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Commonweal

JANUARY 2022

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LETTERS

'An echo of clericalism'

FOURFOLD PRESENCE

I welcome Cardinal Cupich's essay ("Context & Commitment," November), but I couldn't help but find an echo of clericalism (certainly unintended) in his stance on active participation in the Eucharist as a lay shortcoming: "How many of our Catholic brothers and sisters seem to conceive of the liturgy as a spectator sport? How often do we hear, 'But I don't get anything out of it'? The passivity suggested by such an approach is the opposite of active participation."

I would suggest that the notion of liturgy as spectator sport and active participation as limited to the fulfillment of "offices" lies primarily in the weak catechesis of the clergy, and subsequently the laity, in the reform of the liturgy. This results in a one-dimensional notion of worship. When the bishops met for the Second Vatican Council, one of the key principles they put forth is that Christ is present in the liturgy in four unique ways. First, especially, in the Eucharist broken and shared, as well as in the person of the minister, in the Word of God, and in the assembled people of God. How many U.S. parishes are informed by a vibrant sense of a fourfold presence of Christ operative in our Eucharistic celebration? How many pastors work tirelessly toward such a sense of worship? And how often are our bishops fostering such awareness?

Our impoverished worship due to the lack of a sense of active participation is based on an excessively vertical lens concerning our Eucharistic celebration. The vast majority of U.S. Catholics have been formed into passivity when it comes to liturgy: it is an obligation, it is centered on the priest, and it is tightly scheduled to assist with other obligations (including the parish Mass schedule). The corrective, rooted in an effective and efficacious catechesis concerning the fourfold presence of Christ in our Eucharistic celebration, is hiding in plain sight. All that the bishops, pastors, clergy, and laity need do is remove the bushel basket and let the light shine.

Ed Beckett
Philadelphia, Pa.

'MEDIEVAL'?

I was happy to see *Commonweal* publish Sharon Mesmer's review of the new translation of the poems of Juan de la Cruz ("Silence & Contradiction," October). Mesmer makes a number of perceptive points about the challenges his poetry presents to the late-modern English translator. As she points out, these challenges stem not only from his use of Spanish idiom and Spanish poetic conventions but also from the elusive, apophatic nature of his thought.

I was struck, then, to read in the first paragraph that Juan de la Cruz was a "medieval Carmelite friar." On the contrary, as a sixteenth-century reforming Carmelite he was an eminent product of what was, ecclesiastically and politically speaking, the era of the post-Tridentine Church, or the Counter-Reformation; and, culturally and artistically speaking, the Baroque era. It was also the age, as Mesmer reminds us in pointing out that Juan came from a family of *conversos,* of the Spanish Inquisition. The framing of Mesmer's review is its own declaration that even the most lasting poetry requires adequate historical framing. To twenty-first-century eyes, sixteenth-century Spain may still look medieval. In fact, a good deal had changed. For all its mystical, otherworldly tenor, Juan de la Cruz's poetry is also a representation of that change.

J. M. Baker Jr.
Bala Cynwyd, Pa.

MORAL COURAGE

Susanna De Stradis makes a convincing case that the papal censorship of John Courtney Murray has been misunderstood and at least somewhat exaggerated ("Not Quite Silenced," December). But what Murray came to represent for lay Catholics in the 1950s and early 1960s is still hard to overstate. Having been raised a "*Commonweal* Catholic" from an early age, I can attest to the nearly universal appreciation progressive Catholics had for him, not only for his strikingly intelligible theological

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LETTERS

judgment but also for his evident moral courage in the face of what was certainly believed to be adversity.

John C. Hirsh
Georgetown University
Washington D.C.

ACTIVE RESISTANCE

In our time of marked upheaval, established structures and institutions have been receiving fresh scrutiny and are often found wanting. The movement to eradicate entrenched racism in the wake of George Floyd's murder has been a primary groundswell. So bravo to Mollie Wilson O'Reilly for her scathing essay on Archbishop Gomez's now infamous keynote address ("Struggling to Listen," December). And when she appropriately points out his ominous shift from a Church leader emphasizing listening to one blasting the social-justice movement as one of the trendy "pseudo-religions," she is highlighting Catholicism's long-standing ambivalence on race. Indeed, in touting various retrograde positions in his speech, Gomez suggests the American bishops, whom he leads, side not with the victims of an unjust status quo but with their persecutors. In doing so, he also refutes the words of the late German theologian Jurgen Moltmann: "Active resistance for the sake of the oppressed neighbor is not only a right but also a duty of the Christian." How else can the seismic fault in our midst heal?

R. Jay Allain
Orleans, Mass.

THREE RINGS

I loved the story of "The Rabbi's Gift," which Griffin Oleynick recounts in his article, "Embracing Uncertainty" (November), and which was an apt and hopeful complement to Brad East's review of Timothy Jackson's book, *Mordecai Would Not Bow Down* ("Still Supercessionist?" November). I was happy to find the story online, as told by Fr. Francis Dorff, illustrated by the paintings in the abbey library that Mr. Oleynick references.

The story reminded me of Boccaccio's tale of the three rings, retold by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his Enlightenment play *Nathan the Wise*. Three sons inherit rings from their father, only one of which is reputed to confer a special grace. Not knowing who has the truly magic ring, all the sons are advised to behave as though they have it, moving them all to behave more graciously than before. For Lessing, the parable applies to the three monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As Lessing himself might have said, sometimes it takes a good fable to set us on the right track.

Ernest Rubinstein
New York, N.Y.

We mourn the loss of longtime *Commonweal* contributors **CHARLES R. MORRIS** (*1939–2021*) and **TOM QUIGLEY** (*1930–2021*).

The Standoff in Ukraine

Critics of President Biden's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan warned that it sent the wrong message to the rest of the world. To our allies, they said, it signaled that we could no longer be trusted to honor our long-term commitments abroad; to our adversaries it showed that the United States had become a paper tiger whose threats they could safely ignore.

Now many critics of Biden's policy in Afghanistan are worried that he is making a similar mistake in Ukraine by failing to respond firmly enough to the threat of a Russian invasion. Since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, Russian President Vladimir Putin has been fomenting a separatist insurgency in the Donbas, a largely Russian-speaking region in eastern Ukraine. At least 13,000 people have died in this simmering conflict. Last July Putin published a five-thousand-word essay in which he argued that Russians and Ukrainians are historically one people, not two, and accused the West of trying to drive the two countries apart. Since then, Russia has massed nearly a hundred thousand troops along its border with Ukraine, causing alarm not only in Kiev but also throughout Europe. No one in the West seems sure whether Putin is bluffing or preparing for a ground war, but Washington is taking no chances. On December 7 President Biden held a two-hour video meeting with Putin to express U.S. concerns about Russia's troop movements. Biden warned that the United States would impose severe sanctions on Russia if it invaded Ukraine; he also discussed the possible terms of a settlement satisfactory to both Kiev and Moscow.

Biden's critics, however, believe it is pointless to try negotiating with Russia. They say Putin has no right to demand that NATO officially disavow its 2008 resolution that Ukraine and Georgia would one day become members of the alliance. They also say that Putin would not be satisfied with the Donbas, that he has designs on other states on Russia's western border, from the Baltic to the Balkans. Texas Congressman Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has urged the president not to offer any concessions to Russia. "This would not only fail to de-escalate tensions, it would also embolden Vladimir Putin and his fellow autocrats by demonstrating the United States will surrender in the face of saber-rattling," McCaul told the *New York Times*. "Particularly in the aftermath of the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan…U.S. credibility from Kiev to Taipei cannot withstand another blow of this nature."

But McCaul and other critics of the Biden administration are wrong. The solution to Russian saber-rattling is not American saber-rattling, and it would be foolish to try to shore up the credibility of the United States by risking an armed conflict with another nuclear power. Fortunately, there is a far better—and safer—solution at hand. But it will require that we apply pressure to both Russia and Ukraine. Both countries have been dragging their feet on the implementation of the 2015 Minsk II agreement, which was negotiated by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany and endorsed by both the United States and the United Nations Security Council. That agreement would demilitarize the Donbas (Russian "volunteer" forces would have to withdraw from the area), restore Ukrainian sovereignty over the region and its borders, and grant full autonomy and language rights to the Donbas as part of a federal Ukrainian state. This last provision would require a constitutional change, which the Ukrainian government has so far been unwilling to make. Kiev fears that the Donbas might use permanent autonomy to keep Ukraine from joining NATO. For its part, Russia refuses to recognize Ukrainian sovereignty over the Donbas until the region's autonomy is guaranteed. The United States should make it clear to Ukraine that NATO membership is not in the offing—two other member states, France and Germany, oppose it—and that if Kiev fails to abide by all the terms of Minsk II, the United States will cut off economic aid. Meanwhile, the Biden administration should let Putin know that if he tries to annex the Donbas, the United States will not hesitate to impose crippling sanctions on Russia's banking system.

Until now, Washington has been leading Ukraine on—neither promising NATO membership nor ruling it out—while issuing stern but suspiciously cagey warnings to Russia. It is time to be clear and firm with both sides of this conflict, without pretending that the United States is about to fight World War III in defense of a territory that means much more to Russia than to us. Putin is a bad actor, an autocrat and a liar, but we should not be surprised if he—or any other Russian leader—does not want to see NATO expanded to Russia's border, in clear violation of promises the United States made at the end of the Cold War. How would the United States respond if a rival world power tried to establish a military alliance with Mexico or Canada, or began training and supplying their soldiers close to our borders? Insofar as the confrontation in Ukraine is about American credibility, the United States cannot credibly demand of a rival what it would not tolerate for itself.

—December 21, 2021

The Omicron Surge

As 2021 came to a close, cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus were doubling every two to four days. By the time this issue went to press, it had already become the dominant strain of the virus in the United States. Omicron has greater transmissibility than previous variants (it is estimated to be two to three times more contagious than Delta) and is showing relative resistance to vaccines. While two doses of a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine provided extremely strong protection against earlier variants, that protection is reduced to about 30 to 35 percent against Omicron.

Still, there are causes for hope: a booster shot raises vaccine effectiveness to 75 or 80 percent, and for those who have received only two shots or have recovered from previous infections, the probability of Omicron causing severe illness, hospitalization, or death seems relatively low so far. Omicron may be able to evade the antibodies that prevent infection from occurring, but it can still be targeted by T cells—the immune cells that destroy already-infected cells—produced by vaccines or earlier infections. This helps explain why so many breakthrough cases have resulted in comparatively mild symptoms. It's tempting to imagine a future in which COVID-19 becomes endemic in this form: an illness no worse than the common cold or mild flu, something that might be annoying and inconvenient but won't require ten-day quarantines, the cancelation of travel plans, or widespread disruption of academic calendars and public events. Tempting, but *New York Times* science journalist Carl Zimmer calls it "wishful thinking" to be dismissive of Omicron or to be certain that all the new data we collect will confirm that this variant will *always* prove mild.

Indeed, even if the combination of T cells, booster antibodies, and natural immunity make this variant significantly less deadly to a large portion of the population, the sheer number of new infections will inevitably put more pressure on hospitals, perhaps even overwhelming health-care facilities and frontline workers just as previous waves have. And millions of people in the United States remain unvaccinated and therefore still vulnerable to serious illness and hospitalization. They also continue to put other people at risk, even those who've gotten their shots, and especially the elderly (one in one hundred Americans over the age of sixty-five has died from COVID-19, accounting for about three-quarters of the total death toll in the United States). Despite the best efforts of the Biden administration and the medical establishment to emphasize the importance of life-saving vaccines and boosters, there remains a sharp partisan divide on vaccinations as misinformation continues to spread and take root, primarily in Republican communities and often thanks to amplification by elected officials. According to NPR, 94 percent of Republicans believe one or more falsehoods about Covid vaccines, and 40 percent remain unvaccinated, compared with less than 10 percent of Democrats.

Promising results from trials of Pfizer's anti-viral pill suggest it could be a valuable tool for saving lives in the future, and it is expected to receive emergency use authorization from the FDA. But even with that authorization, Pfizer doesn't have the capacity to produce enough pills to address the expected spike. Andy Slavitt, former senior pandemic advisor to President Biden, predicts this wave "will peak in the middle of January," but anticipates it will "start to go down very quickly." Even if this is true, we must encourage and expand the use of tools we already have at hand. Though the administration's vaccine mandate for companies larger than a hundred people has stalled in the courts, companies and institutions should still require vaccines. Individuals should get vaccinated and boosted. And Congress should appropriate more money for at-home testing, to make such tests free and widely available. Omicron has already shown it can't be stopped, but its worst effects can still be mitigated. And maybe we'll be better prepared if another wave comes.

—Isabella Simon, December 21, 2021

Manchin's Machinations

Passage of Joe Biden's signature social-policy bill was never a sure thing, given the super-slim margins of the Democratic majority in the House and Senate. Biden may aspire to New Deal–like achievements, but as *Economist* correspondent Idrees Kahloon wrote last fall, "it is difficult to make Rooseveltian transformations without Rooseveltian majorities." Seen in this light, Sen. Joe Manchin's "betrayal"—that's how furious Democrats have described his rejection of the $2.2 trillion Build Back Better bill in December—might say more about their overall strategy in the face of entrenched Republican opposition. If you don't want a lone legislator determining the fate of a critical bill, do more beforehand to ensure it doesn't come to that. That might have included heeding the warnings from progressive colleagues on the risk of decoupling Build Back Better from the infrastructure bill that passed in the fall; their fears proved well founded.

This isn't to downplay the evident flaws of a system that allows one small-state senator to block legislation supported by tens of millions of Americans. Nor is it to let Manchin himself off the hook. By all accounts his announcement on December 19 (on Fox News, no less) blindsided Democrats, who believed Manchin when, just days earlier, he'd assured the president of his support for the bill. In the end, the senator said, he "just couldn't get there," in spite of trying "everything humanly possible." What that means

isn't clear. He'd already succeeded in getting his colleagues to whittle the package down from its original size, yet still complained about the price tag and its impact on the national debt. One might conclude that Manchin never really intended to support the bill at all.

Many Americans stand to lose from Build Back Better's demise, Manchin's fellow West Virginians in particular. Its provisions on expanding dental coverage for Medicare, addressing childhood poverty, and investing in green jobs and clean energy would have done much to improve life in a state where the median household income is $51,615—$30,000 less than the national average—and whose primary industry, coal mining, is facing collapse. Polling from last fall showed a majority of West Virginians supported the bill. Manchin also scuttled what would have been the biggest climate package ever enacted by the United States. Build Back Better called for more than $300 billion in tax incentives to cut emissions and spur development of electric-vehicle and green-energy technology. Without these, we're all but certain to miss the climate targets set in the Paris Agreement and fall short of commitments made at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow.

With a net worth of $7.6 million as of 2018, according to money-in-politics website Open Secrets, Manchin may not really be attuned to the needs of ordinary Americans. In taking sizable contributions from fossil-fuel lobbyists and the Koch brothers, he's probably not all that intent on addressing climate change. As for hand-wringing over the national debt, consider his enthusiastic vote for the $778 billion defense bill passed late last year—the largest since World War II, even adjusting for inflation. This was $25 billion more than President Biden had asked for, but Manchin raised no questions about the cost.

There's talk that Manchin might still come around on specific provisions of Build Back Better. There's also talk of his switching parties. But he clearly likes being the center of attention, and will probably remain so as long as the Democrats have exactly fifty senators.

—Dominic Preziosi, December 21, 2021

'Shipwreck of Civilization'

The plight of the world's migrants and refugees seems to worsen with every passing month. In late November twenty-seven people drowned when their fragile inflatable dinghy capsized in the English Channel. In December a speeding truck packed with refugees from Central America flipped over on a busy road in southern Mexico; fifty-four of them died. Most troubling of all was what occurred on the border between Belarus and Poland in mid-November, when President Aleksandr Lukashenko ordered thousands of desperate Middle Eastern migrants to force their way into Poland, using them as pawns to seek leverage against the European Union. Polish troops resorted to tear gas and water cannons to drive them back, where they were then left to freeze in the wilds of the Białowieża Forest. At least eleven died from exposure.

These events seemed to elicit little more than a shrug in Europe and the United States, but indifference toward the migrant crisis has lately become even more tinged with hostility to the migrants themselves—and opposition to the right to migrate at all.

This is something of a shift for the European Union, which as recently as 2013—led by figures like Angela Merkel of Germany and Matteo Renzi of Italy—sought to welcome migrants through progressive policies and humanitarian programs. But now there's talk of unraveling the 1985 Schengen Agreement, which permits open internal border crossing throughout most European countries. This has been accompanied by new reporting from the *New Yorker*'s Ian Urbina on the EU's outsourcing of migrant apprehension and detention to militias associated with Libya's government. Provided with money and surveillance information from Frontex, the EU border agency, Libyan "coast guard" crews intercept vessels in the international waters of the southern Mediterranean and return captured migrants to makeshift prisons in Tripoli, where they are starved, beaten, and sometimes killed, or pressed into forced labor.

On this side of the Atlantic, there was a record number of migrant deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border in 2021. Nevertheless, the Biden administration has reinstated the Trump-era Migrant Protection Protocols, otherwise known as "Remain in Mexico," reneging on a promise to recognize the right of asylum seekers to come to the United States to have their cases heard. Its options may have been limited after a federal judge in Texas ordered the program to restart, a decision later upheld by the Supreme Court. Though the administration is promising to ensure the safety of asylum-seekers stuck in squalid camps and to reduce wait times for hearings, humanitarian groups are not optimistic—especially when the administration also continues to cite Title 42 public-health rules as a pretext to prohibit entry and justify deportations.

Wealthier nations must do far better than this, and indeed they may soon have no choice. The World Bank predicts that the effects of climate change will displace an additional 150 million people before 2050. Speaking from the Greek island of Lesbos last month, Pope Francis again implored the developed world to get past its fear and self-interest. Lamenting the "shipwreck of civilization," he called on wealthy countries to "stop ignoring reality." He's right: in our continued indifference and increasing hostility, we are only condemning more of the world's most vulnerable people to death.

—Griffin Oleynick

JO MCGOWAN

Modi Backs Down

Letter from India

One of the most remarkable protest movements in the past hundred years ended a few weeks ago in India with a stunning victory. After more than a year of nonviolent demonstrations, the country's farmers succeeded in forcing the repeal of three laws that would have deregulated India's agriculture sector and allowed major agribusiness conglomerates to buy up massive tracts of farmland.

For most people here, the sight of Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, apologizing on national television for his failure to win over the farmers was strange. Modi is well known for never backing down—it is part of his political appeal. But this time he had little choice. Elections in several key states are around the corner, and Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been doing poorly in the polls. After dramatic defeats in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala in May, the leaders of the BJP are genuinely worried. Losing the country's largest state, Uttar Pradesh, which till now has been solidly pro-BJP, could bring the party's rule to an end.

That could still happen. Uttar Pradesh has a huge agricultural population and in spite of the BJP's effort to discredit the farmers' movement, support for it in the state has grown dramatically during the past year. It was recognition of this fact that likely prompted the government's capitulation, but the response from the protestors was a strange combination of triumphant celebration and suspicion.

After the announcement that the three laws were to be repealed, the government expected that the farmers who had camped in Delhi for the past year would simply pack up and go home. The farmers never even considered it. They celebrated their victory with sweets, music, and dancing in the streets, but they refused to go home until Parliament made it official. They had no faith in Modi's promises.

Their cynicism was well founded. The passage of these laws back in September 2020 had been a spectacle even for India, where parliamentary fistfights are not uncommon. The voice vote on the three laws could barely be heard over the shouts of rage from the opposition, and the preordained decision was rammed through without discussion.

In response to the protests that erupted immediately, the government did all it could to malign the protesters, claiming they were actually terrorists who wanted an independent Punjab (the country's most prosperous farming state). When this failed, the government attempted to discredit the movement's leadership, incited violence during Republic Day celebrations, blocked roads to prevent more farmers from coming into Delhi, removed toilets and cut off water and electricity in the campgrounds, and used tear gas and water cannons against peaceful protesters. Over the course of the year's protests, some six hundred farmers died of various causes. The final straw came when the son of a BJP official deliberately drove his car into a group of farmers marching on the highway, killing four and injuring several others.

The government's inability to gauge the mood of the electorate has startled even its critics. For many years the BJP's strategy of simply repeating lies has been surprisingly successful. In spite of a failing economy, a disastrous response to Covid, increasing violence at all levels of society, and social divisions rivaling those that existed at the time of Partition, the BJP has continued to enjoy an impressive level of public support. But its missteps with the farmers' protests may be its undoing.

The discipline and creativity of the movement, as well as its consistent nonviolence, has evoked admiration, affection, and even awe here in India. Within days of its camps being established on three of Delhi's borders, the farmers erected massive kitchens to feed the thousands and thousands of protesters. Toilets and showers were set up as well as charging stations for cell phones and laptops. To counter fake news in the media, organizers began publishing a biweekly newspaper, *Tractor Times*. Bulletins were shared on official Twitter handles and Instagram accounts.

REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The government's denunciations of the protesters flew in the face of what people were actually observing. On a trip to Punjab in November, three weeks before the laws were repealed, my husband and I witnessed firsthand the level of public support for the farmers. India is not a bumper-sticker country,

Farmers celebrate after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that he will repeal the controversial farm laws, November 19, 2021.

but we lost count of the cars emblazoned with signs reading "No Farmers, No Food." In the homes of friends we stopped to visit, we heard stories of heroic sacrifices by farming families and assurances of an eventual victory.

After the laws were repealed, we called those friends to see what they were thinking now. They were happy but also wary. They were certain it was an election stunt, decided with little thought and zero planning. A strategic, reasoned response, they said, would have included meeting with the farmers and the chief ministers of the states involved and coming up with an alternative plan. Modi, they pointed out, had yet to meet face-to-face with any opposition leaders, let alone with a single farmer. One of our friends who is a farmer said, "Who knows what tricks the prime minister will play after the election?"

Business and industry leaders are unhappy about the repeal, and the government will soon have to face the consequences of its noncompliance with the World Trade Organization's free-trade agreement, which India signed in 2003. That agreement requires India to remove all government supports (such as the provision of free electricity and the guarantee of a minimum price for certain crops) and to allow big corporations like Walmart and Reliance a free hand in the country's agricultural markets by 2020.

In any case, all the repeal has done for now is to return farmers to the status quo ante, which was miserable. The vast majority of them were barely eking out a living, often unable to recover their investments, let alone make a profit. Suicide remains alarmingly common among Indian farmers. The farmers themselves say that what they need is more markets closer to their farms, a minimum support price for their produce, training in practices like crop rotation, natural fertilizers and pesticides, and the promotion of agricultural cooperatives. None of this would be popular with the agriculture industry. But many Indians believe that the country's farmers are its last real hope for sustainable development and perhaps the only group capable of putting big business in its place.

JO MCGOWAN, *a longtime contributor to* Commonweal, *writes from Dehradun, India.*

SCOTT D. MORINGIELLO

Pius Giraldus

Gerald J. Russello, 1971–2021

Gerald J. Russello

COURTESY OF SIDLEY AUSTIN LLP

"Gerald Russello."

"Hi, Jerry, it's Scott."

"Scott! Great to hear from you. How is everything?"

That's how most of our phone conversations began. I was one of the people in Jerry Russello's life who knew him as Jerry, the guy from Regis High School in Manhattan—not Gerald, the well-respected securities lawyer, the editor of the *University Bookman*, the writer whose prose graced many and various publications.

I must have been fifteen when I met Jerry. Along with some Regis classmates, I had started a Catholic reading group under the tutelage of the great John L. Connelly, a legendary teacher who formed the lives of countless Regians, from Fr. Robert Imbelli (his classmate there) to novelist Phil Klay. With the kind of braggadocio not uncommon among Regis students, we fancied ourselves Catholic intellectuals, and asked Mr. Connelly if there were any heirs today to the authors we were reading. Who was engaged in writing about and therefore preserving a compelling vision of the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic culture?

Jerry's advice was simple: writing and exploring ideas should be exciting. Send something to a magazine and see what happens. You'll probably get rejected, but you'll also probably learn something.

Mr. Connelly told us that we'd get to meet such a person the following week at our regular meeting time—8:00 a.m. on Wednesdays, an hour before classes began—when we gathered to discuss Evelyn Waugh, Étienne Gilson, John Paul II, and all the rest.

