Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

OCTOBER 2023

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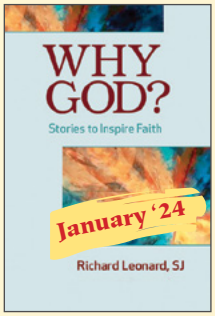

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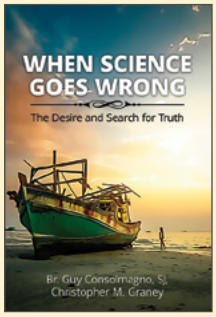

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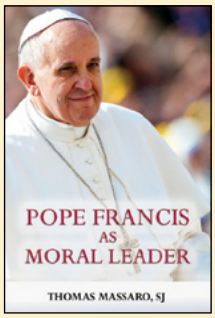

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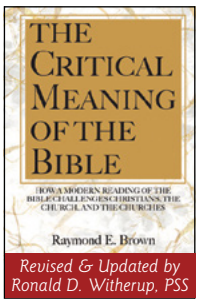

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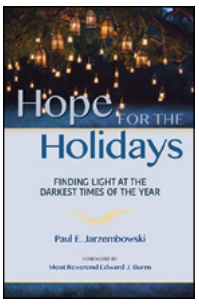

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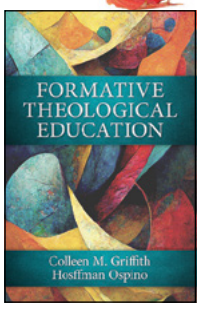

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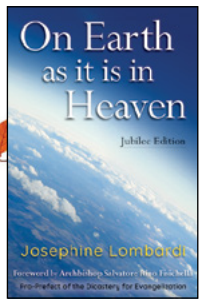

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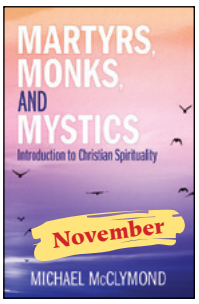

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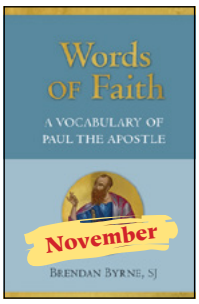

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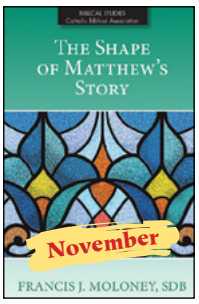

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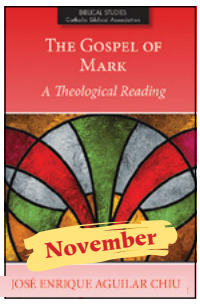

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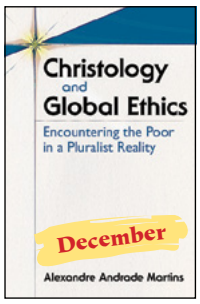

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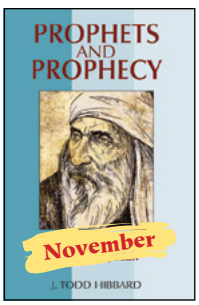

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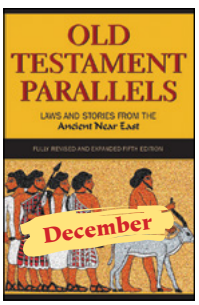

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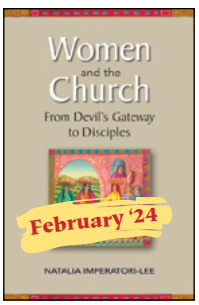

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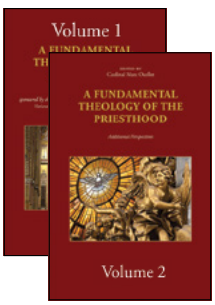

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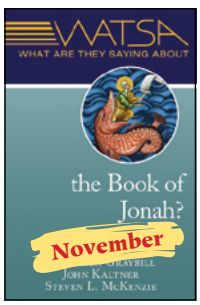

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LETTERS

Fighting featureless modernity, helping young people find Christ

WELCOME INTERRUPTIONS

Matthew Rose's essay on Robert Bellah ("Serious Play") and Peter Schwendener's meditation on Midwestern roads ("Two Roads Home") seem well-placed back to back in the July/August issue. Coming right after the article on Bellah, Schwendener's observations feel like a particular illustration of the "cultural catastrophe" Bellah theorized. Bellah argued that contemporary American society lacks humanizing rituals—in Rose's words, "rituals that interrupt everyday life, break up mundane patterns of perception, and elevate us above the profane world of survival, rivalry, and acquisition." In considering the ritual of travel, Schwendener describes the more humanizing experience presented by slower, older roads, where the land and its history, in all its sadness and strangeness, are inescapable. But we no longer travel along such roads often: now, we take the interstate, which "reduces things to a featureless blur or sets them at an invisible distance." The traveler on I-94 exists not in a *place*, but in a natural and cultural vacuum, with the world passing by as if on a digital screen. The only "ritual" on offer is the selection of generic consumer products at the rest stop. I applaud Schwendener's choice to take the old roads as often as he can; we may find ourselves in the "iron cage" of modernity, but we can still try to catch a glimpse of a more human world through the bars.

Chris Killheffer
North Haven, Conn.

CHRIST IN THE YOUNG

Francis's messages to young people (Austen Ivereigh, "Room for Everyone," September 2023) were deeply Christocentric, constantly inviting them to listen to Jesus, to hear his call, to let him see and love them as they are, to let him accompany them, to welcome him into their hearts, and to love others as he loves them. The pope's final words at the vast Mass in Tejo Park were an invitation to surrender: "He knows each of your hearts, each of your lives; he knows your joys, your sorrows, your successes and failures.... Today, he says to you, here in Lisbon, at this World Youth Day: 'Have no fear, take heart, do not be afraid!'"

But who is actually taking this approach with our young adults and children? Who are the people on fire with Jesus' (and the pope's) message, and where are they? High school and college-aged youths have left the Church because it does not model Jesus for them. Sermons rarely speak to our children and young adults, let alone the rest of the folks in the pews. We scoff at kids who say Mass is boring, and we fail to listen. We are all encouraged to read the Bible, but little is taught on how to pray with it.

I have been a Catholic for eighty-three years, experiencing a relationship with Christ. Studying the Baltimore Catechism and now reading the new Catechism certainly doesn't create that loving relationship. Our young people are thirsting for Jesus without realizing. Who will quench their thirst?

Sally Lofte
Minneapolis, Minn.

Commonweal welcomes letters to the editor. Letters can respond to both print and online articles, and should include your name, city, and state. Please send your submissions to letters@commonwealmagazine.org.

Patients Over Profits

It's been a little more than six years since Republican senator John McCain of Arizona cast the dramatic "thumbs-down" vote that doomed his party's attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act and preserved health care for millions of Americans. Obamacare may be imperfect, with its patchwork of providers and marketplaces and confusing plan tiers. But it is beyond question that it has done a lot of good, insuring some twenty million Americans, expanding access to Medicaid for poor and working-class people, and offering much-needed protections to women, young people, seniors, rural communities, and those with preexisting conditions. It's become so popular, even among many conservative voters, that Republican politicians don't dare talk of repealing it anymore.

Less dramatic than McCain's vote, but no less meaningful, was the Biden administration's announcement in August that the federal government under Medicare would soon begin negotiating the prices of ten prescription drugs, including treatments for diabetes, heart disease, and blood cancer. First passed as part of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, the provision is an important step toward achieving fairer health-care outcomes in the United States, where prescription drugs cost an average of 2.56 times more than in other countries, and where medical expenses cause the overwhelming majority of personal bankruptcies. Patients needing these ten drugs (and the twenty or so other medications to be added each year) won't be the only beneficiaries; beginning in 2025, those requiring insulin will see their out-of-pocket expenses capped at $35 per month, while yearly costs for drugs taken at home will be limited to $2,000 for all Medicare recipients. The savings accruing to taxpayers—the federal government estimates $160 billion over ten years—could be reinvested in the American health-care system, lowering costs for everyone.

This overdue measure has sparked predictable outcry from pharmaceutical companies. Sensing a threat to their outsized profit margins, among the highest of all industries, they've filed lawsuits, engaged in fear mongering, and pushed outright lies. Some of their arguments—that having to negotiate a fair price with Medicare violates their right to free speech, or that they're being subject to price controls and threatened with seizure of property—can be dismissed out of hand. Losing the right to dictate terms hardly constitutes coercion or theft. If anyone has been ripped off, it's the federal government and the taxpayers who fund it. Since 2003, when Bush-era legislation expressly prohibited the federal government from using its considerable leverage to secure better prices, Medicare has been forced into the role of a "price taker." The new provisions simply level the playing field, permitting the United States to do what it already does with other federal agencies and areas of medicine. If Medicare and the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs already negotiate prices for doctor visits, surgeries, and hospital stays, why should pharmaceuticals remain exempt? Besides, if drug companies really prefer not to do business with the government, they don't have to—though they would be forgoing their largest source of revenue.

More pernicious are Big Pharma's claims that if the courts don't block negotiated prices, the cost of private insurance will jump and drug companies' investment in research and development for lifesaving treatments will plunge. Neither claim stands up to scrutiny. Economists point out that if pharmaceutical companies could raise prices, they'd have done so already. In fact, the prices most private insurers pay for prescription drugs will probably go *down*, since insurers usually base what they pay on what Medicare pays. And it's not as if Big Pharma leads the way in R&D spending or in patents. Giants like Pfizer, Merck, Johnson & Johnson, GSK, and BMS spend far more on sales, marketing, and lobbying than they do on R&D. It's the federally funded National Institutes of Health that leads the world in funding medical research, especially at pivotal earlier stages. Imagine how much more it could do with the billions gained from savings on prescription drugs.

Polling shows that about 80 percent of Americans approve of the prescription-pricing plan, and President Biden has signaled that he'll make drug pricing a centerpiece of his 2024 campaign. He should continue to press the issue of health care, which is a winning one for Democrats and which Republicans are largely silent on. Significant problems remain: too many Americans lack access to affordable mental-health care; administrative overhead and waste accounts for nearly 30 percent of the nation's total annual medical expenditures; fraud makes up 10 percent of what the government spends on health care. Then there's the chronic understaffing in hospitals and clinics, the for-profit takeover of the hospice industry, and the rise of private-equity funds buying up everything from nursing homes to fertility clinics, to the detriment of patients and providers alike. But reining in the pharmaceutical industry is an important step toward making health care more affordable for everyone. It's also an indication that there's the political will for the government to stop padding corporate profits.

Autoworkers Stand Up

On November 12, 1936, three welders at a General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan, sat down on the job. They were protesting deadly working conditions, below-subsistence wages, and relentless anti-union intimidation tactics, including an illegal network of spies so extensive that GM even spied on its own spies. The welders were fired, but in response, seven hundred more workers sat down on the job. What followed was a wave of sit-down strikes at GM, which led to a $25 million wage increase and recognition of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

Current UAW president Shawn Fain—elected in March as a reform candidate after years of corruption and concessions at the union—evoked this past when he announced a "stand-up strike" on September 14. "In the spirit of the sit-down strike," he said, "the stand-up strike will keep the companies guessing." In practice, this means workers are striking strategically at select plants of the "Big Three" major car manufacturers, GM, Ford, and Stellantis—the first time there have been walkouts at all three simultaneously. Fain's hope is that this limited strike can target vulnerable points in the automakers' production system while reducing the burden on UAW's strike fund. That said, an all-out work stoppage remains on the table.

The UAW's central grievances revolve around concessions the union made to car companies in 2008 in order to ease their financial difficulties and facilitate a taxpayer-funded bailout. These concessions amounted to billions in reduced labor costs and included layoffs; benefit reductions; and wage cuts, freezes, and tiers, which mean newer workers make less. As a result, since 2003, autoworkers' inflation-adjusted average hourly wage is down by 30 percent. In addition to regular cost-of-living adjustments and an end to tiers, the UAW is asking for a 36 percent pay increase over four years (down from an initial ask of 46 percent).

The automakers can afford it. Big Three profits are up 65 percent over the past four years, and GM CEO Mary Barra took home $29 million in 2022, 362 times the pay of a median GM employee. Automakers are pleading that they need cash on hand to finance the transition to electric vehicles and compete with non-union automakers, but in the past few years they've wasted billions on stock buybacks, which boost stock prices and enrich shareholders. Illegal before 1982, buybacks were a central factor leading to GM's 2009 bankruptcy.

The UAW supports EV production but insists "on a just transition that ensures auto workers have a place in the new economy." Because new battery plants have been structured as joint ventures with Chinese and South Korean companies, the Big Three can avoid abiding by the UAW contract. But the union has been trying to organize workers at these plants, as well as at Tesla and other EV manufacturers. Fain has criticized the Biden administration for not tying EV subsidies in the Inflation Reduction Act to worker protections. GM expects to collect $300 million in EV tax credits this year, but workers at its Ohio battery plant were making just $16.50 an hour while facing a range of safety hazards.

The strike is following a now-familiar pattern. As with the ongoing writers' strike in Hollywood and the foiled rail strike last year, labor is resisting capital's use of technological shifts and financialization to further prioritize short-term profits and stock performance over worker compensation and safety. These corporate priorities also tend to destabilize the economy over the long term. Despite worries that strikes will crash the economy, they represent a much-needed site of resistance to an economy designed to make the rich richer no matter the cost.

—Alexander Stern, September 21, 2023

Devastation in Libya

"There are bodies everywhere," said one CNN correspondent. Another described how, "looking into the sea, what we see is people's lives.... Door frames, windows, furniture, clothes, cars." The reports came from Derna, in eastern Libya, where torrential rains led to the collapse of two dams on September 11 and washed a quarter of the city out into the Mediterranean Sea. The Libyan Red Crescent initially estimated the death toll could surpass ten thousand. Tens of thousands more were missing, and at least thirty thousand were displaced.

Libya was not the only country battered by the storm; Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey also suffered significant damages to land and property, and more than a dozen deaths. But Libya bore the highest toll by far. Derna's devastation can be blamed in part on Libya's civil and governmental dysfunction. Following the 2011 fall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi, the country has struggled to build and maintain a unified democracy. Two competing governments currently lay claim to the country: the internationally recognized Government of National Unity in Tripoli and the Government of National Stability, based in the east. Persistent conflict between the two has left Libya unable to to prioritize the safety and health of its people. Both dams were overdue for maintenance, calls to repair them were long ignored, and engineers had warned of potential catastrophe. When disaster struck, residents received mixed messages about whether to flee or to remain indoors. Furious and distraught citizens have begun staging demonstrations in Derna, blaming authorities for their negligence and even setting fire to the mayor's house.

International relief has been slow to arrive, as washed-out bridges and roads have made it difficult to access the city. The White House is working with the

United Nations to provide aid, but this is not enough. Writing in the *New York Times*, Ethan Chorin argues that the United States has a specific responsibility to help Libya—to "re-engage directly with the Libyan people"—given its role in overthrowing Qaddafi and its subsequent retreat from the nation. But the United States, along with other Western countries, bears an additional, broader responsibility. Stephanie Williams, the former special advisor on Libya to the UN Secretary General, described the Derna disaster as "a climate catastrophe exacerbated by misgovernance." Climate change, while not specifically the cause of every storm, flood, or drought, undeniably contributes to the increased intensity and frequency of these phenomena. No part of the world is completely impervious, but Africa—itself responsible for only 4 percent of global emissions—experiences some of the worst consequences of these natural disasters.

A major success at last year's COP27 climate conference was the creation of a loss-and-damage fund, which historically high-emitting countries would use to reimburse poorer countries heavily affected by climate change. But how that fund will work has yet to be determined. (Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry announced this summer that "under no circumstances" would the United States provide climate reparations.) Leading up to this year's COP28, African nations held the first Africa Climate Summit, writing a declaration they hope to use as the basis of their negotiations. It calls for global taxes on shipping, aviation, and fossil-fuel trading. Whatever they are called—reparations, taxes, "loss-and-damage reimbursements"—the United States cannot in good conscience ignore them. Given the violent conflict and corruption that plague many of the affected nations, it will be challenging to effectively fund and implement adaptation programs to protect citizens from disasters like the one in Derna. But that challenge does not exempt us from our obligations, to Libya or to the rest of Africa.

—Isabella Simon

A Bridge Too Long?

In announcing his retirement last month, Utah senator Mitt Romney called on the two likely major-party presidential nominees to step down as well. "I think it would be a great thing if both President Biden and former President Trump were to stand aside and let their respective party pick someone in the next generation…. I think both parties would be far better served if they were going to be represented by people other than those of us from the baby-boom generation." He was unintentionally generous regarding Biden, born too early to be a boomer (1942), but his point was well taken—even if, as a fitting capstone to his politically moderate senatorial career, it will likely have zero impact.

Biden once hinted at doing exactly what Romney has proposed, positioning himself during the 2020 primaries as a transitional figure bridging the Democratic Party's past and its future. He was then seventy-seven, already older than the oldest-ever incoming president: Donald Trump, inaugurated at seventy. Voters otherwise averse to Biden might have heard this as a pledge to serve a single term—or at least to seriously consider it—and so voted for him with the single aim of defeating Trump. That done, the party could turn to its bench for a 2024 nominee, perhaps someone more demonstrably attuned to progressive sensibilities about climate, immigration, and the economy, and, by default, someone younger.

Biden, as we know now, seems to have had a longer bridge in mind. With incumbency comes the privilege of acting as the presumptive nominee, and the party establishment has coalesced around him. In normal circumstances this would be perfectly fine, especially given Biden's restoration of stability and civility and the policy achievements he can lay claim to. But these are not normal circumstances. Biden's approval rating is terrible; he polls poorly against Trump and other GOP candidates; and the majority of Democratic voters don't want him to run. All of these can be traced in some degree to one thing: Biden's age.

It may seem ageist or unkind. But Americans should be forgiven their hesitancy in returning someone who will be eighty-two years old to the nation's highest office. The vast majority of people over seventy-five are retired, and with good reason: growing older makes it harder to work. It also makes it harder to stay healthy. Research shows the chance of acquiring three diseases simultaneously rises ten-fold between the ages of seventy and eighty, then ten-fold again in the next decade of life. Millions of Americans have experienced these and other effects of aging themselves, and millions more have watched elderly loved ones go through them. Add to that the unique stressors of the presidency, which seem to age presidents before our eyes, and the concerns over Biden's age become impossible to dismiss. Clips of him cycling in Delaware do little to distract from clear signs of diminished physical vigor and verbal acuity.

Biden and those around him insist he's fit to run and that he is Democrats' best option. Their certainty rests on two contestable assumptions. One is that Trump will be the GOP nominee. But legal troubles and his own age-related health issues could change that, and it's not all that hard to imagine how, say, a Nikki Haley would fare against Biden. The other assumption is that if Trump *is* the nominee, only Biden could beat him. That overestimates Trump and Biden both, and blithely overlooks the fact that there are other Democrats qualified to run—current governors, senators, and cabinet members—and capable of winning. If the party believes that Biden is truly the only option, then it could be on a bridge to nowhere.

—Dominic Preziosi

The Church isn't something separate, "out there"; it's in the pews, in every baptized person.

OSV NEWS PHOTO/MIHOKO OWADA, CATHOLIC STANDARD

RITA FERRONE

What Is 'Eucharistic Ecclesiology'?

An apostolic model for becoming a synodal Church

The Roman Catholic–Orthodox Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue produced a statement this past June on the vexed issue of papal primacy and the timely topic of synodality. The Alexandria statement, "Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today," describes the history of the split between the Orthodox and the Catholics and chronicles the efforts to bridge those divisions. Agreeing on a fair statement of what actually happened is an accomplishment. Ultimately, however, the dialogue participants signaled the need to go further. "Purely historical discussions are not enough," they state. And in the end, they make an assertion that I find intriguing: "A eucharistic ecclesiology of communion is the key to articulating a sound theology of synodality and primacy."

What is eucharistic ecclesiology? The document itself does not define it, but some general reference points can help to put this term into context. On the Orthodox side, eucharistic ecclesiology is associated with the groundbreaking work of the eastern Orthodox theologian Nicolai Afanassieff (1893–1966), who taught in Paris at the St. Sergius Institute, and whose thinking and writing influenced other Orthodox luminaries such as Alexander Schmemann, John Meyendorff, and John Zizioulas. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex subject, the basic premise here is that believers are united with Christ through the Eucharist, and Christ is not divided. Therefore, eucharistic assemblies are not merely "part of" a larger church. Rather, they *are* the Church in a qualitative way. Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church.

This argument is based upon a reading of the first three centuries of the Church's history and presumes the presence of the bishop as the president of the local eucharistic assembly. In this view, primacy also has a place, provided it is understood as preeminence and respect. Consultation, resolution of disputes, support of the weak, safeguarding of unity, and so on, are assisted by primacy—not understood as command and control, but as a service to the mystery manifest in each local church that gathers for the Eucharist. Again, the model is taken from the apostolic church.

A "return to the sources" in the liturgical movement and through the patristic revival of the twentieth century also opened up for Catholics some intriguing insights regarding eucharistic ecclesiology that were then articulated at the Second Vatican Council. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*) stated that the bishop

celebrating the Eucharist, surrounded by his presbyters, ministers, and all the faithful, is the "pre-eminent manifestation" of the Church (*SC*, 41). The very introduction to the liturgy constitution affirms a strong link between Eucharist and ecclesiology: "The liturgy… and most of all the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (*SC*, article 2).

One also finds elements of a eucharistic ecclesiology in *Lumen gentium* (the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church). The first draft, prepared by the Roman Curia, heavily emphasized the Church's visible organizational structures. Authority and jurisdiction were in the foreground. The document in its final form, however, shifted dramatically in emphasis. Not only was it enriched by imagery from the scriptures—the sheepfold and flock, the cultivated field, the olive tree, the building of God whose cornerstone is Christ, and more. It also described the Church *first of all* as a sacrament (*LG*, article 1). Article 7 further explains that "really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another." As American theologian Richard Gaillardetz later commented:

> This eucharistic ecclesiology would, in turn, lead the Council to affirm the theological significance of the local church. If each celebration of the Eucharist is a matter not only of Christ's sacramental presence on the altar, but also of his ecclesial presence in the gathered community, then each eucharistic local church must be more than a subset of the universal Church; it must be the Body of Christ "in that place."

Have Catholics actually absorbed these insights? Unfortunately, a top-down and juridical style of governance in practice continues to make it difficult for people to grasp the communal and participatory—indeed sacramental—realities the council highlighted. This accounts, at least in part, for a certain malaise that the Synod on Synodality is trying, in various ways, to address. For too many Catholics, the Church remains something "out there" that does not really, in the end, include them. They refer to the hierarchy as "the Church," full stop, even though they are baptized members of the one Body of Christ that gathers around the altar. Can the eucharistic assembly really be foundational to our understanding of the Church if bishops are seen as branch managers of a multinational corporation, or if we regard ourselves as consumers of products the hierarchy produces (sacraments, homilies, priests, etc.)? Sadly, we have not been formed in such a way that eucharistic ecclesiology makes sense.

But we could be. In a 2018 statement on "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," the International Theological Commission proposed that the shape of the eucharistic gathering is the foundation for a synodal spirituality, precisely because "the Eucharistic synaxis expresses and brings into being the ecclesial 'we' of the *communio sanctorum*" (no. 49). The statement charts the stages of this eucharistic paradigm in five steps: gathering, penitence, Word, Eucharist, and sending (no. 109). These spiritual movements embodied in the celebration of the Eucharist are the very ones we must continually practice in daily life in order to become a synodal Church.

As a liturgist, I would quibble with certain parts of the commission's description (they've overweighted the penitential rite and reduced the opening of the liturgy to an "invocation of the Trinity"). Still, the game is worth the candle. Patterning our spirituality of "walking together" on the eucharistic liturgy is a noble effort. It can enlighten our vision of what we do in the liturgy and at the same time deepen our commitment to those movements of faith that "being Church" requires.

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FRAN QUIGLEY

A Crisis With a Clear Solution

When it comes to housing, we know what works.

A sanctioned homeless encampment near City Hall in San Francisco, May 2020

CNS PHOTO/DRONE BASE, REUTERS

For many of us, our nation's housing crisis is all too evident. If we live in a city, we can see proof that nearly 600,000 Americans experience homelessness every year. If we are among the 44 million households who rent, we don't need to be told that rent prices have skyrocketed in recent years—including an almost 20 percent increase in 2021 alone.

My students and I see the crisis up close in our Indiana law clinic. Each week, we represent tenants facing eviction. The courtrooms where we work are overflowing, a testament to the fact that, along with rents, eviction rates across the country are rising. The latest census reports show nearly eight million households are behind on their rent, which means they are on track to join our clients and tens of thousands of others lining up each day to fight to stay in their homes—or, more often, to learn which day a judge will order them to move.

Twenty-five million people in the United States live in households paying more than half their income on rent, and that spells trouble, too. These families may be meeting all of their financial obligations now, but experience tells us that they may be one broken-down vehicle or unexpected child's illness away from eviction court. Decades of research show that each eviction causes significant damage not just to a family's finances, but also to their physical and mental health—particularly the health of the children in these displaced households.

When it comes to housing in the United States, it can be tempting to despair. But we shouldn't, because we know how to end this crisis.

We know that we can prevent many evictions by making simple changes to the way eviction courts are structured. Currently, these courts overwhelmingly favor the interests of landlords, who often use them as a quick, inexpensive tool to collect more money. There is nothing stopping us from raising the cost of eviction filings. Research from Princeton's Eviction Lab shows that higher filing fees, even in low-income areas like Alabama, are associated with significantly lower eviction rates. Eviction rates are also low in cities where landlords are required to show "good cause" before putting tenants out and refusing to renew their leases.

We know from the experience of U.S. cities like Houston and Denver, as well as places like Finland, that a "Housing First" approach can effectively address homelessness. Prioritizing a safe, secure roof overhead as a human right, and then addressing other social-service needs, is the most humane way to support those struggling with chronic homelessness. And it works: reducing the number of people who are unhoused interrupts the common path from homelessness to arrest and incarceration.

We know that rent control works, too. Over a hundred U.S. municipalities already have rent-control measures in place. Price regulation doesn't just stop price gouging on behalf of greedy landlords. It protects renters from losing their homes when rent shocks occur. (In our area, rents have risen more than 30 percent in recent years.) Rent control hardly condemns landlords to penury; usually such laws allow for regular rent increases that often exceed inflation, preserving the Supreme Court's holding that landlords are entitled to a "fair return" on their investment. Rent control's long-term presence in some of our nation's

most profitable real estate markets (like New York City, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area) proves that such measures not only protect tenants, but can coexist alongside a robust climate of new construction and housing rehabilitation.

We know that we can overcome gentrification and segregation. When racist housing covenants that segregated our communities were finally ruled illegal by the Supreme Court in 1948, many areas simply replaced them with zoning rules that limited neighborhoods to single-family homes with large lot sizes and parking restrictions. White neighborhoods found that these exclusionary zoning rules had the same effect as the racist rules they replaced: most people of color and nearly all low-income families were effectively barred from the communities. Sociologist Matthew Desmond calls exclusionary zoning "our politer, quieter means of promoting segregation," and it is fully legal in most areas of the country.

But that can change, as proven by cities like Santa Fe, which adopted inclusionary zoning rules. Such rules blunt the forces of gentrification by ensuring that affordable housing can be built in areas where working-poor families, seniors, and others can access jobs, schools, health care, and public transportation. As with rent control, none of these pro-tenant regulations have slowed the development of new housing: New Jersey, in particular, has proved that housing construction can thrive and even boom in locations where both inclusionary zoning and rent control are the law.

For the millions of families whose incomes are too low to consistently afford market-rate housing, we know that public housing can be a reliable alternative. Examples from across the United States and around the world prove that we are capable of protecting people living with disabilities and low incomes.

