Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

JANUARY 2021

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LETTERS

Integralists & Vatican II

ABSURD ACCUSATIONS

In the review that you recently published of our book, *Integralism: A Manual of Political Philosophy* ("The New Integralists," November), Timothy Troutner included, among many tendentious and downright false assertions about the work, the claim that it "clearly breaks with Vatican II's teaching on religious liberty." This is an absurd accusation and can only imply that the reviewer is willfully interpreting *Dignitatis humanae* in such a fashion as to deliberately create a rupture between its doctrine and the "traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ," a rupture which *Dignitatis humanae* expressly denies. It is thus the reviewer and not we who attribute error to *Dignitatis humanae*. What he fails to grasp is that, as the declaration itself explains, man's right to religious liberty arises from his "moral obligation to seek the truth." To be sure, the right continues in those who have failed to fulfill the obligation, but Catholics have not failed to fulfill it. Thus their rights are not impeded but vindicated by a requirement imposed upon them to "continue to profess that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter." As John Paul II famously observed, "Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought."

Alan Fimister
St. John Vianney Theological Seminary
Denver, Colo.

TIMOTHY TROUTNER REPLIES:

My review suggested that integralism gets its persuasive power from its claim to be the only game in town for those who think tradition is important—and that if an alternative narrative is provided that accounts for the full sweep of Catholic history, the spell is broken. Should authors Crean and Fimister acknowledge that I affirm tradition without being an integralist, the game would be up. So I'm not surprised to see my position mischaracterized as an affirmation of "rupture," a claim that depends on a false dichotomy: either read *Dignitatis humanae* as nothing other than a repetition (however timid, ambiguous, or garbled) of an allegedly perennial teaching, or admit a betrayal of the faith.

That document presents itself as neither bare repetition nor rupture. Instead, its narrative, which my review echoes, is more subtle, claiming to "develop the doctrine" of the Church and bring forth "new things that are in harmony with the things that are old." It does not jettison the "moral obligation" of individuals and societies "to seek the truth." But it *does* argue that over the centuries the "leaven of the gospel" has deepened our awareness of how this search is to be undertaken: "the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth." Having reflected more deeply on "the way of Christ and the apostles" and the dignity of every human being, the council sees Christian wisdom at work in modern efforts to expand the scope of religious freedom and repents of those aspects of the Church's past that were "hardly in accord with the spirit of the Gospel or even opposed to it."

The manual, with its narrative of decline, cannot account for these "new things," and thus it relies on a forced reading of the *Dignitatis humanae* at odds with its plain meaning. Those who wish for a story faithful to all the treasures of the Church, both old and new, should look elsewhere.

A RANDIAN APPROACH

Mercedes K. Schneider's review of Douglas N. Harris's *Charter School City*, on the New Orleans public-school experiment, left me wondering which writer skirted the margins of a vastly complex subject ("Bad Education," November). This may be unfair to Harris, whose book I have not yet read, but from my reporting on the post–Hurricane Katrina charter-school takeover in *City of a Million Dreams: A History of New Orleans at Year 300* (UNC Press, 2018), I find that Schneider has omitted key information.

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LETTERS

She is absolutely right to criticize the state of Louisiana's treatment of the seventy-five thousand Orleans Parish public school teachers: unionized, fired, thrown into freefall shortly after the 2005 Hurricane Katrina flood that swamped 80 percent of the city. The legislature's creation of the Recovery School District has long been attacked by teacher advocates and liberal reformers for this gross injustice. Odd, then, that Schneider makes no mention of the teachers' class-action lawsuit against the state, which won a $1.5 billion verdict, only to be overturned by the state supreme court.

Treating teachers like riff-raff was a price for the Ayn Rand approach to reform shaped by Leslie Jacobs, but serious corruption had long deprived poor children of a good path to learning. In support of the state's seizure of the city's public-school system was a powerful former teacher, Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, a centrist Democrat. Blanco, who died last year, recoiled from the embedded rot in the Orleans Parish School Board offices. The administration (not teachers) had become a sewer of corruption sending a parade of bottom-feeders into prison.

Many teachers' struggles spotlight the Machiavellian logic behind the Recovery School District, which has seen an improvement in test scores and graduation rates. The charter system is now being folded back into the public-school system with reformers holding elective offices on the board. The root problem is a poverty level at roughly 30 percent of the population, and many at-risk children whose needs outweigh the services most schools provide. I will read Harris's book in hopes of insight on how the new system might work, though Schneider's criticisms of his work give me fair warning.

Jason Berry
New Orleans, La.

THE USEFULNESS OF GOSSIP

The excellent article "Reconsidering *Chisme*" by Neomi De Anda (December) has two glaring omissions regarding the usefulness of gossip. One is merely alluded to: had the hierarchy listened to gossip, Theodore McCarrick's sexual crimes and those of many others would have been discovered much earlier. And *chisme* is not only a way of dialogue; it is a way of learning, which must precede communication. In our asymmetric Church it is all too often the only way the laity learns what the clergy is thinking and doing. Gossip can be cruel or intended for the good; the latter use is necessary.

John O'Neill
Cedar, Mich.

THE TOLL OF CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Reading Roberto J. De La Noval's informative and compelling article "Unwrapping Lazarus" (December 2020) was a bittersweet experience for me. I lost my younger brother Charles to cystic fibrosis in 1955. He was three years old and had been diagnosed at a year old after a bout with pneumonia. His passing left a void in my life that I still feel today.

Throughout my lifetime, I've followed seemingly sporadic treatment breakthroughs for cystic-fibrosis patients. For a while there wasn't much news about CF; it was eclipsed by other diseases in the headlines. Then, little by little, I began to hear that some people with cystic fibrosis were living longer and even had professions and families. Now further strides have been made and, as De La Noval puts it, "a new light has appeared on the horizon" for those with cystic fibrosis. For this news and in my brother's memory, I rejoice.

It is, at best, a complicated and debilitating disease for those who suffer from it, and it is gut-wrenching for their loved ones to watch their suffering and be powerless to do anything about it. I was too young to realize the gravity of my brother's situation, but I think back to how my parents must have felt knowing my brother had an incurable disease. I have felt like Lazarus's sister Martha, who lamented that "if Jesus had come sooner, my brother would not have died," but now, thanks to De La Noval's article, I can also celebrate that today many cystic fibrosis patients have the chance to live longer and fuller lives.

Mary H. Donohue
Wilmington, Del.

Only a Down Payment

The best that can be said of the pandemic relief bill hammered out before Christmas is that it's better than nothing. Indeed, "nothing" seemed like a real possibility until not long ago. But with pressure mounting on the Republican candidates in Georgia's Senate runoffs and last spring's CARES Act about to expire, Mitch McConnell and the GOP decided it might be a bad idea to leave Washington before delivering assistance to the millions of Americans who are in economic distress because of the pandemic. The $900 billion compromise package came none too soon. But it also comes up far too short.

True, the deal provides urgently needed funding for small businesses, vaccine distribution, education, transportation, and health care, and includes a short-term extension of CARES Act benefits for millions who are out of work. It also restores the enhanced unemployment payments that lapsed earlier in 2020, but not at the level Congress approved last March. And it provides only a $600 one-time direct payment to individuals, half the amount that the CARES Act provided and less than what most economists had recommended. Democrats dropped demands to help fund struggling state and municipal governments—a considerable concession, given the straits many localities are in—while Republicans set aside their demands for shielding businesses from COVID-related liabilities. At the last minute, the GOP inserted a provision that would curtail the Federal Reserve's role in refunding pandemic relief programs, which seemed aimed mostly at making it harder for the incoming administration to deal with the crisis. The differences in priorities are telling, and they're likely to be on display when leaders meet on additional relief legislation in the weeks and months to come. Sen. Elizabeth Warren says Americans still aren't getting the help they need, while President-elect Biden has characterized the deal as only a "down payment" on a larger package.

Let's hope that's something closer to the approximately $2 trillion Democrats have said they want but have been frustratingly diffident in fighting for. Last year's CARES Act proved that significant government programs really do help people survive serious economic crises. Democrats should insist on measures aimed at aiding as many Americans as possible for as long as this one persists. They must frame it as a matter not of stimulating the economy but of offering real relief to those who have lost jobs, homes, and savings because of the pandemic—no matter the resistance they'll face from an opposition party still more interested in protecting the interests of corporations and the wealthy, a party back to complaining about deficit-spending now that a Democrat will be in the White House. There is, after all, a strong moral case to be made on top of the economic one.

But the larger case still needs to be made for addressing America's underlying socioeconomic inequities and the indignities heaped on the most vulnerable, conditions that the pandemic has further laid bare. Higher rates of infections and deaths among people of color and those with low incomes are undeniable indicators of disparities in access to health care. The number of Americans behind on rent and mortgage payments soared in 2020, yet landlords and wealthier homeowners enjoyed rising rents and higher property values. There are 10 million more people out of work than last February, and more than 8 million have fallen into poverty since June—by far the biggest one-year increase since the government began tracking poverty sixty years ago. Images of lines at food banks around the country underscore the challenge many Americans face in affording basic necessities. Yet a roaring stock market has further enriched CEOs and the wealthy, as forty-five of the fifty largest companies have turned significant profits (while collectively laying off more than 100,000 people) since March. The pandemic crisis has served to draw a still brighter line between America's haves and have-nots.

Among the most affected are those who since March have been declared "essential workers." Though the designation varies by state, these typically include health aides; factory, warehouse, and agriculture workers; delivery people; fast-food and supermarket employees; and others who, without the option of working from home, are putting their lives at risk to do their jobs. They're employed in industries and sectors where enforcement of basic health and safety measures is already lax, and now they can't always get the personal protective gear they need. Many don't receive a living wage and most don't have health insurance, while job protections (like paid sick leave) are minimal. According to the Economic Policy Institute, there are roughly 55 million workers in industries deemed "essential," but only about 12 percent are covered by a union contract. It shouldn't have taken a pandemic to bring attention to this shameful reality, but maybe this crisis will lead to real reform, such as a higher federal minimum wage, or guaranteed access to health care, or a legally enforceable right to organize. This is the least we can do for those whose labor is necessary to keep the economy from crashing altogether. ✪ *December 21, 2020*

A New Cardinal in D.C.

On November 28, Archbishop of Washington Wilton Gregory became the first African-American cardinal in a socially distanced ceremony at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. His appointment by Pope Francis comes during a period of political discord and renewed attention to racial injustice in the United States. Gregory said that his appointment was "a sign to the African-American community that the Catholic Church has a great reverence, respect and esteem for the people, for my people of color."

Born in 1947, Gregory was raised in Chicago and attended St. Carthage Grammar School, where he converted to Catholicism at the age of eleven. He was so impressed by the priests at his school that, according to his sister, he wanted to be a priest even before he was a Catholic. He was ordained in 1973 and went on to serve as a bishop in Belleville, Illinois, and as an archbishop in Atlanta. He is still the only Black archbishop in the United States.

Gregory was elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2001, just as the sexual-abuse crisis began to make headlines in Boston and elsewhere. As president of the USCCB, he oversaw the groundbreaking document "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," which established procedures for handling sexual-abuse allegations and set a "zero-tolerance" policy for priests found guilty of abuse. When Pope Francis appointed Gregory the seventh archbishop of the Archdiocese of Washington in 2019, the area was still reeling from a new round of the sexual-abuse crisis. The previous cardinal, Donald Wuerl, had resigned amid the fallout from a Pennsylvania grand-jury report that accused him of mishandling clerical sex-abuse cases when he was the bishop of Pittsburgh. Wuerl's predecessor, former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, was defrocked after Rome received credible reports that he had sexually abused minors for years. "It's not about the structures of the Church, it's about the mistakes, the awful bad judgments that the Church made in not focusing on the people that had been harmed," Gregory said in an interview with CNN. "We were so intent on caring about the clerics, priests, or bishops, that we did not see that the biggest pain to be endured was endured by the people that were hurt."

As archbishop of Washington, an area that includes the District of Columbia and surrounding Maryland suburbs, Gregory has been a healing presence in a diocese still recovering from the wounds of the sexual-abuse crisis. He's also been an outspoken voice on racial justice. "We are at a pivotal juncture in our country's struggle for racial justice and national harmony," he said at a Mass last summer in honor of the fifty-seventh anniversary of the March on Washington. He publicly criticized the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington D.C. for allowing Donald Trump to use it as a backdrop the day after police cleared protestors with tear gas so that the president could pose with a Bible in front of St. John's Church. "I find it baffling and reprehensible that any Catholic facility would allow itself to be so egregiously misused," Gregory said.

In an archdiocese where roughly 13 percent of Catholics are Black, Gregory's appointment is a cause for celebration. "We finally have someone who looks like me, who grew up like me and can embrace his African-American heritage," said Rev. Everett Pearson of Mount Calvary Catholic Church in Forestville, Maryland. "We've now got an opportunity to at least come to the table."

—Katie Daniels

Public Health v. Culture War

It's fitting that Amy Coney Barrett, whose nomination to the Supreme Court was celebrated with a superspreader event at the White House, would begin her tenure by targeting measures meant to combat the pandemic. In *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo*, the Supreme Court ruled that restrictions on religious gatherings imposed by New York's governor violated the free-exercise clause of the First Amendment. Barrett's influence was unmistakable. The late November decision departed from two similar cases in recent months that involved churches in California and Nevada. Their outcomes depended on Chief Justice John Roberts joining the four members of the court's liberal wing—which then included Ruth Bader Ginsburg—to uphold public-health rules.

Now that Barrett has replaced Ginsburg, the Supreme Court's conservatives have been further empowered. In an unsigned majority opinion, five of them took aim at an executive order signed by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo that puts a strict cap on attendance at religious services in certain color-coded geographical zones, classified by severity of their COVID-19 levels: in "orange zones" twenty-five people can attend; in "red zones" only ten. Because there were no such limits on either "essential" businesses in red zones or non-essential businesses in orange zones, the conservative majority concluded that houses of worship had been singled out for especially harsh treatment. Justice Neil Gorsuch was particularly irked that liquor stores and bike shops weren't covered by the restrictions. "Who knew public health would so perfectly align with secular convenience?" he wrote in his concurrence.

It's a silly point, one that has less to do with public health or the law than with culture-war grievances. The reason for such disparities should be obvious: attending Mass isn't anything like picking up a bottle of wine. Justice Sonia Sotomayor ably dispensed with Gorsuch's reasoning in her dissent, noting that he "does not even try to square his examples with the conditions medical experts tell us facilitate the spread of COVID–19: large groups of people gathering, speaking, and singing in close proximity indoors for extended periods of time." One might add that, when compared with similar secular events, religious services actually receive preferential treatment in New York—concerts, spectator sports, and movie theaters, for example, are given no reprieve at all.

This is not to say that Cuomo's executive order is beyond criticism. It seems reasonable to suggest that attendance limits could be determined by a venue's capacity—that a vast cathedral should be treated differently than a cramped parish church. But measures implemented in an emergency, subject to adjustment and revision, may be imperfect without being unconstitutional. For all the conservative justices' talk of judicial restraint, this was a striking example of legislating from the bench and usurping the discretion of elected officials.

The day after the decision in *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo* was announced, Pope Francis published a moving reflection in the *New York Times* on how he hoped the pandemic would touch our hearts. He expressed his disappointment at those who protest reasonable public-health restrictions, forsaking consideration of the common good. "It is all too easy for some to take an idea—in this case, for example, personal freedom—and turn it into an ideology," he wrote, "creating a prism through which they judge everything." He might as well have been talking about the Supreme Court conservative majority. For them, "religious liberty" means exemption from having to deal with people or policies they dislike. That they cloak their defiance in the language of the Constitution should fool no one.

—Matthew Sitman

Lame-Duck Executions

In July, the Trump administration ordered the execution of Daniel Lewis Lee. It was the first time a federal prisoner had been put to death since 2003. As of this writing, there have been nine more executions of federal prisoners in the last months of 2020, some of them within twenty-four hours of each other. Three more people are scheduled to die in the first weeks of January. If all goes as scheduled, President Trump will have presided over more executions than any president in more than a century.

In December 2019, then-Attorney General William Barr's announcement that federal executions would resume surprised no one. Barr has been a vocal advocate of capital punishment; in his view, it is not only a deterrent but a requirement of justice for "horrific crimes." In his announcement of the resumption of executions, Barr said, "the justice department upholds the rule of law—and we owe it to the victims and their families to carry forward the sentence imposed by our justice system."

For decades, federal executions had been rare. Before last summer, only three federal prisoners had been executed since the federal death penalty was reinstated in 1988. Most executions in the United States are carried out by state governments, but 2020 was the first year in which the federal government executed more prisoners than all the states combined. It is also rare for a president to proceed with executions during a lame-duck period; the last president to do so was Grover Cleveland.

Why now, why so many, and why so fast? This radical break with custom fits a pattern of "midnight regulations" that the Trump administration is ramming through at the last minute, in what looks like an attempt to thwart the incoming Biden administration. Biden has vowed to end the federal death penalty, and, unlike many other executive orders, executions aren't reversible.

But the zeal with which the Trump administration is pursuing these executions points to something more than just a desire to hamstring Biden. It is an intentionally conspicuous display of raw power. One of those "midnight regulations" is the reintroduction of more gruesome methods of execution—firing squads, poison gas, and electrocution. Support for the death penalty had been declining for decades; even Republicans had lost some of their enthusiasm for it. But under the Trump administration, support for the death penalty has started rising again. The states that carried out executions last year—Alabama, Georgia, Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas—are all red states, while many others have abolished the death penalty. In any case, Trump thinks that imposing "law and order" makes him look strong, and he is willing to swim hard against the current of public opinion to keep up his tough reputation.

Two leading bishops at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City and Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, have called on Trump to stop the executions "in recognition of God's unmerited gift of self-giving love." And in his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis reaffirms that "the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice."

Unfortunately, President Trump has shown little interest in real justice, still less in morality. Fortunately, the next president seems to agree with the pope.

—Regina Munch

RITA FERRONE

'Our Eucharist Is a Feast'

Francis has become a serious advocate for liturgical inculturation.

One of the final recommendations from the October 2019 Synod on the Amazon was that a liturgical rite be developed for use by the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. This collaborative effort would be a work of liturgical inculturation, representing an integration of Catholic faith with the culture of the Amazonian peoples—a Catholic liturgical expression "valuing the original worldview, traditions, symbols and rites that include transcendent, community and ecological dimensions." In his post-synodal exhortation, *Querida Amazonia,* Pope Francis embraced inculturation too: "What is needed is courageous openness to the novelty of the Spirit, who is always able to create something new with the inexhaustible riches of Jesus Christ."

Just a few weeks after the synod, Francis presided at a celebration of the Zairean liturgy at St. Peter's Basilica for the Congolese community in Rome. The Zairean rite is the only fully inculturated liturgy to emerge since the Second Vatican Council, so the symbolic value of the event was high. A book about this experience was recently published with a preface written by Francis praising the liturgy and affirming it as a model of inculturation for the Amazon and elsewhere. He also produced a video message promoting it. Francis, it would appear, is becoming a serious advocate for liturgical inculturation.

What is liturgical inculturation? It is the insertion of liturgy into a given culture in such a way that the liturgy absorbs the culture (and is thus able to speak from within the culture) and the culture absorbs the liturgy (and thus the Christian faith upon which it rests becomes more deeply integrated into the social fabric and worldview of that society). The fathers at Vatican II, when writing the liturgy constitution, incorporated four critical paragraphs on liturgical inculturation (37–40). These gave permission for cultural adaptation of the liturgy in both a simple and a profound manner. It was, and still is, a big deal.

For one thing, it was a decision that ruled out a kind of cultural imperialism that identified Catholic liturgy

CNS PHOTO/VATICAN MEDIA

Pope Francis celebrates a Mass in the Zairean rite for the Congolese community in Rome, December 1, 2019.

exclusively with its European expressions. For another, it has sparked a lot of critical reflection on the role of culture in how people worship generally. As my mentor in liturgical studies, Aidan Kavanagh, used to say, "the liturgy did not fall from heaven in a Glad bag." Liturgy has always drawn on local cultures—not only art, music, vesture, and architecture, but also prayer forms, gestures, and liturgical actions. During the Tridentine era, however, there was a great deal of pressure to centralize control and enforce liturgical uniformity. This was the situation that Vatican II set out to correct.

The Church continues to expand in regions of the world that are home to widely diverse cultures. Why not allow liturgical variations that will speak to the hearts of people living in the Congo Basin? Or the Torres Straits Islands? Or the Amazon rainforest? Advocates of inculturation see it as an opportunity for evangelization. Unfortunately, one has only to recall the hysterical reaction to the presence of statuettes of a pregnant woman at the Amazon Synod to see that ignorance and negative assumptions about indigenous people can fuel opposition to inculturation. We cheerfully put an Advent wreath in a church (a custom derived from pre-Christian Scandinavia), but a piece of Amazonian folk art is presumed to be the product of idolatry.

At the official level, the greatest openness to inculturation occurred immediately after the council, during the pontificate of Paul VI. During the John Paul II and Benedict years, however, the atmosphere turned hostile. It's not as though no one tried. A rite was proposed for India. It was never approved. A rite for the Philippines was completed, but likewise sat on a desk in the Curia. The only liturgy that got through the net was the Congolese Rite. This is why the "Roman Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire" is so important. It's the sole example of what the council actually hoped for, and what Francis now seeks to revive.

The name of their liturgical ordo was imposed on them (they wanted to leave "Roman" out of the title). Nevertheless, even as it remains totally recognizable as the Mass, quite a number of its distinguishing features are rooted in African soil. To name but a few examples: the liturgy includes an invocation of the ancestors. An "announcer"—a particular ministry not known in other iterations of the Roman Rite—invites the participation of the assembly. Servers may carry spears as an honor guard. There is an elaborate offertory procession. The altar is venerated in four directions. Most impressive, there is dancing throughout the Mass. Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, the cardinal archbishop of Kinshasa and a member of Francis's cardinal advisory council, participated in the Amazon synod as a representative of Africa. He spoke at a press conference, noting parallels between the Amazon and the Congo Basin, and he praised the Zairean rite, saying, "our Eucharist is a feast." Will the Amazonian people likewise have their feast, drawing on the riches of their culture in the celebration of Eucharist? If Francis has anything to say about it, the answer is evidently "yes."

Liturgy has always drawn on local cultures.

COLE STANGLER

France's War on Terror

Years of Islamist attacks show the problem is real—but the Macron government continues to play politics with its response.

As the threat of terrorism tightens its grip on French life, the mood here is starting to feel like it did in the United States during those bleak years after 9/11. Terrorism has become the main focus of President Emmanuel Macron and his party, the press spends much of its time relaying the government's proposals and talking points about the issue, and legislation that curtails civil liberties in the name of "security" is now making its way through Parliament. Those who don't get with the program are regarded with suspicion.

The familiarity of this response, however, shouldn't obscure the important differences that mark the current political situation in France. While the 9/11 attacks resulted in nearly three thousand deaths, they weren't followed by another major terrorist strike on American soil, and none of the perpetrators hailed from the United States. France, on the other hand, is in the midst of a drawn-out stretch of terrorist violence that has involved major attacks committed by people either born or raised in France—a cycle that has left more than two hundred and sixty dead since 2012. Of these, the November 2015 attacks in Paris and Bastille Day 2016 attacks in Nice were the deadliest.

Recent events have only added to the unease, especially the gruesome killing of middle-school teacher Samuel Paty in October. After showing his class in suburban Paris a drawing of the Prophet Mohammed—an exercise intended to help illustrate a debate about freedom of expression—rumors abounded that Paty had forced Muslim students to leave the room. (In fact, he'd told students to briefly look away if they'd rather not see the images.) A few days later, an eighteen-year-old Chechen refugee with no link to the school tracked down Paty and beheaded him in the street right outside the school where he taught.

Paty's death hit with particular force because of the critical role the French state assigns its schools. In addition to transmitting knowledge and teaching students how to think, France's education system is supposed to inculcate the universal values of the Republic—that is, to make students into good French citizens. A pillar of that citizen-forming process is understanding the principle of *laïcité*, or secularism: among other things, the notion that all religions are equal before the law and that the state must oversee a delicate balance between protecting one's private religious practices and enforcing neutrality in public spaces.

When Paty was murdered, it seemed to many like a pointed repudiation of that. Here was a schoolteacher trying to encourage critical thinking about one of France's foundational principles, all while being mindful of his students' needs, and it cost him his life.

But the national mourning for Paty had hardly finished before another attack occurred—this time, at a Catholic church in Nice, when a twenty-one-year-old Tunisian who had recently arrived in the city killed three people. Days later, a lone gunman in Vienna killed four people and wounded twenty-three others—a reminder that the threat of terrorism isn't limited to France.

What is going on? The answer is one that some, for fear of stoking bigotry, hesitate to give: Islamist terrorism is a real problem in France. Those who support a just and measured response to it need to understand it as well as possible, rather than deny or downplay the issue.

French political scientist Olivier Roy is well known for his argument about the "Islamization of radicalism." Alienated youth turn to jihadism, Roy suggests, because it offers them a satisfying framework to channel their nihilistic fantasies and sense of disgust with the world. In his telling, Islam isn't much of a factor per se: disillusioned young people are just latching onto what's in front of them. After all, extremists of all stripes have often pointed to religion to justify terrible acts of violence.

But Roy's formula was, originally, a response to fellow political scientist Gilles Kepel's thesis about the "radicalization of Islam," one that many other specialists in the field take for granted today. According to these experts, the recent spike in jihadism is linked to a fundamentalist turn within Islam itself—manifest, for example, in the spread of Salafism in Western Europe. (According to a 2018 note by France's police intelligence bureau, around thirty thousand to fifty thousand people in France today are considered Salafists—a tiny minority of the country's roughly 4 million Muslims, but a number that nevertheless appears to be rising, up from four thousand in 2004.) The overwhelming majority of these deeply conservative Muslims may be nonviolent, but according to Kepel and those who think similarly, their mosques and study groups help nourish homegrown jihadist thought.

Kepel's basic approach is shared by Macron, and it comes with fairly clear political implications: if authorities want to fight homegrown terrorism, they have to look to the conservative Muslim communities making their homes in France.

Kepel and Roy's competing approaches are often pitted against each other by journalists—a literary device made all the more tempting by the two famous scholars' bitter personal rivalry—but, as others have

French President Emmanuel Macron outside Notre Dame Basilica in Nice, where three people were killed in a knife attack before a Mass.