Twenty-seven years later I still have a vivid memory of Jerry walking through Mr. Connelly's classroom door in his suit, holding his briefcase, thanking Mr. Connelly for inviting him, and assuring him that he was in no rush—the judge he was clerking for knew he'd be coming in closer to 9:30 than 9:00. (With all he did, was Jerry ever in a rush? Did he ever not have time for you?) I confess that I don't remember much more about that day, but I know that we asked Jerry how he got started as a writer. His advice was simple: writing and exploring ideas should be exciting. Send something to a magazine and see what happens. You'll probably get rejected, but you'll also probably learn something. Do this again and again, reading as much as you can along the way, until you get published.

That first encounter with Jerry made a lasting impression on me. We all need role models, and that day I found one of mine. But if Jerry had just been someone who dispensed good advice, I don't think there would have been such an outpouring of grief and so many beautiful tributes after his death. Jerry's life was much more attractive than that.

On the façade of Regis High School there is an inscription that reads *Deo et Patriae Pietas Christiana Erexit*: Christian piety built this for God and country. During both of our times at Regis, Jerry and I heard a great deal about our charge to become "men for others," a goal that Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, the former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, set out for all graduates of Jesuit schools. Jerry took those words to heart. He truly lived a life of service to others, in service to God and to his country.

Jerry's greatest gift to me, though, was the way he embodied *pietas Christiana*—Christian piety. "Piety," unfortunately, often calls to mind images of "simple" believers or uncritical religious naiveté. But piety is really an approach to life, a virtue that practices being grateful. It reminds us that we ought to be thankful to God for our country, for our family, for our friends—even for our high school. That gratitude, in turn, shapes our encounters with those around us. True piety doesn't have time for grudges; instead, like the agape for which it is most grateful, true piety "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). True piety never draws attention to itself, and Jerry certainly never drew attention to himself. Those who knew where to look, however, could see the piety with which he approached education, ideas, family, and God.

Jerry would be quick to tell you that piety was a Roman virtue as much as a Christian one. He learned about piety from the *Aeneid* and from the Bible. And he was always learning. A few years ago, six or so of us got together for dinner with Mr. Connelly, as we did about once a year. One friend had just completed a doctorate on Spinoza, another had completed a residency in psychiatry, a third was working in consulting. As we went around the table updating each other about our lives, Jerry, typically, asked the most questions. He had a knack for being genuinely curious and genuinely affirming. He was proud of all of us, in the way an older brother looks with pride on his younger brothers' accomplishments.

Jerry supported Regis and other educational endeavors because he believed they were places where students could ask enduring questions and cultivate abiding friendships. This is also what he saw in the Russell Kirk Center, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and the Lumen Christi Institute. His education—after Regis, he received a degree in classics from Georgetown and graduated from NYU's law school—taught him what was worth studying, and his piety reminded him he didn't have all the answers. Jerry deeply believed that ancient Greek and Latin texts could help us encounter the permanent things, but he didn't love them just because they stood as a bulwark against the latest educational fad; he loved them because of the joy he found in getting together with friends—as we did—to read them.

Most people knew Jerry through his careers as an attorney and as the editor of the *University Bookman*. I can't speak to the intricacies of his work as a lawyer (I'm blissfully ignorant of securities law), but I can attest to the way he brought his piety to legal questions. Even in the rarified world of corporate law, Jerry always had an eye on what specific laws meant to people's lives, and how the practice of law affected lawyers themselves. His legal practice was important, but it was not the most important part of his life. He understood that, while laws could help bring order to people's lives, the goal of life wasn't order. The goal of life was love.

The kinds of thinkers Jerry admired displayed the same kind of piety in their writing that he exemplified in his life. Orestes Brownson, Christopher Dawson, Russell Kirk, and Roger Scruton could all be classified as "conservative" thinkers, but Jerry wasn't interested in their labels. He saw them as writers who took serious questions seriously. They were concerned about what human beings owed each other and how his-

tory and culture shape us. Jerry edited a book of Dawson's writings (*Christianity and European Culture*) and wrote an excellent book on Russell Kirk (*The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*). In those books, Jerry showed that these two thinkers were still vital for understanding contemporary life. He also wrote introductions for reissued texts of Brownson and Dawson. All these writers remained essential because they raised the most important question: How can we be faithful? Or rather, how can we be pious? They didn't answer this or any other question for you, nor would Jerry presume to do that. But they offered models, pictures of what a life well lived looked like.

I honestly don't know how Jerry kept up with editing the *University Bookman*, published by the Russell Kirk Center. Every week, a new essay would appear reviewing a book about history or politics or culture. Jerry was always actively seeking out new reviewers, and he had a special gift for nurturing young writers. He had a light touch with his editing, and he always made your work better, often in ways that you couldn't quite foresee. Most importantly, though, working with Jerry was fun. It was clear that he enjoyed editorial work, but more than that he enjoyed the friendships that came with editing the *Bookman*. Under the @ubookman handle on Twitter, Jerry brought these qualities with him to the usually depressing world of social media. Even there, he managed to show his bonhomie, and he never failed to see the best in others and engage in actual conversations.

Part of what drew Jerry to Russell Kirk, I'm certain, was Kirk's piety toward place. Jerry had a wonderfully expansive notion of community, and the republic of letters of which Jerry was such an active citizen knew no physical boundaries. Jerry would want to remind us, however, not to forget that we are individuals from particular families who grew up in specific places. Like Jerry, I'm an Italian-American kid from Brooklyn (although my mom's family is Irish, and we moved to Long Island when I was six). Perhaps Jerry's most important lesson to me was that our grandparents—their traditions, their love of family, and yes, their piety—possessed a wisdom that our fancy degrees and "connections" could only hope to emulate. Our educations were valuable insofar as they helped us deepen our love for where we came from and for those who raised us. Sure, Washington D.C. or Oxford or Chicago or Wall Street are great. Have you ever visited Mill Basin or Bay Ridge in Brooklyn, though? You can read about filial piety when you read about Aeneas carrying Anchises, but you can actually experience it every Sunday over dinner at your grandparents while watching the Mets. These places and these people opened up our worlds. Our task was to share what we learned. I just wish I had more time to learn from Jerry.

I especially wish I had more time to learn about parenting from Jerry. He was always interested to know about my students because he always wanted to learn what sorts of questions his own children might raise. He cared deeply about passing on the faith to them. I loved getting updates on their lives, and Jerry relished his role as a father. In my sadness hearing about his death, I was heartened to know that when he died, he was surrounded by his beloved wife, his children, and his sister.

Each morning at prayer, I recite a litany of family and friends who have died. Jerry, of course, is now part of that somber list. As I say his name, I don't worry that Jerry needs to be freed from the temporary torments of purgatory. (I'm sure Dante has already Vergiled this son of Mill Basin up that particular mountain.) Instead, in mentioning Jerry I ask God to allow me to practice the piety that Jerry lived because I want to be conformed to the love that Jerry now encounters. *Oremus pro invicem*, my friend, that I may see you again.

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OPPOSITE: CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

A young woman reads during Mass at St. Anne Church in Garden City, New York, January 28, 2018.

RITA FERRONE

Where the Action Is

Ministry in the Church becomes the focus of renewal.

There has been a lot of ferment recently around questions of ministry in the Catholic Church—both in the liturgy and in the life of the Church more broadly. Who ministers? How is their service honored as a gift of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Body of Christ? How do ministries flow from the liturgy and lead us back to the liturgy, which is the summit and source of the life of the Church? It is worth summarizing some recent developments, many of which have taken place in just the past year, and considering their implications.

The possibility of opening the permanent diaconate to women continues to provoke much discussion, both at the grassroots level and in Rome. A thriving grassroots organization called Discerning Deacons is gathering steam, and two Vatican committees were formed under Pope Francis's watch to study the question. The second of these has just begun to meet. In the meantime, Francis has opened the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women. This looks like a modest venture on the surface, but it could prove significant. Then, in May 2021, he decreed the creation of a new instituted ministry, that of catechist, also available to women. This will not only honor those with a lifelong vocation to the catechetical ministry, but will also affect lay pastoral ministers who shepherd communities, spread the faith, lead prayer, help the sick, celebrate funerals, promote justice, and represent the Church in far-flung places. The *Rite of Institution of Catechists* was just released, with a start date in January. This is lightning speed for Rome: announcement in May, fulfillment in December. (It took Cardinal Robert Sarah more than a year to change one line in the liturgy of Holy Thursday so that women could be included in the foot-washing ritual.)

The ministerial priesthood also seems to be a focus of renewal. In March, there was a crackdown at St. Peter's Basilica that eliminated private Masses in favor of concelebration. It's a shift inspired by Vatican II. The problem of having multiple priests celebrating "their" Mass privately, at the same time other Masses are going on, was explicitly addressed by the council, which introduced the practice of concelebration. The norm of the liturgy is that it is a communal exercise, not a solo performance. Concelebration underscores the unity of the priesthood. That point, unfortunately, tended to

The norm of the liturgy is that it is a communal exercise, not a solo performance. Concelebration underscores the unity of the priesthood.

be lost amid media coverage that subsumed the change to an existing narrative about Francis's hostility to the older forms of the Mass. But it really was more than that.

Another development: Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, has announced a plan for a major theological conference at the Vatican in 2022, and it's on—you guessed it—the priesthood. Interestingly, it's not going to be focused only on the ministerial priesthood, but will consider the relationship between the priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. And it's going to be "constructive theology," which means asking new questions. Stay tuned.

While questions pertaining to ordained ministry tend to grab the limelight, the Second Vatican Council brought back into play the whole notion that a variety of ministries serve the liturgy; it is not a clerical preserve. Broadening access to the instituted ministries continues this creative process of *ressourcement* (return to the sources) which was unfortunately interrupted after the council. Therefore, the question of instituted lay ministries—lector and acolyte, and now catechist—deserves a closer look. Lay men and women have been doing these ministries for a long time, but not as "instituted ministries." Does institution matter? If so, *how* does it matter?

A little background is in order. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the pathway to priestly ordination consisted of several steps and stages. Some of these were the so-called "minor orders." According to the twelfth-century theologian Peter Lombard, there were seven degrees of order: door-keepers, lectors, exorcists, acolytes, sub-deacons, deacons, and priests. The first five of these were considered "minor" orders because they were not conferred by a hand-laying, yet all were part of the clerical estate.

Pope Paul VI, as part of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, suppressed some of the minor orders and decreed that the others would be called not orders but ministries. The two principal ones, ministries that he said should be observed everywhere, were lector and acolyte. They are lay ministries. He believed these were so important that we should formally institute those who serve in them. But there was a catch. Paul reserved the instituted ministries to males. It's not clear why. My hunch is that it was because he was still thinking in the mode of "no women in the sanctuary." In any case, it killed the project. Nobody did it. The only "instituted" lectors and acolytes remained those seminarians who were on their way to priestly ordination. It was "minor orders" by another name. We were back to where we started.

At the same time, however, the "informal" use of lay lectors and acolytes, without benefit of institution, grew at a fantastic pace. As early as 1970, women were explicitly allowed to serve in the ministry of reader. Permission for women to serve as acolytes was slower in coming, but by 1994 Pope John Paul II allowed it, though he left the actual decision to the local bishops.

The bishops of the world have been asking for change. Twice, synods of bishops have asked for women to be admitted to the instituted ministries: the Synod on the Word of God in 2008 and the Amazon Synod in 2019. Finally, Pope Francis made the change in canon law in 2021.

Is this an issue of justice? For sure. Yet it's also a move toward greater flourishing because it acknowledges charisms, gifts of the Spirit. It also sets the service of women lectors and acolytes on a more stable footing institutionally. When you institute something, it's no longer ad hoc. It's not a concession. It's a commitment. The Church will still have ad hoc ministers as needed. But they will exist alongside a stable core.

Hidden in this decision is another "something new," which we have yet to appreciate. A look at the early history of the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte show that they were both a participation in the work of diaconal ministry. Thus, the move to open these instituted ministries to women is not unrelated to the discussions about women in the diaconate.

One more thing. The model from the early Church shows that sanctuary ministries were connected, not only to one another *within* the liturgy, but also to the Church's work of evangelization and charity *outside* the liturgy. Thus, a lector might also instruct catechumens, and an acolyte might distribute alms to the poor. This organic approach, if pursued, could indeed be very fruitful. It will affect how we recruit, train, and form lay people for ministry. We're not aiming at just filling slots or getting someone to perform a task. Instead, the focus should be on finding and empowering the called and gifted person, charged with the mission to minister to the Church outside its walls as well as within them. The liturgy both draws us in and sends us out.

All these "new" things pertaining to ministry—women in instituted ministries, discussions of opening the diaconate, taking another look at what the priesthood of the faithful means (and how it relates to the ministerial priesthood), the enforcement of discipline concerning private Masses—suggest a ferment around bringing Vatican II principles into actual practice.

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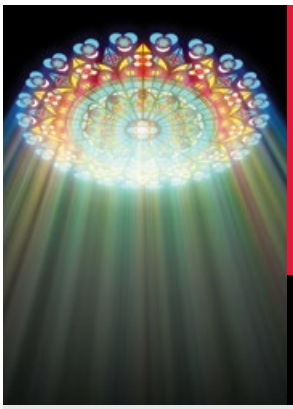

FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY
Catholic Studies
SPRING 2022 **events**

The 2022 Bellarmine Lecture

"Pope Francis, the Ethicist: Ignatian Roots, Jesuit Priorities, Contemporary Challenges"

Rev. Thomas Massaro, S.J., Fordham University

Wednesday, Feb. 9, 2022 | 7:30 p.m.

Hybrid Event: In person at Dolan School of Business Event Hall, or register for livestream at **fairfield.edu/cs**

Movie Screening:

City of a Million Dreams

Jason Berry, Writer and Filmmaker

Wednesday, March 2, 2022 | 7:30 p.m.

Hybrid Event: In person at BCC Dogwood Room, or register for livestream at **fairfield.edu/cs**

The 15th Annual Commonweal Lecture

"Co-Responsibility: Toward a New Culture of Leadership in the Church"

Kerry Robinson, Leadership Roundtable

Wednesday, March 30, 2022 | 7:30 p.m.

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Co-Sponsored With the Bennett Center for Judaic Studies

"Fratelli Tutti: the Good Samaritan and the Rabbi"

Burton Visotzky, Jewish Theological Seminary

Thursday, April 7, 2022 | 7:30 p.m.

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Ronnate Asirwatham

Director, Govt. Relations | Network Lobby for Catholic Social Change

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The Catholic University and The Corporatization of Higher Education:

Wednesday | February 2
"What Are Fair Pay and Good Working Conditions?"
BCC Dogwood Room
5 p.m.

Wednesday | March 23
"How Do We Serve the Underserved?"
DiMenna-Nyselius Library
Multimedia Room
5 p.m.

Wednesday | April 6
"Racial Justice and the Call for Reparations"
DiMenna-Nyselius Library
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5 p.m.

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Fairfield University

War & Penance

Philip G. Porter

What the Church can offer returning soldiers—and the rest of us.

I was not a Christian when I joined the Marine Corps. I was not a Christian when I deployed to Afghanistan, nor when I returned home. I entered the Church only after I had left the Marines. This has made my thoughts about the relationship between military service and Christian faith oddly disjointed. Not only have I entered the Church since leaving military service; I've also become a professor of theology. The disjunction between my life in the Marines and my life as a Catholic theologian allows for—perhaps "demands" is a better word—a kind of reflection on war not immediately available to everyone.

Army specialist Rafael Navarro at Mass in Fort Leavenworth army base, February 2, 2003

CHARLES OMMANNEY/GETTY IMAGES

Like many veterans, I found myself more emotionally involved in this past summer's rapid evacuation of Afghanistan than I thought I'd be. It's been over a decade since I returned home from the war, but watching the final defeat and withdrawal of U.S. forces from a country where I spent a year of my life was distressing. It helped crystallize thoughts that had been foggy and inchoate. The violent collapse of our two-decade mission in Afghanistan has made it clear to me that the Church needs to recover a theology of sin and a penitential practice capable of accounting for the trauma of war. Calls for prayer, reflexively saying "thank you for your service," singing patriotic hymns on Memorial and Veterans Day weekends—these aren't the answer. At best, such gestures make the Church seem generally uninterested in war and its consequences. At worst, they conform the Church's response to that of the world, in the Pauline sense of that term. Shouldn't the patriotism of the person who knows her true homeland is not of this world be distinguishable from the civil religion of the United States?

The Church has resources for addressing these questions. Some of them will likely make you uncomfortable—as they do me. But we all have good reason to feel uncomfortable. The end of the war in Afghanistan *ought* to elicit introspection and compunction, and the Church's penitential practices are, for Catholics, the most suitable expression of that compunction. Now is a good time for us to examine our consciences, individually and collectively.

Returning from Afghanistan was a stranger experience than going. A seasoned master gunnery sergeant told me it would be: "Nothing you do when you get back will seem as important as this, and you're going to have to get used to that." He was right, of course. The stakes of everyday life are less extreme. Decisions are not usually life-and-death. There are more mundane details to civilian life—buying groceries, paying bills, renewing your car registration—than you remember. This adds up to things seeming less important. But it's his warning that I'd have to get used to it that sticks with me. His point wasn't that ordinary experiences *are* less important, but that they *seem* so. Getting used to that means coming to terms with your time at war.

Much of this happens within your unit. Some of it happens with your friends and family, some with the broader community. Your interactions with all of these people helps you understand what it means to have gone to war and to have returned. The Church has a role to play here, too. One thing the Church does, which distinguishes it from all the others, is provide access to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Those returning home from deployment often have things to confess—sometimes terrible things. The ministry of the Church is there as a means of God's grace, to deal with sin. But what if that's not enough?

I don't mean that the grace of the sacrament isn't enough. I mean that the Church might not be able to wait passively for penitents to come to the sacrament for healing. One reason the Church can't stand by and wait is the deep cultural narrative about military service in the United States. According to that narrative, those who serve in uniform are heroes. We must support the troops. What the troops are up to usually isn't part of the discussion. The thing to do—the *only* thing to do—is support them.

The roots of this unreflective support are pretty dark. The backdrop of "thank you for your service" is the complete failure of Americans during the Vietnam era to welcome and assist returning troops. I'll never forget the people waiting to welcome my unit home when we set foot on American soil after a year away. Many of them were Vietnam veterans whose own homecomings had been decidedly different from ours. The veterans waiting for us when my unit stepped off the plane recognized the need—their own and ours—to be seen, and to be seen as honorable. Better, we've decided (and it surely is better) to reflexively support those fighting the nation's wars, to pat them on the back, to call them heroes, than to vilify or ignore them.

But neither vilifying veterans nor heroizing them will help them come home well. Neither helps them come to terms with their actions during deployment. This is where the Church has the tools, and the responsibility, to take action. It can do so by demanding penance from those who have returned from war. To demand penance is not to demonize. Rather, it amounts to an acknowledgment that "evils and injustices accompany all war" (the Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2307). War, as the Second Vatican Council tells us, is something we're enslaved to, something from which we should desire to be freed.

The necessity for universal penance after war turns on a recognition that bloodshed is evidence of sin, of deep brokenness that needs specific attention. Penance can certainly be related to personal sins, and often should be. But we can identify broader reasons for adopting penitential disciplines. Job, "a blameless and upright man"

The end of the war in Afghanistan ought to elicit introspection and compunction, and the Church's penitential practices are, for Catholics, the most suitable expression of that compunction.

(Job 1:8), adopts the posture of a penitent when he shaves his head and sits on the ash heap. He does so not as penance for his own personal sin, but to lament the common human condition after the Fall.

In his August 29 Angelus message, Pope Francis called on all of us to fast and pray for the people of Afghanistan. He said, "I address an appeal, to everyone, to intensify your prayer and practice fasting. Prayer and fasting, prayer and penance. This is the moment to do so." Because this was a call to everyone, it included those culpable for wrongdoing in Afghanistan. But it also included many people with no obvious connection to that country. Here, in other words, is an application of penitential discipline to people who have not committed any personal sin.

The work of penance is salutary. It goes to work on the source of grave evil, the human heart. Penance, and ascetic disciplines generally, are meant to bring us into confrontation with ourselves. As St. Gregory the Great puts it, "When we attentively consider our darkness and blindness, we are mentally provoked to tears." These tears, Gregory insists, are a necessary step toward joy: "The soul sighs before it eats." Before we're capable of making spiritual progress, we must be ready to confront ourselves, to be lanced by compunction. This view of penance requires us to speak of sin not just as a particular action, but as an *affliction*. Sin, St. Paul tells us, is something that reigns (Romans 5:21), enslaves us (Romans 6:9), leads to death (Romans 6:16), and dwells in us (Romans 7:23). If our talk about sin is focused exclusively on personal actions and neglects the way sin infects and corrupts us, the range of things for which we might do penance will be too narrowly circumscribed. Sin is something from which we need to be delivered, not something we can simply avoid. Nothing drives this reality home as acutely as war.

This is not to downplay the moral challenges faced by the individual soldier who has sinned on the battlefield. Some will return from a conflict bearing serious personal guilt. In this case, neither heroization nor demonization will provide the medicine that a wounded soul needs. Demonizing the returning soldiers can drive them to despair, to conclude that Christ's forgiveness is not available to them. Heroizing soldiers causes the opposite but equally damaging problem: presumption. Even if a returning soldier is aware of his or her guilt, being greeted as a hero is likely to cause some cognitive dissonance: *Am I wrong to feel bad about what I've done if people are praising and thanking me for it?*

The Church needs to act as a physician for those returning from war by calling on them to do penance. In the case of those guilty of personal sins in the conduct of war, this call is salutary. Unlike those caught in despair or presumption, the penitent is able to recognize the spiritual wound sin causes and to receive the salve of forgiveness. The imposition of penance forces an examination of conscience. Some who have gone to war and returned home have never felt the need for forgiveness—not because they haven't sinned but because they've yet to recognize their sin. This might be through lack of attention, or it might be through self-deception. In either case, the call to do penance can spur the returning soldier's conscience, and then provide a remedy for whatever guilt he or she may feel.

This is something the Church ought to know how to do. The imposition of penances on soldiers was a normal practice in the Middle Ages. You can see an example of this in the Ermenfrid penitential, promulgated after the Battle of Hastings. The ordinance allocating particular penances to those who took part in the fighting provides very specific guidance. A soldier received one year's penance for each man he knowingly killed, forty days for each man he wounded. This public penitential discipline likely amounted to exclusion from Communion and a diet of bread and water for the prescribed period.

Nor was it only the number of people killed or wounded that was taken into account. One's intentions also mattered. Fighting and killing for personal gain required the full seven years of penance standard in the case of homicide. But even those who fought in service of their sovereign for what they deemed a legitimate cause, and with no consideration of personal gain, owed three years of penance. In short, it was understood that there were better and worse reasons to go to war, but no matter the reason some penance was always required. This, too, suggests that the Church was concerned not only about the particular actions of individuals but also about the corrupting effects of sin that are abundantly evident in times of war.

This view—that participation in war called for penance—finds support not only in the penitentials that issued penances to soldiers. Hrabanus Maurus, Burchard of Worms, and Peter Damian all insisted on the need for public penance for those who participate in warfare. And no less a personage than Gregory VII, the great reform-minded pope, called the profession of arms one "which could not be engaged in without sin." This view recognizes that the conditions of warfare are at once the product of sin and the near occasion for sin. War tends to coarsen those who take part in it. As Thomas Aquinas puts it, "warlike pursuits are full of unrest," and hinder the contemplation of God. But that unrest does us harm in another way when it incites us to violence and hatred.

My own time in Afghanistan brought me face to face with the coarsening I've just described. Most of my time in-country wasn't spent on patrol or in firefights, but on trying to locate specific people so that they could be captured or killed (mostly killed) by conventional forces, special forces, or drone strikes. You get to know a lot about the specific people you're after. You might think this would breed empathy or understanding. In my case, it didn't. The time you spend, day in and day out, tracking people whose deaths you hope will contribute to the overall success of the mission leads to dehumanization. Once you've settled into a rhythm, the procedures you've put in place make your work

relatively mechanical. What information do we have on this target? Where will he be tomorrow? Who's he likely to be with? What's the expected impact of killing him? You get used to asking these questions. And at such a remove, the impact of the work you're doing—the spiritual toll it takes—isn't immediately obvious. It's there, though.

