occasion for a lot of celebration in San Francisco. Perhaps trying to counter its image as an exemplar of gentrification and greed, San Francisco took the opportunity to celebrate Ferlinghetti as representative of a life devoted to art and letters, a kind of life the city can no longer provide. City Lights Bookstore, which he opened in 1953, is now a place of pilgrimage, and like a church on Easter, it was draped with banners. North Beach streets were shut down for readings and parties, and the public library held a marathon reading in his honor. What Ferlinghetti did to celebrate his birthday, however, was remarkable for a person of his age: he became one of the oldest living people ever to publish a novel.

Little Boy, released just before his centenary, is a rambling, stream-of-consciousness narrative with splashes of free-form punctuation and very few paragraph breaks. The book's narrator Little Boy is a man looking back on his long life as a bookseller and writer after a turbulent childhood, service in World War II, and a post-war sojourn in Paris. Much of the previous sentence could have been copied and pasted from Ferlinghetti's own Wikipedia page. The book is not so much a novel, carrying the reader through the story with a narrative arc, as it is a look into the turbulent mind of a person who's kept a creative flame alight for so very long.

LITTLE BOY
A Novel

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI
Doubleday
$24 | 192 pp.

The Beat writers, of course, thought this kind of untethered writing—mashing up autobiographical elements with fictionalized ones, often assisted by piles of drugs and gallons of alcohol—was a means of unlocking creativity. Jack Kerouac even had a nine-point guideline for writing "spontaneous prose." Kerouac's *On the Road*, the bible of straight young men in their senior year of high school who go on to become English majors and get MFAs in fiction writing, was famously written in a drug-addled three-week binge, on an actual scroll of paper, and without paragraph breaks.

Kerouac, like most of the other Beat writers (with the exception of the more modest forest-dwelling sage Gary Snyder) was a self-mythologizer. He claimed the book sprung forth unedited, whereas the writer Joyce Glassman, his girlfriend at the time, later corrected the record and said Kerouac had been tinkering with the manuscript for years. In *Little Boy*, Ferlinghetti alludes to *On the Road* as the product of a "mad mind and heart inflated with the rage to live" and grieves the loss of Kerouac decades after his death. Kerouac's mad mind, its problems worsened by the spotlight of fame, led him to retreat to the home of his mother in middle age and to drink himself to death before the age of fifty.

Kerouac was also a terrible misogynist, but that's par for the course for the Beat writers, who generally treated women like props to be used and disposed of. Ferlinghetti may or may not have participated in this, but sex is a pervasive theme in *Little Boy*. The subgenre of memoirs and essays by the former girlfriends of Beat writers shines a light on the phallocentricity of the era. The exception to Beat misogyny is, of course, Allen Ginsberg, who preferred young, straight men. Ginsberg, the beloved literary godfather of many queer writers, was no sexual saint, but a card-carrying member of NAMBLA, an organization dedicated to normalizing pedophilia and

pederasty. A friend of mine who met Ginsberg when he was a young, beautiful undergraduate still wonders aloud, years later, whether he should have acquiesced to Ginsberg's advances, just for the sake of his literary career. And William S. Burroughs, so beloved by many readers as a kind of bizarre, cranky uncle, was a gay man who also pursued underaged boys, and was briefly married to a woman, whom he shot in the head. He thought of her death as the beginning of his literary career.

That Beat obsession with sex as fuel for creativity is evident in *Little Boy*, making it perhaps the horniest work ever written by a centenarian. *Little Boy* is a novel of observation rather than action, including its observations of the bodies of women and of the narrator's own penis, which may account for its complete lack of anything like a plot. Ferlinghetti cleaves to a kind of narrative arc for the first fourteen pages, tracing his own journey from birth to adulthood, at which point he says that "Grown Boy came into his own voice and let loose his word-hoard pent up within him," and the book subsequently tumbles into its unchained flow from there until its closing line. There's an argument to be made that two hundred pages of nonlinear prose is nothing but pure self-indulgence, and *Little Boy* was apparently rejected by at least six different publishers who'd initially been enthusiastic about the idea of a new novel from Ferlinghetti until they got their hands on it. But the argument can also be made that if anyone's allowed to be self-indulgent, it's a person who lives to be a hundred. If that person also happens to be Lawrence Ferlinghetti, an entire city throws a party in his honor.