CNS PHOTO/ERIC GAILLARD, POOL VIA REUTERS

pointed out, the differences may not be so stark. In fact, they can even be understood as complementary. The development of Salafist organizations may well be isolating a segment of young Muslims from the rest of mainstream Islam and French society at large, increasing the chances they fall into jihadist circles, but there might be other factors pushing someone over the edge. What about someone hardened by spending their formative years in prison? If that person ends up joining ISIS, were they radicalized by the Muslim religion or the rough life they didn't choose for themselves?

These are complicated questions that require nuanced policy responses—questions inseparable, too, from the economic context of the impoverished working-class neighborhoods where conservative forms of Islam have flourished. Unfortunately, the French government's response to the October attacks has been lacking in such nuance: it can be hard to determine which of its new policies are designed to actually reduce the threat of young people radicalizing and which are simply designed to score political victories for the president and his party.

In the next presidential race, in 2022, Macron is once again expected to face Marine Le Pen in the run-off round. Le Pen's far-right National Rally party has long bashed immigration and now regularly calls for improving security and defending *laïcité*. By leaning into these themes, Macron and his government aren't just innocently tackling topics of public concern. They're hoping to win over voters ahead of a hypothetical rematch against Le Pen—and at times, this strategy has involved reaching into the far Right's rhetorical tool box.

This process was already in motion before the recent attacks, with newly appointed Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin spending his summer hyping up a non-existent crime wave and warning of *ensauvagement*—the notion that the country is turning "savage." It was stunning to hear a government minister talk this way, borrowing a word more commonly spotted in the far-right weekly *Valeurs actuelles* or broadcast on the CNews channel, the French equivalent of Fox News.

But those expecting a more sober-minded approach after the attacks were to be disappointed. In a televised interview just four days after Paty's murder, Darmanin criticized the supposed overabundance of halal food in supermarkets. A week later, he doubled down on the comments, saying he understood why stores sold such food, but that he regretted the presence of entire "shelves" dedicated to it.

When the person in charge of the country's police force make comments like that, it sends a message to France's Muslim and non-Muslim population alike: this is not going to be a nuanced public debate. The dragnet being cast is a big one. Hold on to something sturdy if you can.

Many of the new security measures the government has taken in recent weeks are uncontroversial. For instance, the state has temporarily shuttered a mosque led by an imam with Salafist leanings. And it's moved to dissolve a marginal Islamist organization that had relayed unfounded criticism of Samuel Paty on social media before his death. But it's also formally abolished the much larger, more mainstream Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) for allegedly fueling discrimination and "provoking acts of terror."

These are serious charges against a group whose statistics on discrimination have been regularly relayed in the press, and a group that only last fall helped organize a march with mainstream left-wing parties. But as the state's chilling decree makes clear, the main offense here is guilt by association. Because the CCIF has previously criticized government measures designed to fight terrorism as "Islamophobic," the group "must be seen as sharing, condoning and contributing" to extremism and generating the risk of violence. (France's Human Rights League, a well-regarded human-rights organization that was founded during the Dreyfus Affair, called the decision to dissolve the CCIF "political" and warned it will reinforce the idea that all Muslims are to be viewed with suspicion.)

The government has also unveiled legislation designed to "reinforce Republican principles." This was already planned before the October attacks, billed as the "law against separatism," but Macron's party has beefed up the proposal since then. In addition to limiting the ability of parents to homeschool their children, it now includes measures that make it easier to arrest people for sharing harmful information online. But it also enhances government oversight over funding for cultural associations, and would require organizations that receive public subsidies to respect "Republican values," giving authorities power to nix state funding if they feel those groups aren't meeting their responsibilities.

In addition to all this, the government is moving forward with a bill that holds nightmarish implications for civil liberties. While not technically presented as part of the fight against terrorism, the so-called "general security law" is part of a broader push to improve public security—all designed to help Macron convince right-wing voters that he is, indeed, a law-and-order president and deserves reelection in 2022. Most notably, the bill would greatly expand the use of drones and body cameras on police officers. Originally, it also came with a measure to clamp down on sharing images of police officers—punishable by up to a €45,000 fine and a year in prison—but Macron's party has since vowed to "rewrite" that section of the bill after mass protests.

Demonstrations in late November and early December, backed by journalist unions and NGOs, marked a rare bright spot in an otherwise very gloomy political atmosphere. In case anyone forgot how the Yellow Vests, trade unions, climate movement, and anti-racist protesters have managed to wrangle concessions from the government in recent years, taking to the streets still works.

Despite such occasional victories, it all feels terribly corrosive for French democracy: the obsession with security; the rollback of civil liberties; the aspersions cast by the interior minister and various talking heads on an entire religious minority; the installation of an us-versus-them logic that refuses to grapple with even mild pushback against the official line; and a resulting tendency to define critics as either bad-faith actors or political naïfs who don't grasp the extent of the threat facing the nation. (In a perfect distillation of this tendency to lump together all the naysayers, France's education minister has on multiple occasions warned against the apparent danger posed by "Islamo-leftists," an all-encompassing shorthand for political adversaries that harks back to the far Right's denunciations of "Judeo-Bolsheviks" in the 1920s.)

In recent weeks, a number of French politicians and journalists have accused foreign critics, especially Americans, of misunderstanding *laïcité* or underestimating the danger posed by Islamist extremism. They're partially right. Some of these critics have gotten basic facts wrong, and it occasionally feels like they don't appreciate the very real differences that exist between the small minority of deeply conservative Muslims who have become radicalized and the rest of France's Muslim population. But the concerns expressed by other American observers about recent developments in France should be taken as a sincere warning: they've already seen what kind of damage this sort of climate of suspicion can produce in the United States.

Mathieu Magnaudeix, the former U.S. correspondent for the outlet *Mediapart*, has described the recent string of security-driven legislative proposals in France as a "Patriot Act à la française" warning that, like the United States, "we're going to be in this for twenty years." The comparison should be taken seriously. He's right in noticing that the legal infrastructure justifying permanent state surveillance in the United States, introduced in the months following 9/11, has become so entrenched that most have forgotten it's even there. Once you grant far-reaching new powers to the government, it can be very hard to take them back.

Macron's recent rightward turn has been criticized on these grounds; if Marine Le Pen were ever to win the presidency, he'd be leaving an arsenal of dangerous tools at her disposal. That argument has some merit, but it seems to partially misread the situation. The government's onslaught against civil liberties is not some hypothetical risk. It's happening right now. It's happening today.

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NICHOLAS P. CAFARDI

An Ambrose of Our Own

The people should choose their bishops, just like they used to.

There are a number of conclusions one could draw from reading the Vatican report on former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. For example: that the clerical sex-abuse crisis in the Church is worse than we thought and extends to vulnerable adults. Also, that position and influence in our Church are easily bought, and that bishops lie, even to the pope, to protect other bishops. But the conclusion that encompasses all of those things is that the way we choose our bishops is deeply flawed, producing bishops who are, in turn, deeply flawed. How did things get this way, and what can be done about it?

First, let's consider a bit of history. Once the office of bishop was clearly established in the early Church as the unitary head of a diocese (a Roman administrative unit), that office was filled by someone chosen by local people and priests, then ratified by the neighboring bishops, as a sign of the unity of the Church. Even the unbaptized were eligible, as we know from the oft-told story of St. Ambrose, whom the clergy and people of Milan chose as their bishop while he was still a catechumen. The first bishop of the United States, John Carroll, was elected by the priests of Maryland and confirmed by the pope. Today, we are so used to the pope choosing our bishops for us that we think it was always that way. It wasn't. In fact, the right of the pope to choose bishops was only settled with the 1917 Code of Canon Law, a papal document that clearly allocated that power to the holder of the papal office.

Arguably, there is some limited lay input in the selection of bishops. When a priest is being considered for appointment as bishop, the papal nuncio sends out what are called apostolic letters to a select group, which may include laypeople from the area, asking their opinion of the candidate based on some very specific questions. Because the papal nuncio does not actually know the laypeople of a diocese, he normally gets their names from the outgoing bishop, which means that the recipients of

Bishops attend a canonization ceremony celebrated by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square, October 18, 2015.

MASSIMO VALICCHIA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

the letters are usually wealthy donors. Under Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the areas of query in the apostolic letters were: Has the man ever said anything about birth control, abortion, married priests, female priests, the remarriage of divorced Catholics, same-sex marriage? These questions reveal the biases that gave us so many culture-warrior bishops under those popes. Since the election of Pope Francis, the questions focus more on pastoral concerns. But most of the letters still tend to go to influential (i.e. wealthy) people.

Apart from these letters, there is no other lay input into the choice of bishops. The system is still pretty much an old boys' network. Each diocese in the United States is part of an ecclesiastical province—every diocese in Illinois, for example, is in the province of Chicago; every diocese in Pennsylvania is in the province of Philadelphia. At their annual provincial meetings, the bishops of each province can put the names of priests they favor on a list of potential candidates for bishop. This is called the provincial list, and every so often the bishops update it. When there is a need for a diocesan or auxiliary bishop in the province, the papal nuncio begins the hunt by looking at the candidates on the provincial list. Laypeople do not get to put names on the provincial lists. And the papal nuncio is not even bound by the provincial list: it is only a starting point in putting together *his* list of potential candidates. On his own initiative, the nuncio may add the names of priests from other provincial lists around the country, or names that aren't on provincial lists, to create the list of candidates that he sends to the Congregation for Bishops in Rome.

The Congregation for Bishops, currently headed by Cardinal Marc Ouellet of Canada, has thirty or so members, including cardinals who work at the Vatican, plus cardinals and bishops from around the world. The congregation vets the nuncio's list (called a *terna* because it has three names on it) and may add different names before sending it to the pope. An American bishop (usually a cardinal) who is a member of the Congregation for Bishops has inordinate influence on who becomes a bishop in the United States.

After receiving the *terna*, the pope can accept it and select a name from it; he can reject it entirely and ask the congregation for a new *terna*, with names on it that he suggests; or he can ignore the *terna* completely and just choose his own man.

This is our system. And it is easy to see how the McCarrick case fits into it. His first appointment as bishop was as an auxiliary in his home archdiocese of New York in 1977, where he had been serving as secretary to Cardinal Terence Cooke since 1971. Cardinal Cooke, with the consent of the other bishops of the province of New York, had his secretary's name placed on the provincial list. When the apostolic delegate, Archbishop Jean Jadot, went looking for names for a *terna* for auxiliary bishop of New York, there was McCarrick on the provincial list. The Vatican report says that between 1968, when McCarrick was first considered for auxiliary bishop, until 1977, when he was appointed, fifty-two apostolic letters were sent out, mostly to bishops and priests in the New York area, suggesting that very few apostolic letters were sent to laypeople. With his limited investigation complete, Jadot placed McCarrick's name on the *terna* that he sent to Rome. The Congregation for Bishops did its vetting, the list went to Pope Paul VI (who probably had a conversation or two with Cardinal Cooke), and McCarrick was chosen. His appointment required no consultation with the body of clergy of New York, and no consultation with the body of the laity, beyond those few apostolic letters. It mostly required Cardinal Cooke's patronage.

Once a bishop, albeit an auxiliary and not a diocesan bishop, all that McCarrick had to do to advance in the hierarchy was to campaign with the apostolic delegate (whose title changed in 1984 to papal nuncio) to get his name on a *terna* for his own diocese. Given the discretion that the delegate had in structuring a *terna*, and given McCarrick's already prodigious fundraising in New York, it is not difficult to see how this might happen. When the new diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, was established in 1981, McCarrick was named its first bishop. In clerical circles this is referred to as a "starter diocese" to describe the first small diocese given to a man meant for bigger things and bigger dioceses. When a bishop is being considered for promotion or transfer to another diocese, the papal nuncio talks not to the priests and the laypeople of the diocese, but to other bishops who know the candidate. McCarrick, his fundraising prowess increasing as he moved up the ladder, had been in Metuchen for less than five years when he was named the

CNS PHOTO/JONATHAN NEWTON, THE *WASHINGTON POST*, POOL

Then-Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick waves to fellow bishops.

archbishop of Newark. He stayed there for four years, and when a cardinalatial see—Washington D.C.—fell open, McCarrick started campaigning again. According to the Vatican's report, he had been considered for Chicago and New York before this, but concerns about his sexual relations with priests and seminarians kept his name off the final *terna* submitted to the pope by the Congregation for Bishops.

Thanks to the report, we know that McCarrick was not going to be on the *terna* submitted by the papal nuncio for Washington D.C., for the same reason that he did not advance for Chicago or New York: the rumors of his sexual misbehavior. Learning that these rumors had reached the Vatican, McCarrick wrote a letter addressed to his friend Bishop Stanisław Dziwisz, a member of the papal household, but meant for the pope, in which he strongly denied these rumors. The letter had its desired effect. After some curial machinations, McCarrick's name ended up on the *terna* and he was chosen by Pope John Paul II, even though the pope had acquiesced in a prior evaluation by the Congregation for Bishops not to advance McCarrick's name for Washington. We know that McCarrick used funds at his disposal to send personal gifts to prelates at the Vatican. Was there a check for Bishop Dziwisz in McCarrick's letter, to assure that it got passed on to the pope? Who knows?

But see how this process of choosing bishops works. Thanks to the old boys' network among bishops, once McCarrick gets his name on the New York provincial list—and after a limited appraisal by a few New York laypeople for his appointment as auxiliary bishop—his further advancement does not depend on what the laity say. His moves from New York auxiliary to bishop of Metuchen to archbishop of Newark to cardinal archbishop of Washington D.C. involve only the apostolic delegate/papal nuncio talking with other bishops. It is a self-enclosed clerical system that gave us McCarrick, and that gives us our bishops still.

This often results in bishops being parachuted into dioceses by headquarters, without any knowledge of the diocese, its priests, or its people. At least McCarrick was made an auxiliary in his home diocese. One of the practices that increased under John Paul II, and one of the worst, is the appointing of auxiliary bishops for a diocese from priests outside the diocese. This happened because provincial lists were used. But what an insult to the diocesan presbyterate: not one of you is qualified to be an auxiliary bishop of your own diocese, so we must bring in an outsider, usually an outsider who is slated for future promotions because of the influence of his patrons in the United States and in Rome.

Sometimes a parachute bishop works out, sometimes he doesn't. The system usually delivers a bishop whose only loyalty is upward, and not to his own priests and people. This fact alone—how bishops are chosen and where their true loyalties lie—explains a lot about how American bishops mishandled the sexual-abuse crisis.

What would it look like if laypeople had a real role in the choice of bishops? Let's make a modest proposal. When a diocese is about to fall vacant—and we know well in advance when that would be because a bishop must retire when he turns seventy-five—the papal nuncio or someone from the nunciature staff should travel to the diocese and speak with the laypeople directly. Ask people to stay after Mass to talk about this; that way you will get those 22 percent of Catholics who actually participate in the life of the Church to give their opinion. Or hold a convocation in the diocese attended by folks chosen by the people of the parish, not by the pastor. The people know who the good priests are; they know the men Pope Francis described in his talk to the episcopal conferences of Latin America (CELAM) when he said:

> Bishops must be pastors, close to people, fathers and brothers, and gentle, patient and merciful. Men who love poverty, both interior poverty, as freedom before the Lord, and exterior poverty, as simplicity and austerity of life. Men who do not think and behave like princes. Men who are not ambitious, who are married to one Church without having their eyes on another. Men capable of watching over the flock entrusted to them and protecting everything that keeps it together: guarding their people out of concern for the dangers which could threaten them, but above all instilling hope: so that light will shine in people's hearts. Men capable of supporting with love and patience God's dealings with his people.

Let the people tell the nuncio who these priests are. They know.

Another group who knows are the priests of the diocese. If anyone gets apostolic letters from the papal nuncio, it should be these men. They know the kind of bishop the diocese needs, and they know who has the necessary talents.

Having heard from the people and priests of the diocese, the nuncio can then make his list for Rome from the names they suggested. And the list should stay that way. Neither the nuncio nor a member of the Congregation for Bishops should get to put a friend or protégé's name on the list. Their job would simply be evaluative: Which of the candidates identified by laypeople and priests doesn't think and behave like a prince, but is a pastor and close to the people? Even the pope should be bound, not in law, but in conscience, to that list.

Under such rules, the McCarrick horror would never have happened. We might have had something like Milan in the fourth century, and someone like Ambrose as bishop.

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PAUL MOSES

The One Missing Fact

How EWTN misreported the Viganò letter

Raymond Arroyo and Laura Ingraham in 2018

EWTN's website declares that "Our mission is simple. We aim to bring you reliable, accurate, trustworthy news, from a perspective of faith. We prize integrity, fairness, and a commitment to the teachings of the Catholic Church."

But in reporting one of the biggest stories to hit the Catholic Church in recent years, EWTN, which says it is the largest religion-news organization in the world, was neither reliable, nor accurate, nor trustworthy. Its coverage of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's bold call for Pope Francis to resign his office willfully ignored the gaps and contradictions in his claims (except to explain them away), promoted his credibility, and slanted the narrative against the pope.

This can be seen even more clearly now that the Vatican has released its report on the Holy See's role in advancing the career of Theodore McCarrick to his pinnacle as cardinal-archbishop of Washington and elder statesman of the American Church—all the while concealing multiple allegations that he sexually harassed and abused seminarians and young priests. But from the start, EWTN shaped the story to fit its increasingly Fox News-ified agenda.

EWTN Global Catholic Network, based in Alabama, is a powerhouse. The nonprofit organization boasts cable subscribers in 310 million households in one hundred and forty-five countries, more than five hundred radio affiliates, the *National Catholic Register* newspaper, a book-publishing unit, and the Catholic News Agency. Its website received 4.9 million visits in November, according to SimilarWeb analytics. Publicly filed tax returns show that its main entity, Eternal Word Television Network, raised $305 million in donations from 2014 through 2018.

Viganò released his "testimony" against Francis and other prelates through the *Register*, as well as on the farther-right website LifeSiteNews, on August 25, 2018. It was, for any journalist, a titillating document, with a high-ranking insider accusing not only Pope Francis but also numerous bishops of covering up the allegations against McCarrick. But it also contained many warning signs that required journalistic caution in reporting on it.

The biggest was that while Viganò called for the pope to take the unprecedented step of resigning for malfeasance—for supposedly reversing sanctions that Pope Benedict XVI had imposed on McCarrick—the archbishop didn't really know what Benedict had done, or when he did it. On one hand, Viganò said he told Pope Francis about Benedict's sanctions on McCarrick. On the other, it wasn't clear from his own account how much he knew. Despite that haziness, Viganò asserted that it was "certain" Pope Benedict had imposed "canonical sanctions" barring McCarrick from celebrating Mass in public, giving lectures or traveling, taking part in public meetings, and requiring him to leave the seminary where he was living.

This raised another obvious problem with Viganò's claim: it was easily verified that during the sixteen months he was the papal nuncio to the United States and Benedict was pope, McCarrick remained in the public spotlight (sometimes in events with Benedict or Viganò), traveled the globe, and appeared on national television. But in Viganò's telling, "From the time of Pope Francis's election, McCarrick, now free from all constraints, had felt free to travel continuously, to give lectures and interviews." The question was: What constraints?

This is not to deny the document's value as a tool for reporters to unpack the two-decade story of how McCarrick advanced to such heights in the Church. But the EWTN operation lacked the journalistic distance to filter out Viganò's bias, and thus to find the larger story that was implicit in his testimony—how the McCarrick matter was mishandled through three papacies. They're not the first journalists to limit themselves to a major source who gave them a string of exclusives, but they should at least realize what they've done in retrospect. Judging from the coverage of the McCarrick report, released this November, the key journalists there don't.

The network's most visible figure, newscaster and Fox News commentator Raymond Arroyo, led the way in arguing for Viganò's credibility and keeping the focus where the archbishop wanted it: on Francis and those American bishops who supported him. In breaking the Viganò story on August 25, *National Catholic Register* Rome correspondent Edward Pentin wrote:

> "What is certain," Viganò writes in his testimony, "is that Pope Benedict imposed the above canonical sanctions on McCarrick and that they were communicated to him by the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, Pietro Sambi."
>
> The *Register* has independently confirmed that the allegations against McCarrick were certainly known to Benedict, and the Pope Emeritus remembers instructing Cardinal Bertone to impose measures but cannot recall their exact nature.

At first read, it looks like enterprising journalism for Pentin to be able to confirm that important fact while reporting a breaking story. But it reminds me of a quip I once heard from the late Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist Murray Kempton: "An investigative reporter is someone who leaves out one key fact." I took him to mean the missing fact that would lead readers to the gray areas of a story, the ambiguities that soften outrage, Kempton's specialty.

Six days later, Pentin used a blog post to report, in the fifteenth paragraph of a twenty-three-paragraph article, what the key fact was. From "a reliable source close to Benedict" he had gleaned this:

> As mentioned in the *Register*'s initial report on the testimony on Aug. 25, the Pope Emeritus was "unable to remember very well" how the matter was handled, according to the source. As far as Benedict could recall, the source said the instruction was essentially that McCarrick should keep a "low profile." There was "no formal decree, just a private request."

Request. That's a world of difference from the "canonical sanctions" that, according to Viganò, Pope Francis had removed in an act of "sinful conduct," in which he "associated himself in doing evil with someone he knew to be deeply corrupt," and was "abdicating the mandate which Christ gave to Peter."

This revision came about after a Catholic newspaper in Germany, *Die Tagespost*, published an August 28 article in which a Holy See insider, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, said it was "fake news" to claim that Benedict had confirmed Viganò's allegations. This presented a challenge for EWTN: Gänswein, who worked closely with the two popes, was one of the good guys in EWTN's version of Vatican politics, someone who granted its reporters rare access to the highest levels of the Church.

According to *Die Tagespost*, Gänswein was referring to a *New York Times* report on August 27 that quoted EWTN board member Timothy Busch, a wealthy conservative Catholic lawyer and donor, as saying that he believed Viganò's claims to be credible. Referring to the *National Catholic Register*, the *Times* said that "leaders of the publication had personally assured him that the former pope, Benedict XVI, had confirmed Archbishop Viganò's account."

I won't weigh readers down with the semantic debate that followed with Busch's denial and a flurry of related attacks and counterattacks on social media. The editors were on the spot.

As is often the case when that happens, the reporter was left to explain.

Pentin did so in an interview with Arroyo. "This is certainly a very very good source who told me that, and it seems very clear that Pope Benedict did enforce sanctions, he did impose sanctions," he said. But, Arroyo told Pentin with a stagy alarm, Gänswein's comments "seemed to undercut your reporting." With the table set, Pentin responded that wasn't the case. "What he didn't deny is that there were sanctions imposed on Cardinal McCarrick.... So we stand by our report on that."

What was missing was added the next day to the fifteenth paragraph of Pentin's blog post: his "very very good source" had told him in July that Benedict's sanctions amounted to "a private request" to keep a "low profile." In fairness to all parties involved, that should have been in the original story on August 25. But that would have undercut Viganò's credibility. Arroyo continued on his path when he appeared on *The Ingraham Angle* on Fox News. Viganò was "very well respected, [a] man of integrity, a sharpshooter." He declared that "bishops around the United States and the world, Tyler, Texas, Arizona and the entire Conference of Catholic bishops say these are credible charges that need full investigation."

That was an exaggeration: the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops hadn't said the charges were credible. Rather, the president of the conference, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, had issued a statement saying that "the questions raised deserve answers that are conclusive and based on evidence. Without those answers, innocent men may be tainted by false accusation and the guilty may be left to repeat sins of the past."

The missing "one key fact" became clearer when Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, released an open letter on October 7, 2018, explaining what he'd learned through a document search. McCarrick "had been strongly advised not to travel and not to appear in public, so as not to provoke additional rumors in his regard," he wrote. But, he added, "It is false to present the measures taken in his regard as 'sanctions' decreed by Pope Benedict XVI and revoked by Pope Francis." There were no documents requiring "an obligatory mandate of silence and to retire to a private life, carrying canonical penalties. The reason being that at that time, unlike today, there was not sufficient proof of his alleged guilt." This cast the matter into the gray area EWTN commentators had been avoiding: Benedict, lacking evidence to formally sanction McCarrick, "strongly advised" that McCarrick stay out of the public eye to avoid drawing public (read: news-media) attention to himself.

On his *The World Over* telecast on October 11, Arroyo and his "papal

posse," Robert Royal and Rev. Gerald Murray, did their best to dismiss Ouellet's findings. It didn't matter if Benedict's decision was formal or not, Arroyo and Murray maintained. "The pope does not make decisions based on rumors," Murray said, adding that the pope has a right to tell Church leaders what to do, in writing or not. "Any evidence that is brought forward is going to confirm what Viganò said," the New York priest said, adding that the steps Ouellet described "are all sanctions placed on someone who has committed an ecclesiastical crime."

The McCarrick report that the Vatican released on November 10 has shortcomings, but its chief virtue is its extensive disclosure of documents in normally secret Church files. The records show that in December 2006, the papal nuncio to the United States at the time, Pietro Sambi, told McCarrick that "he needs to decide to lead a private and prayerful life, so as not to be spoken of," even if "no one believes in the truth of the accusations."

McCarrick managed to thrive in the gray area that the Curia created for him. There was no announcement to him that the pope had decided this (the report says Benedict was informed of the steps that were taken). At least some of the time, McCarrick informed the Vatican Secretariat of State about his public activities in various parts of the globe. He even concelebrated Mass with Benedict at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York in April 2008.

After the psychotherapist Richard Sipe published an online statement about "The McCarrick Syndrome" in 2008—and Viganò highlighted it in the second of his two detailed memos to Vatican superiors about McCarrick—there was a renewed, but still weak, effort to rein in the cardinal.

The tone of the next letter to McCarrick was more insistent, but still gave him room to maneuver. Cardinal Giovanni Re, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, wrote: "I appeal to your ecclesial spirit and I am obliged to ask you not to accept invitations for any public events." According to the report, Gänswein said Benedict recalled approving of the approach taken in Cardinal Re's letter. If Viganò was right about anything, it was in his call for a real investigation to be done, a canonical proceeding. He never knew if that was done, but told the world that it was. It wasn't.