These effects are much more obvious to those whose jobs require them to stare death in the face, their own and others'. Phil Klay's book *Redeployment* presents these effects in stark detail, with a realism that is hard to bear. If you're trying to understand what I mean by the effects of the War on Terror, his book is a good place to start. We know, too, from the after-effects of war, that not all wounds are physical. The military has gotten better at recognizing and treating the psychological damage suffered in combat. The Church needs to make similar progress in recognizing the spiritual injuries soldiers come home with.

More than four times as many service members have died by suicide than have died on the battlefield since the beginning of the post–9/11 wars. One way to help soldiers to come home is to treat their wounds—physical, psychological, or spiritual. Jesus Christ is the physician of souls, the one capable of binding up all wounds. In order to bring the healing available in Christ to those returning from war, the Church should impose penances on them. In this way, the Church will stand opposed to the evils of violence and hatred that pervade all warfare. It will help all veterans learn to weep for our common condition, force an examination of conscience, and extend the offer of Christ's peace, both to those who know they need it and those who don't.

But too narrow a focus on veterans can obscure the fact that the citizens of the United States are collectively responsible for the war and its many failures. We're responsible because sovereignty in this nation is derived from the will of the people. This includes both our willingness to wage an unjust war and our unwillingness to end it for the past two decades. Sins of commission and omission abound.

Christians have tools with which to reflect on the justice of war. But if the just-war tradition is to be more than just a device for rationalizing bloodshed, then we have to be prepared for critical self-evaluation—for a national examination of conscience. Christians must ask themselves whether the war in Afghanistan met the standards the Church has established both for going to war (*jus ad bellum*) and for the conduct of war (*jus in bello*). I am not a pacifist. I think there are circumstances in which the use of force is necessary and just. But we need to remember that the Christian understanding of just war begins with a bias for peace. Not only are the standards for waging a just war high; the purpose of the war itself must always be the re-establishment of peace.

It's clear to me that the war in Afghanistan—and *a fortiori* the war in Iraq—failed to meet the Church's criteria both for going to war in the first place and for waging it justly. I'm drawing these criteria from the USCCB's 1983 document "The Challenge of Peace," which presents the conceptual apparatus of just-war theory in a straightforward manner. It's evident that the Afghan war failed to meet the just-war criteria of last resort, probability of success, and proportionality.

First, the war in Afghanistan was not a war of last resort. Though the events on 9/11 demanded a response, that response need not have been war. The speed with which the United States found itself in an ever-expanding conflict means that all other means for addressing the problem could not have been exhausted—not on that timeline. The United States had been attacked, and at least part of the reason for the immediate and overwhelming military response to the attack was the need to be seen to be doing something about it. But even if we assume that the United States had exhausted all other options, which seems exceedingly unlikely, two additional criteria were either ignored or abandoned.

Probability of success and proportionality are both crucial components of just-war analysis. To assess this probability of success you'd first need to have fixed criteria for success: What is the desired end state? What would victory look like? The answer to these questions was constantly changing for the duration of the war in Afghanistan. First the goal was to eliminate the threat of Osama bin Laden, then it was to remove a hardline Islamist government, then to contain Iranian influence in the region, then to provide opportunities for women, then to build a stable democratic government, then to train and equip military forces. We were never quite sure what we were doing there. And without being sure of one's aims, it's impossible to estimate the probability of success.

But even with the most general and generous view of what might count as victory in Afghanistan, there was another reason to doubt the probability of success: the historical track record. The Macedonians, the British, and the Russians all failed to conquer Afghanistan. Did we have good reason to

Too narrow a focus on veterans can obscure the fact that the citizens of the United States are collectively responsible for the war and its many failures.

The number of Afghan civilians killed by coalition airstrikes—about 5,900—is nearly twice the toll of 9/11.

believe that we would succeed where others had failed? Had the conditions in Afghanistan changed significantly since the last time the Afghan people had defeated a major superpower? Shouldn't we have expected a protracted guerilla war, with the Afghans receiving weapons and materiel from our international rivals? Again, as the mission in Afghanistan rapidly ballooned out of control, it became evident that we'd bitten off more than we could chew. But even the most basic historical consciousness would have led a reasonable person to conclude, *before* the war had started, that anything describable as victory was unlikely.

Even more obvious than our failure to meet the just-war criteria of last resort and probability of success, however, was our massive failure to satisfy the condition of proportionality. Here it's necessary to think not only of the justice or injustice of going to war in Afghanistan but also of how the war was waged. Nearly 3,000 people were killed by the terrorist attacks on 9/11. It was a staggering blow to the nation, a tragic, hateful thing. But the U.S. response to this has resulted in a death toll orders of magnitude higher. The Watson Institute at Brown University estimates the number of deaths caused by the war in Afghanistan at around 176,000. That number includes 53,000 opposition fighters and 46,319 Afghan civilians. The number of Afghan civilians killed by coalition airstrikes—about 5,900—is nearly twice the toll of 9/11. These are just the numbers for Afghanistan; there were even more deaths in Iraq. This also doesn't take into account the tens of millions of people who have been wounded or displaced in both countries.

In short, these wars were not just. Nor can our collective responsibility for them be shrugged off. It's something we need to reckon with. And once again, it's instructive to look at the Church's past to see how we might do that. St. Ambrose, upon hearing that the emperor Theodosius had massacred the people of Thessalonica, refused to admit him to Communion until he did public penance. Theodosius had committed a grave injustice, killing thousands of men, women, and children. Ambrose demanded penance because Theodosius's actions contradicted his baptism. They placed him outside Christ's body, in a state of rebellion against God's justice. For him to return to the fold required not only acknowledgement of his wrongdoing, but contrition and expiation.

This is where we Americans now find ourselves. We're in a situation comparable to that of Theodosius. It cannot be the case that shifting sovereignty from one man to all citizens old enough to vote simply extinguishes moral responsibility. We should recognize our complicity in the injustices committed by our elected leaders on our behalf. But just as it wasn't enough for Theodosius to acknowledge the injustice of his actions at Thessalonica, neither is the mere acknowledgment of our own guilt enough for us. What's called for is contrition and expiation. We need to do penance. Just as the Church should impose penances on those who've returned from war, it should also recognize the corporate guilt of the country that sent them. Like the people of Nineveh who hear Jonah and believe in God, we need a prophetic voice to warn us so that we might all "call out mightily to God" (Jonah 3:8) in repentance. That voice should be the voice of the Church.

The injustice of America's recent wars poses a pastoral challenge to our nation's bishops. I've argued that our shepherds should institute penances for returning troops. But it's reasonable to ask how American bishops should teach about military service in general. Would it be fair to tell troops only after the fact that they must do penance for their time at war? The bishops may need to do that now; the shot has been fired, so to speak. But in the future? An adequate pastoral policy would involve informing young men and women of the hazards—bodily, mental, and spiritual—of military service. If it's true that, as Pope Francis teaches in *Fratelli tutti*, "We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits," then American Catholics should hear this from the pulpit. American Catholics might need to reconsider military service in light of their country's recent record of waging unjust wars that devastate innocent civilians as well as combatants. This record remains difficult for me, as a veteran and an American, to confront.

If the Church has a responsibility to demand penance not only of veterans but of all U.S. citizens for their respective roles in the war in Afghanistan, what shape should that penance take? Why not start with the traditional penitential practices: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Specifically, the Church could provide returning veterans with catechetical instruction about praying the penitential psalms and participating in the sacrament of Reconciliation. It could impose a reasonable but serious period of fasting and involve returning veterans in the life of their parish communities. A parish with veterans who have recently returned from war might take the opportunity to join them in penance, to recognize a shared culpability, to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). This would be far more appropriate—and surely far more pleasing to the Lord—than another round of patriotic hymns.

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SALT

Marjorie Mir

Lot's wife, among the many,
names lost, arrested in their flight,
most commonplace of histories,
becomes by whim, intent or judgment,
most anodyne of condiments,
an apt, if unintended, choice,
obliquely bound to womanhood.

Salt. Seasoner of countless meals,
domestic presence, staple,
residue of tears,
buoyancy, the rocking buoy
saying to drifting children
here, where I am
you may drop your nets,
here is where they were woven.

Telling, too, is its impermanence.
Diminished, dissolved,
reclaimed by rains and soil,
no epitaph, yet embodying
attribute and accolade
bestowed on seasoned men.

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Learning from Las Hermanas

Amirah Orozco

How a Chicana feminist group modeled synodality before anyone was talking about it.

When Hermana Yolanda Tarango entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in 1966, she was required to bring two texts with her: the Bible and a copy of the documents produced by the Second Vatican Council. She laughed as she told me about her mother running from bookstore to bookstore searching for the latter. "They were not on the Vatican website back then," she joked. Tarango is from Ysleta, which is just outside El Paso, Texas, but she now lives in San Antonio, where she founded a shelter for unhoused women and children. "I saw the whole transition happen before my eyes," she told me, referring to what the council meant for the lives of religious women, and hers in particular.

I often left conversations with Tarango thinking to myself, "I love being Catholic!" She has a charisma that draws you in, a contagious laugh, and a compelling story—a story of prophetic witness and unrelenting love for God, Church, and community. Given the dispiriting state of the U.S. Church, where too many treat the Second Vatican Council as mere partisan fodder, it's a story I desperately needed to hear, and one I think is important to tell right now, in this historical moment. My talks with Tarango, in contrast to such acrimony and division, came to be spaces of healing for me as she recounted the sense of possibility ushered in by the council, and the way it related to her time as a key member of the Chicana feminist group known as Las Hermanas ("The Sisters").

Opposite: Demonstrators gather outside the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. during the Third Encuentro, August 1985.

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THOU ART THE GLORY
OF JERUSALEM THE JOY OF ISRAEL
THE HONOUR OF OUR PEOPLE
O MARY IMMACULATE BE THOU OUR MOTHER
HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE
THE LORD IS WITH THEE
HAIL HOLY QUEEN
MOTHER OF MERCY
OUR LIFE OUR HOPE
BLESSED ART THOU
O VIRGIN MOTHER
QUEEN OF HEAVEN
Voz
Profetica

Las Hermanas was founded in 1971 in Houston, Texas, as a decentralized organization of Latina women. Inspired by the Chicano Movement, which was gaining national attention at the time, Hermanas Gloria Gallardo and Gregoria Ortega gathered religious sisters from across the country to discuss what such a movement could mean for the Church. From the start, Las Hermanas urged Catholics to understand that the Church existed *in* the world, rather than apart from or above it, and to take seriously the call of *Gaudium et spes* for the Church to share in the world's "joys and hopes." In his essay, "The Mexican-American and the Church," César Chávez asked where "our Church" was in the Chicano Movement; Las Hermanas, at least, responded with a powerful answer: "*Presente*."

Dr. Lara Medina, a Chicana scholar and the author of the only book-length study of Las Hermanas, argues that it was "the first national religious-political organization of Chicana and Latina Roman Catholics in the United States." Her use of the term "religious-political" is important for understanding Las Hermanas. Unlike a number of the group's counterparts in both the United States and Latin America, Las Hermanas was committed to opposing oppression inside the Church as much as oppression outside the Church. This made it rare among activist groups linked with the Chicano Movement—many of that movement's leaders (especially younger leaders) fell away from the Church. But Las Hermanas also offered lonely witness within the Church itself, especially when dealing with bishops who refused to publicly support the Chicano Movement.

Like others in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Las Hermanas sought to engage how the Church *worked*—its procedures and mechanisms, the ways different voices in the Church could be heard, and how pastoral planning was carried out. They used the Encuentros, large gatherings by and for Hispanic/Latine Catholics in the United States in 1972, 1977, and 1985, to lift up the concerns of the Chicano Movement, including the struggles of the farm workers that Dolores Huerta and César Chávez were organizing. Las Hermanas helped make the Encuentros opportunities to model a different way of being the Church.

Mario J. Paredes, author of *The History of the National Encuentros: Hispanic Americans in the One Catholic Church*, connects these Encuentros in the United States with the regional encuentros carried out by the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) that began in the 1950s and culminated with the famous Medellín conference in 1968. Like others, Paredes credits Fr. Edgard Beltrán, who had worked for CELAM and was present at Medellín, with the idea of holding a similar conference for Hispanic/Latine peoples in the United States—an idea that gained traction after he shared it with an official from the Archdiocese of New York's Spanish-speaking apostolate, Fr. Robert Stern. But as Michael Sean Winters underscored in a review of Paredes's book, "More than the initial suggestion came from the Latin American Church: The encuentros would be characterized by the kind of deep consultation...which was unknown, even unthinkable, here in the States."

One of the most important parts of that "deep consultation" was the opportunity for Hispanic/Latine Catholics to discuss the implications of the Second Vatican Council in their communities. In that context, the Encuentros were their own reception of the council, one that happened alongside major political and cultural changes in the United States—changes driven by the Chicano Movement, the civil-rights movement, and the rise of feminism. Cardinal Seán O'Malley, who was also at the Medellín conference, has described this period as providing new openings for the Church to aid those fighting for justice, but he likewise emphasizes the way these movements challenged the Church: "It was a time when people of good will who were trying to help others move ahead in life realized that the task ahead was very great indeed."

As the Church embarks on a two-year process as a part of the "synod on synodality" called by Pope Francis, O'Malley's line about the previous era still resonates, and looking back at Las Hermanas' role in the Encuentros can help those committed to synodality better understand the task ahead. By their presence at the Encuentros, these Latina feminists invited the Church to become more horizontal in structure and to journey together guided by the Holy Spirit. Las Hermanas acted as grassroots agents of synodality at those gatherings, and we should learn from them today as discussions and debates make their way from local dioceses to Rome in the months and years ahead.

The First National Encuentro in the United States took place in June 1972 and included about two hundred fifty participants, though only sixty-nine of them were women (fifteen lay women and fifty-four vowed religious). With its relatively small numbers and the inevitable learning curve involved, the gathering was not a particularly impressive consultation for the Church. But it did reveal how the Spirit was guiding Las Hermanas and their co-laborers among the People of God.

Paredes argues that the First Encuentro was "not designed as a congress, but rather as a workshop." I'd add that it really was a *series* of workshops. One of them was given by Hermana Clarita Trujillo, and it was dedicated to the treatment of Spanish-speaking religious sisters. She described how their cultural heritage was often undervalued by their congregations—for example, they were often prevented from working with their own communities because the schools in which they taught were mostly for upper-middle-class white children. In her account, the purpose of Las Hermanas was to provide pastoral leadership formation to sisters whose mother tongue was Spanish, so that Hispanic/Latine people in the United States might be better served. One way they did that was by sending some religious sisters to train at the Latin American Pastoral Institute (IPLA) in Quito, Ecuador.

Studying with liberation theologians from Latin America not only gave the sisters a sophisticated theological framework, but also affirmed that their work was faithful

Las Hermanas was a group of women taking their formation into their own hands, indicating that they were developing a new, powerful consciousness about their own role in the Church.

to Catholic social thought and tradition. In doing so, these theologians, along with a number of Latin American bishops, affirmed Las Hermanas in ways the U.S. bishops never did. IPLA honed these women's ability to speak clearly and boldly when they returned to the United States. Their studies truly energized Las Hermanas and provided another fruitful connection between their work and the work of the Church in Latin America.

The point, for Trujillo, was that Las Hermanas was a group of women taking their formation into their own hands, indicating that they were developing a new, powerful consciousness about their own role in the Church that would carry through to the Second and Third Encuentros.

Hermana Dominga Zapata, a core member of Las Hermanas in its earliest years, was one of the dreamers behind the Second National Encuentro held in 1977. She told me the story of being at a Eucharistic conference in 1975, where Pablo Sedillo, who worked for the USCCB, invited her to the house of a family friend. It was at that dinner, as Zapata remembers it, that the idea for a Second Encuentro was raised and committed to by all present. These origins made for a more organically planned gathering that drew over five times more attendees than the First Encuentro. The USCCB's official report claims 1,200 people were there, and memories of it loom large for those present. "I really wanted to keep it organized, we really tried, but as soon as we showed up, we knew that was not going to be possible," Zapata recalled.

The *hermanas* I interviewed vividly described what unfolded at the Second Encuentro. Tarango told me of people from all over the United States jumping on the back of pickup trucks with people they barely knew. Dioceses that said they would bring ten delegates instead showed up with seventy-five people. "Farm workers, some of whom did not even speak English and needed translation, were grabbing microphones and telling bishops what they wanted to see in the Church," said Tarango. Hermana Margarita Castañeda told me about crowded conference rooms where people were standing with their backs against the wall. Sometimes, the speaker or leader of a workshop lost control of the room when commentary and chatter got louder than the presentation itself.

When I asked Zapata what made the Second Encuentro different from the first, she responded with a certain sense of pleasure, given her role in planning it, but she expressed humility at the overwhelming number of people who showed up. "The first was Hispanics saying 'We are here,' the second was saying 'And we want to be included.'" The Second Encuentro put Hispanic/Latine people—laity and priests—squarely in front of U.S. bishops. "These conferences were important precisely because they were times when the bishops listened," Castañeda explained to me. It was also an opportunity for the Hipsanic/Latine leaders to meet one another. According to Zapata, it was the first time that many people working in Hispanic/Latine ministries across the United States understood that they were not alone, that there was an entire network of people across the country working to make visible the needs and hopes of Spanish-speaking communities. "In that, you really saw the Spirit moving," said Zapata.

One of the concrete suggestions that came from the Second Encuentro was that Hispanic/Latine peoples need greater representation at all levels of the Church. As a result of this demand, a National Advisory Committee was formed to advise the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs. This committee eventually called for the Third Encuentro, and in 1983 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published the pastoral letter *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment*, which announced the beginning of the process for the Third National Encuentro.

The Third Encuentro convened in Washington D.C. in August 1985. In the days leading up to it, Las Hermanas held their own conference, "Hacia El Tercer Encuentro" ("Toward the Third Encuentro"), which was its own kind of culmination. While the Encuentro diocesan consultation was going on, Las Hermanas were also hosting regional conferences where they identified the issues that Latina women most cared about and then, at their national conference, offered workshops on how participants could bring them up as delegates at the Encuentro. By the time the Third Encuentro began, many of the women in attendance had already had in-depth conversations about the topics being discussed. It is hard to overstate how impressive this was as a pastoral strategy, especially in the way it empowered women in the Church to lament and reflect on their problems and needs. In their approach to the Third Encuentro, Las Hermanas modeled being a Church that did not speak for the marginalized, but rather gave the marginalized tools to speak for themselves.

That preparation turned out to be necessary. On the conference's final day, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Tarango—authors of *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, the earliest iteration of what we today know as *mujerista* theology—gathered about five hundred people to pray the rosary outside the National Basilica. At each mystery, someone

Mexican American Cultural Center, San Antonio, Texas, September 1980

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offered a personal story about the painful realities endured by Latina women in the Church and in the world. One woman told of surviving domestic violence, while another spoke of being a single mother bearing the burden of economic precarity. I asked Tarango, "Did anyone tell the story of their call to be ordained?" She responded, trying to remember, "No, I do not think so, because that is what the whole thing was about."

The women gathered outside the Basilica because the day before a proposal for language suggesting the possibility of women's ordination had been rejected. "I do not think people were as mad about it being taken out as they were about the process. They did not respect the process as they had for every other proposal," Tarango told me.

As the proposal was being voted on, a young priest ran up to the podium and whispered something into the ear of one of the bishops—and it was all over. The vote did not continue. Zapata and Tarango are unsure if the proposal would have received the necessary votes, but the optics couldn't have been worse. When I spoke with them, both *hermanas* seemed to think that the order to ignore the vote came from the Vatican itself, though who made the decision or even who that young priest was remains unclear. What *is* known is that the scene immediately turned chaotic. According to testimonies of those present, even people ambivalent about the measure stood up in the pews to protest and call for a fair vote.

After the Encuentro organizers closed the session for the day, Las Hermanas gathered at the back of the church. More people than expected showed up because, Tarango says, this was a moment of "consciousness raising." People came to Las Hermanas looking for them to do something. "It was funny, because people wanted to go back to the hotel and grab sheets to cover Mary, you know, as symbolism," Tarango said, laughing at how funny that mildly disrespectful idea would have been. Eventually, though, it was Tarango who came up with the idea of praying the rosary at the Basilica instead: "Something more powerful, but you can't get arrested for praying the rosary."

Part of the reason many were upset by the flouting of the established procedures was because the Third Encuentro had been organized as a conference with a lot of procedures. It began in local dioceses almost two years before the actual gathering. It was systematic in reaching out to Hispanic/Latine Catholics across the United States, consulting with about six hundred thousand people before the conference even began, according to reports from the time. Paredes, in his history of the Encuentros, describes a meeting in Illinois that produced a twenty-six page document about how the consultations ought to take place, which groups of people were to be consulted, and how the final reports should be written.

Indeed, by many accounts, the Third Encuentro could be *too* organized. While Paredes admits that the twenty-six page outline of diocesan participation was "a very serious guidebook," he believes it also became a "kind of straitjacket that risked strangling spontaneity and inspiration." Perhaps this could be understood as a response to the Second Encuentro, in which the laity really took control of the situation. According to Medina, Las Hermanas publicly criticized that Encuentro for being taken over by the bishops rather than run by and for Hispanic/Latine leaders. In the Second Encuentro, groups like Las Hermanas were allowed to send formal delegates to the gathering, but the Third Encuentro did not reserve places for representatives of grassroots movements.

Despite these disappointments, the Third Encuentro did push the bishops to write a "National Pastoral Plan of Hispanic Ministry." In *Prophetic Vision: Pastoral Reflections on the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry,* Sr. María Soledad Galerón, RMI, writes that the plan acknowledges "the prophetic function of the People of God whom the Holy Spirit sanctifies and directs." Still, it was not well implemented and, by the 1990s, many of its proposals came to be entirely ignored. In this, Paredes finds an "obvious" parallel to the Second Vatican Council—both, in certain ways, have yet to be truly implemented. But, he goes on to add, the writing of the National Pastoral Plan, like the Council, nevertheless "has changed the course of Church history."

The plan's very existence, however much work remains, is due to the hard work of an entire ecclesial community. The Spirit moved through the Hispanic/Latine peoples at the Third Encuentro, and it couldn't be entirely resisted. That success owes a great deal to the presence of Las Hermanas there. The group modeled a way of being Church that was not fearful of conflict, and understood that their role was to help lift the voices of the marginalized rather than to make bishops comfortable. They used their experience of being part of a grassroots movement to organize Latina women in local dioceses throughout the United States and to hold bishops to their commitment to the Third Encuentro's robust process of consultation. Consuelo Tovar, a member of Las Hermanas who later served as the group's national chairperson, has observed, "Many of the bishops who called for it may not quite realize what they have by the tail."

In one of our discussions, Tarango and I talked at length about the meaning of synodality. She cautioned me that the idea that the Encuentros were a "synodal process" is a bit of an anachronism, given that synodality was not a concept well known or used by many of its participants. It's a fair point, but I replied that the Encuentros still seem like a useful example of how the Church could be more participatory and horizontal. That set us off talking about other models from history. She brought up the conference of Medellín. I had recently read Christian Smith's *Emergence of Liberation Theology*, and recommended she read his chapter on Medellín in which he brings to light some of the more political, and decidedly less synodal, parts of the conference. The next day, I scanned the chapter and sent it to her. She responded, "Thank you, it is very familiar and brings me back to the 'heady' days of liberation theology activism."

The theme chosen for the Third Encuentro was "reflecting on a model of the Church as missionary and participatory." Those two words—"missionary and participatory"—have also been chosen by Pope Francis to describe his hopes for the "synod on synodality." They suggest the Encuentros can give us hope that synodality will be a promising way forward for the Church. However flawed, they allowed those in our Church who previously felt unable to speak to be heard, and with each Encuentro, a new channel of participation was created. But has any of this actually changed the culture of the Church, or are they mostly empty gestures? Hispanic/Latine peoples in the U.S. Church largely remain, as Brett Hoover recently argued in *Commonweal*, "unaccommodated" ("Still Unaccommodated," July/August 2021).