For our clients and their families, housing costs are far and away the highest expense in their household. But other income supports like child tax credits, more robust food vouchers, and occasional stimulus checks can help keep these families housed. For evidence of their effectiveness, we need only look at the first years of the pandemic, when the expansion of benefits pushed U.S. poverty rates to the lowest they have been in recorded history—even in the midst of widespread joblessness and illness.

That is the good news. The bad news, as our clients can attest, is that these proven approaches are not the norm across the United States.

Our courts too often operate as collection and displacement factories for the benefit of corporate landlords. Homelessness is effectively criminalized in too many communities. Proposals to expand rent control and invest in public housing are derailed by advertising and lobbying blitzes funded by the private-equity firms making billions in profits on rental housing.

Well-funded NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) forces perpetuate generations of housing segregation by blocking the development of affordable housing in communities where it is desperately needed. Good-cause protection for renters was recently rebuffed in the New York legislature, which just four years ago had passed one of the country's most ambitious pro-renter housing measures in decades.

We can do better, and we must. The most promising developments are not the islands of progressive reform where effective policies have been passed, but the growing and increasingly vocal tenant movement insisting that these policies be adopted nationwide.

History tells us that social change happens when movements are led by those who are most impacted. So it is exciting to see tenants pushing to the front of the line. The most prominent example is the People's Action Homes Guarantee campaign, mobilizing tenants across the country under the "Rent Is Too Damn High" banner. They are demanding a tenants' bill of rights that includes good-cause guarantees and federal action on rent control.

Alongside other housing activists, Homes Guarantee is employing tactics ranging from canvassing to occupying vacant buildings to pushing ballot initiatives. It has already notched some impressive victories. In the 2022 midterm elections, from Kansas City to Portland, Maine, to the entire state of Colorado, ballot measures to both mandate rent control and fund more affordable housing won, often by comfortable margins. As I have previously written for *Commonweal*, religious communities—including Catholic institutions—are prominent supporters of housing justice. The National Low Income Housing Coalition conducts a "HOUSED" campaign to expand rental assistance to every eligible household and create a national housing-stabilization fund to provide emergency help. The HOUSED campaign is joined by Catholic Charities USA, the Union for Reform Judaism, and the national leadership of the Episcopal and Methodist churches.

After tenants traveled to the White House and Congress to press their demands, President Biden responded in January with a "Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights." The Blueprint was short on tangible guarantees, but it did include a statement of federal commitment to protecting tenants and promised to evaluate expanded regulation. Organizers and tenants have returned to Washington and are going door-to-door in their communities, using Biden's statement to continue applying pressure.

It should not be controversial to insist that housing is a human right. That right is not a reality here and now, either in the letter of the law or the daily experience of our clients and millions of others. But we know how to change that. Visionary tenants' groups and their leaders are showing us the way. We need to make sure our elected officials listen.

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REGINA MUNCH

Food Fight

We need a new kind of Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill doesn't usually get as much press as some other congressional actions. Something like raising the debt ceiling or nominating a Speaker of the House draws attention to the too-good-to-miss partisan fights in which one side must vanquish the other. But every five years, the Farm Bill, which determines national food and agricultural policy, is usually passed with bipartisan support. The bill brings the two parties together to fund major programs: SNAP benefits (supported by Democrats) and subsidy payments for commodity-crop farmers (supported by Republicans). It also provides funds for crop insurance and conservation efforts. The two parties usually combine these various programs in one bill without much argument.

But the process of passing the 2023 Farm Bill has been unusually contentious. A group of far-right Republicans have broken with the status quo, insisting that the bill's price tag—expected to exceed $1 trillion for the first time—is too high. They are targeting both Democratic and Republican priorities: they want cuts to SNAP benefits and new restrictions on eligibility as well as reduced funding for agricultural subsidies. Subsidy payments are popular in right-leaning congressional districts: individual farmers who grow commodity crops—corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton—are paid by the government when the commodity price drops below a certain threshold. Begun as part of a New Deal program to help farmers suffering in the Depression and to maintain the national food supply, the commodity subsidies encourage farmers to keep planting even when they can't make a profit.

In response to these demands from right-wing Republicans, Democrats sent a letter to Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, insisting that SNAP benefits not be cut. Many moderate Republicans, including House Agriculture Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson, are urging their colleagues to support the bill with SNAP benefits fully intact. They know that not passing the Farm Bill—or passing it too late—would be extremely unpopular among their constituents, who depend on subsidy payments. The bill almost certainly won't be passed by September 30, when the previous Farm Bill expires. If it isn't passed before the end of the year, the majority of the programs it would fund will expire.

SNAP is indeed expensive, comprising 80 percent of the Farm Bill's cost. But the program feeds 42 million people—12 percent of the country and a quarter of American children. Low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled all depend on it. One of the goals of the far-right Republican cohort is to roll back a recent benefit increase. As a nutrition program, SNAP benefits are determined in part by the Department of Agriculture; the USDA calculates the average cost of a nutritious meal for a family of four, and this information is used to set benefit amounts. Until 2021, this calculation had only adjusted for inflation the grocery prices from 1975, when the calculation was first made. It didn't take into account the rising cost of groceries or various dietary needs. Before the 2021 adjustment, the maximum SNAP benefit did not cover the "average cost of a modestly priced

Harvesting corn in southwestern Michigan

LOREN KING/UNSPLASH

meal in 96 percent of U.S. counties," according to an Urban Institute study. Far-right Republicans are threatening not to support the bill unless this very modest increase—between $12 and $16 per person per month—is scrapped.

It would be fair to ask why SNAP and agricultural subsidies are funded by a single bill. Writing for the *American Prospect*, Luke Goldstein argues that the winners in this arrangement aren't farmers or SNAP recipients but the huge companies that control the American food system. "The real function of the modern farm bill is to deliver windfalls to industry by subsidizing cheap commodity grains…that sell below the cost of production to agribusiness, fast-food chains, and global exports," Goldstein writes. The farmers who grow the commodity crops are subsidized just enough to continue producing, but most of their product doesn't go to feeding people directly. Instead, it goes to companies that use cheap crops to make major profits. Some of it feeds animals, mostly at CAFOs—concentrated animal feeding operations—which are owned by a small number of extremely powerful companies. Some goes to oil companies, which use it in the production of corn ethanol. Much of it ends up in inexpensive, unhealthy food produced by dominant food companies and fast-food restaurants. Commodity farming is further incentivized because only commodity farmers, rather than vegetable or fruit farmers, have access to the subsidies. Goldstein concludes, "This economic arrangement, which many of today's farmers call a new form of serfdom, not only devastates farmers but incentivizes a food system that is causing rising obesity rates, limited access to fresh foods in inner-city areas, and nearly one-third of greenhouse gas emissions globally."

When crop subsidies began in the New Deal era, large agricultural companies were opposed to the payments, which stabilized the fortunes of small-scale farmers and reduced their demand for fertilizer. But the reauthorization of the Farm Bill every five years was an opportunity for agribusiness to monopolize the industry. Beginning in the 1970s, just as antitrust laws were being reinterpreted in favor of lower prices for consumers, lawmakers began to prioritize large, single-crop farms over small, diversified family farms as the way to structure the food system. Richard Nixon's secretary of agriculture Earl Butz insisted that farmers would have to "go big or get out." And get out they did: over 2 million farmers left the industry between 1950 and 1990.

Food aid was added to the Farm Bill in 1964, when the representatives of Southern cotton farmers needed broader support to pass a bill favorable to them but disliked by others. Food aid—what we now know as SNAP—has been a vital part of helping the Farm Bill pass ever since. Support for SNAP has helped sneak destructive policies into the bill that have facilitated the transfer of wealth and land from farmers to corporations in the agricultural, food, oil, and chemical industries.

"Both by design and corporate hijacking, government policies have turned our farmlands into a paradise for big business and a wasteland for the rest of us," argues Rebecca Wolf of Food & Water Watch. Rural communities have been torn apart by the suffering of farmers, who have experienced rising rates of debt, bankruptcy, and suicide. As these communities have been impoverished, regional rural economies that depend on agriculture have been endangered. And we are all weakened by a food system that creates less nutritious food, fails to remunerate the people who grow and harvest it, and pollutes our air and water.

This status quo, which has been acceptable to both political parties, will be hard to break, especially because Big Ag spends more than the defense industry on lobbying. The far-right Republicans holding up the 2023 Farm Bill are not going to be the ones to fix the problem; their vengeful calls to cut both SNAP and farm subsidies do not amount to a serious vision for what U.S. farm policy should look like.

A movement of farmers, activists, and policy advocates are now taking on the extraordinary challenge of refashioning the U.S. food system, and an unlikely alliance between Democratic senator Cory Booker and Republican senator Chuck Grassley has given voice to their priorities. Grassley has been a consistent critic of the consolidation of agriculture, particularly the meatpacking industry, often against the orthodoxy of his party. Booker has also been opposed to monopoly power and has fought against animal abuse at CAFOs. The two senators are advocating for an open market for independent farmers and a rule that would require meatpackers to purchase half of their animals on the open market. Grassley has introduced a bill that would put a limit on subsidy payments to huge, mostly corporate-owned farms, which would help redirect government assistance to the smaller farmers who need it most. Booker is also trying to prevent tax money from being used by agricultural lobbyists for advertising (e.g., the "Got Milk?" campaign).

A number of proposed "marker bills"—smaller pieces of legislation attached to the larger Farm Bill—show that other legislators are paying attention to agriculture. These would increase land access for young farmers, help small diversified farms access crop insurance, and fund research into environmentally friendly farming practices. Many of these proposals have bipartisan support.

Patty Lovera, policy director for the Organic Farmers Association, told Goldstein, "We [anti-monopolists] used to be greeted on the Hill like we were wearing tinfoil hats for saying we had a consolidation problem, and now everyone is like, 'of course we do.'" It will be hard to overcome the inertia of decades-old policies and the influence of powerful interest groups. But the belief that corporate agriculture can keep Americans fed and healthy is at the end of its season.

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People wait in line at a methadone clinic in Hoquiam, Washington, June 2017.

AP PHOTO/DAVID GOLDMAN

JESSICA GREGG

Preventable Deaths

Opioid regulations block access to lifesaving medicines.

I am a physician who specializes in the treatment of addiction, and my patients are dying. Among them, a sweet, legally blind kid with thick glasses, barely in his twenties, who used heroin and then fentanyl. He needed treatment with methadone, but federal regulations intentionally limit access to that lifesaving medication. So, he died instead. Another patient: a sixty-year-old woman hooked on pain pills. I started her on a medication called buprenorphine that has an excellent track record of treating opioid addiction. She stopped using drugs and moved to rural Oregon to reunite with her children. But near her new home, there was only one doctor who would agree to continue her prescription, and when he retired, she lost access to the medication. She started using again. And then she died.

Yes, my patients chose to take the drugs that eventually killed them, but before they died, they also tried to take evidence-based medications that could help them stop. Unfortunately, they discovered it is much, much easier in this country to find a fentanyl dealer than to find a way through the multiple, unconscionable barriers limiting access to these essential medications.

Methadone and buprenorphine are opioids themselves. Unlike other opioids, however, methadone and buprenorphine save lives. They decrease cravings, decrease use, and decrease deaths. Methadone is what is known as a "full agonist" at the opioid receptor, which means it sits on the receptor and activates it fully, just like morphine, oxycodone, or fentanyl. The difference with methadone is that it builds up slowly and sticks around, so there are no rapid highs and few deep dives into withdrawal. At the right dose, it activates the receptor just enough to remove cravings and stem withdrawal, helping patients focus on other, valued parts of their lives.

Buprenorphine is a "partial agonist," meaning it occupies the opioid receptors but only partially activates them, decreasing cravings and withdrawal without an accompanying high. Because it is a partial agonist, it is very difficult for anyone to overdose

on buprenorphine. It doesn't have the potency necessary for complete respiratory depression. Also, because it binds the receptors tightly, it keeps other opioids from binding on them, which means that when it is in a person's system, it protects them from overdosing on any other opioids.

Both are excellent medications, but methadone is stronger than buprenorphine. For users of fentanyl, it is sometimes the only medication strong enough to stem cravings. However, federal rules can make it nearly impossible for some patients to access methadone to treat their addiction. The rules stipulate that patients may only obtain methadone from an opioid treatment program (OTP), and, for the first three months of treatment, they must attend the OTP in person daily to receive their medication. They receive just one dose a day. It doesn't matter if the OTP is hundreds of miles from their home, if a job or childcare makes it impossible to pick up the medication on time, or if they have no car to get there.

Furthermore, rules stipulate that the initial dose must be no higher than thirty milligrams, which generally doesn't come close to curbing cravings. With this insufficient dose, patients often keep using opioids on top of methadone. When they test positive, they don't earn take-home doses, which means that they remain shackled to the OTP, sometimes waiting in long lines, sometimes in cold, wet parking lots, sometimes in terrible heat. It's almost as if the regulations were specifically designed to shame them.

When buprenorphine was approved by the FDA in 2002, it was an intense relief to physicians like me to know that we could offer a treatment for opioid addiction that did not require daily attendance at an OTP. Buprenorphine could be prescribed by a regular doctor in a regular clinic. Still, initial regulations limited who could prescribe it (only providers with a special federal waiver) and to how many patients (thirty at a time).

Faced with a tidal wave of fentanyl-related sickness and death, Congress has whittled away at the rules surrounding buprenorphine until, recently, nearly all barriers to prescribing it were removed. Unfortunately, however, most medical providers still don't prescribe it. It was too long considered outside the scope of regular care, and the tight prescribing limits made it seem as if the medication and the patients who needed it were too complicated, perhaps even dangerous. Best to avoid, too many physicians concluded.

Similarly, most pharmacies don't stock the medication, and some won't fill the prescriptions at all. Distributors also cap the quantity of buprenorphine an individual pharmacy can dispense. I am lucky. I work in a city. When Target won't dispense, we call CVS, then Rite Aid, then Costco, until we find a pharmacy that has the medication. Patients in rural areas aren't so fortunate. If the pharmacy doesn't have it, they go without. Many likely begin using again. Some of them likely die.

Last month, my sister was prescribed a bottle of fifteen oxycodone pills after a minor outpatient procedure, even though she said she didn't want the drug; she didn't even need Tylenol afterwards. She could have picked up the meds, no problem, at the corner pharmacy. But what if she wanted a medication to *quit* taking pills or heroin or fentanyl? If she asked for help with that, would she have found one of the minority of providers in the United States who prescribe buprenorphine and then found a pharmacy to fill the prescription? Or would she have been willing to stand in that methadone line, every morning, while her kids were at home, while she worried about making it to work on time, while she hoped no one she knew would see her?

There is a widespread sentiment I have heard at least a hundred times: people who take buprenorphine or methadone are just "replacing one addiction with another." No. Addiction is defined as the compulsive use of drugs or alcohol in a manner that makes the user's life worse. It is use that leads you to skip your daughter's basketball game because you are sick with withdrawal. It is a weekend of oxycodone that leads to missing work on Monday, again. It is knowing you might die but injecting fentanyl anyway. When my patients stabilize on buprenorphine or methadone, they start going to the basketball games, stay employed, stop injecting, don't overdose. They don't die.

It is true that both buprenorphine and methadone can be misused or diverted and sold. I'm not arguing that the medications should be handed out willy-nilly. But they should be prescribed in the same way we prescribe other potent, lifesaving medications: with close attention to benefits and harms, with the expectation that our prescriptions will be filled, and without stigma, shaming, or life-jeopardizing restrictions.

In some minor good news, the Department of Health and Human Services is considering an update to the methadone rules, adding a drib of telehealth here and drab of dosing flexibility there. But there is no proposal for real change. Tinkering around the edges is not enough. We need to dismantle the disgraceful rules surrounding the provision of methadone, incentivize buprenorphine prescriptions, and require pharmacies to stock these medications.

Until then, if, for instance, you are a blind kid, barely twenty years old, shooting fentanyl, with no reliable means of transportation and no family around to help, you might give up on trying to get to the methadone clinic after a few weeks of missed buses, missed appointments, missed doses. You might know that you need the medication, but you also know that this is not a life you can lead.

So, in the end, you lead no life at all.

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Born to Struggle

Gary Dorrien

William J. Barber II in the Shadow of MLK

The Black prophetic tradition remains the touchstone of progressive religion and politics in the United States, but it takes several forms. Many of its leading voices do not sound like Martin Luther King Jr., or evoke his memory, or speak in his idioms. But the standout figure in this prophetic tradition today is unmistakably a throwback to MLK.

William Barber stands out today as the symbol of the coalitional, Gospel-based, social-justice activism of the Black social-gospel tradition. Though a throwback, he is forward-looking. He sees no reason why churches cannot mobilize as they did between 1955 and 1965, if only they fix on Jesus and build some good organizations. Barber is earnest, eloquent, relentless, eager to preach, and didactic, often riffing at length on political history. He wears black suits with a white clerical stole reading "Jesus Was a Poor Man," or full-robed sanctuary regalia, in both cases with a magenta shirt marking his episcopal status. He speaks in carefully parsed sentences, always leaning forward, a visible sign even to those unaware of his story that he has suffered much along the way.

He was born to the struggle, two days after King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Barber's father, William Barber Sr., was a physics teacher who settled in Indianapolis after graduating from Butler University and marrying a local government clerk. Just before Barber started kindergarten in an integrated Indianapolis public school, his father got a call from his old friend E. V. Wilkins, an educator and civil-rights activist in Plymouth, North Carolina. Wilkins asked Barber Sr. to move back to North Carolina to help in the struggle. The NAACP needed Black teachers and their children to integrate the schools. A year later the Barber family moved into Barber Sr.'s boyhood home in Roper, North Carolina, where his mother still lived.

Barber Jr. cherished his paternal grandmother, who had Mother status in her congregation and was the spiritual anchor of her family. Every Sunday, she visited shut-ins after church. For years, Barber thought she mistook the word "hope" for "help," as in: "We'll be back shortly. We've got to go and hope somebody." Later, he realized that "hoping" others in Christ was precisely how his grandmother survived, contradicting a white society that despised her. Barber's early impression was that his grandmother was singularly extraordinary. As he grew older, he grasped that his father was much like her, except with two master's degrees.

William Barber Sr. was the real thing, like his mother and son. He could have taught at a Northern university but answered the call to integrate public schools in the South. He could have been a big-steeple preacher, but preached on the side in tiny rural churches of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Coming home to Roper meant that Barber Sr. chose a life of poverty, humility, and service. He rode around in a beat-up pickup truck, bringing his son from one community meeting to another, and everyone called him Doc. When people asked why he brought his kid, Barber Sr. said, "Leave the kid alone; he's learning." A conversation at the house about an injustice done to someone would lead to a meeting in a church basement or barbershop. Barber grew up watching his father look out for people, gathering little groups to address their problems, "hoping" them any way he could.

His father preached revivals in small churches across eastern North Carolina, and wherever he went he spread the Gospel *and* expanded his organizing network. Barber Sr. loved to tell the story of the Disciples of Christ, which fused two early nineteenth-century movements that sought to reform the church by restoring it to the model of the New Testament church. The Barton W. Stone strand derived from a 1901 revival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky. The Thomas and Alexander Campbell strand came from Scotland. Barber Sr. stressed that Black and white Disciples worked and worshiped together, cofounding the Fusion Party after Reconstruction, which united freed slaves and poor whites across North Carolina. There were episodes of heroic moral faith to recount, but this was a sad story, even in Barber Sr.'s revival version, because integrated religion and fusion politics were crushed in the Jim Crow South.

Barber Sr. exhorted Disciples to live up to their early history, without much success. People looked away or turned him off, especially in white congregations, objecting that he asked too much. Barber Jr. recoiled at watching the same reaction

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II speaks at the Poor People's Moral Action Congress in Washington D.C., June 2019.

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over and over. He never doubted that God existed or that his father embodied the ideal, but he didn't want to be his father, a minister who wasted too much of his spirit on the church. Barber Jr. majored in political science at North Carolina Central University (NCCU), aiming for a law career. He aspired to serve the public as a credentialed big-city professional, scaling up from his father's world. In his senior year he organized a group that marched to Raleigh to demand more funding for historically Black colleges. The march won ample attention, revealing to Barber that he had the family gift for organizing. Boston University School of Theology offered him a scholarship and Barber nearly accepted it. He still didn't want to be a minister, but following King to Boston University was hard to turn down.

His grandmother prayed about it, returning with a verdict—Barber didn't need to go to Boston. A few weeks later he reluctantly consented to her decision. Years later, when Barber told this story, he recalled that St. Paul wanted to go to Spain, but the Spirit prevented him. Going to Boston would have taken Barber away from his North Carolina family, world, and story. In 1984, Barber met an NCCU classmate, Rebecca McLean, at a Jesse Jackson campaign event. After they graduated and married, he enrolled at nearby Duke Divinity School, where he met William C. Turner Jr., a legend at Duke who specialized in pneumatology and Black church spirituality; on the side, Turner served as pastor of Durham's Mt. Level Missionary Baptist Church. To Barber, Turner was a godsend—a friend, mentor, and spiritual father who helped him remember why he was at seminary. Upon graduating in 1989, Barber accepted a call to Fayette Street Christian Church in Martinsville, Virginia. His first plunge into social activism as a pastor was chastening. A group of workers at a local textile factory asked him to support their efforts to start a union. Shortly afterward, the president of the company hosted a breakfast meeting for Black clergy at his corporate office. All it took was an hour of schmoozing and a few reminders of the company's token philanthropy to get the ministers to oppose the union. A stunned Barber asked himself a seminary question: What would Reinhold Niebuhr say we did wrong? This question practically answered itself. Working for justice in the real world requires real political power. If you don't have any power, you can't achieve gains for justice.

Barber vowed never to enter another fight for justice without knowing who had his back. But learning a Niebuhrian lesson and being a Niebuhrian were different things. Reading Niebuhr in seminary, Barber had not accepted his claim that the test of faithful action is political effectiveness. If Christian social ethics reduces to Niebuhrian realism, why become a minister? Barber thought of Psalm 94, God asking who will rise up before the wicked. That was biblical faith to him—"leading people who had lost a fight but still knew that the Lord was on their side." He thought of William Lloyd Garrison, nearly lynched by a respectable mob in 1835. Garrison had no plan or power; all he could do was rail against slavery and hope to find some allies. Barber also thought of Justice John Marshall Harlan of Kentucky, casting the only vote in the U.S. Supreme Court against *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Harlan was routed in 1896, but the NAACP cited his words for decades, all the way to the *Brown* decision.

It occurred to Barber that Niebuhr might have developed a better Christian realism had he remained a pastor in Detroit instead of moving to Union Theological Seminary. In Detroit, he had allied with working class whites and Blacks. In New York, consorting with academics and Leftist professionals, Niebuhr's blind spot about his white privilege grew worse. Barber questioned whether he had a similar blind spot. His negative feelings about white people were justified, weren't they? Naturally, he trusted Black pastors and workers over white ones. How could it be otherwise? Barber had an inkling of the answer, which worked on him: if he had some white allies, his feelings might be different. Moreover, the Black pastors of Martinsville had folded over one breakfast meeting. If Barber's mission was to work for justice, he needed all the friends he could get.

He stayed for three years in Martinsville, forming an interracial group against toxic-chemical dumping in a Black neighborhood, which won a small victory, "the crash course in moral leadership that I didn't know I needed." Barber returned to North Carolina knowing something about environmental racism and interracial organizing. E. V. Wilkins, still a force in his life, recommended Barber to chair Gov. Jim Hunt's Human Relations Commission. Barber took the job and enjoyed the work, much of it dealing with employment discrimination and fair housing. He preached on the side while Rebecca Barber worked as a nurse in Durham. In June 1993, Barber preached at Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, seventy-eight miles west of Durham. He was not seeking a pastoral call, and definitely not one this far from Durham. Greenleaf members told him he was wrong: God had led him to them.

Barber tried to resist until mid-July, when he relented. Two weeks after he accepted the call, he woke up at home and could not move. Barber's legs and back were paralyzed. He cried out incredulously to Rebecca, who called an ambulance. The diagnosis was ankylosing spondylitis, an extreme form of arthritis that fuses one's bones in place. Barber's neck, hips, and the base of his spine had locked simultaneously. There was no cure; there was only the hope that with intense physical therapy he might regain some mobility.

The pain was excruciating. Barber recoiled at needing constant doses of pain medication to get through a day. His daily trips to the gym were torture, and seemingly futile; when therapists bent his knees, it felt like he was being stabbed with a knife. He fell into depression, spending many nights "just crying in my bed." Barber could barely speak to his congregants when they visited and could not imagine being

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their pastor. They urged him to hold on; he was their pastor and they would wait for him. For weeks it was unimaginable to him that he might resume his ministry. The doctors told him he would never walk again; the pain and depression were overwhelming; and he lost the will to get out of bed. One night a woman in a wheelchair visited him. A double amputee, she rebuffed his plea that he couldn't talk to anyone. She had come to tell him that God was not done with him; God still had work for him to do. The woman prayed for Barber and wheeled herself out. The next morning Barber asked if his mother might be allowed to play hymns in the hospital lobby; maybe he could sing with her. Also, could they tell him the room number of the double amputee? Barber wanted to thank her. The nurses knew of no such patient and could not find one after checking. Barber called her "my amputee angel."

He learned how to use a walker, and his growing family and congregation rallied around him. Barber left the hospital after three months, commencing his ministry at Greenleaf with a tag team of drivers. His family had already weathered one health crisis, his daughter's brain surgery for hydrocephalus. This time, his wife and five children forged a new life revolving around Greenleaf Church and Barber's resolve to bring people together for the work of justice. The pain stabbed him constantly, except in the pulpit. For twelve years he got to the pulpit on his walker, swung it behind him, and leaned on the lectern to preach. Barber savored the irony that Greenleaf was the kind of community he had tried to flee—a small congregation in a small military town consisting of tight-knit families and groups with long local histories. Now the communal closeness worked for him, enabling him to restart his ministry. He often thought of his seminary ethics professor, Stanley Hauerwas, appreciating more than ever the Hauerwas maxim that the vocation of the church is to be the church. What matters is to be faithful to God's peculiar politics. The only way for people to see that another way is possible is for the church to be the strange, nonviolent, nonconforming community of Christ-followers it is called to be.

But that was only the starting point of Barber's ministry in Goldsboro. The church does not exist only for itself and it cannot do the work of justice by itself. Barber led Greenleaf to consider what the good news of the Gospel would look like to the poor of Goldsboro. The answer included a community-development corporation called Rebuilding Broken Places that Greenleaf cofounded with other community groups. They enlisted local businesses and secured grant money to build senior housing units, single-family houses, and a freedom school academy. Barber preached that the Spirit blows where it will, through and beyond the church. God inspires ministries serving the entire community.

In 2005, twelve years into his ministry at Greenleaf, Barber awoke one night and walked to the bathroom. He was standing there before it occurred to him that he hadn't used his walker. Walking back to the bedroom, he asked Rebecca to pinch him; was he dreaming? They laughed out loud at discovering that his body had been healing without their noticing. It happened while Barber was absorbed in nursing their little community from sickness to health. That morning he bought a wooden cane, and never relinquished it afterwards, politely declining nicer ones that people bought for him. The cane was his testimony, like the mat of the man told by Jesus to take up his mat and walk.

Barber scaled up. What if they built a statewide coalition on the Goldsboro model? Running for president of the North Carolina NAACP in the summer of 2005, Barber warned that the NAACP no longer *advanced* people of color; it had become just the National Association for Colored People, specializing in nice banquets. North Carolina schools had resegregated and 12 percent of North Carolina's total youth population had no health insurance. Why did the NAACP respond with self-congratulatory nostalgia? Barber offended the banquet luminaries and won the election, appointing a white civil-rights veteran, Al McSurely, to be his legal redress chair. He confirmed that it meant something to pick a white lieutenant; the NAACP had to go back to being seriously activist and interracial, as in its glory days. Barber enlisted Greenleaf in his NAACP work. He had to be driven everywhere, and his brand of ministry did not work if he did it by himself. He never believed, however, that reenergizing the NAACP would be enough to change North Carolina. The NAACP presidency put him in a position to create what was needed: an organization uniting all the social-justice organizations, a new iteration of fusion politics.