The McCarrick report didn't only expose the bias, the gaps, and the suppositions in Viganò's allegations; it implicitly exposed the same in EWTN's reporting. Given its size and influence, and its claim on truth, the network has a duty to examine how it reported this story—much as mainstream secular news organizations sometimes do after mishandling a major story. Often enough, the problem is getting too close to sources and failing to verify their claims. Think *New York Times* and the Iraq war, or 2016 election coverage that failed to understand the strength of Donald Trump's campaign.

But the release of the McCarrick report prompted a victory lap of sorts at EWTN. In keeping with his practice to tell one side of this story—Viganò's—Arroyo's November 12, 2020 episode of *The World Over* featured what was presented as a telephone interview with Viganò, with the usual piling on from the "papal posse." Even more revealing was a podcast called the *CNA Editor's Desk*, featuring Catholic News Agency's editor, J. D. Flynn, and Ed Condon, the Washington bureau chief. Condon took the opportunity to trash other journalists who had covered the story. The report had noted that reporters from the *Star-Ledger* of Newark, New Jersey, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* had tried to report stories on allegations circulating about McCarrick's advances on seminarians—indeed, the Vatican restrictions on McCarrick had been aimed at preventing those stories—but weren't able to verify them.

David Gibson, at the time a reporter for the *Star-Ledger*, was quoted in the report as saying that in 2002 he had gotten a list of seven former seminarians at Seton Hall University who, he was told, McCarrick allegedly abused at a beach house on the Jersey shore. But none of them would speak beyond a curt denial. (Gibson is a contributor to *Commonweal* and a friend of this writer.) It was the same story for a *Washington Post* reporter.

Condon bragged of how he got that story—but "one key fact" was missing from his boast: there is a huge difference between getting McCarrick's victims to talk in 2002, when he was at the peak of his power, and in August 2018, after he was discredited by a "substantiated" child-abuse allegation and had renounced his position in the College of Cardinals. By then, it was safer to talk.

Condon, a canon lawyer, noted that he didn't have journalistic training when he was hired at Catholic News Agency at the end of July 2018. "I heard these rumors and I published three stories about McCarrick and his conduct with seminarians…and I did it in the first three weeks I worked at CNA," he said. "It was that easy. I don't think I'm some kind of journalistic savant. I think the rest of them were lazy and incurious and culpable in this." He went on: "The difference between us and other Catholic journalists, J. D.—and this is the closest I will come to taking a victory lap in this podcast—"

"We're getting dangerously close to being unseemly here," Flynn cut in.

"I don't care," Condon continued, and without skipping a beat, dug himself in deeper.

Flynn tried again: "I do not like to spike the football."

Condon was undeterred: "I'm mad, J. D."

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ARS POETICA

Uma Menon

When I am alone, I am never truly alone.
There are many things I must become
to give up my memory to a page.
I begin as a hound, stealthy and hunkering.
I chase a tail that is mine, but which I can never
truly have. The key here is not what I find,
but how long I may sustain a fruitless quest &
how much it takes to become an endless
circle. I next become a spider. I spin silk
to cure my loneliness, adding word
by word to a page until I have thousands
of creatures to keep me company.
Like a starfish, I lose a part of myself
before it comes back fuller than ever:
a stomach that returns like Mother Bird
with food to douse emptiness.
To write is to flesh out. To roll back
the skin beneath my eyes and trace an empty
waterline. To transform the naked eye—
not with a telescope,
but with a firm reassurance of the eye's own
shape. How jealous we must be of pufferfish:
empty in one second, full in the next.
For a pufferfish, to be visceral
is to handle poison. To know what I am
made of and still treat myself with care.

UMA MENON *is a seventeen-year-old author from Winter Park, Florida. Her debut book,* Hands for Language, *was released by Mawenzi House in 2020. She is the 2019-2020 Youth Fellow for the International Human Rights Art Festival and attends Princeton University. Read more at theumamenon.com.*

The Bundist Rabbi

Fran Quigley

Michael Feinberg's ministry is activism.

Rabbi Michael Feinberg offers benediction at a 2016 event commemorating the anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire, which killed 147 workers in 1911.

Michael Feinberg never felt more like a Bundist rabbi than when he was marching down the streets of Manhattan toward City Hall, shoulder-to-shoulder with Evangelical Christian ministers, Muslim imams, and Catholic priests. It was 2011 and the clergy had come together to support a landmark New York City living-wage campaign. All told, over one hundred and fifty faith leaders spoke at mass meetings, took part in silent prayer vigils, signed petitions, or buttonholed city officials. Some accompanied fast-food workers as they staged one-day strikes. Feinberg, the longtime director of the Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, helped bring them together.

It was no easy task. Many of them held fundamentally different views on many issues, including LGBTQ rights and abortion. They weren't used to working with each other. But in the fight for fair wages for food-service workers, janitors, laborers, and retail clerks, the faith community held firm.

It turned out that every Roman collar, robe, kippah, habit, and stole was needed. The living-wage proposal was bitterly opposed by an array of high-powered New Yorkers, including then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the editors of the influential *New York Post*, and much of the business community. But the moral voice of the religious leaders helped build strong majority support among voters, leading to the passage of the 2012 Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act, one of the strongest living-wage bills in the United States. "That was the single most important faith-led campaign I've been a part of," Feinberg says. "There was a union providing resources and direction, and without that we would not have been successful. But the campaign was led by faith leaders, and that is what gave it its power." Having felt the weight of their power, the coalition of faith leaders has kept a grip on it. They continue to meet regularly and have come together to support local campaigns on affordable housing, policing, and economic and racial justice.

This organized pursuit of justice is both Michael Feinberg's work and his passion. And it is why he calls himself a Bundist rabbi. The Jewish Labor Bund of Russia and Poland was a socialist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Bund was a response to the rapid rise of industrial capitalism that abruptly threw tens of thousands of Jews out of their roles as artisans and small shopkeepers and into low-wage, tenuous factory work. The Bund fought for economic rights for all workers while also defending the cultural and civil rights of the Jewish community targeted by anti-Semitism. Founded in 1897, the Bund quickly grew to include forty thousand members. By 1906, it had become the largest socialist organization in the Russian empire, which then included Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, and much of modern-day Poland.

The Bund played a leading role in the 1905 Russian Revolution, organizing multiple strikes and demonstrations. Its demands included a democratic political system, civil rights for Jews, and improvements to the dismal conditions of their workplaces and tenement housing. But the Russian Bund's support for democracy clashed with Vladimir Lenin's agenda, and it was dissolved by the Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution. For a few more decades, the Polish Bund remained an active force defending Jewish culture and education, until losing most of its members in the Holocaust.

Some Bund members were able to emigrate, including to England, where a young Michael Feinberg met a group of then-elderly Bundists during Jewish socialist group meetings in the 1970s. Although the Bund was mostly secular, Feinberg says it is the lineage he identifies most with. "The material conditions for it don't exist anymore—we don't have a mass Jewish proletariat—but the Bund's ideas are just as relevant," he says. "We can learn from what they did right and apply it to our organizing now."

During Sunday school sessions in his Reform synagogue in the New Jersey suburbs, Feinberg never heard about the Bund. But he did have a role model for Jewish activism sitting at his dinner table. Feinberg's father, Bill, was a lawyer who devoted countless hours of pro bono work to the early environmental-protection movement, including the fight to preserve Jersey beachfront from capture by private interests. "He believed in the commons, and in public institutions and strong taxation," Feinberg says. "It all pointed in a socialist direction, but he was a liberal Democrat and the label socialist didn't resonate with him. But the values did, and those are what I try to live up to."

As a freshman at Cornell in the mid-1970s, Feinberg was already active in the campus anti-apartheid and anti-racism campaigns when Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) founder Michael Harrington arrived to speak. Harrington, a former Catholic Worker and the author of the landmark poverty exposé *The Other America*, had broken with the Socialist Party to create the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, the predecessor of today's DSA. The DSOC's goal was to work within the Democratic Party to push progressive policies. Harrington himself had moved away from the Catholicism of his youth, but the DSOC included several devoutly religious members. From the beginning, it had rejected Marxist atheistic and authoritarian tenets even as it embraced Marx's critiques of capitalism.

That evening in Ithaca, Harrington pulled together the lessons of Bill Feinberg's example, the communitarian foundations of Judaism, and the exhilarating movement culture Feinberg was newly embracing. "I immediately resonated with Harrington's formula for the 'left wing of the possible,'" he says. "Cultish groups that are waiting for a 1917-style revolution tomorrow never held any appeal for me. For me, the goal is to move closer and closer to socialism, but the daily work has to include improving people's lives."

After college, Feinberg joined the Brandywine Peace Community in Pennsylvania, a group committed to nonviolent activism. He took part in a multi-faith sanctuary movement for refugees from U.S.-funded wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Many of his allies in this activism were Christians, including the legendary Catholic priests Daniel and Philip Berrigan. These were the days when the Berrigans and a half dozen others were busily forming the legendary Plowshares Eight, a name derived from Isaiah 2:4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares." On September 9, 1980, the Eight broke into a General Electric nuclear missile facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, pounded with hammers on the nose cones of two Mark 12A warheads, and poured their own blood on documents. As they waited to be arrested, they offered prayers for peace. Feinberg was part of the Plowshares Eight support group. "If Dan Berrigan had not been the priest that he was, I would not have become the rabbi that I am," he says.

During these years, Feinberg was also deeply influenced by the feminist rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, who in 1981 became the first woman ordained as a rabbi in the Jewish Renewal movement. He met the activist and devout Catholic César Chávez. He learned from rabbis like Arthur Waskow, who demonstrated against wars and in favor of envi-

The Jewish Labor Bund of Russia and Poland fought for economic rights for all workers while also defending the cultural and civil rights of the Jewish community targeted by anti-Semitism.

Feinberg knows he could easily describe himself as a liberal Jewish Democrat, but he sees it as important that he present himself publicly as a socialist.

ronmental causes, and Everett Gendler, whose scholarship connected Judaism and nonviolence. "I've been blessed to meet the right people at the right moments in my life," he says. "Berrigan used the term, 'walking-around saints.' We don't have saints in Judaism, but these were people who were all about creating a better world for others."

As Feinberg saw it, his studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Pennsylvania were preparation for him to follow in their footsteps. "It was never my intention to be a 'pulpit rabbi,'" he says. "I wanted to be an organizer for social-justice movements. I knew being a rabbi was a way to do that within the Jewish community and in multi-faith groups."

As he studied the Jewish tradition, Feinberg found plenty of justification for his chosen path. "I wouldn't say Hebrew Scripture is a socialist blueprint. It was written three thousand years ago in an ancient Near Eastern agricultural society, so you can't just transfer that over to our present conditions," he says. "But the principles are key: the communalism, the concern for the most marginalized and most vulnerable in society—the widow, the orphan, the stranger—the need to cancel debt. The insistence on dignity for all people who are created in the divine image. That ethical framework is the core of Judaism, and I think all of those are deeply socialist principles."

In the same neighborhoods where Feinberg does his work today, his belief in the shared foundations of Judaism and socialism was once the strong consensus. Millions of Eastern European Jews migrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century, and their top destination was New York and its fast-growing garment industry. By 1914, 1.4 million Jews lived in New York City, most of them families struggling with low wages, brutal working conditions, and crowded, unsanitary slum housing. As early as the 1880s, many New York Jews were coming together in socialist meetings and creating socialist institutions like the Arbeiter Ring (the Workmen's Circle) and newspapers like the *Forverts*—the *Jewish Daily Forward*.

Abraham Cahan, an immigrant from Lithuania who would eventually become the editor of the *Forward*, is credited with being the first socialist labor organizer to recognize the importance of speaking and writing in Yiddish. It was already the language of the native New York Jewish working class, and it would serve as both the touchstone of Jewish solidarity and the medium for the politicized Eastern European arrivals to connect with American Jews struggling to survive. After the turn of the century, many of the immigrants were members of the Russian Bund, and they added their passion and experience to the growing socialist movement. Most of the Yiddish socialist leaders were secular, but many of the rank and file were more observant.

By the 1910s, the socialist-led United Hebrew Trades and International Ladies Garment Workers unions had more than three hundred thousand members between them, and they leveraged their power to launch dramatic strikes and create cooperative housing projects and other social programs. Almost sixty thousand people belonged to the Workmen's Circle, and the *Forward*'s circulation of two hundred thousand made it the most read foreign-language newspaper in the United States. The Socialist Party won elections for the city board of aldermen, the state assembly, and in 1914 sent labor lawyer Meyer London to Congress. "Socialists were the ones who defined the mainstream," writes Tony Michels in *A Fire in their Hearts: Yiddish Socialism in New York*.

During the 1920s, the numbers of U.S. Jewish socialists began to decline. European immigration to the United States slowed, and World War I and the Bolshevik revolution both triggered considerable backlash against socialism. Some of the more radical U.S. socialists were attracted to the Communist Party, while many moderates found common cause with New Deal–era Democrats. In 1936, the *Forward* endorsed Franklin Roosevelt for president, breaking a three-decade string of loyalty to the Socialist Party.

But Jewish institutions with socialist roots still exist, including the *Forward* and the Workman's (now Worker's) Circle, and they retain their commitment to social and economic justice. Many historians credit the Yiddish socialist era with influencing the overall liberal political beliefs of American Jews. "Socialism was not a one-generation phenomenon," Michels concludes. "It was a formative experience in the history of the world's largest Jewish community."

Feinberg's daily work advocating for living wages and racial justice has included a key role in the multi-decade push for justice for migrant farmworkers in New York state, which culminated in the 2019 passage of the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act. That legislation remedied a historic injustice by finally including farmworkers within the protection of New York's labor laws. Like his other work, this cause fit comfortably within the spectrum of a liberal Jewish Democrat agenda. Feinberg knows he could easily adopt that label, and he realizes it may make his faith-labor coalition work easier.

But he sees it as important that he present himself publicly as a socialist. He is determined to include in

his advocacy the prophetic work of building the U.S. socialist movement. "Michael Harrington (quoting Irving Howe and Lewis Coser) said, 'Socialism is the name of our desire,' and I think it is important to hold that desire up," he says. "We have a vision for what a transformed society would look like, and not all progressives or faith groups do."

There is no strong socialist political party in the United States, which leads Feinberg to conclude that the only way to realize the vision is by working to transform existing institutions. Which, he worries, poses a particular challenge for Americans. "Most everywhere else in the world, they have social movements. In the U.S., we have 501(c)(3) organizations that have professional staff and boards and have to worry about what funders think, and that is a hard way to build political power." So Feinberg has remained a member of the DSA for a quarter-century of organizational peaks and valleys, and devotes himself to nurturing the better angels of the U.S. labor movement. "I don't need to plant my own flag," he says. "I'm happy to be a foot soldier."

That soldierly commitment begins with being a loyal member of an institutionalized religion. As a young man, Feinberg studied the role of faith communities in the civil-rights and labor movements, and he witnessed firsthand the power of faith-motivated activism in the anti-apartheid and peace campaigns. He concluded then that being a rabbi would provide a place for effective advocacy. And he hasn't changed his mind. "A big percentage of Americans consider themselves to be affiliated with a religious faith, so religious language resonates with them," he says. "Faith can be transformative—I've seen it happen." Both faith and socialism can also provide much-needed community, he says, along with the prophetic vision of a better world.

Of course, both socialism and religion struggle with image problems. Feinberg believes that religious socialists can help. For those suspicious of socialism, particularly in the United States, faith-grounded socialists underscore the humanity of the system, and offer a democratic refutation of the godless, violent images associated with some forms of doctrinaire Marxism. For Americans wary of the reactionary tenor that characterizes much of religion's political influence in the United States, religious socialists offer affirmation of the loving, nurturing message of all major faith communities.

Feinberg's labor and socialism work is multi-faith to its core. But he admits most of the groups he is involved with are heavily Christian. And he still finds himself in settings where the public prayers are ones that he and other Jews cannot join. Yet he works with Sikh and Hindu communities in supporting New York taxi drivers. Pentecostal preachers were leaders of the living-wage campaign that affected their congregants. The blog and podcast of the Religion and Socialism Working Group of the DSA, of which Feinberg is an active member, feature a mosaic of Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian voices. (I am also a member.) "When we are open to working with all people, we can create models that maybe did not exist in the past," he says.

Those new models, he insists, must provide a welcoming home for the many young Americans who are open to socialist policies to an extent not seen in more than a century. A majority of Americans ages eighteen to twenty-four prefer socialism over capitalism, and their support helped Bernie Sanders's presidential campaign win more votes than any socialist candidate in the nation's history. The DSA's membership has swelled from five thousand members in 2015 to nearly seventy thousand now.

At the same time, most of these young people are not flocking to traditional religious congregations. Even among the young who do accept the tenets of a religious faith, many describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious," or are creating their own religious communities that may not be clergy-led. Feinberg is fine with all of it. "They are blazing a path that we are going to need to learn from, and we religious socialists need to be in partnership with them," he says.

But Feinberg won't settle for easy optimism. The lessons from the Bund, the U.S. Yiddish socialists, and from nearly half a century of activism include a mixture of progress and failure. Feinberg has watched the United States slide into increased inequality over the past thirty years, and he is not sure whether the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to positive reforms or a step backward. "But we have to keep meeting people where they are: Can you afford health care? What about your rent? Do you need to work three jobs to cover your expenses? I have a faith I feel in my bones, almost as deeply as a religious faith, of the possibility of a socialist society that really cares about all its members, and is constructed around collective welfare and not greed or profit or private ownership. I don't know if I will live to see that goal achieved. But I never lose track of it. That is what keeps me bumping along."

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A Christian in the Office of Constitutional Judge

Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde

Is it possible for a Catholic jurist to work within the framework of a liberal democracy?

Three years ago, I published an article in Commonweal *about the German Catholic legal scholar, judge, and public intellectual Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, who passed away in 2019 (see "The Böckenförde Paradox" in our December 1, 2017 issue). The subject of my article was Böckenförde's reflections on the secular liberal state and his celebrated assertion that the liberal state depended on conditions that it itself could not guarantee, or the "Böckenförde paradox." At the time, Oxford University Press was publishing the first of two volumes of his translated articles, speeches, and essays on constitutional and political theory.*

Now OUP has published the second volume, which deals with Böckenförde's writings on law, religion, and democracy. Several items in the new book draw on his experience as a judge on the Constitutional Court of the Federal Republic of Germany (1983–1996), including his involvement in a landmark 1993 decision on German abortion law. One of these writings is a retrospective on what it meant to be "A Christian in the Office of Constitutional Judge" (1999), with specific reference to the abortion decision. It is reproduced here, with the permission of the collection's editors and OUP.

Böckenförde's meditation on Christian spirituality, as he calls it, is about how to draw necessary boundaries in one's life as a Christian and as a citizen. The specific public domain he's talking about deals with law and the judiciary. But his meditation's broader principles can speak to all Catholics and even all believers in a liberal democracy. Böckenförde believed that the constructive role of natural law is on the ethical-moral side, not the side of external law, which exists for the common good of social peace. Natural law can shape how we think about and formulate positive law. But it cannot substitute for it if it imposes moral expectations that deviate too much from existing social practices. When that happens, the result is the deterioration of external law as well.

*As a judge on the Constitutional Court, Böckenförde took an oath before God to rule only as the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), Germany's constitution, required. He says he took democratic rules with religious seriousness. That meant he could not be expected to act as though he was the Church's man on the court. (Here it's important to remember that the German Federal Constitutional Court's main duty is to rule on the constitutionality of legislation and executive decisions. There is a separate Supreme Court that acts as the final court of appeals of judicial decisions. Our own Supreme Court serves both purposes.)*

The legislation that occasioned his reflections on being a Christian in the office of a judge was a 1992 law that legalized first-trimester abortions. The case attracted enormous attention when it went before the Constitutional Court. It was the Federal Republic's second abortion controversy. In 1975 the court had invalidated a 1974 law that also legalized first-trimester abortions. The basis for the court's decision was Article Two of the Basic Law: "Every person shall have the right to life and physical integrity." In response to that earlier decision, a law was passed in 1976 that continued to treat abortion in general as illegal but recognized exceptions. An abortion could be permitted if it met certain Indikations *(a declaration following an official process) on the basis of medical (e.g., a threat to the life of the mother), criminal (e.g., rape), or social circumstances (e.g., teen pregnancies). The latter two categories required ethical counseling three days before the abortion.*

German unification in 1990 made it necessary to revisit the 1976 law, because the DDR— the Democratic Republic of (East) Germany—had a more permissive law that decriminalized abortion in the first trimester. In 1992 the Bundestag passed a law that decriminalized abortion in the first trimester, while preserving mandatory ethical counseling but not the Indikations *process.*

That was the law on whose constitutionality Böckenförde had to rule. He sided with the majority decision, which ruled against the 1992 law and upheld the 1975 decision prohibiting abortion at any time as illegal. But the decision added two significant qualifications. First, an abortion could be lawful if it answered to the Indikations *provided by the 1976 legislation. Second, an otherwise illegal first-trimester abortion would still be illegal, but no criminal sanctions would be assessed if it was preceded by counseling. In short: still illegal but not in practice criminal.*

The illegal-but-not-criminal formula was probably Böckenförde's contribution. His rationale was twofold. First, he had consistently held that abortion was not only a moral wrong but also necessarily a legal wrong, by virtue of German constitutional law. He had dealt with the question of "personhood," mentioned in Basic Law Two, by appealing to Article One: "Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority." Human dignity is premised of human life. Because the fertilized ovum is human life, it too deserves the protection of its dignity rather than being instrumentalized as a mere thing. Any effort to find a transitional state at which human life supposedly begins to deserve protection will be arbitrary.

His second rationale for the illegal-but-not-criminal compromise is that it preserves constitutional protection of human life while recognizing that all positive law, to be successful, must be roughly commensurate with general social practice. Law that deviates too drastically from what people are ordinarily able to do will cease to be respected as law. The deterioration of respect for law is deleterious to law's general purpose of protecting the common good of peace. (An American might think of our failed national experiment with Prohibition as an example.) Böckenförde writes elsewhere that he had discovered years earlier that enforcement of the 1976 law was inconsistent and infrequent. Hence the need to compromise.

One benefit of reading Böckenförde's work might be a recognition of the relevance of the social foundation of law. Positive law in a secular liberal democracy exists in part to secure the common good of peace among citizens who may disagree about a vast number of matters, many of which involve unresolvable differences. The pro-life movement in the United States has not persuaded a majority that first-trimester abortions should be criminalized. That is not likely to change soon. Those of us who believe that abortion is the unwarranted destruction of human life may also believe that criminal law is an unworkable instrument to deal with that. It is unworkable in part because we can safely predict that if Roe v. Wade *is overturned and abortion is returned to the states (where, arguably, it should have stayed in the first place), enforcement will be arbitrary and inconsistent in those places where it again becomes illegal.*

A second benefit for American Catholics may be to provide a reasoned justification for urging our bishops to reconsider their intransigent insistence that abortion is the *preeminent issue facing us when we cast our vote. This insistence forces Catholic voters into a moral calculus unhinged from the real political landscape facing Americans and the world today. It is an exercise in futility that leads not to "faithful" but to politically irresponsible citizenship.*

—Michael Hollerich

ROLF HAID/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGE

Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde

I. Professional Life and Christian Spirituality

As a Christian, one seeks to live Christian spirituality. But what exactly does Christian spirituality mean? In his essay, Abbot Ansgar (801–865) gave a concise, and perhaps accurate, definition: "Spirituality is the integration of all of life into a way of life borne by and reflective of faith." These words can be supplemented by those of Monsignore Karlheinz Ducke (1941–2011): Christian spirituality is the life-shaping power of faith that is drawn from the heart. In theological terms, Christian spirituality appears thus as the realization of God's devotion in baptism through the response to this devotion. It finds its forms of expression and its concretization not only in prayer and divine service, but precisely also in daily life; it is a holistic way of life.

Two things follow from this. First, Christian spirituality knows no separation between the personal-private and the occupational spheres: it realizes itself in both, it relates to all of life, it is undivided. Christ's call applies also to one's profession, which is usually work in the worldly realm: "You shall be my witnesses, you are the salt of the earth, the leaven that permeates the world." But how can this be put into practice? What does "doing the words of Jesus" mean for being active in one's profession and society?

Second, this realization of Christian spirituality has a special quality if the profession is a public office, especially an office of the state. Here Christian spirituality specifically encounters pluralistic normality. The state in which we live is no longer a "Christian state," it itself does not have or profess a religion, it does not have its center in the truth of the Christian faith. Its guiding idea is not that truth, but neutrality with respect to religion and other worldviews. It is a house, a common house, in which Christians and non-Christians live together as equal citizens and bearers of rights. The guarantee of religious freedom ensures that Christian faith can be realized by Christians in this state, but the state itself does not realize it.

How, then, does Christian spirituality manifest itself as a faith-based way of life in an office that is part of this state order and plays its part in realizing it? To put it differently: How, in such an office, can the professional life be brought before God?

II. Historical-Biographical Flashback

At this point a historical-biographical flashback is necessary to allow the full scope of the question and the problem to become clear. Arising from a strong interest in politics, which was born out of my conscious experience of the final years and end of the Third Reich, the question of how to be *civis simul et christianus* [citizen and Christian at the same time] was already preoccupying me in secondary school and then at university, and it has accompanied me throughout my life ever since. What guidance on this question was offered by Church teachings—indeed, by official church doctrine—after the war and well into the 1950s?

The relationship of Christians to politics and to the holding of political office was shaped decisively in the application and elaboration of Pope Leo XIII's doctrine of the state. The latter has its foundation in a binding *ordo* of Christian natural law. It gave rise to objective claims of validity and absoluteness, which had to clash with the construct and rules of a democratic system resting on the equal political rights of all citizens and the freedom of political decision-making. To illustrate with an example: during the deliberations of the Parliamentary Council in the spring of 1949, the Catholic bishops were determined to reject the Basic Law as a whole because it did not contain the recognition of the confessional right of parents, that is, the right of parents to determine the confessional character of public schools (with respect to the *Volksschule* [compulsory elementary and lower secondary education]). A pastoral letter to that effect had already been prepared, but Adenauer (at the time the president of the Parliamentary Council) was able to prevent this in internal negotiations. In the eyes of the Church, democratic majority decisions could exist only below and above what was regarded as inalienable natural law within the framework of the presupposed *ordo*. The criterion for whether a political party was electable for Christians was its (at least) practical recognition of natural law, with the Church claiming for itself the authority to interpret this natural law and thus determine its scope. Moreover, on the basis of Leo XIII's state doctrine, the position of the "Catholic state as thesis" held. It maintained that the state as such should be a Christian (Catholic) state. However, if the concrete circumstances did not permit the realization of this goal, because it would create discord or civil war, the state could grant religious tolerance and temporarily dispense with the complete realization of the Christian *ordo*. Religious tolerance arose as a concession, not from a right of the person to religious freedom.