When I asked Tarango what she believed the greatest impact of the Encuentros was, her response surprised me. She said that it was not only a time for the bishops to listen to the laity, but also for the laity to listen to the bishops. Tarango was reminding me that the lived experiences of *all* People of God should be equally valued. The work she and others in Las Hermanas did should convince us that, for synodality to be effective, we all must undergo a process of conversion and be genuinely open to discerning the signs of the times and creating the Church we want, together. For Tarango, the prophetic aspect of the Encuentros was not the laity "sticking it to 'the man.'" Instead, she said, it was when everyone was allowed to say "I am Church, too."

Tarango now focuses much of her time on her local community in San Antonio. After many conversations via Zoom, I met her in person for the first time in November 2021. Just as I had imagined, she has a permanent smile on her face. As a part of my visit to San Antonio, Dr. Horacio Vela invited both of us to attend his course on Our Lady of Guadalupe. Tarango thanked the students for including her friend Ada María Isasi-Díaz on the altar for the Day of the Dead. One young woman presented on Lara Medina's work. When Dr. Vela asked for my commentary, I told the class that Medina's first book was about Tarango and that they were in the presence of a true feminist of the 1970s and 1980s. She laughed and looked around at those of us in the classroom, all young Latina women, and said "And now we're counting on you all to carry the torch."

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The Fallen Idol

Anthony Annett

Neoliberalism has failed. Catholic social teaching can help us replace it with something better.

Something has gone awry over the past four decades. Despite record-setting global prosperity, the common good is threatened by ever more extreme economic and social dysfunctions. Although we've witnessed impressive gains in poverty reduction—driven largely by China—we still have enormous levels of poverty, deprivation, and exclusion in a world of unprecedented wealth. According to the World Bank, about one in ten people alive today lives in extreme poverty, eking out a meager existence on less than $1.90 a day. Around 6 million children die each year before their fifth birthday, and almost all of those lives could be saved by cheap and straightforward medical interventions.

Inequality within countries has also skyrocketed over the past forty years. According to the World Inequality Report, since 1980 the world's top 1 percent have profited twice as much from economic growth as the bottom 50 percent have. The big winners of this era were the global super-rich. As a percentage of global GDP, the wealth of the world's billionaires has doubled over this period. This staggering inequality is the consequence of a toxic combination of trends. Technological changes have benefited high-skilled workers and the owners of capital; globalization has allowed corporations to set up camp in countries with the lowest taxes and the fewest regulations and social protections; and the increasing plutocratic capture of the political system has led to policies that favor the rich. The result has been the hollowing out of the middle class and the evisceration of the working class in advanced economies. No wonder the global financial crisis, when bankers were bailed out and ordinary people left to sink, left a bitter legacy of resentment in its wake.

Homeless on Wall Street, New York City, 2015

LIONEL DERIMAIS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Grave social problems have arisen in tandem with this concentration of wealth. As Robert Putnam has documented in the United States, social ties have become frayed over the past few decades as neoliberal ideology has undermined our sense of solidarity. Signs of this fraying are all around us. They include obesity, substance abuse, and mental-health disorders. Indeed, such problems have become so common and so grave that life expectancy is actually falling among some key demographics.

Hovering over all of this is the existential environmental crisis threatening to destroy the conditions for human flourishing. The greatest threat here is surely climate change, which is driven by the relentless burning of fossil fuels to power the economic juggernaut of our global economy. The energy unleashed by the burning of these fossil fuels powered the Industrial Revolution and laid the groundwork for our global prosperity. But the continued use of those fuels will gradually destroy that prosperity, along with the health of the planet. The concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is higher than at any time over the past 3 million years. Climate scientists predict that without a major course correction there will be a devastating rise in global temperatures, causing more floods, droughts, fires, and severe weather events. In the years to come, climate change will have enormous impacts on agricultural output, economic growth, poverty, human health, migration, political instability, and conflict.

Blame for the current state of affairs can, to a large extent, be laid at the feet of an ideology known as neoliberalism. That ideology involves an extension of the values of neoclassical economics—values like individualism, efficiency, and competition—to all aspects of society. According to neoliberalism, free markets always and everywhere promote well-being, economic growth will always trickle down, and the private sector needs to be unshackled from the grip of government to be efficient and innovative. Public services should be privatized, industries deregulated. Capital should be allowed to move freely across borders in search of the best investment opportunities.

But neoliberalism has failed, even on its own too-narrow terms. As the economist Robert Gordon has observed, total

factor productivity—that portion of economic growth attributable to innovation and technological advance—was three times higher in the United States in the period between 1920 and 1970 than in the following period of fifty years, when neoliberal policies were systematically implemented. Those policies simply did not deliver the supply-side miracle their champions promised. And while growth slowed across the board, it was the poor who saw the largest decline.

The failure of neoliberalism has brought us to a dangerous juncture. As the poor and working classes are left behind, and as social and psychological problems mount, the backlash has the potential to be ferocious. We are already seeing the warning signs. The sense of shared purpose a society needs in order to pursue the common good seems elusive. Instead, economic frustration and anxiety play into the hands of demagogues with easy answers. There is a tight correlation between extreme inequality and the loss of trust in institutions of all sorts, including the government. When that happens, democracy itself is in jeopardy. The history of the early twentieth century teaches us clear lessons in this regard.

Yet in the middle of that century, Europe and America managed to crawl back from the abyss—largely by embracing social democracy, which yoked the market economy to an activist state. Three forces account for the emergence of this era. First, the Great Depression led to a loss of faith in the power of self-correcting markets. Second, the shared wartime experience jump-started social solidarity, which was extended into the postwar period, and took a generation to fade away. Third, the democratic world eyed communism nervously, and sought ways to dampen its appeal to the working classes. It is no coincidence that neoliberalism reached its apogee only after the final collapse of communism.

The social-democratic era was marked by robust welfare states, wide-ranging financial regulation, control of monopolies, strong unions and collective bargaining, and high marginal tax rates. These institutions encapsulated a spirit of solidarity and shared purpose. In stark contrast with the neoliberal era, the social-democratic experiment was a huge success on both sides of the Atlantic, marked by robust, broadly shared economic growth and strong financial stability.

The question to be asked is this: Can our present crisis be resolved by a new social-democratic moment, attuned to the particular circumstances of the twenty-first century? I believe the answer is yes, and that the solution can be informed by the principles of Catholic social teaching. To see this, it helps to explore the role that Catholic social teaching played in the first social-democratic moment. As the historian Tony Judt noted, the postwar European Christian Democratic movement—largely inspired by Catholic social teaching—found common cause with left-wing social democracy against laissez-faire economics. Christian democracy supported a "social market economy" to protect families from the vagaries of capitalism. James Chappel has recently argued that during the twentieth century, Catholic social thought was largely divided between two tendencies: what he calls "paternal" Catholicism—which vigorously opposed communism and elevated the family as the basic unit of society—and "fraternal" Catholicism, which tended to be more left-wing. Yet these two strands came together in the domain of economics during the postwar period. Both supported the state's role in regulating the economy to promote the common good, providing universal social services funded by taxes and social contributions, and empowering unions as a bulwark against excessive corporate power—the kind of power that greased the wheels of fascism.

Although there was never a Christian Democratic movement in the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal was influenced by Catholic social teaching— especially under the tutelage of social ethicist Msgr. John A. Ryan. The New Deal limited the excesses of the market, encouraged just and harmonious industrial relations, created dignified public employment for those in need, and protected people from various kinds of market risks. Its goals extended well into the postwar period and were widely accepted on both sides of the partisan divide. Dubbed by some the "Treaty of Detroit," the set of institutions combining high taxes on the rich, robust minimum wages, and strong collective-bargaining rights helped usher in a remarkable period of industrial stability and shared prosperity. President Lyndon B. Johnson extended the New Deal with his War on Poverty in the 1960s, which led to the creation of Medicare and Medicaid.

So what are the prospects for a new social-democratic moment informed by Catholic social teaching? To answer this question, one must first appreciate the differences between the principles of Catholic social teaching and those of neoliberalism. The latter have had enormous influence in recent decades, so it makes sense to pick them apart.

The first question to ask is what motivates the person. In neoclassical economics—and by extension neoliberalism—the answer is self-interest. This is often traced to Adam Smith's famous dictum that without self-interest, businesses would not supply the goods we need and want. By contrast, Catholic social teaching elevates such principles as solidarity, reciprocity, and gratuitousness. It insists that a core human motivation is willing the good of the other, including the person on the other side of an economic transaction. Recent evidence from psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology affirms that there is something to this view—that we are deeply social creatures, honed for cooperation. But if society consistently sends the message that people are selfish and care only about themselves, many people will internalize these values.

The next question to ask is what constitutes the good of the individual. For neoclassical economics, the answer is straightforward: you seek to maximize your subjective preferences. Put simply, you try to consume the most you can, in line with your personal tastes, with whatever resources are available to you. This answer has a number of implications. First, preferences are subjective and hedonic: you like what

you like, and questioning the value of another's preferences is ruled out. Under this framework, anything that is legal can be a valid preference, no matter how well or how poorly it contributes to human flourishing. Second, it tends to treat all goods as commodities, things to be bought and sold. It sidelines the non-material aspects of well-being, including relational and spiritual goods. Third, the logic of maximizing one's preferences has no internal limit. All that restricts you from consuming more is your income. This leads in turn to the goal of endless economic growth, which runs into grave problems on a finite planet.

When Catholic social teaching ponders the good of the individual, it points in a sharply different direction. It emphasizes instead integral human development, which is the good of the whole person and all people. Thus, it goes beyond the material to emphasize all dimensions of well-being. In an Aristotelian sense, it calls for the fullest development of each person's potential. Implicit in this is a more objective notion of the good, a good common to all people that sets natural limits to their needs and desires. It does not confuse happiness with the maximal satisfaction of appetites. And that means it does not confuse our collective well-being with maximal economic growth.

But neoclassical economics has no concept of a truly collective well-being, a common good worthy of the name; it can conceive of nothing beyond the aggregated well-being of individuals, which it measures by adding up monetary values. This explains why gross domestic product (GDP)—the summation of all production of final market goods and services in a single economy—acts as a stand-in for the common good under neoliberalism. This is an additive standard (what matters is the total) so it is compatible with staggering levels of exclusion and inequality. As Stefano Zamagni has pointed out, the common good is in this respect more geometric, which means that if one person is a zero, the whole thing is zero.

This brings us to the normative standard of judgment. For neoclassical economics, this standard is efficiency—more precisely, Pareto efficiency, the point at which all voluntary trades are exhausted and it is no longer possible to make somebody better off without making somebody else worse off. Economists often argue that this notion of efficiency is rational and value-free, but it really boils down to the best way to maximize your preferences. Notice the implication: Pareto efficiency rules out redistribution and is thus compatible with extreme inequality. As Amartya Sen put it, "A society or an economy can be Pareto optimal and still be perfectly disgusting." Catholic social teaching flips this standard of judgment on its head, emphasizing the universal destination of goods and the preferential option for the poor. The standard is therefore meeting the needs of all people and giving special priority to those at the bottom.

For neoclassical economics, not only are consumers supposed to maximize utility, but firms are supposed to maximize profits. Neoclassical economics holds up "perfect competition" as the norm. What does this mean? It assumes a set of market conditions that is not at all common in the real world: an industry where no single producer can influence the price of the good, where the good in question is standardized, and where there is free entry and exit from the market. Under these ideal conditions, the free-market equilibrium is deemed to be Pareto efficient. But notice the number of hoops that economists need to jump through to reach this conclusion—from the highly unrealistic assumptions that hardly ever hold in practice to the role of Pareto efficiency as the highest standard of judgment. Catholic social teaching does not reject market competition outright; it simply appreciates that cooperation is just as—if not more—important, especially as exercised through the principles of solidarity and reciprocity. There is no support in the tradition for central planning or for completely throwing out the price signals that come from markets.

What, in all of this, is the role of the environment? In neoclassical economics, there really isn't one. The underlying ethos is one of extractivism in the service of ceaseless economic growth. Catholic social teaching, by contrast, recognizes a positive injunction to care for creation, and this includes taking strong actions to curb climate change. It elevates the principle of integral ecology, suggesting that hurting the planet means hurting people, especially the poor.

Though neoclassical economics comes out of the utilitarian tradition, it has also absorbed some aspects of libertarianism, owing to its emphasis on unencumbered markets. Like libertarians, neoliberals fear that the state will suffocate the natural potential of the private sector to unleash innovation and growth. They believe that the proper role of government is to act as a neutral referee, guaranteeing the property rights that are essential for free enterprise. Catholic social teaching, on the other hand, has no truck with libertarianism. This is because libertarianism repudiates the idea of a common good—in this framework, "common" entails some element of coercion and insisting on the "good" negates freedom. It should be acknowledged that neoclassical economics does not go quite as far as libertarianism. Since its only standard is efficiency, it approves government intervention if it can be shown to enhance efficiency. For this reason, it will allow government to provide public goods, regulate natural monopolies, and properly price externalities such as pollution. This is better than nothing, but it isn't enough.

Under Catholic social teaching, the common good in the economic sphere is the proper domain of government. And the government can best serve the common good by deploying the twin principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. Solidarity calls on the government to ensure the provision of the basic goods necessary for integral human development and the common good, including income security, decent jobs, nutrition, health care, education, housing, and a sustainable environment. It is important to note that the market, left to its

When workers lack power and options, flexible labor markets tend to generate jobs that are low paying and insecure, most recently in the so-called gig economy.

own devices, tends to under-supply many of these goods. That means that the state must assume a more active role if people are going to get enough of what they need. It does *not* mean that the state always needs to supply these goods itself. It can sometimes outsource provisions to the private sector, but one way or another it must ensure that these goods are provided. And owing to the principles of the universal destination of goods and the preferential option for the poor, the poorest must take special precedence in policymaking.

Subsidiarity calls for higher-order associations, including the state, to promote but not usurp the responsibilities of lower-order associations. It calls for a proper balancing of the scales, with government support for what John Kenneth Galbraith called institutions of countervailing power—including unions, small businesses, consumer organizations, cooperatives, and regional and local banks. When establishing the rules of the game, the government should strive to respect, assist, and promote the interests of all participants in the economy, not only the interests of the wealthy and well-connected.

Catholic social teaching also has much to say about the relative roles of capital and labor. Neoclassical economics does not. As noted, neoclassical economics assumes that the sole role of the corporation is to maximize profits, typically equated with shareholder value, and hence that the corporation has no wider social role—this view was stated most forcefully by Milton Friedman. In this framework, labor is simply a factor of production. In labor market equilibrium, which again leans heavily on the assumption of competitive markets, the worker is paid in terms of what they contribute to productivity. Once again, neoclassical economics finds a natural ally in libertarianism as not only wage-efficient but also just, because the wage represents the outcome of free choices between worker and employer and the worker is paid in line with what she contributes.

Catholic social teaching takes a different perspective. Under its principles, the role of business, just like the state, is to further the common good. This has numerous implications. First, it calls on businesses to produce goods and services that further genuine human flourishing rather than support mere preference satisfaction. This casts a moral pall over many goods in our modern economy, including addictive products, advertising, luxury brands, pornography, and the fossil-fuel industry. Second, business must support decent work, putting this goal above profits—Catholic social teaching recognizes the priority of labor over capital. Work is also seen as a vocation, as people reach their full potential through dignified, meaningful work. Profit cannot be the number one criterion, a core argument against the principle of maximizing shareholder value. Relatedly, Catholic social teaching holds that business should support a wider array of stakeholders than shareholders alone—including workers, suppliers, customers, society at large, and the environment. It suggests a model whereby business can both make a profit and enact a social benefit, in the form of hybrid enterprises. At the same time, business is called upon to promote and protect the natural world, both by refraining from harming the environment and by supporting sustainable development solutions.

Catholic social teaching also has much to say about the role of labor. It starts from the premise that a worker is not merely a factor of production but a human being who possesses dignity and agency. From this perspective, decent work is a path toward fulfillment and flourishing, core dimensions of integral human development. A key priority, then, must be the promotion of secure and dignified employment as a central goal of public policy. A just wage is central to the concept of dignified work. Indeed, a just wage is regarded as one of the main ways to achieve the universal destination of goods in practice. And, importantly, a just wage is not synonymous with a market wage. Along with just wages, Catholic social teaching recognizes an array of rights for the worker. These include pensions, unemployment benefits, affordable or even free health care, family support, adequate rest, vacation time, and safe work environments. Crucially, Catholic social teaching also respects the right to form unions and to bargain collectively.

Catholic social teaching also affirms the right of workers to share in both profits and the management of the firm. Worker cooperatives are an example of the former; the latter is evident in the model of codetermination found in Germany and other continental European countries. The German model of industrial relations is based on worker representation on boards, work councils that give employees a stake in decision making, and wage negotiation at the regional or sectoral level underpinned by strong unions.

Neoliberalism, in contrast, places a high premium on what it dubs "flexible labor markets." The logic is straightforward: if wages are the outcome of competitive labor markets, any interference in the labor market would hinder efficiency and only generate unemployment. Thus neoliberalism opposes what it sees as excessive interference in labor markets—including minimum wages, protections against workers getting fired, social benefits, and unions. Yet the reality is different. Because workers lack power and options, flexible labor markets tend to generate jobs that are low paying and insecure, most recently in the so-called gig economy. In this system, flexibility is synonymous with insecurity, inequity, disengagement, and a

decline in workplace trust. It is a poor substitute for institutions centered on collective bargaining, profit sharing, and codetermination—which can be simultaneously productive, competitive, democratic, and equitable.

We are now in a better position to map out the contours of a new social-democratic movement modeled on the principles of Catholic social teaching. But before we do, it would be useful to recall what led the postwar social-democratic model to unravel. The French economist and historian Thomas Piketty lists three things: the failure to develop a more just approach to property ownership, the difficulty of sustaining progressive taxes on income and wealth, and the failure to address inequality of education within neoliberal meritocracy.

With regard to the first two items on that list, Catholic social teaching offers a compelling path forward. For a start, it promotes a vigorous role for the state in guaranteeing the material bases of integral human development—including food, housing, health care, education, social protection, decent work, leisure and family time, and a safe environment. To fund this, governments have ample scope to raise taxes on high-income earners, holders of great wealth, and large corporations—a policy that would reduce inequality and lessen the likelihood of our government being controlled by wealthy interests. Given the centrality of decent work, it makes sense to promote full employment as a goal of policy, and maybe even to offer guaranteed public employment to all who wish it at the prevailing minimum wage. Here, a heroic push to decarbonize the economy and shift toward renewable energy—possibly under the auspices of a Green New Deal—will surely entail enormous employment opportunities. To address the last problem on Piketty's list, it will also be important to invest heavily in both education and vocational training. Indeed, governments might want to consider making some forms of tertiary education, vocational training, and early-childhood education cheap or even free.

It will also be important to focus on those institutions that go beyond education and redistribution—areas where Catholic social teaching offers much guidance. For a start, governments should ensure that unions are sufficiently strong to enable collective bargaining for just wages, benefits, and working conditions. They should promote democracy in the workplace, through worker representation on governing boards and in the internal management of enterprises. They should also promote worker cooperatives and other forms of profit sharing. At the same time, governments should implement corporate-governance reforms to make sure that businesses are responsible not only to shareholders but also to all other stakeholders.

An overriding priority must be to solve the climate crisis and other environmental concerns. This is a global challenge. It will require the decarbonization of our energy system by the middle of this century at the latest. Otherwise we will have little hope of preventing global temperatures from rising to more than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. That would undermine the very basis of human flourishing.

Respecting the global commons is a crucial component of an ethical approach to globalization. Yet such an approach goes well beyond climate change. An ethical globalization would be based once again on the twin principles of solidarity and subsidiarity—solidarity because responsibility to care for the other has a global dimension, and subsidiarity because the appropriate level of decision-making is sometimes multilateral. An ethical globalization would have numerous dimensions. It would implement environmental protections. It would fight pandemics, partly by ensuring the equitable distribution of vaccines. It would curb tax havens (as the G-20 is finally trying to do). It would design mechanisms to relieve excess sovereign debt. It would finance sustainable development in poor countries. And it would regulate trade and capital flows in accordance with the common good.

One final point: I mentioned that a failure of neoliberalism lies in its focus on GDP growth as the only standard of well-being. GDP certainly has value as a measurement and should not be simply discarded. But it needs to do a better job of accounting for distributional factors. One way to do this is to calculate the income growth of the rich, the middle class, and the poor—and to use these calculations as indices of economic well-being and guides to policy. More imaginatively, this could be complemented with broader measures of well-being, including happiness studies that ask people to evaluate their life satisfaction. Such studies show that, along with per-capita GDP and health, people care about social support and trust in institutions. In the context of the United States, while per-person income has tripled since 1960, self-reported levels of happiness have been flat. Social problems have multiplied even as purchasing power for a wide range of consumer goods has increased. A narrow focus on GDP misses all this, whereas a focus on happiness and well-being would better account for all the various factors that go into integral human development.

This policy roadmap is heavily influenced by the values of Catholic social teaching. Yet these prescriptions can be embraced by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. All that is required is an appreciation of the fact that the current system is failing and that new values are needed. I would argue that circumstances call for a fuller engagement with both the principles of Catholic social teaching and the policies inspired by it, which have been rigorously developed over the past century. Ordering the global economy along these lines would counter the excesses of neoliberalism and redress some of the social and ecological damage it has caused. It might also help us save our democracy.

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'Lived from the Heart'

An interview with Bernard McGinn

Bernard McGinn has been writing and teaching about the history and theology of Christian mysticism for more than half a century, establishing himself as the foremost scholar in the field. Now an emeritus professor of historical theology, he is the author of twenty-three books and editor of thirteen more. And that doesn't include his long-term editorship (1988–2015) of the now 134-volume library of the Classics of Western Spirituality published by Paulist Press, which is where I first came across his name. Since 1969, McGinn has been teaching at the University of Chicago Divinity School, together with his friend from seminary days in New York, David Tracy. He has lectured at some two hundred universities in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia, and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, among other scholarly organizations. McGinn's wife of fifty years, Pat, is his editor and close collaborator, as well as a practicing psychotherapist. This interview took place in their home in Hyde Park, Chicago, where his study sits on one side of the kitchen, and her counseling office sits on the other. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

KENNETH L. WOODWARD: I want to frame my first question with a story. Many years ago I received a long letter from Graham Greene in response to a book I wrote about saints that included a short paragraph on the popular Italian mystic Padre Pio. Shortly after converting to Catholicism, Greene wrote, he went to Italy to observe Padre Pio say Mass. Greene was deeply fascinated by Padre Pio's stigmata, but he declined an invitation to meet him. The reason: Padre Pio also was said to have had the gift of reading minds, and Greene, a married man, feared that Padre Pio would call him out because he was sleeping with another woman. So my question is: How important are these extraordinary phenomena among the mystics you've studied for understanding what mysticism is?

BERNARD MCGINN: They're secondary phenomena. All the extraordinary gifts people think of—the stigmata and levitation and being fed only on the Host, etc.—all of these things are special graces that are given to some mystics, but they're secondary phenomena.

All the great mystics testify to this. John of the Cross was very suspicious of all sorts of special experiences. Teresa of Ávila, who had many visions, nevertheless was always suspicious of visions. Julian of Norwich starts out her mystical career with wonderful visions of Christ on the cross. But then, when she writes about them in her "Shewings," she says the visions aren't really important. Many of my fellow Christians, she says, are far closer to God than I am, despite my visions. So the major mystics recognized that the special phenomena are sometimes given by God, but they're not the essence of mysticism.

KW: What is?

BM: The essence of mysticism is a deep inner sense of God's transforming presence in your life that increases your love of God and your love of neighbor. God's gratuitous gift, which Catholics used to call sanctifying grace, is the essence. The special graces, such as visions, ecstasies, and the like, are granted only to a few—not for their own sake, but for the sake of manifesting the powers of grace to the whole community of believers. So mysticism is the *fructifying* of the baptismal grace that every Christian receives.

KW: So all Christians are called to be mystics?

BM: Yes, all are called, but the response depends on us and even more on divine grace.