The perennial dream of the American Left is to unite all the groups that struggle for social justice. It never was, or is, hard to imagine. What if we all banded together? Every Farmer-Labor-Progressive-Socialist coalition tried to pull it off. Barber thought of Ezekiel, not the Farmer-Labor saga, when he described fusion politics.

Ezekiel dreamed of Israel's divided tribes uniting in Jerusalem; henceforth, the Lord would be there. Barber listed fourteen "justice tribes" of North Carolina, calling them in December 2006 to a meeting in the state capital. Representatives of *sixteen* organizations showed up and told each other: *there are more of us than of them; let's change the narrative by working together.* The group formulated a fourteen-point agenda, organized a People's Assembly in February 2007 at the state capital, and adopted the name McSurely had suggested, the Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ). Barber fretted that this name might sound like an exaggeration until five thousand people turned out. Barber stressed that HKonJ was not liberal, conservative, Democratic, or Republican. It was for all that is good and right, such as voting rights, criminal justice, labor rights, health care, and immigrants' rights. In 2007 it went all out on one issue that impacted all the others: voting rights.

For a while the new coalition was quietly effective. The North Carolina NAACP and HKonJ worked closely together, being led by the same two people, Barber and McSurely. They won a crucial victory when the state legislature expanded early voting and allowed same-day registration, just in time for a thing of beauty in the 2008 election: "Souls to the Polls." Black churchgoers were driven to early-voting sites after worship services ended. Souls to the Polls rode on the excitement generated by the Obama candidacy, playing a key role in turning North Carolina barely blue in the presidential election. The expansion of voting rights in 2007 added 185,000 new voters to the electorate in a state that Obama won by just over 100,000 votes. That ended Barber's quiet days of power-building. The backlash against Obama and Barber was furious, incredulous, and determined. How the hell had North Carolina gone for Obama? Why had they treated this Barber character as a buffoon?

Barber went swiftly from being derided as "Reverend Bar-B-Q" to receiving death threats. He told friends it was a measure of how strong they had become. In January 2010, the political Right won a colossal victory in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled by 5 to 4 that corporations and special interests have a "free speech" right to pump as much money as they want into elections in complete secrecy. The fallout in North Carolina was devastating. Art Pope, a right-wing kingmaker who inherited a retail chain from his father, played the leading role in turning North Carolina's state legislature flaming red in the 2010 midterm elections. "Big government" was vilified for coddling the "undeserving poor"—always code for Black and brown people. Barber noticed that much of the right-wing money went into culture wars funneled through foundations. HKonJ did win a few more victories during the early Obama years, most notably a Racial Justice Act guaranteeing an appeal to every death-row inmate victimized by racial bias in the sentencing process. But there was no denying that the Republican Right was winning.

The winter of 2012–2013 was the nadir of the Obama years in North Carolina, where Obama lost the state despite winning reelection. HKonJ convened its seventh coalition People's Assembly in February 2013 with a battered but defiant spirit. It confronted right-wing efforts to block the expansion of Medicaid to half a million poor North Carolinians, overturn the Racial Justice Act, require photo ID for voting, and eliminate same-day voter registration. The group responded by forming the Forward Together Moral Movement in North Carolina, advocating a five-part platform of economic justice, educational equality, universal health care, criminal-justice reform, and voting rights. On the evening of April 29, 2013, a Monday, it staged a protest outside the doors of the North Carolina state legislature on Jones Street. Barber said they opposed the "avalanche of extremist policies" being debated by the legislature, and they had written numerous letters demanding to be heard. The time had come to put their bodies on the line. Seventeen protesters were promptly arrested for annoying the legislators and the Moral Monday campaign was launched.

The following Monday, several hundred people showed up to demonstrate and thirty entered the state legislature building to get arrested. Barber said the Forward Together Moral Movement already had a legal strategy to challenge the new policies in court, and an organizing strategy to work across the entire state. The Moral Monday witness had its own work and purpose: to respond to the crisis of American democracy with acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. Moral Mondays struck a cultural nerve. The crowds grew and the media showed up to cover the ritual of protests and arrests. The fourth Moral Monday, on May 20, drew a thousand protestors and fifty-seven got arrested. The following month, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, claiming its coverage formula was based on outdated data.

North Carolina's Republican legislators, no longer restrained by the Voting Rights Act, threw all their voter-suppression ideas into one bill. The Moral Monday crowds swelled to five thousand people per week. After the legislature passed its voter-suppression bill, it went home, but the demonstrations kept going through July. Barber declared on the twelfth Moral Monday, July 22: "The whole world can see through your lies, legislature. The whole world can see through your lies about voter fraud and voter integrity. We know what you are up to. Maybe you are stuck in the nineteenth century, but we're not. Maybe you are stuck in Jim Crow and the Old South, but we're not." This fight, he declared, was on.

Sometimes Barber had to police the "moral" in Moral Monday: "We don't have to curse people to be right." In a moral movement, he said, you aim to make friends of your enemies. All great movements arise from a deep moral wellspring, not from attacking people. Barber knew why his listeners were angry, depressed, and hurting, because he was, too. He said he wanted his sons to realize why he was constantly on the road, trying to change the world. He wanted them to believe it was still possible.

Barber's core sermon pairs Psalm 118 and Luke 4—the rejected stone has become the cornerstone, and Jesus was anointed to preach good news to the poor.

Moral Mondays was a spectacular success. It grew week by week, operating in revival style, replete with evangelistic sermons and an altar call. The revival format did not stop it from feeling interreligious, with sermons by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim clerics who took turns inspiring the crowd. Barber had to bring his own A-game every week just to compare favorably with a slew of very able preacher-orators. When reporters asked where this movement was heading, Barber explained that Moral Mondays was a revival witness and civil-disobedience campaign, not a movement. Forward Together was the movement.

They kept Moral Mondays going for thirteen weeks, culminating with rallies across North Carolina on July 29, 2013, which served as a kind of dress rehearsal for a mass march in Raleigh the following February. Barber said they were trying to birth a Third Reconstruction. The First Reconstruction led to interracial fusion alliances that were viciously attacked by white backlash movements. The Second Reconstruction was the civil-rights movement. The Third Reconstruction must aim higher than the expansion of voting rights achieved by the Voting Rights Act, winning a constitutional amendment that guarantees the same voting rights in every state. In 2014, Barber established an educational center called Repairers of the Breach to equip leaders for state-based coalitions. It teaches organizers to conduct grassroots statewide campaigns and to use moral language to frame policy issues.

After Trump was elected in 2016, Barber insisted that no single defeat changes everything. He said it in January 2017, speaking at Washington Hebrew Congregation: "We will never, never, never turn back. One election can't turn us back. A loudmouth can't turn us back." In 2018 he launched the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival (PPC). It took up the unfinished business of its namesake, fifty years later, building toward "Forty Days of Action" in May and June of 2018. Barber teamed up as codirector with white Presbyterian minister Liz Theoharis, a New Testament scholar who earned her PhD at Union Theological Seminary in 2014 and directed Union's Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice. Barber and Theoharis aimed to build a network of locally focused chapters led by poor people themselves, which ruled out partnerships with national progressive organizations. Barber and Theoharis reasoned that they couldn't call it a grassroots movement if they linked up with national labor unions, think tanks, and advocacy groups. The new PPC kicked off a national tour in Marks, Mississippi, and proceeded to Detroit, Selma, Harlan County (Kentucky), Central Valley (California), and Grays Harbor (Washington), building up to forty consecutive days of action in twenty-five state capitals and other sites. Sometimes they drew encouraging crowds and sometimes they were brutally disappointed.

At Union there was constant anxiety about the size of the crowds and whether PPC was taking off. The Forty Days of Action was up-and-down, like the buildup tour. In 2019, Barber and Theoharis changed their strategy, planning a big march in D.C. for the following year, which required alliances with national organizations. Cosponsors came aboard, including major unions such as AFSCME, the American Postal Workers Union, and the Association of Flight Attendants. When COVID-19 struck, Barber and Theoharis revamped the march as a virtual rally on June 20, 2020. Driven online, it boasted 248 cosponsors and attracted over two million livestream viewers, calling for racial justice, single-payer health care, worker rights, free tuition at public colleges, an assault-weapons ban, and criminal-justice reforms.

The PPC rally provided the strongest evidence in years that the religious Left is still out there to be gathered and mobilized, even as Barber and Theoharis refuse to put it that way. They stick to a Christian Gospel message fixed on the poor. Barber accepted the tradeoffs of moving from a focus on North Carolina to a national stage. Then, in December 2022, he accepted the directorship of the new Center for Public Theology and Public Policy at Yale Divinity School, an educational ministry enterprise funded by the Ford Foundation and the Fetzer Institute. He retired from Greenleaf Christian Church but continues as president of Repairers of the Breach and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign.

Barber's core sermon pairs Psalm 118 and Luke 4—the rejected stone has become the cornerstone, and Jesus was anointed to preach good news to the poor. The Gospel, he insists, is about lifting up the poor. The soul of America cannot be saved without remembering what the Gospel is about:

> I believe right now that the soul of America is at stake. The soul of the nation cannot be saved, cannot be sturdy, cannot be properly put together unless the rejected lead the revival and become the chief cornerstones. This has always been true at the heart of our story. There is no way to mend the flaws of the nation and be one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all unless the rejected are at the center. We can't find our way out of the mess we're in with a left focus or a right focus. We've got to refocus on those who have been rejected.

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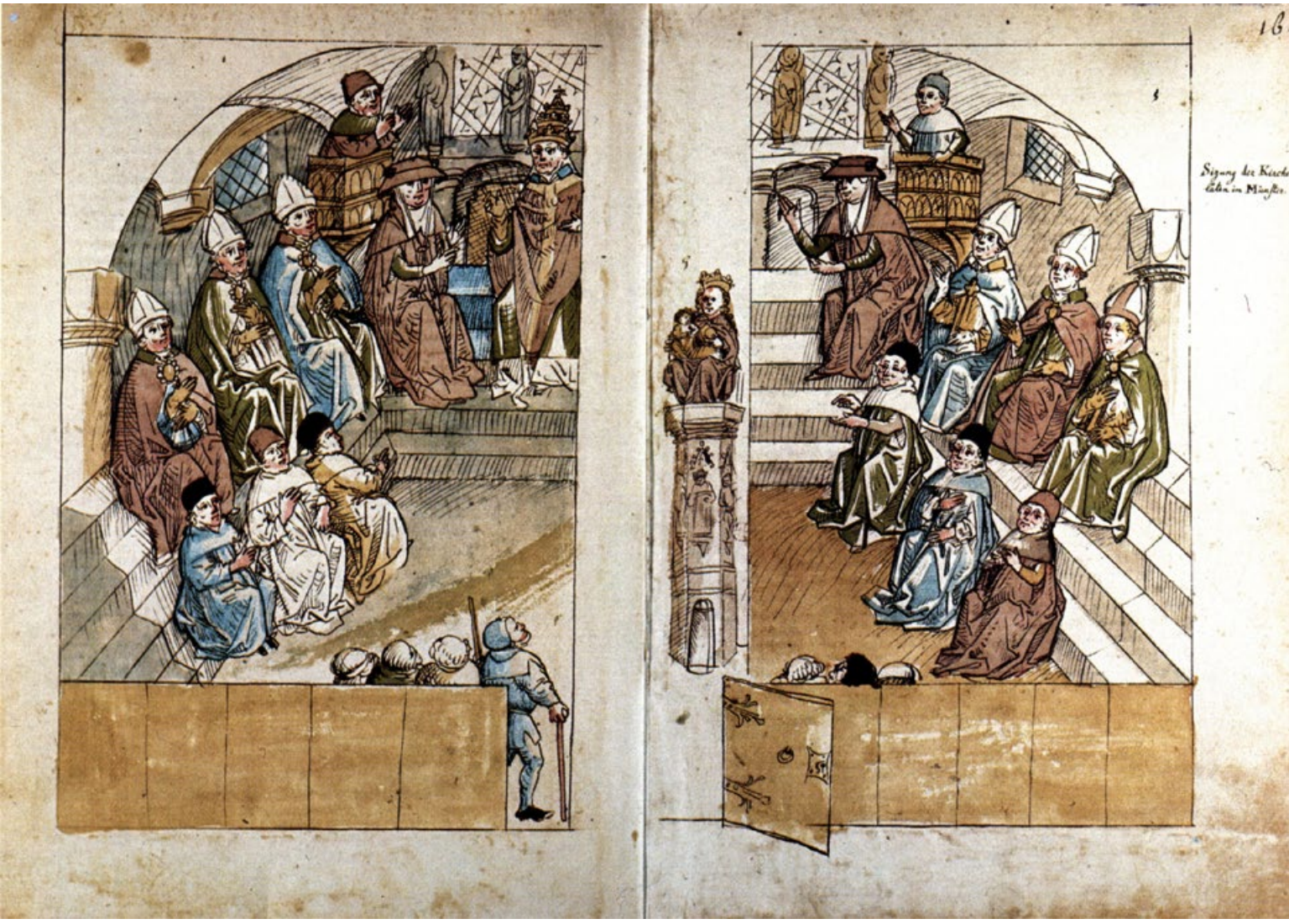
Synodality & Catholic Amnesia

Shaun Blanchard

The conciliarist tradition gets a new name.

Discussions of synodality are about the future—about charting a path forward for Catholicism, from the individual Catholic to the parish community to the universal Church. But these discussions inevitably appeal to the past: to the testimony of Scripture, the practice of the early Church, medieval triumphs and tragedies, and, most of all, to Vatican II and its contested reception. When the conversation turns to history, however, it is rarely acknowledged that the Catholic Church's own tradition of synodal governance endured into the early modern era and functioned as a powerful counter-narrative to the centralized ultramontane model we live with today. Indeed, the evolution of the papacy into its modern form—as an infallible teacher of doctrine with direct jurisdictional authority over every other bishop and the entire Church—owes at least as much to internal Catholic ecclesiastical battles at the dawn of modernity as it does to stimuli outside the Church, such as secularization and the growth of nation states.



Ulrich Richental, Bishops debating with the pope at the Council of Constance, c. 1460

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The First Vatican Council in 1870 punctuated the ascendancy of this new view of the papacy. The dramatic ecclesiastical victory of Pius IX, a pope who did not balk at equating himself with the Church and even with Tradition itself, also marked the shipwreck of the once-mighty conciliarist tradition. That shipwreck was near-total, but the wreckage of conciliarist thought survived on firmly orthodox shores. Among this wreckage were concepts that Catholics never totally lost sight of and, throughout the twentieth century, brought back to the fore: episcopal collegiality, the baptismal priesthood of the laity, the *sensus fidelium*, and ecclesial reception. This is why Yves Congar rightly called Vatican I's defeated conciliarist minority "the vanguard of Vatican II."

Rather than handling our own past with honesty, our institutional memory as Catholics is too often re-tooled to fit ideological goals. Gleeful progressives can be as guilty of this as the most defensive and narrow traditionalists. We cannot learn from our past failures—or even our successes—unless we look at the Church's history with both *parrhesia* and humility. For the Church, as for any family, facing the past honestly often involves dredging up memories that were suppressed.

Our discussions of synodality suffer from historical amnesia. One important reason Pope Francis's desire to relaunch synodality for the contemporary Church has taken herculean efforts—and been met with such dogged and at times vicious resistance—is that some of this pope's predecessors were so effective in suppressing and defanging it. Of course, amnesia is not the only problem that Catholic discourse on synodality suffers from; it is also afflicted by polarization and triumphalism. Recovering suppressed memories about our own conciliarist past will not instantly solve these other problems. Still, we should face the future equipped with an honest account of how we got where we are.

Our seminaries emphasize a philosophical grounding for the Catholic faith but too often neglect Church history, glossing over its complexity and messiness.

American Catholics seem particularly prone to sarcasm and bewilderment when discussing Pope Francis's call for synodality. Some express (or feign?) total confusion, claiming they don't even know what the term "synodality" means. From the pages of *First Things* to numerous YouTube channels to EWTN to the peculiar derangements of Catholic Twitter, hands are thrown up in frustration at the Synod on Synodality. Some of these skeptics see this month's synod as too self-referential, and gloomily forecast that its outcome will either emerge stillborn or lead to further divisions. Less measured critics see the Synod on Synodality as the culmination of a deliberate and heretical program of subversion. An extreme but by no means insignificant group of critics think that either the pope himself is a heretic or is at least willfully blind to the widespread advance of heresy.

My own outlook about the synod is one of optimism and hope. I think Pope Francis's emphasis on synodality is a positive development, an attempt to recover an ancient ecclesiology with deep biblical and patristic roots. Nevertheless, I believe that the confusion, if not the vitriol, one finds in many pews and rectories of the American Church is understandable and should be taken seriously.

What explains it? For one thing, a rather wooden "hermeneutic of continuity" became predominant in catechesis, apologetics, and large segments of ecclesial life in our national church. This was especially the case in the twilight years of John Paul II and throughout the pontificate of Benedict XVI, even though the latter made it clear that the reforms of Vatican II were in continuity *and* discontinuity with past teaching and practice, albeit "on different levels." Our seminaries emphasize a philosophical grounding for the Catholic faith but too often neglect Church history, glossing over its complexity and messiness. In U.S. ecclesial circles, Church history is frequently reduced to apologetics, or presented as a series of hagiographic tableaux and "anti-Catholic myths" to be debunked.

It's no wonder, then, that synodality is hard for many good "orthodox" American Catholics to wrap their heads around. Converts and reverts catechized in a certain way can feel like they've been sold a bill of goods. If the Church—that is, the hierarchy or the magisterium—doesn't *already* possess "the Truth" in its fullness, or can't adequately communicate it, then why be Catholic at all, they may wonder? What use is a purportedly infallible pope and magisterium? Why not practice another type of Christianity, or even forsake the Christian faith entirely? Such a thought process would probably strike many other Catholics as reductive. But those who work in seminaries, university chaplaincies, and many other forms of ministry in the United States are sure to come across such queries from devout and entirely sincere young people.

Pope Francis has certainly brought a number of ecclesial tensions to the surface, and the reception (or rejection) of Vatican II is relevant to them all. Nevertheless, the basic ecclesiological pressure points flaring up in discussions of synodality have much deeper histories. It is often pointed out that the documents of Vatican II—and *Lumen gentium* in particular—contain two ecclesiologies, which sit together rather awkwardly. As the Jesuit historian Klaus Schatz wrote: "The ecclesiology of *jurisdictio*, or rather that of Vatican I, and the still older and now rediscovered ecclesiology of *communio* are placed side by side [at Vatican II] but remain unconnected."

Can we then speak of *the* ecclesiology of Vatican II? The council majority strove to overturn a neo-scholastic and ultramontane juridicism that had become stifling. The fountainheads of that ecclesiology were in the medieval and early modern periods. Inspired by *ressourcement* theology, the majority bloc tried to sketch a "communion" ecclesiology that was essentially patristic. But they were only partially successful. As young Joseph Ratzinger observed just after the council, however one interprets *Lumen gentium*'s "explanatory note"—an ultramontane appendix called the *Nota praevia*, tacked on by papal fiat at the last minute—that coda certainly did not strengthen the council's affirmation of episcopal collegiality, much less help give it any institutional shape. It is revealing that the anxieties of the council minority, once so alarmed by the doctrine of episcopal collegiality, largely dissipated once they had seen the explanatory note. On the question of centralized Roman authority à la Vatican I, "the minority never really lost control," wrote John O'Malley, SJ. In fact, as recent decades have "irrefutably demonstrated," the Roman center "emerged even stronger" after the council.

The relationship between patristic *communio* and ultramontane juridicism at Vatican II was thus "oddly asymmetrical," to quote the historian Francis Oakley. "Something, one cannot help thinking, some mediating form perhaps, is missing," Oakley suggested. "And something, indeed, is missing." Because of this lacuna, it is difficult to blame those Catholics who claim that to question or even oppose synodality is not to reject Vatican II. Many such people have defensible and sincerely held readings of the council documents.

These doubts notwithstanding, I read Francis's project of synodality as both a further implementation of Vatican II and an attempt to smooth over the council's "odd asymmetry." The evidence of that asymmetry in Vatican II's documents is often explained in terms of the politics of compromise, the practical limits of the possible for the reformist party, the shadow of Vatican I, or "Pope Paul's red pen" (i.e., Paul VI swooping in with interventions like the *Nota praevia*). These are all good explanations as far as they go. But a deeper understanding of

this asymmetry becomes possible if we take a close look at the centuries-old roots of the tensions, confusions, and ambiguities that plague Catholic discourse on synodality.

Some critics claim that the term "synodality" is still undefined or even meaningless. In fact, the meaning of the term is quite simple, and its proponents have adequately explained it many times over for anyone with ears to hear. Nevertheless, it is worth asking why a two-thousand-year-old Church must resort to a neologism in order to describe an ecclesiological practice that has such an ancient pedigree. I think the answer to that question hides in plain view. Technically, "synod" is a synonym for "council," though today we almost always use "council" to denote only a general or ecumenical council (Nicaea, Trent, etc.), while "synod" typically refers to something smaller or less authoritative. The Greek "synod" has a biblical, patristic, and Eastern flavor; the Latin "council" is distinctly Western. However, until very recently, "synod" was often used interchangeably with "council"—twentieth-century theology manuals spoke of the errors of the "Council of Pistoia," a diocesan synod, while Vatican II referred to itself many times as "this sacred synod." While Pope Francis is clearly willing to ruffle feathers, he knows that promoting "the conciliar path," "conciliarity," or a "council on conciliarity" might be too messy even for him. The legacy of "conciliar*ism*" as a purportedly heretical alternative not just to ultramontanism but to papal primacy itself is too deeply embedded in the DNA of post–Vatican I Catholicism. Very old things brought forth from the storeroom of tradition must sometimes be given new names.

This very old tradition of Catholic ecclesiology offered, among other things, a "constitutionalist" framework for Church governance. This "conciliarist constitutionalism" is Oakley's missing link, the "mediating form," between the papal juridic tradition, which dominated at Vatican I, and the patristic *communio* tradition, which reasserted itself at Vatican II. Both arise organically from the scriptures and the tradition of the Church. Neither tradition can or should defeat the other. What is urgently needed is to strike a balance between them that still allows for real consultation and deliberative decision-making in which all the baptized participate under their bishops, who are united in hierarchical communion with the bishop of Rome. Pope Francis clearly sees this need. But how can we Catholics "hope to erect a future capable of enduring," to quote the haunting final line in Oakley's study of conciliarism, if we "persist in trying to do so on the foundation of a past that never truly was?"

The International Theological Commission's (ITC) 2018 document on synodality attempted to trace the history of synodality from Scripture and the early Church to the present. Though it did not smear the conciliarist tradition as heretical, as others have, the ITC document evinces an unmistakable discomfort with this legacy. It cites the medieval Catholic principle that "what affects everyone should be discussed and approved by all," an arrangement that Yves Congar praised as "a concrete regime of association and agreement." The ITC cautions, however, that "this axiom should not be understood in the sense of conciliarism on the ecclesiological level" (article 65).

In truth, monuments to conciliarist ecclesiology dot the landscape of the past millennium of Catholic history, but the ITC seems not quite sure what to do with them. The Council of Constance (1414–1418), which applied conciliarist ecclesiology to the crisis brought on by three men claiming to be pope, is discussed in article 34 of the ITC document. But conciliarism itself is described as an overreaction to that crisis. The Council of Constance, we are told, solved the papal schism by applying emergency canonical measures, *not* by doing what the council itself proclaimed it was doing in the decree *Haec sancta*—that is, representing the universal Church in a general council that received its authority directly from Christ.

The ITC then equates *conciliarism* with attempts to "impose a permanent council over and above the primatial authority of the Pope." This is presumably a reference to Constance's decree *Frequens*, which called for convening an ecumenical council every ten years, a stipulation the papacy deeply feared, reluctantly accepted, and later ignored. The council fathers at Constance saw the regular convening of councils not *just* as a way to prevent ecclesial despotism, or as a device for dealing with exceptional situations, such as several men all claiming to be pope. No, frequent synodal consultation and deliberation was envisioned by Constance as the normal mode for healthy Church governance. But article 34 of the ITC's 2018 document describes such conciliarism as an innovation contrary to papal primacy and therefore "not in conformity with Tradition," rather than as a very old ecclesiological tradition that existed alongside others and was enshrined in the texts of ecumenical councils.

Some of the ecclesiological problems that arose in this troubling epoch of Church history remain unresolved. We find traces of this history of ecclesial trauma in odd and interesting places. For example, today the official list of valid popes in the *Annuario Pontificio* excludes those elected by the Council of Pisa (1409), a conciliarist attempt to solve the papal schism just prior to Constance. And yet when the notorious Rodrigo Borgia was elected pope in 1492, he took the name Alexander VI rather than V, even though Alexander V (d. 1410) was elected by the Council of Pisa in opposition to the Roman pope, Gregory XII. Consequently, the official list of popes rather suspiciously jumps from Alexander IV to Alexander VI.

As late as 1958, Giuseppe Roncalli hesitated before choosing the name John upon his election as pope. Was he the twenty-third or twenty-fourth of that name? (Alexander V's successor in the Pisan line had taken the name John XXIII.) When Papa Roncalli finally decided he would bear the name John XXIII, he made clear he was passing no definitive judgment on any thorny questions arising from the conciliarist era. The curial editors of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* suffered

The Church, if it can't or won't tell the truth about its own past, can't fully flourish and is doomed to a kind of ecclesial immaturity.

from no such reticence. They made sure to strike this record of Good Pope John's humility from the official published text of his speech.

The ITC document made no attempt to untangle these historical and theological knots, which may be regarded as little more than curiosities. But stranger gaps and silences show up in the ITC's historical sketch. The document moves on to the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response to it in the Council of Trent. The post-Tridentine diocesan and provincial synods, especially those of St. Charles Borromeo in Milan, are rightly highlighted. What *isn't* mentioned is that, while the council fathers at Trent envisioned diocesan synods and regional councils as principal mechanisms for Church reform, the papal bull confirming Trent's decrees made no mention of synods. Through deft maneuvering, the pope and Curia managed to seize *deutungshoheit* (interpretative sovereignty) over the Council. A key move to this end was the Roman creation of the Congregation for the Council. The *meaning* of Trent—what it meant to be faithful to Trent and thus to Catholic orthodoxy—came to be defined by Rome. For bishops and local churches, to quote Ulrich Lehner, "reception became equivalent with observance."

It is thus unsurprising that in the ITC document a conspicuous silence hangs over the entire seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The story is not really picked up again until the First Vatican Council in 1870, nearly three hundred years later. By that time, Cardinal Manning could confidently claim "ultramontanism is Catholic Christianity"—an assertion that would have been laughed at in the eighteenth century. By 1870, though, the remnants of the once-mighty conciliarist tradition were certainly not laughing. At Vatican I, the ultramontane party succeeded in dogmatically defining papal jurisdictional supremacy and infallibility. The latter definition was specifically crafted to reject even the most moderate conciliarist insistence that a pope's teachings must accord with the prior or subsequent "consent of the Church" to be considered irreformable. It was with respect to this issue that Pope Pius IX infamously shouted "I, I am Tradition! I, I am the Church!"

To its credit, the ITC does acknowledge some precedents for our contemporary understanding of synodality in the nineteenth century. Article 38 of the document reads:

> The need for a pertinent and consistent re-launch of Synodal practice in the Catholic Church became clear as early as the nineteenth century, thanks to prophetic writers like Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838), Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855) and John Henry Newman (1801–1890), who returned to the normative sources of Scripture and Tradition, heralding the providential renewal that came with the biblical, liturgical and patristic movements.