The upshot of these positions was that Christians in political offices should act as the phalanx or vanguard for the realization of (Christian) natural law. Divergent views among Christians could legitimately exist only on purely factual matters unaffected by natural law; only to this extent were compromises and coalitions with other political forces possible.

As time went on, I developed growing doubts about the sustainability of this concept for the realization of the *civis simul et christianus*, namely precisely with regard to the foundations and functional conditions of a democratically organized state. In the process, the concept of the commonweal, which is indigenous to both the Christian and the secular *ordo*, became the bridge concept for my reflections in order to reconcile them with the traditional Christian state doctrine and not simply set the latter aside. To my mind, if one understood this commonweal not as a normative-abstract ideal, but as something related to the reality of a democratic and liberal state, this raised two positions that Christians, too, should not only accept but actively and positively advocate.

The first is the possibility for Christians to place themselves fully into the democratic order, to work within its framework and under its conditions for the realization of the commonweal without a permanent reservation based on authoritative natural law. The second is the possibility to fully recognize the religious-ideological neutral state, which guarantees religious freedom as a basic right, without having the "Catholic state" in the back of one's mind as the real goal. This amounted to turning one's back on the position of Pius XII's toleration address of 1953, which maintained that error as such had no "right to exist, engage in propaganda, and take action [against the truth]" not only morally, but also within the external sphere of the law, though special circumstances could justify(!) not interfering in this regard with prohibitions. By contrast, for me, especially in my capacity as a jurist, the right of the individual to religious freedom, independent of the content of faith, was obligatory. The step towards the acceptance of this right that Pope John XXIII made in his encyclical *Pacem in terris* (1963) was for me a stroke of liberation.

My early essays arose out of this context: "The Ethos of Modern Democracy and the Church" (1957), "German Catholicism in 1933" (1961/62), and "Religious Freedom as a Task of Christians" (1965). They were a reflection of the engagement with the prevailing Church teachings and at the same time an attempt to reorient this Church doctrine and

The judge's oath that I swore at my appointment was the first and only oath of office I performed with a religious affirmation.

practice through criticism from the inside, to change it from a personal struggle for Christian spirituality. The goal was to achieve credibility of the *civis simul et christianus*.

III. The Office of Constitutional Judge and Christian Spirituality

Now on to the real topic: the office of constitutional judge and Christian spirituality.

1. The starting point for me was that it is—and must be—part of Christian spirituality to take on such an office as intended in the constitution: as an office in a democratic and religiously and ideologically neutral state. It seems to me that it is a part of and an imperative especially of Christian conduct in the world to fully embrace this office, its task as well as its commitments.

This office is not one that is politically formative in an active and deliberate way, as is the case for members of parliament or the government. It is a *judicial* office: it is charged with preserving and guaranteeing the constitution in the way it is fixed as a legal system and articulated as to content. That means right away that it is not a sphere of activity in which one could act as an agent for the Catholic cause, as an advocate for the realization of a Christian natural law, or as a representative of the Church's concerns. Precisely such an approach would invert the meaning and function of the office as envisaged by the constitution, for it demands strict independence also towards one's own politically or religiously motivated views and priorities. What matters is the commitment solely to the constitution as the order created for and applicable to the political community.

This takes on special importance because of the power of interpretation that a constitutional court commands. Such a court is mandated to come up with the final, non-appealable and therefore authentic interpretation of the constitution. In the process it often confronts the task of defining in greater detail more or less open normative principles, many of which are contained in the constitution as a framework, not least in the fundamental rights. However, this kind of closer definition, which goes well beyond mere application or strict deduction, must not be used as a "loophole" for clandestinely smuggling certain positions into the constitution, positions that are not already contained in the constitution itself, its regulatory context, and its idea of order. When it does happen, the court engages in the articulation of (legal) policy, which is not its task but that of the legislature. No office in the democratic state is invested with as much trust as that of the constitutional judge; not only is it free from oversight, it is also exempt from justification and endowed with the authority of the "last word."

How did my intention of immersing myself fully into this office and to internally accept its commitments and obligations find concrete expression?

- The judge's oath that I swore at my appointment was the first and only oath of office I performed with a religious affirmation. A religious oath mobilizes the internal powers of commitment of someone who swears it consciously. I wanted to mobilize those powers on behalf of the obligation to this office.
- I told my party, the SPD [Social Democratic Party], that I would not exercise the rights of my party membership for the duration of my judicial office. This pronouncement arose from the fact that the party bylaws do not envisage putting membership on hold, which is what I considered the appropriate step.
- Finally, I terminated my work in the Executive Committee of German Catholics because the Executive Committee undertakes activities—legitimately so—in the pre-political realm and targeted at politics. [Editor's note: The executive committee of German Catholics is elected by an assembly of Catholics representing the different groups and branches of lay German Catholicism. Its tasks include organizing the biennial Catholic Kirchentag (Church Day), discussing pending issues with the German Conference of Bishops, and representing lay Catholicism in public. Böckenförde served as an advisor to the committee for many years.]

From the outset, the goal was to avoid any appearance that I was in any way an "advocate" in this judicial office—either of a political party or of organized Catholicism.

2. The question of how Christian spirituality could be realized in the exercise of such a judicial office did not arise sporadically, but continuously. The problems emerged with particular clarity in two areas, which I want to address in greater detail: in the area of state-church law [*Staatskirchenrecht*], and concerning the law on abortion.

a) The state-church law of the Basic Law rests essentially on the adoption of what is known as the Weimar Church Compromise (Articles 136–141 WRV). Time and again there have been efforts to dissolve this compromise—described in the Weimar period as a "separation of its own kind"—towards one side or the other: either in favor of a more extensive autonomy of the churches, or in favor of a strict separation of state and church and a leveling of the special status of the churches. In this area my goal was to preserve and continue this compromise rather than dissolving it in constellations favoring one side—that of the Church. I opposed such ten-

For me it would have been a transgression against the mandate of the office I had assumed—and thus a renunciation of Christian spirituality—had I tried to act on these questions as a representative of Church interests.

Böckenförde, right, in December 1989

dencies that were evident in existing case law. For me it would have been a transgression against the mandate of the office I had assumed—and thus a renunciation of Christian spirituality—had I tried to act on these questions as a representative of Church interests, according to the motto "our man on the Federal Constitutional Court."

b) The constitutional dispute over the law on abortion brought a dramatic intensification of the problem in some respects. According to my personal conviction, which is supported by my faith, an abortion is not only a very terrible thing, it is also the killing of a (still unborn) human being, a human being who is entirely defenseless and in extreme need of protection. I share all essential positions in the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*—not always their justifications, but their conclusions. In *Christian* terms, one can hardly discern a reason that would make an abortion appear permissible and justifiable. After all, living a Christian life also entails the willingness to make major, life-constraining sacrifices. The situation is different on the legal level, also the natural-law level. Here one can certainly identify limits to a mother's sacrifice, limits where the *legal* obligation to bring a pregnancy to term, enforceable with coercive or punitive actions, ends.

During the proceedings before the Federal Constitutional Court, the public discussion became at times highly political and emotional; for a while it was focused on me, because it was assumed that I would play a key role in the vote: four judges were supposedly against the law, three considered it constitutional, which is why the decision depended on my vote (a 4:4 split decision means that no unconstitutionality can be determined). A well-known journalist spoke of the "three souls" in my breast: that of the Catholic, of the jurist, and of the Social Democrat. Which would carry the day? The feminist Alice Schwarzer, who was at the forefront of the campaign to decriminalize abortion, showered malicious gleefulness on the Social Democrats: they would have only themselves to blame if the law failed, for how could they have sent a practicing Catholic to the constitutional court? On the other side, so I was told, novenas were held in religious houses to keep Judge Böckenförde from "giving in."

What to do? Take advantage of the office of judge to help one option prevail against the "culture of death," deploy the court's powers of assertion—by virtue of its authoritative powers of interpretation—for a core position of Christian truth? Seize the opportunity to act as a "vanguard"? The only thing that was relevant to me in the entire process was the "soul of the judge," which was, revealingly enough, not introduced into the public discussion. Anything else, including the option for the Catholic in me, would have amounted in my mind to a violation of my official duty and of the oath of office I had sworn with religious affirmation. The question could and had to be decided solely according to the guarantee in the constitution, on the basis of its content and scope, independent of the extent to which it is aligned with Christian ecclesiastical positions or falls short of them.

I emphatically defended and supported the fundamental approach of the decision: that unborn human life, by virtue of its participation in human dignity, has a right to life from the beginning of pregnancy, and that every abortion during the entire duration of the pregnancy is fundamentally wrong. This is so because—and the senate informed itself thoroughly on this point—it is one of the definite insights of modern medical anthropology (and not simply part of a faith-based position) that the development of human life experiences no further rupture or qualitative leap once the sperm and egg have fused. It follows from this that the embryo develops *as* a human being rather than into a human being. Added to this are specific considerations of constitutional law: Which basic rights and rights of the woman (mother) must be considered? How far does the guarantee especially of the constitution extend vis-à-vis the legislature? To what extent does the legislature have an evaluative prerogative which the constitutional court must respect? To what extent does the legal duty to protect unborn human life depend primarily on the actual efficacy of the law or on an internally coherent normative concept?

I am aware that the outcome of the decision must be seen as highly unsatisfactory from a Christian point of view, and that there are good reasons for seeing the new law passed three years after the court's decision as an "unjust law" in the sense of Catholic moral theory. This law could not even make up its mind to explicitly qualify an abortion carried out during the first twelve weeks following counseling as wrong—even if it went unpunished—as the court had stipulated.

IV. What Remains?

In conclusion and looking back, however, the question that remains is this: Where does all of this leave us? Does this kind of behavior, which seems right and necessary to me, not lead to the disappearance of Christian spirituality? Does it not lead to a complete assimilation to the "world" and its ways? Could not anyone else do the same, and is there anything specifically Christian still visible here? Does Christian spirituality not turn into an atrophied entity, in which only fidelity to the office and personal credibility are left?

Yet the question can also be asked the other way around: Does Christian spirituality, precisely in fidelity to office and personal credibility, not demonstrate its openness to the world and its service to the world, unselfishly, in the embrace of all rather than any specific group or one's own? Moreover, what options are there? One option could be missionary work. But is that possible by infiltrating or instrumentalizing the institution? After all, missionary activity is neither credible nor Christian if a Christian—to that end—acts in a partisan fashion in institutions like a court, seeking his own advantage at the expense of what has been laid down as obligatory for all. Another option would be withdrawal from engagement into inner emigration. Although the Christian does not assimilate to the world by doing so, he remains entirely within himself and seeks to remain "pure." But can anything emanate from Christian spirituality with this kind of self-referentiality? It then leaves the world to itself and does not contribute to sustaining it.

To be sure, Christian spirituality must also be able to become a sign of dissent within and towards a secular world, which is compliant with respect to the culture of death or entirely under its spell. The crucial thing is how this can be done. It seems to me, at any rate, that it can be done only by preserving sincerity and the credibility of one's actions, not by setting them aside. Should there be situations of conflict that call for a sign of dissent because loyalty would lead to the renunciation of Christian spirituality, the option that remains is public resignation from the relevant offices—that, too, is a visible sign. What is not an option is their (disloyal) instrumentalization. The example of King Baudoin of Belgium, who had himself declared incapable of exercising his office for one day so he would not have to sign the Belgian abortion law, but who did not abdicate the throne, strikes me as only half-successful.

Was the manner in which I sought to exercise the office of judge entrusted to me—taken typologically and with reference to this office—the right way to realize Christian spirituality within pluralistic normality? I am open to argument, but I believe the answer is yes. At any rate, there is something that has not happened to date and which I would rather see as an affirmation of my position: I have not been awarded a Catholic medal for my work as a judge.

ERNST-WOLFGANG BÖCKENFÖRDE *(1930–2019) was a Professor of Public Law at the University of Freiburg. He served as a judge at the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany (1983–1996) and made pathbreaking contributions in the fields of constitutional history, constitutional dogmatics, philosophy of law, the status of natural law and canon law in modern democracy, and to democratic theory.*

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Without God or Reason

Morten Høi Jensen

Albert Camus resolved to face the human condition with total clarity.

I first read Albert Camus when I was seventeen. I borrowed my father's well-thumbed copy of *The Stranger* and greedily consumed it in one sitting on a train from Frederikssund to Copenhagen. I was spellbound. How could I not be? There in the novel was the bright Algerian sun and the shimmering Mediterranean Sea; outside my window was the drab Danish sky—the color of a pâté, forever portending rain. With every page I longed more intensely for the spare beauty of Algiers, to sense what Camus elsewhere describes as "a life that tastes of warm stone"—a life that, in the hard lyricism of his prose, seemed simple yet inexhaustibly rich. At the end of the novel, when the condemned Meursault is visited in his cell by the prison chaplain, he is asked if he ever wished for another life. He answers a little evasively. After the chaplain demands to know exactly how he pictured this other life, Meursault, finally, responds with a shout: "One where I could remember this life!"

Meursault's moving outburst is also his maker's. More than any other twentieth-century writer, Camus struggled to affirm life as it was handed to him, without appeal to religious or secular divinities. In his early notebooks, he spoke of wanting to "hold my life between my hands" and of enduring "this experience without flinching, with complete lucidity"—words made all the more poignant by the "sentence" of tuberculosis he received when he was just seventeen years old, and which repeatedly threatened to cut his life short. It was perhaps in Algiers's Mustapha Hospital, in the winter of 1930, that Camus first felt himself brushed by the absurd: the clash between humankind's desire for meaning and the inscrutable silence of the universe.

The young man who loved to roam the shabby streets of the Belcourt quarter, who preferred to spend his days swimming or playing soccer, thus learned early that our lives mean nothing to the mute world that surrounds us. Only a few years after receiving his diagnosis, Camus asked the costume designer and amateur pilot Marie Viton to fly him to Djemila, a coastal mountain village home to the ancient Roman ruins of Cuicul. There, standing atop the stony remnants of a vanished world, a hard wind burning his eyes and cracking his lips, Camus was overcome by the unrelenting indifference of the natural world. As he wrote in "The Wind at Djemila," the essay his experience inspired:

> I tell myself: I am going to die, but this means nothing, since I cannot manage to believe it and can only experience other people's death. I have seen people die. Above all, I have seen dogs die. It was touching them that overwhelmed me. Then I think of flowers, smiles, the desire for women, and realize that my whole horror of death lies in my anxiety to live. I am jealous of those who will live and for whom flowers and the desire for women will have their full flesh and blood meaning. I am envious because I love life too much not to be selfish. What does eternity matter to me?

KURT HUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

Albert Camus

For the twenty-three-year-old author who wrote those words, death was not the distant terminus of old age but an awful negation that threatens at every moment to erase us. Remarkably, for someone so young when the shadow of death first darkened his way, he did not recoil from this insight. He had no interest in merely pacifying the terror of death, as the Stoic philosophers counseled. (In the *Enchiridion*, Epictetus recommends that we think of death daily, in order to lessen our fear of it.) Instead, Camus resolved to "gaze upon my death with the fullness of my jealousy and horror," to face the absurdity of the human condition with total clarity. "I have no wish to lie or to be lied to," he wrote.

Camus made his first notes for "The Wind at Djemila" around the same time he conceived of Meursault's conversation with the prison chaplain. That proximity is telling. "Have you no hope at all? And do you really live with the thought that when you die, you die, and nothing remains?" the chaplain asks. When Meursault answers in the affirmative, the chaplain tells him it is more than a man can bear. Nevertheless, it is the wager Meursault is determined to make.

This wager was also Camus'. "I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone," he declared in *The Myth of Sisyphus*—the philosophical essay he wrote simultaneously with *The Stranger*, and which forms a kind of companion to it. Camus cannot know whether God exists, or whether the universe has a meaning that transcends it, but he knows that he cannot know these things. They are beyond human comprehension and therefore meaningless. "What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me?" All he knows is that the human need for reason cannot be reconciled with an unreasonable world. Having reached this limit, he decides to endure the absurd and live by that decision. "The mind, when it reaches its limits, must make a judgment and choose its conclusions."

Camus' atheism is attractive because it proceeds from a difficult acknowledgment of human limitations and vulnerability. It has none of the bluster of the nineteenth century's positivistic atheism (repackaged, in this century, as "New Atheism," despite not being very new at all) and therefore constitutes, as James Wood has shown, a "fierce exception" to the discourse of atheism. In fact, Camus was often accused, by critics on both the Left and the Right, of being a religious thinker in irreligious disguise. When he joined the Communist Party in the summer of 1935, he wasn't reading Marx or Engels, but his beloved fellow Africans Augustine and Plotinus instead. He even wrote to his friend and classmate Claude de Fréminville criticizing the party's "lack of religious emphasis, and the Marxists' pretense of constructing a morality that depicts man as sufficient unto himself."

In other words, far from thinking that religious belief is just superstitious nonsense, Camus understood that it satisfies a very real metaphysical need. Like Nietzsche, he recognized that the death of God is not a deliverance from dark superstition to rational light, but an absence that demands a secular response: "What interests me is knowing how we must behave, and more precisely, how to behave when one does not believe in God or reason."

What is remarkable about Camus is not just how early in life he hit on the ideas he would eventually make his own, but the material impoverishment in which he did so. Growing up in the working-class Belcourt quarter of Algiers, he had none of the advantages of his French contemporaries and, unlike them, did not attend any of Paris's elite educational institutions. In the shabby family apartment on Rue de Lyon, where he lived with his mother, brother, grandmother, and uncle, there was no electricity or running water. The only toilet was located on the landing and had to be shared with two other families. Bathing was done in the kitchen with water fetched from faucets in the street.

Yet what Camus lacked materially he was compensated for by the lavish physical impressions Algiers had to offer. "What other city offers as many riches all year long, the sea, the sun, hot sand, geraniums, and olive and eucalyptus trees?" he once asked a friend. In the essay "Summer," first published in 1950, he wrote of his "instinctive fidelity to a light in which I was born, and in which for thousands of years men have learned to welcome life even in suffering."

This world of sunlight and poverty, which held such vital importance for Camus, is sensuously evoked in his two youthful essay collections, *The Wrong Side and the Right Side* and *Nuptials*, published in Algiers in 1937 and 1939, respectively. Along with the much later collection *Summer*, published in France in 1954, these essays are now available again to English-language readers in a single volume titled *Personal Writings*, which joins a slimmer volume of *Committed Writings*, both edited by the Camus scholar Alice Kaplan. (A third volume, *Conferences and Speeches*, will be published next year.) While *Committed Writings* is something of a wasted opportunity (of the many "committed" writings Camus produced, only five are included here), *Personal Writings* offers a welcome return to what Kaplan, in her useful foreword, calls "the foundation for all his work to come."

In the soil of almost every one of these early essays are the seeds of future work. Here are the origins of *The Stranger*: "Only on the day of the funeral, because of the general outburst of tears, did he weep, but he was afraid of being insincere and telling lies in the presence of death" (from "Irony"); *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "I can understand a man wanting to die because nothing matters anymore when one sees through life completely" (from "Between Yes and No"); and *The Rebel*: "I am surprised men can find certainties and rules for life on the shores of the Mediterranean, that they can satisfy their reason there and justify optimism and social responsibility" (from "Love of Life").

Camus once defined the novel as "a philosophy expressed in images." In these essays, we encounter a philosophy expressed through the senses. In "Between Yes and No," the

smell of a room "too long shut up" inspires a meditation on the difficulty of living. In "The Desert," the view from the top of the Boboli gardens in Florence is a reminder that "the world is beautiful, and outside it there is no salvation." In the best of these essays, "Nuptials at Tipasa," a swim in the ocean arouses Camus to offer a defiantly sensual exaltation of life:

> I love this life with abandon and wish to speak of it boldly: it makes me proud of my human condition. Yet people have often told me: there's nothing to be proud of. Yes, there is: this sun, this sea, my heart leaping with youth, the salt taste of my body and this vast landscape in which tenderness and glory merge in blue and yellow. It is to conquer this that I need my strength and my resources. Everything here leaves me intact, I surrender nothing of myself, and don no mask: learning patiently and arduously how to live is enough for me, well worth all the arts of living.

The vast ocean, the arid desert, the brutal mountains—for Camus, to live in such immutable surroundings was to be confronted with the simple fact that human affairs are desperately precarious. This was an important lesson. It taught him what he would later call *la mesure*, or "measure": a Mediterranean value of humility and limits illuminated by the blinding light of the sun. Writing in his notebook in 1942, he observed: "Calypso offers Ulysses a choice between immortality and the land of his birth. He rejects immortality. Therein lies perhaps the whole meaning of the *Odyssey*." In Camus' reading, Homer teaches us to embrace a life of limits, a life in which we are not yearning for either immortality or the afterlife. Our love for this earth is necessarily brief, and death is the price of admission, the final limit. Camus could not believe in God because to do so, as he put it in "Summer in Algiers," is to "sin against life" by hoping for another, thus "evading the implacable grandeur of the one we have."

In what would tragically turn out to be the last years of his life, Camus returned imaginatively to the landscape of his youth—a landscape that, because of the Algerian War, was not accessible to him in the way it once had been. In 1958, he agreed to a French edition of *The Wrong Side and the Right Side*, republished by Gallimard. The timing was significant. "I still live with the idea that my work has not even begun," Camus wrote in his preface to the new edition. It was an odd claim for a writer who had just been given the Nobel Prize for Literature, but Camus was more troubled by the award than he was honored by it. Pained by the war in his native Algeria, shunned by Parisian intellectuals for his critique of the revolutionary Left, he feared he was finished as a writer—a fear that the Nobel Prize, which usually honors work done over a long career, only served to heighten. Refusing an interview with the newspaper *L'Express*, Camus explained that he wanted the noise and publicity surrounding the award to die away quickly. "I want to disappear for a while," he said. To his friend Roger Quinox, he seemed "like someone buried alive."

"A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened," Camus wrote in 1958.

When at last he emerged from what he described as the twin torments of depression and writer's block, Camus seemed cautiously poised to embark on a promising new path in his work—a descent inward that would finally allow him, he felt, to do justice to the silence and the sunlight that was his creative wellspring. "A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened," he wrote in 1958. The same year, he had begun work in earnest on *The First Man*, the beginning of what he hoped would become a long autobiographical novel in the style of Proust. In his notes, Camus stressed that it must be "heavy with objects and with physicality," just as his early, lyrical essays had been. In a particularly evocative passage near the end of the surviving manuscript, Jacques Cormery, Camus' novelistic stand-in, thinks of the "powerful, indescribable sensations" of the physical world around him and his "love of bodies," a love that arouses in him "the longing, yes, to live, to live still more, to immerse himself in the greatest warmth this earth could give him."

That longing was cut short on January 3, 1960, when Michel Gallimard's Facel-Vega slid off the Nationale 5 road fifteen miles outside of Sens and slammed into a tree. Gallimard's wife and daughter, sitting in the back, were unharmed, but Albert Camus, riding up front with Michel, was killed instantly. (Michel, too, later died of his injuries). The following day, Camus' brother Lucien and his two daughters went to the family apartment on Rue de Lyon where the seventy-seven-year-old Catherine Camus still lived. When they informed her of her youngest son's death, all she could say was, "Too young."

He was too young, too loving of life, and surely had too much still to offer. But as William Faulkner wrote in his obituary of Camus, "When the door shut for him he had already written on this side of it that which every artist who also carries through life with him that one same foreknowledge and hatred of death, is hoping to do: I was here." More than that, Camus left behind a body of work that appeals to those of us who are still here to *be here*, to accept our absurd condition with clarity and embrace the one perishable life we are given. In the "bright instant" he struck that tree, Faulkner observed, he was still "searching and demanding of himself." For those of us still searching, he remains our demanding and indispensable guide.

MORTEN HØI JENSEN *is the author of* A Difficult Death: The Life and Work of Jens Peter Jacobsen *(2017). He has contributed to the* New York Review of Books, *the* New Republic, *the* Point, *and the* American Interest, *among others.*

A conversation with Rosanna Warren

Searching for the Sacred

Anthony Domestico

Max Jacob was born in 1876 to a business-owning Jewish family in Quimper, an administrative center of Brittany. He died in 1944 in a Paris internment camp. Today Jacob, a talented painter and brilliant poet, is perhaps best known as Pablo Picasso's first and best French friend. When they met in 1901, Jacob wrote, "We clasped hands with that fire of friendship one no longer experiences after one's twentieth year." The two lived together for a time in Paris, pushing formal boundaries on the canvas (Picasso's Cubism) and on the page (Jacob's fractured, visionary prose poems). In 1909, Jacob had a vision of Christ, which led to his conversion to Catholicism (in subsequent years, he attended daily Mass and spent years living at a Benedictine monastery). He wrote about this vision for the rest of his life.