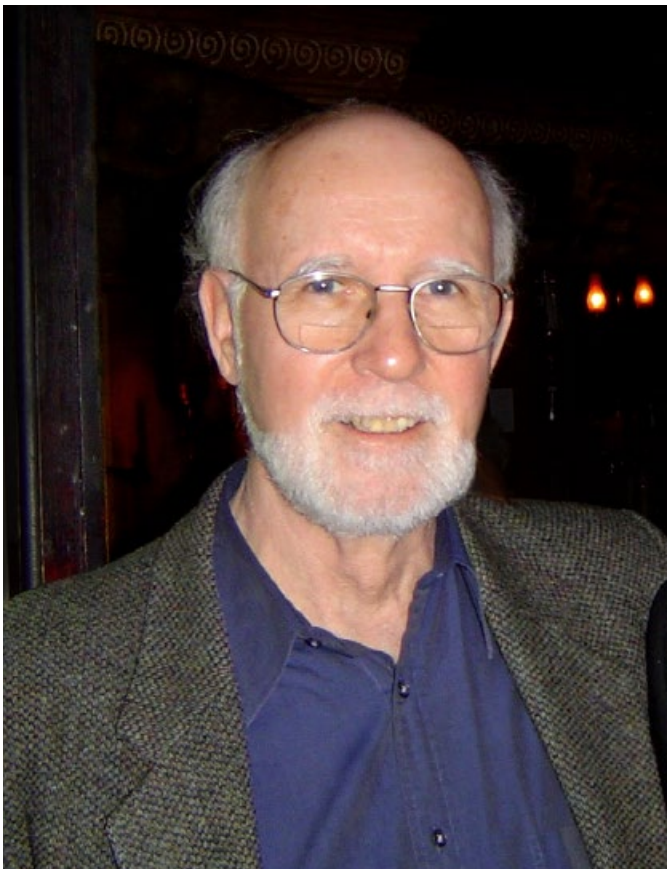
KW: But for some mystics, this deepening of the presence of God in their lives involved real suffering. After her death, we learned that Mother Teresa of Calcutta had what I guess you would call periods of spiritual dryness precisely because she could not feel the presence of God.

BM: Almost her whole life.

KW: This sounds like a cruel paradox. Those who fall in love with the living God experience God's absence rather than his presence. It seems like a divine rebuff.

BM: It's a trial, a terrible trial. And mystics, just because they have such a powerful desire for God and God's presence and frequently have enjoyed it, feel this, I think, much more intensely than the ordinary believer. So they're given this as the trial that they have to undergo: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

As for Mother Teresa, her experience ties into a very long tradition. The experience of desolation, dereliction, loss of God—that all goes deep into the mystical tradition, far back into the patristic period with people like Gregory the Great, and it's always based on Scripture. That's what Christ underwent on the Cross, that's what Job underwent in his trials in the Old Testament. Mother Teresa's form of this experience is her own; it's different from John of the Cross's, for example.



Bernard McGinn

Thérèse of Lisieux spent the last year and a half of her life feeling like there wasn't a heaven. She couldn't *feel* heaven. She continued to believe and to practice, but she goes through this dark period of dereliction. John of the Cross's Dark Night is another form of that. It's a crucial part of the whole mystical tradition: the experience that those who love God the most often have the feeling that they've lost him or he's lost them—he's abandoned them.

KW: Let's look at the other side of the mystical life. You've written a lovely short book on the *Summa Theologiae*, in which Thomas Aquinas names humankind's *summum bonum* the "Beatific Vision." Would you say, then, that the Christian mystic seeks, and may partially experience, a foretaste of the Beatific Vision in this life?

BM: I think that's the general teaching of the mystics—that is, that mystical consciousness and the interior gifts can reach the level of a foretaste of the Beatific Vision. However, they'll never attain the full Beatific Vision as long as they're in this life.

KW: The Beatific Vision suggests a static gazing at God. Is there anything we can learn from the mystics that would render this visual image more dynamic?

BM: Yes, I think there is a very important strain in the mystical tradition that indicates that there's nothing static about the Beatific Vision. The great Eastern mystic Gregory of Nyssa talked about it as *epektasis*. This is a Greek word meaning "stretching forth always," and he bases it on Philippians 3:13. Paul talks about always stretching forward toward God. Gregory understands that to mean that in this life and even in the heavenly life, you can never get enough of God. God is infinite and we remain finite. So there's always a constant movement into the divine infinity. Even in heaven, we may be perfectly satisfied, but we'll be eternally unsatisfied too. God is infinitely beyond you, no matter how far you go.

KW: Does the mystical life require preparation? The Apostle Paul, for example, had a mystical experience of Christ on the road to Damascus with apparently no advanced preparation.

BM: Yes, of course there are examples of Christian mystics like Paul who experienced a sudden moment of grace. But those I think are the exceptions. Typically, mystics are trained by asceticism, prayer, reading, spiritual direction, and so forth. Mysticism is a process. It requires preparation. It also involves a moment of some kind of direct consciousness of God. And then it involves the effects of all the elements of the process on that person's life. It's meant to be transformative—to make people different, both in themselves and in how they relate to other people. I prefer the word "consciousness" to "experience" because consciousness involves thinking and loving and decision-making, as well as experience and feeling.

KW: What is the relationship between will and intellect or, better perhaps, between love and knowledge in the mystical life?

BM: Both are necessary. The relationship is complicated and has differed over the centuries. The Christian definition of God in 1 John 4:16 is "God is love." And the person who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. So for Christians, the love of God is always more important. Why? Because we cannot understand God, really, but we can love God. But that doesn't mean you give up your mind by engaging in the mystical path, because the intellect and what we *can* understand of God is a part of that journey toward God, which ends in love and whatever kind of understanding God will give us. So there's an intimate relationship between intellect and will throughout the course of the Christian tradition. It's spelled out in different ways, so you can't give one answer and say, "This is what the mystics think it is."

KW: Theologians distinguish between the apophatic, which focuses on the unknowability of God, and the cataphatic, which stresses the analogies between God and what he has created. I think of what John of the Cross wrote—"God is no thing"—as an instance of the first, and the opening lines of Hopkins's poem "God's Grandeur" as a wonderful example of

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the second. But it seems to me that a comprehensive concept of Christian mysticism must embrace both.

BM: Oh, I agree fully. We need both the cataphatic, which is "yes saying," and the apophatic, which is "no saying." The cataphatic because we have to say *something* about God, however inadequate it is. So we talk about God from the things that we know that he created, because they're in some way a reflection of him. And then the apophatic is saying, "No, God is not really like created things." So both the apophatic and the cataphatic are necessary, and all mystics have been both apophatic and cataphatic. That's the first principle I teach on this issue.

KW: And the second?

BM: The second principle is that the apophatic is always higher because God ultimately is not like anything that we know. He's not a thing, and we only know things. But there's a third principle, what I call the hyperphatic—the "beyond-saying." God is beyond both affirmation and negation, insofar as we know these, because we do so from a limited, finite perspective. So according to Pseudo-Dionysius and many other mystics, you eventually reach the level of what I call the hyperphatic: God is beyond both affirmation and negation in a realm that we really cannot talk about. We talk around it, and silence is where we finally wind up, in adoring silence of the mystery.

KW: We talked earlier about Mother Teresa as a mystic. But what people remember most about her are her actions. It's hard to picture mystics as activists.

BM: Most of the great mystics are also *supremely* active when you think about it.

KW: Give me some examples.

BM: Augustine is one of the founding fathers of Christian mysticism. He is also an extremely busy bishop of Hippo. He is an important writer and doctrinal figure, combating heresy, running his diocese, doing all sorts of things. Or take someone like Teresa of Ávila. She founded seventeen different Carmelite houses in Spain against great opposition. The best mystics are also the best activists, in a certain sense. They use their mystical sense of God's presence as the wellspring for their tremendous apostolic activities. The mystic who *only* retreats to the mountaintop or the desert is actually the odd person out.

KW: You have argued that all baptized Christians are called to the mystical consciousness of God, but in your history of Christian mysticism it's mainly monastics you write about.

BM: It's true I write about many monastics, but that's not the whole story. Monasticism is a special movement, originating at the end of the third century, one that provided a kind of institutional matrix within which mysticism could flourish as part of a tradition that is handed down and carried forward to this day, particularly in periods of social and political turmoil. It was within the monasteries that most of the faithful practice, most of the learning, and most of what we could call the mystical tradition continued to exist down through the twelfth century.

KW: Isn't that because most Christians outside the monasteries couldn't read or write?

BM: Yes, 90, maybe 95 percent of educated Christians in the early Middle Ages were in the monasteries. So most of the major mystics from the fifth to twelfth centuries are monastics—have to be, almost by definition.

KW: What changed in the thirteenth century?

BM: Four things. First, mysticism gradually moves beyond the level of the educated clergy and monastics to involve the whole Christian community. It's more democratic. Second, it's more secular—that is, it's out in the world, no longer just in the monasteries. It's in the marketplaces. It's in the new mendicant orders, chiefly the Franciscan and Dominican friars, who are preaching to the people in the towns. It's also moving into the vernacular. Before 1200, almost everything is in Latin, or in Greek in the East. After that, mystical literature spreads into all the new vernaculars: French, German, Dutch, Italian, English.

KW: What about the women mystics?

BM: In the thirteenth century, for the first time educated women began to write mystical literature, though a couple of women like Hildegard of Bingen wrote earlier. From this time on, women, if they're going to make a theological contribution, make 98 percent of it through mystical literature. This begins the age of the great women mystics that continues into the seventeenth century, with various permutations. That's the fourth change.

KW: If I read the male mystics alongside the female mystics, what am I going to notice that's different about the women's texts?

BM: You're going to notice differences of nuance, but you're not going to notice a basic contrast. There's a continuing interaction between male and female mystics from this time onwards. As [Medieval historian] Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, there are some different attitudes between men and women, for instance, in their relation to the role of food and blood in the spiritual life. Many female mystics have distinctive traits here, but these are shared by some male mystics. So, it is difficult to say that anything is distinctive just of women or just of men. You

can say that certain women tend to use motifs, images, and some theological doctrines in different ways than men do, but there's no stark contrast to my mind. You can talk about women who are mystics, but I would not talk about "women's mysticism."

KW: Is the bridal imagery in the mystical love poetry of St. John of the Cross an example of male-female mystical interaction?

BM: Yes, and bridal mysticism is very strong in Bernard of Clairvaux, among others. Remember, the soul is feminine in these languages, so they can identify their inner self or soul as a bride in love with the celestial bridegroom. That's part of the tradition. In mysticism, I like to talk about gender malleability. Gender isn't as fixed among mystics as it is in society in general. In the mystical tradition, there's a gender fluidity, and men can identify as being women and women can identify as being men. Hadewijch of Antwerp, the great thirteenth-century Flemish mystic, talks about herself as a questing knight in pursuit of God, a male categorization.

KW: In the last volume of your history of Christian mysticism you describe the seventeenth century as a time of crisis. What was the crisis?

BM: It was the culmination, building from the thirteenth century on, of tensions between some teachers of mystical piety who pushed the envelope of orthodoxy and those in the Church responsible for maintaining it—bishops, popes, Church councils.

KW: Who were some of the envelope-pushers?

BM: Early on, some of them were Beguines, women who belonged to independent and generally small communities, who were trying to live an apostolic life. This was one of the important innovations of the New Mysticism of the period after 1200. Many of the famous women mystics of the thirteenth century—such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and Hadewijch of Antwerp—were Beguines. By 1312 we find the Council of Vienne condemning the "free spirit" mystics among the Beguines for making claims to absolute liberty. Did they actually do so? Perhaps, perhaps not. Marguerite Porete, a French Beguine, was condemned and burned at the stake in 1310 for disseminating her mystical book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Still, it was widely read in the later Middle Ages and has become popular again today. Meister Eckhart gets condemned after his death for certain articles that the pope says are close to the errors of the Beguines. And in the sixteenth century there were the condemnations of people in Spain called the *alumbrados*, the "enlightened ones," whom the Spanish Inquisition saw as dangerous people because they appealed to inner illumination so strongly that they seemed to deny obedience to external authority.

KW: I would think that, beginning with the Gnostics and moving forward through Christian history, there would always be a tension between private and interior illuminations and the Church as a public and external society.

BM: Yes, there are inherent tensions, but this doesn't always lead to open conflict. I've described Gnosticism as the first great Christian mystical heresy. Many of the things that the Gnostics were appealing to, such as special forms of interior experience, were probably not conformable to the external practices of the Church. What was even more dangerous was their esotericism—"I've got the true religion and the rest of the believers don't have it." This is one of the great dangers in Christianity. Because the truth is given to the whole baptized community, no special group has a unique access to it.

KW: Is that the problem you refer to as "the crisis of mysticism"?

BM: It's part of the deep background. What happens is that the tensions between mysticism and Church authority building through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries explode at the end of the seventeenth into a real down-and-out fight between Church leaders and certain mystics in Spain and Italy and especially France, who get condemned under the rubric of "Quietism." That was the name given to various movements that so stressed the need for passivity in one's spiritual life that all activity, whether of prayer or asceticism, seems undervalued or even rejected. Some of the Quietists may have gone this far, but certainly not all who were condemned.

KW: Then why the explosion?

BM: Because the situation had changed. I think that the Enlightenment papacy, plus a kind of rigidification of doctrine, no longer allowed enough room for the interior religion that we find in many mystical authors, including some of unimpeachable orthodoxy. So, the result is the condemnation of Quietism, and after that mysticism was pushed to the margins. Then, for two centuries in the Western Christian Catholic tradition, there's little serious mysticism until its revival in the late nineteenth century. That's the crisis. It's not a stop sign, but it is a caesura in the history of the classic mystical tradition.

KW: Well, you put a stop sign in the seventeenth century to your seven-volume history. Why there?

BM: Mainly because I just don't think there were very many important Catholic mystics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time when mysticism was marginalized by the institutional and intellectual life of the Church. Most of the mystics we hear of—like Anna Katherina Emmerich [1774–1824]—were simple women stage-managed by clerical Svengalis who wrote down their visionary experiences. But there were a lot of Protestant mystics during this time.

KW: Really! I always thought Protestants rejected mysticism as a Catholic thing.

BM: The reason that people think Protestantism had no mysticism is because there was a school in nineteenth-century German theology, represented especially by Albrecht Ritschl [1822–89], who said mysticism and Protestantism are like oil and water: you've got to keep them separate. Hence, they thought there were no Protestant mystics. But Protestant scholars today, especially the Lutherans, admit that mysticism is important to the Protestant tradition.

KW: Was, say, Martin Luther a mystic?

BM: Not in any traditional sense. But mystical traditions inform much of his theology. He loved Bernard of Clairvaux and Gregory the Great. He read and appreciated John Tauler, a follower of Meister Eckhart. He loved the mystical text he called the *Theologica Deutsch*. These formed his view of Jesus and his view of obedience to Jesus, and also his stress on the necessity for the Christian to undergo dereliction and affliction.

KW: His notion of "the hidden God" sounds like a mystical idea.

BM: Yes, the fact that God hides himself is a theme that runs through the great Christian mystics. That's part of the whole apophatic tradition. So, it is no surprise that in the Lutheran tradition there are many mystics—Johann Arndt [1555–1621], author of the spiritual classic *True Christianity*, is a good example. And in the radical Reformation of the sixteenth century there are numerous mystics. Anabapist Hans Denck and Lutheran Valentine Weigel are two of the influential figures. There are also strong mystical elements in the Protestant Pietist movements that emerged in Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Pietists stressed interior religion, the religion of the heart, as opposed to doctrines and external norms. Their descendants eventually formed communities in the American colonies. George Fox [founder of the Quakers] certainly was a mystic. So there's a strong mystical element in Protestantism, not least in the free-church tradition.

KW: What about the English Reformation?

BM: Anglicanism is filled with great mystics—*especially* mystical poets of the first rank like George Herbert and Thomas Traherne. Methodism also comes out of Protestant Pietism and is influenced in that way. John Wesley read classic mystics like Teresa of Ávila, and he also wrote books about the mystics in which he edited them to make them conform to his own theological ideas.

KW: You haven't mentioned anyone from the Reformed tradition.

Pierre van Schuppen, *Saint Teresa of Avila's Vision of the Dove*, ca. 1650

BM: Calvin was deeply critical of mysticism in a way that Luther was not. The fact that Calvin was so anti-mystical, I think, makes mysticism marginal in the Reformed tradition.

KW: If you discovered the fountain of youth, or at least a fountain of energy, how many more periods of mysticism would you delineate?

BM: Well, I am writing a book called *An Introduction to Some Modern Mystics*. I think there is an important modern mysticism that begins in late nineteenth century and grows exponentially in the twentieth century on into the twenty-first, both in terms of new mystical teachers of great importance—Thérèse of Lisieux is a good example of an early one in this period—and new forms of mystical life.

KW: What's modern in the mysticism of Thérèse of Lisieux?

BM: I think she has a unique new form of mysticism in her Little Way, a way that is open to all Christians, not just for vowed religious like herself. It's a recognition that it's not the great way—the highway of Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross whom she was reading. Instead, it's an acceptance of her own limitations with a stress on humility as the way

to come into close contact with God, to allow God to act in us because of our littleness. That's not a totally new message in Christianity. Christians have always said that humility is absolutely essential for mysticism, but Thérèse's sense of her littleness and her humility as the only way that she is going to be able to find God—I think that's definitely a new emphasis within the context of the modern world.

KW: What's your assessment of more recent figures, like Thomas Merton?

BM: Merton is such a wide-ranging figure that he is hard to summarize. But some of his books, like *New Seeds of Contemplation* and *Bread in the Wilderness* are deeply mystical books. He rediscovered much of the Christian contemplative tradition and put it in conversation with mystical traditions from other faiths. Simone Weil is another recent figure. I think she had a very deep mystical life. In her notebooks, she talks about a kind of experience that she had of the presence of Christ. As I recall, she says: "He came to see me in my garret room and we talked," and you can tell that this is some kind of direct experience of Christ. In a similar way she said she had experienced God as she was praying the Our Father with real *attention*—a key word in her thought.

KW: It seems to me that the whole Hasidic tradition, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov in the late eighteenth century, is mystical.

BM: Agreed.

KW: Here's a quote from one of his modern disciples, Abraham Joshua Heschel: "In every man's life, there are moments when there is a lifting of the veil at the horizon of the known, opening a sight of the eternal. We do not leave the shore of the known in search of adventure or suspense, or because of the failure of reason to answer our questions. We sail because our mind is like a fantastic seashell. And when applying our ear to its lips, we hear a perpetual murmur from the waves beyond the shore." Was Heschel a modern mystic?

BM: From what I've read of him he is one of the great modern mystics.

KW: You've studied mysticism in Judaism and Islam. What do Christian mystics have in common with mystics in those traditions?

BM: We believe in the one God, although we name God in different ways. More particularly, I've written some essays on comparative mysticism. I usually work with Christianity and Judaism, to a lesser extent with Islam. What I look for are shared dynamic structures. By that I mean there are certain aspects of Judaism and Christianity, and to a lesser degree Islam, that these three traditions share as revealed, monotheistic religions. Let me give you an example. For Christians, God is a dynamic trinity of three persons, although we believe in one God. In Kabbalistic Judaism, there is of course one God, but there are ten divine energies, the Sephirot, that describe how God relates both within the divine realm and to creation. The comparison between what Kabbalists say about the action of the Sephirot and what Christians say about the Trinity offers some fascinating parallels. And in the same way, some Sufi mystics talk about the ninety-nine names of God, which are manifestations of divine energy, and, again, which are in some ways analogous to what Jews and Christians say about God. They're not the same—but they're parallel to what the Jews say about the Sephirotic system and what Christians say about the Trinity.

KW: Some poetry is described as mystical. Does that stretch your understanding of mysticism too far?

BM: Not at all. Mysticism and poetry are very closely allied. Both stress the limits of language and the depth of meaning of texts. Both try to say things that cannot quite be said. Many prose mystical treatises are really quite poetic—suggestive, rather than didactic in character. There's a long history of mystical poetry. And, of course, the Sufi tradition is primarily poetry rather than prose.

KW: How about poets who are not known as mystics? T. S. Eliot, for example.

BM: *The Four Quartets* is very much a mystical poem. It's both apophatic and cataphatic. I actually just published an article on apophatic theology among some modern poets, using Paul Celan, Rainer Maria Rilke, and R. S. Thomas. Thomas is a Welsh Anglican priest, a wonderful poet, widely known in the U.K., but not so much in the U.S.

KW: Karl Rahner famously remarked that Christians in the future will either be mystics or cease to be anything at all. Do you agree?

BM: I think he was absolutely correct. And I think this is now the general sense of those who study mysticism. Unless the Christian religion is lived from the heart, from the experience of God in some way, it will be empty and will not be attractive. If it's a purely institutional form of life, or even if it's an interesting intellectual exercise, it doesn't have the vitality that comes from the interior experience of the presence of God. And that, as I have been saying in all my work, is the mystical element in religion.

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GRIFFIN OLEYNICK

Mirror, Mirror

A major retrospective devoted to the art of Jasper Johns affords new visions of the artist, and ourselves.

If you know just one work by Jasper Johns—arguably the greatest, most influential American artist still alive today—it's almost certainly his iconic painting *Flag*, from 1954. At first glance, there's nothing particularly special or interesting about it, except perhaps that it excludes the stars for Alaska and Hawaii, which hadn't yet achieved statehood. The work's dimensions are modest (slightly larger than three by five feet), and its materials are crude (waxy encaustic, oil paint, newspaper collage, and fabric mounted on three separate plywood panels). Apart from smudges, drips, and the odd newspaper line or dated advertisement, closer inspection doesn't reveal much more. It's pretty much like every other American flag you've ever seen.

But context, as they say, is everything, and *Flag* bears an extensive mythology. It was in a dream, the twenty-four-year-old Johns once claimed, that his subconscious had conceived the work; he merely went out, scraped together materials, and assembled it the next day. Whatever its origins, *Flag* took the New York art world by storm. Critics interpreted Johns's cool, deadpan image as a provocation and a revelation. *Flag* wasn't just a wry rebuke of abstract expressionism, with its gestural, improvised brush strokes and its cult of self-assertion. By blurring the line between sign and signified, by collapsing symbol and symbolized, the piece had called into question the representational nature of art itself.

And the rest, as they also say, is history. Johns became an instant celebrity, running in the same circles as avant-garde composer John Cage, choreographer Merce Cunningham, and painter Robert Rauschenberg, Johns's mentor and one-time lover. Johns's place in the history of modern American art has been secure ever since. Movements like Pop Art, Conceptualism, and Neo-Dada would be unthinkable without his staid sculptures of beer cans and flashlights, or his serial paintings of flags, numbers, letters, maps, and targets, those "things the mind already knows." But as two new shows at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum in New York powerfully demonstrate, it would be a mistake to limit Johns to his past achievements. He's been evolving for seven decades, and he continues to create original, thought-provoking art even today, at the age of ninety-one.

Planned to coincide with the artist's ninetieth birthday and delayed a year due to the pandemic, *Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror* is unique among retrospectives of individual artists. For starters, its scale is unprecedented: nearly five hundred works spread across two cities in two museums, both of which were early champions of Johns and played key roles in his development. There's also the innovative "mirror" structure itself, which curators Carlos Basualdo and Scott Rothkopf have adapted from the formal doubling Johns frequently employs. The show is billed as a unified whole consisting of two autonomous halves: each gallery in New York corresponds to one in Philadelphia. But this apparent harmony masks deeper disagreements, even rivalries between the two curators. In Philadelphia, Basualdo mounts a more poetic, intuitive show, while Rothkopf's approach in New York is linear and encyclopedic.

At first, I had trouble getting into it. I'm from Philadelphia but live in New York, so I decided to start at the Whitney. For Johns novices like me, that show can be a lot to take in. It begins with a wall practically plastered in prints, stamped with hermetic iconography drawn from different moments of Johns's career. A parade of flags, numbers, and targets yields to coffee cans, upside-down chairs, and pieces of bread; after some stick figures and skulls, the whole thing concludes in a swirl of starry constellations and galaxies. I found it unsettling, even frustrating, like I was standing by the roadside in a foreign country, trying to get directions in a language I couldn't understand. I jotted down a few petulant notes: "Targets—stupid."