These figures deserve the praise they receive as forerunners of the twentieth-century renewal movements and the Second Vatican Council. But why, one might ask, did "synodal practice in the Catholic Church" need to be *relaunched* in the nineteenth century? One could rightly infer—though the ITC does not say it—that Roman centralization had become suffocating. When and why did this happen? The ITC document praises the age of the great Tridentine reformers like St. Charles Borromeo. But what happened in the nearly three hundred years between Borromeo's provincial synods and Cardinal Manning's boast that ultramontanism is coterminous with Catholic orthodoxy?

The answer is that a lot happened, but not much that could be plausibly marshalled in support of a papally led campaign for synodality. My point is not to criticize the ITC. It produced a useful document, and it was not pretending to offer a thorough historical overview. In any case, it was merely following an established trend in ecclesial historical narration. The decades between Trent and the early nineteenth century hang as something of an ecclesiological "dead period." When this period is narrated at all, it is usually dismissed as a dull, unproductive time—a time when clerical sycophants groveled before sovereigns and sold out to the ideals of the Enlightenment or various heresies. Apart from some stalwart defenders of the papacy who were vindicated by Vatican I, this period is commonly considered notable only for the long inventory of condemned "-isms" it produced—Richerism, Jansenism, Gallicanism, Cisalpinism, Febronianism, Josephinism, etc. As Garrett Sweeney wrote, these failed ideas were "remembered only by anathemas and definitions preserved like dead flies in the amber pages of Denzinger."

And at least some of these dreaded "-isms" were indeed corrosive to Catholic unity, particularly when they supported undue state interference in the Church. Nevertheless, Rome's scorched-earth policy tended to jettison the good along with the bad, especially when it came to ecclesiology. Synodal practice had to be relaunched not because it had slipped into oblivion after Borromeo, but because it was actively suppressed in a campaign to establish hegemonic Roman power in the Church.

The issues were crystallized when the struggle between Gallicanism and ultramontanism became a contest between two alternative conceptions of Church governance. In the Gallican model, which all Jansenists eventually supported, the teaching *and* the governance of the pope ought always to be exercised collegially with the bishops. The desire for a papal condemnation of Jansenism, ironically solicited by King Louis XIV, the great defender of the Gallican Liberties,

forced the French Church to articulate a precise model for the reception of papal teaching. The archbishop of Toulouse, Pierre de Marca (1594–1662), provided such an ecclesiology, one based on the ancient African Church, which preserved universality and communion through a commitment to participation at all levels of Church governance. The ITC does mention this ecclesiology, but only as a patristic reality: the 2018 document beautifully describes synodal ecclesiology in a discussion of St. Cyprian, the third-century bishop of Carthage (article 25). The document fails to mention that these principles were also championed by the same early modern Catholics that ultramontanists successfully tarred as heretics in the lead-up to Vatican I.

The French Church historian Jacques Gres-Gayer has explained how early modern Catholics understood this Cyprianic, patristic model of synodal ecclesiology:

> This "participant model" appears to have developed along the lines of a juridical and political conception of the Church, as it stressed two constitutive dimensions: communion at the horizontal level, and representation at the vertical. From this perspective, what constituted the Catholic Church was the unity of faith manifested by the communion of the different (local) churches, one element being necessarily their communion with the Roman Church. The common faith, however, belonged to the entire body and therefore needed not only to be expressed but "verified." This task was eminently if ideally assumed by the General Council, "representing the Church," but only as it reflected the culmination of a long process of representation, by way of synods, from the local community to this general assembly. In that conception, the "representatives" did not act as delegates—this was not a democratic process—but as witnesses. They represented, that is expressed, the faith of their native church, with the purpose of exposing, under the assistance of the Spirit, the faith of the Church Catholic. This is why, in order to be authenticated, their decision had to be accepted, along a reverse path, from the council to the local communities.

It becomes clear in the Vatican II *Acta* that the reformist majority bloc of council fathers dealt quite deftly with this legacy. The ultramontane and neo-scholastic minority was certainly aware of uncomfortable parallels between *ressourcement* ideals and condemned early-modern Catholic reform agendas. During the council's debates, leaders of the minority pointed out these parallels (for example, over vernacular liturgy, religious liberty, and especially over collegiality). But to no avail: in reviving elements of conciliar, synodal, and participatory ecclesiology, the council fathers refused to be boxed in by a narrow ultramontanism.

Many of Vatican II's ecclesiological reforms—those having to do with episcopal collegiality, a renewed theology of the laity, a more diffuse conception of infallibility, the *sensus fidelium*, religious liberty, etc.—are now rightly understood as retrievals from the early Church. And there are good reasons why the council fathers (and, later, the ITC) would present them in this way. But one certainly needn't go all the way back to late-medieval Paris or to Constance, much less to third-century Carthage, to find precedents for these reforms. They were all promoted as late as the nineteenth century by Catholics in Lebanon, Tuscany, London, South Carolina, and Peru. These Catholics drew deeply from the old and venerable tradition of Catholic conciliarist constitutionalism. However, if remembered at all today, they are usually mentioned only as the losers in the story. To quote a popular priest who attacked Pope Francis and the 2014–2015 Synod on the Family in a *Catholic Herald* article, such early modern Catholics were "eccentric uncles and peculiar cousins…who we all feel are best forgotten."

In the United States, the crisis over truth-telling is not only social and political, but also ecclesial. The systematic failure of the Church to tell the truth regarding clerical sex abuse is one particularly grave example of this crisis. A person who cannot face his or her own past (or who consistently lies about it) is impeded from reaching full maturity and healthy integration. Put simply, such a person can't grow up. Likewise, the Church, if it can't or won't tell the truth about its own past, can't fully flourish and is doomed to a kind of ecclesial immaturity.

Vatican II took a number of important first steps: toward ecumenism, toward collegiality, toward more honest views of history aided by critical research, toward more meaningful integration of laypeople, toward a genuine reckoning with past failures, be they intellectual or moral. Just as importantly, the Church took a step *away* from a triumphalism that too often focused more on institutional power, authority, and prestige than on the poor carpenter from Nazareth and the good news he preached.

Pope Francis should be commended for taking the Council as a point of departure for the pilgrim Church and trusting that the Holy Spirit is active in the heart of every baptized person. Modern Catholicism is shot through with ironies. The extreme papalism that was ascendant in much of the Catholic world from the middle of the nineteenth century is obviously antithetical to the vision of synodality now being vigorously promoted by a *pope*, of all people. But perhaps only the Roman Pontiff, with his universal and immediate jurisdiction over every Catholic and every local church, can jolt Catholicism back to a more ancient and more biblical constitution. Pope Francis's intentional creation of a synodal "mess" may be the only way to unravel the ultramontane paradigm. A paradoxical situation to be sure, and a risky one. But one not without hope.

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From Glory to Glory

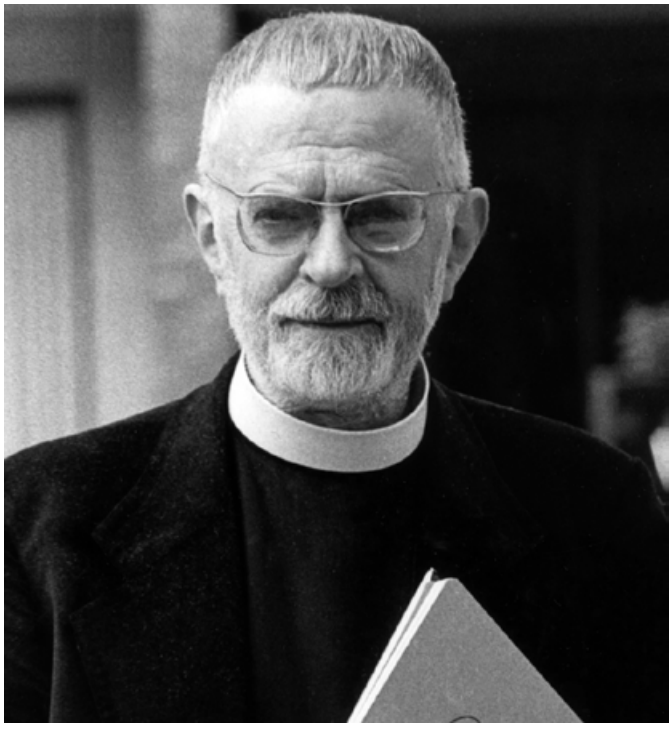
Robert P. Imbelli

Louis Bouyer's cosmic vision

In 1961, I started my one and only year at Saint Joseph's Dunwoodie, the New York archdiocesan seminary. The monastic regimen and set course of studies were pretty much the same in that year as they had been in 1951, or 1941, or.... We knew, of course, that the Church's first ecumenical council in over ninety years would open in October 1962. But it promised to be a short affair. Or so we supposed.

One person thought differently—not a faculty member, but a student in his third year of theology. Philip Murnion already showed the striking intelligence and enterprise which would make him so significant a figure in the U.S. Church for forty years, before his much-too-early death. Phil rounded up a group of eight students from different years and wrangled the required permission to meet once a week. During the compulsory daily "rec period," he led us through the works of contemporary European theologians. And so we came to know F. X. Durrwell's *The Resurrection*, Gustave Thils's *Christian Holiness*, and Louis Bouyer's *Liturgical Piety*. We found Bouyer particularly appealing, perhaps because the subject of liturgy was dear to us, or perhaps because we knew him to be a personal friend of the one outstanding faculty member at Dunwoodie in those days: the scripture scholar Msgr. Myles Bourke.

By 1961, Bouyer's scholarly achievement was already considerable, and over the next thirty-five years he continued to produce works of theological genius. Of the great Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, he is perhaps the least known, yet he arguably has the most to contribute to our ecclesial and theological challenges today. Happily, the fine efforts of younger American theologians like Keith Lemna of the St. Meinrad School of Theology and Msgr. Michael Heintz of Mount St. Mary's Seminary are introducing Bouyer to a new generation and rekindling the attention of people my own age.



Fr. Louis Bouyer

Louis Bouyer was born in 1913, on the eve of the war whose material and spiritual devastation would forever change "Christian" Europe. Still, his childhood was relatively serene, enfolded in the warmth and faith of a loving French Protestant family. In his later years, Bouyer remembered being kissed by the then-eighty-year-old Sarah Bernhardt when he was a child. Her voice, he recalled, had "an unreal richness and sweetness," as she whispered to him, "mon amour."

In his childhood, Bouyer loved to read fiction and poetry, a passion that would eventually lead to four pseudonymous novels and friendship with T. S. Eliot and J.R.R. Tolkien. He was also fascinated by the natural sciences—chemistry and physics in particular. But this period of serenity and intellectual discovery came to an abrupt end when his mother died. He was only eleven. As he wrote seventy years later in his *Memoirs*, "With her gone, I remained totally, absolutely alone in a world emptied of any presence besides my own." Bouyer's father, heeding the counsel of a psychiatrist friend, arranged for the boy to spend some months with friends of his mother in the Loire River town of Sancerre. Its distinctive atmosphere provided healing balm for the youngster's spirit. "That region will always remain something like the native land of my mind, of my soul, of my heart; in a word, of all the best that life had providentially allowed me not only to achieve, but also, I think, to be."

It was also through people Bouyer encountered in Sancerre that he first came to read the Fathers of the Church and John Henry Newman, who would so decisively influence his future journey. He resonated deeply with Newman's vision that "this world, wherein the intelligible and the sensible form a single tapestry, is but a single thought of God." Bouyer had already begun to perceive and savor a sacramental universe. Within a few years he would enter the Protestant seminary in Paris and plunge into the rich liturgical and ecumenical climate of the 1930s.

During that decade Bouyer formed close ties with two men who, along with Newman, played significant roles in his emerging spiritual and theological vision: the Russian Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov and the Benedictine liturgist Lambert Beauduin. Of Bulgakov's "brilliant personality" Bouyer writes: "I straightaway had the impression of seeing reappear before me the very Christianity of the Fathers, especially the Greek Fathers." Bulgakov strengthened Bouyer's belief in the inseparable connection between theology and spirituality. In addition, Bouyer came to share the Russian's conviction that "created Wisdom, which is inseparable from the uncreated Wisdom that is the Word Himself, can alone express the eternal vocation of the created universe." As for Beauduin, Bouyer would later describe him "one of the twentieth century's greatest religious figures because of his broad and generally correct views, be they in theology, in monasticism, in liturgy…or in ecumenism."

It was this very commitment to liturgy and ecumenism that would lead Bouyer to convert to Catholicism in 1939 and to be ordained in 1944 as a priest of the Oratory, the congregation founded by St. Philip Neri and chosen by John Henry Newman as his own religious family. Ever ready to discern the ironies within God's designs, Bouyer commented ruefully that, before the Second Vatican Council, his fellow Catholics often viewed him with suspicion because he was a former Protestant, while after the Council he was deemed an embarrassment precisely because he had left Protestantism to become Catholic.

During the 1950s and '60s, Bouyer began a long and productive period of teaching in the United States: at the University of Notre Dame, the University of San Francisco, Mount St. Mary's Seminary, and Brown University. Several of his books were actually written in English: *Liturgical Piety*; *The Liturgy Revived: A Doctrinal Commentary of the Conciliar*

Bouyer took aim at both "integralists" and "progressives" for their failure to fathom the true meaning and depth of the reform envisaged by the Council. Both sides, he argued, domesticated the Christian Mystery.

Constitution on the Liturgy; *Liturgy and Architecture*; and *Newman's Vision of Faith: A Theology for Times of General Apostasy*.

Today, Bouyer may be best remembered for his involvement with Vatican II and its aftermath. During the Council itself, he was a member of the Preparatory Commission for Studies and Seminaries, an experience that soured him on "conciliarity." He was only grateful that "the inept or incoherent proposals" that issued from the "interminable palavers" never made their way to the floor of the Council. He was, more famously, also a member of the post-conciliar Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy.

Without question, Bouyer was a firm supporter of liturgical revival. He had been involved for thirty years in the liturgical movement and had written several significant works on the meaning of the liturgy. Indeed, not only did he welcome *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, but his own writings, especially the groundbreaking *Le Mystère Pascal* (1945), undoubtedly helped shape it.

Nevertheless, he was alarmed at the haste with which the task of reform was undertaken—the effort to "recast from top to bottom and in a few months an entire liturgy it had taken twenty centuries to develop." He also believed that the all-powerful secretary of the Consilium, Annibale Bugnini, was a man "as bereft of culture as he was of basic honesty." Bouyer eventually discovered that Bugnini had misled both Pope Paul VI and the other members of the Consilium, in effect manipulating one against another.

A much-repeated anecdote is worth recalling. Bouyer and another member of the Consilium were charged with producing one of the new Eucharistic Prayers—by the next day. What became Eucharistic Prayer II was "cobbled together" in a café in Trastevere. Yet, despite his many misgivings about the fruits of this precipitous process, Bouyer acknowledged that there were positive accomplishments as well. He singled out "the restoration of a good number of splendid 'Prefaces' taken from ancient sacramentaries" and "the wider biblical readings." Even the often-criticized new Eucharistic Prayers "reclaimed pieces of great antiquity and unequalled theological and euchological richness."

The haste was driven in part by the convulsions that rocked both Church and society in the late 1960s. There was a sense in Rome that boundaries had to be drawn quickly, before liturgical experiments got truly out of hand. I can testify to that frenzy for change since, as a young priest, I lived at St. Thomas More House, the Catholic chaplaincy at Yale, from 1967 to 1969. Each week, a newly formed "liturgical committee" devised ever-more "relevant" celebrations, cutting and pasting with little knowledge of, or regard for, the principles set forth in *Sacrosanctum concilium*. The one point of reference was the ill-defined principle of "active participation," which soon became a slogan devoid of meaning.

Bouyer's dismay at the post-conciliar situation in France spurred him, in 1968, to write one of his most polemical books, *The Decomposition of Catholicism*. Here he took aim at both "integralists" and "progressives" for their failure to fathom the true meaning and depth of the reform envisaged by the Council. Both sides, Bouyer argued, domesticated the Christian Mystery. "How can the integralists," he asked, "who turn their back to the world, ever be missionaries? And how can the progressivists, who are open to the world, but who are unaware of having anything to bring to it, be anything more?" Nor did he spare the French bishops. Commenting on some recent episcopal appointments, Bouyer echoed the view of an African bishop: "We have made generals overnight out of people chosen and trained to be nothing more than master-sergeants!" These "generals" later returned the favor: Pope Paul VI finally decided against elevating Bouyer to the cardinalate after being warned that the reaction among the episcopate in France would be intensely negative.

But what *is* the true depth of the Catholic liturgical tradition? That question leads to the heart of Bouyer's liturgical-spiritual-theological vision. In the introduction to his path-breaking work of 1945, *The Paschal Mystery*, Bouyer signaled the trajectory of all his subsequent reflections:

> The Christian religion is not simply a doctrine: it is a fact, an action, and an action, not of the past, but of the present, where the past is recovered, and the future draws near. Thus, it embodies "the mystery of faith," for it declares to us that each day makes our own the action of Another accomplished long ago, the fruits of which we shall see only later in ourselves.

"[T]he action of Another" was, of course, the action of Jesus Christ fully revealed in his Paschal Mystery. And the entirety of the Christian life is progressively to make our own—to realize in ourselves—the fruit of that mystery. In the phrase of St. Paul that became almost the leitmotif of Bouyer's writings on the spiritual life: "The mystery is this: Christ in you the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

All of Bouyer's theology is an exploration of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, whom we encounter in a privileged

way in liturgical celebration. Bouyer's theology is therefore inseparably liturgical-spiritual-pastoral in the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. The French philosopher of religion Jean-Luc Marion has even claimed that "the theology of Bouyer has a breadth, a spaciousness, and a breath that few others have had since the great patristic period."

Let's pause for a moment over the title and context of Bouyer's seminal work, *The Paschal Mystery: Meditations on the Last Three Days of Holy Week*. The term "Paschal Mystery" was not in common use in the Church in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Pius XII's 1947 encyclical on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, does not use the term at all. Yet, in less than twenty years, "Paschal Mystery" would become central to Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy. It is also the organizing principle for Part Two of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, promulgated in 1995.

Bouyer's *Meditations on the Last Three Days of Holy Week* are all the more remarkable in that they preceded by ten years the actual reform of the Triduum undertaken by Pius XII. When Bouyer was writing this book, the solemn Easter Vigil was still celebrated early Holy Saturday morning, with sparse attendance, and—at least in my South Bronx parish—the Lord's Resurrection was joyfully proclaimed at noon on Holy Saturday. The result was a severely truncated Triduum. Thus, Bouyer clearly anticipated and fostered the liturgical reforms that were to come.

In his fine introduction to the recent reprint of *The Paschal Mystery*, Michael Heintz suggests that the book presents "a *lectio divina*…on the texts and rites by which the Church expresses, celebrates, experiences, and communicates God's saving work in Christ." Note the word "experiences." Bouyer, like his mentor Newman, is not satisfied with a merely "notional" understanding of the mystery of the faith. His whole project is to promote a "real" understanding—an experiential immersion into, and appropriation of, Christ's Paschal Mystery. He wholeheartedly embraces the Council's call to "full, conscious, and active participation," but does not think of this only, or primarily, in terms of external actions. Rather, the liturgy calls us to contemplate and enter into the absolute newness of the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus Christ. Participating in this newness "costs not less than everything," as Bouyer's friend T. S. Eliot cautions. The liturgy leads participants into a supernatural order that overturns "worldly" values—that new order announced in the Sermon on the Mount. Baptism is not to be understood as just a sociological identity card; it is a new birth, a birth "from above." Like physical birth, moreover, Baptism is only the beginning of a journey, one that requires an ongoing transformation "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), until "Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11).

Bouyer's *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, though written prior to the Council, is as challenging today as it was when

Mysticism is not some esoteric phenomenon, reserved for an elite, but is instead the full flowering of the life inaugurated in Baptism.

it first appeared in 1960. Long before Vatican II issued its "universal call to holiness," Bouyer recognized the connection between holiness and full participation in the liturgy. He firmly believed that mysticism is not some esoteric phenomenon, reserved for an elite, but is instead the full flowering of the life inaugurated in Baptism. It is "nothing other than the most profound apprehension to which we can be led by grace here below—apprehension of the truths of the Gospel, the realities of the sacramental life which the Christian accepts by faith and makes his own by charity." Bouyer went further: "Mysticism follows the vital logic of a life of faith fully consistent with itself." Full, conscious, and active participation in the Church's liturgy thus entails the perception of this vital paschal "logic."

If this view of mysticism seems extravagant, recall the famous (if little heeded) prophecy of Karl Rahner: "The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic,' one who has experienced 'something,' or he will cease to be anything at all." But I think Bouyer provides a fuller sense of the shape, content, and implications of such mysticism than Rahner does, not least because Bouyer insists from the beginning that the "experience" in question is not of "something" but of "Someone"—the Paschal Christ encountered in the liturgy, especially the Eucharist.

Together, *Christian Initiation*, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, and *The Paschal Mystery* form a rich trilogy. The first book draws readers into a series of discoveries: from the discovery of the spiritual world, through the discovery of God, to the discovery of the new life in Christ. The second book sets forth the dimensions of that life and the spiritual exercises and practices that nourish it. The third book, as we have seen, ponders the Paschal Triduum as the Mystery's fullest expression and embodiment.

In addition to these three books intended for a general readership, Bouyer also wrote three other trilogies that are less known and more theologically speculative. Written over a period of almost forty years, these trilogies address, respectively, God's "Economy of Salvation," "The Doctrine of God," and "The Hermeneutics of Scripture and Tradition." Keith Lemna, who is bringing these books again to the attention of the theological community, calls Bouyer's nine-volume work on dogma "one of the most far-reaching syntheses of the meaning of the Christian mystery, in its interconnected dimensions, in the twentieth century."

Lemna devotes special attention to *Cosmos*, the third volume of the trilogy on the economy of salvation. He considers this book to be "Bouyer's most personal as well as most speculative work," one which "opens up the meaning of his other writings." Here, according to Lemna, Bouyer "aims to show the radical newness of the Christian way of seeing the cosmos and the transfiguring Wisdom of God that God's revelation discloses and imparts in the folly and power of the Cross."

Reading Lemna's careful studies of Bouyer's systematic trilogies, I was reminded of an insight of Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*. Having acknowledged and affirmed modernity's accomplishments, Taylor forthrightly diagnoses its deficiencies. He suggests that it tends to produce people who are deracinated and disembodied. They live within a constricted "immanent frame" and shield themselves from the encroachments of others by means of what Taylor calls the "buffered self." His word for this whole dynamic is "excarnation"—the opposite of incarnation. In the final chapter of *A Secular Age*, titled "Conversions," the Catholic philosopher issues this striking appeal to his fellow believers: "We have to struggle to recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean." Taylor then quotes the French poet Charles Péguy: "One is Christian because one belongs to a race *which is re-ascending*, to a certain mystical race that is spiritual and carnal, temporal and eternal." Because Christianity is faith in the incarnate God, there can be no repudiation of matter, no relapse into excarnation.

What Péguy poeticized, Bouyer theologizes, in both his more pastoral and his more systematic works. Bouyer shares with Péguy an acute sensitivity to the corporeal and the communal, a conviction that our access to God cannot bypass the material creation and the concrete Church, which is the very body of Christ. What Bouyer adds is an intense appreciation of the cosmic horizon of the Christian mystery, taking with utmost seriousness Ephesians 1:10, which speaks of the "recapitulation" of all things in Christ. As Lemna puts it, "Matter can be transfigured. In fact, this is why it exists. The illuminated body of the transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor is paradigmatic, and the Mystical Body of Christ is the ultimate instrument of the transfiguration of cosmic being."

Another important (and somewhat neglected) theme in Taylor's *A Secular Age* is *theosis*, or divinization. Taylor speaks of it as "the further greater transformation which Christian faith holds out, the raising of human life to the divine (*theosis*)." What Taylor (via Hopkins and Péguy) hints at, Bouyer brings to full light. Deification does not happen to the isolated individual. Rather, it is *personal*—that is, a relational and communal consummation. As Lemna writes of Bouyer's view, "In the eschatological Church, we shall enter, in the unique person of the Spouse of the Lamb, into a perfect condition of relationship with the Trinity, such that our deepest human capacity as essentially relational beings is actualized."

From early on, Bouyer clearly saw that the full unfolding of Jesus' Paschal Mystery had to involve all Christians in their intimately interrelated humanity. Only together, only in communion, could they image the Triune God and herald a new divinized creation. In *The Paschal Mystery* Bouyer writes, "By our new and supernatural subsistence in Christ, founded upon the Incarnation and maintained in all of us by the Eucharist, we form a single new being in the body of Christ, or, more exactly, in the whole Christ, in the plenitude of Christ." He concludes: "New relations are established between us, uniting us indissolubly, since henceforth we all have no longer but a single life—that of Christ in us."

In fact, all of Bouyer's writings can be read as one long commentary on Paul's teaching that Christ "died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:15, 17). That formulation sounds simple enough, but, as Bouyer showed, its implications are inexhaustible. For Jesus Christ's Paschal Mystery unfolds into the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

When Bouyer died in 2004, the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, preached the homily at his funeral Mass. Lustiger had once been a student of Bouyer's, and he spoke about how the theologian had "reopened for us the great paths of the Tradition, not by ignoring the trials and contradictions of the present, but by teaching us, on the contrary, to confront them and to bring to bear an attitude both open and critical, finding our delight in an even deeper understanding of the Christian Tradition." In his posthumously published memoirs, Bouyer described his career with disarming modesty: "I believe that I was born to teach, and to teach the Christian religion as the only possible inspiration for a humanism that is not a pipedream. My books strike me as no more than the fruit of a lifetime of work. They remain, simply, the output of an honest and competent professor. My priestly ministry contributed to their elaboration far more than the other way round." But Bouyer was more than just competent. His writings on liturgy were ahead of their time; they may now deserve a second look—or a first look—from a new generation of theologians. As for the rest of his work, it is arguably *still* ahead of its time. If we give it the attention it deserves, it may help us both to appropriate the full Christological richness of the Second Vatican Council and finally to move beyond the ecclesial polarization that followed it.

ROBERT P. IMBELLI *is a priest of the Archdiocese of New York.* Christ Brings All Newness, *a collection of his essays and reviews (including several from* Commonweal*), will be published early next year by Word on Fire Academic.*

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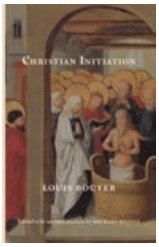

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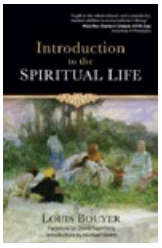

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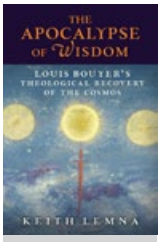

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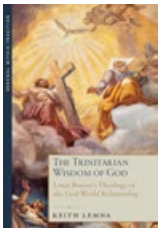

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Poverty Abolitionist

An interview with Matthew Desmond

In his book Poverty, By America, *sociologist Matthew Desmond argues that poverty exists because we "wish and will it to," subsidizing affluence while purposely denying safety and security to millions of impoverished families. He recently spoke with* Commonweal *editor Dominic Preziosi about the persistence of poverty in this nation, the way that corporations undercut labor and the wealthy hoard resources, and the steps we can take to not only alleviate poverty but abolish it. The following interview is a condensed version of their conversation on the* Commonweal Podcast.

DOMINIC PREZIOSI: You say that simply by using a term like "the poverty line," we obscure the real malignancy of poverty in this country. Poverty isn't a line, you write, "but a tight knot of social maladies." What are those maladies and how are they intertwined?

MATTHEW DESMOND: If you look at poverty just as a poverty line, just as an income level, you are struck by the fact that we have a lot of poverty: 30 million of us live below the official poverty line. That's more than the population of Australia. But that's just the surface. If you spend time with folks who suffer poverty, or if you yourself have experienced it, poverty is not being able to afford to go to a doctor, it's telling your kids that they have to eat "wish" sandwiches for dinner, it's facing eviction, it's depression, it's being exposed to unhealthy and unsafe housing and to violence. It's this really tight knot of social humiliations. And it means that millions of us are denied safety and security in the richest country in the history of the world.