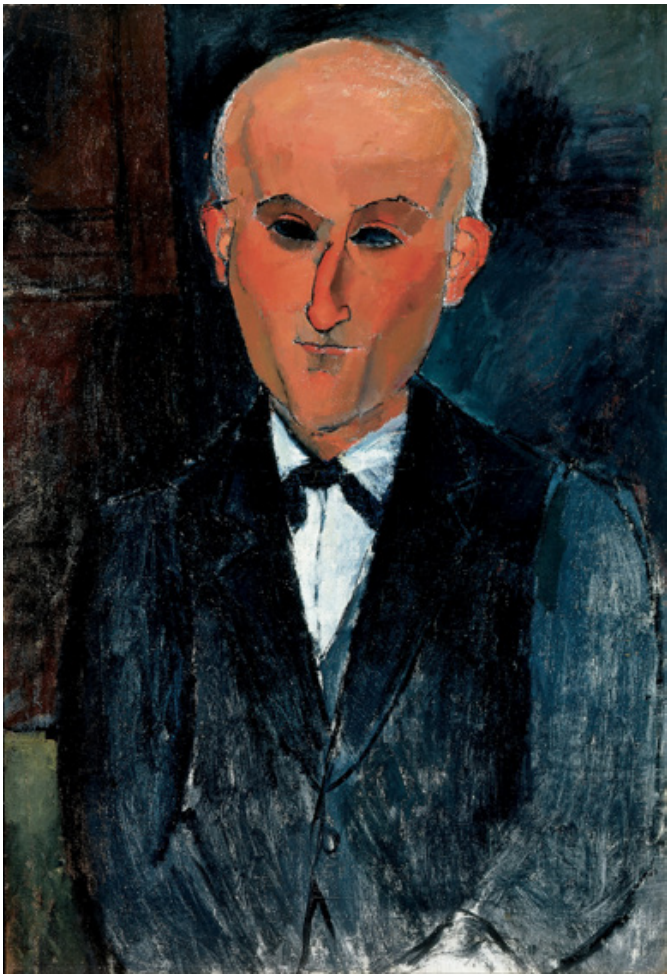
As the poet Rosanna Warren argues in her new book, Max Jacob: A Life in Art and Letters, *Jacob's art emerged from a series of fundamental tensions. He was Jewish and Catholic; he was a painter and a poet; he was a social creature who lived, for long stretches, in retreat from the social world; he was a gay man who saw his desire as both a torment and a mystical route to God. This multiplicity makes itself felt in the very texture of Jacob's writing. In his prose poems, Warren has written, "meaning leaps from unit to unit; meaning is the leaping itself, the motion."* Max Jacob: A Life in Art and Letters *shows us this leaping motion, this vital energy that is a matter of style and soul.*

This interview was conducted via email.

ANTHONY DOMESTICO: In your preface, you claim, "I didn't mean to write this book. To my French friends, I call it *une biographie involontaire*. It was a case of possession." How did Jacob come to possess you?

ROSANNA WARREN: It was a spectral experience. I'd been writing since childhood: when I was seven, my father gave me an old typewriter and I taught myself to type. I created a family newspaper, the *Family Racket*, for which I interviewed the cat, the dog, and the rabbit, as well as my parents and my brother. I also wrote innumerable stories. One, novella-length, was published by Random House when I was ten. We lived in France the year I was twelve, and attending the lycée, I had to memorize hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lines of poetry in French, and I began writing poems in French. Throughout my adolescence, I kept writing poems, mostly in English. But I kept them private. I'd also been drawing and painting since childhood, and the discipline to which I consciously committed myself was painting. I was majoring in studio art in college, and attended serious art schools during the summers—Skowhegan, where I met my inspiring teacher, the painter Leland Bell, and the New York Studio School. It was during the New York Studio School summer program in Paris that Leland asked me to translate the studio notes of André Derain, notes which had been hidden, till then, in an old suitcase in the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet.

I spent my mornings at the studio drawing and painting, and my afternoons at the august library, translating Derain's



Amedeo Modigliani, *Max Jacob (1876-1944)*, 1911/1922

wine- and paint-stained pages. And among those papers I found letters from Max Jacob, because Derain had created woodcuts for one of Jacob's earliest books, the marvelous collection of experimental poems, *Les Oeuvres Burlesques et Mystiques de Frère Matorel Mort au Couvent*, from 1912. I was fascinated. Jacob, like me, both wrote and painted. Like me, he was searching for the sacred. One weekend I drove down to the village of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, where Jacob had spent two seven-year periods of retreat in connection with the Benedictine monastery. I meant to draw the Romanesque capitals of the basilica, but in the little bookshop I found books by Max Jacob and was enraptured by his poems. In my sketchbook, as if a ghostly hand had seized mine, I found myself writing poems (in English) in his style, to him, about him. He kidnapped me. When I got back to college in the fall, I typed up the poems and showed them to my dean, who was also the editor of the *Yale Review*. "These are good," he said, rather severely. The next thing I knew, they appeared in print, and I was encouraged to send poems to other journals, and bit by bit, my writing was no longer secret. It took several years after my graduation from university, but I found I was spending more time writing than painting, and with grief—as in recognizing a failing love affair—I came to recognize that I would not be a painter. Max Jacob had reoriented me.

AD: One of this book's strengths lies in its rich description not only of Jacob but also of what you describe as "the loose commonwealth" of his friends: Pablo Picasso, most famously, but many others too, such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, and Jacques Maritain. Can you describe Jacob as a friend? What was it like to spend a night out with him in Paris in the 1910s? And how did these friendships help shape his writing?

RW: Jacob's nights out varied enormously depending on the friends and on the period in his life. He was a chameleon. With Picasso and Apollinaire in the 1910s, there were raucous nights up in Montmartre, eating at grubby little bistros (when often they could hardly afford a plate of beans), or at the Lapin Agile tavern, where Jacob would entertain his friends by dancing manic jigs on the table top, wrapped in a shawl and impersonating a woman, or warbling lyrics from comic opera. In those years, they were all desperately poor and they depended on Jacob for entertainment. After Jacob experienced a mystical vision of Christ on the wall of his dark little room on the Rue Ravignan in 1909, he was torn more and more between his frenetic socializing and his solitary studies in religion and the occult. He was formally baptized in the Roman Catholic faith in 1915 (with Picasso as his godfather); for several years he maintained a divided life, partly engaged in penitential exercises, meditation, and prayer, and partly carousing in Montmartre and Montparnasse and pursuing fleeting erotic encounters with men. He suffered anguish and guilt at these dissipations, but he was driven to them. After 1916, his social circle expanded to include more worldly friends, such as the Prince and Princess Ghika (the princess was the famous former courtesan Liane de Pougy), and the celebrated fashion designer Paul Poiret. With these people, Jacob was a dandy, elegant, fiendishly witty. Still later, during his first period of retreat at Saint-Benoît in the 1920s, he became friendly with the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain and his wife, Raïssa. With them and with his parish priests, he was still another creature: devout, erudite, kind. With the keenly intelligent, subtle, and loyal writer and editor Jean Paulhan, Jacob was a serious intellectual and artist.

How did these friendships shape his writing? It's hard to say in any precise way, but Jacob was a wildly innovative fiction writer as well as poet, and his stories and novels are populated by a vast array of different characters. The friendship with Picasso was probably the most important relationship of his life, and it persisted, with permutations, from the early days of heroic Cubism, when Jacob was reinventing French poetry as Picasso reinvented painting, to the end of Jacob's life. The last, unfinished painting on Jacob's table, left there when the Gestapo arrested him on February 24, 1944, was a portrait of Picasso. The friendship with Apollinaire was marked by poetic rivalry, but also by affection: it couldn't

develop because Apollinaire died young of the Spanish flu in 1918. The connection with Cocteau lasted for years; they understood each other's homosexuality and were less competitive poetically. They also collaborated in developing a kind of modernist classicism after the Great War in opposition to Breton's Surrealism.

AD: Jacob was turned off by the secular Judaism of his family: as a fictional version of his mother exclaims, "You know, as for me, I don't give a hoot about God!" But he became deeply interested in Kabbalah around 1901 and remained interested until his death. Why did this system appeal to Jacob, as both a mystic and a poet?

RW: You're right that Kabbalah appealed to Jacob as both mystic and poet, and the two disciplines were coterminous for him. In the version of Kabbalah that Jacob read in a French translation, he found a mystical and spiritual version of Judaism that had nothing in common with his parents' shop-keeping world in Quimper, or the elite, intellectual Judaism of his cousin by marriage Sylvain Lévi, the eminent professor of Sanskrit at the Collège de France. One of the painful themes in this story is Jacob's rejection of Judaism, his blindness to possibilities of Jewish identity he might have found, for instance, in the powerful Swiss novelist Albert Cohen, whom he knew slightly. But in Kabbalah Jacob found one way to preserve his Judaism. He saw it as a vision of all creation emanating from the power of language and from the numerical values in Hebrew letters. God creates the world in Genesis through utterance: for the Kabbalist, the entire world is a magical system of language, and the initiate can penetrate to the secret essence of things through incantations. The heavens are composed in spiritual rings within rings "like an onion," and through meditation the initiate can pass beyond the surface and mingle with the divine: "Mystery is in this life, reality in the other. If you love me, if you love me, I'll show you reality." All of Jacob's life can be seen as a drive toward unifying disparate elements: Catholic and Jew, decadent and ascetic, provincial and Parisian, painter and poet. Kabbalah gave him a model of synthesis.

AD: Your first book, *Each Leaf Shines Separate*, includes two poems written for Jacob. In both, you stress the theatrical nature of his faith: "And yet / your piety is touching, though / (because?) histrionic," you write in "To Max Jacob." In the biography, you stress this style of piety again: "The tears were real. The theater was real. Jacob's religion was theatrical and, like all real art, a form of truth." What made Jacob's religion theatrical?

RW: Jacob lived in and through the imagination. For him, the imagination was a faculty for divining truth and then representing it. Art, he thought, was an illusion designed to present essential truths. This is hardly an original idea: Shakespeare plays with it endlessly, such as in *As You Like It* when the clown Touchstone tells Audrey, "The truest poetry is the most feigning." When Jacob was acting, he was finding out what could be real for him, and then he made it real. In his Catholicism, this meant adopting practices of devotion and a theology—which for him was an esoteric set of stories and symbols—then radically changing his life to live into the meaning of those stories. Fourteen years spent in a parish community around a Benedictine abbey was hardly a flight of fancy. Jacob was so thoroughly an artist, I think he treated his own life like an artwork and acted out his truth.

AD: The last pages of the book are dreadful: France falls to the Germans; anti-Jewish laws are passed; family members are arrested and sent to Auschwitz; Jacob is arrested and dies of pneumonia in an internment camp. "Yet," you write, "Jacob wasn't crushed. Poetry gave him a core of resilience and helped him to 'resist.'" Just months before his arrest, he wrote "Neighborly Love." Could you describe that poem—its structure, its shifting pronouns (from "he" to "me" to "you"), its tone—and explain how you read it as an example of poetic resistance?

RW: "Neighborly Love" is a prose poem. The title is savagely ironic: the eager collaboration of the Vichy government with

Rosanna Warren

ANNE RYAN/UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

the Nazis in restricting and extirpating Jewish life in France hardly presents an example of neighborly love. The poem starts with an anonymous speaker asking, "Who has seen the toad crossing the road?" The question could be felt as a challenge to Jacob's fellow citizens in 1943: Who was seeing? Who was caring? Then we see the toad as a "tiny man," crippled, advancing in a humiliated crawl. More questions: "Has he crawled from the sewer?" In the anti-Semitic idiom of the period, Jews were routinely portrayed as sub-human, vermin, filth. Denizens of a sewer. Then a decisive statement: "No one has noticed the toad in the street." At which point the poem shifts its pronouns, as you saw, to the first person, who identifies with the toad: "Before, no one noticed me in the street." And we are hurled into the present of the Occupation, the yellow star imposed on the Jews: "Now children are amazed by my yellow star." The poem ends by addressing the toad directly, contradicting the earlier identification—now the speaker envies the toad, who has no yellow star. I think of this poem as an act of resistance because it presents the situation of oppression with concentrated imaginative force and takes possession of the symbols of oppression: Jews seen as squalid animals, the yellow star. And it forces a reader to pay attention to the horror. Who has seen? Of course, it couldn't be published when Jacob wrote it. It came out in December 1944, after his death, in Éluard's little resistance journal, *Éternelle revue*. I own a copy of that issue, one of my cherished possessions.

AD: You open your preface with a question: "How did the story of Max Jacob's life become the story of my life?" This echoes the preface to another one of your books, *Fables of the Self*, where you write that your critical essays "compose an occult autobiography." How has working on Jacob for three decades helped you to understand your own life? What aesthetic and religious questions has he clarified or complicated for you?

RW: Ah, hard to answer! In many ways, my life doesn't resemble Jacob's. I'm not a man, I'm not French, I'm not gay, I'm not Jewish. But all my life I've been seeking forms of the sacred that made sense to me. I grew up in an atheist family with Protestantism in the background, but we lived a good deal in Italy and France in my childhood. I was drawn to the crucifixes that hung on the walls of the farmhouses we rented and to the religious paintings and sculptures we saw all around us. In high school in the United States, I ransacked Dante, Pascal, Donne, Milton, trying to find—what? God? What belief might look like? Belief for me would have to come in the form of art, in the form of imaginative creations. Working with Jacob, I felt I knew from the inside out what it was to live in the truth of these stories. The birth of a sacred child: the constant possibility of the renewal of love. The crucifixion: the woundedness that breaks us, but can open us to radical love. At the same time, after years of trying to adapt myself to different Christian congregations—even going so far as to undergo, if that is the right word, initiation into the Catholic faith and baptism—I realized that I would always be an outsider. I couldn't accept dogma. I was horrified by the petrification of sacrificial vision in cruel power structures, all the crueler in those years when the sexual scandals in the Church broke out, and it became clear that the Church authorities were more committed to protecting their own hierarchies than in protecting vulnerable people. I'm a lapsed Catholic convert, I guess, still living in the light of the vision but rejecting the institution. For some years now I have lived with my beloved partner who is Jewish, and we follow Jewish ritual quite closely, which moves me and satisfies my longing for a form of worship. In any case, I have read and reread the Hebrew Bible for decades. It seems to me that the sacred is like light: its frequencies are reflected from different surfaces and are interpreted as different colors by the action of the human retina, optic nerve, and brain. Divinity enters us in many different ways and takes many forms, many different stories, in our limited human brains. I'm happy to live in this multiplicity.

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AD: One of my favorite lines in the book comes from a 1922 exhibit essay Jacob wrote, ostensibly on Spanish art but, you argue, really about Picasso and, even more really, about his own poetry. The line reads, "In any case, to say mystic is to say realist." Is that statement true for you, too?

RW: I love this statement too. When I painted, I used to go into trances, sitting in a meadow, or in front of a person whose portrait I was painting: when things were working, normal selfhood ebbed away and I felt in communion with what I was trying to translate into visual marks. Something like that happens when I'm immersed in writing. I don't claim to be a mystic. But in the modest disciplines of writing poems and drawing, I try to open myself to realities beyond myself. "Realist" is the important word. It's a never-ending quest for the revelation of the real, and for a symbolic language in which to express the experience. I came close to saying what I mean in the poem "Man in Stream," from *Ghost in a Red Hat*: "I wanted a day with cracks, to let the godlight in." Max Jacob taught me about making those cracks, finding those cracks, looking for that light.

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RAND RICHARDS COOPER

Hurricane Quebecois

'Les Rose'

Fifty years ago, Quebec was in the throes of a secessionist movement, its French-speaking majority venting long-accumulated resentment at the dominant Anglo minority. In Canada, "the October crisis" signifies not the 1962 global confrontation over Soviet missiles in Cuba, but the domestic strife triggered in the fall of 1970 by the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), which committed a pair of high-profile political kidnappings. Envied today for its political serenity, Canada back then seethed with anger stirred up by the FLQ, whose eloquent, impassioned leader was Paul Rose. Rose's life and times form the subject of Félix Rose's documentary film *Les Rose*, or "The Rose Family."

While most children at some point discover something about their parents in a happenstance way, few can match what Rose heard from a cousin: "Your dad kidnapped a cabinet minister and killed him." The idea for his film began with this shocking revelation. Who is a freedom fighter and who is a terrorist—and who gets to decide? How do we judge political violence committed in pursuit of justice? Rose addresses these abstract questions implicitly while pursuing concrete, personal ones: Who was his father, and how did he do what he did? "My dad wouldn't hurt a fly," Rose recalls thinking upon learning of his father's revolutionary past. But a political hostage? Perhaps.

Rose *père* died in 2013, and the film opens at his memorial service, with family and friends paying tribute as a voiced-over news pundit comments discordantly on "the felon, the terrorist, Paul Rose." The film deftly contrasts the private person with the political one: the older man we see in his living-room easy chair, bantering fondly with his son, versus the young man being led out of a courtroom, head bowed and fist raised in a classic pose of revolutionary defiance.

The Rose Family is cobbled together from home movies, news footage, tape recordings smuggled out of prison during Paul Rose's incarceration, and interviews his son conducts with family members, especially his uncle, Jacques Rose, a former FLQ member. We get an account of a hardscrabble Montreal childhood, both brothers working as teens at the Redpath sugar refinery where their father and grandfather had worked before them—for "starvation wages," Jacques recalls, paid by "English bosses [who] got rich at our parents' expense." A deep class animus lay behind the separatist movement, a bitter sense of exploitation and marginalization that was more than working-class solidarity. French Canadians felt colonized within their own country.

After a stint as a teacher, Paul drifted toward political activism. His cultural coming-of-age is conveyed in emblematic 1960s scenes: worker committees; protestors taking down the Canadian flag and raising the Quebecois one; a visit by Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that triggered a riot. We see footage of a summer in la Gaspésie, the rugged peninsula north of Quebec City, where in 1968 young people flocked for a hippie-ish mass gathering, playing guitars, smoking cigarettes, and befriending fishermen.

A mere two years later, these youthful larks led to a darker place. The FLQ had committed its first bombings in 1963—first mailboxes, then larger targets, culminating in a 1969 blast that heavily damaged the Montreal Stock Exchange. The mounting violence followed a script that was also playing out across Europe and the United States, in which resistance groups proceeded ineluctably from theory to protest to action: demonstrations, followed by bombs and robberies; and finally hostage-takings, ultimatums, and political executions. Insurrectionist provocations and government crackdowns ricocheted in a harsh tit-for-tat. "We had to up the ante," Jacques recalls.

In October 1970, a faction of the FLQ kidnapped British diplomat James Cross. Paul's faction then kidnaped Pierre Laporte, the deputy premier of Quebec. Publishing a manifesto "in the name of the workers" and pledging to "replace the slave society with a free one," the group issued demands. The federal government refused to negotiate, and sent in the army. With troops closing in, the FLQ killed Laporte and left his body in the trunk of a car on a military base.

The Rose brothers were captured in December 1970 and herded through a trial whose legitimacy they rejected. Sentenced to life, Paul became a prison leader, chairing inmate committees and organizing cultural and educational events. After several contentious parole hearings and the defeat of a referendum on Quebecois sovereignty, he was released in December 1982, and spent the rest of his life building a family and working as a trade-union organizer and political activist.

Félix Rose has called his film an attempt to understand what impelled his father to political violence. Some critics have blasted the result. "Every son wants to see their father as a hero, but 'Les Rose' is a whitewashing of history," wrote Marc Cassivi in the Canadian newspaper *La Presse*. One understands the criticism. Rose fuzzes out the full damage wrought by the FLQ (scores of bombings and at least nine deaths); we don't learn the details of how Laporte was killed (he was strangled); nor does the film implicate Paul Rose in the actual killing, despite substantial evidence that he was involved. Absent too are interviews with government figures or historians; Félix Rose relies on family members, introduced with homey subtitles ("My Mother," "My Aunt," and so on), plus a few sympathetic friends.

Yet he nowhere denies the complicity of his father and uncle. Nor does he avoid hard questions; his film puts plenty of moral evasiveness on display. He draws amply from prison interviews with his father done in 1979 and 1980. Asked by a journalist what he had hoped to accomplish by kidnapping Laporte, a bearded and unrepentant Paul cites "consciousness raising" about "infringements of democratic practices."

Paul Rose leaving the Montreal Courthouse on September 18, 1971

CANADIAN PRESS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

And Jacques, pushed by his nephew, describes their actions as "the final solution when democracy failed."

Such comments show that Orwellianism is by no means the sole property of governments in power. "We were requisitioning funds for the organization," Jacques says of the robberies his group committed. "We called them mandatory donations." He is not being ironic. Nor is his reference to "the people's prison"—a converted dumpster the FLQ used for holding hostages. As for the fate of those held there, Paul recalls hesitating to put forth "ultimatums that could prove dangerous to the hostages," as if the danger lay not in the decisions of the FLQ members, but in the negotiating process itself. "We never wanted a man to die," says Jacques, looking back. "But it happened. We had no choice."

Paul remained unapologetic about political violence, advocating it as a form of propaganda of the deed: political action intended not only to accomplish specific goals, but also to catalyze revolution. The concept was formulated by the German-American socialist-anarchist Hans Most (an influence on Emma Goldman), who advocated "action as propaganda" and whose 1885 manual, *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare*, was a primer for would-be bombmakers. The concept was a staple of such revolutionaries as Mikhail Bakunin, whose 1870 "Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis" stated that "we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, potent, and irresistible form of propaganda."

Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner, goes a French saying: to understand everything is to forgive everything. But while *The Rose Family* understands, it stops short of pardoning Paul for continuing to espouse political violence, including the taking of human life. "I regret nothing," Paul said in an interview with *Le Devoir* in the 1990s. "Placed before the same circumstances today, I would do exactly the same thing. It was not a youthful indiscretion." Not a youthful indiscretion, but a conscious political plan. Yet it did not work. A wave of revulsion followed the Laporte murder and triggered, if anything, a loss of support for sovereignty.

The Rose Family covers little of the last thirty years of Paul's life, beyond brief clips of a middle-aged father doting on his kids. The uneventfulness of these years seems significant, and I would have liked more attention paid. What did it signify to Paul Rose to understand that life goes on, and that a type of change that is gradual, rather than cataclysmic—a change that reflects slow work, patience, and personal relationships—is the rule? The interviews of Jacques Rose take place at his house overlooking the St. Lawrence River, where he chats with his nephew while doing home renovations: the aging, ponytailed ex-terrorist, now the very image of the bourgeois retiree. "We just wanted people to get along," he says. "That's the ultimate goal of independence." It seems a far cry from his long-ago fiery pledge to defeat the slave society through redemptive political violence. Uncle Jacques flies the Quebecois flag, and the roof of his home is a bold Quebecois blue: patriotism as home décor. At film's close he is installing new, oversized windows throughout, as if to see more clearly.

An unsettling hybrid of family movie, political chronicle, and what might be called perpetrator history, *The Rose Family* proves suggestive about the fraught nature of the '60s and '70s, and the limitations of the era's revolutionary fervor. Arguably, part of the problem was grandiosity, the belief that political movements could, and should, solve all problems of existence with one fell stroke. "We wanted to take on American imperialism and British colonialism," says Jacques. Winter winds howl through much of the film's soundtrack, reminding us what a cold, unforgiving, and liminal place Quebec is—and also evoking the political gale that buffeted that distant era. Paul himself, in one of the tapes smuggled out of prison, refers poetically to "a wind no one can tame—this great drive, this great fervor within us. I feel it. Together we will create a hurricane."

What is the ultimate effect and meaning of the storm that the Roses helped unleash? "Violence sickened them," asserted the writer, socialist, and friend Jacques Ferron in an interview during Paul's incarceration, "but they took direct action to move history forward." Confidence regarding not only history's eventual judgment, but also its own efficacy in driving history's very mechanism, has always been a hallmark, even obsession of the Left, beginning with Marx himself. But *did* such would-be revolutionary groups as the FLQ move history forward? Those players who remain alive are uncertain. Jacques is alternately melancholic, emphatic, and at times nostalgic—laughing about a contretemps during his trial, when a melee erupted in the courtroom, the judge fled, and he was left holding his wig. "I thought I had scalped him!" he tells his nephew. Just so does time heal all wounds, alchemizing our rages into gleaming gems of memory, gratifying and baffling the revolutionary.

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

ROBERT RUBSAM

What Screens Can't Show

Gerhard Richter's Birkenau paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

In the summer of 1944, a camera was smuggled out of Auschwitz. Inside it was a roll of film with four images from the gas chambers at Birkenau, taken by members of the Jewish *Sonderkommando*. These photos were distributed worldwide by the Polish resistance. Two of them appear to have been taken in quick succession, discreetly, from within a shadowed doorframe. The other pair, one of which is blurred, appear to have been shot at the hip from a distance. The photos show Jewish women stripping before the gas chamber, and dead bodies waiting to be incinerated. White smoke billows as other bodies burn.

In 2014, the German painter Gerhard Richter sought to make a statement on the Holocaust. He copied these stark black-and-white images onto four monumental canvases, first in pencil, then in oil. And then he began to cover them. Over several weeks, he applied layer after layer of paint, first in muted silvers and greys, then reds and greens and purples and blacks, often pushing it across the surface with a squeegee to create ripples and chasms of paint. Two of the paintings are mostly gray, white, and red; the others have large areas of pulsating green. He called the group his Birkenau paintings.

This polyptych came to New York City in March 2020 for a career retrospective at the Met Breuer. Because of the pandemic, the show had to close after just one week. So I saw Richter's paintings for the first time on a computer screen, where they lost their particularity, their colors washed out and their scale uncertain. I scrolled through them quickly.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Walter Benjamin writes that a key development of mass entertainment is a loss of a context. The physical object loses its particular circumstances when it is reproduced as image, especially in a medium like film. Viewing a work of art, which used to require traveling to its location, looking, noticing, and thinking, is transformed into a totally passive form of consumption. "The public is an examiner," Benjamin writes, "but an absent-minded one."

The internet has made this problem worse. Today one can scroll through dozens of paintings in the time it takes the eye to return to a painting from its placard in a gallery. So, too, with images that record atrocities. Throughout the long summer of 2020, the internet was full of arguments about Richter's paintings, with well-known critics and anonymous commentators both finding ways to make the paintings and the deaths they commemorated all about themselves. A prominent *Atlantic* writer took the occasion to claim that America was "nearly as bad as Nazi Germany," while someone on Twitter insisted that Americans should learn about the atrocities committed by Americans, not those committed against "Beckies" like Anne Frank. Never mind that the people who were gassed, shot, beaten, and worked to death at camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau were 6 million individual humans, each with his or her own desires, grudges, hopes, pleasures—each unique and irreplaceable. In our digital life, even suffering can be contextualized out of existence.

The *Sonderkommando* images document the end of perhaps fifty or sixty people, full of everything that marks us as human beings: bone, muscle, blood, skin, hair. We don't know very much else about these women, other than that they were murdered during the summer of 1944, when the beaches of Normandy had recently been stormed and the Wehrmacht had already lost the Battle of Stalingrad. It was no longer a matter of how the war would end, but when. These women might have been French, or Czech, or Hungarian, shipped to Poland in boxcars and gassed upon arrival.

The Birkenau paintings are currently on display in their own room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the four canvases facing four reproductions of the images on which they are based. I went to see the paintings toward the beginning of September. It was my first trip to the Met—or to any museum—since New York City shut down in early March. At first, I was overpowered by the size and physicality of the paintings. The effect of randomness, the way the paint seems to slip and stutter across the canvas, had been imperceptible on a screen. But as I viewed them at the Met, the *presence* of oil paint asserted itself with force. The paintings reminded me of posters half-scraped from a wall or the view from a painted-over window.