That all changed when I entered the gallery dedicated to Johns's maps, all variations on the standard U.S. text-

Opposite:
Jasper Johns, *Fall*, 1986


CHUTE DE GLACE

Art gives us a way of disrupting this habitual process: a map is no longer a map, but a portal into something deeper, more inchoate, and, Johns might argue, more real.

book map, complete with stenciled state abbreviations. (The corresponding gallery in Philadelphia is devoted to numbers.) Seated on a bench at the center, I let my eye travel back and forth across the different canvases, many of them massive. *Map* (1961) is a virtuosic explosion of primary colors, with painted blobs of red, yellow, and blue bursting like bombs; *Map* (1962–1963), laden with blacks, grays, and whites, makes the same motif feel much heavier, while *Two Maps* (1965), with its soothing creams, light blues, and tans, does the opposite. As I stopped trying to grasp what Johns's maps were "about," my mind relaxed, and I simply sensed the forms and colors around me.

Suddenly Johns's insight clicked. As it perceives the world visually, the human mind searches, often desperately, for confirmation of what it already knows, rendering the world a mere mirror of itself. Art, particularly visual art, gives us a way of disrupting this habitual process: a map is no longer a map (a flag is no longer a flag, numbers no longer numbers, and so on), but a portal into something deeper, more inchoate, and, Johns might argue, more real.

It's an insight that Johns has spent the rest of his career wrestling and experimenting with, even as his art shifted away from his early motifs and into more explicitly autobiographical territory, where relationships, places, and the complex memories associated with them become more prominent. Before dropping out of college and moving to New York, Johns grew up in South Carolina. After abruptly falling out with Rauschenberg, Johns returned for a time, purchasing a beach house at Edisto Island, near Charleston, to use as a studio and retreat. The breakup had devastated Johns, and evidence of his anger and sense of betrayal, contained in icy works like *Liar*, *Water Freezes*, and *Fool's House*—all in gray—is on view in both museums.

But Edisto Island clearly provided a respite, as vividly captured in a series of black-and-white photos of Johns by Ugo Molas. The Italian photographer frames Johns's tall, slender figure, often awash in sunlight and casting a long shadow, against foaming surf and shifting sands, hinting at the fleetingness of suffering. Peace is present too in Johns's own large-scale allegory of painting, *Studio* (1964), where full-size tracings of a canted screen door and spiky palm fronds stand out against a soft grisaille background. Dangling from an unwound coat hanger is a string of empty beer cans—their insides lathered with green, blue, orange, purple, and red paint—and a single silver brush. It's one of Johns's most tactile works, and also one of his most entrancing: you can practically taste the beer, smell the paint, and feel the sea breeze.

Johns also looked abroad, especially to Japan, for new sources of inspiration. He first traveled there during his years in the army, spending six months in Sendai in the early 1950s, then again in the mid '60s, after his show at the 1958 Venice Biennale won him an invitation to Tokyo from prominent Japanese gallerist Kusuo Shimizu and critic Yoshiaki Tōno. (In the show's catalog, Basualdo suggestively refers to these trips as "pilgrimages.")

Among the most striking results is Johns's collaborative *Usuyuki* series, begun in 1977 with master printmaker Hiroshi Kawanishi and the Simca Print Artists in New York. The title, taken from the name of a princess in an eighteenth century Kabuki play, literally means "light snow." And that's just what these variegated paintings and prints recall. In some, pinkish, crystalline cross-hatch patterns dance across the canvases; in others, the light blue pattern gradually fades and disappears, only to reappear in differently colored panels nearby. There's beauty, Johns suggests, even (and perhaps especially) in evanescence.

Since the 1990s, Johns has lived alone on a sprawling rural estate in Sharon, Connecticut. He rarely grants interviews (though an authorized biography is now in preparation), and remains tight-lipped about his work, which, even as it adds new elements, continues to revisit and rework earlier patterns and motifs. Much of what he's produced since the 1980s feels dreamlike and surreal: eyes gaze across spare spaces containing cryptic objects like faucets, watches, and stick figures. Some of it is nightmarish, presenting severed arms mottled by disease (Johns's response to the AIDS crisis) and anxious black palm prints. Mostly, though, Johns's recent work evinces a growing familiarity and comfort with death: the New York show features funeral urns, burial shrouds, and shadowy figures standing beside ladders, while in Philadelphia we see clownish skeletons wearing top hats, skipping jump rope, and leaning on canes.

Johns's most recent works also seem to contain an understated religiosity. *Catenary (I Call to the Grave)* (1998) is a case in point. Here Johns suspends a white string between the lower left and upper right corners of the frame—an allusion to the thread of human life woven (and eventually cut) by the three fates in Greek mythology. The title, running in capital letters across the bottom, recalls a line from the biblical Book of Job, the speaker expressing a grief that has become unbearable. Next to it Johns stencils his name and the date, mimicking a gravestone, and as if declaring that the words are also his own.

Jasper Johns, *Usuyuki*, 1982

The whole thing is pretty dark, but like all of Johns's art, it depends on how you look at it. The textual allusions and the colors—at the right of the canvas there's a harlequin pattern that looks like a dusty church window lit by cloudy light—are indeed somber. But the parabola traced by the string, caused by gravity's downward force, appears to bend upward gracefully as it lightly traverses the canvas, eventually exceeding its borders. The tension in the string complicates the portrait of death, adding a note of vital dynamism, even hope.

Slice, made at the height of the pandemic lockdowns in 2020, takes this idea one step further. The work's origins are serendipitous: Johns was waiting for an appointment at the orthopedist's office when he noticed a hand-drawn cross-section of a human knee, made by a high-school student, Jéan Marc Togodgue. Two years earlier, he'd received another illustration in the mail, this time from an astrophysicist, Margaret Geller, who'd long admired his work. She'd sent him a printout of her team's "Slice of the Universe," a map of nearby galaxies. Johns noticed a cluster of galaxies at the center seemingly arranged in the shape of a stick figure—a figure he'd been regularly including in his own work—and in 2020 wrote Geller to tell her that he was working on a painting based on the map.

The result is profound. *Slice* reproduces Geller's radial matrix of red, blue, and green dots set against a black field. But here Johns fills it with a knot pattern taken from drawings by Leonardo da Vinci (whose *Vitruvian Man,* which maps the harmonious proportions of the human body, is another of *Slice*'s allusions). To the right of Geller's map we find a reproduction of Togodgue's illustration of the knee. Johns's juxtaposition of the small and mundane with the cosmic and infinite recalls the nineteenth century trope of the "sublime" when Romantic artists and poets waxed about the vast, restorative power of nature, whose grandeur dwarfed human beings. It also recalls, at least for me, another biblical text, Psalm 8: "When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, / the moon and stars that you set in place / What is man that you are mindful of him? … Yet you have made him little less than a god…."

Did Johns intend this? Probably not. But that's the value and strength of his art. Its "mirror" doesn't just give you a glimpse into Johns's mind. It also helps you see into your own.

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK *is an assistant editor at* Commonweal.

EMMA MCDONALD

The Empowerment Trap

How LuLaRoe sells women a false vision

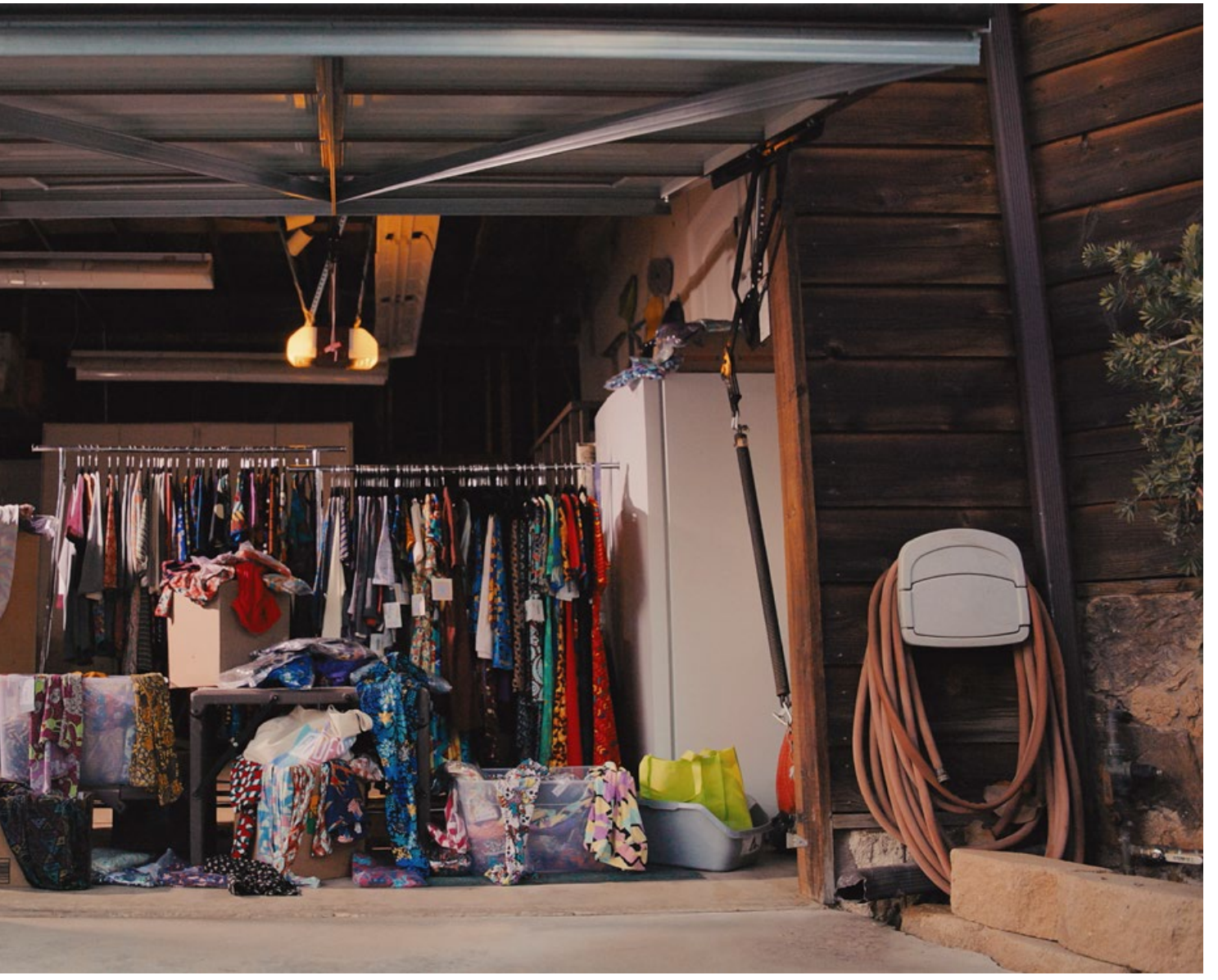
"Creating freedom through fashion" are the words splashed across the homepage of LuLaRoe, the multilevel marketing (MLM) and apparel company that peddles more than just colorfully patterned leggings—it also sells a lifestyle. At least, that's how it recruited more than 80,000 "consultants," almost all of them women, who paid thousands of dollars to become part of the company, lured by the opportunity to work from home, support their families, and still have quality time with their kids. "Join the movement," the company said. "Be your own boss." But as the documentary *LuLaRich* makes clear, the come-on more often landed women in debt. In 2016, the company generated more than $2 billion in sales; while the top 0.01 percent of its workers made over $150,000 in bonuses, more than two thirds made nothing.

But *LuLaRich*, available for streaming on Amazon, doesn't just retrace familiar dangers about MLMs, a "business model" that has for decades been subject to scrutiny. It also examines what motivates women to participate in businesses that consistently fail to deliver on their promises. The company succeeded by exploiting women's precarious economic circumstances and leveraging cultural expectations around mothering. And though currently plagued by lawsuits contending it ran a pyramid scheme, LuLaRoe is still operating today.

Much of what LuLaRoe sold to women isn't new. Earlier iterations of MLMs—Tupperware, Amway—shaped their brand to attract homemakers as sellers ("consultants") by promoting the role as flexible and part-time. But LuLaRoe and other new MLMs have updated this message with tropes of the "girl boss," casting employment opportunities as "part-time work for full-time pay" that empower women to become entrepreneurs while still fulfilling traditional domestic responsibilities. Mark Stidham and DeAnne Brady, the Latter-day Saint couple behind LuLaRoe, positioned it as a "family organization," different from corporate organizations in its embrace of family values, and distinct from unpaid domestic labor in that it could be an income source. As Sophie Gilbert observed in the *Atlantic* last September, LuLaRoe exploited a "structural societal failure" by claiming to have the solution for mothers struggling with work-life balance. LuLaRoe encourages women to assume responsibility for achieving this balance by appealing to ubiquitous American cultural ideals of self-reliance and rugged individualism. It does nothing to acknowledge the structural societal issues that put women in such a position in the first place.

LuLaRoe's message clearly resonated: the consultants featured in *LuLaRich* explain how their own struggles balancing parenthood and professional careers led them to the company. One, Courtney Harwood, had been working in "corporate America" but worried that she was missing milestones as her kids grew up. She could not afford not to work, so she joined LuLaRoe hoping that "I could make what I was making—if not more—working less and spending more time with them." Other consultants, like Ashleigh Lautaha, were stay-at-home mothers who wanted to find paid work but either could not afford or did not want to give up their childcare responsibilities. Lautaha explains that it "really resonated" with her that LuLaRoe would allow her to continue to "be a mom" and change the financial future for her family. Another, Roberta Blevins, hoped to achieve "the dream" to "be at home with my kids and make money."

While the structure of MLMs may suggest the possibility of balancing stay-at-home parenthood with professional life, they are not profitable for most women who join. LuLaRoe claimed that selling inventory at "pop-up" events hosted in women's own homes would earn them full-time income. Lautaha



LuLaRoe claimed that selling inventory at "pop-up" events hosted in women's own homes would earn them full-time income.

COURTESY OF AMAZON STUDIOS

recalls that women were attracted to LuLaRoe because of the "energy" and social environment at pop-ups—seeing women similar to themselves making money from home by leveraging their personal networks. For Lautaha, pop-ups were more important for networking than they were for sales; she could recruit a new retailer, which earned her more money in bonus checks than she could make selling the products themselves. Though pop-ups seemed to be selling leggings, they were actually selling the MLM myth of social and financial empowerment.

MLMs are built on exploitation; because money is made by recruiting people rather than selling products, it is inevitable that the consultants on the lowest tier of the pyramid will be taken advantage of. To hide the fact that the game is rigged, MLMs frame failure and success as a matter of individual effort. They appeal to a familiar and compelling adage of the American Dream—anything is possible if you are willing to work hard enough. And if you don't work hard enough.... "The business responds to the amount of time, energy, and effort, and discipline you put into it," as Stidham says. Any other reasons given for not being able to "turn that box of clothing into a million dollars" is just an "excuse." Lautaha describes the company's response to retailers who complained about their lack of profit: "It works if you work it.... I guess you weren't working hard enough." Framing LuLaRoe as a "pure meritocracy" helped shield the company from scrutiny because retailers were blamed for failing to make money. In reality, a pyramid scheme will always leave new recruits with no profit, no matter how hard they work.

Suburban women are an untapped source of political power: If women can leverage their personal networks to sell billions of dollars' worth of leggings, what kind of transformation is possible if that political power were redirected toward the flourishing of all?

Harnessing this narrative of individual responsibility was in fact how LuLaRoe went about recruiting women. The company encouraged them to strive to "have it all" personally and professionally: it would only take a career change. But as Anne-Marie Slaughter famously wrote in the *Atlantic* nearly a decade ago, individual efforts can only get women so far. The rhythms and expectations of professional life that conflict with family responsibilities make it almost impossible for women to "have it all." Without structural transformations that remove the expectation of a traditional family structure in which one parent stays home, and without cultural change that mitigates the gender biases that leave women performing most domestic labor, women in professional roles will struggle to fulfill family and professional responsibilities.

Though Slaughter emphasized structural constraints and LuLaRoe pushes individual responsibility, both nevertheless frame the central challenge for women within the mainstream, middle-class feminist ideal of "balance," which scholar Catherine Rottenberg defines as "the promise of successfully negotiating the two pulls on contemporary liberated middle-class womanhood"—namely, career advancement and motherhood. LuLaRoe's appeal to this white, middle-class feminist ideal helps explain why its retailers seem to be mostly white and middle class. While LuLaRoe retailer demographics are not available, consultants featured in *LuLaRich* are almost all white, and the Direct Selling Association reports that 87 percent of people involved in direct sales are white. In terms of class, an AARP study found that "current and former MLM participants tended to be well-educated, married, working as a paid employee, and living in a house owned by a person in their household."

Certainly MLMs can't address structural biases in our economy, but LuLaRoe was able to convince recruits that the company had a social mission. An ad for the company depicts retailers chorusing, "We are mothers, building a community, making a difference, through social retail. We are LuLaRoe." While LuLaRoe's own practices undermine the commitment it claims in the ad, it is clear why many women have found this vision attractive. Retailers featured in *LuLaRich* describe how the community of sellers stood out from other professional experiences because it was supportive, like a "family" or "sisterhood." Blevins says that LuLaRoe "felt different" because it wasn't competitive; each seller received different inventory, which let them share customers who wanted different sizes and patterns. LuLaRoe consultants (often in good faith) drew on trust built in their networks to convince other women to join the company, not realizing that MLMs distort friendships and other relationships for exploitative ends. The same AARP study found almost 70 percent of MLM participants were recruited by someone they knew personally, including friends, family members, coworkers, neighbors, and classmates.

For some who thought they could realize their commitment to the common good by working for LuLaRoe, the opportunity to help others get out of it is now fulfilling that ideal. Some of the retailers who came to realize the exploitative nature of the company have banded together to help extricate women who were once in the same position they were. As journalist Jill Filipovic observes in *LuLaRich*, LuLaRoe's successful recruitment actually demonstrates that suburban women are an untapped source of political power: If women can leverage their personal networks to sell billions of dollars' worth of leggings, what kind of transformation is possible if that political power were redirected toward the flourishing of all? The 2020 presidential election offered a glimpse of this potential: for instance, suburban women in Ohio disillusioned by Donald Trump's presidency drew on their experiences as mothers to persuade other moms to vote for Joe Biden.

While confirming the insidious nature of multilevel marketing, *LuLaRich* also shows us that women's motivations to participate in MLMs hold promise for redirection toward the common good—"the good of 'all of us,'" as Pope Benedict XVI said in *Caritas in veritate*, "made up of individuals, families, and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it." *LuLaRich* portrays women exploiting other women, motivated by myths about MLMs and individual responsibility. But the women who suffered by working for LuLaRoe highlight the need for different goals—solidarity, systemic change—and in so doing may hint at a society where everyone can flourish.

EMMA MCDONALD *is a doctoral candidate in Theological Ethics at Boston College.*

CAVE PAINTING

Michael Cadnum

The story is not long.
The wounded animal turns
stumbling over the spears already

thrust into the red future, flint points
puncturing the dawn to come
and the end is one heartbeat, two,

no more. The land is wide and made of stone.
The horizon is unseen, but also rock. The excited,
fearful cheers, too, are grain
beside grain of limestone.
The almost sundered bison's

forelegs are giving in with the freshly
stubborn not-yet. Not yet.
It will not be long.
But the telling.
The telling is all

the rest of the evening we know
without seeing, bay trees and streams
of jasper and jade rolled down from
the silent summit into vowels.
Ocher and charcoal
marshal the hungry, and command them

endlessly into a team, the account
never ceasing as breath never
ceases but continues
the loop in and out as long

as there is awakening,
the hunters poised
beside the handprint,
the celebrant signature blood-
telling wound that always
only begins.

MICHAEL CADNUM *has published nearly forty books. His new collection of poems,* The Promised Rain, *is in private circulation. He lives in Albany, California.*

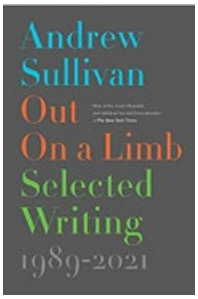
There Will Be Blogs

MORTEN HØI JENSEN

"I have never tried to be popular," declares Andrew Sullivan in the introduction to his career-spanning new collection, *Out on a Limb: Selected Writing, 1989–2021*. But Sullivan is a popular writer. In fact, by any reasonable standard, he is and for many years has been a *very* popular writer. He gained instant notoriety when he—an out, gay conservative—was named editor of the *New Republic* in 1991 at age twenty-eight. His blog, *The Dish*, was a powerhouse of political commentary for the first decade and a half of the new millenium; among his dedicated readers was President Obama, who was given a special login to circumnavigate the paywall. And since being forced out of *New York Magazine* last summer and launching his Substack newsletter, Sullivan has quadrupled his salary and gained somewhere in the vicinity of one hundred thousand subscribers. He is a familiar face on CNN, MSNBC, and *Real Time with Bill Maher*.

A little later in the introduction, Sullivan strikes a slightly different note when he claims that some of the writing collected in this book actually "helped change America." Among the achievements for which he takes some credit: the popularization of gay marriage; the election of Barack Obama; the digital-journalism revolution; the exposure of the use of torture by the United States in the War on Terror; and an "early grasp" of the threat Donald Trump posed to American democracy.

It would have been nearer to the mark—and a good deal seemlier—for Sullivan to simply acknowledge that, on several key issues, he happened to find himself on the right side of history (to use the Obama-era cliché). I'm fairly sure, for instance, that Obama would have still been elected president had Sullivan not written his October 2007 cover story for the *Atlantic*. Neither Sullivan's opposition to "enhanced interrogation" techniques nor his early grasp of the threat posed by Donald Trump qualify as prescient or novel or even brave positions, least of all to the readership of his own blog or *New York Magazine*.



OUT ON A LIMB
Selected Writing, 1989-2021

ANDREW SULLIVAN
Simon & Schuster
$35 | 576 pp.

The exception, of course, is on the subject of gay rights and gay marriage. Here, though he still has legions of detractors—take a peek, if you have the stomach for it, at Dale Peck's scrupulously unhinged review in the *Baffler*—Sullivan was a courageous and forceful voice at a time when, for example, President Reagan's communications director called AIDS "nature's revenge on gay men"; when Republican senators routinely and publicly referred to homosexuals as moral degenerates; when HIV-positive foreigners were banned from traveling to the United States; and so on. For someone of my generation, born too late to remember the worst of the AIDS epidemic, raised in a milieu where being gay seemed about as exotic as being left-handed, it takes some effort to imagine what life was like for gay men in the 1980s and early 1990s, especially those raised in conservative religious communities. To this reader—a prosaically heterosexual and tacitly left-wing atheist—Sullivan's early writings on these issues movingly bridge that imaginative gap. His voice is anguished, alarmed, and searching. Here is a writer trying to make sense of the morass of his own conflicting feelings about the politics of a global pandemic, the clash between his faith and his sexuality, and the sudden, unwelcome presence of potentially imminent death. In "Gay Life, Gay Death: The Siege of a Subculture," he writes:

> Largely invisible and almost incomprehensible to outsiders, gay men and their families now live lives alien to modernity's rhythms. Death is ubiquitous. Friends and lovers die with random, rapid consistency. Time horizons shorten. Death is mentionable again. Indeed, it is unavoidable. Gay men now live essentially as medieval among moderns: habituated in a world of health, besieged by death in the midst of oblivious life.

What's more, for all the racial controversies to which Sullivan seems shackled—largely due to the self-imposed albatross that was publishing the 1994 *New Republic* cover story by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein adapted

Andrew Sullivan

COURTESY OF ANDREW SULLIVAN

from *The Bell Curve*, their book about race and I.Q.—he is admirably sensitive to the specific and widely neglected suffering of Black and Hispanic gays during the AIDS crisis—a neglect often visited on these populations by the overwhelmingly white AIDS activist groups, whose hypocrisy Sullivan rightly deplores: quick to condemn homphobia in the broader culture, they were circumspectly silent on homophobia within minority communities.

The fact that Sullivan, a conservative and a Roman Catholic, has often fallen afoul of his fellow gay-rights activists only serves to make these early writings more interesting, at least from a human standpoint. (Contradictions are always more interesting than resolutions.) So while I can't say I found him particularly convincing, I was nevertheless moved by Sullivan's depiction of being a Catholic who discovered he was gay—and by the difficult negotiation this discovery necessitated. In "Alone Again, Naturally," easily one of his finest essays, Sullivan writes:

> Because it was something I was deeply ashamed of, I felt obliged to confront it; but because it was also something inextricable—even then—from the core of my existence, it felt natural to enlist God's help rather than his judgment in grappling with it. There was, of course, considerable tension in this balance of alliance and rejection; but there was also something quite natural about it, an accurate reflection of anyone's compromised relationship with what he or she hazards to be the divine.