DP: You go on to note that a half-century after Lyndon Johnson declared a war on poverty, we've made little to no progress in reducing it. "Fifty years of nothing," you say, even though anti-poverty spending has actually increased over time and has

Food stamp applicants at local welfare office in Austin, Texas

BOB DAEMMRICH/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

continued to grow even through the Trump administration. So why isn't all this spending helping us make more progress?

MD: It's a paradox. Between Ronald Reagan's first term and Donald Trump's first term, spending on the thirteen biggest means-tested programs—like food stamps and housing assistance—has increased by about 237 percent per person, adjusting for inflation. Over that time, according to many different measures, including measures that take into account government spending and transfers, poverty has been pretty persistent. Fifty years ago, the supplemental poverty measure was about 15 percent; forty years later it was about 15 percent. It dipped lower right up to COVID, and then it plunged during COVID because of the historic, colossal intervention the government made. And now we're creeping back up—so we know that those government programs work. There's a ton of evidence that things like the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers or housing assistance pull millions of families above the poverty line, but poverty still persists. Why? In a nutshell, it's because the fundamentals of American society, especially the job market and the housing market, are breaking down for a lot of Americans today. Unions don't have a lot of power, and wages are stagnant. For a man without a high-school or college degree, his wages are less today than they would have been fifty years ago. So that means we have to spend more to stay in the same place. It means we need different policies, policies that cut poverty at the root.

DP: What would some of those policies be?

MD: We need to do three things. First, we need to deepen our investment in anti-poverty. We can fund the investments with fair tax implementation. Recent studies show that if the top 1 percent just paid the taxes they owe—not paid *more* taxes or a higher tax rate, but stopped evading taxes so successfully—then we as a nation could raise an additional $175 billion a year. That's almost enough to pull everyone above the official poverty line.

We can do this. But we also need to change our game, especially when it comes to exploitation. We need to address exploitation in the labor market, which means we need to give workers power. We need to address it in the housing market, which means we need to expand housing opportunities for families below the poverty line. We need to think about different ways of getting folks access to safe affordable housing, including expanding homeownership opportunities for working-class and low-income families. And we need to end the unrelenting exploitation of poor families in the financial industry—overdraft fees and payday-loan fees are piled on the backs of the poor, costing them $61 million every single day just to access a bit of money and a bit of credit.

The third move we need to make: we have to end our embrace of segregation. We need to strive to be a neighborhood of open, inclusive communities, not communities that hoard opportunity behind walls made of things like zoning laws. We need to tear down those walls and replace exclusionary zoning laws that say it's illegal to build any kind of affordable housing with *inclusionary* ones that say we all need to do our part.

DP: We put a large burden on poor people, you say, by forcing them to pay more for a variety of things. Can you identify some of the ways that's done?

MD: One way is the normal banking system. We often think of payday-loan companies and check-cashing stores as the predatory parts of the financial system. But normal banks—the banks that you and I, and probably everyone reading this, use—are the bigger culprit. Every year, $11 billion in overdraft fees are charged to bank customers; most of those fees, over 80 percent, are charged to just 9 percent of bank customers. Who are those 9 percent? They're poor folks made to pay for their poverty. It's not uncommon to overdraw your account by $20, and end up paying $100 or $150 in overdraft fees. Who does that benefit? I bank at a conventional bank; I get free checking. But it's not free. It's subsidized by all those overdraft fees piled on the backs of the poor.

This isn't just a private-market phenomenon. You could think of cities that balance budgets by ticketing and re-ticketing poor, predominately Black families for small violations. Some states charge inmates for their time in prison, so when they get out they have a huge bill that they have to work off; they have to pay for their own prosecution. The financial exploitation of the poor, by government agencies and by corporations, has come to be seen as normal, as "just how it is in America," instead of very strange and even violent.

DP: Your book identifies and clarifies a lot of common misperceptions. One of those is how people view immigration. Those opposed to immigration will say that new arrivals from other countries depress wages for everyone else while taking jobs from native-born workers and plunging them into poverty. But you say the reality is different.

MD: It's understandable that some folks point to immigration when it comes to explaining the economic woes of a country where rates of immigration have significantly increased over the past sixty years. We might ask, "Has poverty also gone up a lot over that time?" But the answer is no; poverty has basically stayed the same. Three states—California, Texas, and Florida—hold about half of all our immigrant population today. In two of those states, Texas and Florida, poverty has actually decreased over the last several decades, and California has basically stayed the same. So, even the states that have experienced the biggest surge of immigration have not experienced the biggest surge in poverty. We might ask, "Okay, but is it the case that there's competition for jobs, and immigrants are to be blamed for wage stagnation?" Wage stagnation is a real thing, but immigrants are not to blame for that. Immigrants seem to be competing mostly with other immigrants in the economy. If you're an older immigrant, or someone who's been here for a while, you might need to

worry about the newer immigrants. But if you're a native-born worker, you're competing against other forces, and usually not against immigrant pressures. A third concern is that immigrants might place undue weight on the welfare state. But the best research we have shows that the average immigrant family actually pays more in federal taxes than they receive in federal benefits. If we step back and look at the full shape of the welfare state, and how it really benefits folks that have plenty already, it's laughable to point to immigrants as an anchor weight on our welfare state.

DP: You write that "poverty exists because some wish and will it to," and that one way we will it to is by undercutting workers. How does that affect poverty?

MD: It's really hard to overestimate the power that unions had in providing an economy that shared its bounty. Unions weren't perfect. They made a lot of mistakes; they were racist, often barring Black and Latino workers from their ranks. And in that way, they shot themselves in the foot and prevented the country from experiencing the big, powerful, multiracial labor movement that we could have had. But our most equitable time in modern history was in the 1970s, when unions had the most power. They lost their traditional organizing base as the economy shifted away from industrialization, and continued to dig their own grave with self-defeating racism. But unions were also ruthlessly attacked by corporations and politicians aligned with those corporations. About a third of the country was unionized in the seventies, which wasn't just good for those union workers—it was also good for folks that were in the same market, competing with unionized firms. If I was an employer, and my shop wasn't unionized, I knew I'd still have to keep wages high, or else my workers would just leave for a shop that was. Today, only about one in ten workers has a union card. And most of those are public-sector folks: cops, firefighters, nurses, teachers. That really is a driving force for why wages have been stagnant—especially for those without a college degree—and why a lot of work has turned more insecure and gig-like over the years. This is not about education. It's not about a skills mismatch. This is about power, and the fact that workers have lost it.

Matthew Desmond

DP: Do you see any way that organized labor can be built back up at this moment?

MD: One idea that I really like is an idea that you see in Europe called sectoral bargaining. It's a way to make collective bargaining easier. Right now, you have to organize one Amazon warehouse or one Starbucks location at a time, which is just inefficient. There's no way we can organize the American workforce like that. Sectoral bargaining says, "What if everyone in a certain sector took a vote—all the nurses, all the warehouse workers—and if half of them voted yes, that would trigger a process in which the secretary of labor would gather a panel made up of workers and bosses, and they would have to negotiate terms that cover the entire industry?" This has played out in Europe to successful effect. It's a way we could organize entire sectors of the economy at once, so we don't have to depend on the success of this or that local place, or be thwarted by certain states that have anti-union worker regulations.

DP: In your book you talk about the concept of "private opulence versus public squalor." What do you mean by this?

MD: It's an old phrase that goes back to Roman historians, but I encountered it in John Kenneth Galbraith's famous book *The Affluent Society*. Galbraith made the point that if you have a country where a lot of rich people live alongside a lot of poor people, as the rich get richer, they withdraw from public spaces. They don't need to use the public park, they've got the country club; they don't need to swim in the public pool, they have their own pools. As that accelerates through policies like tax breaks, what is shared and public becomes crummy, shabby, and exclusively used by poor folks, who have to use

BARRON BIXLER

the services that no one likes. And that hurts everyone—not just folks who are under the heel of economic desperation, but also folks who are quite secure in their money. You can't really live a full, free life if the public sphere is disinvested from. It's the difference between riding a train in Switzerland or other parts of Europe, and riding a bus in some parts of America: you can tell who invests in and uses public goods. This is an incredibly pernicious part of American society. It's something that should give us all pause, including those of us who do have enough money to afford country clubs and private pools, because it's just another example of how poverty in our midst drags everyone down.

DP: You raise another dynamic at play that may be related: the scarcity diversion. What does this mean in the context of poverty?

MD: You hear about "the scarcity diversion" all the time. You hear it when someone says, "Well, in a world of scarce resources, what do you want to do?" You hear it when our elected leaders say, "We just can't afford to cut child poverty, we can't afford to give everyone in this country access to a dentist." And that's just a lie. We could afford it if the richest among us took less from the government. We could afford it if the country invested more in educational opportunities than it did in guarding fortunes. The scarcity diversion strikes us as something that serious people say. We have to come up with a language that says, "Look, you're lying." We could afford to do more, we just choose not to. The opposite of the scarcity diversion is abundance. The country has a lot. There's a lot to go around. And wouldn't we be a safer, healthier, freer, more vibrant country if we embraced that mindset? That's a policy decision and a personal decision. For me, the end goal is the abolition of poverty. I think our poverty rate should be zero. That doesn't mean we're all equal or that everything's perfect. But it means that no one in this land of riches should fall below a certain level of income and a certain level of happiness and well-being.

DP: We're gearing up for national elections in 2024. Candidates talk about inflation, taxes, and interest rates. What's your assessment at this point of how our politicians are taking up the issue of poverty?

MD: Not great. And I think that poor Americans deserve more than either party has delivered for them over the past fifty years. One party, the Republican Party, seems to have nothing to say to the poor. If I were a Republican voter, I would like to know the plan to decrease poverty in America. Americans want an answer to that question from Republicans *and* Democrats. In Congress, it's a little different. Democrats, much more than Republicans, do wish to enact and champion policies to reduce poverty. But they often shy away from the word "poverty." They prefer talking about "the middle class" or "economic opportunity." I understand the politics behind that. But I don't think you can fix problems you don't name.

The country has a lot. There's a lot to go around. And wouldn't we be a safer, healthier, freer, more vibrant country if we embraced that mindset?

DP: What can the average American do to fight for the abolition of poverty?

MD: Here are five things they can do. First, they can flex their influence wherever they are. We've all got a bit of influence. You might sit on a school board, or you might be an elder at your church. I teach at a university, for example. So I should be asking, how much are my landscapers getting paid? Are we taking care of our adjunct faculty? Are we supporting our first-generation college students? We can flex our influence where we are.

Second, we can vote with our wallets. We can shop and support companies that are doing right by their workers. And we can withdraw support from those exploitative, union-busting companies. This includes our investment decisions. We used to talk about sin stocks in America, remember that? "I'm going to get out of oil, I don't want my money supporting weapons." But what about your money that's supporting union-busting and poverty wages?

Third, let's talk about our taxes differently. Come tax time, basically everyone complains about taxes. Let's challenge that. We have an eviction crisis, and we have over a million public-school kids who are homeless—yet for my home, I'm getting a mortgage-interest deduction. I'm getting government money because I'm a homeowner, but I don't need this. So I'm going to write my congressperson and tell her to take this away. Or I'm going to donate my deduction to my local eviction-defense fund.

Number four, let's get our butts down to those zoning-board meetings. Let's stand up and raise a voice and fight for broad, inclusive communities. Segregationists are working hard to uphold those walls. If we want those walls to come down, we need to put in the work.

Finally, we can join an anti-poverty organization. There are a lot of them working around the country at the local or national levels. If you're interested in getting plugged in, we launched a website called End Poverty USA that connects families to services in their community that they need and deserve. If we want this country to get serious about ending poverty, the anti-poverty movement has to grow, and for it to grow, we need to get involved.

LISTEN Hear the full interview with Matthew Desmond on Episode 113 of the Commonweal Podcast. **commonwealmagazine.org/podcast**

CLIFFORD THOMPSON

What's the Big Idea?

The conceptual art of David Hammons

For a baker's dozen of years beginning in the late 1990s, I was the editor of a monthly reference journal called *Current Biography*. Our articles on accomplished living people relied heavily on secondary sources; in the course of writing and editing each 2,500-word biography of an actor, businessperson, writer, athlete, scientist, politician, musician, or what have you, my staff and I combed through dozens of published reviews, interviews, and profiles. Over the years, I discovered that when it came to what I will call—for the sake of this Catholic publication—*flimflam*, the biographical subjects who inspired most of it fell mainly into one category: visual artists.

As far as I could tell, this was not the fault of the art critics, or not entirely. It often seemed as though, having pages to fill, and having themselves been conned by the artists, those critics set out, consciously or otherwise, to con the rest of us—using hot air to pad their takes on the meanings of the work under review. One artist, for example, exhibited what he claimed was a section of his own bedroom wall, significant to him because of the countless hours he had stared at it. Perhaps that stands out in my memory because one critic, after waxing poetic about the section of wall, added—uncharacteristically for one in his occupation—that one might be tempted to view the work as a scam. *Yes*, I recall thinking. Yes, indeed, one might.

The vast majority of the artworks that inspired flimflam were conceptual. That is no accident. An element usually absent from works of conceptual art, in my humble experience, is craft. That, of course, is the point of conceptual art, which emerged as a movement in the 1960s: the materials and their manipulation are important neither for the aesthetic pleasure they give nor for the skill they display, but for what they express. It's the idea, stupid. But in art, for me personally, craft functions as a passport, lending legitimacy to the intentions of the person whose work I am considering. Clearly demonstrated skill at painting, drawing, or sculpting gets us past the first hurdle, letting me know that the work, whether or not I like it, deserves to be taken seriously. By contrast, I tend to yawn, if not roll my eyes, before works that show no sign of what priests call "the work of human hands." (And if you truly want me to bypass your museum or gallery installation, one time-tested method is to throw in a TV or video monitor.)

These opinions come with two caveats. One is that I recognize that much conceptual art represents serious and legitimate intentions. (I know: very big of me.) What can make it hard to assess the intentions behind conceptual art is the often ineffable nature of the ideas at the center of such work. Those ideas are like small children: precious, delicate, complex, dependent on the support of solid objects and the stewardship of solid people for their survival. But sometimes the quality of those objects and people make one wonder if the ideas, like a Nigerian prince in an email scam, don't actually exist. The second caveat is that sometimes, in cases in which the craft that went into an art object seems limited or absent, the work itself is still so striking that it doesn't matter.

That brings us to the work of David Hammons.

In a career that spans six decades, beginning with his student days in Los Angeles in the early and mid-1960s, Hammons—who is African American—has produced work often grounded in ideas of Black community and history. Many of those works can be seen in Harold Crooks and Judd Tully's 2022 documentary *The Melt Goes on Forever: The Art & Times of David Hammons*, which consists mainly of interviews with curators, critics, and other artists as well as footage of Hammons himself, often seen alongside his creations. The "work of human hands" is not totally absent from those creations; Hammons's hands, and much of the rest of him, are in evidence in his famous series of body prints from the late 1960s and 1970s, for which the artist used paint and baby oil to make impressions, on paper, of his physical self—works that, as one commenter observes, make Hammons a stand-in for the very politically charged idea of the Black body.

Another seemingly hands-on, craft-oriented piece was *How Ya Like Me Now?* (1989), a billboard-sized work portraying the Black activist and presidential candidate Jesse Jackson—who had unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination the previous year—with blond hair, blue eyes, and pale skin. Set up in a Washington D.C. parking lot across from the National Portrait Gallery, the work made the point that the charismatic Jackson's candidacy might have succeeded if he had been white. A group of Black men, interpreting the work very differently, got nationwide media coverage when they set out to destroy it.

For the most part, however, the works seen in the documentary suggest collection and assembly rather than creation, but are often no less powerful for that. Inspired, for example, by a 1970 exhibit at Chicago's Field Museum that featured garments containing the hair of African tribespeople and worn by their chief, Hammons began collecting hair from Black barbershops and affixing it to large, head-shaped objects, such as rocks. The result is stunning. The "heads" are featureless, drawing our attention that much more strongly to the hair, which came from the heads of living people; the hair seems to bring the objects partway to life, allowing them to represent a community. You half expect them to speak.

Other such works include exhibits of cotton attached to long wooden sticks—cotton having, in a sense, given birth to African Americans because, in Hammons's words, "If not for cotton, we [i.e., Black people brought from Africa during

David Hammons at Documenta IX, 1989

the slave trade] wouldn't be here to pick it." Inspired by Marcel Duchamp's concept of the "ready-made," and more directly by the works of the artist Noah Purifoy, which included artifacts from what transpired in 1965 in Watts (variously termed riots, rebellion, and uprising), Hammons collected bottles, bottle caps, and other found objects in Harlem, where he had moved. Among the standout results is *Untitled (Night Train)* (1989), his circular sculpture of uniformly shaped dark green, light green, and clear bottles of cheap wine (called Night Train). The bottles glisten while revealing a great deal about the community from which they are drawn—their different shades might suggest the array of skin tones to be found in Harlem. The power of such works lies in the melding of the aesthetic and the idea-driven as well as in the labor-intensiveness they suggest. They demand to be taken seriously, because serious thought and effort clearly went into them.

This is not to say that Hammons's work is free of any suggestion of flimflam. The *Melt Goes on Forever* begins with a woman telling the story of her 1980s encounter with a man on the street who was selling snowballs. She bought one, thinking she was helping a homeless man. Only later did she learn that she had purchased a piece of art by a famous artist named David Hammons (see cover). The documentary's commentators (one or two of whom are rather adept at flimflam themselves) note that Hammons is "always trying to find the joke" in what he does, and that his work evokes the Duchampian/Warholian tradition of the "artist as scammer." That idea could certainly occur to anyone looking at his 1993 work *Rock Fan*, which is not about music appreciation—rather, it is a giant rock with fans attached—and which Hammons exhibited outdoors on the campus of Williams College for onlookers split equally between admiration and skepticism. The same might be said of his 2007 show in Manhattan that consisted of fur coats spattered (decorated? marred?) with paint. The jokes here could be on the curators—if so, this is a case of willing butts. As the late writer Steve Cannon says in the documentary, the more "Hammons tells the art world to [expletive] itself, the more they want him," and Hammons "gets a kick out of that."

How are we to feel about such works when it's not clear how seriously Hammons himself takes them? *The Melt Goes on Forever* does not provide an answer; the documentary assiduously avoids expressing a point of view apart from those of the commentators, which in one way is effective, letting both the power of Hammons's work and the occasional absurdity of the art world speak for themselves—the latter never more hilariously than when an art dealer recalls his effort to purchase and insure one of the artist's snowballs for $1 million. But the absence of an omniscient viewpoint also makes for a scattershot portrait of Hammons and his career, one that leaves out key biographical details and gives little idea of how and when the artist came to prominence or of the place he occupies in the larger context of the art world, particularly the Black art world. The attentive viewer will learn (from

a still photograph of a news clipping that includes the year) that Hammons was born in 1943, and an interviewee explains that he moved twenty years later from Springfield, Illinois, to Los Angeles, where he learned that there were Black artists when he met and studied with Charles White at the Otis Art Institute. Beyond that, the curious will have to look elsewhere for information, finding out, for example, that:

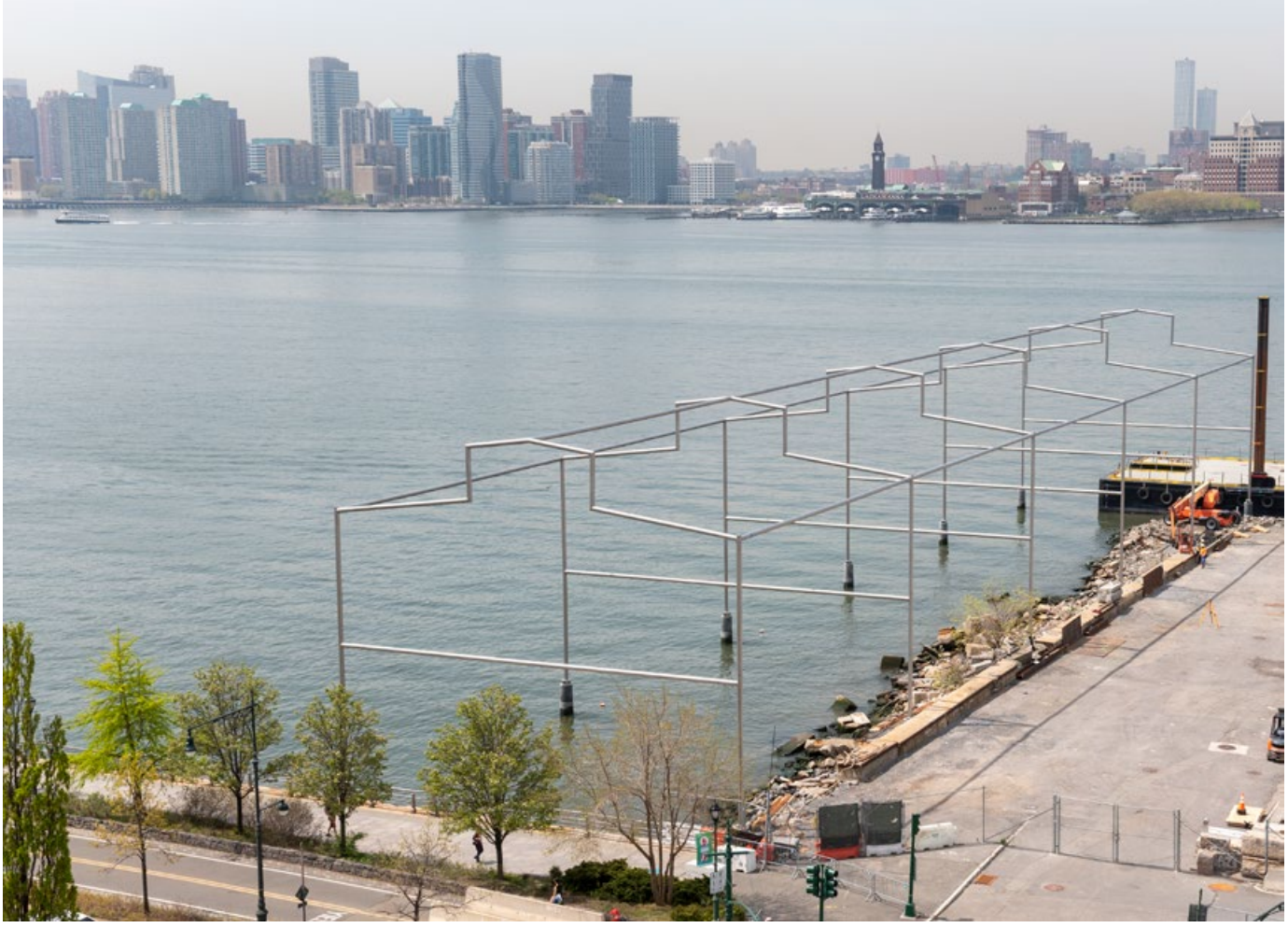
Hammons grew up very poor, the youngest of ten children with a mostly absent father. In L.A. he enrolled in classes in commercial art and design before becoming interested in fine art. He never actually matriculated at Otis; White let him attend night classes for free. Hammons's career and reputation started with the body prints he began making during that period. He was a part of the era's Black Arts Movement; his studio in Los Angeles became a hangout for Black artists. In 1975 he had his first show in New York—where he would move five years later—when Linda Goode Bryant exhibited his work at Just Above Midtown, the space she had devoted to showcasing the work of artists of color. He came under Bryant's wing, and later, as artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, he became an influential figure himself. The 1980s brought him grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts; the Prix de Rome followed in 1990, the same year as his retrospective exhibit at MoMA PS1, which represented a milestone in his career. A year later he won a MacArthur Foundation fellowship. It was official: Hammons was a genius. At art? Scamming? Both?

Perhaps in search of an answer, I went on a Thursday in August to the Manhattan's Whitney Museum of American Art to see Hammons's permanent exhibit, *Day's End*, completed in 2021. The work is not actually *in* but adjacent to the museum, across the West Side Highway, along the banks of the Hudson River. The massive sculpture is inspired by—and has the exact same location, dimensions, and title as—a since-demolished work by the late Gordon Matta-Clark. In 1975, Matta-Clark cut holes in an abandoned shed on Pier 52. The incisions let in the sun—and let the artist in for a visit by city inspectors, who shut down the unauthorized use of municipal property.

Hammons's own *Day's End*, constructed of metal poles fifty-two feet high, sixty-five feet wide, and 325 feet long, is not a building but resembles the frame of one. Walking from the Whitney to get a closer look at *Day's End* meant crossing the traffic-choked highway; I perched on a bench beside a playground at Hudson River Park, which juts out into the river just south of *Day's End*, and gazed across the water at the sculpture. *Day's End* is half-in and half-out of the water, the poles on one side resting on steps. Construction was taking place very near it; runners and bikers passed

Hammons in his Harlem studio, 1981

MICHAEL BLACKWOOD



Day's End, 2014

by along the multi-use path, not one of them seeming to pay attention to Hammons's work. I wondered what I would have thought of it myself, or if I would even have noticed it, had I not known it was there. The day was overcast, the undersides of clouds the same color as the metal, nearly subsuming it. The giant red neon "W" on the hotel across the river in Jersey City commanded more attention than Hammons's work did. You don't look at *Day's End* so much as past it, or through it; the work seems to suggest something that is still to come, or has already left, or else it resembles… well, a few mornings later, over breakfast in a Brooklyn diner, I showed a friend the photo I had taken and asked him what it looked like. "A giant coat rack," he said. "Bingo," I replied.

Sitting on the bench, I kept staring at the work, wanting it to mean something, not wanting to feel like I was wasting my afternoon. Then I thought about the title, and something clicked. The words "day's end" bring to mind life's end, and suddenly the work looked less like a coat rack than a skeleton—mine, or yours. We are that empty frame, or will be one day. What do we do, as the end approaches, except hope that we haven't wasted our days? And what will we do between now and that time?

Listen to me—sounding like one of those art critics I used to scoff at while sitting up in the Bronx in my office at *Current Biography*. Suddenly I felt some empathy for those guys.

And I had questions. If, in conceptual art, the idea is more important than the materials, why do the works require the materials? I argued earlier that the ideas depend for their survival on support by solid objects, but is that really so? Would a flat-out statement of the ideas not work as well? Words on a wall, maybe? Perhaps, though, the reason that Hammons's *Day's End* ultimately works—for me—is that I came to an understanding of its meaning, or what I take to be its meaning, on my own. Another friend of mine once said to me, "I want to learn, but I don't want to be taught," and maybe that's exactly it. That is similar to what I sometimes tell my students of creative nonfiction writing: don't spell out your ideas all the way—let the reader do some of the work. Perhaps, that way, there is more of a feeling of shared ownership of the ideas. (And anyone who pays thirty bucks to gain admittance to the Whitney should feel like a part-owner.) As owners, we get to do what we want with these ideas, including—if we are not impressed, or if we wonder whether they really are ideas—walking away from them.

I had one other question. Is the meaning I derived from *Day's End* the one Hammons intended? Perhaps, staring long enough at anything, anywhere, at any time, I could have arrived at a similar notion. Why do I need *Day's End*? But perhaps that is exactly the point.

I thought, with a rueful chuckle, of a moment from *The Melt Goes On Forever*: Hammons recalled that some people, looking at his work, had said to him, "I could do that." His response was, "Go on and do it then."