Gerhard Richter, *Birkenau*, 2014

Richter's squeegee method compels the viewer to *focus*, to take in every ripple, every bleed, and to consider what is buried beneath. Rather than representing the visible elements of an atrocity as a figurative painting might—doorway, bodies, smoke—Richter's Birkenau paintings try to *reflect* the singularity of this particular atrocity and its particular victims. The physical presence of each painting reflects the concrete nature of pain and death, even the mass death of genocide. This is an abstract art that saves history from the perils of abstraction.

Of course art can also work the other way, transforming individual suffering into something universal. The best paintings of the Crucifixion do precisely this. Christ's body, bent and broken, reminds us that suffering is a universal feature of the human condition. Such images invite us to identify with the divine victim, mixing his pain with our own. Art can take either approach to suffering: it can draw parallels or insist on the utterly, incommensurably specific.

For it to do either of these things effectively, a work of art needs to be seen as it was intended to be seen, because its context and physical circumstances are also a part of the artist's intention. The internet has made pandemic life much easier for those who can use it for work and school, or just to stay in touch with loved ones. But something is always lost in the translation to a screen. A deep encounter with art becomes possible only when viewer and object share the same space. Scrolling through digital versions of art is what Benjamin called an "absent-minded" activity, and we need to be as present as possible when we look at paintings like Richter's, paintings that attempt to represent the presence of suffering itself.

ROBERT RUBSAM *is a writer and critic whose work has been published in the* New York Times Magazine, *the* Baffler, America, *and* Texas Monthly. *He is currently an MFA student at Columbia University. You can follow him on Twitter at @rob_rubsam.*

POETRY

ASTRONOMY
For Katha Pollitt

Michael Cadnum

You knew it would capture you
that evening you caught the flash
you recognized only after a heartbeat,
a meteorite over the rooflines
of yet another childhood home.

Months would go by—even years—before another like it
broke into your life, but it didn't matter. The secrets
were all you hungered for by then,
accompanied by charts and websites,
while your peers went to the party
or the winery, the beach or the fair,
leaving you behind.

How many light years ago
was that? How many weddings
forgone, how many promises
left unvoiced?

Take the cap off another lens.
Climb another flint-backed ridge,
your own breath the only life.
Let another desert cool under
the empty multitude—

here it comes, the solitary
predawn where under that
abyss you'll come nowhere
close to the beginning,

hostage again to the focus
and the stubbornly balanced
tripod under the dazzling
deepfreeze of light.

MICHAEL CADNUM *has published nearly forty books, including* The Book of the Lion, *which was a finalist for the National Book Award. His most recent book of poetry,* Kingdom, *includes many poems that first appeared in* Commonweal. *He is working on a new book of poems,* The Promised Rain. *He lives in Albany, California.*

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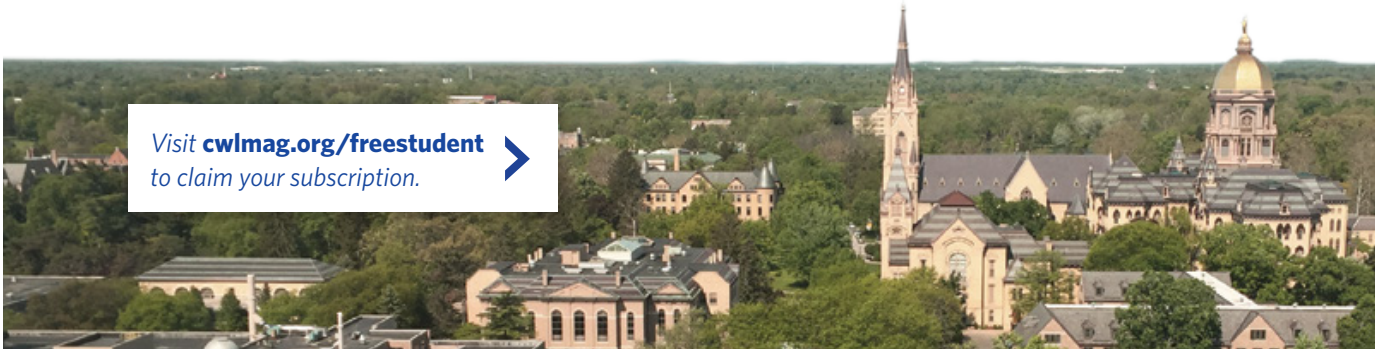

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Experiments in Living

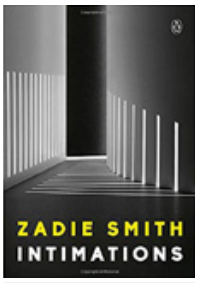
SANTIAGO RAMOS

Zadie Smith introduces her 2018 essay collection, *Feel Free*, with this remarkable note:

> I realize my somewhat ambivalent view of human selves is wholly out of fashion. These essays you have in your hands were written...during the eight years of the Obama presidency and so are the product of a bygone world. It is of course hardly possible to retain any feelings of ambivalence—on either side of the Atlantic—in the face of what we now confront. Millions of more or less amorphous selves will now necessarily find themselves solidifying into protesters, activists, marchers, voters, firebrands, impeachers, lobbyists, soldiers, champions, defenders, historians, experts, critics. You can't fight fire with air. But equally you can't fight for a freedom you've forgotten how to identify.

For Smith, a self can never be fully summed up or pinned down. In the best of times, it shouldn't need to "solidify" into anything. No collective tag, no personal description, not even an authorized biography, can totally cordon off what someone is from what she is not. To discover yourself is to become aware that you are a being "whose boundaries are uncertain, whose language is never pure, whose world is in no way 'self-evident.'" Every human being finds her origin in others—other people, other tongues, other eras. To be free is to recognize this state of affairs and respond creatively. The artist is therefore something close to the paradigm of the free self.

If this view of being human seems hopelessly abstract, *Feel Free* helpfully provides many examples of it. Smith often writes about artists who are bold, scandalous, and meet resistance from critics and the public. A free self (Jay-Z) plays with language, stretching it to the limit ("The House That Hova Built"). A free self may rebel against his roots (Philip Roth in "The I Who Is Not Me"), rebel against what others think of him ("Meet Justin Bieber!"), or enjoy being just plain weird ("*Crash* by J. G. Ballard"). Smith also talks about herself in these terms. She laments the divides of class and culture that still plague Britain, exploited by politicians and making diverse friendships difficult ("Fences: A Brexit Diary"). In a 2019 essay titled "Fascinated to Presume: In Defense of Fiction," the acclaimed author of novels like *White Teeth* (2000) and *On Beauty* (2005) describes herself as someone who has "never believed myself to have a voice entirely separate from the many voices I hear, read, and internalize every day."



INTIMATIONS
Six Essays

ZADIE SMITH
Penguin Books
$10.95 | 112 pp.

But what happens when the walls start closing in? If, as Smith concedes, Brexit and the presidency of Donald Trump threw us into a situation that made her philosophy of selfhood seem like an outdated luxury, what about the pandemic? It too imposes new demands upon the free self. The moment we are currently living through reveals "the complex and ambivalent nature of 'submission,'" Smith says in *Intimations*, a new collection of essays written during the months of lockdown.

Like most of us, Smith has often felt trapped during this time. But the ambivalent nature of submission means one may discover inner liberation even while being subject to a stay-at-home order. It follows that being free is not the same thing as being unencumbered. Smith began learning these lessons shortly before the lockdown began, while admiring tulips through the bars of the wrought-iron fence of a Manhattan public garden. During a brief respite from her busy schedule, she sees "not a very sophisticated flower—a child could draw it—and these were garish: pink with orange highlights." Smith becomes transfixed, "my fingers curled around those iron bars." The "vulgar" flowers somehow command stillness on her part. They intrude upon her day. Soon enough, the lockdown would also command stillness and intrude upon her days *for months*. But Smith did not submit to the tulips: "Even as I was peering in at them, I wished they were peonies." Does rebelling in this way enhance one's freedom? If the world offers us a simple beauty, even a mediocre one, do we gain anything from rejecting the gift? Is true freedom more like the easy contemplation of a flower, or the radical creativity of the artist?

An answer might be found in the essay titled "Something to Do." "Now there are essential workers—who do not need to seek out something to do; whose task is vital and unrelenting—and there are the rest of us, all with a certain amount of time on our hands." This free time might seem ideal for a writer, if in fact the artist is the paragon of freedom. But Smith struggles like everybody else. "Confronted with the problem of life served neat, without distraction or adornment or superstructure, I had almost no idea of what to do with it." Art is "something to do," but it does not fill the void more meaningfully than any other activity. Quite the contrary: it makes us aware of how unnecessary many of our activities really are.

Smith concludes that writing—and everything else—becomes worthwhile only if it is done out of love "in the Platonic sense," that is, "an ideal form and essential part of the universe—like 'Beauty' or the color red—from which all particular examples on earth take their nature." That's not quite right: love is not an ideal form for Plato, but rather the force of desire that drives us toward ideal forms (like Beauty) and opens us to friendship, marriage, and solidarity. But her point is well taken. Art is worthwhile when it is done for the sake of love, because love draws us out of ourselves, toward the world, toward others—toward tulips, even during a pandemic.

There's a lot of political commentary in *Intimations*, as there should be. While inner freedom is perhaps freedom in its highest form, it is also the case that the system one lives under and the people who run it greatly influence what one can do and who one can become. Smith's views are at least partially founded in the existentialist tradition, and she would probably agree with Simone de Beauvoir's description of the human condition in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: "He asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things." Politics can confront many of those "other things." Smith's own political temperament gravitates toward the center-left. In *Feel Free*, she expresses gratitude for the beneficent postwar British welfare state. Concerning the neoliberal dismantling of it, she quotes the English social democrat Tony Judt approvingly: "We need to learn to *think* the state again."

In *Intimations*, Smith's own rethinking of the state considers the institutions that make freedom possible. In "The American Exception," she meditates on the use of war as a metaphor for the pandemic, then considers how this makes clear the importance of state-provided health care: "War transforms its participants.... What was taken for granted, underappreciated and abused now reveals itself to be central to our existence.... People find themselves applauding a national health service that their own government criminally underfunded and neglected these past ten years." In "A Hovering Young Man," she laments the modern rejection of the "mundane realities" of the welfare state ("universal health care, free university education, and decent public housing"). "It is easy to despise institutions, to feel irritated or constrained by them," she writes. But then she contemplates the

Zadie Smith

JEFF MORGAN 09/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

life of an artistic and eccentric coworker at NYU, a somewhat fragile soul: "I felt glad he was at least tethered to an institution, like a red balloon caught in a tree, instead of floating out into the unforgiving city," all the more unforgiving during the lockdown. I see what she means, though this last thought gave me pause: the artist *must* go out into the unforgiving city and report unflinchingly about what goes on in it.

Smith's sharpest political essay is "Contempt as a Virus," which deals with racism and was written after the killing of George Floyd. Racism is a species of contempt, and contempt—a "virus" in Smith's pandemic-inspired metaphor—is a mode of seeing human beings that reduces them to subhuman status:

> Patient zero of this particular virus stood on a slave ship four hundred years ago, looked down at the sweating, bleeding, moaning mass below deck and reverse-engineered an emotion—contempt—from a situation that he, the patient himself, had created. He looked at the human beings he had chained up and noted that they seemed to be the type of people who wore chains.... And having thus placed them in a category similar to the one in which we place animals, he experienced the same fear and contempt we have for animals.

The enslaver is simultaneously objectifying the slave, categorizing her under a fixed essence that is a prison ("people who like to be in chains") and failing to see what is truly essential about her: her dignity, her freedom, her right to life. The three building blocks of the enslaver's contempt are "*They have no capital, not even labor. Anything can be done to them. They have no recourse.*" These viral strands have been passed on through "churches and schools, adverts and movies, books and political parties," to this very day. "Many people are unaware that they carry the virus at all until the very moment you find yourself phoning the cops."

Smith sees the economic dimension as the most important aspect of the problem: the racist "mentality looks over the fence and sees a plague people: plagued by poverty, first and foremost." The fear of "contracting" poverty drives racial division. "To fear the contagion of poverty is reasonable," she writes. "To keep voting for politics that ensure the permanent existence of an underclass is what is meant by 'structural racism.'" Smith calls for "all economically exploited people, whatever their race—[to] act in solidarity with each other," because "real change would involve a broad recognition that...the DNA of this virus is economic at base." But she is not hopeful about this change taking place.

There is an activist side to Zadie Smith that is marching in the streets. There is another, bohemian, side to her that might not mind lounging around with the Rolling Stones at Villa Nellcôte. The former exists so that the latter might be free: Freedom is what Smith is ultimately about, and her political critique is made at the service of this overarching ideal. Described in this way, Smith comes off as a sort of John Stuart Mill–style liberal, who defends egalitarianism in the political sphere and the right to "experiments in living" for individuals.

But there is a third, less pronounced element to Smith's essays that knits together all of her thoughts, judgments, and intimations: love. Love is what makes freedom meaningful, what gives the ever-shifting self a certain mission in life. Love is what compels us to accept the simple gift of a flower, and the rights and dignity of our neighbor. As she put it in an interview last year: "I think the hardest thing for anyone is accepting that other people are real as you are. That's it. Not using them as tools not using them as examples or things to make yourself feel better or things to get over or under.... And it's so difficult that basically the only person that ever did it was Christ." This last could be called the spiritual side of Zadie Smith. It is what completes her: an honest, searching conscience in difficult times.

SANTIAGO RAMOS *teaches at Rockhurst University.*

POETRY

BROOKLYN RADIATOR

John Linstrom

Another Wednesday, another chill
deep enough the oven's on and open.

It's two days till we
touch, bump our

butts maneuvering
the boxlike studio,

warmed by gas blue-flamed
to roast some orange rootstuff.

The sweetness and the stuffiness,
my slippers on your feet, blankets

draped, the room preheated by
my "Brooklyn radiator," and you,

with your visible delight
in toastiness and life—

I tug my blanket. Behind the wall
an alley's worth of snow comes down.

JOHN LINSTROM *is an NYU Public Humanities Fellow at the Museum of the City of New York and series editor of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Library for Cornell University Press. His poems and nonfiction have recently appeared in* Atlanta Review, *the* New Criterion, *the* Antioch Review, *and elsewhere.*

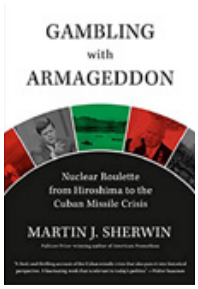
The Patriarchy Gets Lucky

ANDREW BACEVICH

In this riveting account of the Cuban Missile Crisis, only one woman makes an appearance. On October 27, 1962, Mimi Alford, at age nineteen one of President John F. Kennedy's numerous mistresses, is waiting upstairs in the presidential bedroom for JFK to take a break from contemplating the prospects of World War III. After he arrives and avails himself of his *droit du seigneur*, he tells her, "I'd rather my children be red than dead." Given the temper of the times, such an admission, if leaked to the press, would have likely resulted in his impeachment. During the Cold War, presidential dalliances might be permissible; going soft on Communism was not.

Gambling with Armageddon is, among other things, a detailed study of the white patriarchy exercising its privileges at a very specific political moment. This was a time when leaders of both parties agreed that a revolution in Cuba threatened this nation's very survival. That conviction had prompted President Dwight D. Eisenhower to devise and his successor to sponsor a cockamamie counterrevolution, putting a band of Cuban exiles ashore in April 1961 at the Bay of Pigs in hopes of overthrowing Fidel Castro. The humiliating debacle that ensued set in motion a train of events that ultimately found the American commander-in-chief sharing his deepest fears with a teenage paramour.

A historian who currently teaches at George Mason University, Martin Sherwin has written a small number of very good books. In graduate school over forty years ago, I read and admired *A World Destroyed*, his 1975 account of Hiroshima and its legacies. In 2005, he published *American Prometheus*, a biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer (co-authored with Kai Bird), which won a Pulitzer Prize. Now comes this superb rendering of both the Cuban Missile Crisis itself and the context in which it occurred. Not a huge scholarly output perhaps, but one of uniformly high quality.



GAMBLING WITH ARMAGEDDON
Nuclear Roulette from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis

MARTIN J. SHERWIN
Alfred A. Knopf
$35 | 624 pp.

Given the numerous existing accounts of the famous *Thirteen Days* (to cite the title of Robert Kennedy's own posthumously published memoir), it's fair to ask what Sherwin adds to the story. Two things: first, he highlights the hitherto unacknowledged contributions of Adlai Stevenson in resolving the crisis. Second, he appreciates the role of chance. Sheer dumb luck played a large role in averting nuclear war.

Granted, Kennedy himself and his opposite number, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, deserve the thanks of humankind for eventually finding a way out of a crisis that their own recklessness had created. The willingness of those two leaders to strike a bargain—their missiles out of Cuba, our missiles out of Italy and Turkey, along with a pledge not to invade Cuba—provided an escape route from Armageddon. That said, both leaders benefited from breaks that would have produced disaster had they gone the other way.

The Stevenson angle is especially interesting. Both Kennedy brothers detested the two-time Democratic presidential nominee, viewing him as soft and wimpy. His appointment as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations was a way to give him a job with a nice title, while keeping him far away from the White House. Yet it was Stevenson who on the very first day of the crisis urged Kennedy to negotiate with the Soviets—at a time when the only options on the table were to launch airstrikes alone, or to follow airstrikes with a full-fledged invasion. The Pentagon had plans in place for both, with the Joint Chiefs of Staff champing at the bit to execute them. No one played a greater role in persuading the president to follow a different course than did Stevenson.

According to fable, Kennedy successfully navigated his way out of the crisis thanks in large part to the wise counsel provided by the so-called ExComm, an all-white, all-male cohort of advisers. "Nothing," writes Sherwin, "could be further from the truth." Providing virtually a minute-by-minute account of ExComm deliberations, he exposes its members as bellicose,

President John F. Kennedy meets with the Executive Committee of the National Security Council during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

erratic, and possessing only a tenuous grip on reality. The ExComm operated with surprisingly few facts, and many of the "facts" it had were wrong; it wildly underestimated Soviet troop strength and the number of Soviet nuclear weapons already in Cuba, for example.

Sherwin describes Stevenson as "a premature dove." Kennedy himself began as a hawk (in advance of the crisis, he had publicly declared any presence of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba unacceptable) who eventually became a dove as "Stevenson's proposals began to make more sense than the war whoops" of the ExComm and the Joint Chiefs. For Kennedy, cajoling the ExComm into accepting a negotiated settlement was just about as difficult as finding common ground with Khrushchev. "The Soviet leader, after all, did not want a war with the United States," Sherwin writes. "On the other hand, most members of the ExComm *did* want to bomb and invade Cuba." If anything, the Joint Chiefs were even more gung-ho for war.

Meanwhile, far away from Washington (and the Kremlin), miscommunications and misunderstandings created dangerous complications to which political leaders were oblivious. Kennedy and Khrushchev alike were "unaware of how tenuous their control was over events." Reckless actions by obscure subordinates, notably in enforcing the blockade that Kennedy had implemented to buy time, nearly spooked a Soviet submarine captain into unleashing a nuclear torpedo at a U.S. Navy destroyer. The disobedience of Captain Vasily Arkhipov, another Soviet officer on the scene, prevented that from happening. A similar scenario unfolded on the other side of the world when U.S. Air Force Captain William Bassett, assigned to the 873rd Tactical Missile Squadron in Okinawa, chose common sense over an attack directive that he judged misguided. If, as Sherwin writes, World War III turns out to be "history's luckiest nonevent," these unsung heroes will deserve much of the credit.

When the Cuban Missile Crisis ended, the world breathed a sigh of relief. In Washington, the mythmaking began, with White House leaks casting Adlai Stevenson as an appeaser and crediting the men around Kennedy with being peacemakers.

Subsequent events, especially the saga beginning to unfold in Vietnam, did not sustain that judgment. Still, in October 1962, the world did luck out. Given the continued presence of nuclear weapons in various arsenals around the world, one has to wonder how long our luck is likely to last.

ANDREW BACEVICH *is president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.*

ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Theological Resistance

MARCIA PALLY

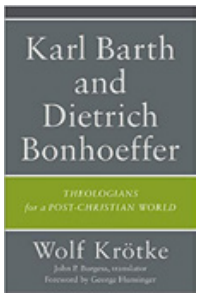
Reading the work of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth often feels like intellectual sparring. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, best known in the United States for his participation in the plot to assassinate Hitler, had a very different authorial voice; even at its most unflinchingly prophetic, his work rarely feels as confrontational. Wolf Krötke, a close reader of both theologians, is able to hone in on the brilliant essentials of their work and to prod the reader to reexamine her thoughts about the relationship between us and God in light of their claims—to ask again and again: *Is this what I believe?*

Krötke, a pastor in Communist East Germany, shares a foundational intention with his subjects, who were also pastors: to speak intelligently and honestly to the way both scholars and non-scholars think about God. Krötke's description of his own reliance on Barth and Bonhoeffer to build a "theological resistance" when political resistance was largely futile elegantly echoes his investigations into their troubled efforts to do the same during the rise of fascism. Beginning in 1934, with the Barmen Declaration's theological argument against the totalizing state, Barth, like Bonhoeffer, came to the conclusion that violent political resistance was sometimes necessary. For his own part, Krötke is unsure about the church's "appropriation of the violent instruments of our sinful era. War, even a so-called just war…offers no general paradigm for Christian resistance to inhumanity, racism, and genocide."

Krötke lays out the grand structure of Barth's thought, from his early work on Paul in *Epistle to the Romans* (1919) through the thirteen volumes of *Church Dogmatics* (1932–1967). "Barth liked to say," Krötke notes, "that the church and theology have the task 'to begin anew at the beginning' 'every hour.'" This is certainly true of Barth's work: you can't grasp any point without "beginning anew" by retracing it to its premises.

In Krötke's account, the main girders of Barth's thought are these: God is, from the beginning, even before creation, "the God who encounters us in Jesus Christ, and is understood in terms of the history of God's grace with humanity." This encounter and its manifestations among us are the "history of a partnership in which the God who is friendly to humans comes among us and makes us capable of being his free partners and of leading lives that deserve to be called truly human." Finally, "because our fundamental orientation is relationship to God, we realize our freedom most fully by corresponding to the call of God."

Krötke cites critics who think Barth's view affords too little space and agency to humanity. Yet the encounter with a God who elected to grace us with friendship remains Barth's starting point. All roads begin there. Readers must decide for themselves whether this sets God in the thick of human living, as Barth believed, or whether, as his critics say, Barth's account of our encounter with God is too uniform—too dependent on German idealist notions of Spirit working through history, and tone-deaf to the particulars of any real person's relationship to God. Is it a "take it or leave it" doctrine as Bonhoeffer described it? Or does it allow one to feel embraced in partnership with God?



KARL BARTH AND DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
Theologians for a Post-Christian World

WOLF KRÖTKE
Translated by John P. Burgess
Baker Academic
$48 | 272 pp.

Having established Barth's fundamental theological outlook, Krötke goes on to explain Barth's ideas about the nature of sin, the relationship between Christianity and other faiths (including atheism and the covenant with Israel), the importance of our flawed efforts at reconciliation (with God and other people), the role of pastoral care in enabling encounter with God (and the role of exegesis in understanding it), and, most importantly, the nature of the divine-human "partnership" granted by grace—what Barth called "the sum of the Gospel."

Krötke begins his section on Bonhoeffer by noting that he, too, anchored his work in the encounter between the human person and God. "Faith is God's gift," Krötke explains, "whereas religion is always a relationship to God shaped by humans." Bonhoeffer's realism can help us see the manifold relationships among people, God, faith, and religious institutions. In this he differs from Barth, who held that all people are "fated" to have religion. This idea of "Fatedness," Bonhoeffer believed, denies the freedom through which people come to God. In Krötke's fine summation, "Humans as distinguished from their religion are God's beloved creatures whose freedom for encountering God contains far more possibilities than any particular form of religious behavior."

Bonhoeffer held to the Augustinian idea that, in the encounter with God, we discover new possibilities of experience we could not otherwise have imagined. And who is this God? Not a

deus ex machina who saves us in time of need, and not only the weak and crucified Jesus, but the God discarded from modern life: "God is for the world only by stepping back from it and in this way giving it time and opportunity to be itself." Bonhoeffer wrote of the "madness" of the invisible God, yet "God's mystery sets humans free to allow God to come to them." God is encountered in prayer and meditation on Scripture, and Krötke offers an eloquent chapter-length analysis of Bonhoeffer's moving *Prayerbook of the Bible: Introduction to the Psalms.* The potency of *this* God, close by when we can do nothing, became more important as the efforts to stop Hitler failed and Bonhoeffer, condemned to prison, could do nothing more. "Sharing" in this God's suffering in a godless world is a source of guidance and consolation. It is how we identify "ourselves generously and selflessly with the whole community and the suffering of our fellow human beings."

Krötke's discussion of these ideas prods the reader into a dialogue with Bonhoeffer on the role of divine and human suffering, God's mystery and invisibility, and Jesus's *visibility* ("Bonhoeffer's God is the God who becomes nothing other than human"). While the German Christians who followed Hitler believed God manifested himself in German history, Bonhoeffer held that God manifests himself only in and through Jesus Christ. Yet Krötke also remarks on Bonhoeffer's "openness to other religions," which "like his understanding of religionlessness, arises from his faith in God in Christ." Our many religions and varieties of faith are part of human living, where God meets us.

Krötke's penultimate chapter on Bonhoeffer explores his political work, the "first concentrated effort in the German theological world…to frame the question of state order in terms of Christology." Bonhoeffer held that the Incarnation and Resurrection do not destroy the world but rather affirm it. Thus, Christ's Kingdom "is the foundation of the [worldly] state too, which wards off the power of death, preserves the 'order of the community, marriage, family, and nation

Karl Barth

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

[Volk]' against the isolated individual, and restrains the thirst of selfishness." In Bonhoeffer's view, as in Luther's, there is no right to revolution.

But this doesn't mean the state has carte blanche; on the contrary, the state is obligated to further the other orders of society—church, family, the economic sphere, "culture, scholarship, and art." And the church must seek to limit state power, which, in its use of sanctions and force, distinguishes itself from Christ's kingdom of love.