Out on a Limb, with its 576 pages, bristles with plenty of other passions and considerations: a reflection on the term "bear" in gay culture; an impassioned defense of the psychedelic drug LSD; a thoughtfully provocative essay questioning our assumptions about hate; a mawkish, dew-eyed elegy for Princess Diana; an account of Sullivan's Bush-era defection from the Right. There is plenty to quarrel with, as you would expect, but there is also a good deal to appreciate. Most of that, however, is confined to the first fourth of this book, or up until about the late 1990s—which is telling, as it happens, for being around the time a new form of writing begins to emerge, a garrulously democratic and insistently populist form. I mean, of course, the weblog.

In a 2008 essay for the *Atlantic* extolling the virtues of blogging, Sullivan defines the form as "the spontaneous expression of instant thought," which may well be a useful definition, except that what Sullivan takes to be the form's supposed virtues are really its worst flaws: the "colloquial, unfinished tone"; the urge "not to think too hard before writing"; the intoxicating freedom that is "like taking a narcotic." This sounds less like a definition of a style of writing than a fairly accurate summation of Donald Trump's confiscated Twitter account. Sullivan admits as much: the key to understanding blogs, Matt Drudge once explained to him, is to realize that it's a broadcast, not a publication—a remark Sullivan, damningly, offers without further comment.

He does admit to some of the form's limitations, of course. He knows that blogging cannot replace or rival the depth of understanding the time writing, and reading, an essay affords. He even suggests that the rise and spread of blogging will make us appreciate traditional print media more, rather as a family might tearfully gather around old photos of a terminally ill grandparent. Weirdly, he goes on to enlist Montaigne as some sort of ancestral blogger. "Montaigne," Sullivan writes, "also peppered his essays with myriads of what bloggers would call external links." I confess I'm not

Why preserve for posterity, or at all, what is by Sullivan's own definition scarcely meant to endure beyond the moment?

really sure what he means. Montaigne, needless to say, wasn't writing with an internet connection that gave him instant access to his readers, nor did he rely on those readers to supply him with hyperlinks or dole out swift and intemperate correctives. No, the great Frenchman wrote in willed self-isolation, sequestered from the cacophony of the modern world in his inherited citadel, and didn't publish the first edition of his *Essais* until 1680, almost a decade after his retirement from public life.

Just as telling as the urge to claim Montaigne as a forerunner is the decision to ensconce so much "instant thought" in the most ponderous of print mediums: the deckle-edged hardcover book. Of the forty writings collected here, fourteen were written either for *The Dish* or *The Weekly Dish*; a somewhat misleading representation, because for the majority of his career Sullivan has been less of an essayist or journalist than an intrepid pioneer of blog writing. (Even his columns for *New York Magazine* in recent years were often closer to collections of blog posts than a traditional opinion set piece.) It raises the question: Why preserve for posterity, or at all, what is by Sullivan's own definition scarcely meant to endure beyond the moment? If blogging is closer to broadcasting than publishing, why saddle your listeners with transcripts of instant thought?

It is a problem of style as much as form. Whereas someone like Christopher Hitchens, Sullivan's friend and occasional interlocutor, seemed to write as much for the music of language as for the rhetoric of argument, Sullivan seems progressively unconcerned with the literary act itself. Now, this may not be the most methodologically rigorous way of measuring a writer's prose, but I tend to underline any sentence or phrase that stands out to me as I read, whatever the context. Any collection of Hitchens's will have about half a dozen per page; halfway through *Out on a Limb*, I didn't even notice that I'd left my pen in the other room.

Style, as we know, is not a glaze applied after the fact; it is a substance baked into the worldview that informs the writing. And my sense of Sullivan as a writer, especially as his presence has shifted from traditional print to fiber-optic cables, is that his writing has become increasingly obscured behind an immense digital scaffolding of tweets, blogs, newsletters, videos, diaries—anything, it often seems, but the central medium itself: prose.

The effect of all this on Sullivan's style is everywhere apparent. The prose bespeaks the form in which it is written: because blogs are meant to be self-forgetful, even self-erasing, the writing proper assumes all the permanence of an Etch A Sketch. His earlier gift for the graceful aphoristic turn (of a friend dying of AIDS in a hospital, Sullivan remarks: "He was an instrument of the instruments keeping him alive") has given way instead to the usual procession of dull conservative bromides ("Left Twitter," "radical feminists," "liberal media," and so on). Crudely put: blogging writes white.

Anyway, what good has all this instant thought done us? Surveying the blighted everyman's-land of the culture wars, what do we see? People sitting around waiting for something to be offended by, and the people offended by the people sitting around waiting for something to be offended by. Reader, how can you tell them apart? It is clear that problems abound on university campuses across the country, in the beleaguered institutions of traditional print media, and among entire populations of this divided country. But surely these are issues that call for nuanced and patient thought, not Twitter threads or thought-stifling generalizations.

All of which I'm sure Sullivan, who likes words like "sanity" and "reason," would hasten to agree with. We must all recognize our tribal thinking, he high-mindedly counsels his readers. "So much of our debates are now an easy either-or rather than a complicated both-and. In our tribal certainties, we often distort what we actually believe in the quiet of our hearts, and fail to see what aspects or truth the other tribe may grasp."

Well, Sullivan would know. His hyperactive Twitter feed is stacked with the kind of tribal cheerleading he pompously ("in the quiet of our hearts…") inveighs against in *Out on a Limb*. "Preach!" he claps as he retweets something an intellectual ally wrote. "Wow," he comments as he retweets some poll about free speech at MIT. "Disgusting," he snorts as he retweets a video clip of an appearance by Michael Eric Dyson on MSNBC. I can't tell if it's ignorance or cynicism, but for Andrew Sullivan to condemn tribal thinking is like watching an arsonist call the fire department.

The best that can be said about *Out on a Limb* is that it offers an inside view of the past three decades of American intellectual and cultural decline. It is an instructive and sobering read for any incipient young writer—but not for the reasons Sullivan probably intended. We might even say that the title is offered advisedly: if you venture too far out, the branch is bound to crack eventually.

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.*

Man looking at U.S. Army recruitment sign, Benton Harbor, Michigan, July 1940

GLASSHOUSE IMAGES/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Wars and Remembrance

ANDREW BACEVICH

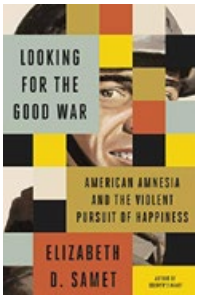
Since 1997, Elizabeth Samet has been teaching literature to cadets at the U.S. Military Academy. To judge by her most recent book, she must be an engaging, inspiring, and utterly subversive classroom presence.

Looking for the Good War suggests that she is fearless as well. Sprawling and discursive—as a writer, Samet adheres to the no-notecard-left-behind school of literary studies—her book takes up the delicate subject of World War II revisionism. Samet aligns herself with the controversial view that the "Good War" may have been less than altogether good.

Reexamining and revising the past is a continuous and necessary exercise. At West Point, it's a safe bet that Lee Gate, Lee Barracks, Lee Hall, Lee Road, and the Robert E. Lee Mathematics Prize, all honoring a certain Confederate general once deemed a role model for graduating cadets, will soon bear different names.

When it comes to World War II, however, revisionism tends to be an especially touchy subject. Early practitioners charged an ostensibly duplicitous President Franklin D. Roosevelt with conspiring to maneuver the United States into an avoidable war. Some subsequent revisionists trafficked in Holocaust denial. More recently, with the achievements of the "Greatest Generation" celebrated in bestselling books and blockbuster movies, merely to suggest that considerations other than God, mother, and apple pie influenced the war's conduct seems very unpatriotic, if not altogether indecent.

Samet dismisses as fraudulent the feel-good interpretation of the war to which most present-day Americans subscribe. "The so-called greatness of the Greatest Generation is a fiction," she writes, "a sentimental fiction, suffused with nostalgia and with the need to return to some finest hour." Her self-assigned task is to poke holes in the "selective memory"—more precise-



LOOKING FOR THE GOOD WAR
American Amnesia and the Violent Pursuit of Happiness

ELIZABETH D. SAMET
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$28 | 368 pp.

Writers and filmmakers depicted former G.I.s as alienated, angry, violent, and prone to various forms of antisocial behavior—the currently dominant Ronald Reagan/ Tom Brokaw/Steven Spielberg interpretation turned upside down.

ly, the invented memory—that props up the mythic narrative of the "Good War." She is hardly the first to do so, of course. Indeed, her account cites writers ranging from war correspondent Ernie Pyle and novelist Joseph Heller to scholars such as Paul Fussell, all of whom have previously exposed aspects of the war's underbelly, albeit with only limited effect.

Emphasizing popular fiction and film noir (while leavening the text with a healthy dose of Shakespeare), her own contribution to this ongoing enterprise highlights "the dangerous and seemingly indestructible fantasy" that the next American war, wherever and whenever it occurs, will replicate the "good" one of 1941–1945 and produce suitably redemptive results. Yet in reality, she notes, that war served as a "prologue to three-quarters of a century of misbegotten ones," including those that her former students have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. These conflicts she characterizes as "interminable and inconvenient," not to mention "embarrassing"—about as different from the remembered version of World War II as they can be.

Colorful but irrelevant embellishments permeate the text. A page devoted to the fate of the French liner *Normandie* offers an example. Docked in New York Harbor in 1939, the opulent vessel caught fire and capsized, never to serve as a troopship as U.S. authorities had hoped. "There is a photo of [Marlene] Dietrich," Samet writes, "in one of four grand suites, the Rouen, in front of its piano." Further detail follows. Readers learn that the ship's whistle, which once announced shift changes at Bethlehem Steel, is now on display at the Pratt Institute. Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum owns several of the ship's murals, while "the magnificent doors of the grand dining room now adorn Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Brooklyn."

Other topics include Ulysses S. Grant's reading habits during his days as a cadet at West Point; the prewar German American Bund's embrace of George Washington as the "first Fascist"; the penchant of souvenir-hungry G.I.s for scouring battlefields (and enemy dead) like "Gilded Age robber barons"; and the purging of Cold War–era U.S. government-supported libraries abroad of anything written by "known Communists or fellow-travelers." None of Samet's excursions are less than interesting. Some are fascinating. What they have to do with "the myths that constitute this book's central subject" tends to be elusive.

Where Samet is most insightful is in her survey of early postwar depictions of World War II veterans. On that score, she appears to have read every pulp novel and seen every B-movie released during the first decade after the war. Her central finding is that when wartime memories were fresh, the cultural status of those who had fought was anything but exalted. On the contrary, writers and filmmakers depicted former G.I.s as alienated, angry, violent, and prone to various forms of antisocial behavior—the currently dominant Ronald Reagan/ Tom Brokaw/Steven Spielberg interpretation turned upside down.

With the onset of the Cold War, however, casting the World War II veteran in the role of anti-hero became distinctly unhelpful. The rationale and conduct of the anti-communist crusade derived much of its moral justification from the conflict that had ended in 1945 in unambiguous triumph. When President Reagan paid tribute to "the boys of Pointe du Hoc" as "the champions who helped free a continent" during a visit to Normandy in 1984, he was implicitly praising their successors who had fought in Korea and Vietnam and those who even then were manning the ramparts along the Iron Curtain. Wherever they served, "the troops" were engaged in what were by definition campaigns of liberation.

On that score, Samet writes, "There is no more important part of the myth of World War II…than the figure of the American soldier as an agent for good in the world." Ever since 1945, Americans have kept "searching for a hero as satisfying and uncomplicated as those favorite images of GIs distributing Hershey bars to children or receiving bouquets of flowers from grateful women." For members of a public with decidedly little interest in the actual conduct of more recent American wars, the belief that the troops fighting in places like Iraq and Afghanistan are themselves agents for good provides a handy excuse for avoiding hard questions.

Samet does not reflect on whether her former students, some of them killed, maimed, or otherwise bearing the scars of war, distributed candy or received flowers in the course of their duties. If any did so, the moment was incidental. But unless I am misreading her, she is outraged that the willful misremembering of World War II sustains the "nostalgia, sentimentality, and jingoism" that find the United States in our own day more or less perpetually at war.

As enshrined in American memory, she writes, "World War II galvanized a faith that America was different, special, unique in the history of nations." Once upon a time, that characterization may have been plausible and even useful. It no longer is. Acknowledging that the United States is not different, special, or unique might provide a step toward enabling her students to enjoy longer, happier, and healthier lives.

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

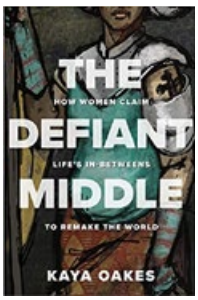
Putting Ourselves Together Again

REBECCA BRATTEN WEISS

If I were to actually say out loud, "A lot of the women saints were probably mentally ill," many Catholics would get angry with me.

I can anticipate this reaction because, while we all know we're not supposed to stigmatize mental illness, "crazy" is one of the things women are constantly accused of being, even if it's also one of the things women are not allowed to be. And holy women, the women we're told are our role models, can't have been ill, or dirty, or otherwise unpleasant.

The representations of women saints that the institutional Church gives us too often have little resemblance to the actual, historical lives of these women. They were often difficult or bizarre, and many of them went to great lengths to avoid marriage, family, and domesticity. Some probably *did* suffer from mental illness. But in the hands of a patriarchal religion's hierarchy, these qualities tend to be downplayed. To be a real woman, an acceptable woman, we apparently must transcend the messy realities of our lives.



THE DEFIANT MIDDLE
How Women Claim Life's In-Betweens to Remake the World

KAYA OAKES
Broadleaf Books
$26.99 | 200 pp.

Kaya Oakes's new book, *The Defiant Middle: How Women Claim Life's In-Betweens to Remake the World*, critically examines the situation of being a woman in a culture and a Church that makes such demands on us. Much of it is dedicated to showing why, for women, simply living on our own terms, let alone remaking the world, can feel hopeless. That's one reason this book is so powerful and so important: it refuses to ignore the many ways women's lives often feel impossible, not least for Catholic women. Oakes is up front about the fact that religion has often made our lives worse. "To understand how women defy expectations," she writes, "religion is not a bad place to start, but its history is littered with the corpses of women who were the victims of religious men who damaged and killed women in the name of God."

Joan of Arc

GL ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The Defiant Middle *specifically addresses the experiences of women on the margins or in "liminal spaces"—women who do not fit in. Which is to say, all women, eventually.*

The central theme of Oakes's book is how women today can look to their medieval forerunners such as Hildegard von Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and Joan of Arc as "mentors." For Catholic women who've had these saints used against them to show why they aren't holy, modest, humble, quiet, and obedient enough, it comes as a relief to view these women not as our judges but as our allies. Such an approach offers a powerful reminder of why some of us hold on to religion despite everything. As Oakes writes, "What religion offered was less a message of personal salvation and more a message that none of us, no matter how sick, angry, filthy, or unwanted, is truly alone. What faith gave me was a reminder that the ordinary world…is still charged with grace."

Oakes shows us how this grace worked in the lives of holy women—even holy madwomen—and gave them the strength to be disruptive in a world that tried to put them in boxes and deny their access to the divine. She connects their experiences to the lives of women making a difference in the contemporary world. Take, for example, Joan of Arc, from whom Oakes draws a line to young women activists such as Greta Thunberg or Malala Yousafzai. Or the story of St. Euphrosyne, "who transformed herself into a monk named Smaragdus and lived for thirty-eight years in the monastery as a man, never discovered until they died," in which Oakes finds encouragement for queer and trans activists who push back against the policing of who is or is not a "real woman."

None of this amounts to a fashionable, facile reduction of these complex women to "badass role models." Being a defiant woman often means being a vulnerable woman. It can mean being harassed, denigrated, depersonalized, assaulted, violated, tortured, and burned to death. For young girls it can mean being hypersexualized; for older women it can mean being erased or held to impossible expectations. It can mean suffering bitter loneliness.

Oakes also leads the reader through the different categories, or spaces, that women are often punished for failing to fit into: Young, Old, Crazy, Barren, Butch/Femme/Other, Angry, Alone. Measured according to these terms, we are perpetually both too much and not enough. "Women are expected to be fertile (otherwise your body is dismissed as a barren wasteland), but not too fertile (otherwise you're burdening society). Self-sacrificing, but not selfless," Oakes writes. "Women can cry picturesquely on occasion, but clinical depression and anxiety have to be brushed aside or sublimated, because we are always expected to be doing something for someone. We should love and accept our imperfect bodies but still not gain weight or 'let ourselves go.'" Oakes often draws from her own experiences in these spaces—as a woman in academia, in a religious community, in family life, and in the world of reproductive health, all of which are noisy with prescriptions about how we are supposed to be, or not be. As I read her book, I felt as though I had been holding my breath for ages and was finally allowed to release it. I felt "seen."

The Defiant Middle specifically addresses the experiences of women on the margins or in "liminal spaces"—women who do not fit in. Which is to say, all women, eventually. I admit that when I first started reading the book, I sometimes thought to myself, "What about the women who do fit in? What about the women who seem to effortlessly embody the patriarchy's ideals?" That's not how it works, though. One way or another, "does not fit in" is true of all women in cultures that demand that we conform to impossible norms. Some of us may be more obvious misfits than others. But all of us must contend with a world that demands us to be "both/and" while punishing us for being either too much or not enough. Women also experience being invisible, especially as we age out of youth, fertility, and sexiness—as Oakes describes it, "the steady erasure of our sexual selves becoming a larger erasure of our very identities." Is this erasure akin to the superpower of invisibility? Or is it more like annihilation? This is one of the challenges women who are approaching the defiant years of middle age must negotiate, and Oakes is truthful about how much of this we do in solitude. But as she also emphasizes, there is a solitude, as we can learn from the women mystics, that is different from bitter loneliness, a solitude where we find ourselves "broken open by sickness and depression and anxiety and meeting everyone's needs." Out of that loneliness women are able to walk into a new space and begin to put themselves together again.

This is a book for all women, but I think especially for women who feel caught in between and pulled in different directions, who are trying to sort out our anger and craziness and deal with a culture that expects the impossible of us. Oakes puts into words what many of us struggle to articulate, or try to keep from screaming out loud. The powers try to tell us, "You can't say that. You can't be that." But, as Oakes demonstrates, women have been saying and being what they were told they couldn't for centuries before. "The quest to change sexist ways of thinking can feel Sisyphean, a lifetime of teaching and explaining and pushing back," Oakes writes. "And yet, we keep showing up, and we keep trying."

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Maggie Nelson

DAN TUFFS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Ride Blind

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS

Maggie Nelson is a poet, an essayist, a memoirist, a critic, and a theorist. She has written on cruelty, on murder, on the visual and literary arts, on feminist and queer theory, and, perhaps most fetchingly, on the color blue. She isn't easy to locate by intellectual lineage, but scattered broadside through her work is Wittgenstein's rejection of the idea that we should aim at a single correct theory of anything, and Pema Chödrön's let's-agonizingly-hold-differences-together school of Buddhism. Nelson is, above all, a writer of prose and poetry often startling in its aptness, precision, and unexpectedness.

Nelson was born in 1974, and she holds, for her generation, something like the position held by Susan Sontag before her. Those writing and speaking about Nelson's work often seem awed by it (the book under review here may change that), and her range of interests already rivals Sontag's. If you haven't read her, you should. A good place to begin would be *Bluets* (2009), which is a thing of beauty from beginning to end; you might follow it with *The Argonauts* (2015), which is among the more careful and attentive things written in the past few decades about desire, sex, gender, family, and what it's like to be human.

ON FREEDOM
Four Songs of Care and Constraint

MAGGIE NELSON
Graywolf Press
$27 | 288 pp.

Her latest book, *On Freedom*, comprises four essays, one on art (particularly the visual arts), one on sex, one on drugs, and one on climate change. The essays map the terrain of current representations of, and arguments about, those matters, and the cartography whose results distinguish dead ends from paths that lead somewhere, wastelands from fertile fields, orthodoxies that bludgeon from heterodoxies that attend. Nelson is looking for freedom with respect to these matters, not as an achievement or a goal or a purpose or a condition, but as "an unending present practice"—a mode of response to the complexities evident in her four topics that opens them up rather than putting them through the meat grinder of some dogma.

Nelson wants negotiation, suffering, and work within and at the boundaries of our constraints and entanglements. She does not want resolution. Rather, she wants us to ask ourselves: If we write this kind of thing about art or sex or drugs or the climate, does what we write permit our topic to address us? Does it give us something else to say? Or do we write only what we already know, in which case there's only repetition? Freedom means going on, having something to say next, continuing the work without seeing or knowing the goal. The alternative is to retreat into "paranoia, and despair, and policing," which are, now, on all sides, our defaults and norms. That paranoid style takes up the bludgeon because, for its practitioners, there is no overlap between the truth and its acolytes and the lie and its servants: the only thing to do with lies, so understood, is beat them flat, salt the ground from which they grow, and force their servants into silence and exile. That is not freedom. It

is the kind of victory possible only in a universe we don't inhabit, a Manichean universe in which the divide between the good and the bad is both absolute and absolutely evident.

With respect to art, for example, Nelson resists writing that already knows, now and forever, what a particular piece of art is and does, and reacts to it on the basis of that knowledge by celebrating the right objects and disciplining the wrong ones. Nelson shows Bill Donohue of the Catholic League responding in this way in 2010 to David Wojnarowicz's *A Fire in My Belly*, which depicts ants infesting a crucifix, and Hannah Black doing the same in 2017 to Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till. These pieces of work, Black and Donohue suggest, do just one thing, and it's bad. The world would be better without them, and perhaps without their makers. Donohue and Black may agree about little else; but, as Nelson reads them, they do agree about what art does and about how to respond to it.

This is a crudely paranoid style of response. It allows a piece of art just one contextless meaning, based largely on what it depicts, and responds to it accordingly. Nelson's style is different, as here:

> It remains our charge to be able to distinguish between the feelings produced by, say, reading a scene in a novel in which someone berates a character by calling her a cunt, from stepping out into the street to get some milk and being called a cunt by a passerby, from a bunch of guys holding Tiki torches surrounding you chanting *cunt*, from being called a cunt in a sex game with your lover, from being called a cunt by your boss during a meeting, from seeing the word *cunt* spray-painted on a wall as you're walking by, from calling your own cunt a cunt, from reading a paragraph like this one, and so on.

It's hard to say anything to this other than, yes, of course it's right; and the penultimate phrase, "from reading a paragraph like this one," makes it luminously so. Use is not mention, mention is not use, and there's a great deal between. To think that the difficult word in question is a piece of dark magic that does the same work in every context is obviously fatuous. Does this approach mean that distinctions aren't possible, that it's always appropriate to use the word "cunt," or that objects containing and deploying the word may never be disciplined, constrained, or removed? No. Does it mean that it's never proper to demand that a painting representing a lynched Black boy be removed from public display? No. But it does mean that neither the word "cunt" nor paintings of lynched people nor depictions of Jesus drenched in urine or crawling with ants should always be responded to in just one way, as if the work of those artifacts was always and everywhere the same and self-evident. Work, thought, negotiation, mistakes (these are inevitable: Nelson is very good on that point), generosity, and trembling attentiveness are all required before and as we respond to art, especially when our response involves the demand that it be removed or destroyed. The bar for that is high, very high. Donohue and Black and their like do not, in Nelson's depiction of them, do the work: they set the bar low by exhibiting paranoia, together with an inclination toward the violence that such an attitude easily prompts. Denunciation and coronation, as Nelson nicely puts it, should not exhaust our responses to art objects. I'd add that whenever we respond to a work of art in either way, without nuance and doubt and reserve, we've abandoned both looking and thinking. That is among the reasons why Christians have wanted to distance icons from the category of art.

Another example: talking and writing about climate change. Nelson's essay on this is called "Riding the Blinds," which, she tells us, is "the hobo practice of riding between cars on a moving freight train" in order to avoid detection by the railway police. When you do that, you ride blind: you can't see where you're going. It's a phrase common in the blues, and, as Nelson reads it, it involves not only spatial but also temporal complication. Time thickens, folds, and pleats; the future and the past both become opaque.