CLIFFORD THOMPSON *is the author and illustrator of* Big Man and the Little Men: A Graphic Novel, *published by Other Press.*

TIMOTHY SCHENCK

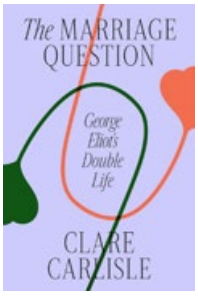
Double Life

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

George Eliot wanted to be buried in Westminster Abbey. At her death in 1880, at the age of sixty-one, she had a towering reputation and a dedicated circle of admirers. Her novels were widely acknowledged as among the greatest achievements in English literature. No less a luminary than Charles Dickens had written to her directly to express his admiration for her first stories, praising their "exquisite truth and delicacy"—a letter that prompted Eliot to write, "There can hardly be any climax of approbation for me after this." By the end of her life, however, she dared to dream of one final honor, that of joining Dickens and England's other great men of letters who rested in Poets' Corner.

Eliot, of course, was not a man. She was first Mary Ann Evans, later Marian Lewes, and finally Marian Cross—having lived with George Henry Lewes, her "husband" in everything but law, for twenty-four years, and then having lawfully wed a young admirer, John Cross, less than a year before her death. If she had been a man, the irregularities of her private life might have been overlooked—Dickens's abandonment of his wife for a much younger lover did not exclude him from that hallowed ground when he died ten years earlier. But Eliot's petition was denied, on account of what the scientist Thomas Huxley described as her "notorious antagonism to Christian practice in regard to marriage, and Christian theory in regard to dogma."

In discussing Eliot's work, it is tempting to pass over the messy details of her private life in delicate embarrassment. (That late-in-life marriage to John Cross, for example, is truly weird.) But Clare Carlisle's excellent new book *The Marriage Question* dares to take Eliot's personal life seriously, as the field in which her finest work was cultivated.



THE MARRIAGE QUESTION

George Eliot's Double Life

CLARE CARLISLE

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

$30 | 400 pp.

And, coming at the end of Carlisle's empathetic portrait of the woman who called herself Mrs. Lewes, a woman who crowned each of her manuscripts with a sincere dedication to her beloved "husband," Huxley's verdict on Eliot's life lands as an outrageous insult. He had been asked to support her interment in the Abbey, but replied with his reasons for opposing it. "One cannot eat one's cake and have it too," he sniffed. "Those who elect to be free in thought and deed must not hanker after the rewards, if they are to be so called, which the world offers to those who put up with its fetters."

Could any woman hope to be "free in thought and deed" in 1850s England? It would be wildly off the mark to imagine Eliot as an anti-establishment rebel, casting off conventionality to follow her whims. In fact, she longed for social acceptance and labored to convince friends that her union with Lewes was honorable. (Legally, at least, it was adulterous; he was separated from his wife, who was living with another man, but they were not divorced.) If Eliot's thinking and writing challenged Christian conventions, it was not for the sake of undermining the faith; she pushed herself and her readers to recognize where concerns about propriety and true human kindness were at odds. Carlisle, herself a philosopher, puts it well: "She shone philosophy's fierce light on conventional mores that passed for ethics."

Eliot had thought herself doomed to loneliness until Lewes, a fellow writer, came into her life. It was he who first encouraged her to take up fiction, and he managed the business side of her lucrative career. They read to each other. They gave each other notes. They traveled together on research trips. When they visited the Convento di San Marco in Florence to study the work of Eliot's favorite artist, Fra Angelico, she waited outside while Lewes toured the cloister and took notes on the frescoes within. Women were not permitted to enter.

Lewes found a publisher for Eliot's work, but they agreed to conceal her true identity; she had high aspirations and wanted her reputation as a writer to be free of both the taint of social scandal and the limitations placed on women writers. When *Adam Bede*, her first novel, was a critical and financial success, she wrote to her publisher, "I sing my 'Magnificat' in a quiet way, and have a great deal of deep, silent joy." But if she laughed when the *Economist*, in its review of *Adam Bede*, declared her a "man of genius," she also resented being unable to claim any laurels publicly. Soon thereafter, she took the risk of revealing her identity and found that her success as an author remained secure. In time, she developed a following of admirers (including

George Eliot in 1849, painted by François D'Albert Durade

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

her future husband, John Cross, twenty years her junior) who "worshipped her not only as a great artist and moral teacher, but also as a figure in whom erotic and maternal fantasies could be ambiguously merged." Still, she was never able to escape the shadows of illegitimacy. Her own brother cut off contact when she began her life with Lewes, and he did not reach out again until Eliot married Cross.

Eliot described her relationship with Lewes as a "double life," and by "double" she meant not "duplicitous" or "divided" but "shared." She felt that she drew strength from living in relationship with him, and their relationship in turn informed her work. A characteristic letter to a friend finds her pronouncing herself "happy in the highest blessing life can give us, the perfect love and sympathy of a nature that stimulates my own to healthful activity." But Carlisle wonders whether their domestic bliss was truly as "perfect" as Eliot insisted. The pair differed, for example, about how Eliot's work should be published and how much she ought to ask in payment. Carlisle suggests that Eliot likely worked out her ambivalent or negative emotions in her writing.

One of the revelations of Carlisle's approach is how *Daniel Deronda*, too often dismissed as merely a disappointing follow-up to Eliot's masterpiece, *Middlemarch*, appears instead as the clearest expression of many themes that had preoccupied the author throughout her career. As Carlisle says, "*Daniel Deronda* brings together the different aspects of the marriage question—political, metaphysical, moral, emotional, spiritual—which had taken shape in Eliot's previous works." Its heroine, Gwendolen Harleth, is vividly self-centered and disinclined to sacrifice, a personality that might lead to success in a man but can only spell misery for a woman. Her uncle, working to secure a suitable match, worries that Gwendolen has "too much fire in her" to attract a mate. "When you are married, it will be different," he counsels her; "you may do whatever your husband sanctions." Chafing at playing the part of an eligible maiden, Gwendolen believes marriage will bring about freedom. Readers have the terrible thrill of watching her walk into the trap that will teach her otherwise. There is no having one's cake and eating it too for Gwendolen, or for any woman facing down the marriage question, as Eliot knew quite well.

In this and all of Eliot's work there lurks what Carlisle calls the "imagined otherwise": alternative possible endings; couplings that might have led to happier outcomes; squandered potential that might have been nurtured in other settings. Readers who grow attached to Eliot's female protagonists have often wondered whether the endings of their stories are quite right; sometimes Eliot comments on these frustrated expectations within the text itself (as in the epilogue to *Middlemarch*, where she wryly notes that "many who knew" Dorothea, her heroine, "thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done"). Eliot could also imagine a world that

was more open-minded, less hypocritical, or more egalitarian than the one she lived in, and she wrote about humanity striving toward it. But her characters must finally make their choices and broaden their own horizons within the limitations that life (or their author) has placed on them.

Carlisle's portrait draws on a vast field of material: diaries and letters written by both Eliot and Lewes; Eliot's notebooks documenting her creative process; the novels themselves, of course, as well as critical responses to them. There are brief and illuminating forays into matters such as the development of clerical marriage in the Church of England, literary expressions of Victorian feminism, and the figure of the Madonna in Medieval art and Protestant thought. And there are the author's own perceptive readings of the novels and what they reveal about marriage as a concept, a limitation, a convention, and an ideal. Carlisle combines all this into an absorbing and surprising portrait of the emotional life of an author I thought I knew well.

"Each day our partners watch us cross the precarious bridge between our intimate and our social selves," Carlisle writes. No one could have known George Eliot better than George Lewes. He helped his wife keep her footing on that precarious bridge, and she loved him for it: "I can't tell you how happy I am in this double life," she wrote to a friend, "which helps me to feel and think with double strength." But aside from the tender inscriptions on her manuscripts, we do not know what she wrote to Lewes. The couple agreed to shield their correspondence from posterity, and the letters they exchanged were buried with Eliot. It is a testament to Carlisle's thorough research and insight that this absence is seldom felt in her book.

Eliot's humanist philosophy, which she developed over many years of reflection and articulated in various ways in her writing, held that men and women must recognize their mutual dependence, and thereby grow in empathy for one another. Marriage, for her, was a school of virtue. She lost Lewes in 1878 and married Cross eighteen months later, apparently deciding the single life was not for her. Explaining this surprising turn, she wrote to a friend, "I shall be a better, more loving creature than I could have been in solitude." It is difficult, for me at least, to read those words and still snicker about the incongruity of the match.

In her final chapter, Carlisle reflects on the hold that other people's relationships have on our curiosity. "Beneath the superficial pleasure of gossip and the fleeting sensations of power felt in passing judgment on another person, lies some grasp of the moral stakes of marriage," she writes. "These stakes are so high precisely because they concern the growth of our souls."

When I first heard about *The Marriage Question*, I thought of Rebecca Mead's 2014 book, *My Life in Middlemarch*, which I reviewed enthusiastically in these pages ("The Larger View," July 11, 2014). I wondered whether there could be more to say about Eliot's emotional life and her relevance for women readers in the twenty-first century. But I found in this new book a new set of revelations. Both Mead and Carlisle express a sense of being enlarged and challenged by Eliot's generous vision of humanity, and that ennobling effect on readers is surely Eliot's richest legacy—the "climax of approbation" she might have cherished most. Carlisle's perspective is original and fruitful, and *The Marriage Question* shines both as a biography and as an inquiry into the "moral stakes of marriage." Its pleasures are anything but superficial.

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY *is editor at large at* Commonweal.

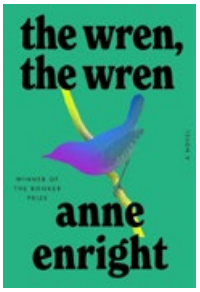
Anne Enright at the Cheltenham Literary Festival in the United Kingdom, October 2015

Agony, Almost

VALERIE SAYERS

Some contemporary Irish novelists are easier to describe than others: Kevin Barry's a madcap experimentalist, Claire Keegan a subtle and lyrical stylist, Sally Rooney an ironic post-postmodernist. Anne Enright is harder to pin down. Her prose is sure and knowing, yet so seemingly offhand that the opening pages of her novels can feel frothy, lightweight. Those deft early chapters, however, invariably lead to complications and disturbances, to complex structures and capacious insights. What looks at first like romantic comedy or domestic kerfuffle can quickly become searing cultural critique.

Enright won the Booker Prize in 2007 for *The Gathering*, but her subsequent novels have only increased my regard for what she's up to with the smooth surfaces and roiling depths of her fiction: *Actress* (2020), for example, begins with her characteristic light touch as she explores the charmed life of a lovely young performer reared in a company of touring players. Soon enough, Enright is delving into commercialized art, the IRA's political violence, and sexual coercion. *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) opens just before the start of an adulterous affair, complete with cheesy pop love songs for chapter titles, but manages, over the depressing course of the lovers' journey toward cohabitation, to skewer the giddy consumerism and real-estate spikes of the Celtic Tiger years. My favorite Enright, *The Green Road* (2015), is an ambitious work that follows the lives of a tempestuous mother and her four children as they move fully into adulthood. Spanning continents, sexual orientations, and political philosophies, the novel gallops right past any notions we might have about the scope of the domestic novel.



THE WREN, THE WREN

A Novel

ANNE ENRIGHT

W. W. Norton & Company

$27.95 | 288 pp.

In Enright's latest, *The Wren, The Wren*, the tone is especially light as the novel opens: the first narrator, Nell McDarragh, is a recent graduate of Trinity College, full of the sarcastic, cynical wisdom of youth. Enright is always interested in narrative voice, in who's telling the story and thereby distorting it. Nell is sensitive, smart, sometimes stoned, and—despite her proclaimed interest in empathy—self-conscious, if not self-centered. She's also likeable, charged with the confusion of energy, lethargy, freedom, and guilt that entangles so many young lives. The granddaughter of a beloved poet, Phil McDarragh, she feels the burden of that relationship when her lover Felim trots her out to a family baptism. It eventually becomes clear that he's put Nell on display because his granny reveres her famous relative.

The famous relative, however, deserted his two daughters for America when his wife was stricken with breast cancer, so Nell only knows him from his poetry and from old interviews. In a good-natured author's note, Enright explains that the idea for this novel came from another real-life writer whose marriage disintegrated when his wife "got sick." Stories of abandonment in the face of suffering might be familiar, Enright says, but "the problem is not one of male self-absorption but something more like denial, fear, or even anguish." That's a generous take, typical of Enright's attitude toward her most difficult characters. But as much as Phil McDarragh may be anguished, he certainly comes across as self-absorbed, at least as seen through the novel's second narrative lens: Nell's mother, Carmel.

Unlike her daughter's chapters, Carmel's are not written in the first

Enright often presses the whole weight of strained human relationships into the length of a striking sentence.

person but in the third, a more formal narration that reflects her generation's custom of self-effacement. The chapters told from her perspective are weighted with her certainty that lovers, family, and friends are bound to let her down and that she's better off on her own, but her self-deprecating wit leavens even her saddest observations. Teaching in Italy, she demurs when a friend invites her to come swimming in the local pool because she "was Irish and would rather die than conduct a conversation while wet." Carmel believes that sex is "almost the opposite of a relationship" and when she gives birth to her own child, she does so without benefit (or handicap, as she might see it) of a husband. Nell grows up happily fatherless, and if there's plenty of tension and evasion in the current mother-daughter relationship, their devotion to each other is clear. Carmel remembers believing, when Nell was only an infant, that she knew all about her mother's sorrows: "The baby carried the whole black universe with her, in the pupil of her eye."

Enright, in turn, often presses the whole weight of strained human relationships into the length of a striking sentence. Just as the impact of Phil's desertion is evident in Carmel's loneliness, the effect of Carmel's attitudes is evident in her daughter's feelings. Carmel describes one youthful sexual encounter as "huge and empty and, at the bright, distant edge of it, a feeling of agony, almost"—"agony" a word right at home in late twentieth-century Catholic Ireland, whether it refers to Christ's agony or Ulster's agony of sectarian violence. Nell, though she belongs to a far more permissive and irreligious generation, welcomes a different kind of agony as she subjects herself to Felim's cruelty. When she finally flees Dublin to escape her obsession, she spies shirtless teenage boys in the English sunshine and, in a droll echo of her mother's tone, says, "I could not remember why I ever wanted to sleep with a man, it did not seem medically possible." A promiscuous friend offers a stoned observation: "Love requires (he pauses, looking for the right term) two acts of submission, and sex (he pauses again) really doesn't." In a new age of bondage clubs, "submission" is another loaded word.

Yet despite their professions of agony, both Carmel and Nell are determined to experiment, a clear reflection of the vast changes in sexual practices and gender expectations transforming religious countries like Ireland in especially jarring fashion. Carmel's father has long since flouted the sexual rules and, from the time Phil McDarragh was a child, had no use for the Church's "attempted pomp…a cheap postcard from the eternal." His religion is nature, the mysteries and wonders of the Irish countryside he celebrates in the original poems and translations that Enright uses as bridges between chapters. What better way than poetry to highlight the novel's commitment to wordplay, compression, and connection? His poem "The Wren, The Wren" is written for Carmel; it invokes "her eye, honour bright / to my vast eye," a lovely link to Carmel's certainty that her daughter's eye contains the universe.

But the poet who celebrates his younger daughter in verse has abandoned her and only connects with Carmel through occasional letters when a sentimental mood overcomes him. Enright faces an interesting authorial challenge in his poems: they must be good enough to make McDarragh important to an older generation and dated enough to make Nell's friends dismiss them. I'd say she pulls it off. Timeless the original poems are not, but they do evince the best of McDarragh (his reverence for the natural world and language) as well as the worst (that sentimentality). The real surprise is not the poetry but the long-dead Phil's prose intrusion into the middle of the book—we readers aren't expecting his visit. His chapter is brief (and reminiscent of dead Addie's arrival in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*) but it's also a tour de force, a haunting depiction of brutality, especially disturbing because the language is so glorious. A fierce badger defends his pup and fights off a killing dog as betting men look on; a young Phil meets the cub's eye as a stranger brings down a shovel on its head ("I looked into the animal's eyes and he into mine and we understood each other completely"). Later, the schoolboy poet betrays the girl he loves after her father cuts off her hair as ritual punishment for walking out with him ("Such was the fierceness of my feelings, that I jeered her too"). As childhood tales of fairy folk give way to a reading list devised by a priest determined to make another clergyman of young Phil, farm gives way to village and religious belief gives way to poetry. By the short chapter's end, we see the faithless man McDarragh will become amid hints of the new country Ireland is becoming.

It seems entirely apt that both Carmel and Nell will leave Ireland as Phil did; the difference is that they return. When Nell comes back to her mother's house after faraway travels, the novel, without tying things up too neatly, suggests a new path for her—but since Nell and Carmel are both prickly, it's a good bet that any future journeys won't be sentimental. They will be anchored, instead, by faithfulness between mother and daughter. They may not be poets, but they do know how to submit to a fierce and steady love.

VALERIE SAYERS, *professor emerita at Notre Dame, is the author of six novels and a collection of stories,* The Age of Infidelity.

The Limits of Liberalism

BENJAMIN J. B. LIPSCOMB

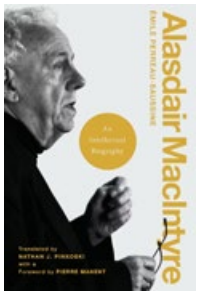
One can't understand a human action without fitting it into a story. What I am doing right now—writing the opening sentences of this review—is intelligible only as a goal-directed activity, situated within a pattern of more encompassing activities: my work as a philosopher. So, stories of a sort: the story of this review; the story of my life. These stories needn't be gripping. Nevertheless, human actions, and whole human lives, make sense only when contextualized as "enacted narratives."

That pivotal thesis of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* is tested, indirectly, in Émile Perreau-Saussine's "*biographie intellectuelle*," first published in French in 2005 and now available in English. The subtitle notwithstanding, the book isn't a biography of any sort. Perreau-Saussine tells no story about the decades-long development of MacIntyre's views. The result is a book that doesn't really illumine the *movements* of MacIntyre's mind.

Perreau-Saussine's book is a worked-up version of his doctoral thesis. Graduate study in philosophy is no preparation for life-writing, and the book is far heavier on allusions to other scholars and various "-isms" than on narrative interpretation. Though intellectual biography is its own subgenre and differs from ordinary biography, I had hoped to learn more about the origins and alterations of MacIntyre's thought. Non-academic readers are likely to find the book off-putting. Despite all that, I am glad Nathan J. Pinkoski translated it, and I am glad to have read it.

Perreau-Saussine does offer an *interpretation* of MacIntyre's thought, positing a unity behind or beneath his subject's multiple (in)famous conversions: from communism to a renunciation of the modern state; from Protestantism to atheism to Catholicism; from Marx to Aquinas. Not content to regard these as turning points on a long-running quest for truth, Perreau-Saussine seeks "the meaning of these ruptures," some constant that underlaid and generated them all. He finds this constant in "antiliberalism": "the continuous base and the final cause of [MacIntyre's] work."

This clarifies the kind of book Perreau-Saussine has written. He remarks that he did not set out to study MacIntyre but antiliberalism. He turned to MacIntyre because MacIntyre is an especially influential and interesting antiliberal, and because MacIntyre was little known in France. Near the end of his introduction, Perreau-Saussine says that he intends to outline "the biography of a problem." I doubt that the life of a problem can be told non-narratively any more than the life of a person. But taking Perreau-Saussine at his word: What is the problem, and how does he characterize MacIntyre's engagement with it?



ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

An Intellectual Biography

ÉMILE PERREAU-SAUSSINE
TRANS. NATHAN J. PINKOSKI

University of Notre Dame Press

$40 | 216 pp.

Liberalism itself is the *solution* to a problem: the problem of how human beings with conflicting goals and ideals can share a common life without any of them dominating the others. It is animated by fear of civil strife and the misery it inflicts. The liberal solution is to grant all members of society an identical but limited freedom to pursue their individual ends. Private citizens seek their fortunes within a rule-governed public realm on the condition that they do not try to impose their ideals on one another.

But this solution creates a different problem. Yes, there are dangers in communities openly debating controversial ideals. There are dangers in communities deciding together that they will pursue certain ideals while sacrificing others. But the liberal alternative, in which we treat our ideals as private—as nobody's business—deprives us of necessary resources for discovering and refining ideals, and thereby diminishes our common life. As Perreau-Saussine puts it, a "too-exclusive concern with tyranny and anarchy impoverishes existence."

Perreau-Saussine's chosen task is to explicate MacIntyre's version of this criticism, insisting on both its power and its limits. After a foreword by Pierre Manent (Perreau-Saussine's thesis director) and after Perreau-Saussine's own introduction, the book comprises three long chapters: one each on politics, philosophy (chiefly ethics), and theology. In each chapter, Perreau-Saussine considers one of the contexts in which MacIntyre presses his critique.

Each of Perreau-Saussine's chapters is *very* inside baseball, but none more than the chapter on politics. It traces the emergence of the New Left in postwar Britain and MacIntyre's on-and-off relationship to the movement (sort of—the chronology is loose). To be fair, Perreau-Saussine teaches the reader lots of interesting things about,

PHOTO BY MATT CASHORE/UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Alasdair MacIntyre speaks at the "Common Good as Common Project" conference hosted by the Nanovic Institute for European Studies in March 2017.

for example, the working ideologies of various short-lived-but-influential journals. I was particularly intrigued to learn about the debt owed by the New Left (or the *first* New Left) to G.D.H. Cole and his fin-de-siècle "Guild Socialism." But Perreau-Saussine also serves up pages and pages of this sort of thing: "In 1946-47, intellectual milieus were rather complacent toward Soviet Russia. But in 1950, the wind had changed, and many returned to their ivory towers." I more-or-less know what Perreau-Saussine means and he's not wrong, but paragraph after paragraph of breezy, unillustrated assertions (and dead metaphors) make the chapter a slog. As do Perreau-Saussine's frequent descents into jargon. Of the intellectual climate of the early sixties, he writes, "It is now the hour of Freudo-Marxist syntheses (in the manner of Herbert Marcuse), which reconcile political economy with the economy of desire through assimilating Freudian repression with social repression." Maybe it sounds better in French.

The politics chapter is also the most nearly biographical portion of Perreau-Saussine's book. I am trying to review the book for what it is, not for what its subtitle advertises. But as an emphatic caveat to any uncertain lector, here is Perreau-Saussine as biographer:

> In 1949, at the age of 20, [MacIntyre] entered the University of Manchester, where he studied philosophy for two years. Several years later, he was to write an article on the spirit of this university. Retrospectively, it clarifies the nature of his choice: a choice for a provincial tradition, for a nonconformist spirit in religion, for a radical spirit in politics, and for a rupture with the establishment.

No quotes, no explanations. If you want to learn something about how MacIntyre's university years shaped him, dig up the piece in *The Twentieth Century* for yourself. Also, maddeningly, for anyone wishing to trace MacIntyre's development, essays like the one just mentioned are cited right alongside much later works like *After Virtue* and "Poetry as Political Philosophy" (the source of MacIntyre's deliciously tart remark that dying for the modern state is like dying for the telephone company).

But this brings us again to Perreau-Saussine's thesis: that MacIntyre's concerns were ever the same. So chronology isn't terribly relevant. The thing Perreau-Saussine needs (and works) to establish is that MacIntyre's antiliberalism was present from the beginning, the basso continuo of his career. I won't dwell on the details, but only say that Perreau-Saussine makes a credible case. And it is a significant contribution to offer readers an interpretive key to MacIntyre's work, particularly his lesser-known early writings. Does Perreau-Saussine smooth out some edges? Yes. Every useful map simplifies. Nevertheless, it is instructive to bring Perreau-Saussine's heuristic to collections like *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, testing the thought that MacIntyre was *always* against the state and for smaller communities of practice and deliberation.

Perreau-Saussine's thesis is critical as well as interpretive, though. Throughout the book, he argues that MacIntyre's antiliberalism, while provocative and even instructive, is politically unserious. This criticism is broached in the opening chapter but developed most pointedly later on.

In his opening chapter, Perreau-Saussine compares MacIntyre to his contemporary and fellow "communitarian" Charles Taylor. Perreau-Saussine notes MacIntyre's rejection of the label, but nonetheless sees significant likenesses between MacIntyre and Taylor, and between them and theorists like Michael Walzer and Michael Sandel. Perreau-Saussine characterizes the shared commitments of these "communitarians" as "what remains of communism after Stalin and Solzhenitsyn."

Communitarianism brings out a singular edginess in Perreau-Saussine. Elsewhere he remarks, "Communitarianism…is the refuge of disappointed communists and socialists." A bit later, Perreau-Saussine calls MacIntyre "a bit of a 'poser'" for highlighting his family's Gaelic heritage. (MacIntyre's grandparents learned English as a sec-

ond language.) This isn't mere saltiness. It speaks to what most bothers Perreau-Saussine about MacIntyre: that MacIntyre doesn't appreciate the history and importance of liberal institutions, the gory awfulness that moved people to fashion these compromised but necessary institutions after the Wars of Religion. He finds MacIntyre's invocations of musicians and fishermen as moral exemplars at best "odd," at worst "irritating." What about the middle managers and other bureaucrats who keep the world running for the likes of antiliberals like him?

And this is where Perreau-Saussine goes in his final chapter: to an accusation of hypocrisy. In 1969, MacIntyre moved to the United States—the quintessential liberal state—leaving behind the practical political engagement of his earlier days, and built a career writing withering, outsider criticism of…the liberal state. I am not sure where Perreau-Saussine thinks MacIntyre should have lived, but the criticism still bites.

Or, it bites and it doesn't. It is bracing, reading this book in 2023, because of how much the world has changed since 2005. In 2005, Manent could write, "the alternatives to liberalism have lost all credibility." The landscape looks different now. A lesson I hope we are learning is that the liberal rules that constrain you likewise constrain your ideological opponents. The whole point of liberalism is that sometimes your opponents will hold power, and then you will want their power to be limited. Liberalism is a technique, maybe the only technique, for achieving this end: a common life without domination for people with conflicting ideals and goals.

But there is more to say, because liberalism does presuppose moral resources that it does not cultivate. Why is liberalism not safeguarding our public life as it is meant to do? Perhaps because we have nothing more? If that answer is even partly correct, then we continue to need MacIntyre (and writers he draws on, like Wendell Berry) to describe the communities we require.

There is much else—too much—to summarize and discuss in this review. To cite just one example, I found extremely interesting Perreau-Saussine's discussion of MacIntyre's debate with Peter Winch on the philosophy of anthropology. Again, I must caution non-academic readers against the book. It is not written for them. But if Perreau-Saussine sometimes lapses into dissertation-ese, the scholarship behind the book—the volume of Anglophone philosophy Perreau-Saussine had to absorb, inside and outside MacIntyre's corpus—is hugely impressive. And we owe Pinkoski a debt for doing the unglamorous kind of work Perreau-Saussine himself did first.

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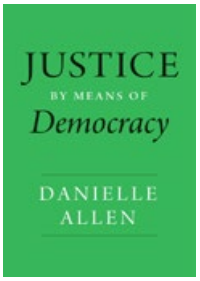
Sanitation workers assemble in front of Clayborn Temple for a solidarity march, Memphis, Tennessee, 1968.

DR. ERNEST C. WITHERS, SR. COURTESY OF THE WITHERS FAMILY TRUST

A Toolkit, Not a Blueprint

MAX FOLEY-KEENE



JUSTICE BY MEANS OF DEMOCRACY

DANIELLE ALLEN

University of Chicago Press

$27.50 | 288 pp.

Liberal political philosophy has been under fire from the start. One of the essential facts about this centuries-old tradition is its resilience—fellow travelers will call it adaptability; anti-liberals might characterize it as slipperiness—in the face of attacks from both right and left. Two related critiques are commonly lodged at liberalism by thinkers aligned with emancipatory political projects: that the tradition, with its defense of private-property rights, authorizes economic inequality; and that it hollows out political life by theorizing the state as little more than the protector of individual rights. According to this latter critique, man no longer resembles the "political animal" described by the ancients but rather an isolated creature pursuing his private interests in civil society.