As the Third Reich maintained a minimum of social order, Bonhoeffer hesitated to demand that the church identify it as an aberration that "comes forth as 'the beast from the abyss'" in denial of Christ. But Bonhoeffer did believe that individual Christians could find that Nazism had abandoned the obligation to work with—and be limited by—other orders of society, placing itself above them as a kind of an idol. In his 1933 essay "The Church and the Jewish Question," Bonhoeffer wrote, "the state is to create 'law and order' for all its 'subjects.' The state therefore illegitimately constricts its office when it refuses order and justice to a particular group of people—in other words, the Jews.… The church must stand up without exception for all 'victims of any societal order' and first and foremost the Jews."

Because of the German state's refusal of justice to the Jews, Bonhoeffer found himself in "an extraordinary situation" in which, as Krötke writes, one could depart "'from the normal and regular,' and decide for an action 'beyond any possible regulation by law.'" While Hitler made lawlessness a new mode of governance, Bonhoeffer saw his own decision to step outside the law only as an exception made necessary by exceptional circumstances—and it was, notably, a decision for which he was willing to accept punishment.

In Krötke's view, it was this thinking that propelled Bonhoeffer to return to Germany from the United States in 1939. Krötke thinks Bonhoeffer's theological position on the Nazi state was finally far more radical than the 1934 Barmen Declaration, largely written by Barth. Yet Krötke also leaves us with one more irony: the theology Bonhoeffer developed to fight the Fascist state would soon be appropriated by East German authorities in support of the Communist one.

MARCIA PALLY *teaches at New York University, is an annual guest professor at the Theology Faculty of Humboldt University (Berlin), and was a 2019–2020 Fellow at the Center for Theological Inquiry (Princeton). Her books include* Commonwealth and Covenant *(2016) and* The New Evangelicals *(2011). Most recently, she edited the collection* Mimesis and Sacrifice *(2019).*

Apocalypse Now

KATHERINE LUCKY

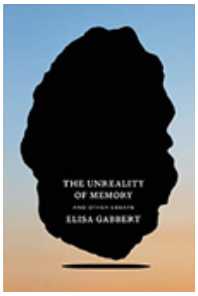
An apocalypse is supposed to be something sudden. Devastating storms roll in; bloody war breaks out; a mutating contagion turns everyone into zombies. Or maybe several nuclear explosions get the job done fast. In a few blasts, we're gone.

But what if the end is more gradual? Elisa Gabbert's new essay collection, *The Unreality of Memory*, is a meditation on living in the midst of apocalyptic events: nuclear brinkmanship, pandemics, war, famine, and climate change. Gabbert, a poet and critic, examines how we respond collectively and individually to encounters with trauma and tragedy. She grapples with the ethics of outrage at what feels like the end of the world.

The Unreality of Memory is divided into three sections, each related to the others by resonances rather than a single argument. The first section sets out a series of disasters, past and present, including the *Titanic*, 9/11, Hiroshima, the *Challenger* explosion, and Chernobyl. Gabbert observes the giddiness associated with shock and spectacle, and our tendency to blame hubris for mistakes (even when we know the risks involved in something like space travel).

Elisa Gabbert

ADALENA KAVANAGH



THE UNREALITY OF MEMORY
And Other Essays

ELISA GABBERT
FSG Originals
$16 | 272 pp.

In particular, Gabbert is interested in disasters that unfold gradually: "slow violence" and "slow death." Tragic effects continue even after a news cycle moves on from a story. People poisoned by radiation fall ill. PTSD persists. Global warming plods along even after a hurricane dissipates. In an essay called "Big and Slow," Gabbert discusses the physics of other dimensions, the long half-lives of radioactive materials, misguided techno-optimism, and megalophobia (the fear of large objects like ships and statues) to illustrate the helplessness we feel when confronted with very big things like space, time, and death.

This gathering of material is a strength of Gabbert's essays. They're curious, interdisciplinary, and wide-ranging. In her prescient entry on pandemics, she discusses the mechanics of zoonosis (the leap of disease from animals to humans) and our historical tendency to see plagues as moral punishments. She considers antibiotics, vaccines, and mosquito-borne illnesses. An immunologist named Dr. Anthony Fauci is quoted. "Many experts think the most likely culprit of a future pandemic is some version of the flu," Gabbert writes. This essay, with its eerie anticipation of COVID-19, epitomizes Gabbert's points about slowness and inevitability. We *know* the floods and fires are coming, the oceans are acidifying, a future virus will be deadly—and yet, we're surprised when disaster strikes, caught without proper dams or protective equipment. "Perhaps we have to make the real threats fascinating," as interesting as an explosion. "But how, if we lack the cognitive capacity to see them?"

What is the citizen to do, stuck in all this disaster like a fly in honey? "Worry, like attention, is a limited resource," Gabbert acknowledges. "We can't worry about everything at once." This concern is addressed in the collection's third section, which considers disasters observed online. The media, desperate for clicks, is primed to report on battles and gaffes, not famine. The consumer eats it up: "I gorged on the news like I was starving." Empathy is exhausting; to be close to trauma is like inhaling "second-hand smoke." "What good is compassion if it

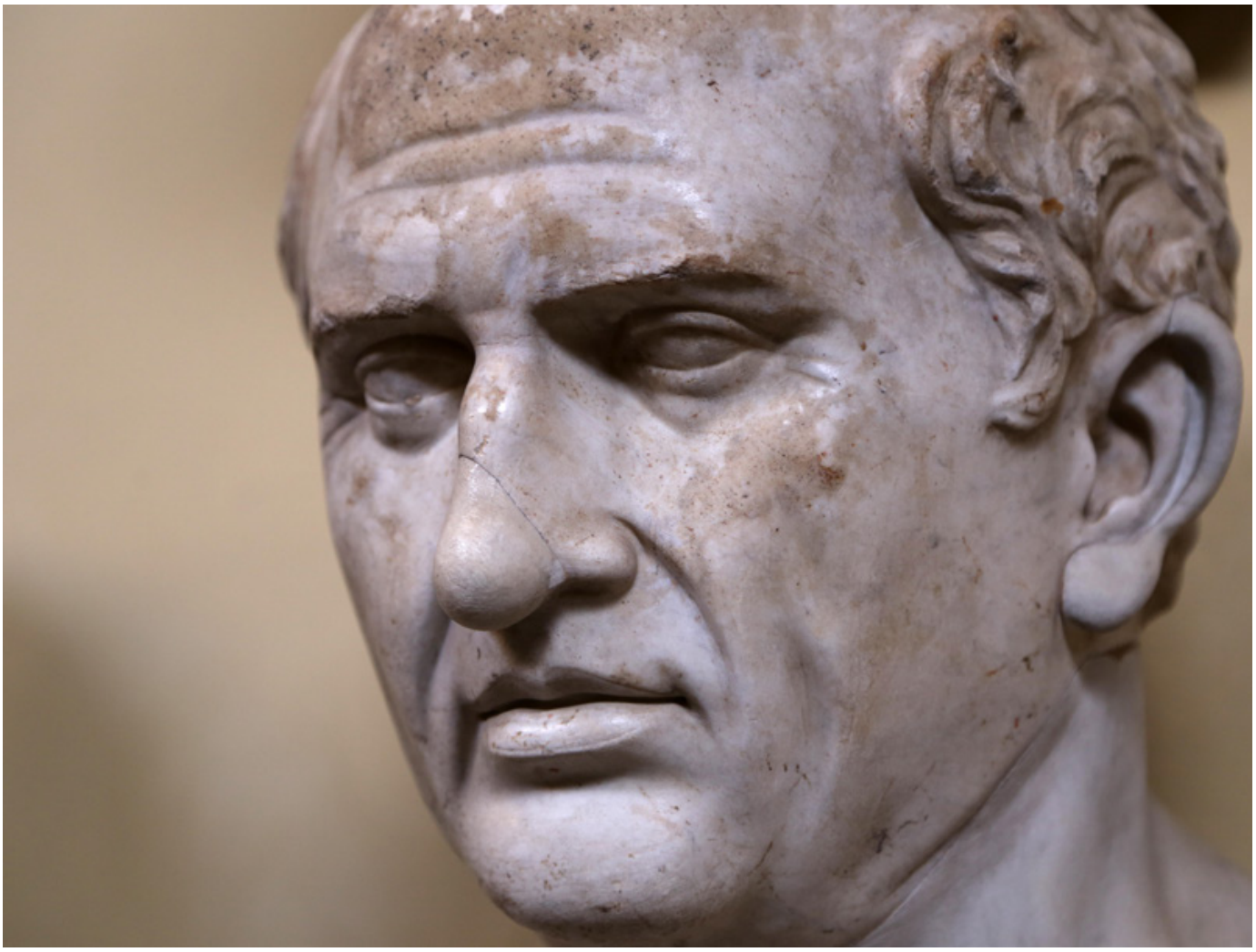
doesn't translate into concrete, external action? It's rational to cut off the supply of emotion if it amounts to wasted energy." But even the engaged citizen, who calls her congressman, signs petitions, and goes to protests, may experience compassion fatigue. The essays in this section are more overtly political, and more obviously infused with frustration. Gabbert doesn't hesitate to implicate herself: "I know what it means that I eat meat whenever I want, that I work in advertising, that I fly many times per year, that I'm psychologically dependent on a device that was built under sweatshop conditions. When it breaks, or just gets slow and inconvenient, I'll buy another. I know because I read the news, and I keep doing it all anyway."

Gabbert's right about all of this: we are complacent, oversaturated, helpless, and privileged, all at once. But in spite of their good arguments, I found the essays in the third section less compelling than others in the collection. Perhaps it's because, as Gabbert writes, "I'm so tired." The position of being a conscious person in a broken world is, clearly, impossible. Our complicity remains, no matter how many times we acknowledge it. Our sacrifices, such as they are, will always be insufficient. Gabbert's essays mention war in Syria, climate change, the 2016 election, and then…they move on. They must. I know about concentration camps in China and child hunger in West Africa: and yet, here I am, also moving on. This kind of writing about moral responsibility is not wrong exactly, but it doesn't take us very far; self-awareness is indispensable but also totally inadequate on its own. None of us have figured out how to live in a world with so much information about so much pain. For now, this big, slow thing has got us beat.

The essays in the middle section of *The Unreality of Memory* are different: softer and quieter, more about problems of psychology than external threats. Human minds are fragile. We misremember and misperceive. When we lose sight or hearing, we have trouble recollecting visual and auditory scenes: "If through injury or illness we lose the code to our memories, if we can no longer embody the method of encoding, we lose the memories entirely." We feel phantom limbs and inexplicable pains. We don't recognize ourselves in photographs, because we're accustomed to seeing our own mirror images. But some rare people lose the ability to recognize themselves in mirrors, too, perceiving menacing strangers instead of familiar selves. We are tricked by placebos; we get possessed by demons; we fall into collective hysteria (i.e., the Salem witch trials). We copy others' eating disorders and suicides, and form communities around fictitious diseases. We lose ourselves under the influence of anesthesia and other drugs.

Placing this meditation on weird psychological phenomena between sections on external catastrophes might seem like an odd choice. But, in fact, this is the section that holds the entire collection together, posing quiet questions about our abilities to control, understand, and improve even ourselves. Gabbert writes in the epilogue, "We don't experience reality as it is, and then warp it in recall…even the first time we live through X, we are already experiencing our warped version of X." If it isn't only our memories but our very perceptions that are unreliable, how can we ever hope to clean up the messes we find ourselves in? So many prejudices and mental glitches undermine the clarity of mind we'll need to address the complicated global problems Gabbert writes about in the first and third sections of her collection. Our minds pick out patterns where there's only blind chance. At the same time, we misconstrue real patterns as a series of unrelated one-off events (fires, hurricanes, droughts). What are the odds we can overcome these mental traps in time?

KATHERINE LUCKY *is a former managing editor of* Commonweal.



Cicero

LANMAS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Cicero Will Outlive Your Tweets

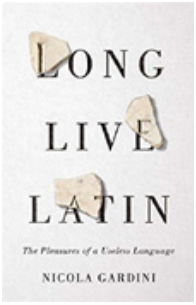
CHARLES MCNAMARA

In the first pages of Oxford professor Nicola Gardini's unapologetic paean to Latin literary craft, he defends the ancient Roman tongue against the perennial charge that it's dead—or at best, zombified. "Latin is alive," he pronounces, "and it's more alive than what we tell our friend at the café or our sweetheart on the phone." For Gardini, the metric of whether Latin still has a pulse is not the annual tally of spoken Latin conferences or the headcount of the schoolchildren chanting the forms of the third declension. Mere speech, he paradoxically contends, is the ephemeral substratum of a lifeless lingua, for "in this very moment the entire planet is jabbering, amassing an immeasurable heap of words. And yet those words are already gone. Another heap has already formed, also destined to vanish in an instant."

It's tempting to see Gardini's claim as some clever Nietzschean inversion: "No, English, *you're* the real dead language." But *Long Live Latin* is more than Oxford sneering at contemporary chatter. It has a real argument: that we can find the lifeblood of Latin in those hushed volumes of Ovid and Petronius, of Sallust and Juvenal, all living because they "express spiritual nobility through linguistic excellence."

The book's regular citations of Dante and Shakespeare, too, show how "linguistic excellence" is not the domain of the ancient Romans alone—these later authors are as undead as Catullus and Cicero. Not a defense of Latin per se, then, Gardini's book pins the immortality of Latin precisely on its literary sublimity. And in our present era, an interminable *Groundhog Day* of regrettable tweets and focus-grouped bromides, Gardini's careful exposition of Virgilian allusion and Tacitean abruptness indeed feels salutary, necessary, and yes, alive.

Undoubtedly, many will look at Gardini's literary tribute as a totem of privilege and snobbishness: the high over the low, the refined over the primitive, the elite over the vulgar. Others, too, will see a willful omission of the violent imperialism underlying Roman culture. Such accusations would not be without merit, and it's strange that Gardini accepts how "individual authors are only embodiments of [their] empirical conditions" but tells us so little about the conditions that brought about, for example, the Augustan leisure class. But if it is true that our own language is "signifying less and less, sounding more and more like white noise, like traffic, or like certain politicians," then perhaps it would do us well to trade Twitter's bird for Catullus's sparrow and to listen attentively to the slow, deep heartbeat of *latinitas*.



LONG LIVE LATIN
The Pleasures of a Useless Language

NICOLA GARDINI
Translated by Todd Portnowitz
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$26 | 256 pp.

Even if the fragmentary inscriptions in the cover illustration of *Long Live Latin* suggest an omnivorous survey of any and all texts surviving from antiquity, the book has little interest in the gravestones, tax receipts, and grammar exercises found in our libraries of ancient literature. These examples of what scholars today call "non-literary texts" are worthy of our study in their own right, of course, if we are to have any hope of grasping ancient political economy and Roman agricultural systems. But Gardini's focus here is exclusively literary. When he speaks of "Latin," he speaks "first and foremost…of a complete dedication to organizing one's thoughts in a profound and measured discourse."

Accordingly, aside from a few introductory sections on Latin's origins and development, Gardini's book is devoted to those authors who were most successful in producing such "profound and measured" language. This account, however, is no tired chronological slog of Cicero to Virgil to Ovid to Seneca. *Long Live Latin* instead bounces from Catullus, backward to Ennius, ahead to Tacitus, sideways to Augustine, finally to Gardini's *primus inter pares*, Horace. The guiding principle is literary excellence, not a historical timeline.

This approach is clear, especially in the treatment of authors whose achievements extend well beyond literature. Always providing ample Latin block quotes and his own clear translations, Gardini shows readers how Cicero, for example, "demonstrates with enviable confidence his knowledge of which words most accurately describe reality" and deliver the strongest punch. Cicero prosecutes someone not as a mere adulterer (*adulter*) but instead as a "conquerer of chastity" (*expugnator pudicitiae*). In another quotation from his *Philippics*, Cicero employs "symmetry, repetition, and variation, in which the various inversions of meaning come to symbolize the spirit of protest and desire for retribution." This presentation celebrates Cicero's stylistic, rather than legal, accomplishments.

Gardini's praise of Ciceronian prose is part of a long tradition—stretching back to antiquity itself—of seeing Rome's most famous attorney-statesman as the pinnacle of Latinity. But he also gives ample attention to lesser-known masters. He highlights, for example, the "tendency to amass details that characterizes satirical Latin" in Juvenal, and he devotes an entire chapter to Virgil's early pastoral *Eclogues*, showing how their "*adynata*, or logical impossibilities," amount to an effort to "depict utopia," a place that "cannot be confirmed by experience or memory." Gardini even includes some early Christian authors, who are often sidelined in classics departments. In a chapter on Augustine's "avant-garde, digressive, even visionary" use of imagery, he spotlights Tertullian, too, a pioneering Christian prose writer whose penchant for "paradox and oxymoron" still suffuses our own religious language.

By presenting undiluted accounts of linguistic novelty in Propertius and branching syntax in Livy, Gardini offers his readers an intellectualized, even outright academic account of Latin literature. Given this unabashed learnedness, I was surprised to see him announce in chapter one that his "is a book, above all, for young students." *Long Live Latin* itself uses a sophisticated, wrought prose style throughout (elegantly translated from Gardini's Italian by Todd Portnowitz), so it's no easily digestible *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*. The book's stratospheric expectations for its young readership, however, are a potent selling point,

Perhaps it would do us well to trade Twitter's bird for Catullus's sparrow and to listen attentively to the slow, deep heartbeat of latinitas.

for inasmuch as *Long Live Latin* is an enthusiast's tribute to Horace and Apuleius, it is also a master class in how to read literature of any kind. Like an expert docent at the Met, Gardini leads the amateur Latinist through obscure allusions and metaphors. Using a similar visual analogy, in fact, Gardini remarks that "art is difficult, and Latin is art, verbal art, just as Picasso's painting, Mozart's music, or Einstein's models of the universe are artistic constructions in their own ways." An adolescent is unlikely to understand Picasso or Einstein without some guidance, and similarly, young people won't grasp the architecture of Augustine's prose unassisted.

The positioning of Latin among other emblems of high culture is likely to resurrect the charge of snobbery or even classism—the charge that for Gardini, Latin is a subject championed by, and reserved for, the well-to-do. But the explicit targeting of a young readership might be the best defense against such accusations. Where I grew up, for instance, there are no Latin teachers and no literature professors, and Gardini's overtly intellectual chapters often made me think what a revelation this book would have been to me if I had read it as a teenager. In that sense, *Long Live Latin* may be suited less for the young person at the posh prep school in New York or New England. Classics and other humanistic disciplines continue to grapple with their inaccessibility to those outside these topmost echelons of privilege, and in the spirit of the book's intended readership, I wish it were vigorously marketed to a broader, younger audience.

Indeed, it is the not-yet-cynical youth who would be helped most by Horace's encouragement "against vulgarity, in all its forms: bragging, indiscretion, gossip, materialism, overindulgence, idiocy." How important for young people, too, to read praise of Julius Caesar centering on his theory of analogy and his ability "to inform and explain, surveying and conquering every inch of the expressible." Caesar, of course, brutally conquered other things: humans, nations, histories. But the implication of Gardini's exclusively literary frame is that if we praise the Romans, it should be not for their walls and aqueducts, nor for their conquests and banquets, but for their gripping metaphors and balanced clauses.

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Fueled by Contempt

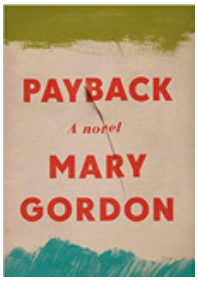
TOM DEIGNAN

The opening pages of Mary Gordon's new novel, *Payback*, simply do not read like a Mary Gordon novel. Where are the Italian cafés and brainy bourgeois couples we met in *The Love of My Youth* (2011)? The fierce mother and daughter debating hunger strikes and Irish nationalism in *Pearl* (2005)? Or passages such as this from 2017's *There Your Heart Lies:* "There was a particular kind of Catholicism that was uniquely American. They combined the worst prejudices of the worst Americans with the worst of being Catholic."

Gordon's latest, instead, opens somewhere in Arizona, on an afternoon in February 2018. The "sun is strong," and women of a certain age—with nails "painted in various shades of opulence"—gather for "water aerobics, a manicure, a pedicure, then lunch." They settle in to watch their favorite tabloid TV show, hosted by the righteous and wrathful Quin Archer. Armed with "orange lipstick" and lots of insults, Archer is on a weekly hunt for public retribution. "When she goes after someone," one fan comments, "I just feel good about things."

Just when you think Mary Gordon has written a straight up, Trump-era pop-culture satire, she brings us back to more familiar Gordonian turf: Rhode Island's Lydia Farnsworth School for Girls, 1972. The kind of place where students say things such as "Just putting in my time at this genteel prison" and "I'll be spending a lot of time on dressage next year." There are debates about Vietnam, pop art, liberals and conservatives. The teachers are young and passionate, particularly Agnes Vaughan, a contemplative Brown graduate with a fiancé off on an "archaeological dig in Iraq." Agnes is warned, "New teachers often get entangled (in students' lives) in ways that have unfortunate consequences." Yet Agnes still sets up a trip to Manhattan for two particularly precocious students to see William F. Buckley and Arthur Schlesinger discuss Picasso's *Guernica*. The trip takes a terrible turn, and worsens when Agnes gets involved, prompting a singularly awful crisis that will haunt all parties for the next fifty years. When we return to Agnes in 2018, she is still guilt-stricken, but also thoughtful, conscientious—and worried about America. Donald Trump is never named in *Payback*, but when some mundane, obscene public spat develops, Agnes thinks, "Everyone knows it is because of the president. He has poisoned the air; he has darkened the sky."

Payback is at its best when Gordon reveals (albeit slowly) how Agnes's moment of crisis in 1972 is linked to a twenty-first-century tabloid TV host. In between, Gordon chronicles Agnes's post-Farnsworth life: her wedding is canceled, and she moves to Italy, where she is glad to live in a "country no one hated." The condensed version of Agnes's middle-aged joys and tribulations—she marries an Italian and has a volatile but beloved child, who eventually has her own child—will have some Gordon fans wishing she'd spent more time with Agnes, strolling past the Fountain of the Tortoises in the Piazza Mattei, pondering life's big questions. "Was it enough to be the daughter of your mother, the mother of your daughter, the grandmother of your grandson.... Why not say that was enough?"



PAYBACK
A Novel

MARY GORDON
Pantheon
$27.95 | 352 pp.

But Gordon is determined to explore a very different kind of character—a less contemplative, more spiteful one. Quin Archer's youth is marred by intense familial conflict. Trauma of a more personal nature follows before a desperate, slovenly period in New York and a political awakening—an epiphany, to Quin, that she and many others are "victim(s) of the 1960s." Agnes and Quin are both granted extensive backstories, though the latter's often seems two-dimensional: quoting Ayn Rand; tending to her beloved cacti, which are (like her?) "self-sufficient, maybe a little bit prickly"; wondering if it's "such a bad thing to be fueled by contempt." In this sense, Gordon could be accused of dabbling in the very kinds of biases that helped you-know-who get elected.

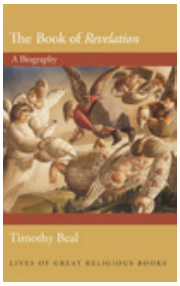
Overall, *Payback* is an ambitious but uneven entry in the Gordon oeuvre. There are dazzling, unsettling moments: in a public library, several homeless people congregate who "all seem to be veterans of one of the endless wars—Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq, Afghanistan." There is the familiar, palpable sense that for all the awfulness in the past, there is simply something worse about these days—the "contemporary mania for exposure," the dread that "the earth itself could turn against us." And yet, despite the "impossibility of understanding anyone," Agnes gamely believes you still have "to try to determine what in your actions might, just possibly, be of some use."

There is one more twist at the end of *Payback*, one more source of angst for Agnes. It may well have something to do with Americans like Quin and Agnes simply being stuck with each other. Agnes, as always, manages—with decency, and with the help of her family. The way Gordon leaves things, there is potential for a sequel. A domestic suburban drama. Or, in a straight-up political satire, Quin Archer could run for president in 2024.

TOM DEIGNAN *contributes regularly to* Commonweal, *and has written about books for the* New York Times, *the* Washington Post, *and the* National Catholic Reporter.

Religion Booknotes

Luke Timothy Johnson



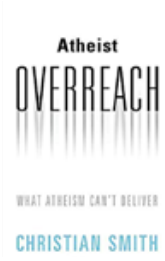
THE BOOK OF *REVELATION*
A Biography

TIMOTHY BEAL
Princeton University Press
$26.95 | 288 pp.

I suspect that no great argument was needed to make the Book of Revelation an entry in the "Lives of Great Religious Books" series. This last book in the biblical canon, with its prophetic voice and phantasmagoric visions, has had a long and often problematic history of reception that invites consideration of its remarkable longevity. Timothy Beal, a professor of religion at Case Western University, has earned a reputation for combining learning in biblical texts with an impressive grasp of contemporary cultural trends. Indeed, as the reader here learns, much of Beal's own youth was immersed in present-day millenarian readings of this classic text (think *Late Great Planet Earth* or the *Left Behind* novels). This background would seem to make him an ideal guide to understanding the impact that Revelation could have. And in some respects, it does; the last hundred pages, for example, contain a mesmerizing account of the peculiar horror culture fostered by apocalyptic cultists.

Beal is also an effective interpreter of the (thoroughly non-apocalyptic) reading of Revelation in Augustine's *City of God*, as well as of the medieval appropriations of the book's imagery by Hildegard of Bingen and Joachim of Fiore. He shows how the book's polyvalent symbolism can be read in quite distinct ways. Another of the pleasures of Beal's treatment is his attention to art. In one instance, he shows how Cranach's depiction of Revelation's visions trumped Luther's disapprobation of its text. In another, he recounts how the African-American folk artist James Hampton used bits and pieces of found objects to construct (in his Washington D.C. garage) a complete heavenly sanctuary based on the vision of God's throne room in Revelation 4–5.

No one can dispute Beal's evidence for the way Revelation's imagery was used to demonize other religions or even large swaths of Christianity (for instance, equating the "Whore of Babylon" with the papacy). Such "othering" (to use Beal's term) was, however unfortunate and ugly, scarcely owed entirely to that book, as the usage of patristic authors concerning Gentile religion makes clear. The tendency to emphasize the negative in the Book of Revelation, I think, is the main deficiency in this otherwise entertaining and informative treatment. This is especially true of the opening exposition, where Beal's claims for the book's violent misogyny lead him to some dubious reading of the actual text. He misses the opportunity to help readers understand more broadly the character of apocalyptic literature (a genre to which this writing belongs), and the ways that the Book of Revelation's call to faithful witness against the powers of idolatry and corruption have strengthened countless believers, especially in times and places of persecution.