Ferlinghetti, Snyder, Michael McClure, and Diane DePrima are the last living Beat writers. Whatever the legacy of the Beat Generation turns out to be once its scribes are no longer alive, it's likely that City Lights will still be around. San Francisco made the building a landmark in 2001, and it remains a vibrant and entertaining place to spend a few hours. I was last there a week or so after Ferlinghetti's birthday, and

There's an argument to be made that two hundred pages of nonlinear prose is nothing but pure self-indulgence.... But the argument can also be made that if anyone's allowed to be self-indulgent, it's a person who lives to be a hundred.

RE/Search, a local radical publisher of books about body modification and robots, was holding a party on the first floor. In the poetry attic on the third floor, a college-aged guy was offering a long, complex defense of Kerouac's poetry to a couple of older female tourists from Europe who seemed not to speak much English. On the basement level, the nonfiction books were categorized into "Muckraking" and "Class War," among other things. A pair of black-clad Antifa guys were paging through Angela Davis books while a couple from the U.K. who looked like they might have been rock stars in the sixties drunkenly tumbled down the stairs.

Ferlinghetti has for years had an office in the City Lights building with a sign saying "open door," and while the Beat Generation and all of its baggage probably pays the bills that keep the bookstore open, what happens inside is much more reflective of the Bay Area and its enduring literary identity, even in the face of change. All of us, as writers, have to reckon with the fact that our literary forebears were often deeply flawed, and the flaws of the Beats don't necessarily outweigh the good City Lights has done. My own father was a devoted but unpublished writer, and regular trips to City Lights to browse, read, rub elbows with writers, and sit by his side while he drank at the Vesuvio next door were a feature of my childhood and adolescence. Lawrence Ferlinghetti was a father to every writer in the Bay Area, because he opened a door for us to discover other writers. When my first book came out, the first place I went to go see it on a shelf was City Lights. Now my teenage niece and her friends ride the train into San Francisco, walk up to North Beach, get wired on coffee at the Café Trieste where Ferlinghetti still goes to write, and then make their way to City Lights. Sometimes, people say, you can see Ferlinghetti's silhouette in the windows of the bookstore's attic. It will probably be there long after he is gone.

KAYA OAKES *teaches nonfiction writing at UC Berkeley and lives in Oakland, California. She is the author of four books.*

Command Performance

DAN BARRY

First we removed our shoes. We aligned them neatly along the hallway wall, applying meaningless order to the moment. Then we gave our apologetic knock.

A friend of our dying friend invited us into the stillness. A few other guests and family members were already gathered in the one-bedroom Manhattan apartment, occasionally pausing from their white-noise whispers to sip wine or sample the plump grapes and mold-marbled cheeses.

All the while, she lay in a hospice bed fifteen feet away, on the other side of the cumulus-white wall. Her illness had overshadowed her fifty-fourth birthday a few weeks ago, after which doctors informed her that nothing more could be done. A decade of consults and chemo and surgery and radiation and living from drug trial to drug trial, back to chemo, back to radiation, and now there was nothing more.

Our friend reeled, then regained her balance. She made plans. A trip to the ocean. A fine meal. And music! An opera, perhaps, with soaring arias conveying all of humanity's wonder and woe.

Yes. Live music, she said, in command as always.

But cancer disrupted once more. When she became too weak to leave her apartment, one of the friends who had been caring for her struck upon an alternative plan.

So:

Into this apartment of awkward murmurs came two more shoeless people: a petite woman with long, dark hair and a tall man carrying a small black case. Larisa and Josh, friends of a friend of our shared friend.

Larisa Martinez is a gifted soprano who routinely performs before tens of thousands—often with the tenor Andrea Bocelli—but a nagging cold tonight had thwarted her plans to honor a request to sing our friend's favorite, "Ave Maria." Joshua Bell is a world-renowned classical violinist who had come directly from the airport after returning from another command performance.

Mr. Bell opened the case and removed a Stradivarius violin. Then, when the time was right, he crossed the divide into the bedroom and introduced himself as Josh.

"They said you like music, so," he said. "We live in the neighborhood. We thought we'd stop by."

He tuned his instrument with a few string plucks, and explained that he'd like to play something for her. Perhaps a solo from *Thaïs*, by Jules Massenet.

The opera, from 1894, tells the story of a monk who attempts to convert a courtesan to Christianity, only to realize that she is the purer soul, and he the one in need of salvation. The violin solo, "Méditation," is performed between scenes, entr'acte.