In his influential 1971 book, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls attempts to redirect liberalism's attention to the demands

of social and economic equality. His famous difference principle—that inequalities in wealth or social status are justifiable only if they are to the benefit of the worst off—would, if realized, be almost revolutionary in its leveling of existing disparities between the rich and poor. But in the first part of her new book, *Justice by Means of Democracy*, the political theorist Danielle Allen argues that Rawls sacrifices political equality and the intrinsic value of political participation at the altar of economic redistribution. In the rest of the book, Allen develops a theory of justice that recovers the principle of political equality and the intrinsic value of political participation for liberal political philosophy.

Rawlsian liberalism, in Allen's reading, prizes freedoms of individual autonomy and conscience—sometimes dubbed the "negative liberties"—over the positive liberties that guarantee meaningful influence over political decisions. Why does this become a problem? Because human beings are creatures who have purposes, who make judgments about how to pursue their own flourishing. This purposiveness, this capacity for judgment, is the basis of human moral equality. But our social context supplies many of the ingredients that we use to craft our purposes. What's more, our social context constrains us in our pursuit of autonomy: every society enables certain courses of life and disables others. Political empowerment—the capacity to influence the rules that constrain a collective—is thus an essential component of human autonomy. If our equality is to be reflected in the political sphere, our polities must be democratic. Democracy is not just one regime type among many; it is a non-negotiable requirement of human equality.

Unlike many other versions of liberalism, Allen's "power-sharing liberalism" sees justice as the ground of human flourishing. Armed with three principles of justice—political equality; the non-sacrificability of both negative and positive liberty; and "difference without domination," a principle that prohibits any social distinctions from leaving some at the mercy of others—Allen devotes most of the book to teasing out the demands of human flourishing across the political, economic, and social spheres. She presents us with several subsidiary ideals across various domains of human life: a constitutional democracy that is egalitarian and participatory; a social sphere that prizes human connection and solidarity; and an economy that empowers everyone to satisfy their obligations as citizens.

While Allen makes good use of the idiom of the Rawlsian tradition, her own project—its methods, its intellectual sources—turns out to be starkly different than that of Rawls. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls offers a social-contract theory of an especially abstract sort. Unlike canonical contract theorists such as Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau, who all develop particular conceptions of human nature that serve to legitimate political authority, Rawls's principles of justice flow from a purely hypothetical situation in which theoretical citizens are abstracted from most recognizable human attributes (religion, gender, values, culture). Allen's text features no such hypothetical exercise. Leaving behind Rawls's austere Kantianism, she develops a liberal theory of justice guided by Aristotle's account of the good life, W.E.B. Du Bois's critique of social domination, and John Dewey's vision of democratic inquiry. Her analysis begins from our concrete situation: empirically observable patterns of political, economic, and social behavior. For Allen, the role of the political philosopher is to unearth the principles and beliefs that lie at the root of our practices, and to present revised principles that might better facilitate human flourishing. Thus, a theory of justice is not just about big institutions like states or property regimes; it's also a matter of the cultural norms that inform how we talk to our neighbors.

While no less ambitious than Rawls's masterwork, *Justice by Means of Democracy* is less than half as long. In a book that represents the culmination of all her academic work thus far, Allen exhibits almost superhuman self-discipline. She heroically resists every opportunity to digress, over-qualify, or repeat herself. This brevity is of philosophical import. Time and again, Allen brings up some knotty dilemma that *could* occasion thousands of words of hand-wringing, provides the reader with some perceptive normative resources she can carry into political life, and then, after a few pages, moves right along. Allen seems to believe that philosophy is limited in its capacity to offer a priori solutions to the tragedies and paradoxes political actors face. As a democrat who is also a philosopher, she hopes merely to equip her readers with some guiding consider-

Democracy is the form of government that demands of its citizens the greatest intellectual and ethical agility.

ations and principles as they engage in real-world practices of deliberation and experimentation. In the final analysis, Allen's theory of justice is not so much a rigid blueprint for an ideal polity as a toolkit for democratic life.

There are moments in *Justice by Means of Democracy* where one is left disappointed by the particular tools Allen offers—especially in her account of the relationship between economic life and the requirements of political equality. At one point, she expresses interest in proposals that would "democratize the firm." This phrase conjures images of workers making decisions about production through richly democratic practices of inquiry, deliberation, delegation, and the like. As it turns out, however, a radical form of economic democracy is not where Allen's real sympathies ultimately lie. Instead, she endorses a form of "stakeholder capitalism," where final decisions about production remain, to a significant extent, the purview of owners, who are implored to act according to purposes beyond profit-seeking. At the same time, states and unions are empowered to check the power of capital. What she calls "democracy-supporting firms" are those that provide their workers with the stability, material resources, and time to satisfy their obligations as citizens. Allen's aim is to "restore economic questions to a secondary place within the structure of human aspiration." A secondary demand of justice in the economic sphere is to minimize domination, but the primary demand is to permit individuals to step off the job and into the public square.

Allen's economic vision is vulnerable to all the standard left-wing arguments. (The wage relation itself creates a structural antagonism that cannot be separated from domination; capitalist production is organized by a form of value that cannot be overcome merely by having firms adopt some beneficent "purpose.") Here, though, I want to offer an adjacent critique, one that relates to a central democratic dilemma in an era characterized by faltering faith in the idea of self-rule: Where and how are we going to develop the capacities that could enable us to genuinely govern ourselves amid the complexity of modern life? Are human beings really up to the democratic ideal?

Several times in the book, Allen references W.E.B. Du Bois's famous argument that the political enfranchisement of African Americans is necessary to avoid a second slavery. Political empowerment, for Du Bois and Allen, is a necessary component of the experience of freedom. I wholeheartedly agree. But political empowerment is more than an institutional fact: it is also a capacity. One must learn how to *become* a power, how to become a co-creator of the collective life of one's community. In her model of the practice of democratic citizenship, Allen emphasizes the importance of civic education, as well as major economic reforms that would grant individuals the free time to practice the activities of civic life. But this raises a chicken-and-egg question: Where could we develop the civic capacities necessary to transform our political and economic structures so that we have the time we need to develop our civic capacities?

Du Bois offers some insight here. He locates resources for political learning in the situation where many of us find ourselves for most of our waking hours: at work. In his remarkable 1920 text *Darkwater*, Du Bois points out that democracy has not touched the matters "nearest" to the majority of people: namely, matters of "work and wages." He thought this explained our civic apathy. Struggles for democracy in the workplace make use of the existing expertise of workers (how to make things, deliver services with care, and operate complex systems of production) and foster nascent capacities of democratic citizenship (deliberating over the proper course of action on a basis of equality). "Unless men rule industry," Du Bois asks, "can they ever hope really to make laws or educate children or create beauty?" The democratization of production is revealed, in Du Bois's account, to be a seedbed of civic virtue.

Democracy is the form of government that demands of its citizens the greatest intellectual and ethical agility. For that reason, education has long been important to democrats. But education does not occur only in schools: we also receive an education when we engage in practical projects with our neighbors, colleagues, and countrymen. Allen rightly insists that democratic practices—voting, speaking before a city council, protesting—are themselves a school in autonomy. But many of our practical projects take place at work, and they too can impart a civic education. After all, the struggle for autonomy in the face of constraint is one of the great themes of contemporary economic life. When an employee enlists the help of a colleague to oppose an unfair scheduling policy, she receives an education in solidarity, collaboration, and problem solving; when she faces resistance, she receives an education in the nature of the social order, one that she might carry with her to the ballot box or into the street.

Allen has done political philosophy a great service with this book, despite its limits and blind spots. Liberals and non-liberals alike should applaud its arrival. She powerfully condemns as incoherent philosophies that claim to honor liberty but sacrifice democracy. She recognizes, like Aristotle before her, that justice must be achieved both in the law and in our interpersonal relationships. A robust democratic ethos, she rightly argues, must accompany any successful project of democratic renewal. Beyond the institutional transformation that justice requires must come, as Du Bois would put it, "the Spirit—the Will to Human Brotherhood of all Colors, Races, and Creeds; the Wanting of the Wants of All."

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Two Poems by Josiah Cox

SEASONAL

All lemon-lime, and caught
in the curb, ginkgo wings mind thin spines,
brightly pathetic.
If they move, they move with whip-wind obligation,
then resume a heaviness. If they fly, they fly
from boot tread, briefly.

For weeks now, trees have heaved freight
overboard—pods and cones
and the final, reluctant prophets. Like a tick,
I couch in disconsolation.
Somewhere a river birch is resolutely flayed alive.
Shed your self-pity. I sleep to survive.

JEFFERSON COMMONS

I

Cars languish in their daily stations
when a cool front rolls into the parking lot.
A strict row of balding maples
separates commerce from subdivision
above the runoff drainage ditch,
which waits like a big bird's lower beak
for a drink. Heavy clouds, then
downpour, anxious to settle
fast, sluice and gutterspew glazing over itself
down the grade to the tilted bill.
But its gullet is blocked, leaf-infested.
Days: and the rain stops.

II

Sun on Monday. I come with my rake.
Arduously, seepage had inched
from the drain's brim through clotted
humus at its PVC esophagus. Now
the bright yellow film which remained
festers in freak ninety-degree heat. I scrape
the septic surface open to its chocolate
underbelly, stench and a spirit
of skeeters lift, released. Brooding air
seems like an extension of me,
as I stuff globs into large paper bags.
Breaking from the wet weight.

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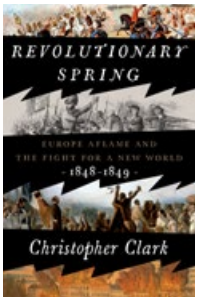
Did It Fail?

JAMES J. SHEEHAN

In 1871, the great Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt began his lectures on "The Age of the French Revolution" by telling his students that the title of the course was misleading. The age of revolution, he pointed out, was not limited to what happened in France after 1789; it was still going on, indeed "we are perhaps only at the beginning or in the second act." This revolutionary drama "is unlike anything in world history."

In the history of revolutions, the upheavals of 1848–49 have a special place. Unlike 1789, which came as a shock to contemporaries, the mid-century revolutions were anticipated by many observers, most memorably by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who sent the text of the *Communist Manifesto* to the printers just before the first sparks of political violence began to appear. When the revolution arrived, it turned out to be—again unlike 1789—a continental phenomenon, in Christopher Clark's words, "the only truly European revolution that there has ever been." Widely anticipated and rapidly extending from the Channel to the Russian border, the revolution dominated European public life from the spring of 1848 to the autumn of 1849. But in the end, its outcome has usually been seen as disappointing. The year 1848 was, as one historian put it, "the turning point where modern history failed to turn." Among Clark's many achievements is to demonstrate just how deeply misleading this judgment turns out to be. The revolution of 1848 was many things; "a failure" is most definitely not one of them.

Revolutions, Clark reminds us, "are never just about the dreams of revolutionaries. They unlock the tensions and resentments building within a society, not just the progressive ones." The first three chapters of *Revolutionary Spring* examine the underlying tensions and resentments that would shape the revolution's origins and outcome. First and foremost was a web of social conflicts that inspired radicals, convinced liberals that change was both necessary and possible, and frightened just about everybody else. While Clark is cautious about establishing direct causal links between social unrest and revolutionary action, a widespread sense of social dislocation did nourish the interplay of hope and fear that, in 1848, as in every revolution, was at the heart of the process. By the 1840s, there were many other sources of hope and fear: conflicts about the role of women in public and private life, intense national aspirations and frustrations, unresolved questions about the function of religion in modern culture and the always-vexed relationship of church and state. About these and many other matters, Clark has new and interesting things to say.



REVOLUTIONARY SPRING
Europe Aflame and the Fight for a New World, 1848-1849

CHRISTOPHER CLARK
Crown
$40 | 896 pp.

Clark begins his account of the revolutionary spring in Palermo, where in early January 1848 printed notices proclaimed that a revolution was scheduled for 12 January. In fact, no revolution was planned for that day; an isolated individual, not a powerful conspiracy of insurrectionists, had posted these proclamations. In Palermo, as in most of the other outbreaks of political upheaval that followed, what happened next was driven by misdirection, misunderstandings, and mistakes: crowds gathered, often more out of curiosity than anything else, troops were mobilized to confront them, and then something—stones hurled from a rooftop, shots fired in panic, barricades hastily erected—set off a cycle of violence. "The strangest thing about the uprising that began on the evening of 12 January," Clark writes, "is that it was ultimately successful." Within two weeks of the uprising's tentative beginnings, Palermo was in the hands of the insurgents; the old regime had apparently collapsed.

Revolutionary impulses spread from the streets of Palermo to one European city after another. The sequence of events differed from place to place, but everywhere deeply rooted tensions and an immediate sense of opportunity and danger inspired the advocates of change and at least temporarily paralyzed the defenders of the status quo. More than any other single cause, the collapse in governments' confidence in their own right and ability to rule enabled the revolutionaries to triumph that spring. These separate revolutions, Clark argues, did not "cause each other, as the aligned pieces in a domino effect cause their neighbors to fall." But they were also not independent of one another because all were "rooted in the same interconnected economic space, unfolding within kindred cultural and political orders, and precipitated by processes of socio-political and

OLD IMAGES/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ideational change that had always been transnationally connected."

Like their origins, the results of these revolutions were at once separate and connected, the products of particular situations and of a complex web of personal, political, and military relationships. In most of Europe, the revolutionary coalitions that had triumphed in the spring sooner or later began to unravel. Liberals and radicals, united by their discontent with the existing order, eventually discovered that they had very different ideas about what should take its place. As significant as these partisan divisions was a notable waning of revolutionary energy; as often happens, men and women succumbed to the insistent demands of everyday life, in which there were still jobs to be done, crops to be harvested, and children to be fed. At the same time, the forces of order began to realize that they were by no means as weak as they had initially feared. Most important of all, regular armies remained intact, ready and willing to act against the insurgents. In some places, the revolution ended with a whimper, but in others, violence—occasionally intense and destructive violence—was required to restore order. In a brief but moving section on "the dead," Clark provides some vivid examples of the high price people paid for their participation in the fight for a new world.

Although the revolution did not fulfill the dreams engendered by its early triumph, its significance for Europe's future was immense. Many of the reforms introduced in 1848, including some of the constitutions promulgated in almost every state, survived. A few, like the Danish Basic Law of June 1848, are still in place. In the revolution's aftermath, many states introduced new economic policies, strengthened their administrative institutions, and reorganized their urban spaces. There were also important changes in how people viewed the ends and means of political action; in both foreign and domestic politics, a new "realism" was now regarded as essential for success. As important as these results of the revolution were, however, few of them corresponded to the hopes and fears that had prevailed in the revolutionary spring of 1848. As Karl Marx wrote in the winter of 1851, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please." He was writing about Louis Napoleon's seizure of power in France, but he must also have had in mind the collapse of the optimistic expectations that he had expressed in the *Communist Manifesto* just three years earlier.

The story of 1848 and 1849 has been told often and well, but never with the breadth and depth of this extraordinary book. By recognizing, though not being overwhelmed by, the enormous complexity of his subject, Clark fulfills Albert Einstein's aspiration to make things "as simple as possible but not simpler." His account of the revolution is full of well-chosen examples, those telling events and fascinating personalities that make history such a rich and exciting subject. Finally, we find in these pages a number of compelling insights—about historical causality, the individual's role in history, the nature of revolutionary change, and more—that encourage the reader to stop and reflect on the wider significance of Clark's narrative for our understanding of both past and present.

Revolutionary Spring is about a particular historical moment, but it is also about how people's vision of history shaped their view of the world. The revolutionaries and their opponents had strong convictions about the part they should play in Burckhardt's great revolutionary drama. The Parisians who tore up cobblestones to build barricades, the parliamentarians who gathered in Frankfurt's *Paulskirche* to debate Germany's future, the reactionary courtiers who tried to stiffen the backbone of their frightened monarch in Berlin—all were moved by both the demands of the present and the apparent lessons of the past. Among the many valuable lessons to be learned from Clark's book is that in the third decade of the twenty-first century, as in the middle decades of the nineteenth, learning from the past is both inevitable and inevitably difficult to use as a guide for the present. In this respect, as in many others, Clark is right to sense a certain kinship between ourselves and the protagonists of his exciting story. "The people of 1848 could," he concludes, "see themselves in us."

An engraving showing the battle in front of Palermo Cathedral during the 1848 Sicilian revolution

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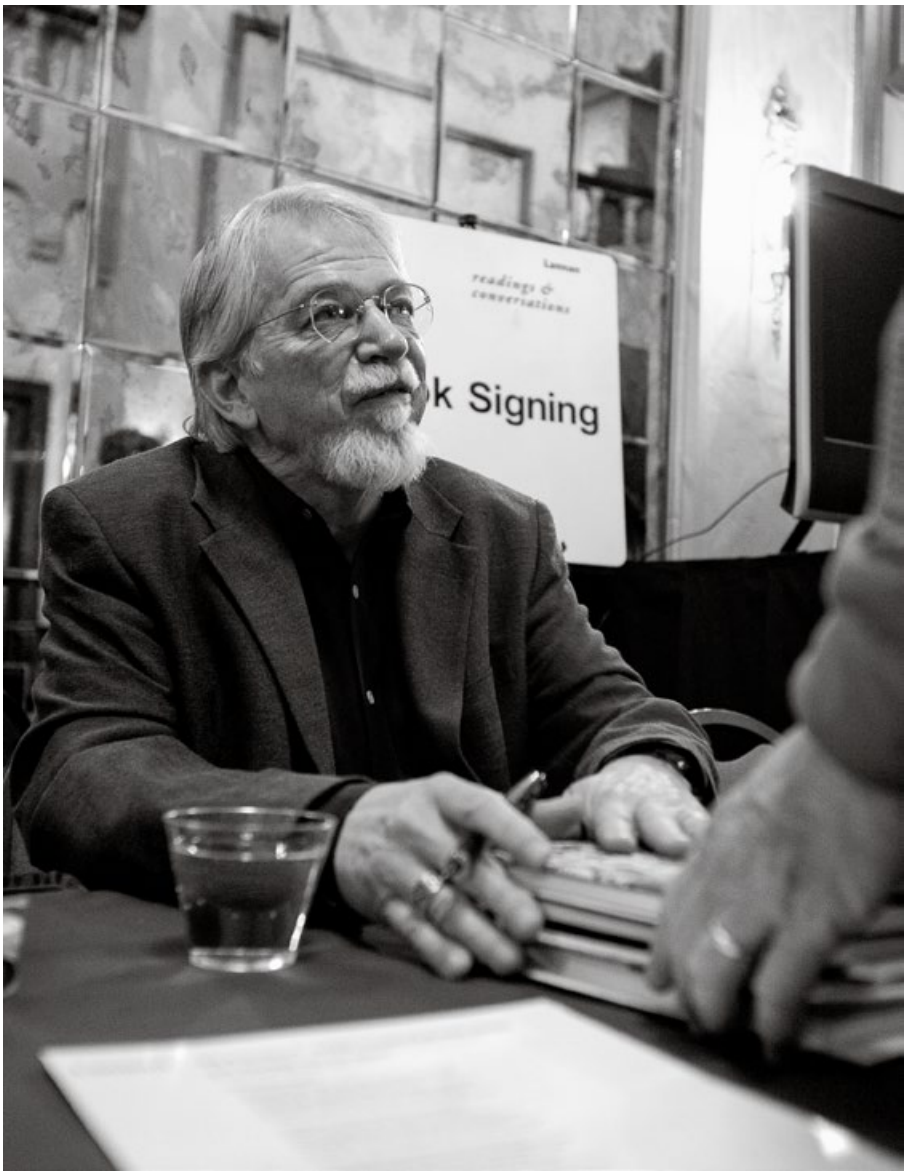
Welder of Words

STEVEN KNEPPER

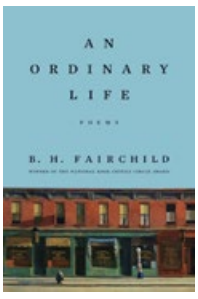
During high school and college, I worked in a small-town hardware store. We sold the usual PVC fittings and drywall screws, receptacle covers and paintbrushes. Much of my work was the expected tasks. I unloaded delivery trucks, stocked shelves, and rang up customers. But the job also apprenticed me as a jack-of-all-trades. It called for at least a smattering of basic carpentry, plumbing, and electrical knowledge, as well as the ability to issue hunting and dog licenses, grind spare keys, mix paint, rescreen windows, and cut copper tubing without pinching the end closed.

The most technical of these odd jobs was threading steel pipe. When a customer ordered, say, four feet of inch-and-a-quarter galvanized, I swung open a trap door and descended rickety wooden steps into the store's dirt-and-gravel basement, where a bare bulb threw dim light on the racks of pipe and the threading machine. The basement smelled sweet from the cutting oil. Curled metal shavings crunched underfoot around the machine. I would measure out the length of pipe, mark it with a piece of chalk, and hold it with a wrench with one hand while spinning the cutter with the other. Then I would lock the cut length in the chuck of the machine, flip the switch, and run both ends through the threading die while dousing them with oil. When all went well, the test coupling turned smoothly over the new threads, and I climbed the wooden steps toward the brighter light and the waiting customer, finished pipe in hand.



B. H. Fairchild in Santa Fe, New Mexico, February 2007

D.J. USNER



AN ORDINARY LIFE

Poems

B. H. FAIRCHILD

W. W. Norton & Company

$26.95 | 72 pp.

At the time I would have called threading pipe a satisfying task, one that required a peculiar mix of force and finesse. I doubt I would have called it beautiful, though. And even as an undergraduate English major reading Frost on my lunch break, I probably would not have called it poetic. The links between the practical crafts and poetry run deep. They are etymologically right there in *poiesis* (making) and *ars* (skilled craft). These links were not lost on me. Analogies between woodworking and poetry seemed very much "with the grain." Yet metalworking, with its sharp edges, groaning motors, and industrial materials, did not seem as obviously poetic to the somewhat Romantic sensibilities of the younger me.

The scales fell from my eyes, however, when I first read B. H. Fairchild's poems about the far more technical and precise metalworking of the midwestern machine shops where he worked in his youth and of his father's welding work among the oilfields. I nodded my head when he praised the beauty in

this work, despite its difficulty, danger, and dirtiness. Of course, most (though not all) of Fairchild's machinists and welders do not call their work poetic or beautiful. At times they even scoff at those who do. This is the great theme of the first poem—"Beauty"—in Fairchild's 1998 collection *The Art of the Lathe*. The poem begins in a Florence art museum, the Bargello, where the speaker's pondering of beauty at first seems to contrast the beautiful sculptures with "the machine shop / and the dry fields of Kansas, the treeless horizons / of slate skies." They are "very far" away from this Italian city. The distance between them is more than geographical. The speaker cannot recall the men of his family ever calling anything beautiful except maybe "a new pickup or dead deer." The poem proceeds through anecdotes of frustration, crass ferocity, and small-mindedness. Yet it also evokes the intelligence, skill, and attention to detail called for in metalworking—and, of course, poetry. The poem ends with how the Florentine skyline, including its "great dome," calls to the speaker's mind "the metal roof of the machine shop," which "would break into flame late on an autumn day, with such beauty." The gaping distance has been traversed. *The Art of the Lathe*'s title poem even more explicitly brings out the "art" of the machinist's work, in part by tracing its dignified history. "Leonardo imagined the first" lathe, we are told. The lathe receives an illustration in Diderot's encyclopedia. The speaker himself is taught the lathe's art by Roy Garcia, a recurring metalworker-philosopher in Fairchild's poetry, who instructs via "Cautious, / almost delicate explanations and slow, / shapely hand movements. Craft by repetition."

Fairchild returns to these concerns and characters in his most recent collection, *An Ordinary Life*. The collection's first poem is spoken by Fairchild's father, who is baffled and bemused by his poetry-studying collegiate son: "Handing me my hood as I leave for work, / he says, *You're medieval, a warrior, a knight / of the industrial order*." The father concludes, "It's not poetry. But it's what I do. / It's what I have to pass along in case / his poet's life proves not as lucrative / as he might like." The father is both right and wrong. Fairchild, now in his eighties, has indeed drawn on the metalworking craft his father gifted him. Yet he did so by taking its virtues into the writing life and by showing that it is, in a sense, poetic. Another poem in the collection, "Revenge," dramatizes an earlier stage in Fairchild's relationship with his father, before any bemused acceptance of the poetic vocation. Here Fairchild's father takes him on a brooding "Ford Falcon" ride to tell him to drop the poet act because his "*fancy-assed, flowery language*" does not "*impress other men, serious men, for whom life / is a serious business*." The son begins to defiantly recite poetry, emboldened by the words and spirit of Dylan Thomas: "My poem, I swore, spoken loudly / and very well as my father stomped the floorboard / with every burning word, would never end." Another poem in the collection, "*The Watchmaker in the Rue Dauphine*," revisits the links between metalworking and other art forms. It begins with an ekphrastic description of Brassaï's photograph of a boy watching the intricate work of a Parisian watchmaker through a shop window. It then turns to "a machine shop / in a small town in Kansas, where a boy / studies under lamplight the bruised hands / of his father measuring out the last cut." The character Roy Garcia returns in this collection as well with a series of prose poems drawn from his journals.

Some of Fairchild's other familiar influences and concerns recur in *An Ordinary Life*. Like his 2009 collection *Usher*, this newest collection features an Edward Hopper painting on its cover, an homage to what Fairchild's aesthetic has drawn from Hopper's lonely characters illumined by striking light. (See another great poem from *The Art of the Lathe*—"All the People in Hopper's Paintings.") The light that silhouettes, haloes, plays around, or glares on Fairchild's characters can be melancholy or unflinching, even brutal, but it can also be tender, allowing for Hopper's isolating loneliness to be overcome by the warm light of love. At times the light even overwhelms, like the searing neons of a welding torch's arc or like a mystical vision, briefly transfiguring this "ordinary life" in all its achingly finite and beautiful forms, as with "the glass children" "filled with silver ripples of light" in one of *An Ordinary Life*'s prose poems. In these mystical flashes, we can see some lessons adapted from William Blake, another of Fairchild's longtime guides.

This is not to say that the poems of *An Ordinary Life* are derivative of others or of Fairchild's own earlier work. Fairchild draws fresh water from the well of memory, and his poetic voice is very much his own. This collection contains some of the best poems he has written. I was so moved by its first few poems that I had to set the book down after each one. "On the Sorrow God Pours into the Little Boat of Life" is a heart-wrenching poem about Fairchild's grief in losing his son and about a stranger's kindness amidst that sorrow—the "awful rowing toward God / in a hard rain" that life can often be. (The collection's epigraph is from Philo of Alexandria: "Be kind to everyone you meet, for they are fighting a great battle.") "My Mother, on Horseback, in a Blizzard" begins with a six-year-old child trying to make it home in a fierce plains snowstorm and ends with a woman waiting at a train station for her husband to return from the Pacific Theater of World War II. "Often the Dying Ask for a Map" is about Fairchild's mother doing just that on her deathbed, drawing memories from the roads and place names. These poems feel expansive, but they are no longer than a page and a half. They are poems precisely wrought out of strong stuff, made to hold up over time. Fairchild is a master of the craft.

STEVEN KNEPPER *is Bruce C. Gottwald, Jr. '81 Chair for Academic Excellence at Virginia Military Institute.*

Spare Parts

JOHN W. FARRELL

In 1979, a biology professor at the University of California Berkeley named Thomas Jukes wrote to Francis Crick, the Nobel laureate and co-discoverer of the helical structure of DNA:

> Dear Francis, I am sure that you realize how frightfully angry a lot of people will be if you say that much of the DNA is junk. The geneticists will be angry because they think that DNA is sacred. The Darwinian evolutionists will be outraged because they believe every change in DNA that is accepted in evolution is necessarily an adaptive change. To suggest anything else is an insult to the sacred memory of Darwin.

In his new book *What's in Your Genome?*, Laurence A. Moran shows that all the research done in the decades since that letter was written has confirmed what Crick, Jukes, and other specialists believed all along: much of our DNA is indeed a kind of "junk."

WHAT'S IN YOUR GENOME?