ATHEIST OVERREACH
What Atheism Can't Deliver

CHRISTIAN SMITH
Oxford University Press
$19.95 | 168 pp.

It is refreshing to read a book that states a modest but well-defined goal and then proceeds to accomplish it through the application of clear thought. Such precision delights the reader particularly when the topic is one that, without the control of consistent logic, could easily grow unwieldy. Christian Smith is a professor of sociology at Notre Dame University, whose earlier books reveal him to be a philosopher intensely concerned with religion and morality. In this small book consisting of four relatively independent essays, he seeks to challenge what he considers the "overreach" of claims concerning human morality made by certain humanistic atheists (or atheistic humanists) by carefully examining the logical connections—or lack of connections—between the claims they make and the warrants for those claims.

Smith states that he wants neither to defend religion nor attack atheism, but instead seeks to advance the conversation by paying attention to arguments made by atheist authors. His interest, therefore, is not in the obvious facts that many atheists are (sometimes impressively) personally moral, nor in the (pretty convincing) arguments of evolutionary psychologists that a naturalistic explanation of the world provides the basis for a limited altruism that can extend to others in one's family, tribe, or nation. His interest, rather, is in larger claims being made for a morality based on an atheistic premise.

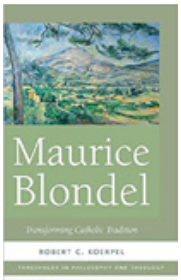
His first chapter asks, "How good without God are atheists justified in being?" That is, do they have a basis, as some apologists hold, for a high standard of ethics without recourse to God? Smith concludes that intellectually honest atheists, lacking delusions about innate human goodness or the

need for social control in the absence of religious conscience, "do not have good reasons justifying their strong, inclusive, universalistic humanism, which requires all people to adhere to high moral norms and to share their resources in an egalitarian fashion for the sake of equal opportunity and the promotion of human rights." They fail to reckon, he says, with the weight of religious influence that still persists among people, and they have no real answer to the problem of the "sensible knave" who takes advantage of everyone else's rule-keeping to break rules (as criminals do) for his own benefit.

The second essay is a fascinating variation on the first: What justifies aspirations for universal benevolence, egalitarianism, and equal rights among those who inhabit a "naturalistic" universe—that is, one that consists merely in material causes and effects without design or purpose? If humans are only accidentally and randomly selected, the logic of this view would seem to work in the opposite direction—a social Darwinism characterized by savage competition rather than sweet cooperation. To think otherwise, Smith suggests, is once more to borrow without acknowledgement from the traditions of transcendental warrants provided by religion, or to indulge in sloppy sentimentalism.

Smith's third essay shifts from ethics to epistemology. "Why Scientists Playing Amateur Atheology Fail" makes the fairly obvious but often occluded point that the methods of science properly practiced do not (and cannot) be the basis for metaphysical or "atheological" declarations. His quote from Terry Eagleton summarizes nicely: "Imagine someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is *The Book of British Birds*, and you have a rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on theology."

The last and most properly sociological of the essays asks whether humans are naturally religious. After a careful run-through of inadequate ways to ask or answer that question, Smith offers a highly qualified "yes," in the sense that humans have natural capacities for religion that are real and resilient, but that can be either suppressed or encouraged by ideological and cultural influences. As I say, a careful and thoughtful book, with many notes at the end, but in a prose that is for the most part accessible to a non-specialist reader.

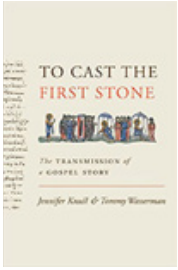


MAURICE BLONDEL
Transforming Catholic Tradition
ROBERT C. KOERPEL
University of Notre Dame Press
$55 | 278 pp.

Post–Vatican II Catholics who understand tradition as a living process, encompassing all the Church's practices and above all its liturgy, might be surprised to learn that such an appreciation is not to be taken for granted. In truth, it is a hard-won perspective owed to such French Catholic theologians as Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Jean Daniélou, all of whom were marginalized in the years before the council, but whose views animated the council documents on revelation and the Church. Catholics today are undoubtedly even less aware of the early-twentieth-century philosopher whom de Lubac himself named as the greatest influence on his own sense of tradition: Maurice Blondel (1861–1949).

Robert C. Koerpel teaches theology at the University of St. Thomas, and he seeks in his slender but densely written book to elevate this mostly ignored thinker to his proper place in the history of Catholic theology. Blondel was a philosopher by trade rather than a theologian, and this distinctive role allowed him to approach questions with fresh eyes. His earliest philosophical work (*L'Action*, originally published in 1893 and expanded to two volumes in 1936–37) served to lay the foundation for his later thinking about tradition within the Church. In contrast to the idealism of Kant and Hegel, which emphasized human cognition, and similar to his contemporaries Bergson and Marcel, who focused on the dynamism of embodied human existence, Blondel began his analysis with *practice*, specifically with the implications of human volition. It was in the gap between a person's reach and his grasp when willing something that Blondel located the space for divine revelation. The same emphasis on practice, this time in the body of the Church, characterized his later contributions on tradition.

Koerpel works hard to show the intellectual context within which Blondel developed his understanding of tradition in works such as *Histoire et Dogme* (*History and Dogma*, 1904). On one side was the reductionistic historical-critical approach of Alfred Loisy, and on the other side was the equally reductionist approach of neo-scholasticism, which, following the lead of the First Vatican Council (1869–70), tended to define tradition propositionally in terms of dogma or magisterial pronouncements. Blondel advanced a more profoundly religious, even mystical, understanding of tradition, as the continuing presence of the incarnate Christ (through the Holy Spirit) within the practices—above all the celebration of the Eucharist—carried out by God's people in the Church. It was a stunning insight that, by being positively appropriated by more renowned theologians like de Lubac, entered the consciousness of those of us fortunate enough to have inherited it.



TO CAST THE FIRST STONE
The Transmission of a Gospel Story
JENNIFER KNUST AND TOMMY WASSERMAN
Princeton University Press
$45 | 464 pp.

The story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery is among the most vivid and memorable in the Gospel tradition. Jesus invites the one without sin to cast the first stone at her, and when her accusers withdraw, he

releases the woman with the words, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on, do not sin again." In English translations and in the critical texts of the New Testament on which the translations are based, the story appears in John 8:1–2. But it also appears in brackets of some sort, with an accompanying note warning that the story is absent from the earliest Greek manuscripts; that in some other manuscripts it is found after John 7:36, or after John 21:25, or even after Luke 21:38; and that there are many variations in wording even in texts that contain the story. Like the "longer ending" of Mark (16:9–19), the passage's origin and authenticity are questioned by New Testament scholars, most of whom do not consider either story to be the work of the "original evangelist." But if that is the case, how did they become part of canonical Scripture?

Jennifer Knust teaches at Boston College and Tommy Wasserman at Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole in Norway. Finding themselves both researching the passage on Jesus and the adulterous woman, they combined forces to produce this splendid and exhaustive examination of its textual history and reception by the Church. With scrupulous attention to every scrap of extant evidence, they probe the obvious questions: Was the passage added, was it omitted by accident, or was it suppressed for some ideological reason? They examine each possibility within the context of the actual practices of ancient scribes who worked on classical and biblical texts, showing how a strict fidelity to the version being copied was accompanied by the freedom to mark dubious passages with asterisks. The conclusion that the passage was not part of the evangelist's narrative, however, is only the first step. How did it get into that narrative?

The authors trace the signs of a story about Jesus and a woman caught in sin that can be detected as early as the second or third centuries—at a time when our earliest papyri evidence was being produced. The story was around, in other words, for a long time. Then they show how the story was incorporated into its respective locations in Greek and Latin manuscripts of the New Testament. In the West, the acceptance of the passage ("found in many manuscripts") by Jerome in his Vulgate translation sealed the deal.

In the East, the liturgical reading of the passage meant its inclusion in lectionaries, which turn out to be invaluable sources for the text critic. The passage, in brief, was a witness to the character of Jesus that was regarded as evangelical, even if it had not been penned by an evangelist. In a very real way, this study confirms what Maurice Blondel argued about tradition (see the previous review): the practices of the Church form and transmit tradition, and sometimes the shape of Scripture itself.

Although massively learned and minutely argued, this book on an apparently arcane and insignificant issue makes a major contribution to our understanding of early Church history as well as contemporary debates about the relation of Scripture to tradition. It also makes a major statement concerning text-criticism of the New Testament as a whole: the quest for the "original text" has some merit, but the far more fascinating topic is the history of textual reception—how Scripture was actually read in diverse communities.

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON *is emeritus Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and a frequent* Commonweal *contributor. His many books include* Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity *(Yale) and* Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church *(Eerdmans).*

Pandemic Parenting

BURKE NIXON

Not long ago, a friend of mine who walks his dog down our street almost every evening knocked on our door. "You know your car doors are open?" he asked. "I thought maybe I'd find you alone in the back seat, mumbling to yourself." Since March, he's been sending me occasional text messages to check in, wondering how my wife and I are handling the social-distancing life with our five kids—ages two to nine—in our small house.

I told him that I hadn't realized the car doors were open; I was a little frazzled. My wife was at the emergency room with our youngest daughter, who had fallen and hit her forehead on the corner of her bed. The kids had been playing together quietly in their room when suddenly my son ran out yelling, "Addie has a hole in her head! Addie has a hole in her head!"

My wife and I rushed in, and our three-year-old did, in fact, have a hole in her forehead. It was approximately the circumference of a pencil eraser, but it looked deep. My wife thought she could see part of Addie's skull, and I freaked out. We loaded everyone into the car without putting their shoes on and sped to the children's hospital fifteen minutes away, where one of the emergency-room docs scoffed at the possibility that my wife could see bone. Our daughter only needed a few stitches.

Still, this was one of several briefly terrifying moments we've experienced during quarantine. I'm not including the minor injuries, such as when our youngest managed to get his finger stuck in a vacuum and a strip of skin got sucked off. I'm talking about the kind of nauseating incident that seems, in the moment, like it could change your entire family's trajectory.

A week or two after the ER trip, the same three-year-old stood up on one of our living-room chairs and somehow flipped herself over the back, hitting her head on the floor. From the kitchen, we heard that horrifying sound familiar to all parents—halfway between a thump and a crack—and rushed over to find her motionless on the ground, eyes glassy and unresponsive. For an agonizing fraction of a minute—twenty seconds? Forty-five seconds?—she remained limp even as we picked her up and shouted her name. But then she started crying, and half an hour later she was back to her normal, happy self, although her parents were deeply shaken. "Gotta hand it to these kids," a doctor friend of mine said when I texted him about it. "They have pretty flexible skulls."

Even as we've been fortunate to avoid the virus so far, these incidents have forced me to confront something that most of the time I'd rather not acknowledge: family life is *always* a little precarious. You can socially isolate all you want, and you can be extremely cautious, but you can't avoid risk, even at home. That's the nature of being alive, further intensified by having kids. Sure, a child's skull might be mercifully flexible, but it can also make that terrible sound at a moment's notice.

Even on injury-free days, our failures as parents sometimes dominate our quarantined hours. These are the hours full of children yelling and crying and whining and arguing, of sibling-on-sibling pushing and shoving and clawing and biting. The hours when everything in our house—a certain chair, a toy that nobody has played with in months—becomes a coveted resource that the kids fight over like global superpowers, my wife and I minor countries with very little influence. (As I write this, secluded in our bedroom, I just heard my wife say, "Don't bite! Don't bite! Y'all go *somewhere else*. Stop wrestling in my lap!")

One day, as the kids played in their room, we heard a child scream, "You're not even a real ninja!" Another afternoon, one of the older kids yelled at her baby brother for eating the buttons off a calculator. We've been encouraging the kids to "treat others the way you want to be treated," but at some point during quarantine, the older children took to yelling these words as a threat. They make the Golden Rule sound like a line from *The Godfather*.

During one particularly bitter sibling confrontation, I told my five-year-old to take a deep breath, and she yelled, "I will *never* take a deep breath!" At low points, this seems to be our family motto. My wife and I have struggled to take deep breaths ourselves plenty of times, losing our cool and raising our voices at the children for not listening, for endangering themselves or others, for holding down the ice maker on purpose to cover the kitchen floor with ice, for standing on the table during dinner, for intentionally smearing jelly on the couch. My kids, predictably, have not responded well to my yelling. One day, I found a small piece of paper on the floor with an X drawn over the word "Daddy."

One of my younger kids keeps coming into my bedroom and messing with my alarm clock during the day. I've been woken up by a midnight alarm more than once. A few days ago while I was working in my bedroom, I noticed that they'd changed the time again, and, alone in the room, I started shouting, "STOP! MESSING! WITH! MY! CLOCK!" over and over. My wife said a delivery person dropped off a package at the front door as I was doing this, and he glanced into our window with some concern. In some ways, this has been the most exemplary moment of our socially isolated parenting experience.

And yet, despite all the yelling and whining and arguing, our kids have actually risen to the challenge of these months. Yes, they've eaten the buttons off our calculator and smeared jelly on our couch, but they've also greeted almost every quarantined day with striking reserves of enthusiasm and imagination.

That's been our saving grace: the incredible capacity kids have for getting excited about the world. We've collected caterpillars and raised them inside our house, watching the little green furry things become first cocoons, then intricately winged butterflies, before releasing them back outside. We've watched YouTube videos about life on the International Space

Ambrose Andrews, *The Children of Nathan Starr*, 1835

Station, then watched the actual space station move through the night sky above our house a few hours later. We've used Lynda Barry's great book *Making Comics*, drawing ourselves as monsters and vegetables. The kids and I invented a serialized game of pretend in the backyard called Dragon Awaits. They want to play it every day, but I can only muster the energy to play every couple of weeks. We recently completed Dragon Awaits 5: The Last Dragon, and now they want to start a new project called the Cave of Secrets.

Most of their enthusiasm and imagination occurs without us, though. They pair up, or make groups of three, or play as a quintet, with the little one mimicking whatever the big kids do, all of them pretending to be teenagers, bakers, babysitters, parents, pirates, teachers, cats, dogs, horses, knights, ninjas, giants, princesses, wizards, orphans—or siblings, even though they are siblings. Last week, the oldest boy turned to his big sister with a reflective look and said, "We always used to pretend we were beavers."

When they're not pretending, they're often drawing or painting, or making cards, bookmarks, Lego Castles, and pillow forts. The older kids recently spent an entire week drawing their dream house and dream rooms, down to the most intricate details. They gave me my own third-story office, which was nice, since my actual office during quarantine has been my closet or bedroom. The next week, they decided to design their dream ranch, with a creek running through the front yard and a barn for the animals. These fantasies may be a direct result of living in a not-so-large house with four other siblings during months of social isolation.

Still, our kids seem to believe that even if they're at home, they can make something new or be in a different world each day. I'm trying to adopt their perspective, with less success. The sameness of their quarantined days doesn't seem to bother them, at least not the way it sometimes bothers me. On the rare occasions when we spend most of the day away from the house, we'll walk back through the front door and they'll immediately start pretending or making something, as if they're famished, craving their own creativity, eager to return to their true purpose in life.

In his book *How to Be an Artist*, the art critic Jerry Saltz notes that whatever else art might be, it is also "a survival strategy." "For many artists," Saltz writes, "making their work is as important, spiritually, as breathing or eating." I'm realizing now that this is equally true of a child's imaginative acts, which provide a much-needed sense of joy and control during a period that may seem bereft of both.

There's a holiness to the creativity of children, a Godliness even: creation for the joy of creation. Yesterday, one of my kids said, "God must be so creative to make all the different things in the world." Then they named a few of those things: birds, trees, lizards. Sometimes, if I take a deep breath and actually pay attention, I can sense the presence of God in my children's creativity, too. Their imagination feels like a pure gift, as precious as water or air.

One of my most vital tasks now, as a parent, is to remember this. As this strange new school year continues and many parents shepherd our children through weeks or months of learning at home on digital screens, we can't forget that our children also need space to pretend and be creative and engage enthusiastically with the world. Using their imagination isn't just a way for them to pass the time; it's a spiritual survival strategy. And it might help us survive, too.

BURKE NIXON *is a lecturer in the Program in Writing and Communication at Rice University, where he teaches a course called Fiction and Empathy.*

STAIRS AND BURIAL VAULT DISPLACED BY HURRICANE ISAAC FLOODWATERS
Braithwaite, Louisiana, 2012

Hurricane Isaac spun into New Orleans seven years to the day after Hurricane Katrina hit the region in 2005. The storm dumped more than twenty inches of rain in less than twenty-four hours. The resulting flood carried this two-thousand-pound burial vault in Plaquemines Parish more than two miles from its cemetery, depositing it in a front yard next to stairs from a neighbor's house. I was in New Orleans after returning from a nine-month trip documenting the climate crisis around the world for my project, *The Witness Tree*. I saw the devastation of storms in other countries; now I was witnessing it on home ground.

In 2015, I traveled back to the area to see how the recovery was progressing, and to find out what happened to this crypt. I was pleased to discover that the vault had been repainted and restored to its resting place under a large living oak tree in its original cemetery, with metal brackets now bolting it to the ground.

CAROLYN MONASTRA
is an artist, educator, and environmental activist who has received numerous awards, including artist residencies at the Ucross, Djerassi, and Saltonstall Foundations. She is currently working on a new climate project, The Divergence of Birds, *which focuses on the threat of species extinction.*

To view more of the artist's photographs about climate change, visit her website: www.TheWitnessTree.org.

LOWER MATHEMATICS

Judy Brackett

The little boy shouts "To infinity and beyond!"
and asks "Where the heck is infinity?"
and "Is a googol bigger than a gazillion?"
and "How can there be a biggest number?
Doesn't the whole entire world

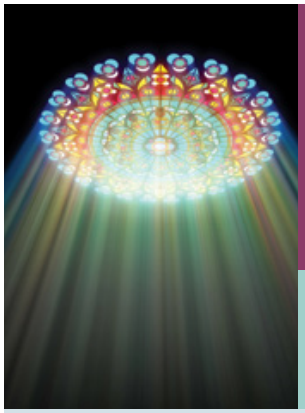
have room for 1 or 2 or 3 more?"
and "How can there be something littler than zero?"
She tells him—snowflakes, grains of sand, chess moves,
broken promises, teardrops and raindrops,
stars and universes, seeds in dandelion puffs

floating in a summer breeze. All jumbled together.
He closes his eyes. "I'm trying to see a gazillion
gazelles!" She wonders how math people can talk
to each other when they can't even agree
on whether a billion is a million millions

or a thousand millions. "False friends," they say.
She closes her eyes and sees—tears
flowing over broken promises,
becoming part of the air,
drizzling back up into the clouds,

and showering down again next January
in a googol's worth of raindrops—
plus 1 or 2 or 3.
She doesn't know what to tell the boy
about zero.

JUDY BRACKETT *lives in a small town in the northern Sierra Nevada foothills of California. Her poems have appeared in* Epoch, *the* Maine Review, Catamaran, Commonweal, Midwest Review, *the* Midwest Quarterly, Subtropics, Crab Orchard Review, *and elsewhere. Her poetry chapbook,* Flat Water: Nebraska Poems, *was published by Finishing Line Press in 2019.*



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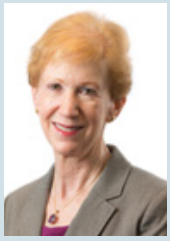
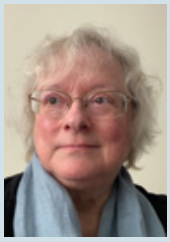


The 2021 Bellarmine Lecture
"Add Women and ~~Stir~~ Transform: Jesuit Coeducation at 50 Years"
Susan Ross, Loyola University Chicago
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 | 7:30 p.m.
Zoom Webinar: Register at **fairfield.edu/cs**



The 15th Annual Lecture in Jewish/Christian Engagement
Co-Sponsored With the Bennett Center for Judaic Studies
"Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing: Jewish and Christian Women as Allies in Anti-Racism"
Ann Millin, PhD, Former Historian, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, March 16, 2021 | 7:30 p.m.
Zoom Webinar: Register at **fairfield.edu/cs**

The 14th Annual Commonweal Lecture
"Walking with the Saints: My Writing Life"
Robert Ellsberg, Orbis Press
Wednesday, April 7, 2021 | 7:30 p.m.
Zoom Webinar: Register at **fairfield.edu/cs**

LIVING THEOLOGY
SPRING 2021
WORKSHOPS

Wednesday
February 24
Zoom Webinar
4:30 p.m.

Wednesday
March 17
Zoom Webinar
4:30 p.m.

Wednesday
April 14
Zoom Webinar
4:30 p.m.

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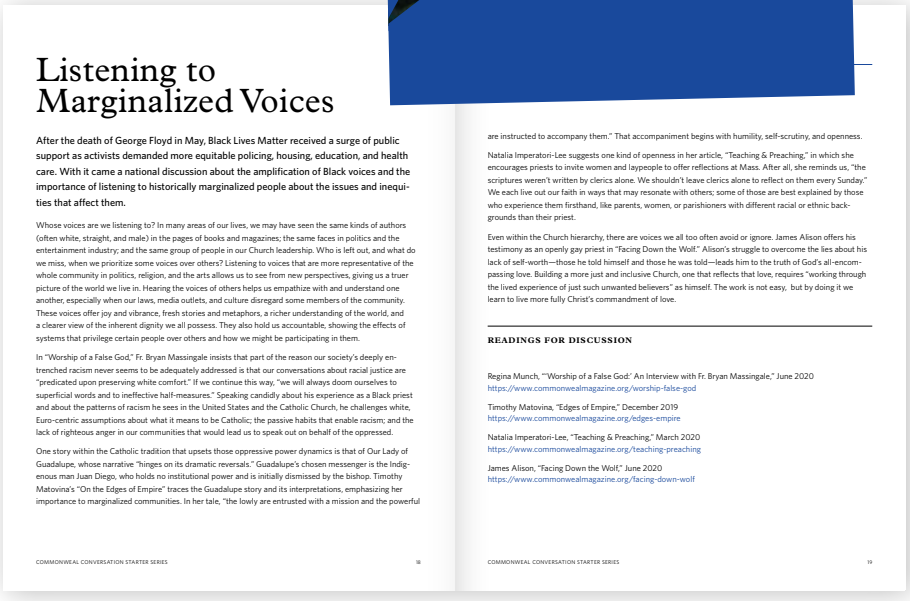
2. *Listening to Marginalized Voices*
3. *Transforming Parishes Today*
4. *The Art of Conversion*
5. *Altneratives to Capitalism*
6. *How Does Church Teaching Change?*
7. *Seminaries & Formation*
8. *Environmental Spirituality*



Listening to Marginalized Voices

After the death of George Floyd in May, Black Lives Matter received a surge of public support as activists demanded more equitable policing, housing, education, and health care. With it came a national discussion about the amplification of Black voices and the importance of listening to historically marginalized people about the issues and inequities that affect them.

Whose voices are we listening to? In many areas of our lives, we may have seen the same kinds of authors (often white, straight, and male) in the pages of books and magazines; the same faces in politics and the entertainment industry; and the same group of people in our Church leadership. Who is left out, and what do we miss, when we prioritize some voices over others? Listening to voices that are more representative of the whole community in politics, religion, and the arts allows us to see from new perspectives, giving us a truer picture of the world we live in. Hearing the voices of others helps us empathize with and understand one another, especially when our laws, media outlets, and culture disregard some members of the community. These voices offer joy and vibrance, fresh stories and metaphors, a richer understanding of the world, and a clearer view of the inherent dignity we all possess. They also hold us accountable, showing the effects of systems that privilege certain people over others and how we might be participating in them.

In "Worship of a False God," Fr. Bryan Massingale insists that part of the reason our society's deeply entrenched racism never seems to be adequately addressed is that our conversations about racial justice are "predicated upon preserving white comfort." If we continue this way, "we will always doom ourselves to superficial words and to ineffective half-measures." Speaking candidly about his experience as a Black priest and about the patterns of racism he sees in the United States and the Catholic Church, he challenges white, Euro-centric assumptions about what it means to be Catholic; the passive habits that enable racism; and the lack of righteous anger in our communities that would lead us to speak out on behalf of the oppressed.

One story within the Catholic tradition that upsets those oppressive power dynamics is that of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose narrative "hinges on its dramatic reversals." Guadalupe's chosen messenger is the Indigenous man Juan Diego, who holds no institutional power and is initially dismissed by the bishop. Timothy Matovina's "On the Edges of Empire" traces the Guadalupe story and its interpretations, emphasizing her importance to marginalized communities. In her tale, "the lowly are entrusted with a mission and the powerful

are instructed to accompany them." That accompaniment begins with humility, self-scrutiny, and openness.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee suggests one kind of openness in her article, "Teaching & Preaching," in which she encourages priests to invite women and laypeople to offer reflections at Mass. After all, she reminds us, "the scriptures weren't written by clerics alone. We shouldn't leave clerics alone to reflect on them every Sunday." We each live out our faith in ways that may resonate with others; some of those are best explained by those who experience them firsthand, like parents, women, or parishioners with different racial or ethnic backgrounds than their priest.

Even within the Church hierarchy, there are voices we all too often avoid or ignore. James Alison offers his testimony as an openly gay priest in "Facing Down the Wolf." Alison's struggle to overcome the lies about his lack of self-worth—those he told himself and those he was told—leads him to the truth of God's all-encompassing love. Building a more just and inclusive Church, one that reflects that love, requires "working through the lived experience of just such unwanted believers" as himself. The work is not easy, but by doing it we learn to live more fully Christ's commandment of love.

READINGS FOR DISCUSSION

Regina Munch, "'Worship of a False God:' An Interview with Fr. Bryan Massingale," June 2020
https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/worship-false-god

Timothy Matovina, "Edges of Empire," December 2019
https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/edges-empire

Natalia Imperatori-Lee, "Teaching & Preaching," March 2020
https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/teaching-preaching

James Alison, "Facing Down the Wolf," June 2020
https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/facing-down-wolf