The violinist stood at the foot of the bed. To his right sat Larisa, his fiancée; to his left, a display of children's get-well drawings. He took a step back, as if in recognition of the power in his hands. He raised his priceless instrument, and it began.

We on the other side of the wall sat transfixed. Through the sliding door's clouded window pane, we could see the silhouette of the violin, the bow arcing up and across, the slight sway of man at one with ethereal sound.

The music seemed to weep as it soothed, summoning all fifty-four years of a life.

It is common to frame a cancer diagnosis in martial terms. Battling cancer; fighting cancer; the war on cancer. It is common, but wrong, the implication being that anything short of survival amounts to personal failure. Or surrender.

Summoning her working-class Rust Belt grit, our friend met her illness with a resolve so airtight that few of her work colleagues knew she had cancer. Year after year, she quietly endured the exhaustion and neuropathy, among other insults, yet continued to seize her days. She became one of the most respected editors in journalism, known for her literary ear and fierce demands that proper voice be given to the unseen and unheard. But she also made sure to resist the newsroom's never-ending gravitational pull; to have a private life removed from deadlines. She indulged her exquisite tastes in food and travel, fashion and music, and pampered a toy poodle she named Simone, after the one and only Nina, the high priestess of soul.

Now here was her entr'acte.

The caress of strings transported us to someplace well beyond this Chelsea apartment. We returned only when Josh summoned the last sorrowful-sweet note and raised his bow. In the ensuing silence, all was understood—a collective surrender to the mysteries.

The violinist and the soprano left as quietly as they had arrived. We followed soon after, slipping back into our shoes and leaving our dear friend in her sacred space.

DAN BARRY *is a longtime reporter and columnist for the* New York Times *and the author of several books, including* This Land: America Lost and Found *(2018). Most recently, he has worked as a senior story editor on "The Weekly" television program for the* Times.

KRZYSZTOF CHMIELEWSKI

Commonweal's transformation is under way.

We thank everyone who has made it possible.

Transforming Commonweal is a campaign making possible critical investments to increase *Commonweal*'s audience and effectiveness, from digital media to a redesign of the print magazine.

Thanks to these generous donors, we have now exceeded our three-year campaign goal of $1,050,000. But the work of transformation continues. For information about how you can help, please contact publisher Thomas Baker at tbaker@commonwealmagazine.org.

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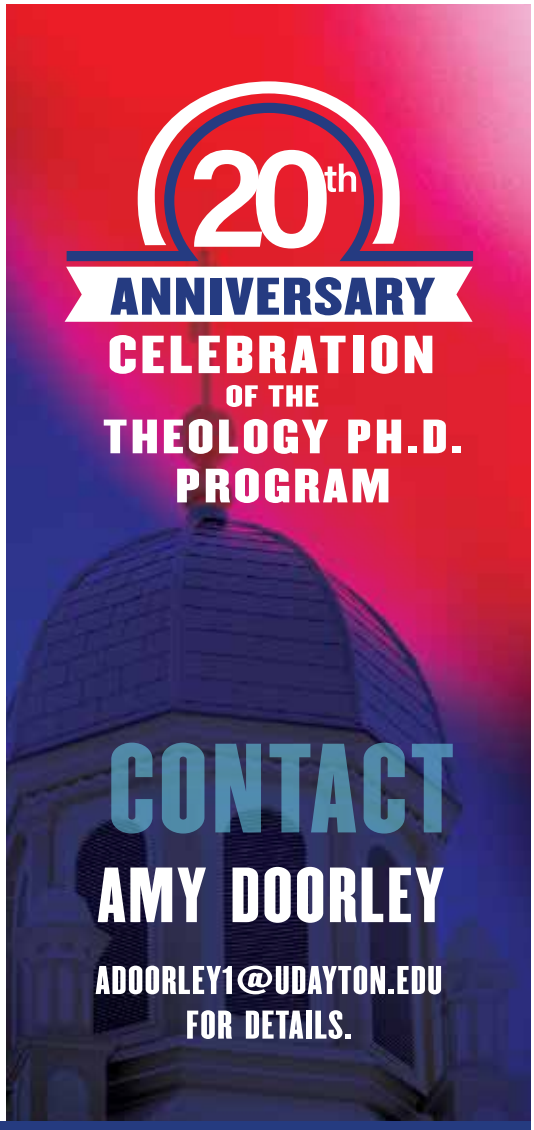

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