90% of Your Genome Is Junk

LAURENCE A. MORAN

University of Toronto Press

$39.95 | 392 pp.

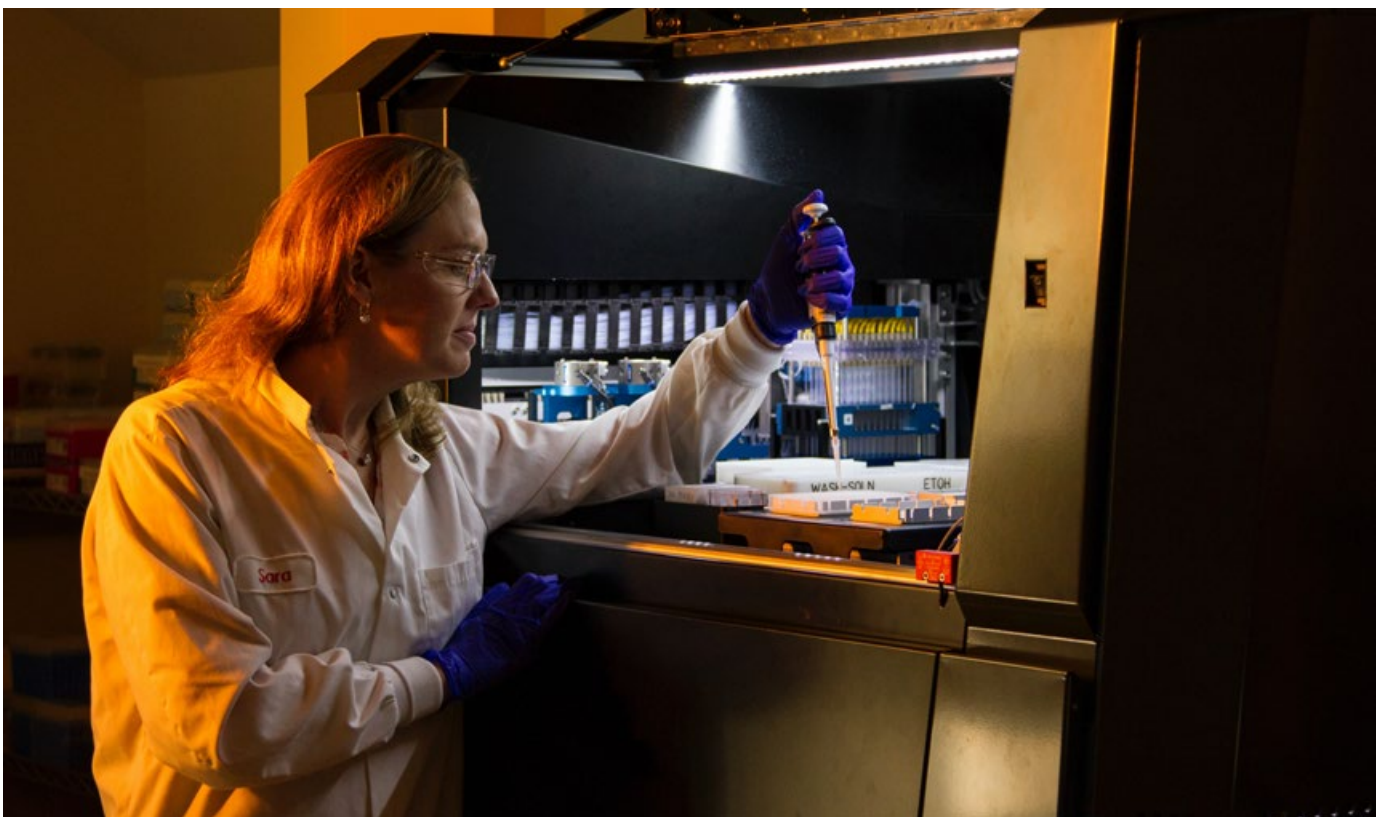
Moran is professor emeritus of biochemistry at the University of Toronto. While he has been a science textbook co-author through five editions of the highly regarded *Principles of Biochemistry*, *What's in Your Genome?* is the first book he has written for the general public. In addition to his teaching duties, Moran has since 2006 run his own blog, "Sandwalk"—named after Darwin's favorite walking path. Beautifully organized, it's a comprehensive resource for anyone who wants to learn more about the many complicated aspects of evolution that don't always get covered in the popular press.

It goes without saying that Moran has tangled with creationists of all stripes for years. Indeed, his blog grew out of the need to carefully defend each and every aspect of the science they attacked. "There is no simple way to explain evolution correctly," he writes, "but there are many simple ways to explain it badly."

Moran is not shy about chastising celebrity science authors such as Richard Dawkins who, in Moran's judgment, ignore or play down the crucial random processes involved in evolution while placing too much emphasis on natural selection and adaptation as the primary drivers of change.

Junk DNA is one of the more complicated examples of how randomness permeates the history of life. Few topics are more misunderstood and deliberately garbled in the press. The evidence that up to 90 percent of the human genome consists of useless DNA, repeatedly copied over the eons alongside all the most important genes that make us who we are, upsets a number of evolutionary biologists who believe—mistakenly, in Moran's view—that natural selection simply wouldn't have tolerated the accumulation of so much

A technician conducts genetic studies at the Cancer Genomics Research Laboratory, April 2020.



NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE/UNSPLASH

wasted code. And yet, as Moran shows in eleven detailed chapters, it's precisely the existence of junk DNA in the genomes of most species that serves as one of the most powerful lines of evidence in support of evolution.

But what exactly do scientists mean by "junk"? First, it's important to remember what they mean by a gene: a DNA sequence that's transcribed to produce functional products (proteins) that constitute the body of an organism. Put another way, functional DNA is any stretch of DNA whose deletion from the genome would reduce the fitness of the individual organism (causing illness or death). Junk DNA, by contrast, is any stretch of DNA whose deletion from the genome makes absolutely no difference to the fitness or survival of the individual organism. And it appears we have a lot of it.

The term began to circulate back in the early 1970s (possibly coined by Benjamin Lewin, the editor of the journal *Cell*), but by then scientists had long been faced with a puzzle about human DNA: given the rate of harmful mutations that scientists estimated took place throughout the genome, the percentage of DNA that was actually responsible for producing a healthy human body could only be a fraction of the total DNA, otherwise humans would go extinct. A second puzzle had to do with the wide variation in the amounts of DNA that different and related species possessed. Since mammals displayed a greater developmental complexity than, for example, primitive fish, it was assumed they must have more DNA. In fact, it turned out many simpler species had *more* DNA than humans. The lungfish (*Protopterus aethiopicus*) has one of the largest genomes known, more than forty times larger than the human genome. The common house mouse (*Myotis mystacinus*) has a genome similar in size to ours. But the Venezuelan spiny rat (*Proechimys trinitatus*) has a genome almost twice the size of ours. There was no obvious explanation for such variation when the data began to emerge, a problem that became known as the C-Value Paradox: there appeared to be no correlation between the size of a genome and the complexity of an organism.

The answer seemed to be that the vast amounts of repetitive DNA scientists were discovering throughout various animal genomes were simply not necessary to the survival of the organism. Still, many scientists continued then, and continue now, to resist the evidence for junk DNA, and expect that further investigation will lead to the discovery of some kind of important function for it. Moran considers several examples of these efforts and explains why none of them are ultimately convincing.

While *What's in Your Genome?* is intended for a general audience, its author does expect the reader to be able to digest some fairly dense sections on how genes are transcribed, the various kinds of no-longer-functioning DNA (transposons, pseudogenes), population genetics, and the role of genetic drift in evolution. There are helpful illustrations throughout the book, and Moran provides copious notes and a thorough bibliography. Still, a glossary of terms would have made it easier to keep track of the many different processes discussed.

Given that humans are the inheritors of a "sloppy genome," resulting not only from natural selection but also, and no less importantly, from random processes such as genetic drift, the question arises: Is it really a shock to discover we carry so much empty genetic baggage?

Randomness in the structure of creation is not an unfamiliar problem to theologians over the centuries, nor is the idea that God's designs could be realized through chance and contingency. The 2004 International Theological Commission's "Communion and Stewardship" document emphasizes that, according to the Catholic understanding of divine causality, "true contingency in the created order is not incompatible with a purposeful divine providence. Divine causality and created causality radically differ in kind and not only in degree. Thus, even the outcome of a truly contingent natural process can nonetheless fall within God's providential plan for creation." This is in keeping with Aquinas's thinking. In his *Summa Theologiae* he writes that the effect of divine providence is not only that things should happen somehow, but that they should happen either by necessity or by contingency. "Therefore, whatsoever divine providence ordains to happen infallibly and of necessity happens infallibly and of necessity; and that happens from contingency, which the divine providence conceives to happen from contingency" (I, 22,4 ad 1).

Still, it can be disquieting to realize how much our own genetic makeup is steeped in the wreckage of what lived before. The Dominican priest and scientist Raymond Nogar (1916–1967) thought deeply, and perhaps somewhat ruefully, about the chaotic nature of the physical world he had spent his life studying, and how it frustrated the human desire to project order onto the universe. "What is far more obvious to me is the disorder, the waste, the hectic disorganization of the fragments of the universe of reality," Nogar wrote in his book *The Lord of the Absurd*. Such a view is a painful one, he acknowledged, but we could now be confident, he believed, that the old idea of cosmic harmony was an illusion. "The universe may, in point of fact, *be one*; when God looks upon the universe He may *see it to be one*; but when I look out upon the universe of matter, of man and of God's handiwork, *I do not see it as one*."

What's in Your Genome? is a powerful account of how the human genome was assembled at the most basic level, why it's so sloppy and prodigal, and why that isn't necessarily a bad thing.

JOHN W. FARRELL *is the author most recently of* The Clock and the Camshaft: And Other Medieval Inventions We Still Can't Live Without *(Rowman & Littlefield)*.

Fugitive Gleams

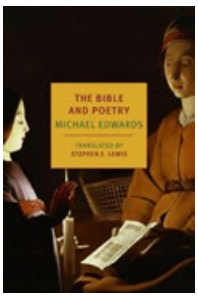
CHRISTIAN WIMAN

Over the years I've heard countless ministers, ministers-in-training, and even divinity-school professors tell me, often quite cheerfully, that they just don't "get" poetry. Ancient theology, modern novels, academic philosophy so fanged and rebarbative it would make a layman's brain bleed—no problem. But slip a sonnet into the mix and the gears grind to a stop.

On one hand, this makes sense. Poetry is a particular way of thinking. It enacts and enables meanings rather than (or often in addition to) expressing them. It requires a kind of non-utilitarian intelligence, a "willingness to exist among doubts and uncertainties without any irritable reaching after fact and reason," as Keats famously put it. This can be confusing to anyone combing Scripture for a "message" and an actual impediment to religious scholars systematically supporting some thesis.

On the other hand, roughly one third of the Old Testament *is* poetry, at times as bristly and semantically layered as any high-modernist text; and much of the New Testament, including some of its crucial moments ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"), consists of quotations or references to these ancient poems. It would seem, then, that if you can't read poetry, a great part of the Bible is going to remain closed to you.

And indeed this is just what Michael Edwards says in *The Bible and Poetry*, a short but hugely ambitious book whose aim is essentially to correct the course of Christianity. (Edwards, the only Englishman ever elected to the Académie Francaise, is a winningly candid Christian and interprets Scripture in that context.) Poetic illiteracy, according to Edwards, is not simply an individual problem but an institutional one. Christianity has developed as a religion of precepts and articles of faith. It has been defined and determined by systematic theology, an enterprise that Edwards believes—from Aquinas to Calvin and right through the present day—is simply an "error." There is, he thinks, a *reason* that God chooses poetry to speak to us. Understanding this reason might not only lead to spiritual consolation and clarity for the individual believer but might even begin to heal some of our deep divisions.



THE BIBLE AND POETRY

MICHAEL EDWARDS
TRANS. BY STEPHEN E. LEWIS
New York Review Books
$18.95 | 176 pp.

Take Communion, for instance, to which Edwards devotes a full chapter. He knows and quickly dismisses all the well-known historical and theological disputes, homing in on Jesus' words "This is my body." Protestants, he says, have diminished the strength of the verb in Jesus' pronouncement, whereas Catholics have overinterpreted the phrase and allowed customs (the prayer of consecration, the insistence that communion require a presiding priest, etc.) to restrict and occlude the original significance, and *both* misunderstandings are the result of not reading the text poetically.

Neither Jesus in the gospels nor Paul in Corinthians elucidates "This is my body" at all, Edwards points out, and this "gives us an astonishing and salutary hermeneutical lesson." We don't have to literalize the act in ways that demean both it and us (exactly what part of Jesus' body are we munching on?), and we don't have to diminish the mystery by turning the act into a merely mental experience. "The words of Jesus are clear and secret, clear about the unheard-of gift that is given to us—hear him say to us, 'This is my body… This is my blood'—and secret because of the transcendence of his divinity." We are meant to inhabit the act without fully understanding it.

Or consider these lines from the Book of Job, when Job is cursing the night of his conception: "Let the stars of its twilight be dark; / let it look for light, but have none; / nor gaze on the eyelids of the dawn." Edwards points out that Job, "in looking on the abyss of his sufferings," experiences a nostalgic sense of wonder at creation that sends a kind of lightning flash through that total darkness. Is this a moment of faith, perhaps, even hope? Might it change how we read Job's whole stance to God—and God's to Job, as God presumably enables this relief—and thus our theological sense of the whole story?

I'm struck by Edwards's reading but see another one as well. Job is cursing his very conception in this passage. The last line has an undeniable sexual element, as if the dawn and night were at the end of a tryst. One could argue that Job is enlarging his curse to include the very "conception" of reality, that it reaches beyond his life to include life itself. Some critics have suggested—I am one of them—that Job's curse of his existence amounts to a curse of God and that Satan actually wins their cruel bet. Reading this passage as I have suggested is further evidence for this interpretation.

Is the reading, then, "right"? Right enough. But so is the one Edwards offers, which is entirely contradictory. Auden

Gaspar de Crayer, *Job on the manure pile*, 1619

MUSÉE DES AUGUSTINS DE TOULOUSE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

once defined poetry as "the clear expression of mixed feelings." The phrase is a little bland for the conflicting intensities of Job, but you get the idea. The poem not only balances competing meanings but demands them, and any attempt to strangle its polyvalences with a single interpretation or to explain away complicated passages with paraphrase is a violation of the poem's integrity and achievement. Edwards goes so far as to say that such attempts, however well-meaning, are ultimately "diabolical."

It's an odd—and compelling—aspect of this book that it focuses so much on the New Testament. The New Testament often quotes Hebrew poetry and hymns, and of course there are many "poetic" passages, like the one above from Jesus, that both distill and enlarge reality in the way that good poems do. Strictly speaking, though, there probably aren't any *original* poems in the New Testament.

Occasionally, someone will dispute this. A few years ago, Willis Barnstone published *The Poems of Jesus Christ*, which argues that just about *all* the New Testament was originally poetry. No biblical scholar would support this, though, and the thought of Jesus walking around speaking in verse is difficult to reconcile with—and perhaps even a *diminishment* of—the ordinary, earthy, plainspoken person that comes through in the synoptic gospels. (John is a special case.) That his language could have the force of art without the artifice is part of its grounded power.

Edwards's focus on the New Testament is an aesthetic surprise as well.

Great poetry can bring one close to God, even though the subject may be entirely "secular," and even though it may have been written by a poet who was not religious.

"Even the most powerful parts of the New Testament from a literary point of view," writes Harold Bloom, "are not works that can sustain a close aesthetic comparison with the stronger parts of the Hebrew Bible." This seems hard to dispute. The Book of Job is as powerful and irreducible as anything in Western literature (and, in my opinion, towers over the rest of the Hebrew Bible). Throw in the Psalms, the Prophetic books, the Song of Songs, Proverbs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes, and the poetic achievement seems immense.

The New Testament is operating at a different frequency and has different ambitions, which can cause some consternation for believers with a literary bent. A divinity student once came to me in despair, wondering how it could be that this book that was meant to be the most important book in the world—in fact meant to be the very word of God—could often be so…boring.

Edwards doesn't address this discrepancy, and I suspect he would say that it misses the point. The New Testament is so thoroughly emergent from the Old that the two together amount, as Jack Miles has written, to a kind of palimpsest. Learning how to read the Old Testament teaches us how to read the New. The sixteenth-century thinker Isaac Luria created the famous image of the "shattering vessels" to describe the moment of creation. The forms were inadequate to contain God's creative power and the divine sparks that flew at their shattering were dispersed throughout reality. The task of existence becomes to reclaim or redeem that scattered light. As I was reading Edwards's book, it seemed to me that Luria's image casts "light" on the reading of the New Testament, which has embedded within it all these fugitive gleams from the Old.

This is why Edwards focuses so closely on certain short passages from the New Testament, and why he justifies reading them as poetry. He does this with great sensitivity and illumination, and I find him completely convincing in these moments. Late in the book, though, after he has devoted chapters to the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and the Book of Isaiah, Edwards returns to the New Testament and begins making much greater claims for certain passages as autonomous poems, much in the way Barnstone does. This is a mistake. Lineating prose does not improve its literary quality. It can in fact have the opposite effect, causing perfectly serviceable prose to seem like mediocre poetry. I found my spiritual attention flagging in the face of my aesthetic resistance.

Edwards writes well about the power of poetry in general and the kind of spiritual insight that may be found therein. But he draws a clean line between the poetry of the Bible and "secular" verse. This is an orthodox position, but is it valid? Scripture, the thinking goes, was inspired by the Holy Spirit and speaks the Word of God. Secular literature, for all its force and beauty, is inevitably the product of a fallen world and can't be read in the light of faith in the same way.

I wonder. That student who came to me depressed by the flat prose of the New Testament was himself a poet and fresh off a seminar spent reading the modernists. He discovered a fact that has both bolstered and troubled many believers who are also serious readers: great poetry can bring one close to God, even though the subject may be entirely "secular," and even though it may have been written by a poet who was not religious. My student, in fact, found himself *more* spiritually moved by some secular poetry than he was by Scripture.

The dilemma is familiar to me, but after a lifetime spent reading and writing poetry, I have come to an uneasy peace with it. Isaac Luria's image is a useful lens for reading the New Testament in light of the Old, but the image's original aim is *all* creation. Some of those initial divine sparks must have lodged in some very unlikely places—in the brain of Wallace Stevens, for instance, or for that matter, in Friedrich Nietzsche's. Surely the Holy Spirit didn't exhaust her creative powers between the covers of a single book.

Am I suggesting that the Bible might not be the "book of all books," that not only has its status "as Holy Writ…discouraged the perception of it as a body of literature that uses poetry to *realize* meanings," as Robert Alter has written, but that this status has also kept us from allowing God to speak to us in other ways? I am. Idolatry of the Bible is in part the cause of the split and antagonism between Judaism and Christianity, not to mention the endless and often insipid rifts and retrenchments within Christianity itself. Just stop to ponder how many people have been murdered over the interpretation of those few words of Jesus as he broke bread. Can something this divisive, this poisoned with prejudice and human vanity, be salvaged?

Edwards's book is at least a step in the right direction. Will it have any effect? I suspect its chances of diverting the course of Christianity itself are roughly the same as those of the previous paragraph. But one of the great virtues of this book is its modesty. "If the words and the gestures of Jesus speak otherwise to the reader," Edwards says after one argument, "may he deepen them for himself, forgetting what I have written." No doubt some determined readers will do just that. But for those literate Christians out there who often find themselves caught between the clarity of their call and the obscurity of its course, and who find themselves alternately drawn to and repelled by the Bible, this little book may prove very helpful indeed. I hope they find in it both the provocation and the consolation that I have.

CHRISTIAN WIMAN's *new book,* Zero at the Bone: Fifty Entries Against Despair, *will be published in December. He teaches at Yale Divinity School.*

2024–2025 Corcoran Visiting Chair in Christian-Jewish Relations

Boston College and its Center for Christian-Jewish Learning invite applications for a one year visiting appointment (renewable for a second year) as the Corcoran Visiting Chair in Christian-Jewish Relations, specializing in an aspect of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Candidates must hold a Ph.D. or its earned equivalent, have a demonstrated record of publication in the field, and hold (or have retired from) a tenured position (or its equivalent) in a university or seminary. Applications from all relevant disciplines are welcome. The Corcoran Chair will agree to take on specific responsibilities related to the mission of the Center. The full description is available at **www.bc.edu/cjlearning**. A list of previous Chairs, and their conferences and courses during their tenures, is also available online.

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The Other Side

EVAN BEDNARZ

"You have picked a bad night to cross," the man tells the shivering couple in the kitchen, as they watch snow falling outside the window. The other man replies, "Every night is bad." This observation, recounted in Octavio Solis's *Retablos*, a coming-of-age memoir set in El Paso during the sixties and seventies, still applies in the borderland.

At El Paso's Sacred Heart, the Spanish-speaking Jesuit parish half a mile from the border, hundreds of Venezuelan migrants milled outside the church's overcrowded shelter, Casa del Sagrado Corazón, spilling out into the alleyway and nearby street corners. Those inside and outside the shelter were all part of a refugee crisis that has pushed past 7 million. With an eye to the thousands of migrants camping out across the border in Ciudad Juárez as well as those already on the streets of El Paso, the mayor declared a state of emergency beginning in May. Anticipating a dangerous surge after the expiration of Title 42 (the provision of federal-health law invoked during the pandemic that expedited the expulsion of migrants), Gov. Greg Abbott sent a "Tactical Border Force" of the Texas National Guard to counter what he sardonically referred to as President Biden's "laying down of a welcome mat for the entire world."

On a Sunday in April, a few weeks before Title 42 ended, I was volunteering with my girlfriend at Sacred Heart, beautifying the block after 10 a.m. Mass. As we harvested cigarette butts, Coke cans, and the occasional diaper, some migrants saw us and began to help. A Venezuelan man in his mid-thirties, with a sunburnt, melancholic face and a weathered backpack, trailed behind me for part of the block, picking trash with his bare hands. "*¿Qué está pasando en Venezuela*?" I asked in gringo Spanish. The man answered simply, "*Muy fea allí*": "Very ugly there."

Life for most people in Venezuela has been ugly for the past decade: political turmoil, food shortages and malnutrition, a collapse of public infrastructure, and a lack of clean water. As liquid pooled at the bottom of our trash bag, I thought of news footage I had seen of hungry Venezuelans sifting through rubbish piles for food. At the end, I offered the man a handshake and "*buena suerte*," as he returned to the queue, likely to pass another night in the streets. Canopies of Red Cross blankets and cardboard bedding lined the alleyway between the church and the shelter. I hoped the man might find America less ugly.

Beyond the wall and the Rio Grande, Ciudad Juárez stares back at El Paso. From the University of Texas–El Paso, you see houses arrayed on hillsides, splashed with tropical colors that offset the drabness of cinder block. A city associated in popular imagination with cartels and crime (it features in *Breaking Bad* and *Sicario*), Juárez is part of a transborder manufacturing hub that generates about $4 billion annually. It was also the scene of a horrifying fire at a migrant detention center in late March, which killed forty migrants. Most migrants use Juárez as a staging point before crossing into El Paso, adding a layer of complication to the lives of those who cross back and forth across *la frontera* every day.

As my girlfriend and I drive over the Bridge of the Americas into Juárez, we see a few joggers and families congregating in a park. White-gloved Mexican cops, one impressively smoking a cigarette with no hands, direct traffic at an intersection. We are heading to Clinica Proyecto Santo Niño, a school and health clinic run by the Sisters of Charity in Anapra, an impoverished *colonia* on the northwest outskirts of Juárez. Paved streets are interspersed with dirt roads, and we have learned to navigate hidden speed bumps and roundabouts made of tires. The first time I came here, sewage spilled into the streets. Further west, miles of border wall span into the Chihuahuan desert, tagged here and there with anti-Trump graffiti.

The façade of Clinica Proyecto Santo Niño is painted bubblegum pink, with a children's mural depicting the Holy Mother surrounded by *angelitas* and a boy in a wheelchair. Inside, there are Montessori-style classrooms, a common area, a common bath, and a physical-therapy room. The clinic mostly serves locals with disabilities such as muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, or cerebral palsy. I sometimes assist my girlfriend, who is a physical therapist, but just as often I am simply there, drinking coffee with the mothers, playing with the kids, practicing my broken Spanish—a male presence in an unmistakably maternal atmosphere.

Just being there, I encounter the Christlike beauty of the broken and poor. Mothers carry their disabled children like icons of the *pietà*, lowering them gently into the waters of the bath. Hands caress and wash damaged muscles in everyday liturgies of hope and healing. Jesús is in his early thirties and comes to the clinic with his affable mother, Monica. A

Migrants camped out in front of Sacred Heart Church in El Paso, Texas, April 2023

OSV NEWS PHOTO/PAUL RATJE, REUTERS

former criminologist, he had a brain tumor that was over-radiated and now he has difficulty walking and speaking. With the help of a translator, I talk with Jesús and Monica after a session, asking them about life in Anapra, about what they might want Americans in Chicago or Seattle to know about their experience on this side of the border. Shy at first, Monica expresses her gratitude to the clinic and the sisters, and to my girlfriend for the physical therapy she provides her son. Only then does Monica speak of the troubles that afflict her and others in Anapra: poverty, corruption, the trafficking and violence of cartels. "You have to have faith, because the devil is here," she tells me. Monica cares for Jesús full time, while her husband works as a handyman and her youngest son studies to become a nurse. What she wishes for her family is not very different from what most middle-class American parents would wish for theirs: better access to health care, more economic opportunity. But Monica also speaks freely of Christ and the guardian angels who protect her family. Her faith and gratitude give her courage, protecting her against bitterness and despair.

At the Paso del Norte Bridge, a stone's throw from Sacred Heart, we idle in our car, waiting to pass back into the United States. I watch as a female border-patrol agent strides across the pedestrian walkway, leading recent deportees to the streets of Juárez. Another agent brings up the rear, hand on his holster in an easygoing martial pose. Many Americans believe the situation on the border requires a military response. Gov. Abbott is one of them. He has deployed a "Tactical Border Force," and tasked thousands of Texas National Guard troops with his "Operation Lone Star." Fort Bliss, home to seventeen thousand soldiers of the First Armored Division, is also a major player in the economy and culture of El Paso. The border wall, steel-beamed and concertina-wired, can seem like the frontline in a military zone.

Is the crisis at our border a national-security issue or a humanitarian one? These simplistic characterizations seem to be the only ones we are allowed to choose from, but they obscure the systemic nature of the problem. They obscure, for example, the history of U.S. meddling in Latin America. They also obscure the cartel operations bankrolled by drug use across the United States. The average migrant trudging through the Panamanian jungle or sleeping rough in the alleys of El Paso is a victim of these larger forces, for which we bear at least some collective responsibility. Mass migration, like economic globalization and pandemics, points urgently to the interdependence of today's world. And interdependence without solidarity is a recipe for mass suffering. As the French Catholic poet Charles Péguy wrote, "We must be saved together / We cannot go to God alone; / Else He would ask, / 'Where are the others?'"

EVAN BEDNARZ *teaches high-school theology in El Paso.*

POULENC'S 'GLORIA'

Magda Andrews-Hoke

"While writing [the Gloria*] I had in mind*
those Crozzoli frescoes with angels sticking out their
tongues, and also some solemn-looking Benedictine
monks that I saw playing football one day."
—Francis Poulenc

I saw the monks cavorting in the avenue,
kicking a ball back and forth on roadside dirt,
nearly dancing, coal-hot feet catching
and releasing the white orb. For what
they played, and bowed a great *Laudamus*
Te, I couldn't see. But wanted to
join in the fun, for all their banter,
pushing, panting, came from and went towards
Someone.

MAGDA ANDREWS-HOKE *lives in Philadelphia. She studied theology and the arts at the University of St. Andrews and was a 2019 recipient of the Frederick Mortimer Clapp Fellowship for Poetry.*

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