One result of traveling in this way is that simple storylines get dropped. The straight story, the one that tells how things really are, loses its attractions. Nelson opposes, therefore, meta-stories about climate change that tell us we can fix it by getting the story right, or by identifying the right principle and hewing to it. Attempts to come up with those kinds of rightness generate and fertilize their opposites. Such meta-stories are fantasies. Some of them are etiologic and some prognostic. There is, for example, the story that we can solve the climate crisis only by appealing to reproductive futurism: getting people to see that we must change our greenhouse-gas-emitting lives because of the responsibilities we have to generations yet unborn (*do it for the children*). That generates a queer-theoretic response that refuses the idea of futurism, especially futurism based on procreation, and affirms instead solidarity as the story that must be told if we're to act rightly in the face of climate change (*make kin not babies*). Each side then becomes heavily invested in its story being the right one, the one that identifies what it's *really* like, why we've *really* come to the pass we have, and how, *really*, we can now learn to do the right thing. Always the emphasis on *really*, elegantly stiff-armed by Nelson: lurking in the background here is Wittgenstein's allergy to the German word *eigentlich*, and still more to the sternly heavy abstract noun *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity).

Against all this Nelson advocates modesty about our capacity to find and tell the straight story, and about our need for one if we're to pay the kind of careful attention that makes action possible. "When it comes to care," she writes, "there is no such thing as getting it exactly right." And the appetite for getting it exactly right is among the principal causes of our tendency to replace action with stories about action, attentively passionate response to particulars with investment of our symbolic capital so that it's well ordered

and bears maximal interest, funding our contempt for those whose shibboleths aren't ours. Better to care half-blindly for the world we live in, from within the pleated time given us by riding the blinds, and act, when we can, for small things in a small way.

Nelson cites, as an example of what she means, an ecological dispute about logging in Indonesia that brought together in shared opposition to the practices of a logging company people with different, even incompatible, stories and theories about what forests are and how humans should live in and with them. The opponents of the logging company agreed on almost nothing except that this particular kind of logging should be stopped, which it was. She generalizes the point to suggest that climate-change deniers and climate-change affirmers might be able to work together in mitigating and adapting to particular local conditions (floods, fires, mudslides, sea-level changes, and so on) even when they share no theoretical or narrative account of these conditions. And significantly: "They [the climate-change deniers] may also have things to teach us [the climate-change affirmers] about freedom, care, and constraint that we don't already know, even—or especially—when we already think we do."

Nelson tries to occupy that sliver of rhetorical and conceptual territory between averting our gaze from the horrors of climate change because there's nothing we can do about it and the desire to finally fix it, which, as she points out, is intimate with our desire not to be part of the thing we aim to fix. For the most part, she succeeds. It's a territory marked by difficulty, ambiguity, and complexity, in which neither we nor our opponents, whoever they happen to be, can avoid difficult trade-offs, imperfect remedies, and brutal outcomes. It will all end badly, of course; our task is to find a way of saying and showing this that will nurture the small amounts of mitigation and adaptation of which we might be capable.

There's an important analogy here to individual human lives, which Nelson draws on, even if not as deeply or as often as she might have: those, too, all end badly. No one now living will be alive in a century or so, and most will suffer unpredictable and uncontrollable horrors in the course or at the end of their lives. We can attend and care and mitigate and adapt, confusedly and blindly, to some very small extent. But we can't win. We can't get it right. Rightness is not the thing to want. Just so with the planet and our contributions to the change in its climate. Nelson shows that something is not nothing and doesn't need to be everything. She shows, too, how to write as if that were so; and how writing as if it were not so—as if we need the unimpeachably straight story—is a principal contributor to the evils it tries to avoid.

Nelson occupies a territory marked by difficulty, ambiguity, and complexity, in which neither we nor our opponents, whoever they happen to be, can avoid difficult trade-offs, imperfect remedies, and brutal outcomes.

This is a subtle and elegant book. I found it occasionally frustrating, however, in its mosaic-like use of quotations from the work of others. Nelson is fond—too fond in this book—of moving her prose along by writing about what *x* says in interpreting the work of *y*, who in turn appeals to *z*'s construal of.... It's good, of course, to show gratitude for the work of others, to acknowledge your own dependence on it, and to encourage your readers to seek out that work for themselves. But when you're as good a writer as Nelson is, and as unusual a thinker, overstuffing your prose with this sort of thing obscures the line of beauty.

The paranoid style Nelson identifies and opposes throughout *On Freedom* is by now powerful and widespread, perhaps especially among those who might read this book. To suggest that modesty, work, and attention to context are what we need before we move to the barricades and light the bonfires, and that none of us has access to, or should want, the straight story about anything remotely complex, is unlikely to endear her to anyone, right or left.

While reading this book Simone Weil and Susan Sontag were often in my mind. When she learned of the German invasion of Paris in 1940, Weil wrote in her journal that it was a great day for the people of Indochina because it would bring about the end of French colonialism. Sontag wrote after 9/11 that "if the word 'cowardly' is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others.... Whatever may be said of the perpetrators of [the 9/11 attacks], they were not cowards." Neither response is unproblematic; neither is free from complexity; each calls for comment, elucidation, and argument; each is idiosyncratic, transverse to the usual lines of argument, the opposite of a cliché, disturbing. All that is also true of much of what Nelson writes in *On Freedom*. What is important about this book is not only its argument but also that it is an excellent example of the practices it commends.

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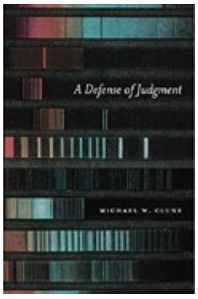
Learning What to Want

NATE KLUG

What difference does aesthetic experience make in shaping who we are? If you've ever had a book or painting touch you to the core, you know how difficult it can be to explain that feeling to a friend, to connect that feeling to the other parts of your life. And yet you have no doubt that the experience has left you a different person. Or, as Michael W. Clune might put it, the experience has left you *wanting* to become a different person. "You must change your life," Rilke says at the end of his poem about looking at a sculpture, "Archaic Torso of Apollo." But change it how? In *A Defense of Judgment*, Clune outlines a vision for aesthetic education as an end in itself, full of potential for personal transformation yet free of the moral prescriptiveness we sometimes attach to our encounters with art or literature.



A DEFENSE OF JUDGMENT

MICHAEL W. CLUNE
The University of Chicago Press
$27.50 | 256 pp.

In a January 2020 column published in the *New York Times* ("The Academic Apocalypse"), Ross Douthat cites Clune in support of his lament that literature professors no longer offer value judgments about literature. Douthat claims that humanists have created "a unilateral disarmament in the contest for student hearts and minds," shying away from evaluation and presenting their academic discipline in terms of its critical methods and procedures. Students who major in English graduate with tools for making complex arguments, but no convictions about why one should read one author rather than another.

Clune's new book makes a similar argument. But what makes *A Defense of Judgment* surprising and sometimes even thrilling is how Clune relates his critique to a progressive, anti-capitalist politics. For Clune, literature offers a "form of value beyond market determination." Capitalism promises the consumer an endless series of alterations governed and affirmed only by her choosing—tiny changes that, because they reflect her existing preferences, don't amount to change at all. Aesthetic education, where "one suspends one's current values in the expectation of acquiring better values," can lead to more authentic transformations and attitudes of resistance.

To really change, one needs judgment. In the crucial step of his argument, Clune dismantles the proposition that all desires must be treated as equal, an idea that runs through Amazon marketplaces and humanities departments alike. The triumph of capitalism—and of the theories of neoclassical economics—at the end of the nineteenth century led to a society in which our only agreed-upon source of value is individual preference. My desire, whether for a Toni Morrison novel or whatever Netflix show is trending, is worth no more

Visitors at the Art Institute of Chicago viewing *Paris Street; Rainy Day, 1877* by Gustave Caillebotte

PHIL ROEDER/FLICKR

or less than yours, and to insist there might be any "better" way of spending one's time or money comes across as snobbish and paternalistic.

Clune uses Karl Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Program" to argue that our modern struggle against inequality "cannot be advanced through adherence to the principle of equality." Viewing all human desires as equivalent makes it harder for us to distinguish between the consumer goods whose production is killing the earth and the goods (such as leisure time spent reading poems) that might help us thrive.

In a highlight of the book's first section, Clune returns to Marx in order to engage with the arguments of Martin Hagglund's book *This Life* (2019), which drew a straight though subtle line from "secular faith" to democratic socialism. Clune contends that Hagglund's ideological commitment to equality over and against judgment ultimately undermines his own socialist project, because "the distinction between better and worse ways of spending our time is a precondition for a robust vision of a transformed work world."

A book written in defense of judgment might not be expected to hold uncertainty in high regard. But central to Clune's vision of aesthetic education is a strong notion of what he calls, borrowing from John Keats, "negative capability." Keats coined this phrase in a letter where he was trying to express what he valued most in Shakespeare: a capacity for "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." Following the philosopher Agnes Callard, Clune takes this essential ingredient for poetic creativity and applies it to learning in general. As Callard writes, in aesthetic education "[teachers] aren't selling [students] something they already want; instead, we are trying to help them learn to want something." Once a student accepts that some desires might be more important than others, she can aspire to fashioning a self, embracing uncertainty and mystery on the way to discovery.

A Defense of Judgment consists of three parts with three very different aims. The first two chapters outline Clune's general argument. Next come two chapters titled "Judgment and Expertise I: Attention and Incorporation" and "Judgment and Expertise II: Concepts and Criteria." Full of reflections on the status of English departments and literary criticism, this second section was my least favorite in the book. Nonetheless, Clune's defense of academic expertise is worth pondering. Experts are those who "know more than they can tell," and we need experts who can model an aspirational, tentative mode of judgment in order to foster an alternative to capitalism's value system of "dogmatic equality," where everyone acts as their own authority.

The three chapters of the book's final section, "The Practice of Judgment," provide close readings of texts by Emily Dickinson, Thomas Bernard, and Gwendolyn Brooks. It wasn't immediately clear to me what these chapters had to do with Clune's previous argument—apart from exemplifying the judgment that is essential to literary interpretation—but each of them traces a provocative path. The chapter on Gwendolyn Brooks, "Race Makes Class Visible," stands out in particular, with its paradoxical claim that two famous Brooks poems intentionally obscure the dynamic of race, in order to show us how much is lost when we don't include race in our social analysis.

Paradox feels essential to Clune's way of engaging with the world. He is also the author of a funny and terrifying memoir about his decade as a heroin addict, and of an earlier book of criticism, *Writing Against Time*, that focuses on poems and novels whose temporal forms are used to contest temporality. There's an itching impatience toward final things at the heart of Clune's writing. He doesn't come out and say it in *A Defense of Judgment*, but it seems likely that literature has saved his life several times over. "Aesthetic education, by denying that all preferences are equal, gives me reason to be skeptical about my existing values.... We choose judgment over equality when we face our students and our publics and say: we will show you a better way to live."

As I read *A Defense of Judgment*, it struck me that the counterintuitive nuances of Clune's argument might be helpful to liberal religious people who sometimes find themselves defending their identification with a specific faith against understandable charges of narrow-mindedness. Clune, a Buddhist, has written elsewhere of his religious practice and its specific influence on his experience: "I meditate each day, observing, as the Zen saying has it, my thoughts and my life dying and being reborn hundreds of times a minute.... Afterward, if I'm reading, or writing, or hiking, or hanging out with my partner, I sometimes experience less interference from myself. There seems less of me in those experiences." Why meditate regularly, or attend church week after week, instead of sampling spiritual ideas in the culture more broadly? A choice that sounds limiting might enable the intensity of seeking required for transformation. The goal of Christianity is to become a different person, Wittgenstein said. As in Clune's ideal of aesthetic education, here judgment can lead toward the energizing uncertainty of a life's work.

Early on in his book, Clune acknowledges that he is not calling for a "radical transformation" of practice for critics, professors, or anyone who loves books or art. Rather, he's trying to help us be honest about what happens when an encounter with art or literature gets stuck in our nervous system, leading to further discoveries, and perhaps compelling us to leave a former self behind. The poet Frank Bidart writes that "everything made is made out of its / refusals: those who follow make it new / by refusing its refusals." Seen this way, judgment is an unavoidable feature of our deepest aesthetic experiences, leading us deeper and farther than we might otherwise go.

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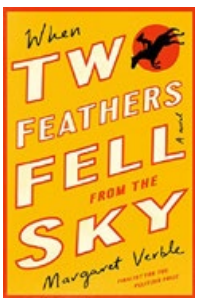
A horse diver in Colorado, 1905

Good Spirits

KATHERINE LUCKY

The familiar American ghost story, writes scholar Kathleen Brogan, is a "thrilling fireside tale." We imagine nineteenth-century authors—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe—composing these tales by candlelight, detailing black veils and catacombs with an inky quill. Their settings, haunted houses and graveyards, are manifestations of grief, corruption, and shame. Ghosts are evil.

But in some contemporary literature, Brogan argues in her seminal article "American Stories of Cultural Haunting," ghosts take on new meaning. Writers of color—Louise Erdrich, Toni Morrison, Cristina García—use phantoms not to symbolize threats but to "recreate ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past." Their characters' ancestors were subjugated, colonized, and displaced. They suffered bloody deaths and were buried in unmarked graves. It's no wonder their spirits still roam the earth. But they aren't necessarily malicious, at least not forever. These books follow a "movement from possession to exorcism—or more accurately, from bad to good forms of haunting."



WHEN TWO FEATHERS FELL FROM THE SKY

MARGARET VERBLE
Mariner
$27 | 384 pp.

When Two Feathers Fell from the Sky, Margaret Verble's new novel, is just this kind of ghost story. It follows Two Feathers, a visiting horse diver at Nashville's Glenville Park Zoo in the summer of 1926. One day, her routine—diving from a high platform into a pool of water, on the back of a horse—goes terribly wrong. The rest of the book is consumed with Two's recovery from injury, her reckoning with a sinister zookeeper, and the stories of other people who live on the park's property. Near the novel's close, the zoo's animals come under threat. It's an unusual structure that saves major plot points for the beginning and end, with a middle designed to process what's happened and worry about what's to come.

Two loves these creatures, communing with the bears and buffalo. She "smudges," burning cedar and sage to cleanse tainted spaces. She hears her grandmother's voice, though she lives miles away on an Oklahoma ranch with the rest of Two's extended family. And she's haunted—protected by the ghost of a Cherokee brave named Little Elk who was killed centuries ago in a skirmish with white settlers on Glenville's property. The ghost scrounges for tobacco; he gets jealous and petulant. He wants to be acknowledged and remembered. And he isn't evil.

The same can't be said for the novel's flesh-and-blood characters: namely, a white, red-headed zookeeper named Jack, who has a fetish for Indian culture and a sinister obsession with Two

C. E. HOLMBOE, CIRCA 1905/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Feathers. Calling himself "Strong Red Wolf," he desecrates native graves for artifacts to sell and stalks Two around the park. He tries to gain her favor with ice cream and flowers. When he's snubbed, he takes revenge. Little Elk calls him the "murderous night-going witch."

Jack's transgressions are sexual as well as racial. As a child, learning that his parents' farm sat on Cherokee land, he makes a mistake: "Instead of concluding the land had been stolen, he decided the Cherokee must be his tribe." This original sin has made him brazen and entitled.

But Jack's crimes are only the novel's most explicit manifestations of the prejudice held by many of the people living and working at the park. Verble writes these characters skillfully, emphasizing their humanity without dismissing their racism. Mrs. Hampton, the kindly dorm mother for female performers, sets aside sandwiches for her charges. She longs for romance. She also doesn't "know if Two should be treated like a white or a Negro. And that was important. Standards had to be maintained." (Mrs. Hampton eventually softens; putting her arm around Two's shoulders, she's surprised by her tenderness, finding it "both odd and natural.") Then there's the zoo's wealthy owner, Mr. Shackleford. At the close of the Civil War, his slave-holding family endured poverty and near-starvation, suffering from what he calls "the brutality of morally righteous victors." He's a sympathetic man, and also a bigoted one. He's unsure if Two should be taken to the "good" hospital after her accident, and uneasy about one of his employees, Crawford—son of a respected Black family who's possessed of an authority that doesn't sit right with Shackleford.

White characters aren't the only ones attuned to subtle distinctions of skin color and class. Two notices that Crawford, her closest friend at the park, is "lighter than a brown paper bag." But she's "used to people being mixed and had never asked about his ancestry." Her own family are "mixed and modern Indians," farmers and ranchers with "a lot of white ways." Crawford is in love with the daughter of another prominent Black Nashville family, but the two clans have never married into each other. "The Boydstuns were somewhat darker in shade," and in their estimation, "the Crawfords, as a family, didn't do enough for the race."

Two worries for her own race's future: "Her children wouldn't be Cherokees; born after the allotment rolls were closed, they'd be white people by law. Like her profession, her tribe, her people, her history, were fading and narrowing to nothing." Smudging, writing letters home, recognizing the spirits of caves and rivers and animals, eventually rejecting alcohol—through all of these rituals, she preserves her endangered culture. What a comfort, then, to have Little Elk close by for a time, flickering in and out of view, offering war whoops to the sky. At first she's unsure of him—he may be a witch in disguise. But her instinct says he's friendly. "Haunting," Kathleen Brogan argues, "is necessary to the maintenance of historical meaning." A world without ghosts would be a lonely one, a "loss of significance" for people who have already lost so much.

When Two Feathers Fell from the Sky is a heavily plotted novel. There's a freak accident, a rescue, some murders, and some mystery. The book has sex scenes and a hippo and a lemur on the loose. It's a novel crowded with noise and color, hot and sticky as a Nashville summer—scented with popcorn, lit by electric lights, roaring with crowd noise.

And yet, *Two Feathers* doesn't read like a thriller. It's too long. It's slow. It takes its time talking about the logistics of turtle races and walking routes, offering backstories and conjectures and context. At times, this is a tedious read, bloated with details of time and place. From the Scopes Trial to the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, from tycoons to James K. Polk, the book is almost overly situated in history. It's packed with secondary characters' love plots and familial tensions and money troubles and traumas, not all of which are satisfactorily resolved. Conversations move slowly, sometimes repeating themselves or wallowing in irrelevancies. As a reader, you never have a privileged vantage point. You're in the thick of things with the characters, trying to figure out what's important.

Perhaps it's best to conceive of *When Two Feathers Fell* as a novel of ambience, just as interested in setting a mood (Tennessee, 1926) as in telling a story. And that mood—despite instances of camaraderie, romance, and ultimately, victory—is grief. Little Elk isn't the only ghost stalking Glenville's grounds. There's a World War I soldier shot in the trenches who haunts a caretaker suffering from PTSD. A Confederate soldier clanks around in loud boots; Mr. Shackleford's wife, May, hears his stomping, and remembers the wounded and sick of both sides. At this tumultuous moment in history, not far removed from wars and enslavement and the Trail of Tears and a flu pandemic, everyone is living with loss, tending to shared pains and private injuries.

People can exist only in their own time. Even ghosts, arrived from the past to avenge and protect, vanish when their "unfinished business" is completed. But the land remains. *When Two Feathers Fell* begins with an elegiac ode to the zoo's grounds. It's lined with old buffalo traces, and pocked with mass native graves pillaged for arrowheads and pot shards, then exhumed in order to provide a twirling calliope and picnic grounds for the people of Nashville. This story takes place "long after the buffalo thundered toward the great salt lick in lines," and "after the braves stalked game every fall and winter, won an occasional scalp in a fray." It takes place after "bones were broken and tossed," and "loot enriched several universities, museums, and private collections." But the past is entirely the present in this place: "after" might as well be "during." Two worries that the "hidden deaths of the park" have been "wiped out of memory, completely erased." It turns out nothing could be further from the truth.

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

The Christ Life

GEORGE DENNIS O'BRIEN

Years ago, when we were living in Rochester, New York, my wife and I often attended services at a Catholic church that was, if one can say it, "synodally alive." A dwindling inner-city parish, Corpus Christi, had been transformed by its pastor, Fr. Jim Callan, into a vibrant community. Synodal means "traveling together," and Corpus Christi had more sorts of folks celebrating Mass together than we had ever experienced before or since: rich and poor, Black and white, gay and straight, even residents from a nearby mental hospital who sometimes seemed to speak in tongues. We talk about "celebrating" Mass, but at Corpus Christi it was a real celebration. There were lively Gospel hymns, and at the kiss of peace the congregation dissolved into a surging crowd of hugs and pats, peace signs and, where appropriate, genuine kisses. At Communion, Fr. Callan would announce: "Anyone who takes Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is welcome to come forward to receive communion." That open Communion announcement was, it seems to me, at the heart of synodality.

El Greco, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, circa 1577–87

What does it mean to "take Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?" Start with "take." This is a strong "take," as in the marriage vow, "I take you as my lawful wedded wife." To "take" Jesus as Lord and Savior is to seal one's life in a vow. Committing to Jesus as Lord and Savior commits one to living a Christ life. No one has expressed what it means to live a Christ life better than Dostoevsky's Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*. There Alyosha speaks his Christ commitment: "I am responsible for everyone and everything and I more than anyone else." This passage has also been translated as: "I am guilty for everyone and everything and I more than anyone else."

Either of those vows is humanly impossible. Only God can be responsible for everyone and everything. Only God can suffer for my sin and save me. Nevertheless, to take Christ as Lord and Savior is to take on Christ's task—to be responsible for the other, for *every* other. "I more than any other"? Yes, I am always "the chosen one." I can never say, "Well, it is someone else's responsibility." I cannot accomplish the work of Christ, but I also cannot pass his burden on to another. To be his disciple is to work for the salvation of all, the whole ragged assembly that celebrated Mass at Corpus Christi.

It is true that in the enthusiasm of a truly celebratory Mass one may find oneself saying "I take Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" without fully realizing the depth of the vow. But then, how many who speak the vows of marriage realize the depths of a commitment "until death do us part?" A vow seals us beyond a promise. Traditionally a vow seals an action beyond time and change—in other words, in God. The Christ vow states both our commitment and our sinful failure, challenging us at the core of our lives. We may be puzzled or offended by how another person lives the Christ vow; we may question and critique that other life as the other will question us. The many unique ways of living the Christ life require us to exercise what Rowan Williams has called "skills of recognition." Unhappily, Christians have often been better at the skill of rejection.

I do not hold out Corpus Christi's exuberant liturgy as *the* pattern for your ordinary Sunday service. (And I should add that the long history of Corpus Christi is complex and in many ways unhappy. My interest is solely in the special experience of services when all was going well.) Where we now live in New England, a stately pace is more in order. If, however, one could imagine Catholics throughout the world celebrating together at a single simultaneous Mass, I imagine it would be much like the one at Corpus Christi: rich and poor, Black and white, racially diverse, and ethically contentious. We know that in such a Mass there would be kneeling and embracing, ordinary and exotic dress, silent prayer, chant and drums and dance. Around the altar there would be a sprinkling of saints within the crowd of sinners. They would all be present in the grace of holiness and recognition of sinful failure because they all take Jesus Christ as Lord.

At the first Eucharist, the Last Supper, Jesus breaks bread with his loyal twelve. He knows that in the crisis at hand all will fail him—sleep when he asks them to attend, deny allegiance, or betray him to authority. If the first Mass welcomed such a mix of allegiance and desertion, the here-and-now Church cannot do otherwise.

GEORGE DENNIS O'BRIEN *is a longtime contributor to* Commonweal *and the author of* Finding the Voice of the Church *(Notre Dame Press)*.

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JULIA IN TEOTITLÁN DEL VALLE, OAXACA, 2021

My series *Kanitlow* takes its name from the Zapotec word for when a person starts to disappear. I wanted to record things that are in danger of disappearing not all at once, but gradually, without our noticing. I was inspired to document the elderly in particular because I'm drawn to old photographs of my own grandpa; I wanted other grandchildren to be able to look at photos of their grandparents and almost feel the details of their clothing and their bodies, and to see up close what it means to preserve a culture.

LUVIA LAZO *is a Zapotec photographer from Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca. She received a Jóvenes Creadores grant in 2020 and an Indigenous Photo Project grant in 2021.*

www.luvialazo.com

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